

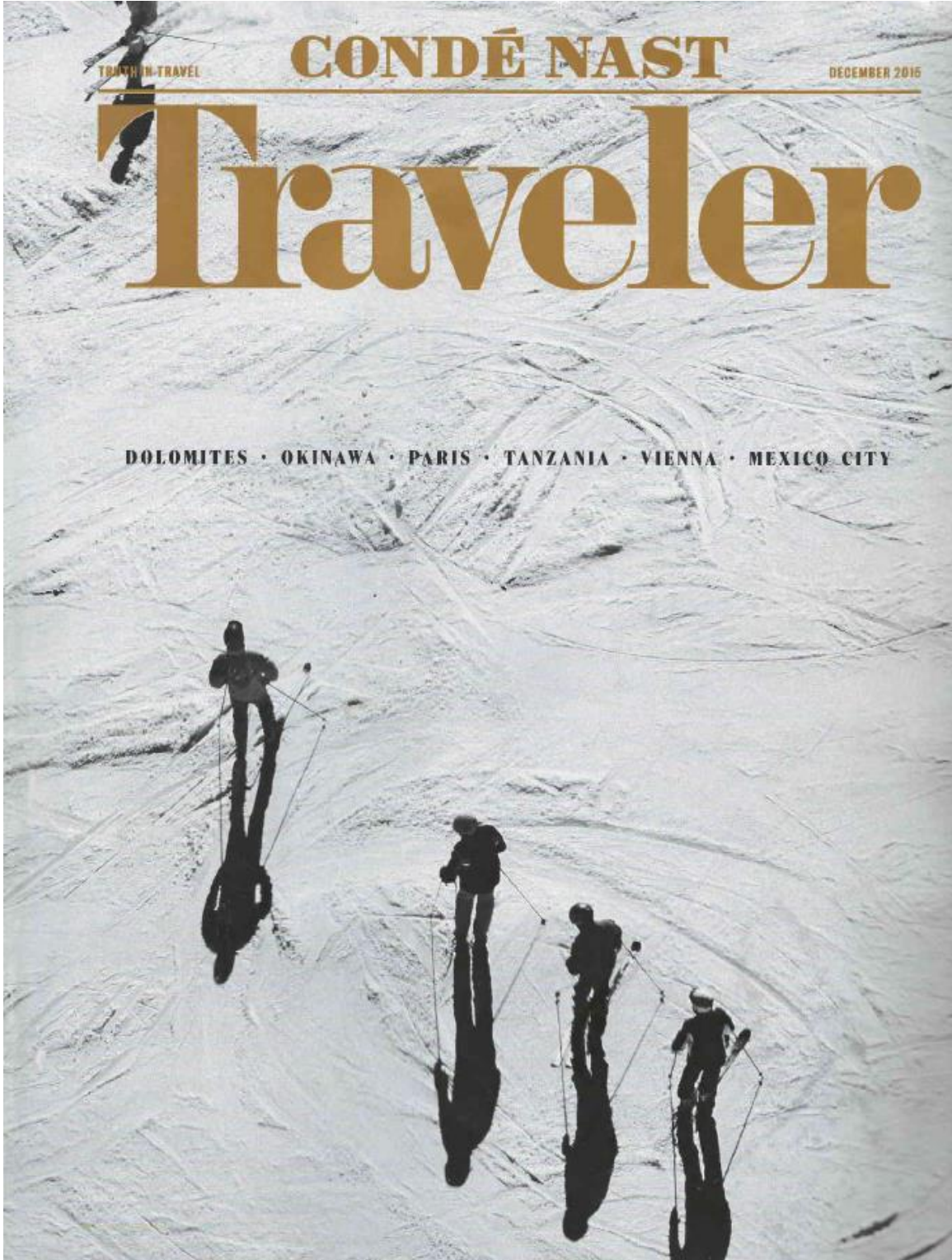
TRAVEL

CONDÉ NAST

DECEMBER 2016

Traveler

DOLOMITES • OKINAWA • PARIS • TANZANIA • VIENNA • MEXICO CITY



Word of Mouth
Travel Specialists



Our group at
&Beyond's
Serengeti Under
Canvas camp,
where dinners
are often served
alfresco.

TRAVEL IS GETTING SMALL

DIY MAKERS

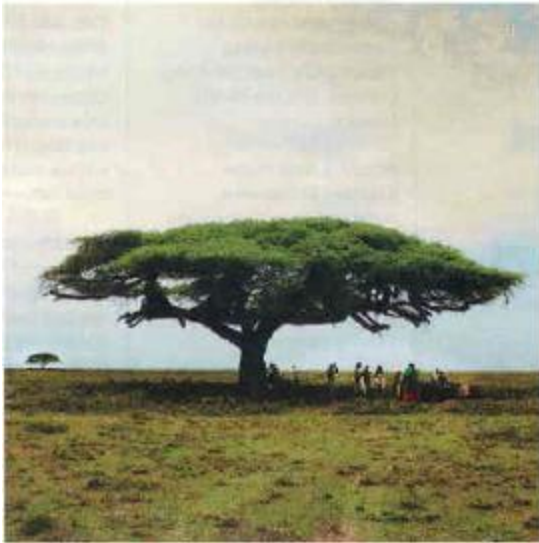
The Experience Makers

-2015-



Sometimes even the well-traveled call on the pros for help—editor in chief **Pilar Guzmán**'s expertly crafted East African safari is proof of the power of a great travel specialist. Whether your dream trip involves horseback riding in Argentina or the best *kaiseki* in Kyoto, these are the experience makers we trust to put together the perfect journey.

Willem," our guide Matthew Laizer at the Singita Grumeti game reserve whispered, while closing his hand as if to pull taffy. My eight-year-old son responded instantly by sitting down and quieting his twitchy limbs. We had discovered early in our nine-day journey from the Serengeti Plains in Tanzania to the Maasai Mara in Kenya that a guide gauges an animal's receptivity to close observation through near imperceptible clues—a depression in the grass, a confrontational gaze. And with much the same acuity, we had begun to decode the nuances of our guide's expression, pace, and hand gestures. "I didn't like the way he was looking at Willem," Laizer explained. Willem had stood up suddenly to take a photo, catching a young male lion's attention—and, it seems, disrupting an unspoken covenant of safari protocol. In the days before, we had come close enough to touch prides of 14 and 20 lions varying in age, gender, and state of hunger throughout Singita's pristine 350,000-acre concession without inciting even the flick of an ear. This particular "teen," according to Laizer, might have mistaken Willem for a baby wildebeest. "I feel this lion has a bit of an attitude," he said matter-of-factly. "Even the lioness in the same pride doesn't trust him with her littlest cubs. See how she keeps turning around?" The animals, accustomed to being observed view the vehicle and its passengers as a single entity. Once humans exceed its fragile perimeter, they, like any other moving mammal become recognizable as prey. (Not surprisingly, when I looked back at Willem, he had moved to the center seat, where he would sit on his hands for the remainder of the drive.) We had arranged to go on safari with another family over our sons' spring break. I wish I could say that I had planned the entire itinerary by trolling blogs and social feeds and cobbling together tidbits from my most well-traveled friends, as I have for so many other trips in my life. Or that it was easy for me to



between modernity and tradition, was fodder for much discussion. Once, returning home after a long stretch at Singita, he was physically—and embarrassingly—unable to swallow his father’s traditional cow’s blood offering. My son still asks me, “How many days does it take Matthew to get to his village from Singita?” Three. Almost a full day on a bus, followed by two days on foot, traversing the wild so he can visit with relatives along the way.

On our last night, as I lay awake in the dark with my son in our airy canvas tent at Mara Plains Camp, sited on a densely forested bend in a river in the Olare Motorogi Conservancy, I thought about all we’d packed into just over a week, thanks in no small part to easy plane transfers and expert planning. With grunting hippos and hissing cats providing a sound track by turns lulling and haunting, I realized that true adventure lies in that butterfly-bellied dream state where beauty and just-outside-your-comfort-zone fear intersect. ♦

The Future of the Travel Specialist

"The new breed will be a trusted close adviser, much like a physician or an attorney. We'll hire experts to study worldwide security and safety issues, we'll book restaurants globally, and we'll know the best guides and drivers personally. We'll help clients sift through all the information—and misinformation—that they can find online."

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SPECIALISTS

on our list say that British Airways (or its Oneworld alliance) remains their favorite airline, making it the most popular carrier among specialists.

U.S. SOUTHWEST

Caroline Bach Wood

Caroline Travel

Will arrange private dinners inside national parks and recommend leading Grand Canyon guides.

Caribbean

CUBA

Tom Popper

InsightCuba

Has been traveling to Cuba since 2000 and can hook travelers up with a Grammy-winning jazz musician, established visual artists, and some of Havana's best guides.

Adam Vaught

Absolute Travel

A frequent visitor to the island, Vaught crafts cultural, social, and gastronomical tours to the destination everyone's talking about.

ST. BARTS

Peg Walsh

St. Barth Properties

Works with 200 holiday rentals, and is a resident half the year to stay up on the latest additions to the rental market.