

game-changing trends in luxury lodging now give that exotic fairy tale called the African safari a dramatic new look. You'll roar with approval.

BY PAUL RUBIO

andBeyond Sandibe Okavango Safari Lodge

MARK WILLIAMS (SINGITA SERENGETI HOUSE), MICHAEL POLIZA (SEGERA RETREAT), DOOKPHOTO (NGALA TENTED CAMP)

1 Ultrachic camps

Every fairy tale has its castle — and in the original African tale, that castle took shape as a supersized canvas tent in remote wilderness that mixed myriad creature comforts with a welcome touch of “roughing it.” But the new incarnations of safari abodes have shifted more toward permanent structures with design-savvy interiors and resort-style amenities such as air conditioning, rain showerheads, and infinity pools.

In the early '90s, Singita's inaugural lodge exposed a fledgling blueprint of wilderness swank. Flash forward to present day and the brand's latest endeavor, the **Singita Serengeti House**, which embraces entirely the apex of high design in the African bush. Singita has made the suites bigger, employed big-name designers, and showed us that remote African settings need not compromise style, sophistication, or consumer demands.

At **Segera Retreat**, Wilderness Safaris transformed the private Kenyan estate of renowned German entrepreneur Jochen Zeitz into a larger-than-life African playground that's at once a celebration of African art and a true luxuriant ranch inclusive of a full spa; sprawling, lounge-lined swimming pool; and a stocked wine tower for oenophiles. Six raised villas unfold over vast acreage in the Laikipia Plateau, separated by mazes of

sculpture gardens, cactus gardens, and eclectic, freestanding statues. Horse stables have been reinvented as a library, bar, and art gallery, with each stable now a revolving showcase of contemporary works.

In Botswana, **andBeyond Sandibe Okavango Safari Lodge** is scheduled to debut a fresh face in July with 15 elevated, cocoonlike suites in the forest canopy, each with a private plunge pool and fireplace, and prime views of the game-rich Santantadibe channel. Also in July, **andBeyond Kichwa Tembo Tented Camp** in Kenya's Maasai Mara will literally raise the camp to give superlative bird's-eye views of the Mara. In South Africa, at the **andBeyond Ngala Tented Camp**, rebuilt in late 2012, the whimsical design of the suites and common areas channels Philippe Starck with stylish bird's-nest chandeliers, mint-hued mega throw pillows, and intricate snow-flaked patterned partitions.



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SUB-SAHARAN EXPANSION

Beyond the mainstream circuit, Africa's lesser-known parks and sights now trend as gripping alternatives to the more predictable safari experience

IN THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO

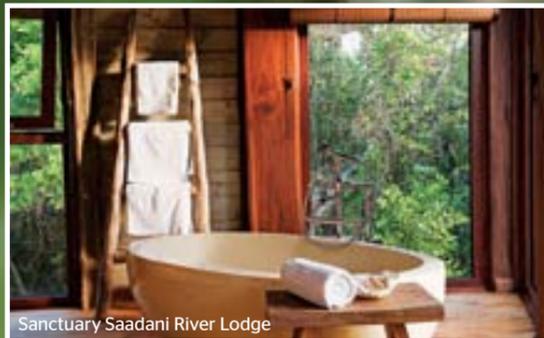
Wilderness Safaris has unveiled two of its Wilderness Collection camps, the **Odzala Camps**, in Odzala-Kokoua National Park, which boasts the world's highest density of western lowland gorillas.



Singita Pamushana Lodge

IN LANDLOCKED ZIMBABWE

The seven-villa **Singita Pamushana Lodge** handsomely rewards those venturing down the road less traveled with the extreme natural splendor of the Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve and an unexpected immersion into Zimbabwean cultural heritage. With Zimbabwe's political turmoil finally subsiding, Pamushana and other national lodges are enjoying some long overdue attention.



Sanctuary Saadani River Lodge

Even Africa's original safari destinations have been revisited as more than savanna-strewn animal kingdoms.

IN TANZANIA

One of the world's most exclusive hotels, the 130-acre **Lupita Island**, rises from Lake Tanganyika's placid waters as a private island paradise in the country's far western side. All 11 open-sided, 1,800-square-foot thatched-roof cottages and two 2,500-square-foot family cottages dole out gobsmacking vistas of the world's second-deepest lake, with islands, sandy beaches, and crystalline waters rivaling French Polynesia.

Time at **Sanctuary Saadani River Lodge**, on the Wami River, feels like a joyous ride on Disney's Jungle Cruise. On daily boat safaris, eye hippos, crocs aplenty, Pied Kingfishers, and the odd elephant crash through the forest to see what all the fuss is about. With a mere 18 units cast along a mile of footbridges, privacy reigns supreme. Each of the thatched-roof, stilted megasuites commands a remarkable river view, plus expansive outdoor terraces, alfresco showers, and claw-foot bathtubs for embracing the romantic surrounds.

DANA ALLEN (GORILLA); MARK WILLIAMS (SINGITA PAMUSHANA LODGE)



Four Seasons Safari Lodge Serengeti



Mahali Mzuri

Rise of the Trusted Brand History books tell us of the "imperialist Scramble for Africa" from the 1880s to 1914, when European nations fought for a slice of the African pie. Now, in a new "scramble," in a much lighter context, the world's best-known hoteliers and hotel brands are claiming their stake in the African economy's rapid growth.

Who's moving in?

FOUR SEASONS: The Toronto-based luxury chain opened its first sub-Saharan outpost in late 2012 with the **Four Seasons Safari Lodge Serengeti** after the success of its showstopping resorts on the African islands of Seychelles and Mauritius. The Serengeti lodge dutifully marries Four Seasons distinction with classic safari grandeur. Think exquisitely appointed, safari-chic accommodations; a sumptuous infinity pool cascading over a watering hole teeming with elephants; and rare safari amenities such as a full-scale gym and functioning Wi-Fi.

ST. REGIS: This Starwood luxury brand made its African debut last March with the **St. Regis Mauritius Resort** (more on page 55).

JACK BROCKWAY (MAHALI MZURI)

VIRGIN LIMITED EDITION: The British business venture juggernaut opened its first East Africa property last summer with **Mahali Mzuri**, building on the success of the brand's global fame and its other Africa lodge in Sabi Sand, South Africa. Located on a private conservancy on the outskirts of Kenya's Masai Mara, the Richard Branson-backed camp features 12 big-top suites decked out in Space Age style and riveting game drives around the Mara.

ON DECK: Four Seasons has three properties in the works: a hotel in Johannesburg slated for summer 2014, a tented safari camp in Tanzania's Ngorongoro Conservation Area in 2015, and a beach resort on Zanzibar with no set opening. **Ritz-Carlton** plans to come on the scene in 2015, on Mauritius. **Hilton** has 19 hotels in the pipeline, many business-centric; ditto for **Marriott** with 23.



For the Adventurous

Are you an adrenaline junkie? One of the continent's leading trendsetters, luxury outfitter **Micato Safaris**, has expanded its roster of "active" safaris for true adventure seekers. Two new options:

→ The "Elephant Back South Africa Sojourn," in which you'll explore the bush for 10 days, several of those atop an elephant. *From \$14,275.*

→ An eight-day Mount Kilimanjaro climb. This nontechnical trek requires no mountain-climbing experience, but you should be in good physical condition and hardy. *From \$4,750.*

Or opt for... **Micato's** new "Private Invitation Safari" ventures to Africa's boutique camps and lodges, where often you'll dine and tour with the proprietors, straying far off the beaten path. *From \$16,960. 800-642-2861; micato.com - P.R.*

A

Bespoke wildlife encounters

Growing evermore explicit and savvy about their wildlife encounters, Africa-bound jet-setters now home in on optimal locales for snapping brag-worthy, big-cat photos, witnessing predator and prey face-offs, or coming in close contact with one of the world's last white rhinos. Luxury lodges have responded to this new paradigm in species-specific safaris, tailoring activities to concentrate on their most iconic residents.



What to see where?

Rhinos and elephants In Namibia, rare scenes of desert-adapted rhinos and elephants in real time are the main draw for venturing to Wilderness Safaris' **Desert Rhino Camp** and **Damaraland Camp**, respectively. Separated from their eastern counterparts centuries ago, the unlikely desert animals roam the ethereal landscapes, where they've learned to live off the imposing, desolate terrain. Expect

twice-daily game drives in pursuit of these prime examples of natural selection. The struggle to save Africa's remaining black and white rhinos is a hot topic at all six lodges within **andBeyond Phinda Private Game Reserve**, in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa — arguably the continent's ultimate stronghold of these endangered species. On half-day, ranger-led walking safaris, trail through the bush in search of these

prehistoric-looking giants, with excellent chances of meeting at close range. As part of the rhino research program, experience true conservation in action as you work alongside veterinarians and researchers to dart the rhinos and collect pertinent data for species longevity. Phinda also sits on prime cheetah real estate, garnering major attention from those seeking prize photos of these master sprinters.

Leopards For paramount leopard sightings, head north toward South Africa's Sabi Sand Game Reserve to **andBeyond Leadwood Lodge** — where you'll discover it's a leopard's world and we're all just living in it. Fleeting encounters are typically the norm with these elusive apex predators, but extended leopard spotting is hardly uncommon on twice-daily big-cat-centric game drives at Sabi Sand.



5 URBAN GROWTH

Since the birth of safari, realizing the African dream first required an overnight stay in one of Africa's dire capital cities. But some long overdue investment in gateway cities has softened the blow of Africa's "capital" punishment, and — dare we say — fostered sophisticated pockets now deserving of an extended layover.

NAIROBI Near the city center, the new **Villa Rosa Kempinski Nairobi** teems with bold, cosmopolitan flavor, including an Arabian-inspired, cabana-lined rooftop lounge, high-design rooms epitomizing modern luxury, and expat dining hot spots 88 and Italian Bistro Lucca. The opening of **Hemingways Nairobi** last spring endowed Kenya's capital with its first true boutique hotel. Far from the urban grit, the low-rise, 45-room enclave overlooks the Ngong Hills in Nairobi's most coveted

Villa Rosa Kempinski Nairobi's rooftop lounge

suburb and is proximately located to the city's star attractions — the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust orphanage, the Karen Blixen museum, the Giraffe Manor wildlife sanctuary, and Nairobi National Park.

NAMIBIA In Windhoek, South African photographer Micky Hoyle captures his eclectic vision of the country's diversity with photos that hang in seven original suites at the **Olive Exclusive All-Suite Hotel**, marking the city's pioneering instance of Namibian swagger.

RWANDA Scheduled to open at the end of 2014, the **Kigali Marriott Hotel** will be the latest up-market entry in Rwanda's burgeoning capital. Though the chain's fare is predictable, its host city is anything but. Modern-day Kigali is pristine and inviting, with many museums, restaurants, and lounges; serene hiking trails; and myriad cultural centers. In less than 20 years, Kigali has managed to shed the scars of its tragic history and fast-forwarded to a fledgling metropolis.

TANZANIA The larger metro-buzz has yet to hit East Africa's other safari gateway, Dar es Salaam, but the **Southern Sun Dar Es Salaam** has just enough creature comforts to ensure a smooth transition through the former capital.

DREAMSTIME (LEOPARD)

DREAMSTIME (MARTIN MARK (RUNNER), NIDERLANDER (PIANO), MARK VAN OVERMEIRE (CITY))

Cape Town's Big Year

This South African capital reigns as the World Design Capital in 2014, an honor bestowed on it by the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design. The city will celebrate with a yearlong series of events and exhibits, and the following news and developments also support the Mother City's must-see status this year.

SEE Through a new partnership with Iziko Museums of South Africa (iziko.org.za), the **Taj Cape Town hotel** (tajcapetown.co.za) now promises guests behind-the-scenes tours and curator chats at 14 prominent local museums, from historic manor homes and the South African National Gallery to the city's Planetarium.

DO The **V&A Waterfront**, a harborside entertainment and shopping district at the foot of iconic Table Mountain, has launched new sign-posted running routes up to 3 miles long in the seaside quarter. The routes give runners splendid views of the mountain, working harbor, and offshore Robben Island. waterfront.co.za

The oceanfront **Twelve Apostles Hotel & Spa** will now pair you with a "sports buddy," aka an active staffer, to guide you on coastal bike rides to scenic Chapman's Peak, hike with you in the Twelve Apostles Mountain range, or even play tennis with you. 12apostleshotel.com



HEAR The lower vaults of the 1898-vintage St. George's Cathedral now house the **Crypt**, a new jazz club drawing South African headliners, such as vocalist Monique Hellenberg, as well as touring acts, such as Italy's Piero Delle Monache Quartet. thecryptjazz.com

EAT In maritime history, sailors regarded Cape Town as "the tavern of the seas" for its welcome supply of fresh food and drink. Thus, fittingly, the city has embraced its first gastropub: **The Odyssey** serves souped-up burgers and braised lamb on Bree Street in the Central Business District. theodyssey.co.za

In the distinctly Dutch suburban wine district of Constantia, pair a local shiraz from the country's oldest wine estate, the 17th-century Groot Constantia, with a slab of ribs at the lively new restaurant **B.B.QUES**. bbques.co.za — ELAINE GLUSAC



Worth the Drive: Venture out to the coastal resort town of Paternoster, a popular getaway about 100 miles north of Cape Town, for **Reuben's at Abalone House** restaurant. South African celebrity chef Reuben Riffel (right) features West Coast ingredients in dishes such as snoek — a kind of mackerel — soufflé and traditional malva pudding, a cakelike dessert made with apricot jam. abalonehouse.co.za



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Diversification of the Activities Portfolio

Back-to-back game drives can grow a bit monotonous, so top-tier lodges now spice up daily agendas with educational, conservation, and enhanced leisure components

Community outreach At **Segera Retreat** in Kenya's Laikipia Plateau, game drives share the spotlight with community interaction and conservation experiences. You'll spend as much time visiting local schools and villages to witness how communities have united to surmount human-wildlife conflicts as you will observing endangered Grevy's zebra.

Leisurely pursuits At **andBeyond Nxabega Okavango Tented Camp** in Botswana, float through the Okavango Delta's water lilies in a *mokoro* (a traditional dug-out canoe, above) or fish the crystal-clear waters for tigerfish and tilapia. At sister property **andBeyond Chobe Under Canvas** in Botswana's northern reaches, bask in the splash of bathing elephants as you get close and personal on your river cruise.

At **andBeyond Lake Manyara Tree Lodge**, pass by sunbathing giraffes and approach the flamingo-filled lake by bicycle; at **Singita's** four lodges in Tanzania's Grumeti reserve, explore the Serengeti on horseback.

For families Singita properties offer a full roster of activities to keep kiddos entertained. At its latest endeavor, the **Singita Serengeti House**, the savanna transforms into a fun house with children's activities that include archery, baking, and a Mini Rangers course, where they identify wildlife tracks and study butterflies.



Maasai pose at andBeyond Lake Manyara Tree Lodge.



Maasai engage with camels at Segera Retreat.



Four Seasons Resort Mauritius at Anahita

7 INDIAN OCEAN ADD-ON

From Mauritius' palm-laced beaches to the Mozambique and Tanzania coasts, this turquoise beauty has become as much a part of the safari circuit as the wildlife-rich plains

MAURITIUS The **Four Seasons Resort Mauritius at Anahita**, which just marked its fifth anniversary, ushered in a new luxury dimension to the island nation.

The **St. Regis Mauritius Resort**, Starwood's first African property, debuted last March on a prime

beachfront locale. Its 172 rooms deliver dreamy ocean vistas, with many opening directly onto shallow lagoons. At the central pool, palm trees and other native flora in oversize planters rise through the water, creating both a swimming and colossal reflection pool.

EASTERN SEABOARD On Mozambique's unspoiled southeast coast, the **White Pearl Resorts, Ponta Mamoli** provides idyllic fodder for Robinson Crusoe fantasies in its beachfront and hillside suites, each equipped with a plunge pool.

At Tanzania's **Sanctuary Saadani Safari Lodge**, mix your post-safari beachside detox with a final elephant encounter in Saadani National Park, the lodge's home. It's not as luxurious as you might expect from this brand, but the locale easily makes up for that. ■

Africa by Air



Across the continent, private jet safaris are taking off — literally and figuratively — as the newest way to explore Africa's diverse regions in a single journey.

→ Come March, **Abercrombie & Kent** will reintroduce its "Africa: Across a Continent by Private Jet" safari, whisking 40 globe-trotters to seven African countries in 19 days. \$79,995 per person. 800-554-7016; abercrombiekent.com

→ Traverse multiple countries on **Micato Safaris'** "Elite Jetting" safari (from \$7,000 per person, per day) or indulge in endless panoramas from the air on its "Eurocopter Excursions" (from \$3,000 per hour), jet-setting across Kenya and Tanzania in an EC130 Eurocopter. 800-642-2861; micato.com — P.R.

DAVID CROOKES (SEGERA)

DREAMTIME/PHOTAWA (JET)

Lodging Essentials

Note: Rates often include more than just your room, so do inquire.

andBeyond lodges: From \$310 per person, double occupancy. 011-27-11-809-4300; andbeyond.com

Four Seasons Resort Mauritius at Anahita: From \$840. 800-819-5053; fourseasons.com/mauritius

Four Seasons Safari Lodge Serengeti: From \$445 per person, double occupancy. 800-819-5053; fourseasons.com/serengeti

Hemingways Nairobi: From \$555 per room. 011-254-20-229-5011; hemingways-nairobi.com

Kigali Marriott Hotel: 800-228-9290; marriott.com

Lupita Island: From \$1,225 per person, double occupancy. 800-524-7979; tanzaniafirelightsafaris.com

Mahali Mzuri: From \$590 per person, double occupancy. 877-577-8777; mahalimzuri.virgin.com

Olive Exclusive All-Suite Hotel: From \$198. 011-264-61-239-199; theolive-namibia.com

Sanctuary lodges: From \$367 per person, double occupancy. 011-44-554-7016; sanctuaryretreats.com

Singita lodges: From \$1,095 per person, double occupancy. 011-27-21-683-3424; singita.com

Southern Sun Dar es Salaam Hotel: From \$274. 011-27-11-461-9744; tsogosunhotels.com

St. Regis Mauritius Resort: From \$765. 877-787-3447; stregismauritius.com

Villa Rosa Kempinski Nairobi: From \$207. 011-254-203-603-000; kempinski.com/en/nairobi

White Pearl Resorts, Ponta Mamoli: From \$294 per person, double occupancy. 011-27-11-026-7178; www.whitepearlresorts.com

Wilderness Safaris retreats and camps: From \$450 per person, double occupancy. 866-988-7575; wilderness-safaris.com