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SOCIAL PARADISE

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THE 101 MOST
BRILLIANT AND
BEAUTIFUL HOTELS
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SHINY HAPPY PEOPLE

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TRAVEL GUIDE

2016

Makanyi Game Lodge

TIMBAVATI RESERVE, SOUTH AFRICA

That daydream of yours, the one where you up sticks and head into the wild, to let the offspring go free range under a great African sky? Well, Jessica Gold followed through, taking her wildlife-mad seven-year-old from the big smoke and relocating to the edge of the Kruger National Park. Her new lodge is a gem: seven suites that blend into the landscape – stone and thatch, wood and leather, huge and open-plan – all with earth tones and tactile fabrics. Glass-walled showers have you eye-to-beady-eye with impala, kudu and waterbuck. Romp through the bush on foot, bounce about in a 4WD, or zip over the savannah in a chopper with expert guides, before a crisp evening G&T and scrumptious ostrich steak, overlooking a pod of harrumphing hippos. What a life. We're jealous as anything. **BOOK IT** Red Savannah (redsavannah.com; 01242 787800) offers five nights, full board, from £2,730, including flights, transfers and two daily game drives.

Prime time

August sees the Kruger at its most dry, which means fabulous game-viewing and a top time for one of the lodge's photographic safaris.



HANNELI RUPERT'S
South Africa

FAVOURITE SAFARI SPOT

The Lowveld [location of the Kruger National Park] for the excitement of the big five – the noises that the animals make at night are unforgettable.

Prime time

July to October, when vast herds of wildebeest cross the Mara River, to the delight of visitors – and resident crocs.

Mkombe's House

SERENGETI, TANZANIA

Splendid isolation? Tick. Endless views over the Serengeti? Tick. A safari crafted for you and your kin? Hell yes. Mkombe's is spot on for a big family – it sleeps 10, and there's lots of lounging space, plenty of terraces and two pools to cool off in. The decor is super-chic and nicely local: kikoy-covered cushions, handwoven shaggy lampshades that look like Wookie legs, pops of colour and shine from beaded Masai necklaces and recycled metal chairs. Your butler, Babu, will bring your wake-up coffee, mix the perfect sundowner and point out lions, in case you're too busy playing Scrabble to notice. Because at Mkombe's, your timetable is your own: stay out for as little or as long as you want, which is on the nose when there are little people in tow. The food too: the chef will rustle up a feast, inside or out, whenever you're peckish. Then snuggle under a duvet and a blanket of stars, as lions roar and hyenas whoop long into the night. **BOOK IT** Ultimate Travel Company (ultimatetravelcompany.co.uk; 020 3051 8098) offers four nights, full board, from £2,880, including flights and transfers.

FIRST THING I DO

I'll normally arrive in the early evening covered in dust after a fair bit of travel, so I'll take a shower and cover myself in anti-mosquito spray, and then have a G&T overlooking the African bush.

FAVOURITE SPOT

Tambarina's restaurant in Komatipoort, for the best Mozambican peri-peri prawns – you can make a day trip through the Kruger to get there.

I CAN'T DO SAFARI WITHOUT...

Closed shoes – don't underestimate the snakes, spiders and scorpions.

TOP TIP

Go at the end of the European summer, the dry season here, when it's easier to view game and doesn't get scorchingly hot.

FELLOW GUESTS

Safaris are not very social places – you're unlikely to bump into anyone you know from home.

BEST BUY

Grass-weave bowls from Gone Rural in Mahlanga, Swaziland.

Hanneli Rupert is the founder of Okapi (okapi.com)

Norden Camp

GANSU PROVINCE, CHINA

Trust us. Hot nomad Yidam Kyap is reward enough for your multiple-flight pilgrimage to this remote corner of the Tibetan Plateau. So imagine our added delight to find European beds at his gorgeous reimaging of a traditional nomad camp. There are six cabins and four hand-woven tents here, and beds are dressed with softer-than-a-kitten's-tummy yak wool from Yidam's other family business, Norlha, which supplies this supple stuff to Lanvin and Céline. You can picnic on the Gyenja grasslands, romp through off-the-radar Gansu, or gallop on horseback across the wildflower-strewn landscape. Or kick back in the sauna or on the deck of your cabin, listening to the Himalayas-fed river whoosh past.

Most restorative. And after dark, head outside to gaze at the constellation-filled heavens, which doesn't sound like much until you run out of wishes with all those shooting stars. **BOOK IT** Double, from £200, full board (nordentravel.com; 00 86 15109 418170).

Prime time

July and August, when nomads and their herds of yak and sheep converge in the pastures around Norden Camp.



AWARD WINNER

WILDLY BEAUTIFUL

Singita Ebony Lodge

SABI SAND RESERVE, SOUTH AFRICA

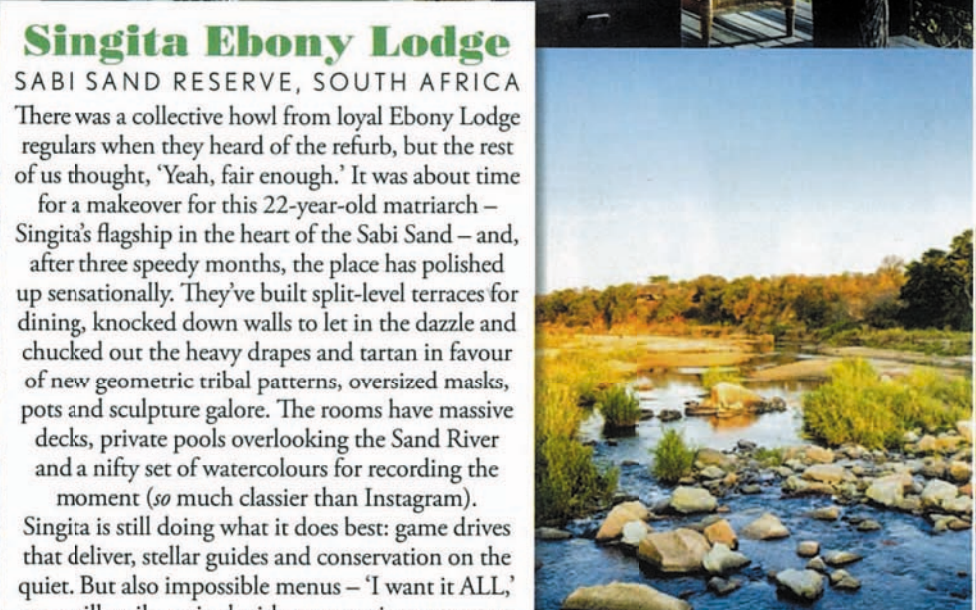
There was a collective howl from loyal Ebony Lodge regulars when they heard of the refurb, but the rest of us thought, 'Yeah, fair enough.' It was about time for a makeover for this 22-year-old matriarch – Singita's flagship in the heart of the Sabi Sand – and, after three speedy months, the place has polished up sensationally. They've built split-level terraces for dining, knocked down walls to let in the dazzle and chucked out the heavy drapes and tartan in favour of new geometric tribal patterns, oversized masks, pots and sculpture galore. The rooms have massive decks, private pools overlooking the Sand River and a nifty set of watercolours for recording the moment (so much classier than Instagram).

Singita is still doing what it does best: game drives that deliver, stellar guides and conservation on the quiet. But also impossible menus – 'I want it ALL,' you will wail – paired with proper wine; massages at midday; and wine-tastings by night with super-sommelier Chantelle Gous. Old-timers and newbies rejoice: Singita has done it again.

BOOK IT Double, from £1,690, full board, including transfers from the Singita airstrip and two safaris (singita.com; 00 27 21 683 3424).

Prime time

June, when large herds of elephant migrate back to Sabi Sand.



PHOTOGRAPHS: NOMAD-TANZANIA.COM; SHUTTERSTOCK, WIRE IMAGE, GETTY IMAGES; ILLUSTRATIONS: JON ROGERS/PHOSPHOR ART

AWARD
WINNER

AUTHENTIC ADVENTURE

Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba

URUBAMBA, PERU

Now THAT'S what we call a view. Folds of mossy-green mountains rising up from the valley floor, wispy clouds, sky the colour of a bottle of Bombay Sapphire gin – and it's right at the foot of your bed, flooding through those huge windows, so you can gaze at the Valley of the Incas without moving a toe. But up and out you must go: to hike through the mountains, to spy hawks and hummingbirds, to learn about Incan astronomy and weaving and how best to brew up the ancient *chicha de jora* drink. Or to nose around the organic plantation that supplies all those hip South American ingredients – quinoa, artichokes, giant corn – to the kitchen. This lodge is very Peruvian, very stylish. It's Peruvian-owned and run, and decorated with 1,000-year-old fabrics, pre-Columbian masks and shiny conquistador armour. And sleek as anything – cow-skin rugs scattered on terracotta floors, rough stone walls, a fireplace big enough to roast a llama, leather sofas the size of tractors. And sustainable – like all the Inkaterra properties – in the most meaningful way (carbon neutral, sustainably built, 100 per cent Peruvian staff). Grab a pisco sour, pick an armchair, drink in that view. **BOOK IT** Rainbow Tours (rainbowtours.co.uk; 020 7666 1266) offers two nights as part of a 12-night trip, from £3,685, including flights and transfers.

Prime time

September, to visit Machu Picchu, and see the famous ruins appearing through the morning mists.



Prime time

September, for the south-east trade winds – perfect for sailing.

Lizard Island

QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

This was always the sweetest (and remotest) of the Whitsundays, drawing in smart regulars who like their resorts neither sprawling nor teeny-tiny. Post-cyclone-revamped Lizard is perfectly proportioned: 2,500 acres of national-park loveliness, 23 bone-white beaches, 40 breezy suites, half with heated plunge pools. Best suites: the slick new Villa or the headland-positioned Pavilion, both above Sunset Beach (killer sunset views, unsurprisingly). Lots to do, too, with two cool bars and the Salt Water restaurant offering views of the dazzling sea and pitstopping yachts (guess-the-owner is a favourite game). There's diving at Cod Hole, sailing (you MUST sail around the Whitsundays), snorkelling in Watsons Bay, Vichy showers in the Essentia Day Spa, or a 2.5-mile round-trip hike to Cook's Look, from where Captain Cook stood and tried to figure out how the hell to get around those reefs. **BOOK IT** Bridge & Wickers (bridgeandwickers.co.uk; 020 3642 8551) offers five nights, full board, as part of a 10-night trip, from £6,295, including flights and transfers.

CLEAN LIVING

Time to freshen up. Because gallivanting around the globe is no excuse to pong. Diptyque Travel Collection, £40. diptyqueparis.co.uk



Amilla Fushi

BAA ATOLL, MALDIVES

We like 'new'. We love 'inventive'. We're big on 'unusual'. Which is why our ears pricked up and our tails wagged when we heard Per Aquum founder Tom McLoughlin was launching a new concept in the Baa Atoll. He's good at new/inventive/unusual. The architecture, for starters – it's so unusual, it's a shock to the system: white cubes standing cheek-to-cheek over a reef. Then head inside to the bright, colourful suites with the coolest bathroom tiles in all of the Maldives. Less shocking, but just as inventive, are the treehouses – up in the palm-tree canopy, with a pool amid the fronds. No hushed, hidden-away, romantic dining here, either; instead there's a mini 'boulevard' of restaurants. There are enormous beanbags all over the place, an outdoor cinema, and a cheery, zingy kids' club. Anything goes. Stroll barefoot from restaurant to restaurant, perch in the bar with a ginger martini, pad out along the pier to swanky Lonu, by Aussie whiz Luke Mangan. Best thing of all? The Javvu Spa and its cool treatment pods, where you get an hour's treatment on arrival. We love. **BOOK IT** Cleveland Collection (clevelandcollection.co.uk; 020 7843 3596) offers seven nights, half-board, from £3,200, including flights and transfers.

Prime time

October, when Amilla's Dive Butler service comes to the fore, for seeking out passing whale sharks and manta rays.