A photograph of three women standing in a savanna landscape. The woman on the left has long brown hair and is wearing sunglasses, a light-colored cardigan over a white top, and dark pants. The woman in the middle is wearing a yellow hat, a dark blue button-down shirt, and light-colored pants. The woman on the right is wearing sunglasses, a patterned scarf, a dark vest over a black long-sleeved shirt, and tan pants. They are all smiling and looking towards each other. The background shows a vast green field with scattered trees under a blue sky with light clouds.

This
SIDE *of*
EDEN

There's a place on earth where it is still the morning of life and the great herds still run free. Welcome to the Serengeti. Zelda Kienle and her daughters Stephanie and Jessica take you on this African safari of a lifetime.

By *NICOLE LIMOS*
Photographs by *CHRISTIAN GONZALEZ*

THERE IS SOMETHING MAGNIFICENT about the light in Africa. It is the kind that tinges everything in incredibly varied shades of brown. It stretches rippled plains into endless horizons, the sort of landscape into which one can dream of vanishing. At its best, during midday, when the sun hits its high notes, the land bakes into richer hues, the perfect backdrop for the thousands of animals that roam. Here, from the ambers of its dawn to the sepias of its dusk, Zelda Kienle and her daughters Stephanie and Jessica bask in glorious abandon.

FAMILY AFFAIR

It was a year of milestones. Zelda and her husband Max celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary. Their daughter Stephanie marked her first with husband Christian Gonzalez.

the world. Traveling has validated the values they've been taught and the traits they are exposed to at home, affirms Jessica, who at 22 may speak a lot older than her years. They learn to respect cultures, people, life, above all else.

Africa isn't a new destination for the family. Except for Jessica, the rest had already been to parts of the continent. Max's mother spent 45 years in the Congo. Zelda had explored some parts of the north, where her husband was born and spent a few years of his childhood. Stephanie had flown to the south for her honeymoon in 2011. A vacation in East Africa, however, was a first, and this recent family trip to the Serengeti was a dream of their father realized.

The Serengeti has come to symbolize paradise for many of its visitors, "the high noble arc of the cloudless African sky," as the American hunter Stewart Edward White put it in 1913. The Serengeti National Park, the biggest wildlife sanctuary in the world, occupies almost half of the entire Serengeti Region, which covers 30,000 square

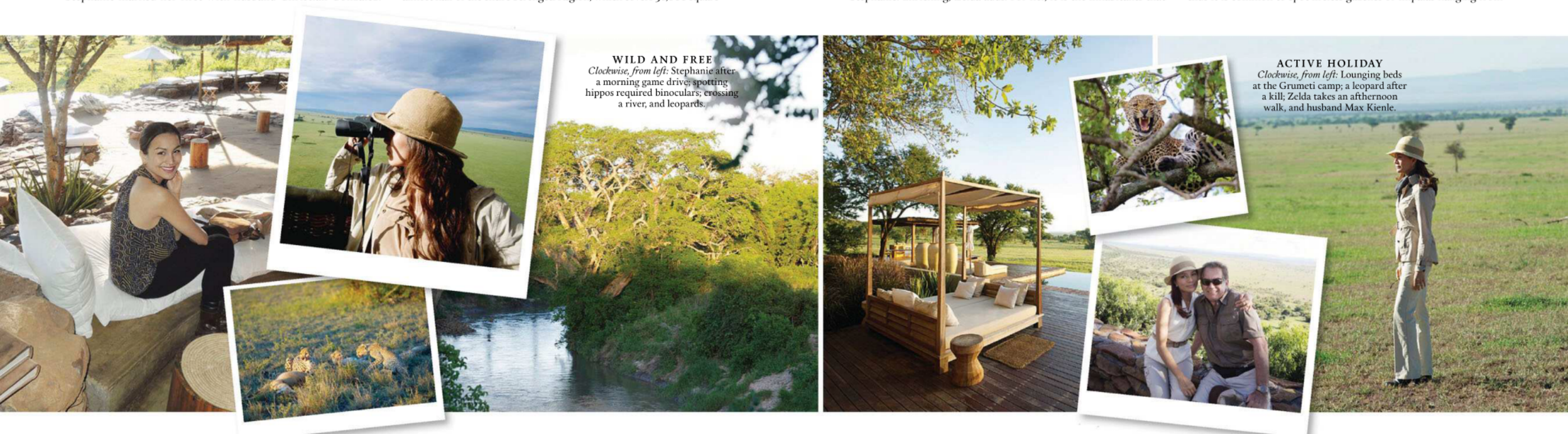
says Stephanie. (How their grandmother at age 90 managed to get up first, and stay energetic throughout the safari schedules was a marvel for everyone. She was the life of the party, says Jessica.) The camp was set in the remote reaches of the reserve, near the Grumeti river known for its wildebeest crossings during the Great Migration in July and December.

Before sunrise, over some aromatic tea, coffee, and morning biscuits, the day ahead is planned with their guide, Medard. He is a local, trained extensively by the camp to assist and lead guests through game drives and other activities. Medard is in tune to the movement and rhythm of the wild. He is affectingly passionate about his job, always entertaining with tales of native life and moving with his fervor for nature, as with many other locals. The kind that necessarily provokes travelers to truly immerse not only into each day on safari or every moment of the game, but in life itself—rightfully sensational, in the words of Stephanie. Enriching, Zelda adds. For her, it is the inhabitants that

to be a marvelous experience in itself, whether it was pausing for a break under the dramatic arches of umbrella trees on the savannas or navigating through rivers or lakes to catch glimpses of honey badgers and porcupines.

Lions are plentiful in the park, making prides common sights on almost every morning and afternoon game drive. The Kienle ladies cannot forget the sight of a lioness feeding her cubs, a couple on the reserve's famed Kopje rocks, and a pride moving just five feet across them—all mental snapshots worthy of a National Geographic documentary.

And then there are the large spotted cats among the tall African grass. The family was eager to witness what their guide referred to as a kill. Find us a kill, they urged Medard excitedly. And he did, leading them to a leopard and its prey. Leopards, according to Medard, may kill their prey just for the sake of it, even when they are not hungry, thus it is common to spot lifeless gazelles or impalas hanging from



WILD AND FREE
Clockwise, from left: Stephanie after a morning game drive; spotting hippos required binoculars; crossing a river; and leopards.

ACTIVE HOLIDAY
Clockwise, from left: Lounging beds at the Grumeti camp; a leopard after a kill; Zelda takes an afternoon walk, and husband Max Kienle.

Max's mother Edith turned 90. It made sense to have a big fête to earmark the year, says Stephanie. So the whole family embarked on an African safari through the Serengeti in Tanzania, the jewel in the crown of the country's protected area, where the spectacle of the largest terrestrial wildlife migration in the world takes place.

Traveling is nothing new for the Kienle daughters, Stephanie and Jessica. They grew up exploring the world's most magical places with their parents, moguls of locally manufactured furniture label Philux, where they also work now (Stephanie handles sales and marketing, while Jessica recently joined the company to head the design team). Zelda believes travel is an important part of education. They work hard, they do more, they make sure family vacations get an annual budget, she quips. Exposure to other cultures is crucial for her daughters, who are after all, half-Swiss. Experiencing their father's European way of life has opened their eyes to a deeper, wider view of

kilometers. The plains just seemed endless, looking into the eternal, recalls Stephanie. The name Serengeti, after all, as noted in her travel guide, means "the place where the lands move on forever."

HAKUNA MATATA

This sanctuary, while best experienced intimately and first-hand, is also most elating when prepared for, the women attest. Read books, choose a great camp, listen to your travel guide, be in the moment, Stephanie says.

The family booked their travels through Asia to Africa Safaris (atasafaris.com), which curates customized and highly exclusive safari trips. At Grumeti Tented Camps, a luxury safari lodge where they were booked for seven days, days began at four in the morning. They wake to the whimsical interiors of their palm frond tents, punctuated by beaded curtains and mosaic surfaces that always injected a good early vibe,

deepened her experience of the continent. Rarely has she found people as beautiful and true as their motherland. They made sure we were every bit all right, she says. They are like Filipinos, even more hospitable and accommodating.

HIGH FIVE

The Serengeti is the place in which one escapes the raw fret of daily life and gathers the self—not in silent stillness—but in what the Kienles refer to as contemplative action. The game drive—the conventional way of seeing landscapes and wildlife on a private open 4x4—is the method. They went on two game drives daily, one in the early morning and late afternoon, which could last between two to three hours each. While the foremost goal was to spot the famous (and well, literal) Big Five—lions, leopards, buffalos, elephants, and rhinos—in the course of the safari, every step of the journey proved

tree branches, where these huge cats set them away from scavengers.

On another day, they were led to a river further away where they marveled at a herd of African bush elephants, one of the two species found in the land, daunting with their fully grown, long, curved tusks of ivory.

The Cape buffalo, on the other hand, was hidden in the bushes on the way back. A handy telescope gave them a better view of this horned bovid, seemingly harmless in its stance, but considered the most dangerous of the Big Five, having ambushed and attacked more people in Africa than any other predator to date.

Zelda reiterates the importance of being still inside the jeep amid close calls. No sticking out of arms. No sudden or loud noises. No night drives. No walking safaris. No off-roading. No breaking of rules. What's great about the Serengeti, which is a private reserve, however, is that the animals, through the years, have grown accustomed to the profile



TRAVELING HAS VALIDATED THE VALUES THE DAUGHTERS HAVE BEEN TAUGHT AND THE TRAITS THEY ARE EXPOSED TO AT HOME.



PERFECT PLAY
From top: Jessica and the family take an early morning balloon ride; the Kienle's tent at Grumeti; and the view from the camp's poolside. *Opposite:* Zelda and Jessica on the eight-seater jeep the family used for game drives.

of the jeep, explains Stephanie. It's no longer a threat to them, it has become part of their comfort zone.

The last of the Big Five is the most difficult to spot, if not almost impossible for many travelers today—the critically endangered black rhinoceros. Poaching has significantly diminished its population, killing more than 1,000 rhinos every year for their horns, which are sold in China and Japan for medicinal and prosperity beliefs. Hidden near the swamps, as Medard points to some 100 feet away, is a pair of rhinos moving past tall grass. We completed the Big Five, they exclaim, following the animals' progress with their telescopes. These rhinos, known to attack at the slightest human movement, Stephanie relates, were flown all the way from the London Zoo to the Serengeti reserve for interbreeding.

50 SHADES OF EARTH

The Kienles knew that every time they stepped out there, they were endangering their lives, but not without enriching them. It was always this truth that kept them going. In between hunting for the Big Five, they also explored the Serengeti plains,



observing countless primal activities and immersing in dramatic sights. The hyenas were up to speed with their stabbing teeth and meat-hooking claws. The banded mongooses, jackals and foxes, and birds of prey were killing machines as ferocious as the bigger ones. The prey, from the soft-eyed gazelles to the herbivore zebras and wildebeest disappeared into their hideaways at night, when predators roamed to hunt for food. And the baboons, the hundreds of baboons—they were incredible, trills Jessica. It felt like they were launched into the Planet of the Apes.

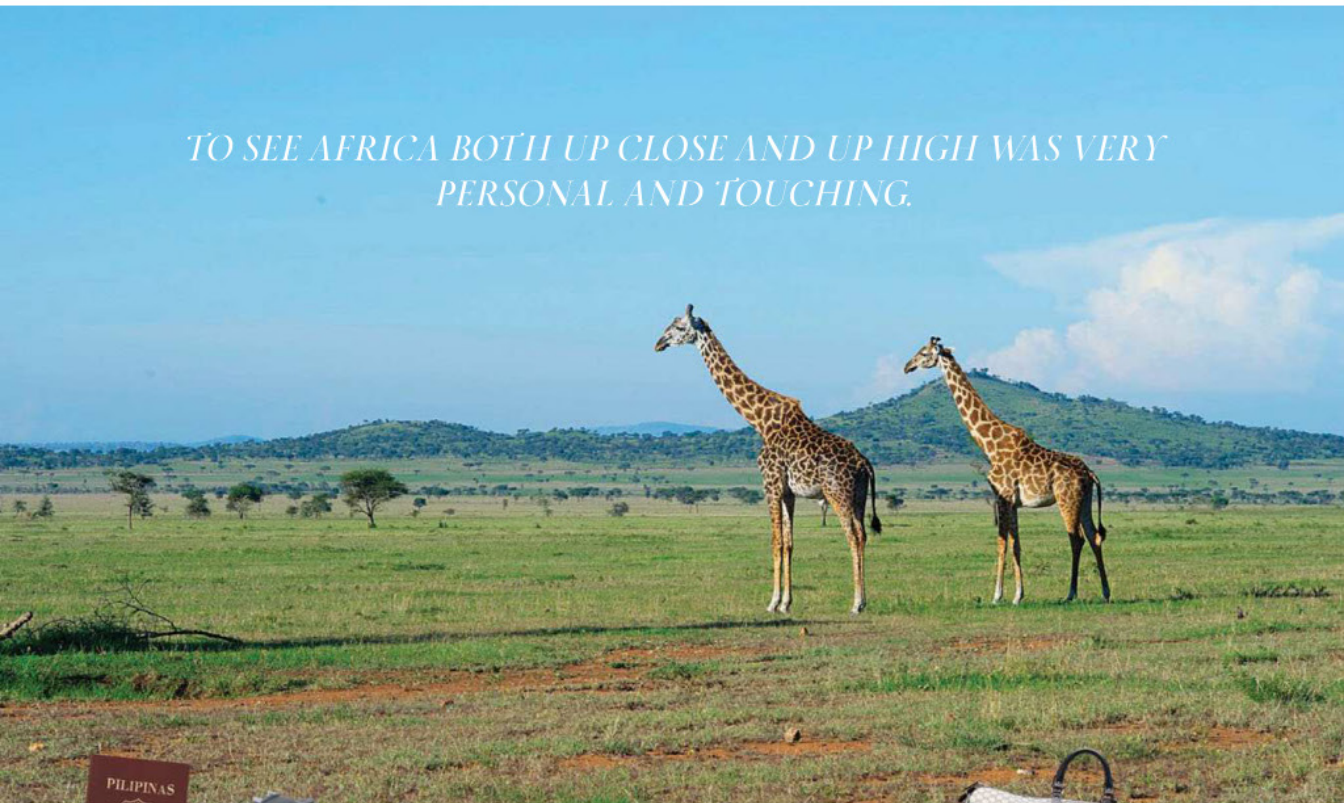


On one morning, they traded a game drive for a hot-air balloon ride. Aboard a striped balloon, they took off at dawn, rising with the sun, flying from over treetops to lower landscapes that allowed photographic takes of wildlife. At their highest ascent of 10,000 feet, they viewed the best panorama of the Serengeti. Earth hues, greens and oranges and ash all wash out to shades of brown. To

see Africa both up close and up high was very personal and touching, shares the first-timer Jessica. No one returns home unchanged.

Trips back to the lodge were always a treat, where after the morning

TO SEE AFRICA BOTH UP CLOSE AND UP HIGH WAS VERY PERSONAL AND TOUCHING.



SERENGETI AND BEYOND



» TAKE NOTE «

HOW TO GET THERE

✓ Asia to Africa Safaris arranges flights from major cities in Asia via Hong Kong, Singapore, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, or Dubai.
atoasafaris.com

VISA REQUIREMENTS

✓ For Philippine passport holders, a visa is obtained upon arrival in Africa.

PACK LIGHT

✓ Bring everything in a soft duffel bag; hard-side suitcases and soft-sided internal frame carry on luggage will not fit into the compartments of small aircraft.

✓ Luggage limit is 15 kilograms per person.

WHAT TO WEAR

✓ Cool and comfy casual wear for the day, layering pieces for colder evenings.
✓ Gray, brown, or khakis are the recommended clothing colors from July to October, and green from November to June so as not to alert wildlife of your presence. Camouflage clothing is prohibited.

POINT AND SHOOT

✓ Minimum 200 to 300 mm range DSLR camera
✓ Telephoto lens
✓ Extra digital storage, spare camera, and batteries

as these are not easily available at lodges

PLUG IN

✓ 220 V / 240 V cables and adapters

JUST TO BE SURE

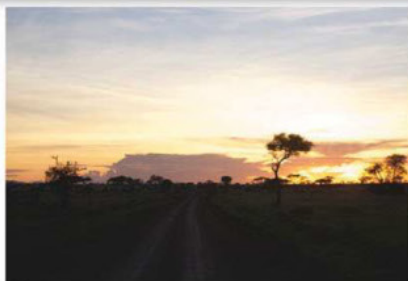
✓ Bring and take anti-malaria tablets.
✓ Get a dose of Hepatitis A vaccine.

BEST TIME TO GO

✓ Exceptional wildlife viewing during the dry seasons, from January to March and June to October
✓ Migrating wildebeest and zebra herds occur from December to June.

game drives or hot-air balloon rides, they were served platters of fruit and cheese and hot breakfast dishes. Outside their private camp was a spacious shaded shower with a wrought iron dome, where they freshened up before late lunches on vibrant decks overlooking the river.

There was time for *siesta*, a dip in the pool, reading, or even tennis in the early afternoon before tea time when their ranger headed back to plan the second game drive for the day. Cocktails were served on afternoon game breaks, sometimes set on a Savanna picnic or on wooden tables under a tree. Evenings, on the other hand, were



SPOTTED!

From top: Giraffes seen on an afternoon game drive and the sunset on the way back to camp.
Opposite: Stephanie, Jessica, and Zelda.

for family conversations and recollections of the day. Dinners, adds Jessica, were witness to nocturnal serenades of owls and bush babies.

On this side of paradise, no day offered the same scene or the same story or even the same lighting, quips Zelda. The experience was humbling, adds Stephanie—there was an immensity that made one feel utterly small, and depth that allowed a view of the grander scheme of things. Africa put everything into perspective. It was meditating, inspiring, liberating in its rawness. It brought them back to beginnings.

