

Private Guided Tours

Adventures of the Modern Day Traveller

by Lindsay Harlow

Love the beach but hate the idea of zoning out in an all-inclusive for a week? More interested in witnessing the migration of Wildebeest in the Serengeti than standing in line at a crowded amusement park? Looking for a genuine cultural experience, rather than watching a foreign city through the windows of a tour bus? If this sounds like you, you're not alone.

According to Jeff Willner, founder of Kensington Tours, one of the most notable trends in the tour market today has less to do with the new and exotic destinations "where" people are travelling and more to do with "how" they are travelling.

Travel experts report that the industry is seeing growth in two key areas: first, a continuing trend towards more "experiential" travel and second, an increased demand for "connoisseur-style" private tours. The modern traveller wants to take home an experience, not a store bought souvenir, and, more and more it's about customized travel rather than following the group. "Veterans of traditional tours," asserts Willner, "are discovering private tours with their own private guide and vehicle, and telling us that they'll never travel any other way."

A Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society and a veteran of global expeditions, Willner started Kensington Tours nearly a decade ago after having gone on a multitude of global expeditions that taught him a thing or two about globetrotting. "What I discovered through my personal expeditions is that experienced local guides – connected to the culture and people and attuned to your personal expectations – can deliver breathtaking moments. That's the type of experience you can't get on a tour bus. Savvy travellers today appear to be discovering this very thing in greater and greater numbers."

Private tours, like the ones offered by Kensington, cater to this new traveller – adventurous and eager to experience exotic destinations, but less willing to make compromises and follow the pack. "Travellers that book private tours want to make sure they have the freedom to travel their way. They don't want to be pigeon-holed into pre-set departure dates and pre-set itineraries," says Willner. "They want customized itineraries and customized experiences that only travel experts can deliver – this is the connoisseur traveller emerging."

As is the case with many other trends today, travel trends are being driven by the Baby Boomers who have both the time and the disposable

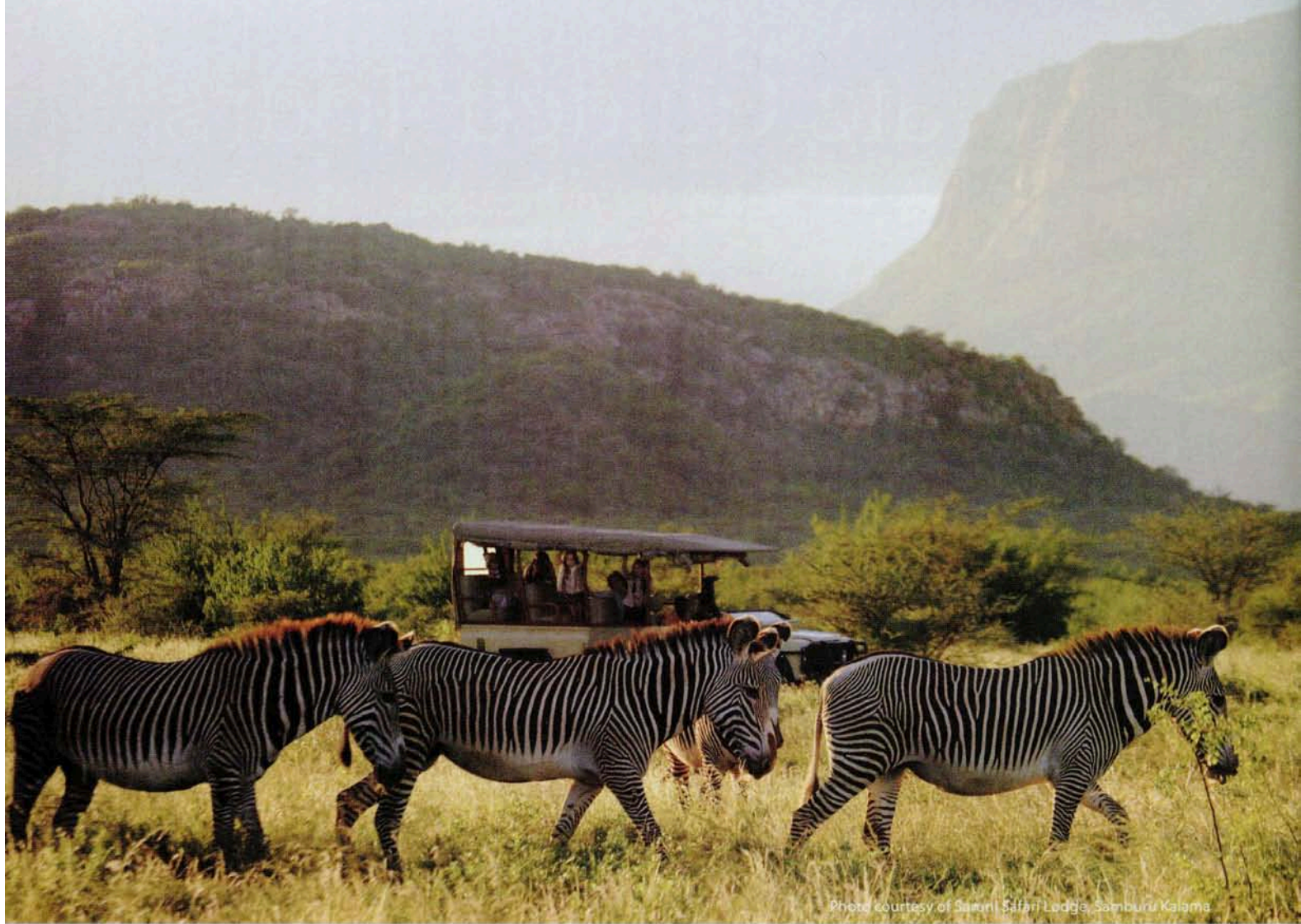


Photo courtesy of Samiri Safari Lodge, Samburu Kalama

income to travel, and who are no longer satisfied with simply being tourists. Travelzoo.com reports that more and

more Boomers are looking to embark on an "adventure" rather than just another sightseeing vacation, and increasing numbers want to share this unique adventure with their children and grandchildren.

According to the independenttraveller.com, while families have always gone on holiday together, many are now opting for longer getaways to more exotic destinations where they get to catch up with each other and discover a new place at the same time.

Roger Mueller and his granddaughter, who travelled to East Africa with Kensington Tours this past July, were especially happy with the flexibility and personal attention that their private tour afforded them. "My granddaughter and I spent nine glorious days traversing the game reserves of Tanzania and Kenya with our knowledgeable guide, Rody. Rody made this a memorable safari with his in-depth knowledge of the animals and his uncanny ability to spot hidden lions and cheetahs. My granddaughter and Rody discussed the animals and their

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behaviour nonstop. He went way beyond his duties to extend his driving time on our safaris to full day

experiences rather than short 2-3 hour game drives."

While sales at Kensington are a barometer for positive growth in the private tour sector, many travel enthusiasts have yet to discover private tours, often due to the misconception that these are reserved only for the wealthiest travellers. "It's absolutely not true," says Willner. "While we do offer higher range tours with the most luxurious hotels and lodges, we also offer tours that suit a wide range of budgets. In fact, many of our tours are less expensive than comparable group packages."

Kensington Tours offers private guided tours to over 50 of the world's most extraordinary countries. For more info, visit their website at:

www.kensingtontours.com