

ASILIA GAZETI

VOLUME 1 • 2019

JUNGLE VIP

The lucky chimps
of Lake Victoria

NEWS FLASH

What's hot in
East Africa right now

GO, GIRLS

Sub-Saharan women are
taking back control

WE ARE FAMILY

Asilia's co-founder talks to Francisca Kellett about the pioneering safari company's early years and why he's so proud that its DNA remains the same today

It's amazing what a holiday can do. Back in 2002, Asilia Africa co-founders Jeroen Harderwijk and his wife, Jane, decided to have an extended holiday in Tanzania. Jane hailed from Arusha, and they'd had the idea of spending some time in Africa setting up a charity. They never left.

'I'd decided to have a mini sabbatical after eight years of hard work,' Jeroen, originally an investment banker from the Netherlands, explains. 'We had a real passion to get something going in the charity space.' So they spent three months establishing the Kamitei Foundation to help improve rural education; the organisation continues to thrive. Little did Jeroen know that 17 years later he would be overseeing one of the world's leading safari companies, with 19 camps scattered across a vast swathe of the East African wilderness.

'There wasn't a master plan,' Jeroen tells me from his home in Tanzania, but he and Jane had been thinking about a big move, one that would let their children experience a continent other than Europe. 'We wanted to explore the world and decided to dive head-first into something completely new. You might say we were reckless,' he laughs.

Staying in Arusha, the heartland of Tanzanian hospitality, exposed Jeroen to the realities of tourism. 'I got to know locals from the safari industry who had been doing it for generations. These were real bush people, who really knew their stuff, but were struggling, as tourism was changing.'

'Standards were going up, visitors expected things like internet connections and brand-new vehicles. These guys were passionate and absolute experts in their field, but that was no longer enough.'

Jeroen saw an opportunity: to team up with these safari experts, bringing in his business experience and investment contacts to help locally-owned, family-run businesses build a more sustainable model. 'We wanted to continue offering genuine safaris, but to give them some real financial backing to keep up with the changing world.'

It worked. Asilia, which is Swahili for 'genuine' or 'authentic', launched in 2004, partnering with a group of legendary names in the African travel world that are still involved today – key stakeholders from Ker & Downey, the oldest safari operator in the world, as well as from Oliver's Camp in Tarangire National Park and the mobile safari company, Sokwe.

'These companies weren't just family-run – they had people behind them

who were truly passionate about the land and the people. Their businesses were all about conservation, making an impact, and collaborating with local communities,' explains Jeroen.

The camps and lodges that became part of the Asilia family are in some of Africa's most beautiful wilderness areas, and safeguarding their futures was at the very heart of what Asilia was all about from the beginning. 'We wanted to protect the areas we operated in, as well as strive to transform them into lasting conservation economies for local communities,' he adds.

The company became known for working closely with local communities, working with them as meaningful stakeholders, investing in local training and employment, and supporting NGO initiatives. As Jeroen emphasises, 'From the very start, this was in the DNA of the company – it defined Asilia.'

Take Matemwe, in Zanzibar. Known as a luxurious island hideaway, famous for its white sands and sparkling, turquoise waters, it has also been a pace-setter in community engagement since its inception in the early 1990s. For Asilia, this angle was just as pivotal as providing a world-class holiday experience for its guests.

The brand also ventured into areas that other companies wouldn't touch, opening up remote, seldom-visited regions to ecotourism. Sayari Camp, established in 2005, transformed a far-flung corner of the Northern Serengeti. The territory had suffered for years from rampant bushmeat poaching, but working with locals to introduce vital conservation practices, as well as providing new income streams based on tourism instead of hunting, quickly brought about regeneration.

Does Jeroen have a favourite camp? 'That's like asking if I have a favourite child!' he says. But he does highlight Rubondo, an island in the middle of Lake Victoria (see page 9). 'Coming to Rubondo and enjoying that climate, it's incredible – warm, but not too warm, with 30-metre high trees all around. It is very special.'

Really, every single Asilia camp holds a place in his heart. 'I'm really proud that we've been expanding since 2004 and still remain true to our original vision,' he says. 'We are now a family of nearly 1,000 people, and helping to secure and protect so many wildlife areas means we're having a much bigger impact than anticipated. And our DNA has remained the same.'

So it all worked out? 'It worked out better than expected,' laughs Jeroen. 'It's not been an easy ride, but we know that we are making a difference to our guests' lives and to the people of East Africa. That makes everything worth it.'

It's amazing what a holiday can do.



JEROEN HARDERWIJK
CO-FOUNDER AND
CEO OF ASILIA

THIS PAGE, THE ANNUAL
GREAT MIGRATION PASSES BY
OLAKIRA MIGRATION CAMP IN
THE SERENGETI, TANZANIA

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ASILIA THROUGH THE DECADES



1946 Ker & Downey, the world's first safari company, launches in East Africa



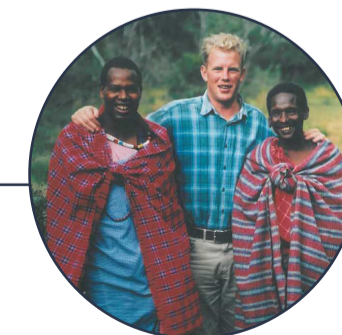
1990 Matemwe Lodge opens. Partners from Ker & Downey create mobile safari company Sokwe



1992 Oliver's Camp opens in the Manyara Region of Northern Tanzania's Tarangire National Park



2004 Sokwe, Matemwe Lodge and Oliver's Camp join together to form Asilia



2010 Asilia expands into Kenya and acquires Rekeru Camp, deep in the Masai Mara National Reserve



2014 The launch of Kwhihala Camp marks the first of Asilia's operations in Southern Tanzania



INSIDE TRACK

Hot restaurants, helpful routes and the coolest new camps



HIT THE ROAD

Feeling intrepid? Say hello to Asilia Adventures, a brand-new selection of unique, custom-made itineraries that take visitors off the beaten track. The range of curated trips offers insightful experiences and heart-pumping adventures, from multi-day walks and horse-riding safaris that get you close to the wildlife, to fishing, fly-camping, log cabin retreats and fascinating, authentic cultural interactions. Opt for a vintage safari experience that combines driving a Series 1 Land Rover with horse-riding to the east of Tarangire, or spend time with the fascinating Hadzabe hunter-gatherers in Tanzania's Yaeda Valley (see page 13). Alternatively try the five-day east-to-west walking safari across the Masai Mara conservancies, a remarkable way of seeing game away from the crowds. asiliaadventures.com



FANCY SOME WINE AFTER YOUR WILDLIFE VIEWING? FINISH YOUR SAFARI IN NAIROBI AND HOP ON KENYA AIRWAYS' NEW DIRECT ROUTE TO CAPE TOWN IN SOUTH AFRICA, FOR WHITE BEACHES, FABULOUS WINERIES AND A COOL, URBAN VIBE. THREE TIMES WEEKLY. (KENYA-AIRWAYS.COM)

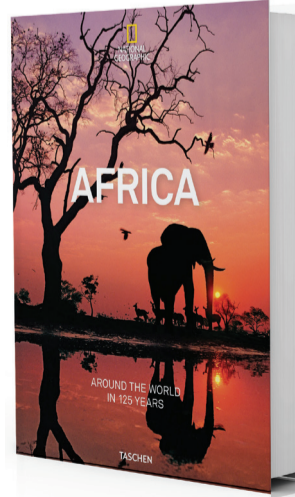


PHOTO SAFARI

The definitive guide to National Geographic's pioneering photographs of Africa, this beautiful book covers spectacular landscapes, bustling cities, local customs, and wildlife images. taschen.com

STREETWISE

WONDERING WHAT TO DO IN KIGALI, DAR ES SALAAM OR ARUSHA? CHECK OUT THIS NEW GUIDE TO THE BEST OF URBAN AFRICA WITH TOP TIPS ON WHAT TO SEE, EAT AND DO IN THE CONTINENT'S MOST VIBRANT CAPITALS. AFRICANCITYGUIDE.COM

NAMIRI PLAINS is reborn

The latest from Asilia is a relaunch of a Serengeti classic: Namiri Plains. Located beside the Ngare Nanyuki River in the grassy Eastern Serengeti, the area feels remote and uncrowded – perfect for visitors wanting to have the plains to themselves. The camp is located in front of a seasonal riverbed, where wildlife gathers to drink and cool off, while the surrounding plains are big cat territory – daily sightings are almost a given.

Built using the distinctive white-grey calcrete rock from the area and coupled with canvas awnings, the lodge is stylish and breezy. Guests can watch all the action from the cool of the camp's brand-new swimming pool and shady deck – the perfect place to take a dip while watching wildlife come and go. The large, brand-new suites open up fully to the exterior, with full-length sliding doors that lead to a private viewing deck overlooking the riverbed. The indoor-outdoor bathroom features a free-standing bath on the suite's deck for an indulgent al fresco game-viewing experience.

As with all Asilia lodges, Namiri Plains has been built to strict environmental standards, using innovative materials such as 100 per cent recycled deck flooring. Decorative touches like the handwoven baskets are crafted by local women, thereby supporting local communities and businesses.

Elsewhere around the camp is a well-stocked library and a dramatic campfire, beautifully framed by acacia



DID YOU KNOW?

The camp is close to Olduvai Gorge, where paleoanthropologists Mary and Louis Leakey discovered the world's most important hominid fossils – mankind's ancient ancestors – dating back 1.75 million years.

ABOVE: THE NEW CAMP IS BUILT TO STRICT ENVIRONMENTAL GUIDELINES

trees and perfect for dining under the stars. The mobile bar can move to wherever it is needed – by the pool or beside the campfire – ensuring that a cooling G&T is never far away.

The Information Centre provides in-depth literature on the area, which is famous for its large population of lions and cheetahs. End the day with a soothing treatment in the brand-new spa, tucked behind a grove of acacias in a quiet corner of the camp.



TALK THE TALK

WANT TO KNOW YOUR POMBOO* FROM YOUR POPO*? LEARN KI-SWAHILI ON THE GO WITH BITE-SIZE GAMES FROM THIS FUN APP. DUOLINGO.COM

48 HOURS IN NAIROBI

Five must-sees on a city stopover



NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK

Want to see game without leaving the city? Head to this gem, Africa's only National Park connected to a city, for a just-hit-the-ground safari thrill. kws.go.ke



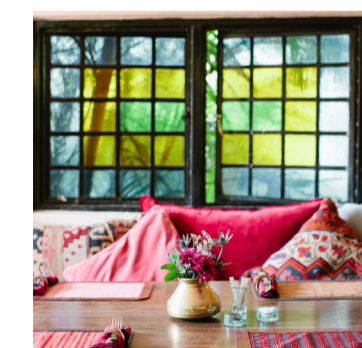
ONE OFF ART GALLERY

Make a beeline to the One Off Contemporary Art Gallery in the Rosslyn neighbourhood, which represents Kenya's most established modern artists. oneoffafrica.com



SHELDRIK WILDLIFE TRUST

Get up close and personal to orphaned elephants at this rehabilitation centre. Don't miss bath and feeding time at midday, probably the cutest wildlife experience in Kenya. sheldrickwildlifetrust.org



TALISMAN RESTAURANT

Head out to the leafy suburb of Karen to experience one of the best restaurants in Nairobi. Fascinating fusion dishes, colourful interiors, and a lovely organic garden. thetalismanrestaurant.com



GIRAFFE MANOR

Book in to this famous hotel and sanctuary and have a delicious breakfast with the friendly resident giraffes. Be warned: they are inquisitive animals. thesafaricollection.com

PHOTOGRAPHS: THE SAFARI COLLECTION, ONE OFF CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY, SASTHON POORVAKUL, ISTOCK / CHINGTING HUANG. * Pomboo means dolphin and popo means bat, in case you were wondering.

YOUR BACKSTAGE PASS TO EAST AFRICA

Asilia is known for its beautiful, authentic lodges, but did you know that the safari operator also organises itineraries in other parts of East Africa?

Whether it's having the chance to see the rare lowland gorillas of Rwanda and Uganda, tackling a once-in-a-lifetime adventure climb of Mount Kilimanjaro, or exploring the pumping heart of Kenya with an exciting city tour of Nairobi, Asilia will take care of everything. See page 17 for more details



SAY HELLO TO...

ANGEL VENDELINÉ NAMSHALI

Angel is the manager of Dunia in Tanzania, the only safari camp in Africa run entirely by women. She grew up in a family of six children in a rural community in Northern Tanzania, and landed her dream job against the odds. She now supports her husband, teenage son and wider family back home.

I NEVER WENT TO UNIVERSITY. I did well at school, but my father had to sell a cow to pay for our education, and he decided only my brothers could go on to university. I wanted to go, but there was no money. I was so sad! I cried for two weeks.

WOMEN DO NOT GET MANY OPPORTUNITIES IN TANZANIA. They are expected to get married, stay home and look after the children. In my tribe, the Pare, it is the boys who have the opportunities.

MY MOTHER NEVER WENT TO SCHOOL. She wanted to help me, so she spoke to her cousin who suggested I get a job in a hotel. My father was horrified! I started as a linen keeper, looking after guest laundry, but after two weeks the supervisor spotted me and promoted me to reception. She was very kind and trained me.

I HAD NEVER EVEN SEEN A DOLLAR BEFORE. I did not know how white people spoke. I knew they came from all over the world, but their accents really were something different.

WHEN I GOT A JOB WITH ASILIA AS A CAMP MANAGER, THE CAMP WAS STAFFED ENTIRELY BY MEN. I faced a lot of challenges. They did not respect me, they were untidy and they gave me a lot of problems.

THEY QUICKLY REALISED WHO WAS BOSS! After six months they were all lined up, working so well and respecting me and one another.

DUNIA BECAME ALL-WOMEN IN 2016. The first female-run camp in Africa – that is something we are very proud of.

I LOVE TALKING TO GUESTS. I just love hosting them. I meet a lot of different people from different countries – people I would never have met if I'd stayed in my village. In the evenings, we all sit together at dinner and I have many different conversations. That helps me learn a lot and build my confidence.

LIVING IN THE BUSH IS WONDERFUL. I love animals. I've been here so long but I never tire of seeing them. We have a herd of elephants who are always passing through – I just love them.

MY COMMUNITY LAUGHED WHEN I FIRST GOT A JOB. They thought I should be at home, not working away. When I started to support my family and to pay for my brothers' school fees, they changed their minds.

NOW THEY ARE VERY PROUD, ESPECIALLY MY PARENTS. When I go home, many women come and see me with their daughters and ask for my advice on how they can succeed as well.

MY ADVICE? ALWAYS LEARN AND BE PASSIONATE. Work hard and take courage. If you are passionate, you will get where you want to.

For more information on Dunia, visit asiliaafrica.com/dunia

PHOTOGRAPHS: ISTOCK / (M) DAVIES, STOCK/ADORE/IRYNA, PAYNE OF THE EQUATOR (Syl and Cynthia Dewdney, page 1)

DO THE KANGA

A new generation of contemporary designers is bringing these traditional cloths into the Instagram era, finds Lisa Johnson

One can never have too many kangas, but next time you buy another set of these versatile cotton rectangles – they come in pairs and are used as everything from skirts and headscarves to baby slings and towels – you might want to consider what it's saying.

'Embe mbivu yalikwa kwa uvumilivu' ('A ripe mango has to be eaten slowly') is just one of the Swahili proverbs and slogans that have found their way onto the patterned borders of the colourful cloths, while others focus less on romance and more on politics ('Women want equality, peace, and progress') or religion ('We are all passengers, God is the driver').

Kangas didn't arrive on the East African coast spouting slogans. When they first evolved in the mid-19th century from the bandanas of Portuguese traders, which were bought in batches of six and stitched together, the designs bore a closer resemblance to the spotted plumage of the guinea fowl, which gave the kanga its name. But it was the proverbs sewn into them – thought to have been introduced by a Mombasa trader called Kaderina Harjee Essak, circa 1910 – that rooted the cloths in Swahili culture.

Following the abolition of slavery in Zanzibar in 1897, kangas were worn by Swahili women as a symbol of self-empowerment and wealth, and they still speak silent volumes, worn in different ways in different social contexts, and used in rituals marking birth, puberty, marriage and death.

Over the past decade, as contemporary African fashion has found a global market, African prints have come to signal a designer's pride in his or her heritage. Look at the websites and Instagram feeds of the continent's fashion weeks and one-stop shops Industrie Africa and Ichyulu, and you'll see models posing coolly in a kaleidoscope of traditional prints and patterns reinvented for the modern era. Among leading brands such as South African knitwear label MaXhosa by Laduma and Nigerian designer Lisa Folawiyó are a number of East African brands championing both the kanga and the thicker kitenge, if not the inscriptions that go with them. But this may not be a bad thing. As the Swahili proverb goes: *'Sumu ya mahaba ni maneno mangi'* ('You can poison romance with too many words'). industriafrica.com; ichyulu.com



ABOVE: THE COLOURFUL CLOTHS CAME TO REPRESENT SELF-EMPOWERMENT AND WEALTH. BELOW: TRADITIONAL PRINTS NOW SIGNIFY A DESIGNER'S PRIDE IN HIS OR HER HERITAGE

THE HOT NEW DESIGNERS TO WATCH

In Kigali, menswear label **House of Tayo** is known for its sharp tailoring and wax-print ties and scarves, collars and cuffs, an emphasis on accents that is also favoured by **Mille Collines**.

Ugandan designer **Eguana Kampala** uses traditional African prints for unisex bomber jackets and contemporary silk-and-cotton ensembles, such as those in its SS'19 African Greatness collection.

In Nairobi, **Cocolili** draws from regional traditions to create bold new patterns for contemporary clothing and swimwear, while **Moran Apparel** uses wax print on canvas shoes.

And in Tanzania, **Doreen Mashika**, who has a shop in Zanzibar, is known for her innovative approach to the kanga.

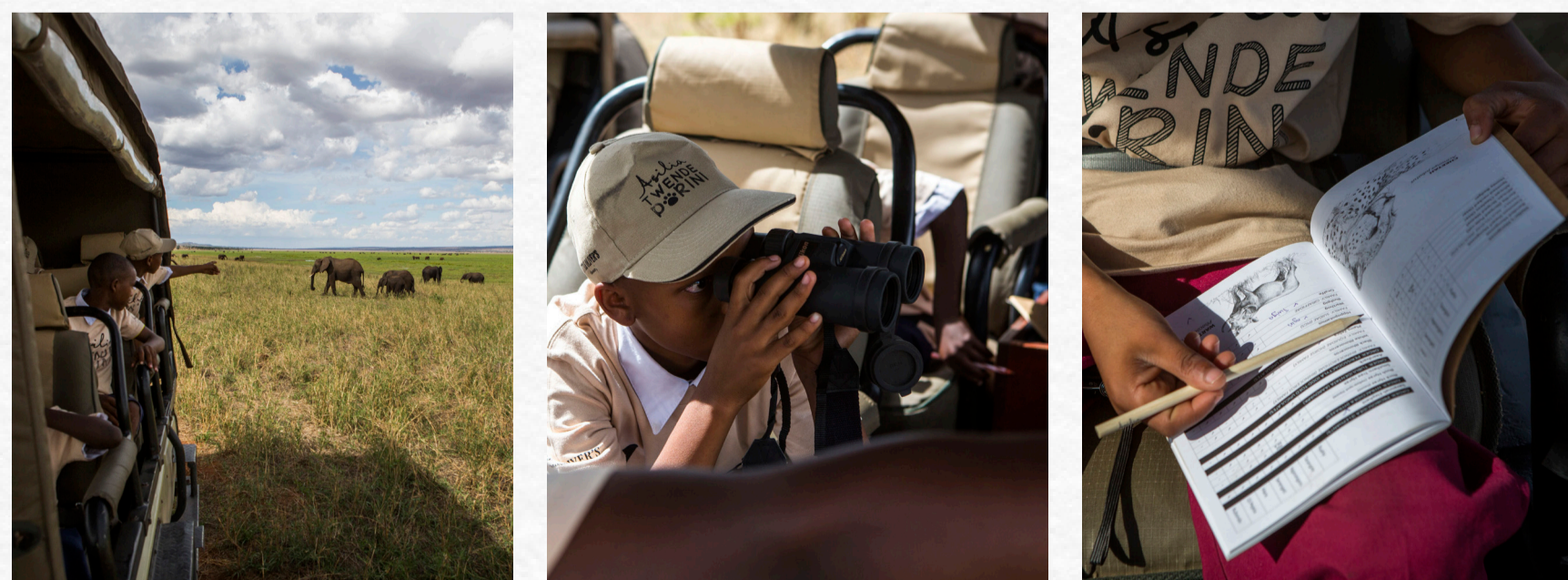
houseoftayo.com; millecollines.es; eguana.carbonmade.com; cocoliliafrica.com; @moranapparel; @doreenmashika





SEEING IS BELIEVING

Asilia's flagship education programme gets kids excited about conservation out in the great wild open



The 4x4 is filled with children, and they all have binoculars pressed to their faces. Their guide, Emmanuel Qamara, is pointing at a small herd of elephants moving on the horizon. The binoculars come down and facts are scribbled in notebooks as Emmanuel explains the elephant's life cycle. When he tells his audience how long these animals usually live – 60 to 70 years – pens are lowered, eyes open wide, and mouths form impressed 'Os'. And then the vehicle moves off, bumping along the dusty road in search of the next adventure.

This is not your average day for the children from the local Ol Tukai Manyara Primary School in Tarangire. But then this is not your average day for Emmanuel either. As one of the expert guides at Oliver's Camp, a stylish tented camp in the remote southern reaches of Tanzania's Tarangire National Park, Emmanuel is more accustomed to guiding well-travelled international guests around this wildlife-rich area. For the next few days, though, his charge is a little different: a group of 44 children from Ol Tukai Manyara and the Plaster House, the latter being a home in Arusha that cares for children who are recovering from corrective orthopedic surgery, plastic surgery, and neurosurgery.

This is Twende Porini, which means 'Let's go to the bush' in Swahili – Asilia's flagship educational programme, set up in 2015 in Tanzania and extended to Kenya in 2018. Through the programme, Asilia brings schoolchildren aged between eight



ABOVE, CHILDREN FROM OL TUKAI PRIMARY SCHOOL SPEND SOME OF THE AFTERNOON PLAYING BALL GAMES IN THE BUSH. OPPOSITE, MORNINGS ARE FILLED WITH FUN AND FASCINATING WILDLIFE ENCOUNTERS

and 14 to its camps across East Africa – to see the wildlife up close and to learn first-hand about the importance of looking after both the animals and the environment.

It is a busy four days. Expeditions set off each day at the crack of dawn for a morning game drive, where the children are shown how to use binoculars and take photos, and are also taught about topics such as poaching or the gestation period of a giraffe. Afternoons are filled with activities and lessons in

everything from conservation and nutrition to HIV/AIDS awareness.

Epimark Mwakalinga, a Positive Impact Coordinator for Asilia, says that exposing school-age children to the realities of conservation is hugely important. 'In 20 years' time, some of these kids might work for the National Park, or be employed by the government, and they'll have an idea, from this programme, about the benefits of keeping wildlife and the environment safe.' Thadeus Aseta, the camp manager, agrees. 'That's why we're trying to make sure that the people living around the national parks are keen on the environment. Nature is about sharing. If we all feel part of it, we all thrive – the communities and the wildlife.'

Things are kept lighthearted with afternoon activities – soccer, drawing, mask-making, and singing sessions. And then, come sundown, everyone gathers around the campfire to hear stories from the bush, or they get together indoors to watch a wildlife documentary. At night, the children sleep in the very same rooms that guests usually stay in – beautiful tented suites with indoor and outdoor showers, overlooking the floodplain.

'The kids will remember this their whole lives,' says Rachael Mshana, one of the teachers that accompanies the trip.

Back on a game drive, the children are watching in silence as a pride of lion stalks quietly across the plain. 'Something that surprised me is the environment here,' the softly spoken Sumia Miraj, 12, says with a smile. 'I've never seen anything like it.'

WORKING HAND IN HAND

AsiliaGiving channels guest donations to local partner charities and NGOs, which then go towards funding a variety of projects, such as these, below



To find out more, visit asiliagiving.org

PRIMATE PARADISE

Welcome to mysterious, remote Rubondo Island, home to an assortment of chimps with an extraordinary story. Nigel Tisdall reports



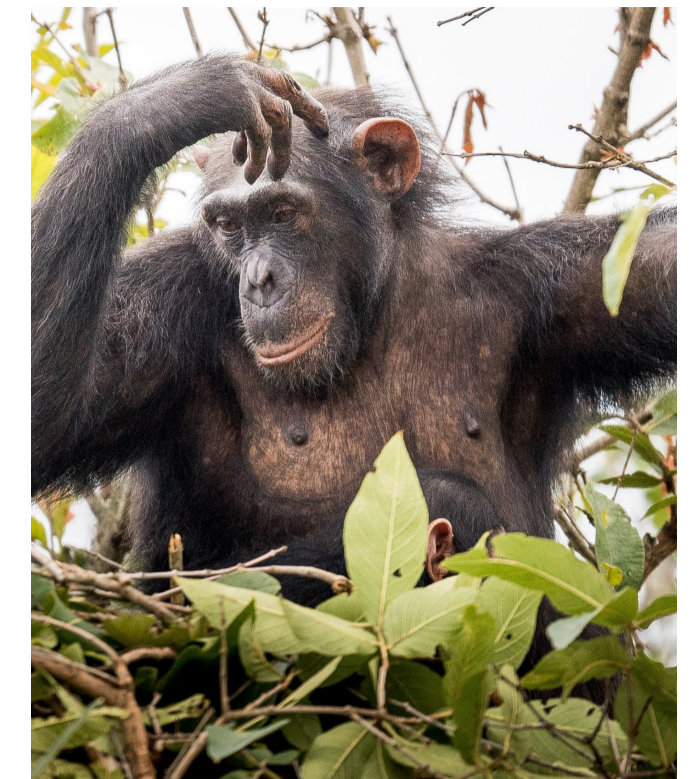
Am I about to meet the luckiest chimpanzees in the world? As I fly over the ruddy hills of south-west Tanzania in a tiny single-prop aeroplane, my background reading certainly suggests so. In 1966, 10 of these most engaging primates were rescued from European zoos and taken to Rubondo, a remote, uninhabited and predator-free island on Lake Victoria, where their descendants survive.

The mastermind behind this madcap adventure in rehabilitation was Professor Bernhard Grzimek, a German conservationist who was the director of Frankfurt Zoological Society for 29 years. He received an Academy Award for his 1959 documentary *Serengeti Shall Not Die* and penned some 20 books that reveal both his passion for wildlife and his unorthodox methods for studying it. One bizarre and highly dangerous experiment involved placing a large inflatable lion, elephant and rhinoceros in front of their living counterparts, apparently to discover 'what goes on in animals' heads'.

Chimps were a particular obsession. In 1945, after Berlin Zoo had been destroyed by bombing, Grzimek took several into his flat, resulting in 'numerous scars'. He made his 16-year-old son, Michael, spend a month transporting a giant male chimpanzee back from Ivory Coast, only for it to die on arrival. Both father and son loved to fly around East Africa in a Dornier 27 painted like a zebra. In 1959 it hit a vulture and crashed, killing Michael. Fifteen years later, Grzimek married his son's widow.

Travelling in this forgotten corner of Tanzania still has a feel of those freewheeling times. 'I envy you staying on Rubondo,' admits Tron Williams, the South African co-pilot on my early flight east from the Rwandan capital, Kigali. 'The island looks like something from Jurassic Park,' he enthuses, 'just a mass of green forest with a little air-strip.' Not that I can see it, for as we draw near a thunderstorm erupts, sending the plane lurching as lightning dances over what now looks like a gloomy Scottish loch.

Lake Victoria is the world's second-largest lake, its somnolent shores and islands sprinkled with tin-roofed villages and wooden jetties where fishing boats cluster. It seems woefully under-appreciated, and must have seemed an ideal place to play Noah's Ark half a century ago. Grzimek's assorted chimps had originally been abducted in infancy from the forests of West Africa, then spent from three months to nine years in various zoos. Most were now fully grown and sexually mature — so no longer the mischievous youngsters the public liked to see. The photos of them being released here from wooden crates after their five-week, 16,000km journey from Antwerp have an entertaining sense of 'light touch paper and retire'. One male had to be shot after attacking a warden, but



ABOVE, A MOTHER CHIMPANZEE WITH HER BABY. OPPOSITE, AERIAL VIEW OF RUBONDO ISLAND

the rest thrived in their 237 sq km island sanctuary. (Chimps can't swim, although as they share 98 per cent of our DNA, I'm not ruling out the possibility they might learn.)

Grzimek didn't stop there. Another six chimps were brought to Rubondo, along with 20 black-and-white colobus monkeys, 16 full-grown rhinos, 12 giraffes and two pairs of roan antelopes. In 1973 six young elephants were added, followed in 2000 by a flock of grey parrots from Cameroon that were seized in Nairobi while being smuggled to Asia.

What became of this strange menagerie? That is the wonder of Rubondo, and a chief reason to visit. There has been a small camp here since 1997, which in 2012 was bought by Asilia, an Arusha-based safari company with a taste for out-of-the-way locations — other properties include The Highlands, a cluster of geodesic domes in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area set at 2,660m, and Namiri Plains in the cheetah-rich grasslands of the eastern Serengeti. Today Rubondo Island Camp has eight thatched cottages set beside a 200m sandy beach, with a small pool and decked restaurant. The style is unpretentious, off-radar and supremely restful.

During the past six years Asilia has donated more than \$180,000 towards the habituation of Rubondo's chimps — the process of gradually getting the animals accustomed to human observers, so they can be studied in the wild. Run in conjunction with the Tanzania National Parks Authority and the conservation NGO Honeyguide, the project has been so successful the camp has now launched a three-night 'habituation experience' offering guests the chance to be a part of this process.

'Most of our guests see the chimps,' confirms my guide, Dunia Lukongola, as we set off with an armed ranger to try our luck. There are now about 60 chimps, split into two groups, but as Rubondo is 26km long they can be hard to find, and the 12-strong



habituation team take pride in never offering them food or using sound to draw attention. The best time to visit is in the dry season from June to September but encounters are never guaranteed. Yesterday's violent storm hasn't helped, so we're instructed to climb up a ridge and await instructions. Three hours later, I'm still there.

Fortunately, Rubondo has much in the way of compensation. While the island's rhinos fell victim to poachers, today there are more than 100 elephants, along with a similar number of giraffes enjoying a stress-free life in which snakes represent their only threat. A game drive reveals an abundance of fish eagles, sitatunga and bushbuck, while fishing for Nile perch at sunset brings satisfying results. When I spy another boat trying for a whopper (the record is 104kg) I'm shocked — I'd assumed we had the place to ourselves. In fact some 50 people live here, mainly camp and park staff. The island gets about 1,000 visitors a year, with inexpensive accommodation also available in self-catering bandas run by the park authorities.

Rubondo was declared a game reserve in 1966, then a park in 1977, and there is nothing to remind visitors of the 400 Banyarubondo people who fished and farmed here before this. 'There was no compensation,' reflects David Tibanywana, a retired schoolteacher who was forced to leave the island at the age of 18. Now he lives in Muganza, a 15-minute boat ride away, and while he is nostalgic for his lost home such displacement has been common in the creation of Africa's parks. His nephew, Emmanuel Itamula, now works as a boatman for the Asilia camp, and local farmers are employed to grow its vegetables.

The next day we climb a different hill, and the moment we reach the summit there is an excited call — the trackers have found a party of 17 chimps. We're in the wrong place, though, so down we go again and after a hectic 45-minute drive we plunge into the forest on foot. 'We'll need to step up the pace!' urges Hamza Raza, another expert Asilia guide, but there are no paths through the tangled branches and I'm

'THERE IS A PIERCING THRILL WHEN YOU GO EYE TO EYE IN THE WILD WITH OUR CLOSEST RELATIVE.'

ABOVE LEFT, VIEW OF RUBONDO ISLAND CAMP AND BEACH. ABOVE RIGHT, ONE OF THE MANY ELEPHANTS ROAMING THE ISLAND

painfully aware how much easier it is for chimps to swing and leap through the trees. At one point Dunia's radio picks up their screeches and hee-hees, which seem to mock our hot and flustered pursuit.

Two-and-a-half hours and 10km later, we stop for a breather. Have they beaten us? Luckily, the chimps have had enough of this runaround too. 'Come — we've found five with a baby!' a tracker whispers urgently. The thick vegetation makes a sighting and photography tricky, but we gradually creep within 10 metres of a six-year-old male, Mgwesa. Stretched out on some leaves, he yawns lazily, baring his teeth as a member of the habituation team makes notes.

'Does he know we're here?' I ask naively, at which point Mgwesa stands up and gives us a good hard look. There is a piercing thrill when you go eye to eye in the wild with our closest relative in the animal kingdom. It is a mutual sense of wonder, like trying to place a face through the mists of evolution. Then suddenly Mgwesa's off, up into the trees to snack on mbungo fruits and crash around so that twigs, branches and eventually a mighty log come tumbling down, forcing us to pull back. It is a clear lesson in who is king of this jungle, after which Mgwesa nonchalantly swings off to find his mates.

It has been a memorable meeting, but begs the question where, for the traveller, is the sweet spot in the process of habituation? Now, I would suggest. Two years earlier, I might not have seen anything. A decade on, will Rubondo's chimps be so used to visitors they become just another turn-up-and-click experience?

Grzimek would surely welcome such developments, for his aim was to encourage travellers to Tanzania

to do more than pay 'lightning visits' to its flagship wildlife-viewing arenas, the Ngorongoro Crater and the Serengeti. The location of Rubondo and its chimps means the island could become the midway stop on a bucket-list itinerary combining those classic sights with the mountain gorillas of Rwanda. It is also a viable alternative to Zanzibar as a place for some downtime, even if swimming is out of the question thanks to hippos, crocodiles and the risk of bilharzia. 'I wanted somewhere to relax that was still close to nature,' explains a fellow guest, Punit Mehta. A New York banker, he was visiting for a few days after climbing Mount Kilimanjaro. 'So far I've seen a python and crocodiles, caught a massive Nile perch, glimpsed a chimp and fallen in love with hippos.'

Asilia has plans to build a second camp further north at Masekela, which will be closer to the habituated chimps and have luxuriously appointed tree houses, but for the moment Rubondo remains a blissful spot to escape the safari circus. On my last morning, Hamza points out a tiny, white-bearded face high in the fig trees. It's a magnificent black-and-white colobus monkey with a long train of white fur descending like a waterfall. Close by sits a fine pair of grey parrots, their red tail feathers flashing bright — had life taken another course they would now be pets in a cage. Tinkering with the natural world is always hazardous, but in the curious case of Rubondo, Professor Grzimek's intervention has had clear rewards. □

DETAILS

This article originally appeared in *The Financial Times* in January 2019.* For more information on Rubondo, visit asiliaafrica.com. Coastal Aviation (coastal.co.tz) offers daily flights to Rubondo from the Serengeti in Tanzania, and from Kigali in Rwanda.

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EQUAL ACCESS

Campaigns for female empowerment are levelling the educational playing field in sub-Saharan Africa. Heather Richardson reports

Naati was 12 years old when her family arranged for her to be married. Her husband-to-be was a 55-year-old man; marrying her off would help lift some of the family's financial load.

Naati ran away. She found help through the Maa Trust, a social-development organisation in Kenya's Masai Mara region and one of Asilia's partners. AsiliaGiving, which is part-funded by guests staying at Asilia properties, offered Naati a scholarship so that she could continue at school; when she graduates and finds a job, she will be able to support her family through a career made possible by education.

Naati's situation is not uncommon. In sub-Saharan Africa, one in three girls marry before the age of 18. This situation has social and health-related consequences, of course. But child brides also rarely complete their education, making it very difficult for them to find jobs and alternatives to domestic village life. Education can open up a path to independence. The long-term economic implications are huge as well. The World Bank estimates that child marriage costs African countries at least USD 60 billion in lost lifetime earnings.

'If you educate a woman, you educate a nation.' This Ghanaian proverb is often heard all over Africa, and it's true that when a woman is educated, there is a wide-ranging positive impact. Education, however, is expensive. The cost of fees, books, and uniforms is a barrier for many rural children — particularly girls, as parents often prioritise their sons' education. Even if a woman completes her education, she often struggles to find equal access to employment.

The good news is that many companies and individuals in East Africa have identified these challenges for women and are taking action. One simple way to empower girls is to help out with education costs. Asilia's scholarship programme, for example, has so far benefited nearly 100 students like Naati. Though these scholarships are for both girls and boys, it's arguably more impactful for the former: in sub-Saharan Africa, nine million girls aged six to 11 will not attend school at all — a third more than boys, according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Scholarships are instrumental in empowering girls in poor rural areas and boosting their numbers in class.

There is change afoot within schools too. At Loyola High School in Dar es Salaam, student



'SCHOLARSHIPS ARE VITAL IN BOOSTING THE NUMBERS OF GIRLS IN CLASS'

Alice Magaka saw that many girls could not afford sanitary products; this kept them from attending classes for several days each month. So Alice dreamed up the Pink Box Project. She set up a box for girls to donate their extra pads, which are collected by the matron and handed out as necessary — as a result, no one has to skip school.

Alice is now a student at the pioneering African Leadership University (ALU) in Kigali, Rwanda — another institution aiming to empower women. ALU's School of Wildlife Conservation (SOWC) has launched a scholarship programme for women in conservation. Elizabeth Tolu Ojo, Director of Operations at SOWC and the brains behind the scheme, aims for the next intake to be at least 50 per cent women.

Then there's the matter of access to jobs. In rural areas around the Masai Mara, the Maa Trust runs the Maa Beadwork and Maa Honey programmes, providing income opportunities specifically for women. The Maa Trust operates many other initiatives too: providing clean drinking water and toilets at schools, offering bursaries to children with trauma in their backgrounds, and running entrepreneurship programmes for youth groups.

The safari industry has long been dominated by men, but attitudes are changing, and Asilia is leading the way. Across its camps, over a third of the company's managers are female, and Dunia is a trailblazer; it is staffed entirely by women, the first camp of its kind in the Serengeti. Aside from providing so many women with jobs, it sets an example for young girls, proving that women can run camps just as well as men (see page 5).

These positive actions are slowly making their mark. Female literacy in East Africa is almost at parity with that of men, and women are in the majority in Rwanda's parliament.

There's still work to be done, but the future for East African women, and for girls like Naati, is looking bright. □ themaatrust.org



FROM TOP, GIRLS ATTENDING SCHOOL IN ZANZIBAR; DUNIA IS RUN ENTIRELY BY WOMEN; THE MAA HONEY PROGRAMME PROVIDES INCOME FOR WOMEN



DID YOU KNOW?

The Hadzabe, who live exclusively in Northern Tanzania and are believed to number about 1,300 individuals, are the only ethnic group in East Africa that relies on hunting and gathering for its subsistence. They speak Hadzane, a click-based language that, although it shares some phonetic similarities to other Khoisan languages, is not intelligible to other Bushmen.

PERFECT HARMONY

Katie Fewkes catches sight of the honeyguide bird while walking with the fascinating Hadzabe hunter-gatherers of Northern Tanzania

The women ahead of us are moving effortlessly through the scrub, gliding past the branches of the aptly named wait-a-while bush. We crash along behind, pulling thorns from our clothes and clumsily snapping every available bough underfoot. When you're walking with the Hadzabe, there's a lot to learn.

We're in the Yaeda Valley, close to Northern Tanzania's Lake Eyasi, spending time with the Hadzabe people. This is one of East Africa's least-known tribal groups – hunter-gatherers whose lifestyle has, so far, largely avoided the mayhem of modernity. Their language alone is fascinating, a stream of clicks and sounds that will seem familiar to anyone who has spent time with the Khoisan Bushmen of Botswana and Namibia, although the languages are not actually related. Like the Khoisan, though, the Hadzabe use hunter-gatherer techniques to live off the land, passing on their knowledge from generation to generation.

The group stops suddenly as one of the women stoops down over the earth, putting some of that knowledge into practice. A couple of swift digs with a stick reveals a tuber – an African equivalent of a potato – and there are smiles all round. Nearby we find a few more roots to bring back to their village of woven-grass shelters, taking just enough but always leaving plenty to ensure there will be food to be found another day.

This respect for their surroundings is central to the Hadzabe way of life. They are thought to have lived in Tanzania for 100,000 years, which has made them experts in existing in harmony with the land. Everything they need is here – honey, berries, roots and meat – all foraged, hunted and shared equally amongst the group. It is a fundamentally sustainable lifestyle, a system that we visitors could certainly learn from.

We're fortunate enough to be spending time with the Hadzabe on an Asilia Adventure, a programme of short, experience-rich journeys designed to show travellers parts of East Africa beyond the national parks.

These visits with the Hadzabe are far from commercialised. Our guides are the Peterson family, who have forged a strong bond of friendship and understanding with the Hadzabe over more than 50 years. They speak the language, translating

for us and explain the importance of the Hadzabe people's traditions and cultural integrity. With only a handful of inquisitive and well-educated visitors coming to accompany them, the experience feels like deep immersion rather than awkward observation.

As we spend time with them, we start to understand that roles are divided and that everyone has their part to play. While the women go out gathering, the men set off each day in search of much-prized honey and meat, hunting with handmade bows and arrows, cleverly mimicking animals, and using impressively silent footwork. They seek out the slightest scratch on a tree or the smallest mark in the sandy soil that might indicate the presence of an animal. We learn about one particularly extraordinary skill, where the men work in symbiosis with the honeyguide bird. The bird calls out to guide them to a beehive, and smoke is then used to pacify the bees and extract some honey, allowing the birds to feast on the beeswax and larvae.

Our guide, Mika Peterson, explains that the challenges faced by the Hadzabe go far beyond the search for food and water. Their territory is increasingly being encroached on by other tribal groups, and wildlife numbers have dropped dramatically due to modern diseases, human settlement and roads disrupting migration routes. It is their hope that tourism can have the lightest footprint here,

changing little but allowing visitors to gain insight into their wisdom and traditions. Indeed, funds from tourism have enabled some Hadzabe children to acquire formal education and return to advocate for the rights of their tribe.

That evening, it's dinnertime back at the fly-camp, our home for the duration of this adventure. Witnessing the tribe's approach to foraging and eating makes us all the more mindful about each mouthful; the contrast between their world and ours seems vast. Seeing their strong ties to the land, and their ability to live in harmony with their surroundings, passed on from generation to generation, has been a humbling experience. Just yesterday, our campfire dinner had seemed like simple safari fare. Tonight, it is a delicious and extravagant feast. □



ABOVE, HADZABE WOMEN GATHERING WOOD. OPPOSITE, HADZABE MEN LOOKING FOR HONEY

Inspired to return for an adventure like this yourself? Visit asiliaadventures.com or speak to your travel agent.

LOUD AND PROUD

Chris and Monique Fallows, guests at Dunia and Namiri Plains, share their extraordinary encounter with a Super Pride of lions



Photographed by CHRIS FALLOWS

CATS AND KOPJES

Serengeti is the Swahili word for 'endless', which perfectly describes the area, with its limitless views of grassland savannah. Dotted across these grasslands are majestic kopjes, the rocky outcrops used by predators as vantage points from which to spot prey. It was our goal to photograph lions sitting on them.

We were not disappointed. We saw lions every day, including an impressive group of males who, after a long wait, stood proudly on a kopje for our perfect shot – our *Lion King* moment. This was at Dunia, which looks out over Moru Kopjes in the Central Serengeti.

One of the most special experiences was when we spotted a lioness walking in the road just ahead of us. As we approached, I became vaguely aware of a rustling sound in the grass to our left. With a jolt, I realised this wasn't a herd of gazelles; it was a 'herd' of lions! There were brown shapes everywhere. This was a Super Pride, and all three of us – our guide Zawadi, Chris, and I – were shaking with excitement. Super Prides are almost mythical, and this was something we never dreamed we

would be lucky enough to see. There were 43 lions in total.

Our next stop was Namiri Plains, famous for its cheetahs, and we saw 26 in just six days, including a female that chased, and caught, a Thomson's gazelle. On our last day, it had rained late into the afternoon, but when the weather finally cleared it left behind a beautiful dark sky. We'd been watching a lion pride resting by a large termite mound, and to our delight one of the youngsters perched himself at the very top of it. At that moment the sun popped out from behind the clouds and a few exquisite moments followed.

It was the perfect end to a truly special visit to the Serengeti. The wildlife sightings had been phenomenal, the areas were beautiful, and the people we met were amongst some of the most genuine and warm we have encountered on our many travels. □

Do you have an extraordinary Asilia experience you'd like to share? Get in touch @asiliaafrica

OFF ROAD

For a different view of Kenya, head to the hidden gems of Meru, Lewa-Borana and Samburu

This journey around three unique locations is the perfect trip for returning visitors wanting to gain a deeper understanding of Kenya's wildlife, communities and conservation programmes. The eight-day itinerary combines excellent wildlife viewing, including the chance to spot rare species, plus a unique insight into conservation and a deep dive into the rich culture of the Samburu people.



DAYS 1 AND 2

FLY FROM Nairobi to Meru National Park and spend two nights at Elsa's Kopje, named after the lioness raised by Joy and George Adamson and made famous in the film 'Born Free'. Spend the day on game drives seeking out elephants, lions, leopards and buffalo, as well as visiting the rhino sanctuary. Fishing, river trips and walking safaris can also be arranged.

DAYS 3, 4 AND 5

TRANSFER BY road around the north of Mount Kenya to the Lewa-Borana Conservancy.

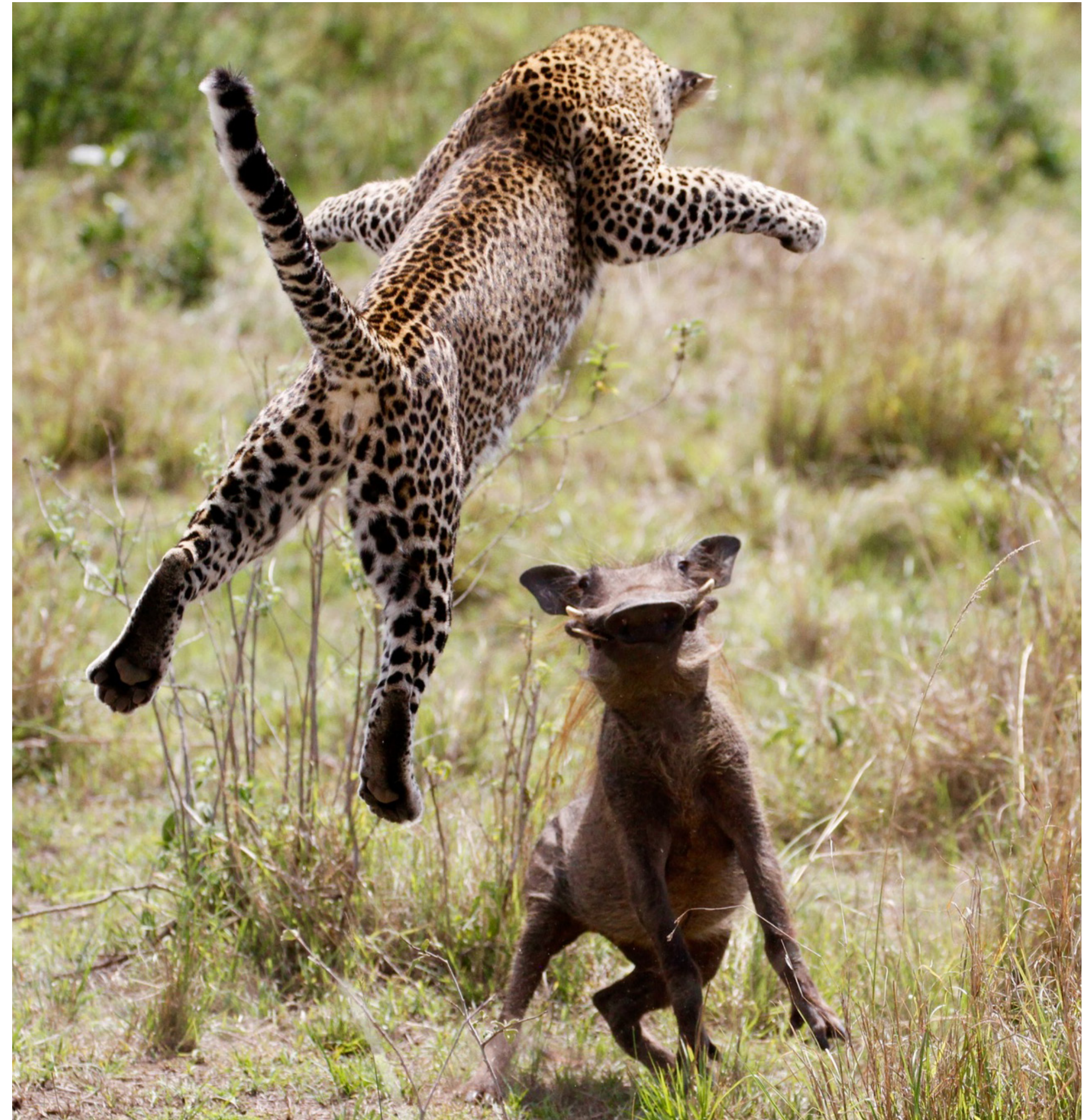
Borana Lodge, your home for the next three nights, has sweeping views across the rugged landscape of the valley and offers game drives, walking safaris, horseback safaris and mountain-biking amongst the wildlife. This is a top spot for learning about conservation by joining the teams that monitor the lions and rhinos.



DAYS 6, 7 AND 8

FLY BY charter plane to Sasaab, a beautiful lodge located on a conservancy bordering Samburu National Reserve. Head out on game drives, guided walks and camel rides in search of some of Northern Kenya's more unusual species, such as Grévy's zebra, reticulated giraffe and gerenuk. A highlight is spending time with one of the vibrant Samburu communities to learn more about their culture and traditions, or you can opt for a dose of adventure by sleeping beneath the stars at a remote fly-camp. Return to Nairobi by plane at the end of your adventure.

FOR SIMILARLY INSPIRATIONAL TRIPS, CONTACT YOUR TRAVEL AGENT OR ENQUIRIES@ASILIAAFRICA.COM

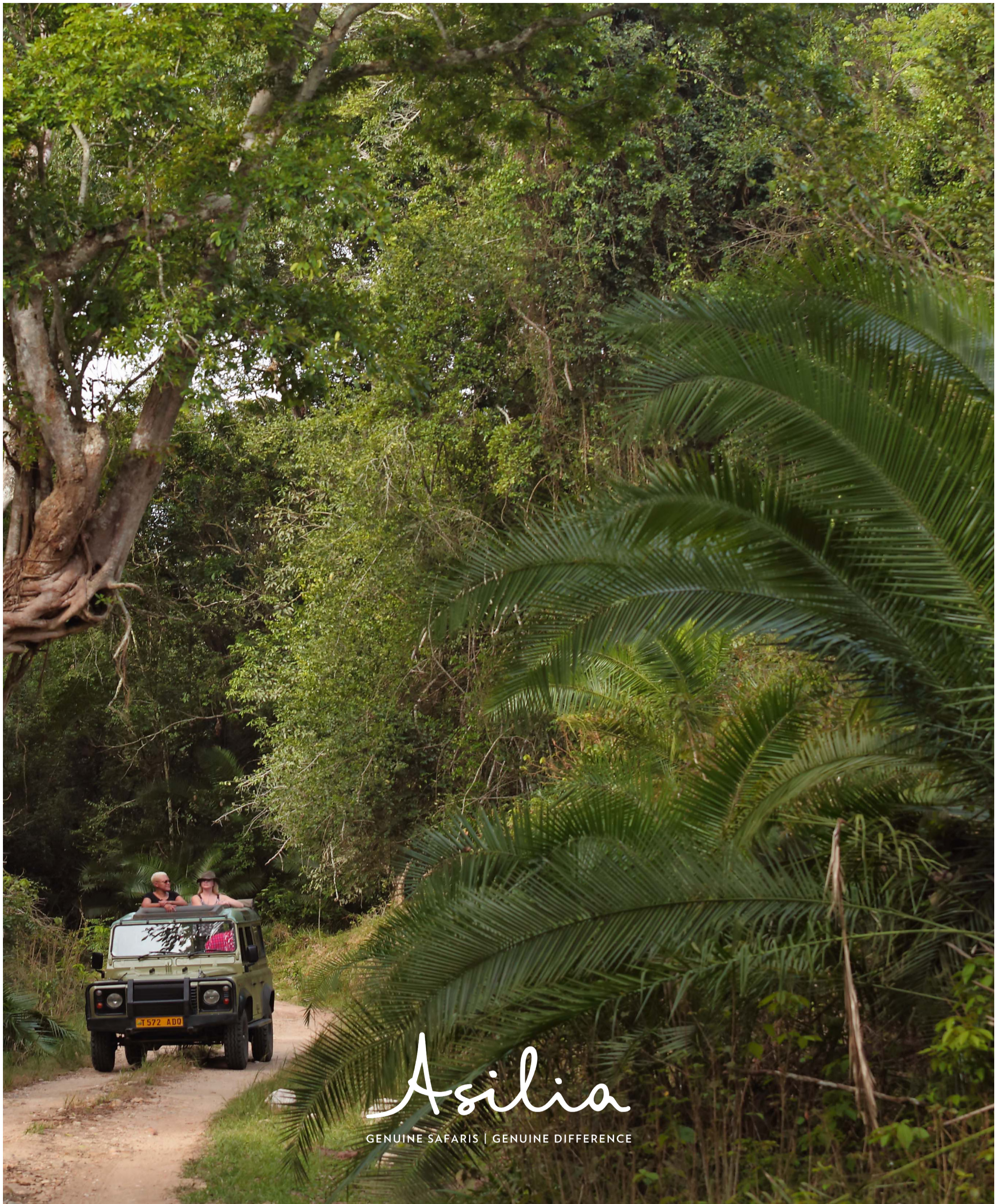


LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

'I was driving in the midday heat, close to Rekeru, when I came across a young, grazing warthog. Seconds later, I saw Bahati (which means 'luck' in Swahili), a beautiful, pregnant leopard, often spotted around the camp. She was snarling at the birds that were invading her cool, shady resting area. But her focus quickly shifted to the warthog, which was bumbling towards her, oblivious. I had just enough time to get out my camera before she pounced on the hapless creature, mere metres in front of me. It was a curiously quiet duel, and the bush seemed to go still around them as they tussled. Just a few minutes later, it was all over, and the clever Bahati dragged her kill off to the bushes for a well-deserved lunch.'

PETER THOMPSON, Manager
Rekeru, Masai Mara, KENYA

EQUIPMENT USED: CANON 5D MARK III (ISO 1000, 1/5000 SEC @ F/4)



FRONT AND BACK COVER,
RUBONDO ISLAND CAMP,
LAKE VICTORIA, TANZANIA

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Created for Asilia Africa
by Mundi & Co (wearemundi.com)

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Production

The paper used for this publication is based on renewable wood fibre, sourced from sustainably managed forests.

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