

# Africa

M E E T T H E P E O P L E

The naturalist  
The craftworker  
The contemporary artists  
The eco visionary  
The e-bike entrepreneur  
The forest guide  
The shark expert  
The savannah guide  
The airline captain  
The urban forager

For all its myriad natural wonders and abundant wildlife, it's the people of Africa who are the real highlight. From a Maasai beadworker in Kenya and a Tanzanian savannah guide to a shark conservationist in South Africa, we meet some of the continent's most charming characters.

Words **EMMA GREGG**

IMAGE: JAMES WALSH, SINAMATELLA, ANGAMA MARA





## ETHIOPIA

In 2015, the European Council on Tourism and Trade voted Ethiopia the world's best tourism destination, citing its rich heritage and community-friendly tourism, which brings much-needed income to rural areas. In the Simien Mountains, a fragile World Heritage Site, an exciting new project is shaping up.

## The ECOvisionary

### Shiferaw Asrat

Limalimo Lodge is the kind of grand design that would have Kevin McCloud frowning his brows and delivering urgent pieces to camera. When I visit, it's not yet complete. Founder Shiferaw Asrat, who runs local hillwalking company Simien Treks, and Julia Jeans, his English wife, have dozens of decisions to make: from restyling their dining room lampshades (the prototypes aren't quite right) to making their green roofs and rammed earth walls less appetising to monkeys.

None of the construction team has built an eco-lodge before, so they've called in the experts. "Almost everything is hand-built by 200 local men and women, using eco-friendly techniques and technologies that are totally new to us," says Shif. "We've been learning as we go."

Undeterred by the hubbub, the first 'test guests' gamely pick their way past the carpenters and masons to admire the view. Limalimo's location is superb. It's perched like an eyrie in Ethiopia's answer to the Grand Canyon. Below its deck, shaggy-furred gelada monkeys meander among wild Abyssinian rose bushes and nibble peacefully on rosehips. Beyond, crags recede into the distance like a tide.

Funding has come from African Wildlife Capital, which promotes nature-based tourism with conservation potential. Limalimo is the first locally owned and managed lodge it has supported. "I guided their executives in the mountains once," says Shif. "Fortunately, they remembered

me. That helped." This is fascinating and unspoilt trekking country. "There are campsites, but they're very basic," he says. "This beautiful place deserves better."

Shif seems to know everyone. As we drive through his home town of Debark, he stops every few metres to exchange greetings. "My father, who worked for the national parks authority, was somebody everyone loved and respected. He died when I was 18, and people transferred their affection onto me," he says, modestly.

Instead of attending university, Shif cared for his mother and siblings, earning a living as a mountain guide and setting up



Debark's first internet cafe. A gentle, intelligent leader, he has helped other guides develop their careers. But it was always his dream to build an eco-lodge.

"I've spent time in Europe, so I know what city living is like," he says. "When people come to a place like this, they don't want to

sleep in a hotel built of concrete blocks. They want to feel close to nature.

"The first thing I did when I was granted this land was plant hundreds of native trees. I wanted to feel that, even if Limalimo never got built, I'd have done something worthwhile." [limalimolodge.com](http://limalimolodge.com)

**ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES** flies direct to Addis Ababa from Heathrow. [ethiopianairlines.com](http://ethiopianairlines.com)  
**COX & KINGS** offers an Ethiopian safari from £1,595 per person, including flights, transfers, two nights in Addis Ababa and three at Limalimo Lodge. [coxandkings.co.uk](http://coxandkings.co.uk)

## The airline captain



### Amsale Gualu Endegnanew

Ethiopia's first female airline captain. To celebrate International Women's Day earlier this year, she commanded an all-female crew on an Ethiopian Airlines flight from Addis Ababa to Kigali.

#### Who were your role models?

My parents. They encouraged me to have confidence. I was born in 1977 in Bahir Dar in northwest Ethiopia, the eldest of four children in a middle-class family. I always wanted to be a pilot. Our father would take us to the airport to see planes landing and taking off.

#### Is there a gender bias in Ethiopian society?

Yes, it's deep-rooted, but I don't feel I've faced any unfair competition during my career. What happened to the other candidates during selection and training, happened to me, too.

#### You're a mother of three. Is it difficult to maintain a work-life balance?

It's a matter of being psychologically prepared. I've learned to manage my time! Thankfully, my husband helps take care of our children.

#### Are you ambitious?

I didn't set out to become Ethiopia's first female captain — I just wanted to be a pilot. But now, I want to take my career as far as I can.

#### When young Ethiopian women ask you advice on how to succeed in a male-dominated industry, what do you say to them?

Keep trying. Believe that it's possible. ▶

## SOUTH AFRICA

Near the tip of South Africa, where the Atlantic and the Indian oceans meet, Emma goes snorkelling with sharks and undertakes an expedition foraging for chestnuts, mushrooms and seaweed.



BRITISH AIRWAYS and SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS fly direct to South Africa from Heathrow. [ba.com](http://ba.com) [flysaa.com](http://flysaa.com). The next Land Rover Shoals of Agulhas Expedition will be in April/May 2017. [montyhalls.co.uk](http://montyhalls.co.uk) [landrover.co.uk](http://landrover.co.uk). Charlie Standing runs foraging tours in partnership with the Table Bay Hotel. [theurbanhunter-gatherer.com](http://theurbanhunter-gatherer.com) [suninternational.com](http://suninternational.com)

IMAGES: NICK DIMBLEBY, LAND ROVER; EMMA GREGG

## The shark expert

## Meaghen McCord

It's rare for a snorkeller to be torn between looking up and looking down. But that's exactly how I feel as I bob around in the indigo waters of the Indian Ocean on a grey day in July. Beneath me, bronze whaler sharks are circling. Meanwhile, in a boat a few metres away, something just as exciting is playing out.

I'm taking part in Land Rover's Shoals of Agulhas Expedition, an overland adventure led by broadcaster Monty Halls along South Africa's Wild Coast, following the famous Sardine Run. Every year, from May to July, gigantic sardine shoals up to nine miles in length and 131ft deep travel north from the cold southern oceans off South Africa's Cape Point, to the warmer waters in the north.

Equipped with rugged vehicles and high-speed boats, we're exploring the rolling seas where dolphins race, seals tumble and gannets dive like torpedoes as they feast on the seasonal abundance of fish.

Scientist Meaghen McCord (left), a member of the team, is aiming to capture, tag and release as many sharks as possible in order to analyse their behaviour. She's been unlucky so far, but today, a bronze whaler — or copper shark — takes the bait.

"Very little is known about the movements of predators before, during and after the Sardine Run," she says. Detailed information will help promote better management of shark species along this coast. "Most South Africans accept that, by swimming in the ocean, they're visiting the homes of amazing animals. But some still have archaic views, like those who insist on deploying bather protection nets in KwaZulu Natal, for example." Controversially, these nets take a heavy toll on marine life.

Meaghen runs the South Africa Shark Conservancy, which studies various aspects of marine ecology. She advises anyone hoping to dive the Sardine Run to do their research. "Look for responsible dive companies which help fund conservation," she says. "[Sadly] some just regard shark tourism as a way to make money."



## The urban forager

## Charlie Standing

"I take people foraging in my home city, Cape Town. It's an idea which grew out of my love of cooking and the outdoors. Some of my earliest memories are of collecting mussels off the rocks and fishing in tidal pools using makeshift rods with my dad. I also remember picking berries on my walk home from school and balancing in a loquat tree, gorging myself until my stomach hurt. I think foraging comes naturally to all of us, but in today's urbanised world we seem to have lost touch with nature.

"Foraging gets easier with experience, but it's also getting more competitive. A few years ago I might have overlooked a delight that's everywhere in town because I didn't know it was edible.

These days, other foragers sometimes beat me to the chestnuts and porcini mushrooms [on offer].

"September is a good time to gather Cape pondweed for *waterblommetjebredie*, a classic lamb stew. Our spring is also

excellent for seaweed. I make kelp lasagne, using kelp instead of pasta. It's mind-blowing how yummy it is.

"I'd love Cape Town to put more resources into encouraging people to grow their own produce. I know it seems idealistic, but we need more projects like Abalimi Bezekhaya Harvest of Hope, which empowers shack dwellers to grow organic vegetables, and Oranjezicht, a

non-profit city farm established on a disused bowling green. It's distressing to see local vegetable plots replaced with yet more shopping malls.

"Cape Town has a European feel, with a vibrant edge that's very African. It's a hub for creatives, dreamers and alternative thinkers.

I'm a former stunt man

and rigger; I used to make performing artists fly, Cirque du Soleil-style. My other lifelong passions are rock climbing and surfing. Nothing beats eating a delicious fully foraged (or homegrown) meal after a day in the mountains or on the sea."



BOTSWANA

## The contemporary artists

The San Bushmen have a heritage that can be traced back over 40,000 years. The rock paintings of their ancestors are the last traces of a way of life which no longer exists. Founded in 1990 in a remote village west of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, Kuru Art is a grassroots project which nurtures the cultural identity of Naro San artists and helps them sell their work. Collectively, they use art to express their responses to the pressures of modern life and their respect for the natural world.



### Ncaote Thama

“I don’t really know what art is; I just do it and find I like it. My late husband’s beautiful paintings intrigued and inspired me. My work tells of my love for the Kalahari.”

### Gamnqoa Kukama

“I led a hunter-gatherer lifestyle and worked as a farm labourer before becoming an artist. My art enlivens the memories that I’d otherwise have lost.”

**KURU ART** ([kuruart.com](http://kuruart.com)) is in D’Kar, near Ghanzi. Companies which arrange trips to the Kalahari include Rainbow Tours and Botswana Specialists. [rainbowtours.co.uk](http://rainbowtours.co.uk) [botswanaspecialists.co.uk](http://botswanaspecialists.co.uk)

IMAGES: NICK SMITH, KURU ART; NICK WEST, KURU ART



### Coex’ae Bob (Enni)

“I was born in the 1930s, strongly rooted in the traditions and beliefs of the Kalahari San. Through my paintings, I share my knowledge of wildlife, domestic animals and medicinal plants.”



MAURITIUS

## The e-bike entrepreneur

### Laurent Marrier d'Unienville

"I discovered e-biking in 2015. I was looking for a way to regain my fitness after a serious illness. Electric bikes are totally new to Mauritius and when I tried one I was like, 'Wow! This works.' It's the perfect way to train. The idea of a tour company came soon after.

"At first, my friends thought I was crazy. People don't cycle much here. But now, many of our guests are Mauritian. On e-bikes, it's easy for everyone to stay together and ride at the same pace, even with little cycling experience.

"We offer exercise, scenery and culture, so our trips have broad appeal. Sometimes the guy who came for a workout will say he never expected to see and learn so much, and the person who doesn't normally ride at all will love the physical side. I've even taken professional cyclists



out. For them, it's something different. They can crank up the resistance on the bike to make the experience really sporty. I think this is the future.

"On my tours, I talk about pirates, settlers and slaves. I've done a lot of research. Even though I'm eighth-generation Mauritian — the tombs of my ancestors are in the Souillac Marine Cemetery here in the south — I've learned things I didn't know before. When Mauritians come on my tours, they say the same; so much took place here in the 18th and 19th centuries, but we're not taught much about it in school.

"Mauritius is very multicultural. Some Mauritians consider themselves totally separate from the rest of Africa, but I disagree. Jo'burg is only four hours away. We're different, but we're definitely African."

 **BRITISH AIRWAYS** flies direct from Gatwick to Mauritius. [ba.com/mauritius](http://ba.com/mauritius)  
**ELECTRO-BIKE DISCOVERY** offers half-day group tours in southern Mauritius from Rs1,500 (around £30) per person.  
[electrobike-mauritius.com](http://electrobike-mauritius.com) 

## KENYA

The owners of luxury safari lodge Angama Mara insisted that the quarters for their mostly local Maasai staff should be as well-designed as the guest areas — so, it's sleekly modern, with respectful references to Maasai culture. And the people who work at the lodge, which opened in 2015, seem delighted with the result. We caught up with two of them...



IMAGES: TYLER DAVIS, ANGAMA MARA

## The naturalist

**Fredrick Kerika Ole Sinoni****WHO INSPIRED YOU WHEN YOU WERE GROWING UP?**

My father. I consider him a hero. Managing a huge family of four wives and 27 children is no easy task. He was a local administrator and would attend conservation workshops, bringing home leaflets containing wildlife illustrations and interesting facts. These small pieces of information helped me develop my passion for nature.

**WHAT DO YOU ROUTINELY WEAR WHEN YOU'RE GUIDING A BUSHWALK?**

A typical Maasai warrior ceremonial outfit. It makes me stand out and gives me a sense of identity. Beadwork is entirely a woman's role, so my necklaces, bracelets, straps and the beading on my *shukas* (clothing blankets) are all handmade by my mother, sisters and girlfriend.

**DO YOU THINK THE MAASAI WILL STILL BE WEARING TRADITIONAL DRESS IN 25 OR 50 YEARS' TIME?**

Christian preachers used to discourage the Maasai from wearing traditional clothes and ornaments, calling them ungodly, but we're now reclaiming our identity. People wear traditional

dress everywhere, to the market, at church and for other important occasions. In my opinion, our dress code is here to stay.

**ARE TRIBAL RITUALS IMPORTANT TO YOUNG MEN?**

They're very important, since they indicate our age group and social status. This ensures cohesion and mutual respect. They have enabled us to come a long way as a community.

**DO THE MAASAI HAVE A SPECIAL UNDERSTANDING OF NATURE?**

Yes, the stones, leaves, grass, trees, birds and animals are our first library books. Spending time in the bush herding cows hones our skills. We can track wildlife and the changing seasons by merely picking up on the clues in our surroundings.

**WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPIEST?**

I have a passion for nature and love meeting people from different parts of the world. With every encounter a new story unfolds and a lesson is learned. That's the essence of life — it's a continuous learning process.

## The craftworker

**Elizabeth Kaiyoni****How did you learn your craft?**

My grandmother taught me how to work with beads when I was a girl. Selling things was my way of contributing to the family.

**What's the significance of the beads worn by Maasai women?**

We have necklaces for specific events, like weddings or meetings with the elders. I make my own. When I wear them, I feel in touch with tradition.

**Why are Maasai traditions important to you?**

They teach our children how to become good elders. Also, tourists find them interesting — many people want to dress and dance like the Maasai! Presenting our culture to tourists has brought us schools, hospitals and other benefits.

**Are you proud to be Maasai?**

Yes, because we've kept our culture intact. Our cows are our wealth; we live in *manyattas*, groups of small houses, that unite us — it's a cheap and resourceful way to live. I'm happy because I'm in my home country, healthy and at peace.

**What does it mean to you to be African?**

My skin doesn't change even if I walk under a hot sun. If I'm pricked by a thorn, I remove it and apply herbs and it heals very fast. I'm African, therefore I'm tough.

JACADA TRAVEL offers a luxury safari staying four nights at Angama Mara and three nights at Segera Retreat from £7,295 per person sharing, full board, including activities, transfers and flights from Heathrow. [jacadatravel.com](http://jacadatravel.com)



TANZANIA

In East Africa's safari heartlands, we meet two guides working in very different habitats.

## The savannah guide

### Ernest Onesmo

What do you look for in a walking safari guide in the African bush? Sharp eyes, a steady nerve and a sixth sense for danger? Rifle skills, just in case?

The best guides have all the above, but are also artful interpreters, able to decode the intimate mysteries of the bush. When you step out of your safari vehicle and start walking, you break an invisible barrier. Suddenly immersed in the Great Outdoors, you want to get stuck in — touching bones, sniffing herbs, listening for tiny sounds. Ernest Onesmo, who's based at Sand Rivers in the Selous Game Reserve, knows this.

"Do you recognise this?" he says, picking up a pinch of sweet-smelling, semi-digested grass. "Elephant dung?"

"Correct! And it's also a source of new plants, if we let the seeds germinate; an insect repellent, if we burn it; paper, if we press it; or stomach medicine, if we use it in a potion. Each time we let a poacher take out an elephant, we sacrifice so much. It's a battle we can't afford to lose."

Ernest is an all-rounder, as adept at mixing a gin and tonic on the bonnet of his Land Rover as he is spotting birds, tracking lions or planning a bushwalk. On foot, he's totally at ease.

In many ways, ours is a walk like any other. But there's a crucial difference: I've packed my toothbrush. As I follow Ernest through dappled woodlands where antelopes eye us, shyly, from a distance, I'm thrilled that our destination remains, to me at least, a mystery.

"Welcome!" says Ernest at last. "This is your home for the night."

We've reached a beautiful lakeside clearing. The fly-camping team have rigged mosquito nets over mattresses near the shore, and hoisted a bush shower in a terminalia tree. As we rest our legs beside the crackling campfire, delicious cooking smells drift our way.

"Everything OK?" asks Ernest.

It certainly is. Right now, there's nowhere else I'd rather be.



IMAGES: EMMA GREGG

# The Forest guide

## Butati Nyundo

"I've been interested in chimpanzees all my life. My father was a field assistant to the Japanese primatologists here in Mahale Mountains National Park. I have a very early memory of one male chimp attacking another, kicking him and standing on his head! I was amazed at his strength.

"My father encouraged me to get a government job, but I wanted to work with wildlife. Luckily for me, one of Mahale's researchers sponsored me to study for a diploma in Wildlife Management in Kilimanjaro.

"Chimps are incredibly exciting. They're always doing something different — grooming, feeding, exploring. They make me laugh every day, but a dominance display can be nerve-racking. It's like stepping into a domestic dispute.

"I recently met Jane Goodall. It was a dream come true. I asked her whether she'd ever tried to convince people to practice family planning in the communities living adjacent to protected areas. I was the only Tanzanian in the room to ask her a question and she asked everyone to praise me for raising such an important point.

"I believe that uncontrolled population growth is one of the biggest conservation challenges we face. My father had 13 children, but I have no wish to follow him. I have twins and that's enough." □

**NATURAL WORLD SAFARIS** can create a 10-night bespoke safari at Sand Rivers Selous, Greystoke Mahale and Arusha Coffee Lodge from £6,995 per person, full board, with activities, transfers and flights from Heathrow. [naturalworldsafaris.com](http://naturalworldsafaris.com)

IMAGE: NOMAD TANZANIA