

Press Coverage: andBeyond

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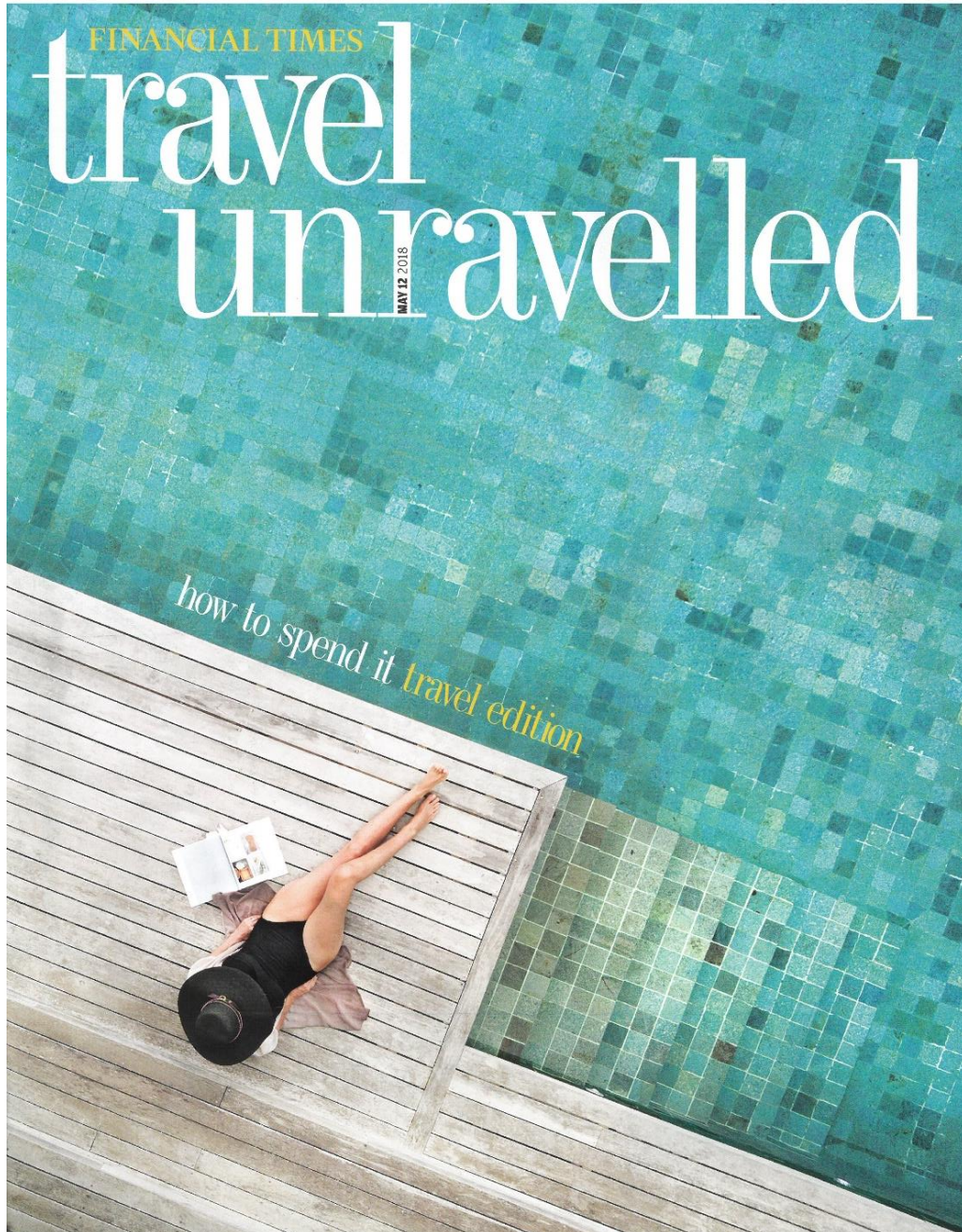
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Beyond's Rhinos Without Borders project is relocating 100 rhinos from South Africa to the safe haven of Botswana, including this animal on Phinda Private Game Reserve.

## WILDLIFE AT HEART

A new philanthropic travel model gives guests a role in the behind-the-scenes work of wildlife and wilderness conservationists. Alice B-B glimpses the potential for change on a pioneering rescue mission in South Africa.



## “I’ve just lost 19 rhino”

This is not the opening gambit I expected from Les Carlisle, group conservation manager for eco-tourism company &Beyond. It’s not because he is careless; rather, Carlisle is on the cusp of making conservation history. The Rhinos Without Borders project will this year see the total number of rhinos translocated from South Africa to Botswana reach 100. But as of five minutes ago, Carlisle is 19 short – a private buyer has pipped him to the post to secure the rhinos for his own ranch.

As we breakfast on the sweetest mango and ranger’s omelette, overlooking fever trees glowing golden under the morning sun, it’s apparent the breeze around the Ubombo mountain range at Phinda Private Game Reserve in KwaZulu-Natal brings change. Sustainable travel has been the global buzz for over a decade: solar power, low carbon footprint, plastic free. But in a climate that some scientists are calling The Sixth Age of Extinction (the first to be man-made), travellers at all financial levels have become more engaged, demanding an immersive experience that can effect real change. This – coupled with forest leaves parting to reveal scientists, conservationists and animal whisperers all inviting the human connection fundamental for conservation – heralds a new dawn: one I recently heard referred to, only half jokingly, as the dawn of superhero travel. Opportunities are opening up for philanthropically minded travellers to fund research and conservation work that they actually participate in; work that can potentially help to fast-track the protection of a species – or of a whole ecosystem. It’s about having an amazing, singular time while supporting the real heroes and, in the process, maybe saving a little piece of the world.

&Beyond is one company leading the charge – in this instance, with the support of the Getty Family Trusts, one of two primary shareholders in this owner-operator outfit founded 28 years ago with a dream: to restore a stretch of KwaZulu-Natal cattle farm and pineapple plantation to protected wilderness. That dream is now a reality, and Phinda, the wilderness reserve in question, is the blueprint for &Beyond’s 29 lodges and camps in Africa, which manifest the ethos for the company’s guide-led experiential journeys across Africa, Asia and South America. The holistic business model is sustained by operating photographic safaris, but for the aspiring

superhero, there are new, exciting opportunities. After witnessing a rhino-notching operation (whereby the animal is sedated and its ear nicked for identification) at Phinda five years ago, &Beyond CEO Joss Kent realised the potential value of turning the conservation operation inside out – of not just exposing guests to what truly goes on behind the scenes, but actually immersing them in it. “We started offering guests the opportunity to be part of the rhino-notching experience, in return for them covering the \$5,000 cost; there are now waiting lists. Revealing the gritty stuff has a dramatic payoff – guests want to step forward and really be part of the story, while passing the conservation message on.”

The Rhinos Without Borders project began in 2012, when six rhinos donated by Phinda were transported as part of a new core population to Botswana – a country far safer for these animals than South Africa, where, under the perfect storm of corrupt government ministers and a record-setting \$90,000-a-kilo value for rhino horn on the Chinese market, poaching of these mammals exceeded 1,000 a year. In Botswana there is a zero-tolerance policy for poachers. “When we released them, His Excellency Ian Khama [then president of Botswana] and the minister of environment, wildlife and tourism Tshekedi Khama both attended,” says Carlisle. “I’d never seen that kind of political will before anywhere in Africa. We needed to support that.” So the project was ambitiously scaled up to translocate 100 rhinos. “It costs \$45,000 to move one rhino into Botswana; donors who are prepared to invest in a full rhino can be present for the capture, loading or release,” he says. “Translocation is a very emotive experience on a lot of different levels. To be part of something that has such a big vision, such long-term benefits for conservation, is remarkable.”

These extreme trips are tailored to the level of luxury required. Guests can take a private jet to Phinda’s airstrip and, from September, stay at &Beyond’s newly rebuilt Homestead Lodge, an exclusive-use four-bed house, fully staffed up, including a chef, guide and tracker. Until then, high-end donor-travellers have the opportunity to rent the Getty family’s home (pictured top right), a six-bed house imbued with history, family photographs, a library stuffed with leather-bound editions, romantic views across the reserve, plus a fleet of vehicles and a helicopter pad where instead of an H the letter G marks the spot.



From top: the Getty family home is available to rent on Phinda Private Game Reserve. Explaining a giraffe skull to Phinda’s younger visitors. Journeys for Giants, an adventure spin-off from charity Space for Giants, are bespoke trips to help fund conservation

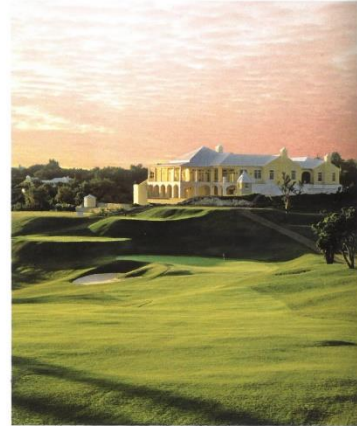


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Clockwise from left: Jeremy Madellos takes Nonsuch Expeditions patrons with him while checking on cahows in Bermuda. The newly revamped Rosewood Bermuda acts as a base for seabird-seeking guests. Henry Cookson Adventures provided its clients with space on a helicopter transporting baby giant tortoises up a volcano in the Galápagos Islands



"Now that conservation is a global conversation, it's nice to be at a point where we have 25 years of runway behind us," says Jessica Getty, "and not to have eyes glaze over when you mention it."

My own first experience of a conservation operation on this huge and emotional scale took place a few years ago in Kenya with Max Graham, a Cambridge PhD who has worked on environmental and development projects from Afghanistan to Ecuador and across Africa, in conjunction with his charity Space for Giants. At the turn of the 20th century, perhaps as many as five million wild elephants roamed Africa; today there are fewer than 450,000.

As well as poaching, elephants are at high risk in the daily waged human vs animal conflict. Not long before my arrival, Graham had identified a big bull known for crop raiding, devastating local farmers' livelihoods with a formidable set of tusks; it was only a matter of time before a desperate farmer shot him. In a rare and pioneering second-chance operation, the bull was partly detusked by the Kenya Wildlife Service, the operation funded by the Astrup family, Norwegians with a long history of working in conservation in Kenya. Strapped into one of three doorless helicopters, I accompanied the researchers as the elephant was located, then darted. The drugs took hold; the bull went down. The helis landed and the entire team rolled up their sleeves, gathering data, taking measurements or, in my case, just giving tentative strokes as half his tusks were removed by chain saw. Back in the chopper, we watched as the antidote took hold and the elephant came to, his trunk gingerly feeling about the newly shortened tusks like a patient in a dentist's surgery. As he swaggered off into the bush, no longer a menace to farmers or a danger to himself, I wasn't the only one who shed a tear of joy. It was both incredibly moving to be so close to such a majestic animal and thrilling to be part of a project giving him a real chance at survival.

Since then, Graham has satisfied the growing demand for similar experiences by setting up Journeys for Giants, a spin-off, not-for-profit adventure arm. He organises a maximum of eight bespoke trips a year, often booking as a base Enasoit, the game-rich corridor with an exclusive-use tented camp, owned by Ina Astrup. Graham recently organised a three-day helicopter safari for one of Denmark's most successful businessmen,



himself a land conservationist, with a very specific remit. "I wanted to show him the importance of the natural landscape, explain what it takes to protect our natural heritage and demonstrate not just who we are as *Homo sapiens*, but what we are – our place in the natural kingdom and the impact we have had since our imagination took us beyond our biological limits."

The adventure included sponsoring the collaring of two elephants, meeting anti-poaching units trained to special-forces standard, dining with an elephant whisperer and flying to Lake Turkana, where an unprecedented collection of hominids has been found, for a 3.5-million-year potted history of early man delivered by famed paleontologist Richard Leakey. "These immersive, holistic experiences can have such a profound impact," says Graham. "At Space for Giants, it allows us to build relationships and connections with

individual donors who are so precious to us, giving us the flexibility to grow and take risks."

A similarly action-centric ethos is at the core of double polar world record holder Henry Cookson's adventures. "I'd say that 70 per cent of our small-group, light-footprint trips include working with conservationists in some way," says Cookson. "Often we bring people who can really make a difference right to the coalface." A recent trip to the Galápagos saw Cookson cut a deal with the authorities to bring in a helicopter – usually strictly forbidden – on one condition: that the national park's rangers had access to the chopper to transport 250 baby giant tortoises up a volcano, with Cookson's clients there to observe. "That's what we could give back," says Cookson. "It was a conservation arrangement, not a commercial deal. And simultaneously it allowed





From left: the author meets manta rays during a night dive with the Manta Trust, one of whose projects is based at the Four Seasons Resort Maldives. All rental income from Arijju private lodge helps to support Kenya's Borana Conservancy

our guests to be part of an extraordinary experience at the nuts-and-bolts end."

Such travel also encourages the seriously niche. Take Bermuda, famed for pink beaches, rum swizzle cocktails – and the cahow, the world's second-rarest seabird. This Lazarus species was thought to be extinct until the 1950s, when 17 breeding pairs were discovered on one of the 138 islands that make up Bermuda. But rising sea levels, predatory rat populations and lack of deep cavities meant these underground-nesting birds had to be translocated to vermin-free Nonsuch Island if they were to survive. Thanks to the dedicated work of conservationist Jeremy Madeiros and the Nonsuch Expeditions team led by Jean-Pierre Rouja, there are approximately 335 cahows today. It's an incredible success story, and for conservation-minded guests staying at the new Rosewood Bermuda (pictured on previous page) – the old favourite Tucker's Point, freshly revamped and flying the Hong Kong brand's flag – there is the chance to become patrons of Nonsuch Expeditions, joining seasonal voyages to the protected island to observe the scientists working with the birds.

Other opportunities to join heroic expeditions delve below sea level, where some shark species have been decimated by as much as 90 per cent in one generation

by the estimated \$1bn shark-fin industry. Manta ray populations too are suffering from Chinese medicine's appetite for their gill plates (considered a health tonic). Fighting their corner is marine biologist Guy Stevens, who was instrumental in pressuring for the protection of Hanifaru Bay in the Maldives, which in the summer monsoon sees over 150 manta rays converge to feed on plankton. Following this success, Stevens co-founded the Manta Trust, which has one of its projects based at the Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru.

I joined him not long ago for the Trust's twice-yearly manta ray expedition aboard the *Four Seasons Explorer*, sailing the Maldivian atolls in search of these creatures that glide like elegant spaceships and have the highest brain-to-body-weight ratio of all sharks, rays and skates. A night research dive in inky waters with Stevens, during which five vast mantas fed off plankton just feet from me, attracted to my underwater torch, was unforgettable – only made more so by knowing the trip was raising funds for the Trust and an opportunity to pass on the conservation message to the next curious taker.

Such immersive conservation experiences have spurred some philanthropists to take their passion to the next level. The owner of Arijju (pictured top right),

the stunning Michaelis Boyd-designed private lodge in Laikipia, Kenya, explains, "This is all about a commitment to support the preservation of the stunning landscape and extraordinary wildlife that make up the Borana Conservancy. We wanted a family home that drew our children deeper into African nature, but also a project to attract others to support the communities, cultures, animals and natural beauty that make this part of Kenya so special."

The ultimate in stealth wealth, the house is barely visible from outside, with a living roof and an entrance hewn from the bedrock. But inside is an unexpected rose-filled courtyard surrounded by Cistercian-inspired cloisters, with elegant interiors by Maira Koutsoudakis, famed for her work at North Island in the Seychelles. All income from renting the house to guests goes towards supporting employment, education and conservation for the Conservancy, most notably the endangered wildlife, such as African wild dogs, reticulated giraffes and both white and eastern black rhinos, that is found here. The most compelling attractions, however, are private visits to the anti-poaching units to hear about efforts up close, and helicopter excursions in support of conservation.

Naturally, the globe is filled with many more examples where the winds of change are fluttering the preservation anemometer. There needs to be: human activity has changed our planet to such a degree that we've brought on a new geological age – the Anthropocene. The World Wildlife Fund's 2016 Living Planet Report showed that since 1970, global wildlife populations had declined by 58 per cent. And that figure is set to grow to a staggering 67 per cent by the end of this decade. It seems even more urgent following the death of "Sudan", the last male northern white rhino, and the inevitable extinction of that subspecies. The impacts on our wildlife, climate, forests and oceans are profound – as are the consequences for humanity. "Superhero" travel, then, is an ever more necessary tentpole for conservation tourism efforts.

When I speak to Les Carlisle at Phinda a few weeks after my return home, he happily tells me he's found his 19 rhinos. That's 19 more opportunities for philanthropists in the making to do their part to save a bit of the world and its wildlife. Here's hoping they step up, because the bottom line is truer every day: there is no Planet B. ♦

#### MISSION IN LIFE

Alice B-B travelled as a guest of **British Airways** (0344-493 0787; ba.com), which flies from London Heathrow to Johannesburg twice daily from £653 return, and of **&Beyond Phinda Private Game Reserve** (+2711-809 4300; andbeyond.com), staying at **Mountain Lodge**, from £516 per person per night. Guests can also stay at **Homestead Lodge**, from £4,868 per night on an exclusive basis for up to eight; and **The Getty House**, by special request. **Arijju**, arijju.com; from £5,405 per night on an exclusive basis for up to six, minimum three nights. **Enasoit**, +254722-521 740; enasoit.com; from \$4,350 per night on an exclusive basis for up to six (maximum 16). **Henry Cookson Adventures**, 020-7736 0452; henrycooksonadventures.com; tailor-made adventures, price on request. **Manta Trust**, mantatrust.org; expeditions in the Maldives on the *Four Seasons Explorer* (+960660-08 88; fourseasons.com); from £1,838 per room, minimum three nights. **Nonsuch Expeditions**, nonsuchisland.com. **Rosewood Bermuda**, +1441-298 4000; rosewoodhotels.com; from \$960. **Space for Giants**, +254713-607 885; spaceforgiants.org; safaris, from \$10,000 per person.

PHOTO BY ALAMY/CHRISTINA JACKSON; GUY STEVENS/MANTA TRUST; GUY COOPER