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INSIGHT

Africa Middle East Insight

Africa is rich in wellness experiences

By [Dorine Reinstein](#) / November 23, 2016

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Africa's tourism industry is ideally placed to benefit from the current interest in wellness travel. That is according to the WTM Global Trends Report 2016.

The report mentions that the idea of "wellness in the wilderness" resonates with travelers seeking unique and authentic experiences, resulting in a demand for spiritual travel with an adventure component.

"Africa is so diverse, so raw, so full of natural beauty and so open to the elements; it's the perfect place to ground yourself and revive all your senses," said Hannah Strand of Wildlife Explorer.

Tour operators across Africa and the U.S. say that wellness is still a mostly untapped opportunity for Africa. However, they also mention there are already some exceptional wellness experiences on offer:

- **Stargazing in Namibia:** Natalie Faggianelli, vice president of sales at Bayside Travel, a Virtuoso agency, said that wellness travel has become an important part of a client's experience as a result of the frantic pace of people's lives. "People need a place to relax, rejuvenate and heal their minds and bodies," she said.

According to Faggianelli, stargazing in the Namibian desert is one wellness experience that can truly bring a sense of calm and reflection to a person. "It is an experience that includes the body, mind and soul," she said. Recognized as a "dark sky reserve," the **NamibRand Nature Reserve** offers views of the galaxy like few other places in the world.

- **Healthy and conscious eating on North Island, Seychelles:** "Wilderness Safaris has recognized that the concept of wellness has developed beyond traditional spas to more holistic experiences where conservation and ecotourism are center," said Tarryn Gibson, the company's communication manager.

North Island, for example, is a pristine natural environment that speaks to the conscious wellness traveler. The island offers a strong emphasis on healthy and conscious eating. The dining experience at North Island is deeply connected to the spirit of the island where the food philosophy is to serve fresh, seasonal produce. North Island's chef custom designs daily menus incorporating harvest from the on-site organic vegetable garden and aligning the menu with guest's dietary preferences.

• **Wildlife experiences throughout Africa:** According to Jim Holden, president of Holden Safaris, safaris have always been about wellness. He said: “Wellness starts with jettisoning all our first-world gadgets and being reacquainted with all our senses of smell, hearing, seeing, tasting and feeling. One of the joys of being a safari guide is observing clients visibly start to relax and unwind as the safari progresses. At first they can’t spot an elephant hidden in the bush only 10 yards from them; and then they start to learn to look again. And so on with smell, hearing and taste. And often the first sign of feeling is when they burst into tears for no apparent reason other than they ‘feel’ some strange connection to Africa.”

Extraordinary Journeys' Marcia Gordon explained that the most important thing that Africa offers is the encouragement to unplug and get attuned to nature. She said: “To wake up to the sounds of birdsong and sleep when it gets dark and pretty much throw watches and schedules and multitasking away is instant renewal. The whole experience of being outside most of the day and slowing down (to watch a particular animal or wait for a bird to appear) is almost as good as a retreat.”

• **Uninterrupted beaches in Mozambique:** Mozambique is still one of the few places in the world where travelers will find long stretches of uninterrupted beaches, according to Natalie Tenzer-Silva, director of Dana Tours. “Where else in the world will you find an isolated beach completely to yourself?”

Travelers can reconnect with their bodies and souls as well as with nature on any of Mozambique’s tropical islands. They can dive amongst hundreds of species of tropical fish and extraordinary coral reefs. In some cases, spa treatments can take place on the beach.

• **Walking yoga safaris in Zambia:** Throughout Africa, operators and suppliers have picked up on the wellness trend and are offering unique wellness experiences, said Henk Graaff, managing director for SW Africa. He explained that some lodges in South Africa now offer yoga safaris, enabling travelers to meditate in the most beautiful wildlife surroundings.

A truly unique experience is the Africa yoga walking safari, where travelers walk, practice yoga and meditate in Africa's most remote and untouched wilderness areas, such as the Luangwa Valley in Zambia. Said Graaff: "The act of being on foot in the wilderness is yogic by nature. Travelers are able to truly slow down and synchronize to rhythms of the wilderness surrounding."

Holden agreed, saying: "In much the same way as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, a walking safari is a stroll through the Luangwa Valley's pristine flora and fauna. After a few days on a walking safari, strolling from bush camp to bush camp, one's soul is refreshed, the mind purged of all its worries and the body relaxed. No modern spa has such healing possibilities."

• **Cultural encounters in Tanzania:** Mefi Pishori Alapat of Journey to Africa explained that increasingly travelers have been requesting what she calls "human connection wellness." She explains travelers want to interact one-on-one with the local population and get an authentic insight into a different world.

Alapat explained that visits with Maasai tribes to see how jewelry is made are very popular as are visits to the last hunter-gatherer tribe, the Hadzabes in the remote Lake Eyasi region. She said: "These tribe members chose to keep their ancient ways of life in this modern world though wide cracks are forming in their lifestyle. One 16-year old client told me he wishes people would not force change on them as what we perceive as 'backward' is actually a happier, earth-based lifestyle, and we could all learn from them. That is the type of response that is rewarding."

- **Spa treatments in unique locations:** Africa lends itself to superb wellness experiences because of the proximity to nature, with many lodges offering massages in exceptionally beautiful and secluded places, said Jonty Medcalf, head of sales for Go2Africa. He explained that at the **Twelve Apostles Hotel** in Cape Town, South Africa, travelers can enjoy a massage in the outdoor gazebo overlooking the Atlantic Ocean.

For Arnelle Kendall, vice president of public relations for the Travel Corporation, **Bushmans Kloof Wilderness Reserve Wellness Retreat**, located in the Cederberg Mountains, is the place to be. The retreat recently won a Crystal Award for Africa in the 2016 Wellness Travel Awards.