

SAFARI WELLNESS

A raft of yoga safaris in Africa combine wildlife and wellness for a truly holistic experience Writer Angela Goh

Safari means a 'journey' in Swahili. A yoga safari, fusing African safari adventure with the physical and mental benefits of yoga, is indeed a journey not only of discovery but one towards wellness. Reconnecting with nature in its raw form, time spent aligning body and mind while secluded in the wild, ensconced in luxury accommodation and detached from urban distractions. These wellness retreats embrace nature's healing powers and incorporate African-inspired holistic treatments.

But be warned. "The power of Africa lies in its enchanting rawness where she can steal your heart and inspire your soul, if you let her," says Hannah Strand, yoga instructor and founder of pioneering travel company, Bold Earth, which offers bespoke wellness safaris.

TANZANIA

THE HEALING SAFARI

DATES: NOVEMBER 18–27 2018

The intensively immersive 10-day Healing Safari draws participants into the natural rhythms of Africa and its healing powers. Daily yoga and meditation are enriched with learning the wellness practices of the Maasai people as well as reconnecting with nature through the sensory spectacle of the great wildebeest and zebra migration. "Practising yoga in such wilderness is wildly inspiring as it encourages you to connect with the natural world and your movements synchronise with that of the animals," says Tanya Pergola, wellness instructor, Vedic teacher and author, who created and leads the programme.

Together with Maasai elder-healer Lekoko Ole Sululu, participants will be introduced to Maasai yoga and meditation. This yoga style integrates the poses of local wildlife (such as lion, giraffe, elephant) and draws on the energy of the land. In Maasai Meditation, the mantra consists of a Maasai word promoting peace, stillness and joy, which is repeated silently to oneself. "When practised in East Africa, the primordial sounds familiar to Maasai life surround the practitioner, the sounds of birds and other wildlife, wind through the acacia trees, rivers and streams," says Pergola.

The retreat journeys through three different environments, from the vast steppes under the gaze of Mt Kilimanjaro, to the game-rich Serengeti plains and the



cooler forested highlands of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area. Each stimulates body-mind adjustments, igniting new sources of energy from within. While days begin with meditation followed by yoga tailored to any level, the evenings are capped with lessons about Maasai wisdom shared around a campfire. The insights include how this warrior-herder tribe heals conflict and stay healthy physically, mentally and spiritually. Optional private sessions can be arranged with a traditional Maasai spiritual healer, Pergola or Ole Sululu.

www.thehealingsafari.com

SOUTH AFRICA

BUSH TO BEACH YOGA SAFARI

DATES: MARCH 17–28 2019

This yoga safari has a greater emphasis on wildlife, combining the best of game viewing



PREVIOUS PAGE: The red sand dunes of the Tok Tokkie Trail. CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Tanya Pergola created and leads The Healing Safari to draw participants into the natural rhythms of Africa; Namaste's safaris in Namibia combine adventure and awe-inspiring scenery; swim with dolphins in Mozambique on the Bush to Beach Yoga Safari



in South Africa's Kwazulu-Natal province and ocean safaris in neighbouring Mozambique. The inspiration for this 12-day package stems from Cheryl Lancellata's penchant for wildlife. "I am first and foremost an animal lover, then a yogi," says the certified yoga teacher. Yoga sessions are a combination of hatha, vinyasa krama and yin. Most evenings will feature yin yoga for its restorative stress-relief and relaxation in preparation for sleep.

A typical day in the bush begins early with a game drive at Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park, Africa's oldest game reserve and contains the largest number of white rhino in the world. A mid-morning break in the wilderness allows participants to drift into mindful meditation while savouring snacks and scenery. The afternoon yoga session culminates in a second game drive which finishes after sunset.

In Mozambique, the group is accommodated in a house on the beach at Ponta do Ouro where dolphins, diving and deep-sea fishing are the main attractions. The day starts with yoga on the beachfront deck and winds down with another session at day's end. Everything else in between is dedicated to relaxation and 'marine therapy'.

Go whale watching or swim with wild dolphins. These creatures will release the inner child in you. It must be emphasised though that no physical contact with dolphins or other wild animals are allowed on this ethical safari, which honours both

the ocean and the delicate balance of life in the bush. www.sayogasafaris.com

NAMIBIA

HIKING AND YOGA SAFARIS

DATES: YOGA SAFARIS – 7 DAYS (DECEMBER 7–13 2018), 10 DAYS (NOVEMBER 27–DECEMBER 6 2018) YOGA HIKING RETREATS – TOK TOKKIE TRAIL (APRIL 10–16 AND OCTOBER 9–15), FISH RIVER CANYON (DATES ON REQUEST)

Namibia's arid landscape is as captivating as it is inspiring – picture sun salutations amid jaw-dropping scenery. Namaste's newest seven-day Yoga Hiking Retreats scheduled for next year will ignite the senses as you sink your feet in the shifting sands of the world's oldest desert, the Namib, from which the country derives its name. There is a choice of the challenging Fish River Canyon or the more moderate but no less picturesque Tok Tokkie Trail of gentle rolling dunes. Both are bookended with sunrise and sunset yoga.

The Fish River Canyon hike requires a reasonable degree of fitness to handle the 14km descent to the base of Africa's largest gorge with a 17km rugged trail at the canyon floor as well as the clamber back up. The river flows intermittently, usually flooding in late summer while the rest of the year it is a chain of long narrow pools. Nights are spent in comfortable dome-shaped tents.

Located in NamibRand Nature Reserve,

one of the most stunning sections of the Namib Desert, the Tok Tokkie Trail hike showcases vivid vistas from red sand dunes to sand-and-gravel plains adorned with camel thorn trees and mountain ranges. En route look out for the fog-basking Tok Tokkie beetles (it does a headstand for moisture from the morning fog to trickle down its body), barking geckos, among other desert fauna. And with dining and sleeping (on 'stretcher' beds spread out for privacy) under a star-studded sky, this million-star 'luxury' is profoundly memorable.

For those less keen to walk, the 10-day Yoga Safari promises safari and sightseeing between two daily yoga sessions. View desert-adapted rhino and lions at Etosha National Park. And be mesmerised by how a hostile environment can radiate such ethereal beauty as the Skeleton Coast at Swakopmund where the desert meets the sea, Sossusvlei's rolling dunes and the eerie clay pan of Deadvlei.

www.namasteyogasafari.com



TOP AND RIGHT: The Safari Collection's Wilderness Wellness Retreat draws inspiration from the natural landscape and its indigenous people. BOTTOM: Bold Earth's Wellness in the Wild programme helps guests reconnect with nature and themselves

Vumbura Plains serves up a magical atmosphere matched with a habitat mix where almost all the species found in the Okavango Delta can be easily spotted. Chief's Camp in the predator-rich Moremi Game Reserve delivers some of the best game viewing around and offers one of the best chances of spotting the elusive rhino.

www.bold-earth.com

KENYA

WILDERNESS WELLNESS RETREAT
DATES: MAY 16-19 2019

The Safari Collection owns a portfolio of luxury boutique lodges in Kenya including the legendary Giraffe Manor, which houses a herd of endangered Rothschild giraffes. The Collection's fitness-focused holistic retreat is based at Sasaab Lodge in northern Kenya. Perched high on the banks of Ewaso Nyiro River, Kenya's third-largest river, the Swahili-Moroccan style lodge containing only nine luxury tents opens out to an arid landscape dotted with acacias and scrubs,

with Mount Kenya in the distance.

The four-day retreat aimed at strengthening body and mind is led by personal trainer-Pilates coach Karina Walsh, and nutritional therapist-chef Heather Cuthbert. Drawing inspiration from the natural landscape and its indigenous people, Pilates and yoga classes are conducted on the seasonally dry riverbed while several of the local Samburu people dressed in vibrant coloured traditional outfits join participants in runs and walks. Chef Cuthbert will delight participants with wholesome organic, gluten-free cuisine as well as cooking tips.

Safaris at nearby Samburu National Reserve are replete with not only the continent's big game (especially lion, elephant and leopard) but also rarer species such as the Somali ostrich, Grevy's zebra, reticulated giraffe, gerenuk antelope and beisa oryx. Ease sore muscles or relax with a massage at the on-site spa, which offers a wide selection of African-influenced treatments.

www.thesafaricollection.com



BOTSWANA

WELLNESS IN THE WILD
(DATES ON REQUEST)

Bold Earth designs private, bespoke 10-day wellness safaris not limited to a destination but Botswana is its newest location and one of the most diverse in terms of landscapes and habitats. Flexibility is the utmost feature – each day is planned the evening before, allowing for comfort and flow.

"Everyone connects in their own way and pace," says founder Hannah Strand, who purposefully eschews a scheduled itinerary, preferring instead to craft each safari to client preferences. "Leave behind expectations of the 'big five' or witnessing a kill. That could happen but that's not the biggest motivation," says the professional wildlife guide and certified Iyengar yoga instructor.

The programme aims to reconnect participants with nature and themselves. Wellness sessions include restorative, healing yoga combined with guided meditation. In Botswana, the programme covers three diverse locations over 10 days, ensuring wildlife viewing at its best with both land- and water-based safaris.

Mashatu boasts endless open plains, amazing sunsets and an abundance of elephants.

