

WE

• IN DISTINCT, FAR-FLUNG CORNERS OF TANZANIA, THREE INTIMATE CAMPS AND LODGES HAVE BEEN QUIETLY REINVENTING—AND PERFECTING—THE AFRICAN SAFARI.

YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE AWAITS.

THE END OF THE

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WE

R O A D



WE



Previous page,
from left: Chem
Lodge owners
Fabia Bausch and
Nicolas Negre,
seated, with guide
Raposh Laizer on
Lake Manyara's dry
lakebed; Masai
giraffes near Chem
Chem. **This page:**
Arriving at Greystoke
Mahale, on the
shores of Lake
Tanganyika.

WE

Suddenly,

ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE .

Thirteen-year-old Teddy had been tenderly cradling the infant girl, combing her dark hair with his fingers as they sat among family and friends; you'd have sworn she was his own baby sister. *Such a sweet picture of domesticity*, I was thinking, when out of nowhere a 37-year-old named Christina began screaming and flailing her arms, her face a knot of fury. Turns out the baby's mother, 14-year-old Xantip, had been hovering nearby, making it clear she was ready to reclaim her child. Teddy wasn't taking the hint. Christina—Xantip's mother, and the infant's grandmother—had finally lost her patience. The impudent teen loosened his grip, and Xantip swept in to scoop up her baby.

I had heard that chimpanzees share something like 99 percent of our DNA. But until I witnessed this primate soap opera up close—and locked eyes with that infant chimp—I never imagined how eerily similar to us they actually are. It had taken our small group three hours of rigorous climbing to reach this spot, high in the Mahale Mountains of western Tanzania, where, as guests of a lodge called Greystoke Mahale, we had the opportunity to observe “habituated” chimps in their natural environment.

I'd been plotting to get myself to Mahale for ages, ever since a lunch in Manhattan spent comparing Africa notes with a former investment banker named Jose Cortes. In 2002 he had ditched his Hong Kong job to co-found A2A Safaris. The exquisitely remote Mahale—getting there requires a five-hour flight from Arusha followed by two hours

on a boat—remained at the top of his list, he told me, after more than 100 African safaris.

It's no wonder. The location, for starters, is spectacular: on the white sand shores of Tanganyika, the second-deepest lake in the world, which may explain its astonishing turquoise hue. So clear is the water that we could see hippo footprints on the lakebed several feet below. It's warm, too, and ideal for swimming, though doing so near the shore means keeping watch for hippos and crocodiles. The lake is home to 400 species of fish, a few of which—including the succulent *kuhay*, or yellowbelly—occasionally turn up as sashimi at cocktail time. (The food at Mahale, despite the logistics of sourcing it—every last cilantro sprig must also travel in by plane and boat—is vivid and flavorful, running mostly to fresh salads and aromatic curries.)

With its jungle backdrop, the lodge itself, rising above the beach like some oversized Flying Nun cornet, exudes a desert-island charm: Aside from the main structure, filled with rough-hewn furniture and overstuffed pillows in beachy-white cottons, its guest buildings are limited to six wood-and-thatch bandas done up in Zanzibari fabrics.

Stays at Mahale involve the usual encounters with bush babies (adorable primates with Margaret Keane eyes), feisty baboons, and colobus and vervet monkeys, which swing like trapeze artists through the jungle canopy. But you never know. One morning, Jeffrey Condon, the lodge manager at the time, arrived at breakfast so giddy over the previous night's encounter he could barely get the story out. As Condon passed his camera around, we became acquainted with the scaly, anteater-like creature known as the pangolin. Spotting one in the flesh, he said, was "about as rare as Jesus walking in here off the beach."

Still, the highlight of Mahale is those chimps. Researchers from Japan's Kyoto University have conducted fieldwork in the area since 1965; theirs was the world's

second-longest-running wild-chimp-observation project. (Jane Goodall had arrived in western Tanzania five years earlier, when the country was still under British control and known as Tanganyika.) Though the human-habituated chimps in Mahale Mountains National Park number only about 60, the park itself, which spans 623 square miles along Lake Tanganyika, is home to 1,000 chimpanzees, among the largest chimp communities on earth.

Scouts head out from Mahale before sunrise to track the animals. If and when they locate any, they radio back to the lodge, where guests scramble for cameras and water bottles before setting off on climbs into the jungle. The impassioned chronicling of the chimps' escapades by our guide, 36-year-old Mwiga Mambo, proved nearly as entertaining as the primates themselves. He can identify each animal by name and point out every sibling and political ally. (In their unabashed jockeying for power, Mambo told us, the primates are reminiscent of Tanzania's parliament.) From Mambo we learned that it isn't uncommon for a mother to carry around a dead infant for a month. Nor did he sugarcoat their nastier side, providing a detailed recap of a murder that took place a few years back and involved a coordinated assault on an alpha male.

W H I L E M A H A L E ' S

chimps have long drawn primate lovers to this remote corner of the country, Tanzania as a whole is enjoying something of a moment these days. Ethnic violence and terrorist attacks have deterred travelers from visiting neighboring Kenya, but Tanzania remains one of the few African nations largely untouched by ethnic or religious conflict. Stability has paid off: Between 2000 and 2013, foreign arrivals more than doubled.

Nicolas Negre and Fabia Bausch didn't have arrival numbers in mind when they set their sights on Tanzania. They just loved the land. Born and raised in France, the sandy-haired Negre had spent more than a decade working as a hunting guide in southern Tanzania's Selous region. But he'd grown disillusioned by the way the

Clockwise from top left: The open-air lobby at Chem Chem Lodge; the camp's colorful pool towels; sundowner hour at Greystoke Mahale; its main lodge, where guests gather for meals and bonfires.



WE



Left: A dhow turned dining pavilion at Greystoke Mahale. **Right:** Mangoo Choo, Bausch's pet mongoose, at Chem Chem Lodge.

traditional style of hunting—entailing weeks of camping in the bush—had given way to a *let-me-kill-something-quick-so-I-can-hang-it-on-my-wall* mentality. In 2005, while vacationing in the Bahamas, he met Bausch, a sporty-chic blond from Switzerland who'd recently left a 12-year career in corporate finance. The two were “in a similar kind of mood of changing comfort zones,” Bausch recalled. A month later, the pair were on a balcony in Zurich when they hatched the plan to create a “Slow Safari”—a way for guests to “see, feel, and smell the African bush,” she said, not from a vehicle but right up close, on foot.

By 2008, Negre and Bausch had leased what is now a 50,000-acre concession inside a wildlife-management area 90 minutes southwest of Arusha, where they proceeded to build two stylish camps, Chem Chem Lodge and Little Chem Chem, from the ground up. (*Chem chem* is Swahili for “spring.”) The former opened in 2011, with eight tented villas set in a palm- and acacia-fringed oasis. Its sophisticated design, blending black-and-white wildlife photos, bronze animal sculptures, and Taschen tomes wrapped in coffee-colored canvas, reflects the effortless fabulousness of the couple themselves. (Bausch often appears with her pet mongoose named Mangoo Choo—after the shoe designer—tucked inside her sweater.) Chunky furniture crafted from local *mirunga* trees is set off by fabrics in lustrous ochers and pinks, some of them from Negre's friends the Missonis.

Unlike the permanent-feeling structures at the lodge, which are built on concrete foundations, the five tents at Little Chem Chem, a 45-minute drive away, speak a more traditional safari vernacular of sisal, wicker, and leather. Pale greens and taupes nod to the surrounding savanna. (A sixth, two-bedroom tent ideal for families should be ready by June.)

Over breakfast one morning, Bausch explained how the couple's concession overlaps a migratory corridor for animals moving

TANZANIA FIELD GUIDE

WHEN TO GO

June through October are the best months, with little rain and relatively cool temps. November through February are hotter, and camps often close for the very rainy months of April and May.

WHAT TO PACK

You'll need to travel light—flights in the region have strict per-person weight limits on luggage, as low as 12 kilograms (26 pounds). The good news: All camps have laundry service, so you'll need only a few changes of clothes. Stuff everything into a soft-sided duffel, since wheeled and hard-sided bags aren't typically allowed in light-aircraft cargo holds. You'll also want a pair of high-quality binoculars and twice as many camera memory cards as you think you'll need.

HOW TO BOOK

A travel specialist can coordinate bush flights and pair you with the top guides at each camp. When it comes to Tanzania, we swear by Dan Saperstein of Hippo Creek Safaris and Linda Friedman of Custom Safaris. For more Africa travel experts, see cntraveler.com/travel-specialists.



between Tarangire and Lake Manyara national parks. (They opted not to operate inside a park because they wanted to work directly with the locals, which they do, on conservation initiatives and through a collaboration with a primary school.) One of their main projects has been to rebuild the corridor, restoring the habitat after overuse from agriculture and grazing, and working with park authorities to curb once-rampant poaching. In 2013, not a single elephant could be found on the property, Bausch said, but within ten months of their efforts, the animals had begun to return. Driving through a swampy area after breakfast, we bumped our way over their cavernous footprints while watching 40-odd zebras walking single file by Lake Burunge and a flock of cocky ostriches preening like supermodels in poufy feathered skirts.

Operating outside a national park also means that the couple—and guests—can pretty much do what they like. One evening, we watched the sun go down from the dry lakebed, where flamingo feathers dotted the crackled earth. Breakfast the next morning was served beneath a 3,000-year-old baobab tree with a rickety staircase fitted into its hollow trunk.

Bausch and Negre concede that the life they've chosen isn't for everyone. There's no order-in anything, no texting friends to meet at the local bar. Still, they say, Tanzania gets into your blood. The two now have their sights set on a concession in Negre's beloved Selous, where they hope to offer an extreme take on their Slow Safari concept, doing away with buildings altogether. Because when it comes to *remote*, it really comes down to what you're used to. ♦