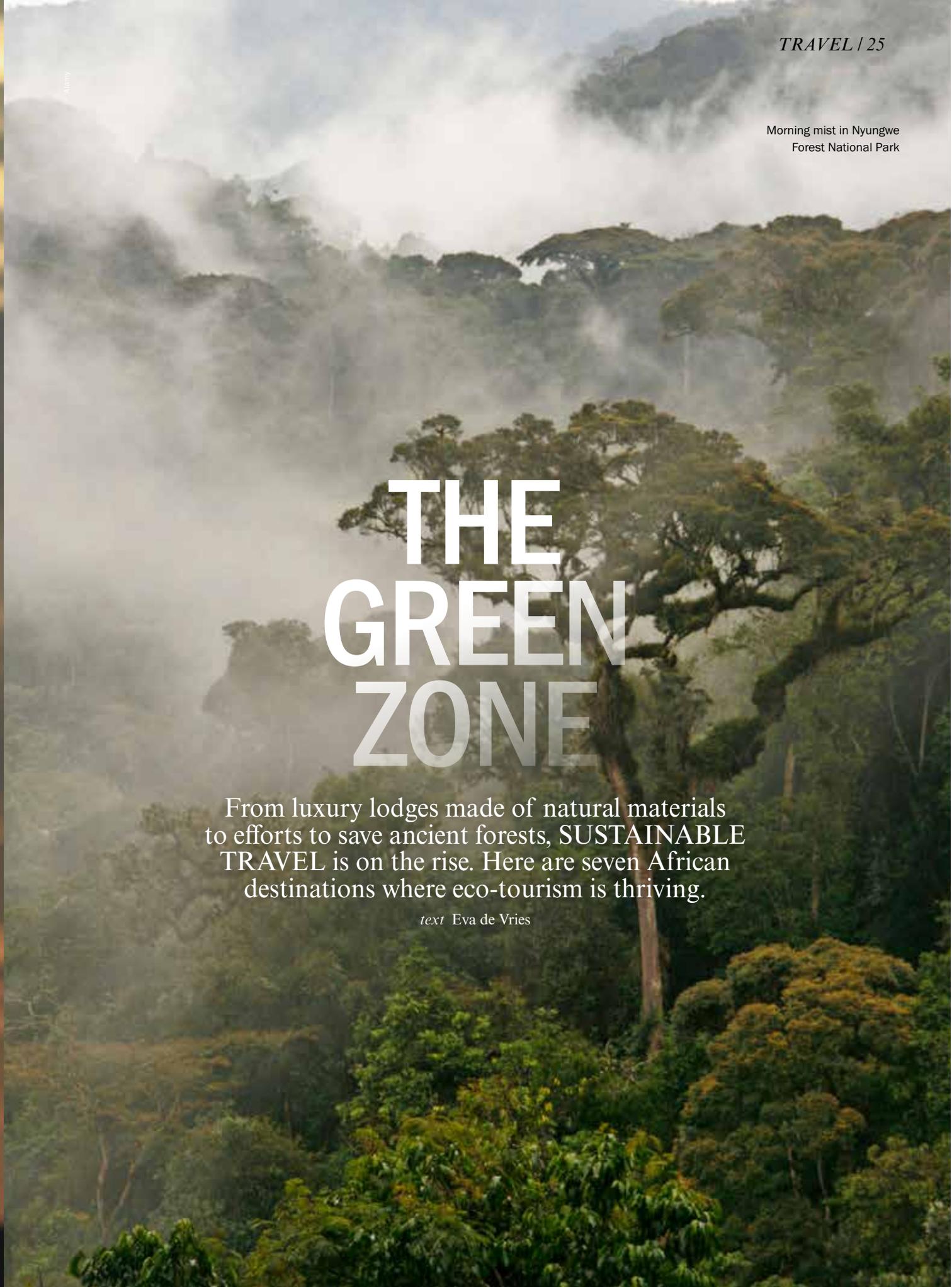




What is eco-tourism?

The International Ecotourism Society defines eco-tourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people and involves interpretation and education". The money generated from eco-tourism can be used to provide local communities with an additional source of income to improve their livelihoods and help preserve the environment. The eco-tourism industry has grown rapidly over the last few years, and it's now one of the most important sectors in the international tourism industry. Africa is at the forefront of the sustainable-travel trend, but given the rate at which natural habitats are being destroyed around the world, it may soon become the only way to travel.

A lush green forest landscape with thick morning mist or low clouds hanging between the trees. The scene is serene and atmospheric, with sunlight filtering through the canopy.

THE GREEN ZONE

From luxury lodges made of natural materials to efforts to save ancient forests, SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL is on the rise. Here are seven African destinations where eco-tourism is thriving.

text Eva de Vries



Rwanda

Nyungwe Forest

With its intensive animal conservation efforts, its increasing number of sustainable lodges and its ban on plastic bags, Rwanda is one of the greenest countries on the planet. A percentage of its tourism revenues even goes to the communities that surround its national parks. While many visitors to Rwanda head straight for the famous Volcanoes National Park to catch sight of the endangered mountain gorilla, an often-overlooked gem is the Nyungwe Forest. One of the world's most majestic rainforests, Nyungwe covers approximately 1,000 sq km and is home to 13 species of primates and 300 varieties of birds. Go off the beaten track for thrilling chimpanzee trekking, bird-watching trips, waterfall hikes, tea-plantation visits or a memorable 200-m canopy walk high above the jungle. All activities require a local guide. For a luxurious stay, try the One & Only Nyungwe House, which is in the tea plantations. If you're on a budget, the Kitabi Eco-Center is a good option. It's located on a hilltop just outside the park.

oneandonlyresorts.com; kitabiecocenter.com

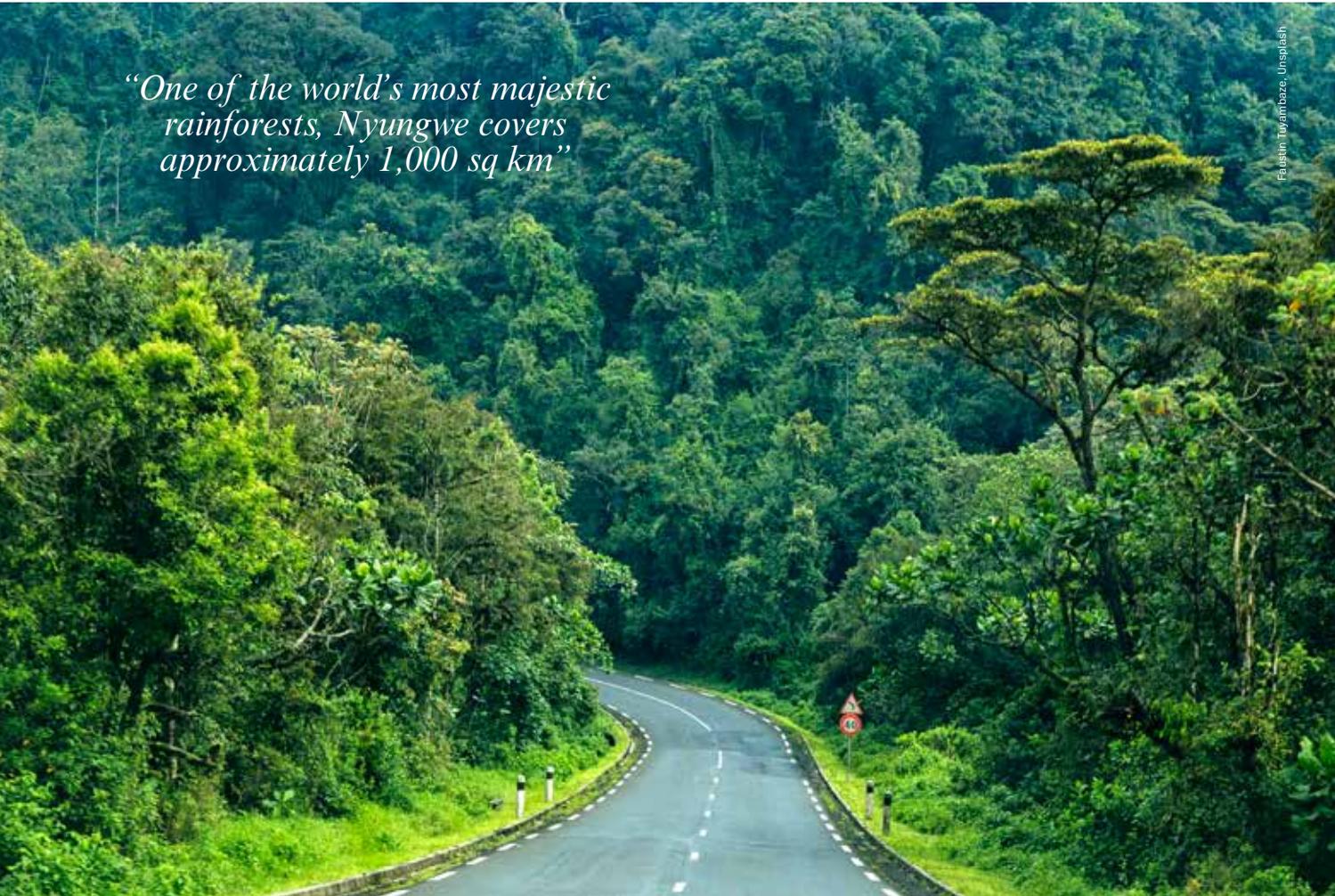


Kenya Airways operates daily direct flights from Nairobi to Kigali.



www.instagram.com/sgellman

“One of the world’s most majestic rainforests, Nyungwe covers approximately 1,000 sq km”



Faustin Twambaze, Unsplash

Senegal

Sine-Saloum Delta

Senegal's beautiful Sine-Saloum Delta, where the Saloum River flows into the North Atlantic Ocean, is truly a sight to behold. It has a rich mangrove ecosystem that is home to several species of bird and marine life; it also provides food, clean water and raw materials to the locals. As a result, the mangrove forests are being rapidly destroyed by both humans and climate change. To reduce this pressure on the delta, conservationists are working to improve local knowledge and better manage the mangroves. Eco-tourism supports these initiatives by raising money for conservation efforts, and by providing an alternative source of income for the community. To get up close to the delta, take a boat ride. You can also go fishing, rent kayaks and sleep under the stars on one of the beautiful islands. Sangomar Kayak offers tours as well as overnight camping trips, and even hyena-watching. For eco-friendly lodgings, discover the lodge Les Collines de Niassam, where you can stay in charming huts or a treehouse.

sangomarkayak.com; niassam.com



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Alamy



Kenya
Watamu

With its white sandy beaches, crystal-clear turquoise waters, coral gardens and vast array of wildlife, Watamu Marine National Park & Reserve has it all. But the park is facing some major ecological challenges. Its coast is being rapidly altered as a result of climate change, pollution and unsustainable practices. Tourism is the region's main source of income and much of the profits are being used to preserve this precious area. Instrumental in this preservation is the Watamu Marine Association, which organises educational mangrove boardwalks, bird-watching trips and snorkelling, as well as visits to the community recycling centre to learn about biogas production and permaculture. The Local Ocean Conservation organisation, with its mission to protect sea turtles, invites visitors to participate in their important work via their hands-on Eco Visitor programme. Beautiful Watamu offers several eco-friendly places to stay, such as the magical Watamu Treehouse and the tranquil Charming Lonno Lodge.

“Tourism is the region’s main source of income and much of the profits are being used to preserve this precious area”



 Book your flight to Nairobi on kenya-airways.com.



Zimbabwe & Zambia
Victoria Falls

One of Africa's most striking sights, Victoria Falls is known locally as *Mosi-oa-Tunya* ("the smoke that thunders"). The roar of the world's largest single curtain of falling water can be heard from 40 km away. Adrenaline junkies come for the whitewater rafting, ziplines, helicopter tours and bungee jumping. Conservationists are concerned, though, about noise pollution, littering and illicit tour activities, which are a threat to the falls' ecosystem. Fortunately, sustainable tourism is on the rise, offering accommodation and activities for guests who are eager to experience the natural thrills of the falls in a responsible way. Serious eco-tourists can even take a tour with the Victoria Falls Anti-Poaching Unit to learn about the conservation of local wildlife and its natural resources. For places to stay, Munga Eco-Lodge in Zambia is an oasis of tranquillity, well located for exploring the Victoria Falls area. A more opulent option is the Tongabezi Lodge, a hideaway on the banks of the Zambezi River.
mungaeacolodge.com; tongabezi.com

 Kenya Airways flies from Nairobi to Livingstone, Zambia.

Getty Images

LonnoLodge.com

Kenya**Maasai Mara**

Every year, thousands of tourists descend on the Maasai Mara National Reserve, which borders the Serengeti in Tanzania, to witness the Great Migration. However, the park is becoming a victim of its own success: the growing numbers of visitors pose an imminent environmental threat. One way we can reduce our impact is to choose alternative lodging outside the park's boundaries. Consider camping at Loita Hills, where giraffes, zebras and even lions are often spotted, and where the indigenous Maasai live in harmony with their cattle, nature and wildlife. Sankale Ole Ntutu, the Maasai community chief of Maji Moto village, is a passionate guide. He's also the manager of the Loita Hills Basecamp, which offers a wide variety of nature activities, such as animal tracking, medicinal plant workshops, beading classes, mountain-bike rides, walking safaris and bush expeditions. Part of the profits go directly to the community that makes the camp and its activities possible. loitahillsbasecamp.com



Book your flight to Nairobi on kenya-airways.com.



Robert Harding

Tanzania

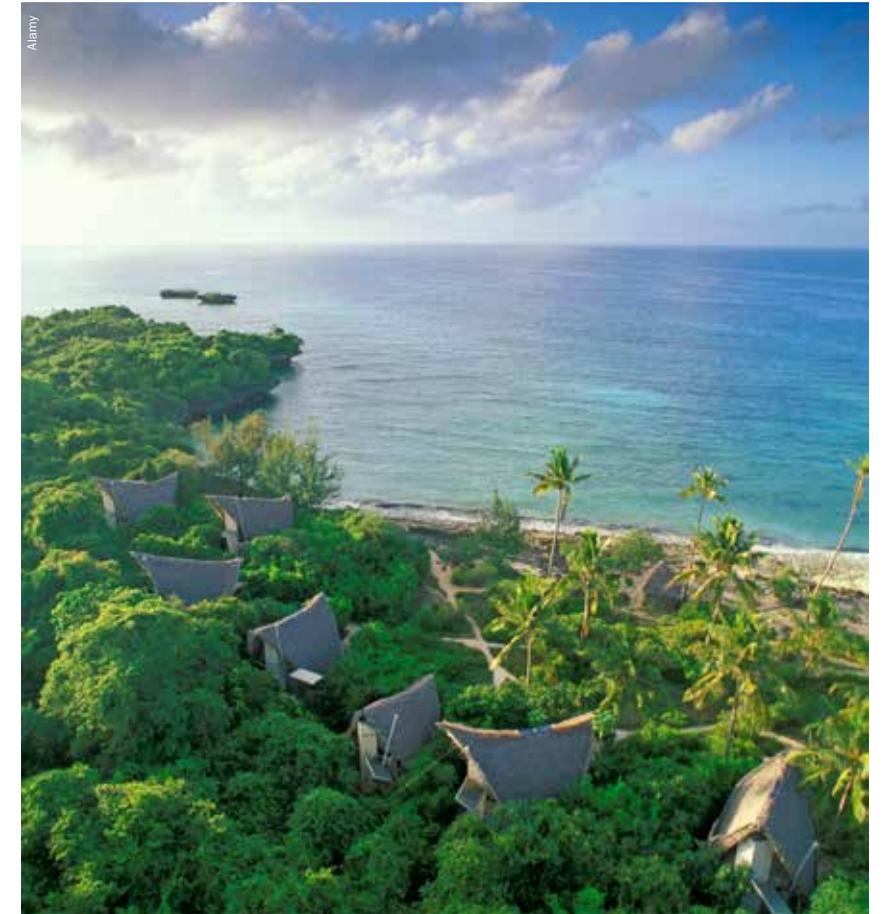
Chumbe Island

Chumbe Island Coral Park, a pristine coral island located off the coast of Zanzibar, is the first privately established marine park in the world. The project consists of a fully protected coral reef sanctuary, a forest reserve for rare wildlife, an education centre and a small eco-lodge. The profits from eco-tourism help to finance research, environmental education programmes for local schools and other benefits for the surrounding community. But doing good doesn't have to exclude feeling good. Island life at Chumbe means you can relax in a hammock, watch the sunset, take a boat trip, walk the nature trails, spot endangered animals and snorkel in the island's shallow waters. For accommodation, the island's small eco-lodge consists of seven striking, palm-thatched bungalows made entirely of local materials. They all feature solar powered lights and showers, rainwater catchment and compost toilets. All bungalows overlook the sea and offer direct access to the warm blue ocean.

chumbeisland.com



Kenya Airways flies daily from Nairobi to Zanzibar.



Alamy



bushmanskloof.co.za

South Africa

Cederberg Mountains

This wonderfully rugged mountain range – 200 km north of Cape Town – is known for its gorgeous landscapes, streams, waterfalls and well-preserved rock art. Bushmans Kloof, an ecological retreat surrounded by sandstone formations and ancient bush art sites dating back 10,000 years, is an excellent basecamp if you want to explore the Cederberg Mountains. It's committed to conservation and social responsibility; some of lodge's initiatives include protecting the rare Cape Leopard, safeguarding a herd of Cape Mountain Zebras and working to preserve the area's original inhabitants' cave paintings. Some of the area's most popular activities are hiking and rock climbing, and wildlife lovers can take a guided tour to spot rare bird species, snakes and other animals. Bushmans Kloof offers a luxurious experience, but if you're looking for something more budget-friendly, you can camp under the stars or sleep in one of the cabins at Gecko Creek.

bushmanskloof.co.za, geckocreek.com



Kenya Airways flies daily from Nairobi to Cape Town.



Getty Images