

just back from

Remote Tanzania

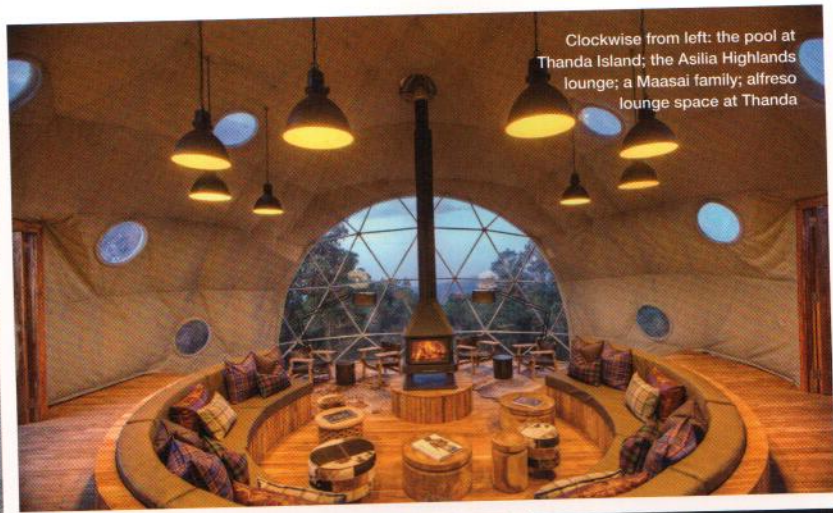
Amelia Osborne Scott travels to remote corners of Tanzania and discovers two new properties that celebrate their far-flung locales.



Tanzania, I have found, inspires gratitude. Being in East Africa, in general, instills deep appreciation—for what we have throughout the world and what is specific to this magnificent region. Life unfolds unhurriedly here, and we watch animals move (or sleep) and the sun rise and set and experience our connection without being aware of the minutes passing. Participating in a game drive, dining at the bottom of a 500-million-year-old crater, walking across private, gleamingly white sand beaches or visiting the Maasai, visitors can't help but feel thankful for the world's wonders and humbled by their tiny place in this universe. The best lodge owners understand and promote these feelings, and two new properties in very different parts of the country celebrate their unique locales to great success.

Sitting in the Indian Ocean 16 miles off the east coast of Africa, **Thanda Island** (thanda-island.com) will officially open later this year but already promises to provide one of the world's most extraordinary private isle experiences. The 20-acre, pear-shape jewel of fine sand and pine forest is available only to guests who take over the complete property, meaning that its fully staffed five-bedroom villa, two traditional yet luxurious bungalows and limitless water and beach activities are theirs alone.

The perfect way to end a safari trip, a stay on Thanda Island can be tailored to your preferences, whether these run to sipping Champagne on the beach after a dip in the ocean or more rigorous activities, like waterskiing, stand-up paddle-boarding or snorkeling or diving amid green and hawksbill turtles, whale sharks, en-



Clockwise from left: the pool at Thanda Island; the Asilia Highlands lounge; a Maasai family; alfresco lounge space at Thanda



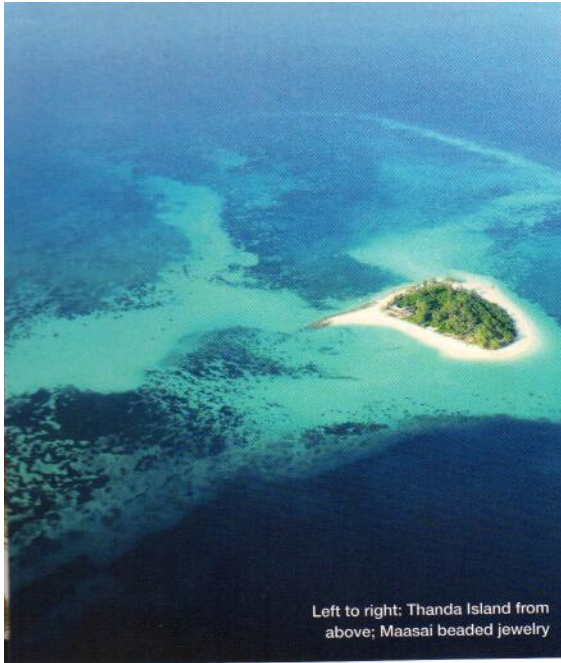
dangered dugongs (funny-looking manatee-like creatures) and some of the most colorful coral reefs in the world. In places like this, where few humans or human artifacts intrude on your sightlines, the occasional storm cloud rolling across the sky provides Hollywood-blockbuster-level entertainment and silences viewers awed by the majesty, the drama of nature.

On the Tanzanian mainland, in the Serengeti's vast Ngorongoro Conservation Area, the new **Asilia Highlands** (asiliaafrica.com), too, caters to those looking for personalized encounters with nature and local culture. Rather than compete with the masses who descend into the Ngorongoro Crater early in the morning, the Asilia guides begin their game drive at mid-day, with a leisurely bush lunch under towering yellow fever trees, after which they take guests

in jeeps across the crater floor to see animals in their natural habitat just as most other visitors are beginning to leave. At the end of the day, Asilia guests are usually among the only people left in the park.

The eight-tent lodge is located about an hour's drive from the crater, in an extremely remote region, amid Maasai villages and hamlets little visited by tourists. Guests of the property are able to gain some insight into the Maasai culture without affecting it detrimentally through a carefully crafted program in which they are driven to a variety of *boma*, or home-

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Left to right: Thanda Island from above; Maasai beaded jewelry



steads, and introduced to the patriarch and his wives and children. There, they learn about the people's lives and complex coming-of-age traditions, communicating with them through a translator and via gestures.

The Maasai are gracious and welcoming, eager to share the little they have. I met a young mother of three who, having noticed me admiring her intricately beaded jewelry and pitying me for my simple pearl studs, took off her own earrings to give to me. The next day, she came to the Asilia camp to teach me how the Maasai make such beautiful beadwork. Together, we

created earrings for me to take home. (The property offers jewelry-making workshops.)

Being in Tanzania makes us slow down, taking the time to enjoy our surroundings and simple comforts like sleeping under billions of stars—whether viewed from under mosquito nets on a tropical island or cozying up to a hot-water bottle in the cool highlands. We are happy to put our life on hold for a moment and focus on our place in the universe. Rather than homesick, we feel at home, on a remote island, on the floor of a crater, on a mountainside, in the vast grass plains, with ourselves.

Thanda Island in Brief

Vibe: Ultimate private luxury hideaway

At a Glance: The resort, comprising a five-bedroom villa and two bungalows on a private 20-acre isle in the Indian Ocean, offers a very luxurious way to end an East African trip.

Who Should Stay: Those seeking the ultimate Robinson Crusoe vacation with world-class luxury. It is perfect for multi-generational groups, since it welcomes children of all ages and has enough activities to keep everyone happy, regardless of interests.

Indagare Loves: Having an Indian Ocean island to yourself; snorkeling, stand-up paddle boarding, jet skiing, kayaking, swimming, wake-boarding and sunbathing, all in a single morning or afternoon; spectacular meals featuring freshly caught seafood

Asilia Highlands in Brief

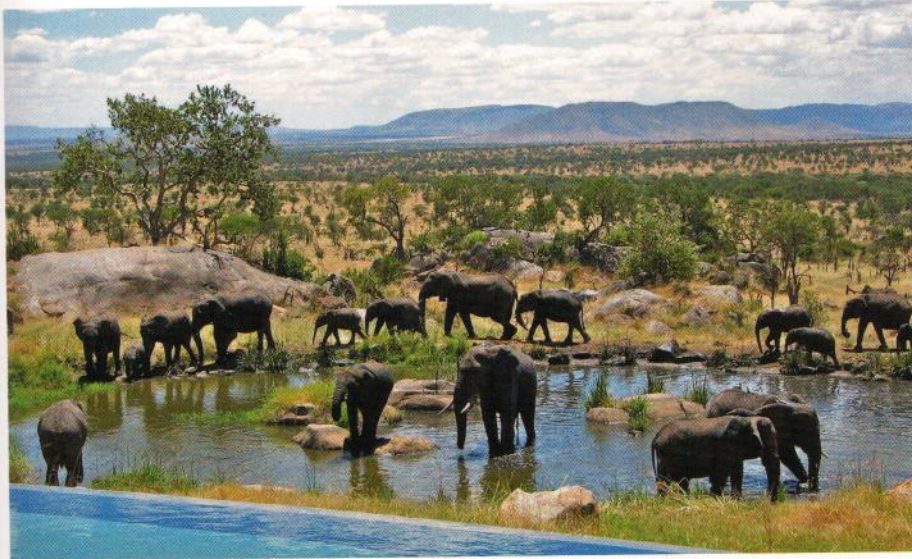
Vibe: Remote, cozy, providing meaningful insight into Maasai culture

At a Glance: The resort's eight round-top tents sit on the upper slopes of the Olmoti Crater and offer guests a luxurious base from which to explore the untouched highlands of northern Tanzania.

Who Should Go: Those wishing to see the Ngorongoro Crater and learn about the Maasai. Asilia welcomes families with children over five years old.

Indagare Loves:

The chic, cozy tents with wood-burning stoves, platform porches, stunning black-and-white Maasai photographs by Graham Springer and lush beds; meeting Maasai in their homes and in arranged activities like beading workshops.



Family-Friendly Tanzania: Four Seasons Serengeti

From afar, the idea of sleeping in the Tanzanian wild is incredibly appealing, not to mention romantic. But for some travelers, particularly those with squeamish kids, the reality of being close to large wildlife and having the occasional bug in the bedroom is not right. For them, there's the Four Seasons Serengeti, a safari lodge resort opened by the luxury-hospitality company in 2013.

The 77-room property, located in the middle of the Serengeti, offers many perks—a kids club, a spa, a state-of-the-art gym, two- and three-bedroom units for families and multiple dining venues—that, although standard

for the brand, are not so for Tanzania. Elevated walkways connect the main building with two wings of accommodations, making it perfectly safe to walk around during the day (at night a Maasai accompanies guests back to their rooms).

All the spacious guest rooms have white-dressed king-size beds and large bathrooms with double vanities, freestanding bathtubs and rain showers. The curtains around the beds are purely decorative: finding even a single mosquito inside is rare. No creature comforts need be sacrificed here, including a flat-screen television and massive walk-in closet.

Those who long to feel remote from the civilized world, with a cacophony of sounds surrounding them, wildlife close by, and a touch of ruggedness in their accommodations might be disappointed. But anyone who appreciates resort amenities and space in which you can move around freely will love it. Combining a stay here with one in a tented camp or at a smaller lodge is a good choice, especially if you end the trip here. fourseasons.com —*Simone Girner*

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