

HOLIDAYS



Responsible
travel can take
you to some
of the most
spectacular
places on Earth.
Lisa Grainger
picks out some
worthwhile
breaks – and
looks at the
inspiring stories
behind them

When Vanessa Parker went to Zambia to volunteer with VSO as a maths teacher, aged 25, she had no intention of living there for ever. But a chance meeting in 1990 with Ben Parker, a young conservationist who gave her a lift when she was hitch-hiking from Victoria Falls, changed all that. By the time they were married, four years later,

they had built the now acclaimed Tongabezi safari camp on the banks of the Zambezi River.

By the end of 1996 Parker had opened the first thatched classroom of the school, Tujatane – in the local

Chitonga language it means “let’s all hold hands together” – that would consume her energy for the next quarter of a century.

It is one of the most admired primary schools in Zambia, with sports facilities, art and music rooms, an amphitheatre, library and canteen. Built on the camp’s land and attended by all three of the Parkers’ children,



it now has 282 pupils, whose education, food and activities are funded by Tongabezi's guests. Scholarships allow 32 high-flyers to attend college and university.

Former pupils are "accountants and teachers, a pilot, an engineer and a lawyer, which is so rewarding", Vanessa Parker says. For the village parents, many of whom can't read, "having educated children with jobs is such a source of pride", she explains.

It costs about £500,000 a year to keep going, she says, "which has been a worry, given the pandemic". It is also a worry she faces alone, after Ben's death last year from cancer. "We'd planned a big party in June to celebrate Tongabezi's 30th birthday," she says wistfully. "What I keep reminding myself is of the incredible opportunity Ben gave me to start the school."

Thankfully, because most guests contribute on a monthly or annual basis and sponsor one child's entire education, they have continued to be supported during lockdown – despite no one being able to visit. "I think our social media has helped as donors have been able to keep in touch virtually. And seeing a happy Tujatane child always

brings a smile, even to a stressful day."

● tujatane.com
Aardvark Safaris has a seven

night-safari in May 2021, with three nights at Tongabezi and four at Chiawa, from £5,275pp, full board (aardvarksafaris.co.uk). Fly to Livingstone via Johannesburg with British Airways

GORILLA CONSERVATION UGANDA AND RWANDA

Praveen Moman, a British diplomat turned conservationist, has no doubt who gave him a love of the wild: his father, a Punjabi civil servant sent to serve in Uganda. Until Moman was 16, when the family were forced out of the country by Idi Amin, he had "spent every minute of my spare time surrounded by the wilderness and people of Africa that my father so loved".

As an adult he visited Africa frequently for work, but it was only after the genocide in Rwanda that he felt compelled to return to the continent "to continue my

father's legacy". In 2000 he created Volcanoes Safaris, the first international tourist company to take visitors to Rwanda. Since then he has built four characterful eco-lodges around the Virunga mountain range in Rwanda and Uganda, kick-starting gorilla tourism and creating hundreds of jobs.

He has become one of the world's experts on gorilla conservation and community development, and is part of a UN project to save great apes and a trans-frontier

trust to preserve forests in central Africa.

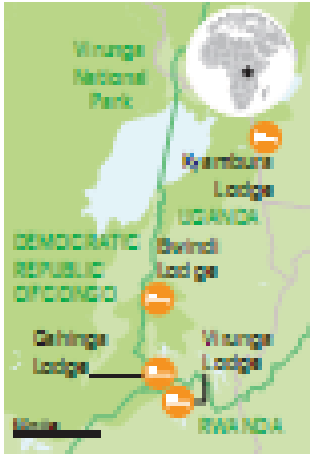
His lodges are intimate local

stone and wood camps with far-reaching views over forests into which guests can go birding, gorilla trekking, plant foraging and volcano climbing. Nearly all of his staff are from the surrounding communities, including the marginalised Batwa forest dwellers, who were evicted from national parks and now live on land bought for them by Moman. The collaboration is important because, he says, "guests need to understand how people and wildlife co-exist and that, without the locals' protection, the apes won't survive".

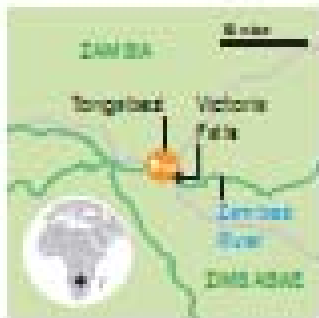
Lockdown, he admits, "has been a challenge, as our funding for non-profit community work relies on a steady stream of guests. But our staff are determined to get through this time. A number of our former guests have continued to donate, whether to give a water tank or to buy a sheep or just book ahead for 2021. We were not only fully booked this year, but oversubscribed. So we are looking forward to our guests returning soon."

● volcanoessafaris.com
Original Travel has eight nights from £9,055pp in June 2021 at Volcano Safaris' Virunga, Gahinga, Bwindi and Kyambura lodges, full board, including all flights, transfers and permits (originaltravel.co.uk)

Continued on page 33 →



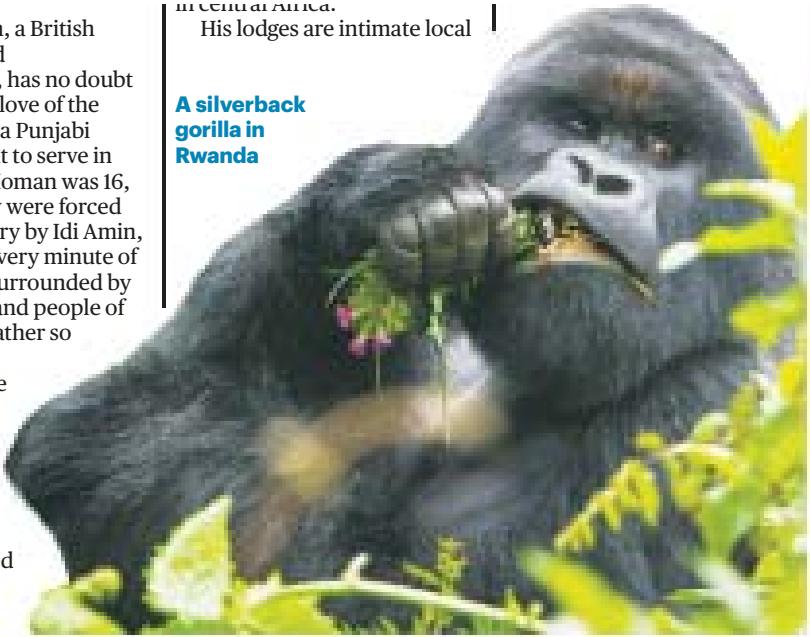
THE SAFARI SUPPORTING A SCHOOL ZAMBIA



n, a British
 d
 ; has no doubt
 love of the
 a Punjabi
 it to serve in
 foman was 16,
 y were forced
 try by Idi Amin,
 very minute of
 surrounded by
 and people of
 ather so

in Central Africa.
 His lodges are intimate local

A silverback gorilla in Rwanda



e
 ad

Source: The Sunday Times {Home}
Edition:
Country: UK
Date: Sunday 6, December 2020
Page: 31,33
Area: 1765 sq. cm
Circulation: ABC 647622 Weekly
Ad data: page rate £60,690.00, scc rate £144.00
Phone: 020 7782 5000
Keyword: Praveen Moman



A private deck at Tongabezi safari camp, on the banks of the Zambezi River; in the classroom at Tujatane school, below left

Continued from page 31

THE FARMS TURNED FOREST RESERVE BRAZIL



The businessman Renato Machado started buying land around the Ibitipoca National Park in the mid-1980s. Since then, thanks to his efforts to replant and revive 15,000 acres of farmland with indigenous Atlantic rainforest, he has become one of Brazil's leading rewilding advocates.

His connection with nature, he says, began at a young age, "when I immediately felt at one with the mountains, the waterfalls, the trees" of Ibitipoca near his home town of Juiz de Fora. The more he began to explore the area, though, the more apparent it became that dairy farms had started to encroach on the park. So in 1984 he began buying farms and planting trees on them. "I realised I had to do something," he says. "Once this Atlantic rainforest covered a million square kilometres. Today there's less than 7 per cent left in Brazil."

At first local people thought he was crazy. "Because, unlike cattle, trees don't provide a living," he says. But today his Comuna do Ibitipoca, made up of more than 200 former

farms, is firmly on the Brazilian tourist trail. He owns

the reserve, now three times the size of the state park, but its facilities are owned and run by former cattle farmers, whom he has provided with micro-financing, land, training, education and access to the tourists who now come from around the world to stay at Ibitipoca's characterful farmhouses and eco-cottages.

Many return annually to reconnect with the commune, Machado says. They also come for the "exquisite nature", from thick primeval forest to tumbling waterfalls and rare creatures such as tapirs, which he is reintroducing, as well as horse rides and mountain-biking expeditions through forest trails.

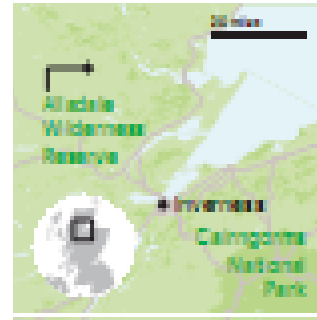
During the pandemic he helped build a cachaca brewery, creating vineyards and expanding the vegetable gardens. "It's not financially sustainable yet," he says of the place he now calls home. "This is a long-term project. But the people of this area now have jobs, private healthcare, education and money. And we've planted

six million trees. So we are getting there."

• ibiti.com

Journey Latin America has eight nights from £2,848pp in January 2021 with six nights' full board at Comuna do Ibitipoca and two nights' B&B in Rio de Janeiro, including flights and transfers (journeylatinamerica.co.uk)

**REWILDING
SCOTLAND
& EUROPE**



Thanks to his attempts to reintroduce wolves to the remote glens of Sutherland, Paul Lister didn't immediately endear himself to the local community around Alladale, the 23,000-acre Scottish estate he acquired in 2003. Ramblers objected to him fencing off areas for them. Farmers took against having apex predators anywhere near their sheep. Estate owners didn't want him culling deer to give new saplings a chance to re-establish what the Romans once called the Great Forest of Caledon.

Today, though, he is seen as a far-sighted conservationist leading the way in rewilding not only in Scotland, but also in Europe.

On Alladale he has planted nearly one million trees – Scots pine as well as indigenous Highland varieties – and reintroduced red squirrels, wild boar and wildcats. Guests can now stay on the estate in lodges, cottages and a remote bunkhouse, and there is also the chance to explore this wild and beautiful part of Scotland on foot, mountain bike or with guided tours.

In 2000 Lister established The

European Nature Trust (Tent) to encourage visitors to explore what he calls "the

last great untouched forests on our continent". The inspiration came, he says, when he took a flight from London to Bucharest and saw nothing below but farmland. "We had just 5 per cent of forest left on the continent. I thought it was worth trying to save it for future generations."

He is in partnership with the Foundation Conservation Carpathia, to protect Romania's forests, which, he says, "make up 50 per cent of the virgin forests of Europe", as well as pockets of forest in Italy and Spain. He'd had no idea that 2,000 wolves coexist alongside villagers in Abruzzo and that, in Asturias, you can still find brown bears.

Through Tent he arranges trips including guided walks in Spain's Riaño mountain range to spy Iberian wolves and wildcats, or hiking and helicopter excursions in Romania's forested Carpathians to see bears, with nights spent in wildlife hides. The proceeds go towards conservation projects there.

Post-pandemic, he says, "I think people are going to be desperate to get back into the wild. And will hopefully appreciate these nature projects – which are right on our doorstep – even more. From my experience, once you've felt the impact of the wilderness on your soul, you're hooked."

● theeuropeanmaturetrust.com Alladale Lodge has three-night stays from £272pp per night, full board (alladale.com). Steppes Travel and Tent have four nights in the Carpathians in April 2021 from £1,795pp, full board, including Tent donation (steppes-travel.com). Fly to

Bucharest with
Wizz Air



Once you have felt the impact of the wilderness on your soul, you're hooked



After yoga at Ibitipoca, try the hammock and sunken hot tub, above

Source: The Sunday Times {Home}
Edition:
Country: UK
Date: Sunday 6, December 2020
Page: 31,33
Area: 1765 sq. cm
Circulation: ABC 647622 Weekly
Ad data: page rate £60,690.00, scc rate £144.00
Phone: 020 7782 5000
Keyword: Praveen Moman



Source: The Sunday Times {Home}
Edition:
Country: UK
Date: Sunday 6, December 2020
Page: 31,33
Area: 1765 sq. cm
Circulation: ABC 647622 Weekly
Ad data: page rate £60,690.00, scc rate £144.00
Phone: 020 7782 5000
Keyword: Praveen Moman



BRITAIN'S LAMBS MEDICAL/AMNEV/GETTY

Chillie's Rest, one of the lodges at Alladale, in the Highlands of Scotland; a red deer stag, right

Source: The Sunday Times {Home}
Edition:
Country: UK
Date: Sunday 6, December 2020
Page: 31,33
Area: 1765 sq. cm
Circulation: ABC 647622 Weekly
Ad data: page rate £60,690.00, scc rate £144.00
Phone: 020 7782 5000
Keyword: Praveen Moman

