



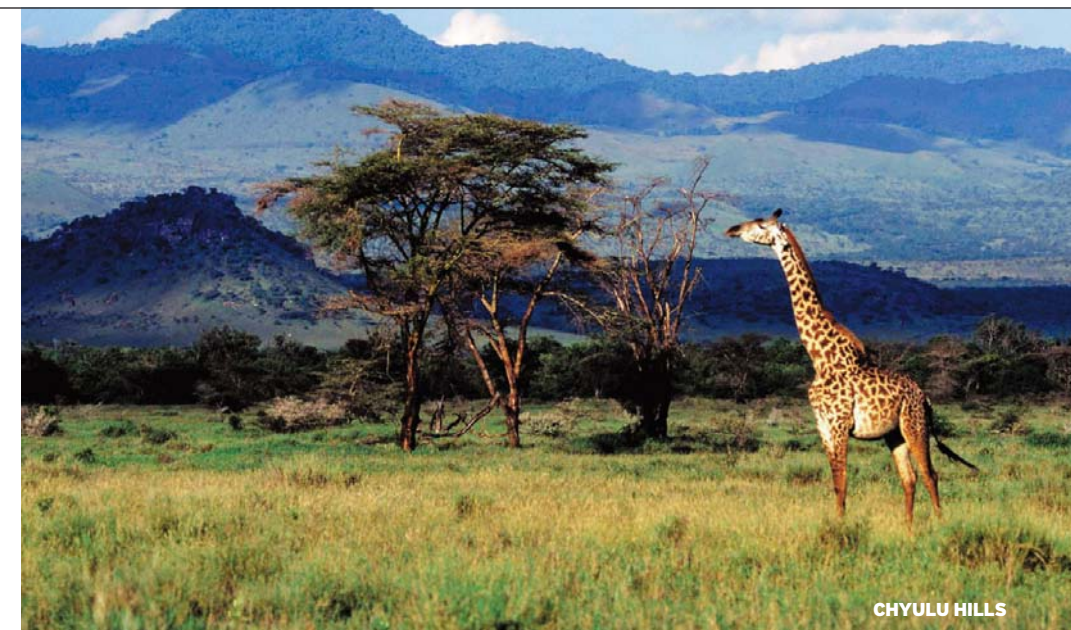
Dreaming of Africa

There is nothing more awe-inspiring than the African bush. You'll be starstruck by your first lion, amazed by the grace of giraffes and transformed by the golden light and magnificent vistas

by Viia Beaumanis

MAASAI PHOTO, KEVIN GARRET.

SHOMPOLE



CHYULU HILLS



MAASAI WOMEN

Ultimate Luxury

You won't find Jeeps full of tourists all pointing their cameras at the same giraffe at **Shompole**, a hilltop compound set on a vast private conservancy. The beauty of the landscape and wildlife here is equalled by the cultural experience. The Maasai are partners in the lodge: They share in the profits and are involved in the lodge on every level, working as waiters, chefs and guides. As their guest, you experience a way of life that's been unaltered for centuries.

This isolated eco-chic hideaway on the edge of a cliff has eight rooms that curve around the contours of the escarpment, each with its own plunge pool, and each a vision of white simplicity. Who needs walls? Enjoy the drama of a room open to the elements and the cinema that is the African bush. Rough-hewn fig-wood furniture under soaring 40-foot ceilings of woven thatch, all-white fabrics embellished with monochrome Maasai beading, floors inlaid with mosaics of local stone — Shompole is a study in organic luxury. Electricity, yes; Wi-Fi and cable, no. Even air conditioning is managed naturally, with continuously flowing, icy spring water flushing through the shallow channels that edge every room before emptying into refreshing plunge pools. Meals are largely organic and delicious, with much of the produce harvested from the on-site garden.

This is the sexiest perch in Kenya — David Bailey, who shot it for *Vogue*, is listed among the brochure's photo credits — and, yes, cool posh comes at a price. 011-254-718-769-051, wilderness-ventures.com, dbls from \$1,221, including meals and game drives. >

YOU'LL HAVE BEEN CAPTIVATED by Africa's sepia-tinged images long before you touch down on its dusty, sun-bleached tarmacs. *Out of Africa*, *Born Free*, *The Flame Trees of Thika* — the continent plays a starring role in movies, novels, storybooks and especially our grandest globe-trotting fantasies. And when you're dreaming of Africa, you're likely thinking of Kenya. Home to the Maasai, arguably the continent's most fabulous-looking people, Kenya also boasts a population of warm, laid-back, easy-smiling types that I always think of as the Italians of Africa. Edged with a spectacular coastline and sand-dollar islands, Kenya is blessed with a bonanza of landscapes and wildlife — particularly during the July-to-October Great Migration, when nearly two million zebra, wildebeest and antelope, closely tailed by their predators, make the long journey across the savannah from Tanzania's Serengeti to Kenya's Masai Mara.



A TENTED ROOM IN MARA SAFARI CLUB

Give a Little Bit

For a little expert assistance, **Micato** tailors safaris to your interests, managing everything from hotel bookings to internal flights and car rentals. No detail is too small. Forgot postage? Cards arrive pre-stamped. Need earplugs? They've got them. Gum for the flight? It's on your seat. Guests are also treated to turndown gifts — a beaded Maasai wedding necklace one night, a colourful blanket the next — so even those who don't enjoy shopping leave with cool keepsakes.

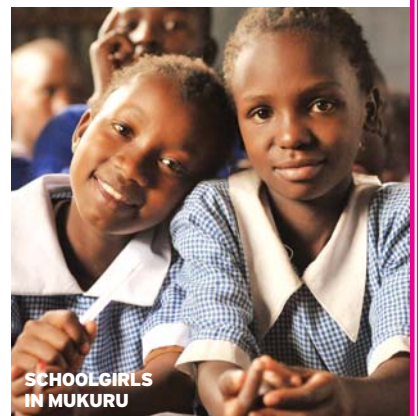
For every safari booked, Micato sponsors a Kenyan child's education through its One to One program. And Micato's non-profit foundation, America Share, has managed to create a safe haven of playgrounds and schoolhouses, and provide clean water, AIDS programs, books, breakfasts and a basketball court in the Nairobi slum of Mukuru. "Tourists come to Africa for the animals," says Micato's founder and owner, Felix Pinto, "but it's the people they remember when they leave." Many do more than remember: One couple were so inspired by Kenya that they raised \$100,000 to build Mukuru a new community centre in 2010. The basketball court? A gift from an American boy who donated the proceeds of his bar mitzvah. *Micato Safaris, 1-800-MICATO1, micato.com, dbls from \$8,475.*



SHELDRIK WILDLIFE TRUST

Family Camp

An hour's flight from Nairobi, **Mara Safari Club** is a classic tented camp at the edge of the Masai Mara National Reserve, where your front door is a zipper and hippos are sunning themselves on a riverbed 20 feet from the veranda. Inside, ceiling fans rustle the mosquito net draped over a four-poster bed, North African-style rugs line the floor and there's a bar tucked into a stand-up leather steamer trunk. It's no place for late risers: You're up with the sun for game drives that track elephants, lions, vast herds of wildebeest and zebra, scampering gazelles and doe-eyed giraffes nibbling at the acacia trees. Unlike lodges that are exposed to the reserve, this is a protected, family-friendly property where you won't need an armed guide to escort you to your tent at night. Small children can roam freely or splash around in the pool while Mommy enjoys a massage in a nearby cabana. *Fairmont Mara Safari Club, 1-800-257-7544, fairmont.com/marasafariclub, dbls from \$485, including meals and game drives. >*



SCHOOLGIRLS IN MUKURU



ON A SAILING DHOW IN LAMU



LAMU TOWN



SHELA

WHILE YOU'RE HERE

Take a Hot-Air-Balloon Ride

Gliding over an African savannah scattered with herds of zebra, elephants and wildebeest in the golden light of early morning is extraordinarily silent and peaceful — until you dip down above the treetops over a Maasai town and the kids go crazy, waving and shouting. Do this during the Great Migration, when the plains are flooded with wildlife, and you can tick the box next to Ultimate Safari Experience. The luxe champagne breakfast that awaits after the ride is the perfect ending. *Book through Micato Safaris, 1-800-MICAT01, micato.com, \$450.*



Go Island-Hopping

Kenya's coastline is killer, and **Lamu** is a 70-minute direct flight from Nairobi. Home to Lamu Town, the country's oldest Swahili settlement, this car-free island retains a spice-route vibe in its ancient architecture, sailing dhows and locals who get around on donkeys. Lamu House, restored by a Spanish architect, overlooks the bustling harbour from a tree-shaded restaurant veranda. Tucked inside you'll find 10 rooms wrapped around a lounge-like courtyard pool. On the other end of Lamu, in the genteel enclave of **Shela**, you'll find miles of white-sand beach and a lively crowd of locals, expats and old-school Kenyans gathered at Peponi Hotel — one of the island's oldest hotels, and a favourite bar and social hub. *Lamu House, Lamu, 011-254-424-633-491, lamuhouse.com, dbls from \$258. Peponi Hotel, Lamu, 011-254-733-203-082, peponi-lamu.com, dbls from \$292. >*



GIRAFFE MANOR

Rainy Day

Named for Karen Blixen, the Danish baroness better known as Isak Dinesen, the district of Karen is a 30-minute taxi drive from downtown. Her farmhouse is preserved as the small, charming Karen Blixen Museum. *End of Karen Rd., Nairobi, museums.or.ke.* Possibly the most fun lunch in the world is at **Giraffe Manor**, also in Karen. A 1930s manor house turned into a six-room hotel, it serves as a sanctuary for giraffes that amble over to eat right out of your hand. *Koitobos Rd., 011-254-732-812-896, giraffemanor.com.* Featured in the film *Born to Be Wild*, narrated by Morgan Freeman, the **David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust** shelters baby elephants and rhinos whose parents were killed. Watch them tussle in their daily mud bath. *011-254-202-301-396, sheldrickwildlifetrust.org.*

NAIROBI

Hit the Shops

For an Afro-copia of curios and cultural crafts — textiles, masks, jewellery, drums and carvings — cruise the endless stalls of the **City Market**, sheltered in an old aircraft hangar. *Monday to Saturday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Muindi Mbingu St.* Nairobi is also a great place to pick up some striking accessories. **Gemini Desai's** showroom is heaped with coral-filigree necklaces, outsized amber rings and glam curtain tie-backs made of chunky beads. *Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., 3 Urafiki Lane, Muthaiga Estate, 011-254-713-090-080, jdesai@wananchi.com.* The tribal-chic statement jewellery and handbags of **Adèle Dejak** are found at her studio, by appointment. *Mushroom Rd., 011-254-737-253-862, magikgrace.com.* **Penny Winter's** boutique at Ngong House stocks stylish linen, silk and leather clothing. *Ngong House, Karen, 011-254-733-611-565, pennywinter.com.*

African Art

Curator Carol Lees showcases Kenya's top modern artists at her **One Off Contemporary Art Gallery**. Don't miss work by Ehoodi Kichapi, who expertly mimics the style of Basquiat, and Timothy Brooke's elegant watercolours. *By appointment: 011-254-722-521-870 or oneoff@africaonline.co.ke.*

Checking In

In the leafy suburb of Karen, the stunning **Ngong House** is your go-to for tree-house living. Forget your backyard hideout. In these stunning sleeping quarters, even the mosquito netting is glam. Or choose a six-person log cabin or a suite in the main building. *011-254-891-856, ngonghouse.com, rooms from \$450.* In Nairobi proper, Kenyan native Mark Somen, former GM at New York's Soho House, runs the sleek **Tribe Hotel**: 137 rooms in the sophisticated Gigiri area, which attracts Nicole Kidman with its chic design. *Rooms from \$275, tribe-hotel.com.*



NGONG HOUSE



GIGIRI, NAIROBI