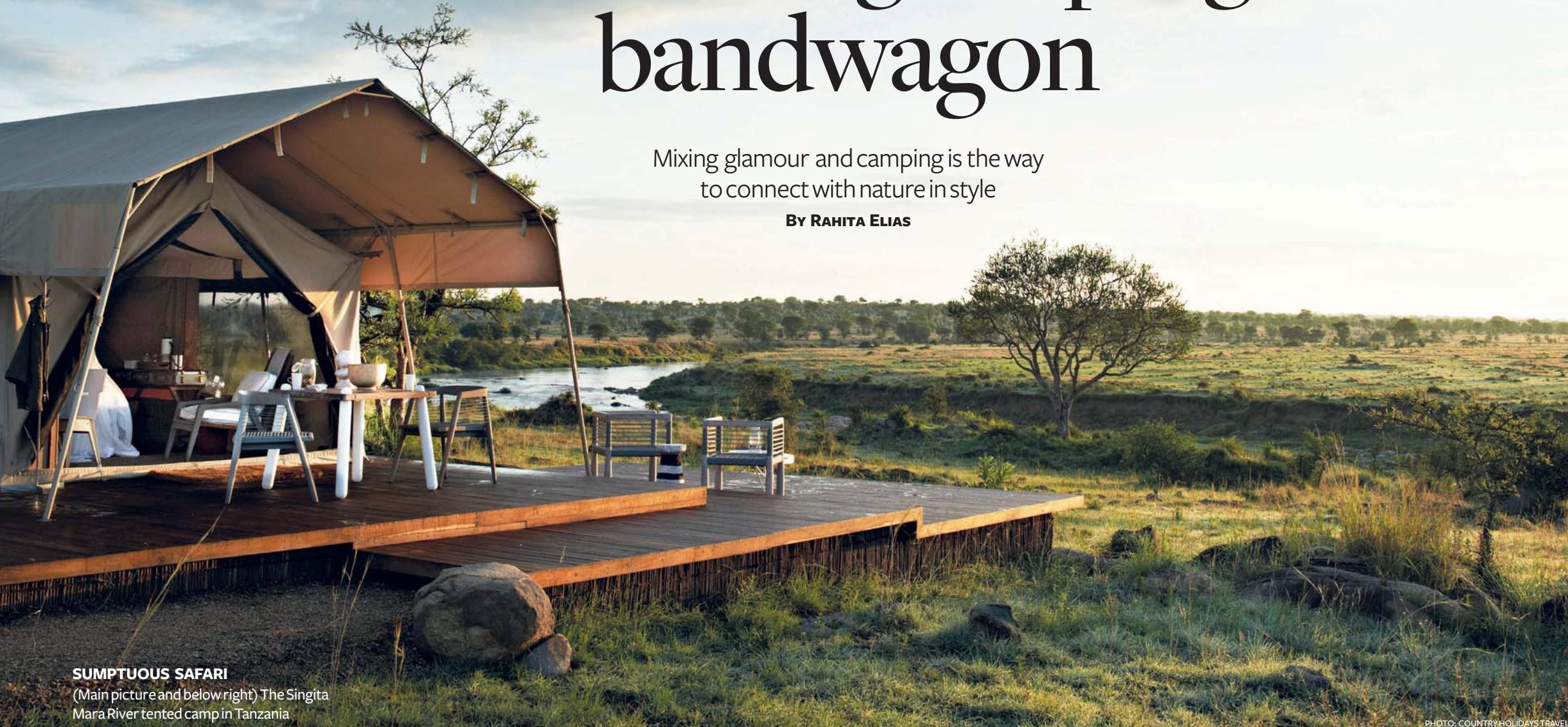


Onto the glamping bandwagon

Mixing glamour and camping is the way to connect with nature in style

BY RAHITA ELIAS



SUMPTUOUS SAFARI
(Main picture and below right) The Singita Mara River tented camp in Tanzania

If your idea of communing with the great outdoors includes indoor plumbing, thousand thread-count Egyptian cotton bed linen, a bottle of Cristal and butler service, glamping is for you. Kate Moss, Sienna Miller and Gwyneth Paltrow are said to have gone the glamping route at the Glastonbury music festival in England where they stayed in luxury tents, complete with sheepskin rugs, bedside champagne crates and a hefty price tag. They are among the growing list of celebrities who have jumped on the glamping bandwagon.

Glamping, a mash-up of glamour and camping, is said to have started in Africa in the early 1900s when rich Europeans and Americans went on safaris in style – getting close to the creatures without sacrificing their creature comforts. In the past few years, glamorous camping has taken off in a big way in the United States, Europe and Australia. Glamping is now fast gaining fans in Asia. Resorts are scattered across the region in countries such as Cambodia, India, Indonesia and Thailand.

According to the Glamping Hub website, glamping comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. Accommodation options include tents, barns, cabins, tree houses and even caves. What unifies them all is luxury.

Jess Yap, general manager, Country Holidays Travel, says: "Glamping is defined as glamorous camping, and much involves stunning settings, luxurious furniture and pampering."

She adds that travellers are also increasingly conscious of their environmental footprint. The majority of glamping destinations "are built on the principle of eco-consciousness", making them fundamentally attractive to these eco-concerned tourists.

"Compared to the four walls of a hotel room, glamping offers guests a chance to connect with the great outdoors minus the discomfort, since glamping focuses on a very high level of service to pamper guests," says Ms Yap.

Glamping also enables the well-travelled person to gain new and exciting experiences in exotic and often remote destinations.

"Travelling these days involves more than just a picture and mass accommodation. Discerning travellers are on the lookout for new experiences, and many naturally relate to glamping as a form of experiential travel," says Ms Yap.

Glampers also include outdoor enthusiasts who want to enjoy nature, but in comfort and luxury.

"Others may want to relive their previous camping experiences but in a more upscale manner, or they may have either come of age or wish the best of both worlds," says Ms Yap.

Emanuela Padoan, owner of Sandat Glamping Tents in Bali, Indonesia, says: "Those who choose glamping love to find all the comforts, but at the same time want to feel a little bit like Robinson Crusoe. They are not seeking over-the-top luxury, but rather charm, refinement and a discreet elegance."

Glampers include the more athletic who are interested in trekking, mountain biking and hiking. They could also be culture buffs, interested in learning about a country's culture and traditions, or gourmands who want to savour local flavours and food.

Ms Padoan adds that increasing pollution and waste generation are shining a spotlight on environmental issues. "Clean, clear water and fresh air, forests and green meadows



are becoming a rarity. For that reason, they are more precious and valuable, and cannot be wasted. The need to get back in touch with nature is becoming the decisive factor for the third millennium's traveller, who is escaping from urban centres and who is eager to embark on journeys rich in experiences and authenticity, but also with five-star service."

Sandat Glamping has two main types of accommodation, comprising safari tents and lumbung, which traditionally were used as warehouses. The five eco-glamp tents, two of which are suites, are made of water-repellent and fireproof cotton. The resort's three lumbung share a swimming pool. A night's stay at Sandat will cost from US\$210 plus tax and service charge for a total of two adults.

Ms Padoan says that Sandat attracts a wide range of guests, ranging from 20 to 80 years old in age. They include families on vacation, couples on a romantic retreat, and even big groups having a party.

In addition to the Bali property, Ms Padoan and her husband, Federico Carrer, also own Glamping Canonici di San Marco in Venice, Italy, which houses four tents including two suites.

Country Holidays' Ms Yap says the glamping phenomenon has gained traction as glampers scour the globe for different experiences, from witnessing the annual great migration in Africa to sun worshipping on remote beaches to fly fishing in crystal clear lakes.

Depending on the destination, season and camp standards, Ms Yap adds, a glamping holiday could cost anywhere between US\$250 per person per night at the Four Rivers

Floating Lodge in Cambodia and US\$1,550 per person per night at the Singita Mara River Tented Camp in Tanzania.

Ms Yap adds: "This surge in popularity of glamping has prompted us to launch 'Our Finesse Collection' which features a series of handpicked lodges endorsed by us."

The collection includes a five-day glamping trip exploring the ancient Angkor Temples in Siem Reap, Cambodia. The tour package starts at US\$2,090 per person for a group of two. For part of the trip, guests stay at a tented camp in the Banteay Chhmar temple complex.

The camp offers guests the unique opportunity of staying within the main complex of this 12th century temple, but in luxurious, comfortable and fully furnished accommodations. It has two tents, each able to accommodate two people. Villagers cook on site, using local ingredients for the authentic Cambodian flavour. The camp, the product of a partnership with the local community, is working towards building a sustainable business for the local villagers.

The Banteay Chhmar project underscores the attractiveness of glamping. Guests get immersed in the culture and environment of the place they are visiting with the full knowledge that they are helping the local community and preserving the local culture and environment.

Glamping, with its holy trinity of nature, unique experiences and luxury, certainly offers an attractive option for the well-heeled eco-traveller. As it continues to gain popularity, more destinations will be offering this luxurious option so guests can enjoy the great outdoors and commune with nature without actually having to combat the elements. **W**

ECO-GLAMP
(Right and below) Sandat Glamping has two main types of accommodation, comprising safari tents and lumbung, which traditionally were used as warehouses



PHOTOS: SANDAT GLAMPING TENTS