

FLIGHT MISCHIEF

If you're going to pay a flying visit to the hotspots of East Africa, then by golly do it in a helicopter. Chop-chop, says Caroline Phillips



Think of Tintin's aeroplane, a pilot with the unlikely name of Sebastian Lamoureux and an elastoplast-sized virgin airstrip of gravel. Add to that a ragamuffin group of 40 black children crushing around the plane excitedly. Finally picture two machete-wielding workers and, walking behind them, a fellow in a spotless shirt, tie and suit trousers. This is the scene after our four-hour flight over the bush from Dar es Salaam to Kipili Bay on the shores of Lake Tanganyika, Tanzania.

The sun beats down and the cheery kids crowd around to share my cashew nuts. Shirt Man is the children's teacher. 'I've come to show my class this transport. It is new to us. Where,' he points to the plane, 'is the oxygen?' Lamoureux laughs that *that's* more of a space-shuttle requirement.

I'm here to meet up with the new Lady Lori helicopter that's being delivered to the company's Nairobi base from South Africa, to join the final three-day leg of its journey. The helicopter is carrying Lady Lori's American buh-

zillionaire owner, Jim De Nooyer, who made his money in car sales and holds the Hudson River world speedboat record, and his wife, Lori. Plus Dallas gal Mindy Moroney (of media empire Belo Corp fame) and her partner. They're all Kenya residents: De Nooyer leases the 63,000-acre Loisaba ranch in Laikipia; Moroney resides near them in her country retreat, er, Camp David.

Lady Lori is East Africa's premier helicopter company. Our pilot (and also the company CEO) is Ian Mimano, a Kikuyu tribesman turned evangelical Christian who was educated latterly in Britain, where he learnt also to fly. Mimano has flown Sting and Branson, and Lady Lori is regularly favoured by a world-famous businessman, a global spiritual leader and a prime minister. They have French-built Eurocopters: two Squirrels, two EC130s plus a new Cessna Caravan — Bentleys-in-the-air to the aeronautically uninitiated. For \$2,050 per flying hour, Lady Lori spirits clients through East Africa.

Photography courtesy of Lady Lori at Olarro

Above: Lady Lori helicopters take customers on a unique flying tour of East Africa

They fly across the throats of volcanoes and lakes pink with flamingos; over the wildebeest migration; and land on Mount Kenya's glacier-fed lake shores at over 10,000ft for picnics and trout fishing. They take City boys on long safari weekends from London, fast-tracking them through immigration and on to a game drive before lunch. And they introduce their HNW clients to everything from the Rwandan mountain gorilla experience to Uganda's Impenetrable Forest.

Tonight we're meant to be staying on a private island in the exclusive Lupita Lodge (\$1,725 for a cottage per night), but it has been hit by lightning. In similar vein, the 1920s-style luxury tented camp Sabora (in the Serengeti) is blown away by a tornado before we arrive. But then this is Africa, the final frontier. Instead we're in Lake Shore's charming makuti thatched cottages on the shore of Lake Tanganyika, where the passenger ferry is a former World War I battleship. *Very African Queen.*

There's something compelling about being in Africa: it reminds me of the Congo in Barbara Kingsolver's *Poisonwood Bible*. The only other white people nearby are two Belgian and Dutch missionaries. It's 166km one-way to collect the mail from Sumbawanga. (Reportedly locals have been murdering albinos there and then using their arms to dig for emeralds. Welcome to the voodoo capital of Tanzania.) Soon my 21st-century air-taxi drops from the sky. Afterwards, as the sun sets, I boat with Lady Lori's four passengers and Mimano on the lake — with its unique water cobras and 250 endemic species of acid-trip-coloured fish — then dine on the shore. At night, I fall asleep to gently lapping water and kerosene lights flickering in the fishing boats on the lake. The local Ha tribesmen are fishing for sardine-like *dagaa*, which are attracted to the lights. I wake up far from home, with a pungent bat in my bed, flapping in my mosquito net.

This is a flying visit. So we depart the following morning, flying at a mere 500ft above jungle so dense and remote that



if you were to walk a few hundred yards into it, you could get lost for ever. The bush extends to the horizon. We fly for three hours over huts and dirt cattle pens; over hippos bathing, buffalo running and impala scattering. Underneath us we see the weekly bus: the sole vehicle on a dirt road so red it's as if molten material from inner Earth has spurted out. There are no schools, just tribespeople tilling the ground until their premature deaths at around 50. Entire villages run outside looking skywards at the flying miracle.

Our next stop is a surreal contrast: Sasakwa Lodge in the Western Serengeti. Set in 350,000 (leased) acres of the Grumeti Reserves, Sasakwa is owned by Paul Tudor Jones of the multibillion-dollar hedge fund Tudor Investment Corp. Think chandeliers, wood-panelling, silver, and asparagus and truffle oil soup on a sweeping veranda overlooking the endless plains of the Serengeti. (From \$1,650 a night.) 'The Hadza are just 100 miles away,' reveals Mimano. 'They're a tribe of about 400 hut and cave-dwelling, hunter-gatherer pygmies. They use bows and poisoned arrows, eat berries and baboons and get high smoking from pipes made of hollowed-out tree-stumps. They're only easily accessible by helicopter.' Another time.

Instead we drive in a 4WD, stopping for jungle speed bumps — trees uprooted and strewn across the road by elephants — and passing black flags doused in cows' urine and chemicals, to kill tsetse flies who bite them, thinking them buffalo. A family of baboons cross the plain. The air is thick with bird song and monkey chatter.

All too soon we return to our flying machine: an air-conditioned capsule of polished wood, cream leather, headphone music, chilled wine and smoothness; none of

that fixed wing turbulence, darling. We fly over the Grumeti River with its crocs and hippos lazing in brown water; over a gold mine; and by the eastern edge of Lake Victoria, the second largest lake in the world. Thirty minutes later we alight at Musoma airport. It's unmanned. Immigration officials come from town a few minutes later to greet us.

We cross the border into Kenya. After endless nothingness, we're suddenly in the land of Waitrose sugar-snap polytunnels and tea plantations: in one of the country's most densely populated parts. In this new airspace, we see smarter common dwellings: ones with corrugated roofs. We fly over python nests, sisal fields and boys playing football on dirt pitches. We have a heartbreaking aerial view of deforestation- and cultivation-induced erosion disgorging massive brown silt patches into the river; and of algae-choked waters caused by fertiliser.

Soon we're going back in time: passing the densely forested Aberdare Mountains, with their former Mau Mau guerrilla hide-outs and treetops, where Elizabeth went to bed a princess and woke up a queen. On towards snow-capped Mount Kenya and the colonial-style Mount Kenya Safari Club. And then, with supreme precision, Mimano lands the helicopter between the croquet hoops on the club's manicured lawn. Mimano is steady: a reformed drinker, he's had several years from bottle to throttle. He's also knowledgeable and professional. Along with 20/20 vision, not a bad thing in a pilot. *f*

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LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

Call it the New Colonialism, if you will. But, once again, Africa is being carved up — this time by international investors like Microsoft's Paul Allen and hedge funder Paul Tudor Jones, who are pouring vast sums into philanthropic projects. The new luxury in Africa is less about sublime lodges (although there are plenty) than about who boasts the most iconic, biggest and best game reserves and concession areas. The best projects divert the monies raised from tourism to conservation and sustainable community projects.

Singita leads, with its land and luxury lodges in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Tanzania. (Tudor Jones has three properties in Tanzania's Grumeti Reserves.) Great Plains Conservation has impressive camps in Tanzania, Kenya

and Botswana. Then there's Olarro, 10,000 acres of private conservancy in Kenya, and Kenya's Olare Orok Conservancy, which was partly underwritten by Sir Richard Branson. Mostly these places provide exclusive (high-end, low-volume) eco experiences for the HNW. But should you invest?

Many western watchers of Kenya, in particular, remain very nervous. The highly regarded journalist John Githongo views it as being 'like a car slowly sliding backwards and the gears have stopped working.' With Kenya's extreme corruption and culture of impunity, many say it's not a question of if but when political violence will resume. The last election left 1,500 dead and thousands homeless; many observers think the same will happen again in the lead-up to the 2012 election. Kenya remains the Wild West.

For a gallery of photos from the Singita Reserve visit spearswms.com.



Inside track

Lady Lori Helicopters

American squillionaire Jim DeNooyer is the man behind East Africa's number-one helicopter company, Lady Lori. Based in Nairobi, these choppers are used by Sting and Trudie, at least one global spiritual leader, governmental bigwigs, film crews and City boys (on safari-from-London weekends). Clients are fast-tracked off international flights and whisked to one of four state-of-the-art French-built Eurocopters (two Squirrels and two EC130s), which seat six passengers in Bentley-style comfort. Then it's off for a spot of heli-oystering, heli-camping, heli-gastronomy and heli-partying throughout Zambia, Uganda, Ethiopia, South Africa and beyond. (Or just use it to beat Nairobi's hideous airport traffic and get to your hotel in seconds.) The Lady Lori USP is indigenous pilots with incredible local knowledge (all accredited guides) and mega connections. The company's flying machines are maintained by a global award-winning engineering team. The best thing? They'll whizz you almost into the mouths of volcanoes, glide over the game in the savannah, nip you up to glacier-fed lake shores for picnics at 10,000 feet before taking you to meet a tribal chief in a remote village and then on to your superlodge in the bush. Book them by the hour or by the week. **Caroline Phillips**
Ring 00 254 7257 97397 or visit flyladylori.com

Lady Lori
Helicopters



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FLYING ADVENTURE

Balloonist-turned-heli-pilot Ian

Mimano flies guests to the coral islands off **northern Kenya** to pick up oysters at low tide and eat them fresh

on the beach. He also offers trout fishing in Lake Alice, dhow lunches and heli-safaris. *From US\$2,050 per hour. www.flyladylori.com*



CLIFF-TOP CHALLENGE

Abseil 50 metres to an elegantly laid

table on the secluded edge of Lake Huapi in **Patagonia**.

While you adjust your adrenaline level, a chef serves dishes including gravalax with avocado, and plenty of local Malbec. *From US\$500 per person. www.cazloyd.com*



COASTAL EXTRAGANZA

Spend a morning whipping up beetroot caviar and an afternoon chasing the best waves in **Cornwall** with surfchick Mod Le

Froy, who has launched bespoke gourmet surfing breaks with the help of Ben's Cornish Kitchen. *From £150 per person. www.globalboarders.com*



SENSE SENSATION

Opening this summer in **Shanghai** is Ultraviolet, a daring, interactive experience for 10 created by chef Paul Pairet. During the '20-course

theatrical production', guests experience changing temperatures, soundtracks and scents. *About £195 per person. www.uvbypp.cc*

