



## AFRICA IS ALWAYS A GOOD IDEA

### *An interview with Kate Coleridge of Handpicked Africa*

Meet Kate Coleridge, the adventuress we turn to for many an African calling, because she's got her finger on the pulse of all the best addresses on the continent, including two we've featured this month in our Africa blogs: Kenya's Lewa Wilderness, and Leobo in South Africa. She also represents Xanadu Villas on Zanzibar and the stunning Arijju House in Kenya, to name a few. Here's her take on how to enjoy travelling in Africa today.

#### **By way of an introduction, would you tell our readers what Africa offers visitors in a few words?**

The trip of a lifetime is an overused expression, but I have never come across anyone who was blasé about their holiday in Africa. We offer romance, adventure, wildlife and R&R all at once, in breathtaking lodges with all the comforts visitors could ever need or want. Going on safari is something people remember forever. Those first encounters with wild animals, tribal communities and huge skies plant a seed that grows into intrigue and a yearning for the wild and an appreciation – often a passion – for wildlife in its natural habitat that will last a lifetime.

#### **In your opinion, what would you say is the main motivating factor for anyone to visit?**

The main motivation to visit Africa is to go on safari and see Africa's iconic species like elephant, rhino and the big cats. However, over the years that I have spent in the Africa travel industry, I have discovered that there is so much more to the continent in addition to the classic jeep safari. There are many cultural experiences, stunning vineyards in the Cape, wild beaches and some serene, idyllic islands with excellent diving opportunities. And there are so many other ways to view the wildlife – for example on horseback, in hot-air balloons, on planes, quad bikes, on foot, in boats, and the list goes on.

#### **Your most exciting day on the job was when...**

Before starting Handpicked Africa, I worked as a horseback safari guide in South Africa. Mixing horses with wildlife meant every day was unexpected and unpredictable, and there were many exciting ones. I have been charged by both elephant and rhino whilst riding with guests which sounds terrifying, but it should be noted that they were only "mock" charges to make us all back off a little. I learned to keep my distance for future encounters. More recently, I joined a team of researchers, conservationists and vets to dart the biggest lion in East Africa. Having my hand in his mouth, measuring his teeth and analysing his gums was without a doubt a rewarding and exciting day at work!

#### **Something unique about Africa that would surprise people is...**

Africa caters surprisingly well for young children; gone are the days when you wouldn't take your kids on safari. There are now fabulous lodges and private houses where the facilities, activities and staff are so geared up for toddlers and teens that Africa has well and truly become a firm favourite family experience.

#### **In your free time, you like to...**

I have always been driven by action and adventure, so in my free time I



# AFRICA IS ALWAYS A GOOD IDEA

## *An interview with Kate Coleridge of Handpicked Africa*

like to be outdoors and active, be it surfing, diving, horse riding, hiking, or exploratory road trips. I love big open spaces and have never been a fan of cities, hence my passion for all things Africa.

### **In Africa, you'd like to see more...**

I would like to see more people enjoying life! Too many of us travel with tick lists and our Instagram accounts in mind instead of experiencing and immersing ourselves in our travels. We like surprising our guests, encouraging them to be in the present moment and shed their layers of social conforms to really enjoy the experience. Guests feel alive in Africa more than anywhere else, but not if they are stuck in a car or buried in their phones. Children should be running around in the bush learning how others live, playing and bonding with their families and nurturing a healthy appreciation for wildlife. We make sure Africa gets under their skin and their fingernails before they leave us.

### **Name one experience you wish more people would try...**

There are so many, but it's horses for courses. I guess the only experience I think everyone benefits from is a digital detox. I wish more people would spend a week without phones, a mirror, or any of life's everyday attachments. I spent ten days crossing the Namib desert sleeping under the stars, and it was deeply profound, but even just three days without the outside world will

enable you to connect with the present moment and live it, which in Africa, is a wonderful thing.

### **What's the one luxury item you can't see yourself travelling without?**

My penknife, while maybe not deemed true luxury, is something I always carry – a habit instilled in me by my mother who never ventured out without her Swiss army knife. Also, I don't go anywhere without my polarised sunglasses. I had an encounter with a crocodile that proved to me that polarised lenses do, indeed, help you see through the water!

### **If I didn't work in the travel industry here in Africa, I would like to work in ... because ...**

Marine conservation in Raja Ampat, Indonesia, because my other passion is scuba diving. I care deeply about the state of the world's reefs and the devastating effects of plastic pollution and coral bleaching due to global warming.

### **A perfect personal day for me at work is spent ...**

Working with tour operators to curate the dream family holiday to Africa. I also enjoy going to an industry drinks evening and catching up with old friends from Africa, because they are an infectious fun bunch of people who love life and live it to the full.

