

# The Best of Kenya & Tanzania

Safari means “journey” in Swahili, and it’s quintessential to the East Africa experience: a transformative trip through some of the continent’s most extraordinary landscapes, wild and untouched, much of it teeming with Africa’s densest concentrations of wildlife. The coastline is equally blessed, with exotic islands surrounded by an extraordinary variety of hard and soft corals, home to myriad species of gemlike fish that flit just below the surface. Add to this pristine beaches, cuisine and architecture that reflects a fascinating blend of Arabic and African influences, a host of very special places to stay, the warm embrace of ever-temperate climes, and a laid-back and welcoming atmosphere, and you’ll see why East Africa is one of those destinations that never disappoints.

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## 1 THE MOST ROMANTIC SAFARI DESTINATIONS

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- **Borana—Cottage No. 8** (Laikipia, Kenya): As the country’s very first boutique lodge, Borana revolutionized the way travelers bed down while on safari in Kenya. First built in the early 1990s, Borana’s urbane owners chose a brilliant cliff-edge location and ensured that each of the beautifully rustic stone cottages enjoys amazing views. They also brought a high level of wilderness-appropriate luxury, unparalleled exclusivity, and hands-on hosting to rejuvenate the safari experience. Upping the design ante, though, are the newly added open-to-the-elements suites. Built directly into the rocks, the Moroccan-influenced rooms are, in fact, nothing short of breathtaking, with lime-washed floors, views framed by natural wooden beams, and eye-catching furnishings. Cottage 8 is the most desirable of all—with a shower carved from massive boulders, glass doors that open onto wooden decks stretching down to your private plunge pool, and a bathroom that’s as massive as the bedroom; the overall look is chic, cool, and sexy. It’s simply one of the most romantic spaces in Kenya. See p. 214.
- **Dodo’s Tower at Hippo Point** (Lake Naivasha, Kenya): This unusual and decadent folly near the shores of Lake Naivasha breaks the rules of any dwelling you’ve ever laid eyes on. Each on a different floor of this majestic fairytale tower, the five elegant bedrooms offer increasingly splendid views—and from the upper level you’ll spy pink flamingoes in the thousands and half-submerged hippos wallowing in the lake. Built of cedar, cypress, mahogany, ebony, and black granite, the interior is a marvelous gallery of astonishing antiques, artfully displayed alongside Maasai handicrafts. There’s every chance you’ll forget where in the world you are, but when you’re not swooning over the fantastical design, you can arrange game drives, boat rides, or a muscle-tingling massage in the lakeside

gazebo—and the animals you'll see will bring you back to the heart of Africa. See p. 149.

- **Ngorongoro Crater Lodge** (Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania): Built right on the lip of the crater, this is Africa's most over-the-top lodge, a wonderful mix of hobbitlike styling and baronial splendor famously described as "Versailles meets Maasai." As such, it is a destination in its own right, and every vantage quite stunning—the view of the vast crater below is an added bonus. It's a real exercise in pampering, too: Return from your game drive, and you're likely to find a crackling fire lit in your room (it's cold up on the crater rim) and a rose-strewn bubble bath; settle in and drink in the view, along with a glass of bubbly. See p. 418.
- **Olerai and Elephant Watch** (Rift Valley and Samburu National Reserve, Kenya): These shabby chic properties are two very distinctive creations by the effervescent conservationist Oria Douglas-Hamilton. One is on the shores of the Rift Valley's Lake Naivasha, near the family mansion where Oria grew up, and the other in the heart of the elephant-rich Samburu game preserve. Both are defined by slick bohemian styling and superbly intimate hosting. At **Olerai** you'll enjoy the gentlest possible introduction to East Africa, in lovely colonial-era quarters; hippos trim the lawn through the night (perhaps munching right outside your window), and you can watch all kinds of plains game while you breakfast on the vast lawns. From Olerai, you can arrange to be flown to the popular Samburu game park, where **Elephant Watch**—not far from the elephant research facility started by Oria and her husband, Ian—is far and away the best place to stay inside the reserve. It's also arguably the finest place in Kenya to get up close and personal with pachyderms, perhaps watching them from your beautifully decorated tent or from beneath the open-air shower where you wash with water from a hand-painted bucket. Never was rusticity so elegant. See p. 151 and 234.
- **The Sanctuary at Ol Lentille** (Northern Laikipia, Kenya): Each of the four villas at this fabulous boutique "resort" is magnificently attired and comes with a private butler, personal Maasai guide, and housekeeper. With its far-flung location creating a sense of absolute privacy and remoteness, there's no disputing that this is East Africa's most exclusive and alluring hideaway (and one of Africa's most luxurious). Even if the surrounding territory is not yet bustling with animals, the real thrill here is the splendid luxury in the midst of a sweltering semi-arid landscape—on a clear morning, you can spy Mount Kenya across the dry plains strewn with rocks and studded with termite mounds. The visual beauty will hold you in its awe. For pure romance, the retro-style Eyrie is ideal for sensualists—after waking up to wraparound cinemascope views on your circular, shagadelic bed, you can dine at your convenience, anytime, anywhere, and sign up for decadent spa treatments, all included in the reasonable rate. Secluded from the world, you'll be hard-pressed to imagine a higher degree of pampering—or why you'd ever want to leave. See p. 221.
- **Saruni Samburu** (near Samburu National Park, Kenya): Inspired by the arid, rock-strewn surrounds, Italian author Riccardo Orizio's second Kenyan camp is a splendid mix of Moorish influences and elements drawn from nomadic Samburu tribal homesteads. Savvy minimalist design works surprisingly well in the sweltering heat of Northern Kenya and the large, beautiful accommodations blend magnificently

into the rugged, rocky surrounds. Positioned on the lip of a cliff, and affording show-stopping views from al fresco showers, these dreamy spaces are a perfect spot from whence to commence a love affair with Africa in its more arid avatar. Returning to your quarters at the end of a busy day of game drives or bush walks, you'll find the light of the stars, flickering candles, and a leopard calling in the dead of night all combine to set the scene for another sort of romantic magic. See p. 232.

- **SaSaab** (near Samburu National Park, Kenya): This chic addition to Kenya's safari scene is—like Saruni Samburu—a firm signal that tony, design-centric properties are the country's future trendsetters. Each of the beautiful open-fronted living quarters comes standard with wonderful views from the bedroom, the bathroom, and the plunge pool on your private terrace overlooking the Ewaso Nyiro River and distant plains beyond. With their Moroccan-inspired good looks and generous proportions, you'll have no trouble thinking up excuses to spend entire days in your suite, but with excellent game drives into the game-rich Samburu National Reserve and the chance to visit tribal homesteads or picnic on boulders in the arid wilderness, don't forget that this is a perfect location to combine sensual pleasure with a top-drawer safari experience. See p. 228.
- **Serengeti Under Canvas** (Serengeti, Tanzania): There's little to beat the romance of having nothing but canvas between you and the bush (hence "The Best Tented Camps" reviewed below). The semi-permanent tented camps that follow the Migration offer great game viewing with a level of luxury—carpets, plush sofas, table lamps, and small libraries—not normally associated with camping. There are four excellent operators (reviewed in chapter 15), but only &Beyond comes with the luxury of a private butler to see to your every need, from delivering piping hot water, warmed over a fire and carried to your private bucket shower, to remembering that you like your G&T with crushed ice and mint. See p. 432.
- **Shompole** (Southern Rift, Kenya): Sitting pretty on a cliff in one of the haziest, hottest parts of Kenya, this is another innovatively designed designer lodge, this time overlooking the volcanic hills and breathtaking plains of the Great Rift Valley. The thatched, white-washed accommodations are bright, light-filled, breezy, and beautiful—to compensate for the heat, they're open to the elements and feature running water in the rooms. You'll be mesmerized by the exotic design and drawn to the relatively undiscovered location; not far from the Tanzanian border, this is an ideal spot if you want to escape the hordes. From here, you can easily nip across the border to witness millions of flamingoes carpeting the Lake of Fire's crimson-colored surface, or take a plane ride to get a better view of Kilimanjaro. See p. 146.
- **Singita's Grumeti Camps** (Grumeti Reserve, Serengeti, Tanzania): Singita has been wowing followers of the world's glossiest travel tomes with their South Africa camps for years, and they regularly vote Singita SA Best Destination on Earth (a record-setting 5 consecutive years)—with Grumeti sure to follow suit. Well, given the landscape, Singita's East Africa camps—a choice of three, each so different you'll feel as if you've arrived at a totally new destination—are even better. Whether you're on honeymoon or have been married "forever," this is where you come to feel like the world's first couple. See p. 440.
- **Tassia** (Laikipia, Kenya): The multi-talented architect-cum-builder (and now pilot with Kenya's Tropic Air) who

designed this community-owned lodge legendarily spent 2 years living in a tree while he conjured each of the unique wood and rock cottages. Balancing on a rocky bluff that protrudes from the Mokogodo Escarpment in a remote corner of the vast Laikipia Plateau, each of the imaginatively crafted spaces over-looks a scene of devastating beauty—especially lovely when troops of elephants come bounding through the wilderness below. Pachyderms, in fact, are frequent visitors to the salt lick just below the lodge, and you can spend

hours watching them from behind a nearby gigantic rock. For more active pursuits, your hosts will take you on exciting adventures—up sacred mountains, into caves once used by tribal hunters, and on foot through an animal-rich wilderness. It's a magical place to lose yourself for a few days and experience a life unimpeded by modernity—solar energy powers the entire lodge, and the only contact with the outside world is from a satellite hotspot under a tree down near the airstrip. See p. 224.

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## 2 THE WILDEST ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS

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- **Wondering exactly where that roaring lion is** (Most game preserves in Kenya and Tanzania): In any national park or concession with a relatively high lion population, your slumber will more than likely be disturbed by the distant but still powerful roar of a lion announcing jurisdiction over its kingdom. Reaching 115 decibels, the sound is carried across the plains 8km (5 miles) or more and remains one of the most powerful, thrilling sounds on Earth. See chapters 9 and 15.
- **Watching a cheetah beat a Ferrari** (Serengeti/Masai Mara): The fastest animal on land, the cheetah can reach a top speed of 110km (68 miles) an hour; more impressively, it can reach this top speed from a stationary position in 3 seconds flat—0.2 seconds faster than a Formula 1 car! Despite occurring in vastly reduced numbers, your chances of seeing this critically endangered cat hunt in the Serengeti are probably higher than that of seeing a leopard stalk, as cheetahs are diurnal, preferring to hunt at sunrise and sunset, and usually on the open plains, where they can approach stragglers by running them down with a short burst of speed within a 400m (1,312 ft.) range. See chapters 9 and 15.
- **Witnessing crocs snacking on easy pickings** (Serengeti/Masai Mara): The sight of thousands of animals plunging into waters infested with some of the biggest crocodiles in Africa is, for many, the eponymous moment of the “greatest wildlife spectacle on Earth.” The Migration usually crosses the Grumeti River sometime during June or July (timing depends on rainfall during that particular year), while the Mara River can see continual crossings from June to September as the herds seek out fresh pastures on either side of the river. See chapters 9 and 15.
- **Tracking rhino with a Maasai warrior** (Laikipia, Kenya): By all accounts, walking into the wilderness can be extremely dangerous, and those who do it without expert guidance put themselves at risk—from elephants, rhinos, buffaloes, hippos, and predators, too. Typically when you head into the bush, you'll be accompanied by a rifle-carrying ranger or tracker who will—if push comes to shove—shoot an animal to save your life. At **Lewa Wilderness** in Kenya's Laikipia Plateau, it's possible to

head out with a Maasai warrior (or elder) whose intimate, expert knowledge of the animals means that you could find yourself within 20m (66 ft.) of rhino and closer to an elephant than you ever imagined possible in the wild. As you discover how to study the ground for tracks and stay upwind in order to avoid detection, you'll feel yourself marveling by the untamed splendor of a world far removed from the relative security of a tented camp or fenced-off lodge. If you're seeking a profoundly intimate encounter with the wilds, jump at the chance to head out and track the animals on foot. See p. 218.

- **Counting coins with a whale shark** (Mafia Island): It's humbling swimming alongside the planet's biggest fish. Whale sharks weigh in at around 15 tons and can reach a length of 14m (46 ft.); the oldest is estimated to be 150 years old. While classified as a shark (not least because its huge mouth has around 3,000 teeth), these gentle giants—their dappled skins giving rise to the Swahili name *papa shillingi*, which means “shark covered in shillings”—are harmless and feed on enormous amounts of plankton sieved through their gills. Whale sharks tend to arrive in Mafia's waters around November and usually stay until February. See chapter 14.
- **Being serenaded by a million wildebeest** (Serengeti, Tanzania, and Masai Mara, Kenya): East Africa's most abundant antelope is charmingly vocal at night, with a harmonious array of snorts

and honks that sound not unlike a composition by Stockhausen, best appreciated when sleeping underneath the thin “walls” of a canvas tent. The Migration happens year-round, so find out where the herds are likely to be before deciding where to book; alternatively, time your visit for December/January, when some 1.5 million wildebeest descend on the short-grass plains near Lake Ndutu, birthing—at their peak—8,000 calves daily. See chapter 15.

- **Swimming with endorphins** (Zanzibar, Pemba, and Mafia islands): Plunging into the waters above the coral reefs of Mnemba (Zanzibar), Misali (Pemba), and Mafia is a little like a good dose of shock therapy—guaranteed to cauterize depression. Floating above this parallel universe, swarming with magnificently patterned and brightly colored fish, even the most committed skeptic cannot help but experience something like a religious awakening. See chapter 14.
- **Tracking chimpanzees on the shores of Lake Tanganyika** (Southern Tanzania): Gombe National Park, famed for the research undertaken there by Jane Goodall in the 1960s, vies with nearby Mahale Mountains National Park as Africa's best chimp-tracking destination. The hiking can be tough, but the reward—touching base with a totally habituated community of man's closest relative in its forested home—is utterly thrilling and engaging. If you're choosing between the two, the tracking is generally less demanding in Gombe, but Mahale is a wilder and more scenic location. See chapter 17.

### 3 THE BEST NATIONAL PARKS

- **Meru National Park** (Kenya): Experiencing a massive renaissance after poachers decimated animal numbers and waged all-out war on park wardens,

Meru is not only a beautiful reserve where you can spot the Big Five among increasingly good numbers of plains game and slightly rarer animals, but

because it was virtually off-limits for so many years, it's seen relatively little development and consequently draws few visitors. Such alluring potential solitude is unlikely to last, though, so make this a priority if you'd like to get a glimpse of African wilderness before the developers step in. See chapter 7.

- **Mafia Marine Park** (Mafia Island): Lapping the largely uninhabited archipelago that lies 200km (124 miles) south of Zanzibar, Mafia Marine Park's waters hold some of the richest reefs in the world, with more than 400 species of fish flitting along its shallow reefs and plummeting walls, including the whale shark, found in the shallow waters on the northwestern side of the island, facing Kilondoni. With a grand total of six accommodation options in the entire archipelago, diving these clear waters is also a pretty exclusive experience. See chapter 14.
- **Serengeti National Park** (Tanzania, Northern Circuit): The Serengeti is the greatest game park on the continent. It's not just the wildlife (the sight of more than two million animals moving across the plains is quite a sight), nor is it the actual size (almost that of a small country), but rather the expansive views you find at every turn. It was the Maasai who called it Siringitu—"the place where the land moves on forever"—and it is precisely this sense of vastness that will blow you away: the sheer expanse of the short-grass plains like a yellow sea, broken only by occasional rocky outcrops and elegant acacia trees. And above it all, always the high noble arc of the African sky. See chapter 15.
- **Tarangire National Park** (Northern Circuit): While the focus for most travelers to Tanzania is nearby Serengeti, many come away claiming lesser-known Tarangire as the real highlight of their trip. It can't compete in terms of size, but it is a beautiful park, typified by century-old baobabs that stand sentinel above the open grass plains and riverbeds, and home to a vast array of animal and bird species, attracted by the permanently flowing waters of the Tarangire River. In fact, given its dense concentrations of animals—second only to Ngorongoro—there is every chance you will enjoy a higher incidence of sightings here than in Serengeti; elephants, in particular, are common. See chapter 15.
- **Kilimanjaro National Park** (Tanzania): Kilimanjaro is unique in the pantheon of great mountains, in that it can be scaled by virtually anyone with the drive to do so—no mountaineering skills or special preparations are needed, and most people entering this park are intent on conquering the summit (though only some 60% actually make it). Even if you're not interested in ascending Africa's highest mountain, the sight of Kili's snowcapped dome—when she deigns to appear from behind the clouds that swaddle her for much of the day—is a source of amazement; a result, perhaps, of the viewer being physically immersed in equatorial heat, while towering 5,895m (19,336 ft.) above the plains is the other-worldly glow of snow and ice. See chapter 16.

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## 4 THE BEST PRIVATE CONCESSIONS

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- **Ranches throughout the Laikipia Plateau** (Kenya): Kenya's Laikipia Plateau is the country's hottest destination for enlightened safari enthusiasts looking to escape the crowds and experience a less commercial, more authentic brush

with the wilds. This is also where you'll find the greatest number of smart, well-managed, conservation-savvy ranches, many of them with intimate and exclusive camps or lodges (or both) where top-notch game-viewing opportunities are available day and night. Because the ranches and privately managed game reserves exist without the rules and strictures of the state-run parks, here you'll have the chance to set out on foot, on horseback, on mountain bike, and in the company of camels—there are chances to sleep under the stars (at **Loisaba**) or strike camp in the middle of an untamed wilderness. Laikipia may not offer the same kind of dramatic high-density game viewing experienced in the popular Masai Mara, but it offers the seductive allure of an African wilderness completely free of the press of mass tourism. See chapter 10.

- **Grumeti Private Reserve** (Adjoining Serengeti, Tanzania): If you're fortunate enough to have a rather cavalier attitude toward budget constraints, make a bee-line for the Grumeti Private Reserve, bordering Serengeti in the northwest. A beautiful concession, it offers classic East African landscapes explored with exceptional guides, both informative and charming, who are allowed to go off-road to approach the game up-close in open-topped vehicles. Accommodations are also unparalleled, but perhaps the real luxury is the fact that only a handful of guests enjoy access to the Grumeti's 138,000 game-rich hectares (340,860 acres). Also the best place for horseback safaris. See chapter 15.
- **Klein's** (Adjoining Serengeti, Tanzania): Like Grumeti, Klein's offers off-road game drives, allowing visitors the chance to get really close to animals, as well as night drives and guided walks,

accompanied by an armed guide. Guides here are also top-class (typical of &Beyond's stringent selection and training), and the experience is similarly exclusive to the handful of guests over-nighting at the camp. Hardly surprising that Klein's is one of the most popular destinations in the Serengeti, despite the fact that accommodations are not quite up to &Beyond standards. See chapter 15.

- **Ol Donyo Wuas and Campi ya Kanzi** (Chyulu Hills, Kenya): Although lovingly described by Hemingway, the Chyulu Hills in Southern Kenya remain an undiscovered paradise—visually among the most satisfying stretches of real estate in East Africa. The rolling volcanic hills and vast swaths of lushly vegetated lava flow have hardly seen any development, and views are magnificent no matter what way you look at it—not to mention the spectacular vistas of nearby Mount Kilimanjaro, best appreciated at dawn or, if you're lucky, with a sundowner from atop a rocky hill. There are just two remote and wonderful places to bed down in this region, and both of them offer the thrill of being surrounded by Africa at its most pristine. **Ol Donyo Wuas** is one of the most luxurious places to stay in Kenya—enormous, lavish suites overlook a vast plain and every imaginable activity is on offer, including light aircraft flights at sunrise and a chance to compare your jumping skills with Maasai warriors. Far less lavish, but with a no less magnificent setting (and some incredible views of Mount Kili), **Campi ya Kanzi** is a conservation-focused project with emphasis on community empowerment, and it's a good place to better understand the ways of the Maasai. See p. 112.

## 5 THE BEST TENTED CAMPS

- **Bateleur Camp** (Masai Mara, Kenya): For pure luxury, this is one of Kenya's top-drawer offerings, with chicly styled tents (and state-of-the-art built-in stone-and-glass bathrooms) and imaginative public areas filled with intriguing artifacts and artworks. In fact, tents are so smart—with dark wood furniture, built-in wardrobes, rare Maasai beaded leather, and Egyptian cotton linens—that you'll probably find yourself checking the walls to make sure they're canvas. Over and above the pampering you get from your butler, whose job it is to take care of your every whim (including sorting out your daily schedule), you'll be treated to exceptional guiding by some of the best in the business. And all this within striking distance of some famous *Out of Africa* film locations—if that doesn't stir your imagination, there's always the prospect of witnessing an episode from the Great Migration directly from your private porch, complete with a butler-mixed G&T at your beck and call. See p. 176.

- **Cottar's 1920s Safari Camp** (Masai Mara, Kenya): A regular backdrop for fashionable magazine shoots and a popular destination with safari-loving celebrities, this evocative camp just outside the Masai Mara harks back to another era. Re-created here, in fact, is a time when the Cottars established their reputation as the First Family of the safari business, setting up the first fixed camps in Kenya. The big, breezy tented accommodations are beautiful and private, and there's a small wing of two-bedroom suites especially for families. Colonial-era antiques, family heirlooms, and nostalgic *objets* re-create an era of sublime, gentle luxury—although game drives are now in modern 4x4s and most guests arrive by light aircraft.

Meals are served by waiters in period costume, with candles and lanterns setting a romantic scene. The camp is beyond the reach of the multitudes that drive around the southern part of the Masai Mara, so apart from local tribespeople and cattle herders from across the Tanzanian border, you'll seldom catch a glimpse of another soul. See p. 193.

- **Joy's Camp** (Shaba National Reserve, Kenya): Kenya has recently seen the establishment of several new tented camps that have broken an older mold of generally bland and functional canvas operations. Set within the peaceful, little-visited Shaba reserve (where authoress Joy Adamson lived out her final years), this elegant camp—with pretty Bedouin-style tents surrounded by a quintessential African wilderness and distant volcanic hills—is a relaxing place to get attuned to the rhythm of the continent. Whether from your private terrace, the pool, the open-air dining area, or your cleverly positioned shower, you'll be able to watch elephants and buffaloes grazing just beyond the edge of the camp—and in the morning you might discover evidence that the animals have been tasting the grass just outside your sleeping quarters. See p. 234.
- **Ngare Serian** (Masai Mara, Kenya): Renowned Kenyan safari guide and filmmaker Alex Walker offers a wide range of game-viewing activities from his exclusive new riverside camp that—with just four smart, simple tents—is jam-packed with charm and elegance, yet without any over-the-top grandeur. There's no in-room electricity, for example, but your large, multilevel accommodations (including open-plan bathrooms with tub and shower)



overlook a stretch of water populated by comical hippos that will keep you entertained all day long. Not that they'll need to, though, since you'll be out discovering the local wildlife on totally private game drives, picnicking in the bush, or tracking animals on foot. And if that sounds like too much effort, you can always settle into the breezy mess tent—designed like someone's posh indoor-outdoor lounge—while being served by cool, disarming Maasai butlers. See p. 182.

- **Oliver's Camp** (Tarangire National Park, Tanzania): Located in a remote wilderness area in the eastern section of Tarangire, Oliver's lies at the end of a dirt track that has scenery and game that will have you stopping to take pictures every few minutes. The camp itself is just as beautiful, combining thoughtful and luxurious furnishings with authentic camping facilities (composting toilets, bucket showers), and is one of only two camps that offers walking safaris inside the park; visitors can either complete a few hours' circuit or head off across the plains to overnight at a specially set up (and more rudimentary) fly-camp. See p. 402.
- **Rekero** (Masai Mara, Kenya): In the heart of Kenya's most popular wildlife preserve, there's little to beat the river's-edge location of this rustic, thoroughly authentic camp. Secreted away from the Mara's often-hectic crowds, and almost indistinguishable from the bush upon approach, here you can breakfast in full view of one of the Great Migration's best fording points. Add to this intimate service and impeccable guiding by some of the Mara's most respected Maasai—professional, articulate gentlemen who not only introduce you to the

abundant animals you'll spot within close quarters of this unfenced camp, but also share a deep knowledge of their culture. Your tented digs will be neat, simple, and functional, but the pared accommodations only help make the experience more memorable. See p. 192.

- **Sabora Plains Tented Camp** (Grumeti Private Reserve, Tanzania): "Camping" doesn't get better than this. Each tented "suite" comprises a huge bedroom tent furnished with antiques and custom-made articles, all with brass hinges to indicate mobility (in keeping with its Victorian safari theme), Persian carpets, and cut-glass vases brimful with roses. This is linked to a separate bathroom and dressing room tent to one side, and a separate lounge/library tent to the other, the latter filled with books and games; beyond your wrought-iron outdoor bed is a shaded umbrella-thorn acacia tree. Quite simply the most opulent and beautifully furnished tented camp on Earth. See p. 441.
- **Sayari Camp** (Serengeti, Tanzania): Located on the south bank of the Mara River, in the remote northwest of the Serengeti, Sayari Camp enjoys an unusually lush location in the Serengeti, with rolling parkland interspersed with riverine woodlands, and the river a permanent magnet for a variety of game. After a full refurbishment in 2009, furnishings in Sayari's public spaces are cool and modern—more urban bar than Hemingway safari—and the tents now have bathtubs in addition to showers and double basins. With the completion of the pool, this is now—along with Singita's Sabora Plains—the best tented camp in the Serengeti. See p. 437.

## 6 MOST MEMORABLE MOMENTS

- **Waiting out a storm on Lake Baringo** (Rift Valley): You see it coming, the weather that—inexplicably and without any real warning—besieges gorgeous Lake Baringo. Surrounded by cliff-edged escarpments, tea-colored Baringo is usually a peaceful oasis supporting canoe-riding fishermen and serene island communities. But the lake is subject to tremendous climactic mood swings, and when the winds suddenly kick up, the scene can be exciting and spectacular—particularly when seen from the inside. Although usually short-lived, the storms that blow in are pure, epic theater—brilliant tempests that bring welcome relief from the sweltering heat. Best place to witness the drama? From your water's-edge bedroom at the intimate Samatian Island “resort,” or from the porch of your wooden lakeside cottage at Roberts' Camp, where you'll sometimes catch glimpses of crocodiles poking their snouts above the choppy waters. See chapter 8.
- **Hot-air ballooning over the Masai Mara** (Masai Mara, Kenya): The most memorable way of seeing the Masai Mara—Kenya's most popular wildlife preserve—is from a hot-air balloon that launches at dawn and flies just above Earth's surface, from where terrestrial animals and splendid topography combine to create a marvelous bird's-eye drama. Gather for the predawn ritual of watching the balloon being inflated, and you'll be swept off your feet—spoiled with compelling vistas as you float above the plains and forests, following the contours of the Mara River enjoying a compelling perspective on an enchanting animal kingdom. Book well in advance if you want to fly during the Great Migration, when your view of tens of thousands of wildebeest and zebra will be without comparison. See p. 183.
- **Flying the Waco** (Laikipia Plateau): Here you have the rare opportunity of reliving the romance and thrill-ride fun of flying in an open-cockpit Waco. Piloted by Will Craig, owner of the superb **Lewa Wilderness** safari lodge, the bright yellow Waco is a replica 1930s biplane. During your exhilarating flight, you'll feel the wind on your face as you check out the ant-size animals down below and get the ultimate, definitive feel for the lay of the land. Because there's just the one biplane and only Will is able to pilot it, it's worth booking your flight *before* leaving for Kenya—and prepare to encounter the African wilderness in a truly unforgettable way. See p. 218.
- **Setting sail with a *taarab* orchestra** (Zanzibar, Tanzania): Listening to a live performance of *taraab* (roughly translated as “to be moved by music”)—preferably on the sea-facing terrace of the Serena Inn—is wonderful. Like so much of the island's architecture and cuisine, this Zanzibari music form is a blend of styles from Africa, India, and the Middle East, and dates to the 19th century during the sybaritic rule of Sultan Barghash. The Ikhwani Safaa Musical Club, which his court musician established, remains one of the leading Zanzibari *taarab* orchestras, with 35 active members playing a variety of instruments. See chapter 13.
- **Taxying up to Mafia's “airport”** (Mafia Island, Tanzania): Having run the sandy palm-lined strip that passes for a runway, the Cessna's pilot taxis up to a whitewashed shed, juddering to a halt near a neatly placed row of white plastic chairs behind a hand-painted sign that

reads DEPARTURE LOUNGE. Mafia airport is the most charming we have yet arrived at (or, sadly, departed from). Step inside the whitewashed shack to have your luggage weighed on an old stainless steel scale; it's as if you've traveled back 50 years, to a time when air travel was exotic and thrilling, and it was actually possible to find yourself marooned on a tropical island. See chapter 14.

- **Driving the road to Ol Doinyo L'Engai** (Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania): If you like getting off the beaten track and revere stark and desolate landscapes, a trip to Lake Natron, which takes you past the last active volcano in the Rift Valley, is a must. Aside from the volcano's spiritual significance (rumblings emitted by the mountain are believed by the Maasai to be the voice of their female deity), Ol Doinyo L'Engai is one of the most arresting sights in East Africa. Entirely barren, its single-cone peak dusted in white ash, the triangulated shape rises from flat plains that are blackened and strewn with volcanic rock; hot and hostile, it is as humbling as any of Earth's great natural wonders, a truly surreal and post-apocalyptic vision that will have you stopping your vehicle every few minutes to try, yet again, to capture it all on film. See chapter 15.
- **Walking with camels** (Laikipia, Kenya): You'll need time and stamina to explore the arid expanses of the sweltering northern wildernesses. Traveling on foot in desertlike conditions under blazing sun and intense heat can be physically and mentally challenging. Camels will accompany you to carry your gear—tents, food, and other supplies—but you'll enjoy an intimate encounter with the bush that's without parallel. Typically you'll be guided by local tribespeople—keen trackers and experts at surviving some of the harshest conditions known
- to humankind—who'll share intimate secrets of the terrain and show you wild creatures not only in their natural habitat, but light-years away from the nearest vehicle or sign of Western civilization. At night you'll sleep under canvas or beneath the stars in a temporary campsite, and you'll feel as if you are one of Africa's original explorers. See chapter 10.
- **Gazing into the Ngorongoro Crater** (Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania): Like Victoria Falls or the Taj Mahal, the world's largest unbroken volcanic caldera is one of those wonders that does not disappoint. Created some 2 million to 3 million years ago, the crater walls drop a sheer 610m (2,001 ft.)—a circular embrace enclosing a 260-sq.-km (101-sq.-mile) valley, in which even a 6-ton elephant appears no larger than an ant. Standing on the lip and gazing into this vast natural arena, the opposite walls of which rise almost 20km (12 miles) away, one is struck not only by the sheer size and symmetry, but by the visible ecosystems: From the dark montane forests that clad the southern crater walls, to the open yellow grassland and acacia thickets, intersected by veins of freshwater streams and the tell-tale white crust of its very own salt lake, Ngorongoro's great caldera falls into the archetypal realm of an isolated "Lost World." See chapter 15.
- **Boating the Rufiji** (Southern Tanzania): The Rufiji is Tanzania's largest river and the lifeblood of the vast Selous Game Reserve, its wide, sluggish waters feeding a labyrinth of small lakes and reed-lined channels. Boat trips along this riverine wilderness provide a thrilling variation on the conventional game drive—the indignant harrumphing of hippos, outsized crocodiles basking gape-hawed on the sandbanks, buffalo and giraffes filing down to the riverbank to drink, and elephants cavorting

playfully in the shallows. The birdlife is fantastic, too: Storks and skimmer wade close to shore, colorful bee-eaters and kingfishers nest seasonally along

the mud banks, and pairs of African fish eagles deliver their piercing trademark call from high in the palms. See chapter 17.

## 7 THE BEST PLACES FOR CULTURE & HISTORY

- **Lamu** (Kenyan Coast): Discovered as part of the hippy circuit just a few decades ago, this ancient Muslim town has become a favored getaway for celebs and royalty keen to escape the gaze of the media. Remote and relatively isolated, Lamu is also an intriguing repository for a culture and way of life that's seen little impact from the outside world, and many visitors spend their days wandering through the narrow laneways gazing up at the multistory stone houses trying to make sense of a world where donkeys and dhows are the principal means of transport. When the sense of *déjà vu* from continually cruising the same tight spaces gets too much, you can sail off to even more remote islands, such as Pate and Kiwayu, discovering deserted beaches, mingling with villagers, and picking through ruins of towns mysteriously abandoned centuries ago. And when the sense of stepping back in time starts to overwhelm, you can revel in the natural beauty of the Lamu archipelago, swimming with dolphins, tackling the warm water surf, or venturing across majestic sandy dunes. See chapter 11.
  - **Stone Town** (Zanzibar, Tanzania): The history and atmosphere of the old city surrounding Zanzibar's port—declared a UNESCO site in 2000—is tangible, its town planning almost medieval. Get lost in its labyrinth of narrow, winding lanes lined with tall crumbling buildings, where turning a corner can produce the sparkling ocean or a courtyard
- of local schoolchildren intoning the Koran. While it is a popular tourist destination, Stone Town is no sanitized historical re-creation, and you'll cross paths with (or observe, from your spot on the sand or on the balcony of the House of Wonders) African men in long dresses, women draped in black, and bare-backed men on the seashore sweating beneath huge bags of spices. See chapter 13.
- **Ngorongoro Conservation Area** (Northern Circuit, Tanzania): Ngorongoro was, and still is, the only conservation area in Africa to provide full protection status for resident wildlife as well as the interests of its indigenous pastoralists, the Maasai, who traded their rights to live in the Serengeti and pursued their traditional lifestyle in the neighboring Ngorongoro Conservation Area half a century ago. There are a number of villages within easy striking distance of the crater, but these see heavy tourist traffic; the best encounters are off the beaten track, such as the road to Lake Natron, where you will see Maasai men striding like kings before their cattle, their tall, lean frames draped in artful shades of red—a startling contrast against the parched backdrop of seemingly barren valleys; similarly, the women usually are wrapped in blue, their white beaded manacles gleaming against their elongated necks and slim wrists. Despite the innate beauty of these scenes, trigger-happy photographers are urged to practice restraint; some Maasai prefer not to

have their photographs taken, others will expect to be paid; always ask first, and respect the response. See chapter 15.

- **Kilwa Ruins** (Southern Tanzania): Set on the small offshore island of Kilwa Kisiwani, on the remote south coast of Tanzania, are the extensive ruins of the medieval port that the 14th-century globetrotter Ibn Buttata described as “one of the most beautiful and well-constructed towns in the world.” For

300 years, Kilwa Kisiwani was the hub of a trade network that linked the goldfields of present-day Zimbabwe to Arabia and Asia, and the haunted ruins—dome-roofed mosques, sprawling palaces, and ornate graves—form a peerless example of medieval Swahili architecture, recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1981. See chapter 17.

## 8 THE BEST ISLAND LODGINGS

- **Baraza** (Zanzibar, Tanzania): We’re not fond of resorts, but this is a real beauty, and if you like space, opulence, modern conveniences, and great service, this is definitely the number-one choice on Zanzibar. It’s also the top choice for spa junkies, with the best-looking spa in East Africa, and treatments to match. See p. 365.
- **Chole Mjini Lodge** (Chole Island, Tanzania): The ideal destination for anyone harboring a castaway fantasy (and wanting the best diving experience in Mafia waters), tiny Chole Island has no roads, electricity, or water mains, and this intimate ecolodge, the only on the island, is accessible only by boat. Accommodations are, in some ways, relatively spartan, but if you think real luxury is living in a large stilted tree-house, open to the sea breeze but private enough to enjoy the view naked, and near enough to the water’s edge to be lulled by the sound of the tide trickling back through mangrove roots, this is for you. See p. 380.
- **Delta Dunes** (Tana River Delta, Kenya): Spread across the tops of high dunes and affording indescribably beautiful views over river, ocean, and yet more dunes, this is a Robinson Crusoe-style fantasy comprising a unique

combination of beach and bush. The location makes it possible to spend the day getting the adrenaline pumping and then, with G&T in hand, witnessing wildlife at sunset while lazily cruising through the delta’s water channels. The big appeal is being sequestered among the naturally, organically designed spaces and with an endless, wild beach at your disposal (if you’re lucky, you’ll spot elephants swimming across the river or lion tracks on the beach). See p. 281.

- **Fundu Lagoon** (Pemba Island, Tanzania): Just getting to this aptly described “beach safari camp” is an adventure. Located on the isolated west coast of Pemba Island, here you will do nothing but dive, snorkel, canoe, and relax—there are plenty of places to do so. It’s both a romantic hideaway and a serious divers’ destination. See p. 373.
- **Funzi Keys** (South Coast, Kenya): At the northern edge of Kenya’s southernmost marine park, a maze of water channels spreads between a patchwork of pretty mangroves and forested islands, one of which has been transformed into this exceptionally laid-back and relaxing hideaway, with palm trees and handsome, beautifully designed and decorated *makuti*-roofed bungalows ranged

along a private beach. Everything here is designed to make you feel spoiled and pampered, whether you're taking a Jacuzzi bath in your massive open-plan room, having a romantic breakfast for two on the sand island that appears and disappears with the tides, or taking a languid sunset cruise between the islands. Come here to feast on spectacularly fresh seafood and discover new ways to do very little at all. See p. 268.

- **Kiwayu Safari Village** (Lamu, Kenya): Spread across the beach just a few steps from the gently breaking surf, the huge, beautiful, open-plan bungalows at this ultimate toes-in-the-sand hideaway are the final word in beachcomber chic. Just about everything is made from natural materials, and there's hardly a hint of concrete to be seen. Vivid Swahili colors bring a simple elegance to the interiors, while outside, the gleaming white sands offset the sea's turquoise palette brilliantly. Besides marveling at the sense of solitude and remoteness—you're lodged at the northernmost enclave along the Kenyan coast with only a tiny village for neighbors—there's an endless line-up of waterborne activities to keep you active, and the endless supply of fresh, fresh seafood at mealtimes will have you in rapture. And if sharing paradise with a few other guests seems unfair, you can always opt for the ultimate in privacy at the very exclusive **Baobabs of Kitangani**, where a single couple can indulge their castaway fantasies while being waited on hand and foot in a dreamy setting. See p. 295.
- **A private villa in Lamu** (Lamu, Kenyan Coast): The conversion of Lamu's *medina*-style stone houses into chic contemporary holiday homes has created some of the most sumptuous and romantic lodgings in the archipelago.

Although the houses are generally suitable for families, they also make decadently spacious retreats for anyone who values their privacy and wants a sense of being part of the daily life of this ancient settlement. There are now dozens of sophisticated and lovely villas that you can rent, either on Lamu Island or on Manda, its neighbor to the north. Those in Lamu town and Shela village are mostly restored originals, done up in a flattering style that's reminiscent of authentic Swahili design, while there is also a selection of newly built houses (the best is Leslie Duckworth's beautifully innovative creations at **Kizingoni Beach**). See p. 288.

- **Mnemba Island Lodge** (Mnemba Island, Tanzania): This small, chic resort, carefully tucked into its picture-perfect island, is arguably the most romantic escape in Africa. The island is tiny (it takes about 10 min. to stroll its circumference), with a coastal forest that sticks out from the powder-soft beaches and is surrounded by a conservation area. Plunge into the ocean to have the most amazing snorkeling experience; diving farther afield is stellar. See p. 363.
- **Pongwe Beach Hotel** (Zanzibar, Tanzania): This unpretentious, laid-back beach retreat is located on a particularly stunning piece of coast and enjoys one of the most remote locations in increasingly developed Zanzibar. This is still easily the most romantic barefoot beach hotel on Zanzibar's east coast and offers exceptionally good value. See p. 369.
- **Shooting Star** (Zanzibar, Tanzania): This intimate, personally managed beach resort offers a rustic, pared island style that resonates with island-hoppers from across the globe. The spa, a single whitewashed room, is within earshot of the ocean. See p. 369.