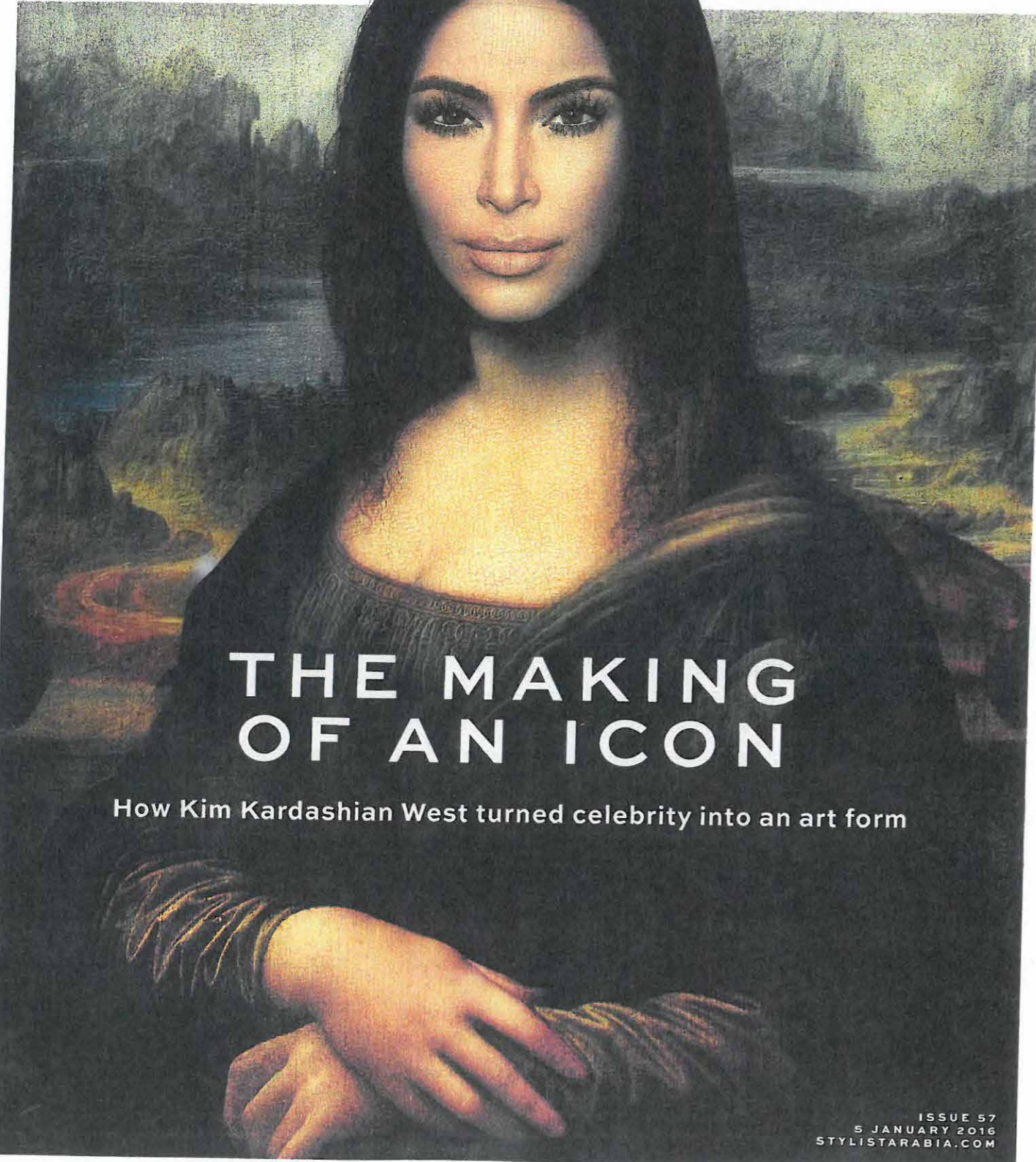


FREE FASHION TRAVEL PEOPLE IDEAS BEAUTY

STYLIST

ARABIA



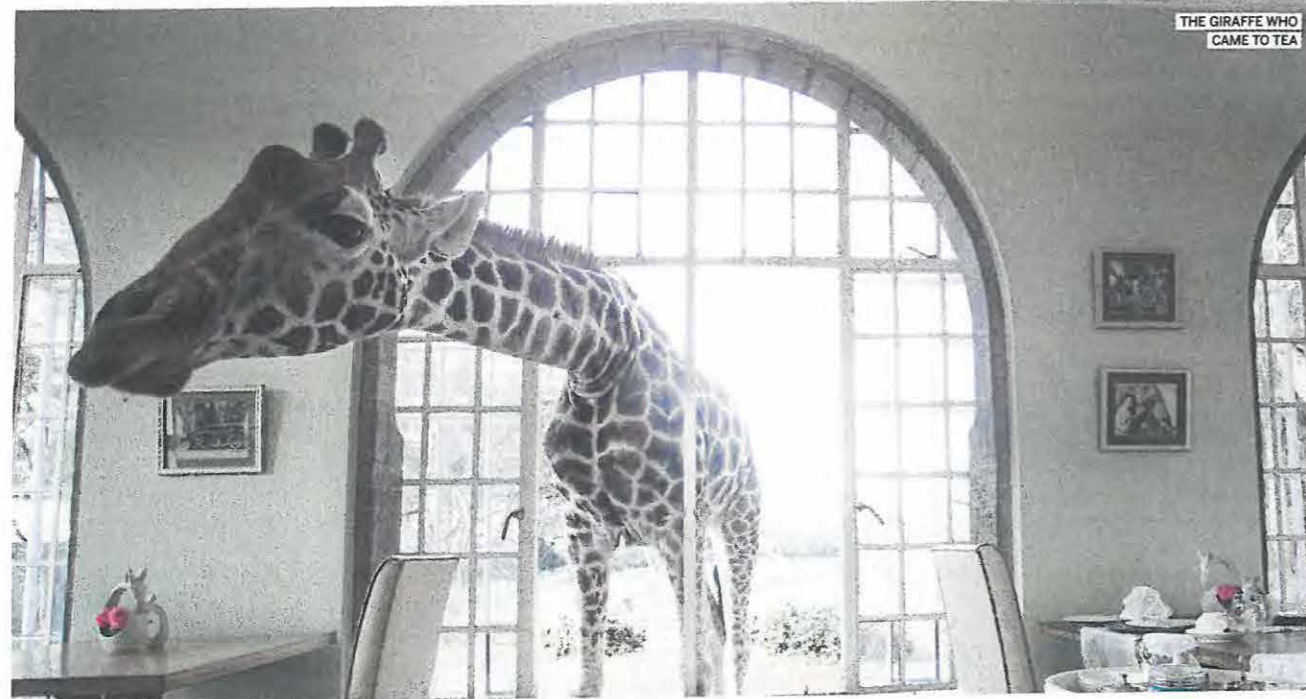
THE MAKING OF AN ICON

How Kim Kardashian West turned celebrity into an art form

ISSUE 57
5 JANUARY 2016
STYLISTARABIA.COM

THE REVIEW

THE FIVE-STAR SAFARI TRIP OF A LIFETIME



TAKE A LUXURIOUS WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

Stylist contributor and self-professed city-slicker Natasha Faruque follows the call of the wild – and never wants to return

What's that gentle tapping at my first-floor bedroom window? Stacey, one of the resident Rothschild giraffes that call this uber-luxury, English-style manor turned boutique hotel home is looking for pre-breakfast treats (that are conveniently placed in our room for us to dispense to our dawn visitors). To say this 140-acre sanctuary is a bucket-list experience is an understatement.

Harking back to Kenya's colonial past, this ten-room '30s estate offers a truly unique experience. From breakfasting with the larger-than-you-anticipate 15 foot-tall giraffes who crane their necks to get

treats through the windows, to seeing warthogs, antelopes and impala nonchalantly dropping in, to the surrounding Langate Forest – this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get seriously up close and personal with Kenyan wildlife. Even though it's a holiday, you'll be raring to get up at 6am: prime time to have your giraffe

“THE MARA HYPNOTISES; IT FEELS ENDLESS AND HAS AN ABUNDANCE OF WILDLIFE THAT THRILLS”

encounter; if you sleep in, fret not, as snack-time recurs at the more civilised 5pm. Failing that, you can pop in any time to the adjacent, hugely educational Giraffe Centre.

Just a five hour direct flight from Dubai, Kenya has emerged as one of the most sophisticated,

hospitable safari destinations for adventurous travellers. The reason I opted for The Safari Collection's portfolio of lodges and camps? I like my adventure with a side order of five-star comfort.

Giraffe Manor, a wilderness oasis in the middle of a bustling metropolis, is just half an hour from Nairobi's main airport

and makes the ideal first night pit stop for those who, like me, want to immerse themselves in their wildlife experience from the get-go.

This manor, which was home to the renowned conservationists who also founded the African Fund for

Endangered Wildlife, Scottish Jock Leslie-Melville and his American wife Betty, is truly a one-off experience. And no, the photographs you see taken at this supremely Insta-friendly spot are not photoshopped.

From our tranquil Nairobi retreat we take a short (and very small) eight-seater, 45-minute plane journey to our second stop; Solio Lodge on the Laikipia plateau, perched on a private reserve between the world-renowned Mount Kenya and Aberdares mountains. Our guide Bashir, and Samburu spotter Charles, who took care of us throughout our stay, whisked us off the plane, into a top-of-the-range, specially kitted out Land Cruiser and straight into a thrilling game drive.

As soon as we entered the acacia-lined ravines, wooded swamps and grassy savannahs

of the seemingly endless 13,500-acre Solio, we were surrounded by the 300 black and white rhino that are the main draw of this famed high-end East African lodge that has a hugely successful breeding programme for these endangered two and a half tonne giants. Other immediate spots? Mammoth buffalo, teams of baboons, agile impalas, eland antelope, Thompson's gazelles, dozens of zebra and a plethora of beautifully-plumed birds, all before a noon lunch on day two of our five night trip.

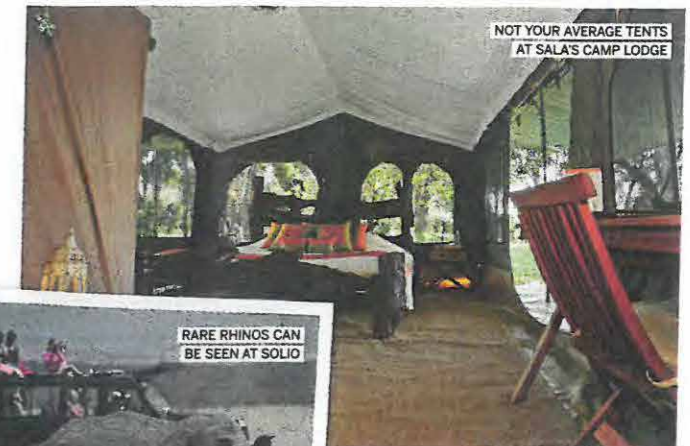
Six self-contained thatched cottages with all the mod-cons you could hope for, each in their own individual lodges, house guests at Solio, whilst the main two-storey lodge provides the hub at which visitors exchange sightings and share expertly-prepared, gourmet meals (my mother's request for halal meals was immediately catered for) under the hospitable watch of South African manager Ava Paton and her ever-smiling staff. And yes, there is Wi-Fi, so you can instantly upload pics that are sure to make your fellow wanderlusts green with envy.

Everything at Solio oozes elegant fabulousity; from the wood fires that greet you when you return to your room at night to the hot-water bottles you find tucked under your duvets when it's chilly. From the fully stocked drinks cabinets to the private, floor-to-ceiling glass-lined, open-plan villas with stand-alone Palazzo baths, rain showers, private terraces and seating

areas that are frankly bigger than most people's Dubai apartments. This is a seriously slick operation that lures those accustomed to the finer things in life. The only problem? You are always torn between enjoying the luxurious lodge and being out on expertly-guided drives!

But for me, the drives always win out; every outing has a distinct highlight. From the excitement of following one of the reserve's four packs of lions out stalking prey at night to seeing a baby giraffe being born and taught its first steps to taking tea in the midst of the rolling savannah under endless blue skies; Bashir regaled us with facts and anecdotes that kept us enthralled through the day as we sat in the open-air on the seats specially placed on the roof of the vehicles. The more active could also opt for horse-back riding and nature-walks in the adjacent Solio-owned cattle ranch, and day trips to the nearby 767 square kilometre Aberdares National Park.

We tear ourselves away from the contemporary chic confines of Solio and head to our much-anticipated final stop; the majestic Maasai Mara. Believe the hype; the sheer splendour of this vast 3,910 square kilometres natural reserve cannot be underestimated. The moment our Maasai driver Moses (who we



tease has a tough act to follow after our Solio sojourn) and spotter, the gentle, eagle-eyed Anthony, pick us up, we are yet again in the midst of a game drive. In minutes we spot a herd of elephants, complete with calves galore, and then a pack of lions. So far, a very good start! Sala's camp is at the cusp of the Tanzanian-Kenyan border, in the southern tip where the Serengeti meets the Mara – a prime sighting site, away from the other hotels and lodges that populate the now very popular reserve. On the banks of the Sand and Keekorok Rivers, during the million-strong wildebeest migration, this is truly the place to be.

Exclusivity is yet again key in this newly renovated, seven-bedroom, tented camp that still delivers on the comfort front with en-suite baths and showers, supremely-comfortable beds and three-course gourmet meals (a cheese soufflé was conjured up when requested although the local fish curry was a particular highlight) served in a picture-perfect riverside spot in front of the main tent. On most days you'll see a herd of elephants there to greet you from across the water. The Mara hypnotises; it feels

endless and has an abundance of wildlife that thrills. Our requests for elephant encounters and hippo sightings easily fulfilled, we went on to witness multiple packs of lions, hyenas and, hugely excitingly, three elusive cheetahs. Given that there are less than 500 left in Kenya, this was an unexpected treat. The only big five we hadn't seen? The shy leopard, something Moses admitted was always a challenge to find – but he was up to it. On our final morning we got lucky: on the banks of a stream was the majestic leopard, gnawing on a recent kill, an ostrich.

One of the most striking things about these undeniably exclusive (yet never stuffy) spaces was their emphasis on conservation and the fact that they seamlessly fitted in with – and celebrated – the communities they were part of. You feel privileged to be a small part in helping to fund these much-needed sanctuaries. And yes, I ticked off all big five game animals from my safari must-see agenda, as well as truly ticking off an item on my bucket list. The only hitch in this once-in-a-lifetime trip? I have already booked to go back!

For a bespoke safari experience email info@thesafaricollection.com for a quote; thesafaricollection.com; Emirates flies daily to Nairobi twice daily from Dhhs1,705 return; emirates.ae