

The Masai Experience at Africa Amini Life in Pictures

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In Search of an Authentic Experience

I was lucky enough to call Arusha, [Tanzania](#) home for a few months of 2015 as part of my role with Shadows of [Africa](#).

Over the course of five months I picked up a smattering of Swahili, fell a little bit in love with Ndovu beer and chips mayi, danced my ass off at Arusha nightclubs, went on a bunch of safaris, and had the distinct pleasure of learning more about the various cultures that make up the rich tapestry of peoples who call Tanzania home.



The Masai in their iconic clothing and jewellery are as synonymous with Africa as the lion.

Of the many tribes of Tanzania, the Masai are perhaps the most famous, but genuine interactions with these tribal people can be hard to come by. The Masai have not been immune to the popularity of the country as a tourist destination, and so you find there are two kinds of Masai:

- The ones who smile and dance for the cameras in exchange for tips;
- The kind who want nothing to do with outsiders.

You can't fault either party. On the one hand, those catering to tourism are bringing much needed money back to their villages and, on the other hand, not everybody wants to be treated like a spectacle for the amusement of wealthy foreigners.

I experienced the more touristy style of Masai in my first visit to Tanzania, so on this trip I sorely wanted to see something a bit more authentic. I knew I wouldn't be able to live in a 'real' Masai village, but I wanted to get something closer than the 'just like in the pictures' villages that exist along the road to the Serengeti.

Thankfully, such an experience exists, and so it was that my co-workers and I made our way to the Africa Amini Life Masai Lodge.

Lying in the very shadows of Mount Kilimanjaro, the resort offers an engaging fusion of local traditions with western style luxury in a way that makes authenticity accessible without having to sacrifice comfort.



Guests at Africa Amini Life overnight in traditional style bomas with a twist – inside you'll find power outlets, comfortable bedding, and warm showers.

What is Africa Amini Alama?

[Africa Amini Alama](#) is a Tanzanian non-profit started in 2009 by a pair of Austrian doctors, Dr. Christine Wallner and her daughter, Dr. Cornelia Wallner-Friesee.

The charity oversees a number of projects "dedicated to health care, education, social care, tourism, and agriculture". The hope is that through the use of sustainable tourism sites such as Africa Amini Masai Lodge and Africa Amini Hillside Retreat, that a bridge can be built

towards self-help, stability, increased cultural awareness, and the sustainable development of tourism in Tanzania and within the Masai community.

The lodges themselves act as a revenue stream to fund local schools, medical outreach, and hospitality training for members of the community wishing to learn.

Africa Amini Masai Lodge, our destination for the weekend, is the flagship property: a luxury lodge offering a complete Masai experience for guests that includes nature walks, Masai dance, traditional food, and other activities.



The staff at Africa Amini Lodge are all from the local Masai community.

The charitable work that they're doing is similar to what Didier Drogba and Nestle are doing in Ivory Coast with the Nestle Cocoa Plan, and you can learn a bit more about that from the [video](#) below.

The Lodge

It would be remiss of me to stay at a luxury lodge and not at least discuss a little of my experience there.

Africa Amini Lodge provides an intriguing mixture of authenticity and closeness to nature without sacrificing comfort. As such, you'll overnight in rustic Masai style bomas complete with wind whistling in the walls, thatched roofs, and the blissful silence that only exists when you're many miles from civilization.

On the flip side, you're sleeping in a vast bed, showering with hot water, and enjoying WiFi in case the silence gets to be too much for you.



A super cool, rustic shower experience. The cool wind that crept in made for a really enjoyable shower.



The Spartan but comfortable bedroom.

Every meal we had was absolutely scrumptious, and kept up this idea of fusion. Traditional Tanzanian style dishes were served either alongside western favourites or in a way that was western with an African twist.

Lunch was a proper sit down affair with a set course menu of flavourful treats, breakfast was a full buffet complete with hot coffee delivered to your room at dawn, and dinner was a mixture of a hotel style buffet and a fireside roast of freshly slaughtered goat.



Our goat roasting over the open fire.

The Masai Experience

You could argue that you can get a comfortable bed and a good meal anywhere, but what really makes Africa Amini stand out is the hands on involvement of the local Masai community.

The staff you seem roaming about the property aren't just dressed in traditional Masai garb for effect – that's what they wear in their day to day lives. Far from being a manicured experience in which locals are forced into suits and told to speak with deference, this is an experience in which you feel a part of the community.

The men on staff will joke with you. They'll encourage you to pluck up a spear and join them for some practice. They'll eat from the same fireside roast as you and have frank and honest discussions with you about Masai life.

My co-workers and I enjoyed a long, enlightening chat with the manager about everything from gender equality to crime & punishment to the extent to which modern Tanzania has encroached upon Masai society.



The girls from Shadows of Africa chatting with the staff.

A big selling point of Africa Amini Life is its Masai Experience – an opportunity for local students or visiting guests to participate in some Masai activities such as bead-work, nature walks to learn about the Masai relationship with the land, spear throwing, or even the ritual slaughtering of a goat ahead of the evening meal.

It's not a polished tourist experience. It's real – from the blood of the goat spilling out into a bowl to the local women bartering with you to get the best price on some of their exquisite bead work.



The ladies barter for some new jewellery.

It's sipping foul-tasting 'medicinal tea' by a roaring fire underneath an impossibly beautiful sky and waking up at dawn to the cheerful, gap-toothed smiles of the staff as they urge you to take in a sunrise view of Kilimanjaro.

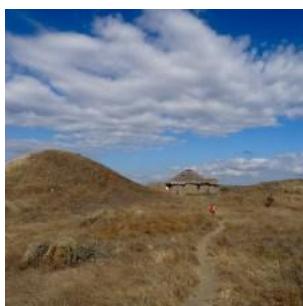
Authenticity is such a hard thing to define in travel. After all, how can it be truly authentic if we're there to interact with it and shape it as outsiders? Africa Amini Life delivers as close as I've come to an authentic experience for a visitor to Tanzania.

In Pictures

I could go on and on about what a positive and memorable experience I had at Africa Amini Lodge, but I think pictures do it more justice.

Sit back, relax, and enjoy some of my favourite pictures from my stay at [Africa Amini Life Masai Lodge](#).

Click on a picture to bring up a full-screen slideshow!



Set in the plains and against the backdrop of both Mount Kilimanjaro and Mount Meru, Africa Amini Life offers a stunning view.



Another shot of the open grasslands and rolling hills.



Dreamcatchers are not a part of Masai culture, but less skilled beadworkers have learned to make them for visiting tourists.



Hamming it up with the ladies before they returned to the nearby village.



The dream catchers are ever present around the foyer and dining space.



The girls from Shadows of Africa bid farewell to the super friendly staff.



The Shadows of Africa team. Lesya and Julia from our UAE office, Marjeta from our European office, and me representing Asia-Pacific.



A local bird haunts the fringes of the area, waiting for a bite.



The killing of the goat might be confronting for some, but it's all a part of local tradition. The trees pictured are where the goat is killed.



A goat is prepared for dinner. Not for the squeamish!



The animal's blood is consumed by the Masai warriors who work at the lodge.



Killed and drained, it's time to skin the goat.



Guests are invited to help in preparing the goat for dinner. One brave ten year old boy was only too happy to lend a hand.



The sun is high as we set out for our guided nature walk.



A guided nature walk through the surrounding wilderness offers a fascinating insight into Masai life and how they live off the land.



Our guide squats beneath a tree to tell us what role it plays in Masai life.



Lesya and Julia enjoying a quiet moment out on the plains.



Two of the warriors enjoying a quiet chat away from the camp.



Not so much privacy when you've got two photographers snapping your picture.



What a view! Our spear throwing instructor watches on as we practice.



The missing tooth is a common sight among Masai men.



Lesya tries her luck with the spear. None of us was any good.



Watching on with a critical eye.



The local boys show us how it's done, shouting encouragement or insults at one another as they go.



Good form.



A sunset dance performance from the staff was a real highlight. Howling and hollering as they jumped and sang, it was a fine way to end the day.



Sitting area in the room.



Light filters in through the shop window.



Feeling a bit artsy.



One of the local men wanders by the campfire.



Looking out from the dining area.