

BLACKBOOK

▶ A GLOBAL GUIDE FOR THE DISCERNING TRAVELLER ◀



Alfresco dining amid the arched cloisters of Arijiju villa in Kenya

ON THE PULSE

AFRICAN OUTBACK

A host of eco-lodges, cutting-edge hotels and dramatic safari camps ushers in a new generation of the continent's hospitality, says **LISA GRAINGER**

In 2016, the growth rate of tourism in Africa was higher than anywhere else, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council. So it is no surprise that smart new properties continue to open across the continent. While a handful have sprung up in cities – including in Cape Town,

in time for the opening of the **Zeitz Museum of African Contemporary Art** (zeitzmocaa.museum) in September – the majority have been constructed in wild, remote spots, from islands to wildlife reserves and riverine forests.

Of the latest openings, the most hotly awaited →



Duba Plains Camp nestled in the watery landscape of the Okavango Delta, northern Botswana



TAKE TO THE SKIES

This year sees the first three-day **Explorations Company** heli-safari into northern Kenya. Each day, the helicopter will traverse extremely different terrain: one day, the plains of Sirikoi, to see black rhino; the next the Matthews Range, to hike in ancient forests; and the final day the Chalbi Desert, before settling near Lake Turkana to witness humanoid fossil-hunters at work. explorationscompany.com

has been **Miavana** (@timeandtideafrica.com), off Madagascar's northeast coast. Conceived by Silvio Rech and Lesley Carstens, the design duo responsible for the glamorous North Island and Chinzombo interiors, the 14-villa island retreat is sleek and contemporary – and just a 30-minute helicopter flight from the mainland. Although its design is a key attraction, it also has rarely visited reefs nearby, as well as warm seas through which whales migrate.

On the mainland, several new safari camps have also opened in formerly inaccessible areas. A new circuit of four lodges by **Namibia Exclusive** (namibia-exclusive.com) now allows travellers to explore remote desert dunes, the wildlife of the little visited Khaudum National Park and to spend time with Owambo communities who live side by side with the wildlife of Etosha.

In South Africa and Botswana, &Beyond has completely refurbished its **Phinda Rock Lodge** – first opened two decades ago – and **Nxabega Okavango Tented Camp** (andbeyond.com), opening up bedrooms, living areas and pool decks to the wilderness. In addition, the respected National Geographic filmmakers Dereck and Beverly Joubert have totally rebuilt **Duba Plains Camp** (@greatplainsconservation.com), creating five luxe tents and



The sleek Miavana, off Madagascar, a much-anticipated opening; rhinos await when exploring the terrain around Arijiju

a two-bedroom suite from which to safari into their private concession, while the intimate six-suite **Feline Fields** bushcamp (felinefields.com) has been erected in the Kalahari Desert, for adventurers who want to venture into the sands with Bushman guides.

Farther north, in Zambia, Beks Ndlovu's respected African Bush Camps has bought and refurbished **Thorntree River Lodge** (africanbushcamps.com) beside the Zambezi,



PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: DOOK, CROOKES AND JACKSON, DOOK/TIME+TIDE, © TROPIC AIR



Dining by the pool at Duba Plains Camp

and Norman Carr Safaris has created – again, with Rech and Carstens – the slickly designed **King Lewanika Lodge** (@timeandtideafrica.com) in the Liuwa Plain National Park.

There's expansion in East Africa, too. In Laikipia, Kenya, the serene **Arijiju** villa (arijiju.com) has recently been opened to private groups who wish to explore a 40,000ha wildlife conservation area in their own time, with private guides and staff; plus, a couple of hours' drive away, there's the new **Loisaba Tented Camp** (elewanacollection.com), with far-reaching views of wildlife-rich grasslands from its cliff-top swimming pool. And, in Tanzania, Asilia Africa's **Rohoya Selous** (asiliaafrica.com) camp will open in the vast wilderness of Africa's biggest park, Selous.

This year has proved to be a particularly exciting one for the architect Nick Plewman. In June his innovative, nest-like structures at **Bisate Lodge** (@wilderness-safaris.com) hosted their first guests, visiting

Rwanda to see gorillas in the nearby Volcanoes National Park. And this month his cutting-edge, ecofriendly **Jabali Ridge** (asiliaafrica.com) camp will be launched in Tanzania's Ruaha National Park, with its large clusters of giant baobabs and great herds of elephant.

Not all experiences in Africa are wildlife-centric, though. **Journeys By Design** (journeysbydesign.com) now takes intrepid guests fly-camping in remote areas of the Omo Valley in Ethiopia, to meet little-visited tribes and witness their way of life, hours from Western civilisation. Though there are no roads in the area and transport will be by foot, boat and helicopter, that is not likely to diminish interest for those intent on experiencing a continent that continues to entice. ●



A Duba Plains Camp tented bathroom



Journeying into the Kalahari's harsh environment is a draw of Botswana's Feline Fields camp

DOING WHAT COMES NATURALLY

When four key African conservationists create a company, there's bound to be a frisson – particularly when one per cent of profits is given to conservation. **Natural Selection** – cofounded by Colin Bell, Dave van Smeerdijk, Dr Jennifer Lalley and James Ramsay – intends not only to bring together owner-operated lodges, but to build new ones across southern Africa. The first, Sable Alley, opened in May, with six more planned next year. naturalselection.travel

