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INCORPORATING SELLING SHORT HAUL

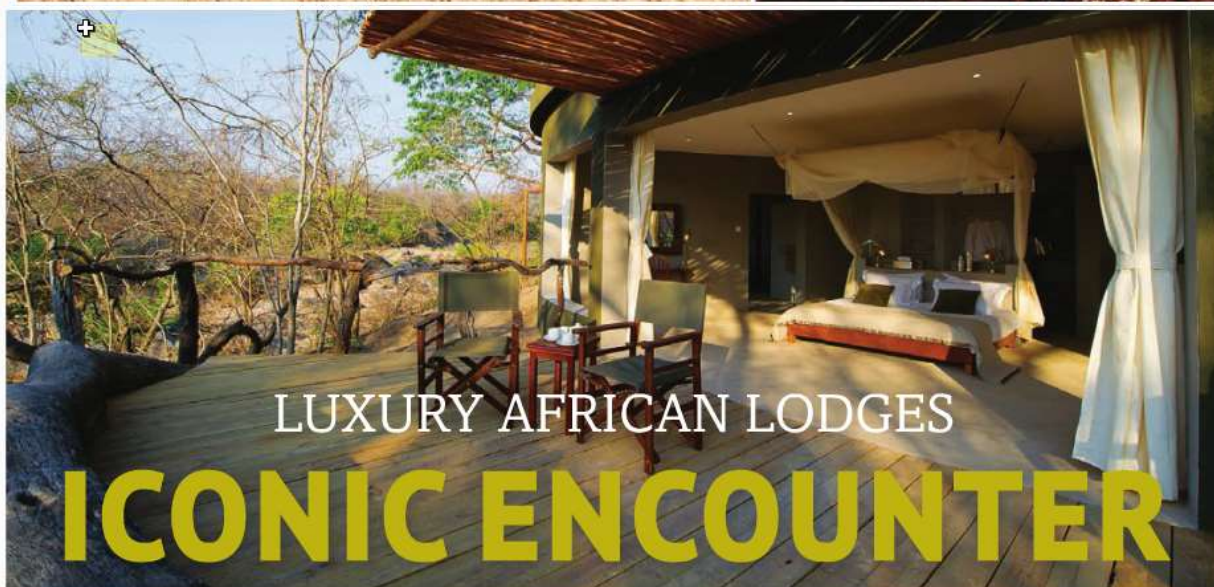


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LUXURY AFRICAN LODGES

ICONIC ENCOUNTER

Luxury can be interpreted in a myriad of forms but in the end it all comes down to personal taste. The dictionary defines luxury as: "a state of great comfort or elegance, especially when involving great expense". Jo Austin puts Africa to the test

Expense might not be a major concern for your clients who simply demand the best, but getting the right luxury product can present a challenge. After all, they need to impress their dinner party guests when they get home!

Luxury is about the whole experience and a safari in Africa will probably include an up-close-and-personal experience with game in the company of an experienced guide.

Think wide open spaces in the wilds, travelling in an open 4WD game drive vehicle, expert trackers, small lodges, hot baths and private plunge pools combined with delicious food, perfect hosts and world-class service. All these and more are offered by Great Plains Conservation's OI Donyo Lodge in the heart of Kenya's Chyulu

Hills and its magical Mara Plains and Toto tented camps set on a private reserve beside the Masai Mara National Reserve in Kenya.

Mobile safaris are also in demand, where guests can choose to walk or drive from one exclusive tented camp to another. The Selous in Tanzania is 'home' to the walking safari where guests can stroll safely amongst game with a guide in the knowledge that there are no carnivores about. Azura Retreats, known for its boutique hotels in Mozambique, is expanding into Selous with a new top end property on the Ruaha River.

Marco Rosa, Senior Vice-President for Sanctuary Retreats (sanctuaryretreats.com) commented: "We are excited about the opening of our new lodges and mobile camps in Tanzania. We

can now offer a 'circuit' for clients, who can literally follow in the path of one of nature's greatest shows, the magnificent migration, as it travels across the continent, by staying at Sanctuary Serengeti Migration Camp."

Wilderness Safaris' (wilderness-safaris.com) Pafuri Walking Trails feature in the private Makuleke Concession in Kruger National Park, South Africa. And if night walking appeals, exclusive Lugenda Wilderness Camp (lugenda.com) in Mozambique runs full-moon safaris with skilled rangers.

Specialist safaris can be tailored for almost any interest whether your client is looking for bats, beetles or wild dogs. Horse-riding safaris in malaria-free Waterberg in South Africa offer a stylish way to mingle with the game when staying at Ant's Nest or neighbouring Ants Hill (waterberg.net). Horse-riding is also an activity offered by OI Donyo.

andBeyond (andbeyond.com) is investing heavily in its luxury camps and lodges and Sandibe's brand new look is inspired directly by nature.

Says Joss Kent, andBeyond CEO: "The innovative design of our completely remodelled Sandibe



► Okavango Safari Lodge is serene and organic. The new nest-like suites are raised among the trees becoming private cocoons at night and gazing over the lagoons of the Delta by day'.

Top of the league when looking for luxury in Africa has to be Botswana, with private retreats such as Zafara Camp in the Selinda Reserve with its new Dhow Suites which come complete with a private chef and staff for just four guests. Close behind are Zambia, Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa.

Up and coming with some stunning and unusual properties are Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia and more recently, Rwanda and Uganda.

In Rwanda, luxury tends to mean the experience rather than the accommodation and Volcanoes Safaris (volcanoessafaris.com) has unveiled two deluxe eco-bandas at Virunga Lodge where visitors pay high prices to get close to the gorillas in the region.

Gorilla trekking in Uganda is also offered by Sanctuary Retreats.

Robin Pope Safaris (robinpopesafaris.net) offers the perfect two-centre combination with South Luangwa in Zambia and Pumulani Lodge beside Lake Malawi or Mkulumadzi in Majete Wildlife Reserve, one of the outstanding success stories of

African conservation. Nkwichi Lodge is nestled on the Mozambican side of Lake Malawi featuring just six lodges and two private houses for the ultimate hideaway. Luxury in Malawi also comes in the form of privately-owned Kaya Mawa (kayamaya.com) where guests are assured a total escape on Likoma Island. Co-owner Susie Lightfoot will take guests to her unique textile workshop and for those with a passion for African textiles, the exclusive Tongabezi (tongabezi.com), on the Zambian banks of the Zambezi, exudes African-influenced personality. Its new Nut House follows a Moroccan theme complete with hand-made tiles.

New direct flights now link the Royal Zambezi Safari Lodge on the Lower Zambezi with Livingstone, saving hours of travel via Lusaka. Free flights are being offered to launch the route.

For a safari with a difference, Zambezi Voyager (zambezivoyager.com) is a luxury houseboat that cruises the confluence of the Chobe and Zambezi Rivers on the border of Botswana and Namibia.

Zimbabwe is slowly seeing a resurgence of tourism numbers and lodges such as Chilo Gorge (chilogorge.com) by Ghonarezhou National Park and Wilderness' Little Makolo in Hwange National Park offer the highest quality experiences. The Hide in Hwange is offering four nights for the cost of three in deluxe tents on most dates in 2014.

The high-end choice is also growing at Victoria Falls where Mantis Collection (mantiscollection.com) features the Stanley and Livingstone with its own private game reserve and Africa Albida (africaalbidatourism.com) has opened six new suites at

is flagship Victoria Falls Safari Lodge property.

If luxury means spas, Wilderness Collections' Segerer Retreat in Kenya offers the ultimate health and wellness retreat for guests committed to the conservation of nature as well as mind, body and spirit. Mantis will also be featuring Finch Hatton's in Kenya when it opens later this year with 17 luxury tented guest suites, wellness centre, yoga studio, spa pool and airstrip transfers.

The challenge when booking trips within Africa is getting your clients from A to B. Fly-in fly-out is 'the norm' for luxury lodges in Africa with many sharing a private airstrip.

South African Airways (flysaa.com) is rapidly expanding its regional flights within Southern Africa and these can link with domestic airlines such as Proflight in Zambia and Ulendo in Malawi (both are well-versed in landing on grass or dirt airstrips.) Air Botswana (airbotswana.co.bw) flies into Maun and Kasane linking with light aircraft into the Okavango Delta.

For the very ultimate in luxury, Abercrombie and Kent (abercrombiekent.co.uk) is offering a private jet safari departing February 2015 spanning Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa for a little under £50,000.

For those who would rather take the train, a 21-day rail journey from Dar es Salaam to Cape Town on the iconic *Pride of Africa* is on offer with Great Rail Journeys (greatrail.com) priced from £9,995.

Now *that* really could improve the next dinner party conversation!

What's new

🏠 **Accommodation/Lodges:** For a stunning view of Mount Meru from your window, Classic Portfolios' Northern Tanzania circuit now features Legendary Lodge in Arusha. Situated in Southern Serengeti, Mwiba is an isolated aerie built among boulders and ancient coral trees and described as a 'benchmark for future developments' in the country.

Hoanib Skeleton Coast Camp is an exclusive Wilderness Safaris property in the remote Kaokoveld in northern Namibia with access to the Skeleton Coast by air or 4WD. In Botswana, Wilderness Explorations, the guided division of Wilderness, has opened the intimate Gomoti tented camp for a maximum of eight guests. ►

