

ASILIA GAZETI

VOLUME 3 • 2023

Make a difference

How to pack purpose into every trip

INTO THE UNKNOWN

A truly wild experience in Tanzania

A STAR IS BORN

A Kenyan favourite reimaged



A LIONESS AND HER CUBS
AFTER THE RAINS AT
ENCOUNTER MARA, KENYA

WE ARE FAMILY

Matt Starkey, Asilia Africa's
Managing Director, tells us how
Asilia's groundbreaking work
is transforming wild areas — and
the lives of local communities

I haven't been in this role for long, and I'm still pinching myself on a daily basis. As someone who's always been passionate about the wilderness, becoming the Managing Director of Asilia Africa is a dream come true.

I'll be honest: I was pretty terrified when I started. It's a huge responsibility being in charge of more than 850 people and 18 properties. But what an amazing challenge to be faced with, and what an amazing team with which to meet that challenge.

For me, it's the team – the Asilia family – that makes this job what it is. Every single member, from our HR staff to wildlife safari guides, our camp chefs and admin assistants, knows what an extraordinary opportunity we have.

On the one hand, we teach, grow and empower our teams to reach their full potential. On the other, we bring visitors from all over the world to East Africa's most incredible wild places and provide

them with life-changing experiences, all while enriching local communities and protecting biodiverse areas at the same time.

It's that care for the communities and environment that drives everything we do, and it's where we've always come from. Those who travel with us feel it, too. Travelling with Asilia, they see it, they feel it, and they leave as different people. We know from experience that all our guests return home as brand ambassadors, full of stories and with a new-found passion for travel, one that has a positive impact – because that's what every single Asilia experience is about: travelling with purpose and leaving a positive impact. We empower and help communities, and we're in it for the long term.

Take our pioneering work in Usangu, in Ruaha National Park, Tanzania, an area of global importance that has been decimated by hunting and desperately needs conservation. Here, we're using

travel and tourism to enrich and enhance the area, employing local people, conducting vital scientific research, retraining poachers as guides, and working hand-in-hand with the community to protect this natural wilderness that's so rich in both plant and wildlife biodiversity. It's an incredible model, and one that our whole Asilia family is proud of.

However, what I'm most proud of is our team. I read every guest review, and the one thing they all say – every one of them – is how fantastic our staff are. When you arrive at an Asilia camp, you'll experience our sensational welcome and this wonderful, nurturing feeling where the staff take you under their wing from the very start. You are looked after and cared for, while being shown some of the world's most spectacular wildlife and wild areas we call home.

So I'm very pleased to be able to welcome you to Asilia. We're happy to have you with us, and can't wait to share our world with you. □



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LET'S GET SOCIAL

Connect with us for exciting stories straight from the bush. You'll get to know our community of safari enthusiasts, wildlife photographers, wonderful camp staff, and so much more. Don't forget to share your reviews for future travellers on Tripadvisor.



INSIDE TRACK

News, views, and tips to make the most of your time in East Africa



BREATHTAKING VIEWS
FROM THE NEW POOL AT
OLIVER'S CAMP, TANZANIA

RELAX WITH A VIEW

You've been lucky enough to have had the most incredible wildlife experiences, from walking with impala and tracking lion to enjoying sundowners in a spectacularly wild location. Now you want time to process it all, unwind and regroup...

Cool off at Oliver's Camp

Our new pool at Oliver's Camp is a welcome addition to this Asilia favourite, set in Tarangire National Park, Tanzania. Take your pick of our sumptuous sun loungers, bring along a book or your favourite podcast, and settle in for the afternoon.

Our charming staff are there to look after you, whether you fancy an icy glass of wine or a freshly-mixed cocktail. The best bit? Your vantage point allows views of animals passing by, from herds of elephant to curious, grazing gazelles. Sit back, relax and let the wildlife come to you.

Relax and unwind at The Highlands

This camp is set within the extraordinary Ngorongoro Conservation Area in Tanzania and its award-winning geodesic domes offer endless views over grassy plains and mountainous forests. The Highlands has been a game-changing lodge since it opened its doors in 2016 and now the addition of our new Asilia Spa and Sauna offers you a wraparound, day-to-night safari experience like no other.

Inspired by the bomas of our neighbouring Maasai community, the spa and sauna cleverly tie in with the camp's cutting-edge design. Spend your day on a game drive in the world-famous Ngorongoro Crater spotting the Big 5, hike to the rim of Olmoti Crater, or visit the soda lake and have an al fresco lunch in the Empakaai Crater, home to thousands of pink flamingos. As the afternoon sets in, return to camp for a rejuvenating few hours in the spa. Relax in the barrel sauna, or opt for an aromatherapy massage or facial treatment in the nurturing hands of our experienced spa therapist.

End the day cosying up in front of the crackling fire and share your stories of the day, before a delicious three-course meal. □

For more information, visit asiliaafrica.com

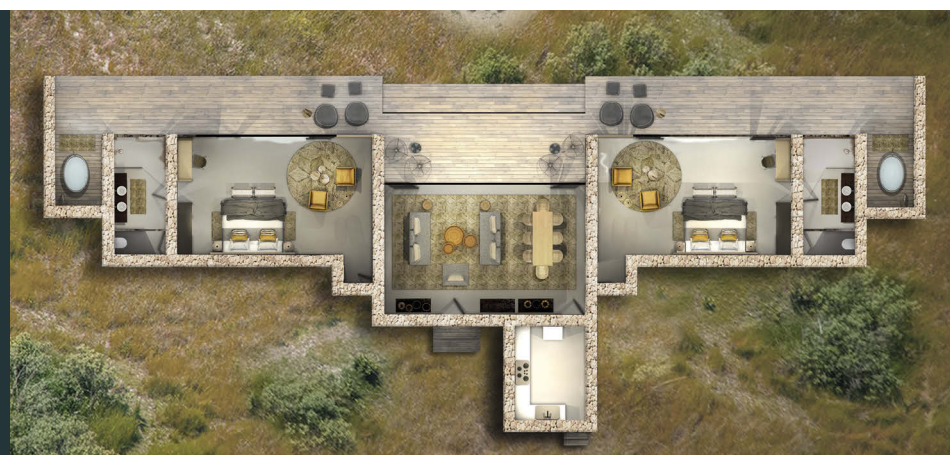
INTRODUCING
THE RETREATS
AT SAYARI AND NAMIRI PLAINS

THE NEW ASILIA RETREATS AT NAMIRI PLAINS, TANZANIA. BELOW RIGHT, THE RETREATS LAYOUT

We pride ourselves on our exclusive safari experiences in some of the wildest, most conservation-driven spots in East Africa. That's why we're thrilled to unveil our latest offering: a collection of stylish, private Retreats which allow you to have the ultimate getaway with family and friends, where everything is designed around you. Located at Sayari in the north of Tanzania's Serengeti National Park, and Namiri Plains in the eastern Serengeti, Asilia's Retreats offer the next level in tailor-made safaris, the perfect option for groups of friends, multigenerational families, and VIPs. Sleeping up to six people, the design of each Retreat – two per camp – is elegant and unique, speaking to the style of the camp and always bearing in mind our sustainability ethos. But what really sets The Retreats apart is that the entire experience is tailored to suit the needs of you and your group. Each day is designed around you, offering total privacy and complete flexibility (within the bounds of national park rules), with game drives whenever you want them, our best guides, our newest vehicles, and our top team to take care of your every need – including a personal host and a private chef to create specially curated delicious five-star menus. □

TRULY FLEXIBLE

Your Retreat host is there to ensure all your needs are catered for, along with your own private chef. Your host can also arrange any extras, such as spa treatments.



SAY HELLO TO...

Evalyn Sintoyia Mayetu

Evalyn is a guide at Naboisho Camp in the Greater Masai Mara. She ran away from home aged seven because she wanted to go to school, and is now training to become Kenya's first female Gold Level guide with the Kenya Professional Safari Guides Association.



Guiding came naturally to me.

I wanted to do something that only men do. In my community, women do not work and no one has ever worked as a guide. I wanted to do something different, and I had an instinct that I would be good at guiding as I grew up in the wilderness surrounded by animals.

I'm still studying.

Learning to guide came naturally to me because I am passionate about wildlife. I already had a lot of knowledge and I added to that. When you really want to learn, it comes easily.

I've been with Asilia for seven years.

I'm about to finish my degree that I'm taking in Conservation Resources and I've been sponsored by the Kenya Wildlife Trust. Next, I'm going to study for my Gold Level in guiding – it is very difficult and takes a lot

of work, but it will make me the first woman in Kenya to achieve this.

I love my animals!

I love being a guide as you don't stop learning. Every day is different. You might see similar animals most days, but they're never doing the same thing or in the same situation.

My parents are so proud.

They did not understand my ambition to go to school, but now my whole village is very proud of me. When I go back, women stop me and ask for advice for their daughters, and girls come to talk to me to find out what I did and what their options are.

My dream is to open a school.

One day, I hope to open a girls' school in my village. I want to empower them so they have choices about their future. The best thing you can do is give someone an education.

My parents didn't go to school.

They didn't understand the benefits that education could bring, so I ran away, first to my grandmother and then my aunt. It was only with her that I was able to go to school. I wanted to have a say in my future.

Looking for the best safari in Tanzania? Go south!

Ultimately, you decide what you want from your safari. If seeing the Great Migration is your dream, then be prepared to put up with the crowds. However, if it's exclusivity you're after, here are five reasons to head south for one of the finest safari experiences.

1

PERFECT TRANQUILITY

Almost a third of Tanzania is protected by national parks, conservation areas, and game reserves – two of the largest are in the south, Nyerere National Park (the Selous) and Ruaha National Park, so head that way for an intimate wildlife experience, with far fewer people.

2

PRIVATE SAFARI EXPERIENCE

While wildlife is less densely packed than in northern Tanzania, sightings are more rewarding simply because you'll likely be the only vehicle around. With only a handful of safari camps, travellers have a true sense of exclusivity accompanied by some of the best game-viewing in Africa.

3

HUGE NUMBERS OF WILDLIFE

In both Ruaha and Nyerere, you might come across mega-prides of lion, Tanzania's largest population of elephant, herds of buffalo, African wild dogs, and one of four large cheetah groups left in East Africa, plus over 500 resident and migratory species of birds.

4

REMARKABLE ACTIVITIES

Both Ruaha and Nyerere National Parks offer exciting options for wildlife viewing – from languid boating safaris to night game drives that allow a glimpse of the nocturnal comings and goings of the bush, as well as walking safaris to get even closer to the fauna and flora of the wild south.

5

SHIFTING LANDSCAPES

Ruaha's diverse landscapes dramatically transform between the seasons. Golden, grassy plains shift to vivid greens, leafless baobabs burst into flower, and sandy, dry riverbeds fill with deep, fresh water. Each visit will feel like a new place you've never seen before.



POSITIVE IMPACT

At Asilia, we believe that staying in our camps is only half the story. By making bold, often pioneering investments into ecologically and economically vulnerable areas, we aim to transform them into viable conservation economies, benefitting both the local communities and the environment. We're proud of our efforts to use tourism as a force for good, using our conservation work to bring meaningful change to the regions we operate in.

A cornerstone of this is our understanding that people and nature are inseparable partners, which is why we work closely with communities, authorities, NGOs, and industry partners to achieve the best possible long-term outcomes for all.

Our award-winning Positive Impact initiative, Twende Porini, which means 'Let's go to the bush' in KiSwahili, brings local kids into our camps to learn about conservation and the balance of living alongside nature. Recently, this took place at Oliver's Camp, where 48 children spent four nights going on game drives, experiencing wildlife, and learning what it takes to be a guide or a researcher.

In Kenya, we've built a new conservatory at Ol Pejeta Bush Camp, allowing guests to see where some of our organic vegetables and herbs are grown, while reducing our reliability on sourcing fresh produce from afar, thereby reducing carbon emissions. It also allows our talented chefs to use the freshest ingredients to ensure meals are of the highest quality. It's all part of our promise to you: a genuine safari that makes a genuine difference. □



CHILDREN HAVING FUN AT ASILIA'S TWENDE PORINI PROGRAMME



A TASTE OF ASILIA

We've selected one of our favourite recipes from Asilia's brilliant chefs, including plant-based alternatives, for you to recreate at home.

ASILIA BUTTER CURRY (chicken, or lentil and tofu)

INGREDIENTS (serves 6)

For the tomato gravy:

- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1½ white onion, finely chopped
- 4 tbsp butter or ghee (or vegetable shortening)
- 4 tbsp lime juice
- 2 tbsp each ginger paste and garlic paste
- 2 tsp each garam masala,

- chilli powder and ground cumin
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 cups tomato purée
- 1 cup plain yoghurt (or plant-based yoghurt)
- 2 cups cream (or coconut cream)

For the curry:

- 1 kg chicken thighs, deboned (skin on), cut into bite-sized pieces OR 500g cooked brown lentils and 200g firm tofu, cubed
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 tsp garam masala
- 2 pinches cayenne pepper (or paprika for a less spicy version)
- 1 tbsp corn starch
- ¼ cup water

METHOD

Tomato gravy:

Heat 2 tbsp vegetable oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Sauté the onion until soft and translucent. Add the butter/ghee/vegetable shortening, lime juice, ginger and garlic paste, garam masala, chilli powder, cumin and bay leaves and stir to combine. Cook on medium heat for 1 minute, stirring frequently. Add the tomato purée. Cook for another 5 minutes over low heat. Stir in the cream and yoghurt. Simmer for 15 minutes, stirring frequently, then season and set aside.

Butter curry:

Heat 2 tbsp vegetable oil in a large, heavy skillet over medium heat. Season the chicken with salt and pepper and brown. Reduce heat and add 1 tsp garam masala and cayenne pepper (or paprika). Stir in a few spoonfuls of the tomato gravy and simmer until the liquid has reduced and the chicken is no longer pink, then add the remaining sauce (replace chicken with cooked brown lentils and tofu for the vegan option). Mix the corn starch and water and stir into the sauce. Cook for 5-10 minutes, or until thickened. Garnish with fresh coriander. Serve with basmati rice, poppadom or chapatti, and sambals and chutneys.



48 HOURS IN...

ARUSHA

Five things to do in Tanzania's safari gateway

Tengeru Village and Coffee Farm

Join a walking tour of a small-scale coffee farm on the outskirts of Arusha, including coffee tastings and learning about growing, harvesting, and grinding the coffee.

Shopping with purpose

The beautiful Shanga shop employs 34 people with disabilities in the arts of traditional weaving, glassblowing, beading, paper, and metal work, using recycled materials where possible.

Hike Mount Meru's foothills

Head into Arusha National Park, just north of town, with a private guide to discover a forest filled with wildflowers, home to dik-diks and colobus monkeys.

Horse ride with wildlife

The predator-free Dolly Estate provides two-hour riding safaris, where you'll get up close and personal with giraffe, wildebeest, zebra, and long-necked gerenuk.

Tinga Tinga workshop

Try your hand at this colourful regional art form, which uses dotted patterns. You'll learn from a craftsman in his own studio – a fun activity for the whole family.

QUICKFIRE GUIDE TO: SWAHILI

Jambo – hello
Kwaheri – goodbye
Karibu – welcome/you're welcome
Asante sana – thank you very much
Tafadhali – please
Sawa – OK
Habari gani? – how are you?

Nzuri asante – I'm fine, thank you
Ndiyo – yes
Hapana – no
Nataka... – I'd like...
Maji – water
Hakuna matata – no worries
Pole pole – slowly slowly
Pole – sorry
Baadaaye – see you later



FROM THE CLOSURE SERIES
2018, BY AWARD-WINNING
JEWELLER AMI DOSHI SHAH

Made in East Africa

Kenya and Tanzania's fashion scene is showcasing local artisanship while empowering women. *By Lisa Johnson*

Over the past decade, African fashion has exploded onto the world stage, expressing a new vision that is not only confidently African and buzzing with creativity, but is also busily building community and promoting circular, sustainable fashion at the same time.

East African fashion is very much part of this new dynamic: Nairobi Fashion Week and Dar es Salaam's Swahili Fashion Week are both going strong, while Nairobi's Tribal Chic showcase has been running for more than a decade. A recent edition took sustainable fashion as its theme, featuring designs by Nairobi fashion house KikoRomeo, which uses handmade and hand-dyed fabrics, as well as developing innovative textiles – such as one made from regenerated orange peel. There were also pieces by We Are NBO, an up-and-coming jewellery brand supported by the British Council's Creative DNA programme, using discarded cow bone, wood offcuts or old brass hardware in its pieces.

One organisation that has helped to shape the East African fashion scene is the International Trade Centre's Ethical Fashion Initiative (EFI), which connects international designers with social enterprises. The Vivienne Westwood brand has worked with them since 2010 on its Made in Kenya collections, now employing 66 local artisans – 60% of whom are women supporting 429 dependents.

Several home-grown Kenyan labels have also benefitted from the EFI's Accelerator Programme, including Katush and Hamaji – two of nine African brands featured during a recent Paris Fashion Week.

Showcasing Africa's cultural and natural heritage is a key priority

for leading East African brands. Ami Doshi Shah from Kenya has won the African Designers for Tomorrow Award and incorporates the minerals of the African landscape in her sculptural jewellery, while Nairobi-based Adèle Dejak has collaborated with global brands such as Salvatore Ferragamo with statement pieces that showcase adornments of the Samburu and Turkana people.

Luckily for international shoppers, many of these brands sell direct from their own websites, or if you're in Nairobi, find fashion and jewellery in the Made in Kenya store in Westlands, the African Lifestyle Hub in the Village Market and Artisanal Gallery in Gigiri. □

EMERGING HOMEWARE BRANDS

Cape Town designer Caline Williams-Wynn is creating interiors for Asilia with a number of young Kenyan women

Lucidity Artisanals
(@lucidity_artisanals_shop)
Home accessories.

Savannah Space
(@savannahspacekenya)
Furniture and rugs.

Maa Beadwork
(@maa_beadwork) Run by a young Maasai, Simaloi Saitoti.

Santana Africa
(@santanaafrica_)
Beautiful, custom-made accessories and unique mid-century furniture.

Masawe Interiors
(@masaweinteriorske)
Exclusive range of contemporary, mid-century and antique furniture.

PREVIOUS PAGE (ARUSHA PICTURE); PHOTOGRAPHER MOZ HUSEIN/ALAMY

NABOISHO *On The Rise*

It's rare that you find a place where tourism, community, and conservation work together in true partnership – and where each one thrives as a result. The Naboisho Conservancy in the Masai Mara is one such place. As those who have been will know, the safari experience is exceptional, and thanks to the evolving work of the Conservancy, it's getting better every year.

As the Conservancy evolves, so does Naboisho Camp. Its nine new tents were rebuilt to create a heightened feel of space and luxury, without losing the sense of place. Spacious bathrooms include solar-heated outdoor showers with a thoughtful design that frames the view through to the valley.

'There are so many gorgeous new details,' explains Helen Schutte, Asilia's Styles and Standards Coordinator for Kenya, 'from

the subtle green tiles in the bathrooms to the intricate beadwork created by our local Maasai community.' Many of the new fittings, such as the striking lights in the tents, were created nearby, while much of the furniture was sourced in collaboration with a group of female designers in Nairobi (*see opposite*). 'We felt strongly that we wanted to support local,' says Helen.

Our family tents have been redesigned to create two suites, with two en suite bedrooms connected by a central lounge, ideal for families or couples travelling together. The camp's central living and dining space has also been rebuilt with even more options for indoor-outdoor living. Guests can take a dip in the infinity pool and watch animals wandering past. 'There is always wildlife roaming about,'

says Helen, who has lived at Naboisho for the past 10 years. The shared areas have been redesigned too, with space for guests to take in the breathtaking views.

Those views include regular wildlife sightings, thanks to the success of this conservation initiative, established in 2010 by the Maasai community with Asilia. 'Initially, you wouldn't see a predator and there were no buffalo,' says Helen. Today, there are two 600-strong herds of buffalo, and this is one of the best places in Africa to see big cats. 'That was possible because we worked hand-in-hand with the community, including over 600 Maasai landowners,' Helen explains. 'It's their land and they've been very involved, so it would've been impossible to achieve this without them.' □



TOP 5 NABOISHO EXPERIENCES

1

Take a guided walking safari.
This is one of the few places in Kenya to get up close with the wildlife.

2

Meet the local community.
Naboisho works with the Maasai and offers rewarding visits to the Maa Trust.

3

Go fly camping.
A unique experience sleeping out in the bush, with luxury Asilia extras. Pre-bookings only.

4

Head out on a night drive.
Get closer to the creatures of the night in one of the rare places that offers this.

5

Enjoy the Safari Bar.
Our one-of-a-kind transformed Land Rover gives a sundown experience like no other.

TRAVEL WITH PURPOSE

How modern travellers are setting a new, more responsible agenda when they explore the world

It's gone by many names over the years: green travel, eco travel, sustainable travel, conscious travel... But really, it amounts to one thing. It means a new way of travelling – one where we're mindful of our impact on the environment and the communities we're visiting.

Let's call it travel with purpose. It's a model that's about engaging with the destination in a deep and meaningful way – in a way that either has a minimum impact or, even better, leaves a destination in a better place than it was.

The good news is that it's being widely adopted. According to the latest sustainability report by Booking.com, a benchmark for the industry which gathers insights from 30,000 travellers from 32 countries, 71% of respondents say they plan to travel more sustainably, while a majority of travellers say they want to leave the places they visit better than when they arrived.

But what does travel with purpose really mean? Obviously, there is the environmental impact of travel, and it's impossible to ignore the climate crisis and our associated carbon emissions. That's why one important factor is slowing down and staying longer. Not only will the travel experience be more enjoyable, but it means your per-day carbon footprint reduces the longer you stay. It also allows more time for tourist dollars to filter into the host community.

Another factor to consider as a conscious traveller is minimising single-use plastic, for example by using reusable water bottles where possible. All the guests at Asilia camps are given a beautiful reusable bottle on arrival, fringed by intricate beadwork created by the Maa Trust, a women's cooperative – so you're both reducing your plastic impact and improving local livelihoods.

It's also important to avoid buying souvenirs made from animal products. The illegal wildlife trade is worth billions of dollars each

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL IN ACTION



Increased tourism activity



Community development and support



Community support of conservation



Improved land use and wildlife protection

year according to the International Fund for Animal Welfare, with tourists often unwittingly buying mementos made from endangered species. Things to steer clear of include souvenirs made out of any animal parts such as fur or tortoiseshell, as well as seashells, coral and, of course, ivory. Avoid hardwoods, too.

But as Glenn Fogel, the CEO of Booking.com, said in the industry report, travel with purpose goes beyond our personal environmental footprint: 'Protecting the natural environment isn't the whole story; we must also consider the social, economic, and cultural impact.' According to a recent poll by American Express, 72% of travellers want to help boost tourism revenue in local economies.

Certainly, this is a key driving force behind ethical safari operators such as Asilia, which works closely with the communities living on the borders of national parks and conservancies in Kenya and Tanzania. Experience has shown that a community that understands, and benefits from, sustainable wildlife-based tourism is more likely to positively engage in conservation. An engaged and empowered local community is, in other words, crucial to the long-term survival of both wildlife and wilderness areas.

Starting young is also encouraged. Take Asilia's Twende Porini programme, which brings schoolchildren from surrounding communities to an Asilia camp for four days of action-packed adventure that allows them first-hand experience of the importance of wildlife conservation. Not only does this plant the seeds of conservation for the long term, but the children also become ambassadors for conservation within their own communities.

A luxury safari operator must work with local communities at all levels, whether that's supporting businesses, such as honey producers and organic farmers (thereby also lowering the carbon footprint of any food brought into camp), or sponsoring further education and offering work placements in camp, as Asilia does. Every guest staying in an Asilia camp pays a US\$5 per night Conservation Charge, generating over US\$200,000 a year, all of which goes to their Positive Impact initiatives.

Travel with purpose can be part and parcel of a holiday – if you travel with a socially- and environmentally-responsible operator. Just by booking responsibly, your holiday can have widespread benefits to both communities and conservation, even if you just relax by the pool.

And that's the beauty of purposeful travel. Not only can you have a wonderful experience – one that may genuinely change you – but you also know that by simply being there, you're doing good. □

'Travellers want to leave the places they visit better than when they arrived'

AFRICAN ELEPHANT
IN RUAHA NATIONAL
PARK, TANZANIA

Wild at Heart



Asilia's Usangu Expedition Camp in Tanzania is a unique mix of reimagined safari and meaningful, hands-on wildlife experience.

By Jennifer Flowers

A leopard is stalking me in the Tanzanian wilderness. I'm on an evening game drive with two safari guides and two travel companions in the Usangu wetlands, a seldom-visited corner of Ruaha, Tanzania's second-largest national park. We're observing a juvenile male leopard through one of the camp's thermal monocular cameras, which lets us see his shape and movements in the darkness. Thankfully, we're not on foot – we're in one of the two upcycled, ethanol-powered vehicles that belong to Asilia Africa's Usangu Expedition Camp.

When we turn our car headlights off, the leopard slinks toward us in a way that indicates to the safari guides that he's hunting us. Occasionally we turn the headlights on, and he stops in his tracks, like in the childhood game Sly Fox. In my previous experience in the bush, habituated predators pay vehicles little attention. But this leopard is acting like he's never seen humans before. My guides excitedly take pictures using the iPad we've connected to the thermal camera. 'I've never seen anything like that,' Hamza Visram,

Asilia's head guide, tells us later around the campfire. 'The animal behaviour is very different in Usangu.'

In these wetlands, there are no other camps for 30 miles other than Usangu Expedition Camp, and as a result, most of the wildlife is still not used to cars and humans. The wetlands, which consist of a mosaic of shaded miombo forests and sprawling swamps that form the beginning of the Great Ruaha River, are a lifeline for both wildlife and a surrounding community of approximately 10,000 people. The area is a former hunting block called Usangu Game Reserve that stretches for more than 5,000 km². In 2006, it was annexed into Ruaha National Park, but the land sat neglected for years, making it an easy target for illegal fishing and cattle grazing. Along the riverbanks, illicit rice-growing farming caused damming that was reducing the flow of this life-giving water source.

That all began to change in 2017, when the Tanzania National Parks Authority (TANAPA) and the Tanzanian Wildlife Research Institute (TAWIRI) began to manage the land in earnest. In 2020,

as part of an effort to increase ranger presence as well as monitor and protect the wildlife that lives here, the Tanzanian government partnered with Asilia to create a research centre along with a research-integrated safari camp whose profits would support the conservation work.

The results are already promising. Scientists have discovered large prides of lion, along with cheetah, leopard, and herds of topi antelope numbering in their thousands.

Brandon Kemp, Asilia's country manager in Tanzania, who spent 12 years working in Botswana's Okavango Delta, describes Usangu as one of Africa's last great unexplored wetlands and notes that it has more biodiversity than even the Okavango. 'TANAPA has been incredibly responsive in an effort to clear this area of illegal activity,' says Kemp. 'This has resulted in a real bounce back of the wildlife numbers. Combined with healthy intact flora, the area is transforming quickly into being one of the top wildlife destinations in Tanzania.'



Visitors are kept busy here. I spend my days recording sightings through the thermal monocular cameras, setting up camera traps around camp to monitor wildlife activity, and swapping stories at the end of the day with staff and fellow guests at camp, where dinner is cooked over an open fire on a grill made from the wheel spokes of bicycles that once belonged to poachers. For a seasoned safari-goer like me, there's something incredible about making new discoveries about the wildlife and landscapes right alongside the guides and researchers – while having the area all to yourself.

Between nature walks and game drives, I shade myself from the day's heat in one of the six sprawling tents, all powered by solar energy and built on platforms of responsibly-sourced teak, with enormous beds topped with soothing grey-hued linens. My bed faces a mesh wall with wraparound views of the landscape; I find myself there often, gazing out at the horizon and reflecting on that leopard encounter, or on stories from the locally-hired staff about the area's centuries-old baobab trees, which are filled with cultural and spiritual significance. There's no Wi-Fi in the tents, but when I need it, I take the short walk up to the research centre, where I often stop to chat with other guests and researchers.

Almost every conversation with the staff teaches me something new about the area. On a morning drive with Anderson Pakomyus

Mesilla, a trainee guide from the Wasangu community which has lived here for many generations, he tells me how several decades ago, his grandfather's generation was removed from this very land to make way for the reserve. Anderson himself used to make ends meet by returning to the area to poach honey illegally. Today, he's the first person in his family to be benefiting from the park as an Asilia employee.

Both the park and Asilia are working to support communities like his through local employment and programmes covering everything from education to improved agricultural practices. 'Since Asilia started operating in Ruaha,' says Anderson, 'they're hiring many people from our village, so everyone now can understand the benefits of tourism and conservation in this area.'

Protecting the Usangu wetlands also conserves other wild areas in Tanzania including Nyerere National Park, the new name given to the Selous Game Reserve in 2019 when the park's borders were redrawn to include former hunting blocks. That's where the Great Ruaha River connects to the Rufiji River, a vital water source for food, water and power to the surrounding communities and wildlife. 'From a national perspective, there are three hydroelectric dams relying on the flow of the Ruaha River to generate much-needed electricity for the development of Tanzania,' explains Kemp.



DINNER IS COOKED ON BICYCLE WHEELS THAT ONCE BELONGED TO POACHERS IN THE AREA. OPPOSITE, GUESTS RELAXING IN THEIR TENT AT USANGU EXPEDITION CAMP. ABOVE, ONE OF ASILIA'S ETHANOL-POWERED LAND ROVERS

The leopard is acting like he's never seen humans before. Hamza Visram, Asilia's head guide, says, 'The animal behaviour is different in Usangu.'

In November 2022, when the seasonal short rains arrived, the camp closed as a precautionary measure, camp manager Bruce Arnott stayed on site to assess the impact of the rains. His experience was that the wetland grasses were green and teeming with life during December and January, game drives and walking safaris were minimally impacted, and the roads were driveable. Given his positive experience, the camp will now extend its usual June-to-November season into December and January, allowing more guests to experience and support the project.

On the heels of this successful partnership with the government, Asilia has another research-integrated camp in the works in Nyerere. Like the Usangu wetlands, little is known about the flora and fauna in Nyerere's former hunting blocks. Asilia's research camp has already opened on the banks of the Kilombero River, and plans to offer a research-based safari experience in 2024.

'When an area generates good revenue for a park, it will also receive the necessary protection the area deserves,' Kemp explains further. 'We hope to have a beautiful natural resource to be enjoyed by all in the future.' □



BEHIND THE LENS

‘Over the course of a week, I watched the migration go from a trickle to a flood of game that ultimately enveloped the rolling hills of Namiri Plains, in Tanzania. It was an unforgettable experience, but perhaps most fascinating was observing the behavioural shifts in the wildlife. For the great cats, they went from famine to feast. Suddenly, the rocky promontories were topped with feline sentinels, planning their next attack. Another simple strategy, like the one used by this magnificent male, was to lie out in the open and wait, perusing the menu as it walked by. By day, the zebras and wildebeest would skirt the cats at a safe distance, but at night all bets were off. With the cats’ superior eyesight, you knew they’d have a successful hunt.’ □

CHRIS FALLOWS, FINE ART WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER
chrisfallows.com

MAKE A DIFFERENCE WITH ASILIA

The pioneering work Asilia is doing is changing lives every day. Find out how your donation is helping.

Asilia’s Positive Impact initiative supports projects that work to both improve the lives of local people and protect surrounding nature. Working with our key implementing partners, we have adopted a holistic ‘areas approach’, where we consider how to protect entire areas and ecosystems at a time. Together, we look beyond the core wilderness areas of our camp locations to include the buffer zones and wildlife corridors that sustain these regions.

Through your US\$5 per-night contributions, we are able to make the most significant positive impact towards our goal of empowering these critical areas, including the communities and wildlife that calls them home. Thanks to you, our guests, we can support our expert implementing partners to address educational, social, and economic development of local communities, as well as conservation issues within these regions.

To find out more, head to asiliaafrica.com to read our latest Positive Impact report, showcasing the joint accomplishments of our implementing partners and the support of your contributions as lifelong friends and guests of Asilia.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO MAKE A POSITIVE IMPACT?

Should you wish to donate to AsiliaGiving or one of our specific Positive Impact partners, please use the envelope within the fold here, filling out your details on the front and handing it over to the Camp Manager on departure.

Asante sana from us at Asilia



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‘Lose yourself in nature and find peace, they say.
I lost myself in nature and I found me.’

Asilia

GENUINE SAFARIS | GENUINE DIFFERENCE



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JABALI RIDGE, TANZANIA

Editors

Beatriz Choi
Francisca Kellett

Art director

Tardeo Ajodha

Chief sub-editor

Louisa McGovern

Contributors

Nastassja Ambler
John Baumann
Amadea Thiar
Chris Fallows
Jennifer Flowers
Lisa Johnson

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