

Game spotting accompanied by afternoon tea

Flying into Kenya's Campi ya Kanzi, it is impossible to decide which way to look. To the right of the 12-seat jet are the Chyulu Hills: verdant waves created by volcanic eruptions, the lava paths still visible in the form of hundreds of fingers demarcating the lush cloud forests below. To the left, Kilimanjaro straddles the Kenya-Tanzania border, its summits, Kibo and Mawenzi, linked by a seven-mile saddle floating in an alpine desert 19,000 feet above sea level.

THE ARRIVAL

Open-air Land Rovers whisk guests to the camp—its name means “camp of the hidden treasure” in Swahili—stopping perhaps to track a pride of lions that had been spotted earlier that morning. There they are met by the owners, a stylish young family from northern Italy: Luca Belpietro, Antonella Bonomi (whose family owns the Bonomi Tenuta Castellino vineyard near Milan, renowned for its sparkling wines), and their four-year-old daughter, Lucrezia.

Belpietro leads the way to Tembo House, a lava-stone and thatched-roof lodge that belies the splendor inside—a stone fireplace, a large antique dining table, a library stacked with volumes on Africa, an expansive veranda with plush tangerine cushions on wicker chairs and panoramic views of Kilimanjaro. He introduces the staff, referring to the 39 Maasai in traditional dress as our hosts, before serving a lunch that uses recipes from Italy and vegetables from an organic garden yards away (think pasta with green beans and olives, a basil-and-tomato salad, wine from the Bonomi vineyard).

IN THE BEGINNING...

When Belpietro and Bonomi set out to build a small luxury safari camp, they wanted to avoid messy land disputes and the strict rules of the national park system, which dictate that guests must always stay in jeeps on designated roads. Mostly, though, they wanted to partner with an indigenous community to create a new model for sustaining Kenya's wildlife.

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SAFARI REVOLUTION

Campi Ya Kanzi

A sophisticated camp in Kenya reveals how African tourism can finally benefit its natives.

The Maasai are part owners of Kanzi.



Sunset over the camp



Belpietro, an ardent conservationist who spent much of his youth on safari with the last of the white hunters, explains that the old model for land conservation—drawing a circle around an area to protect it—no longer works. Animals easily travel in and out of reserves, becoming prey to hunters, poachers, and farmers. He offers three statistics to prove his point: 75 percent of the country's wildlife lives outside the national parks; over the last 40 years Kenya has experienced a baby boom that tripled its population; in the last ten years the lion population has dwindled from 100,000 to 18,000. His is a deceptively simple solution—working with private landowners to develop eco-camps that benefit entire communities.

A TRIUMPHANT RESULT

Under a uniquely progressive model, the Maasai are, essentially, Belpietro and Bonomi's landlords on these 400 square miles of pristine land, the very same acreage mythologized by Hemingway in *Green Hills of Africa*. All staff come from within the community, and the Maasai chief's son is the camp's head guide.

A portion of all lodge fees goes to a trust that funds 14 schools with 20 teachers and to secondary-school scholarships for outstanding students. The trust pays for Maasai elders to teach in the schools—meaning that the children won't abandon their own culture in the process of gaining a Western education—as well as for a dispensary with permanent doctor's quarters and a sterile delivery room. It also protects Kenya's lion population by directly compensating those who have lost livestock to predators. Meanwhile, guests at the camp are immersed in luxury. They stay in solar-powered tented cottages with Italian linens, private verandas, stone bathrooms, and fresh flowers. They hike to a mountaintop to watch sunsets, the only visitors on an endless swath of unspoiled land where herds of giraffes and wildebeest roam.

It wasn't easy for Belpietro and Bonomi to gain the Maasai's trust. Tribe members recall how their elders watched, bewildered, as the English and Germans fought World War I on their land, and it took several years for the couple to convince the tribal council of their good intentions. But the result is an astonishing source of hope—many conservationists believe Kanzi to be a top model for sustainable wildlife development. Watching 50 zebra drink from a lake in the savanna as four Maasai shepherds walk their cattle across the same plains, it seems the forces behind Kanzi may indeed be onto something. *From \$430 per person, plus a \$40 daily conservation fee; 800-298-9509; maasai.com.*

—SOPHIE HELEN MENIN

The Maasai chief's son, who is also Kanzi's head guide



Kilimanjaro looming in the distance



A game drive through the Chyulu Hills