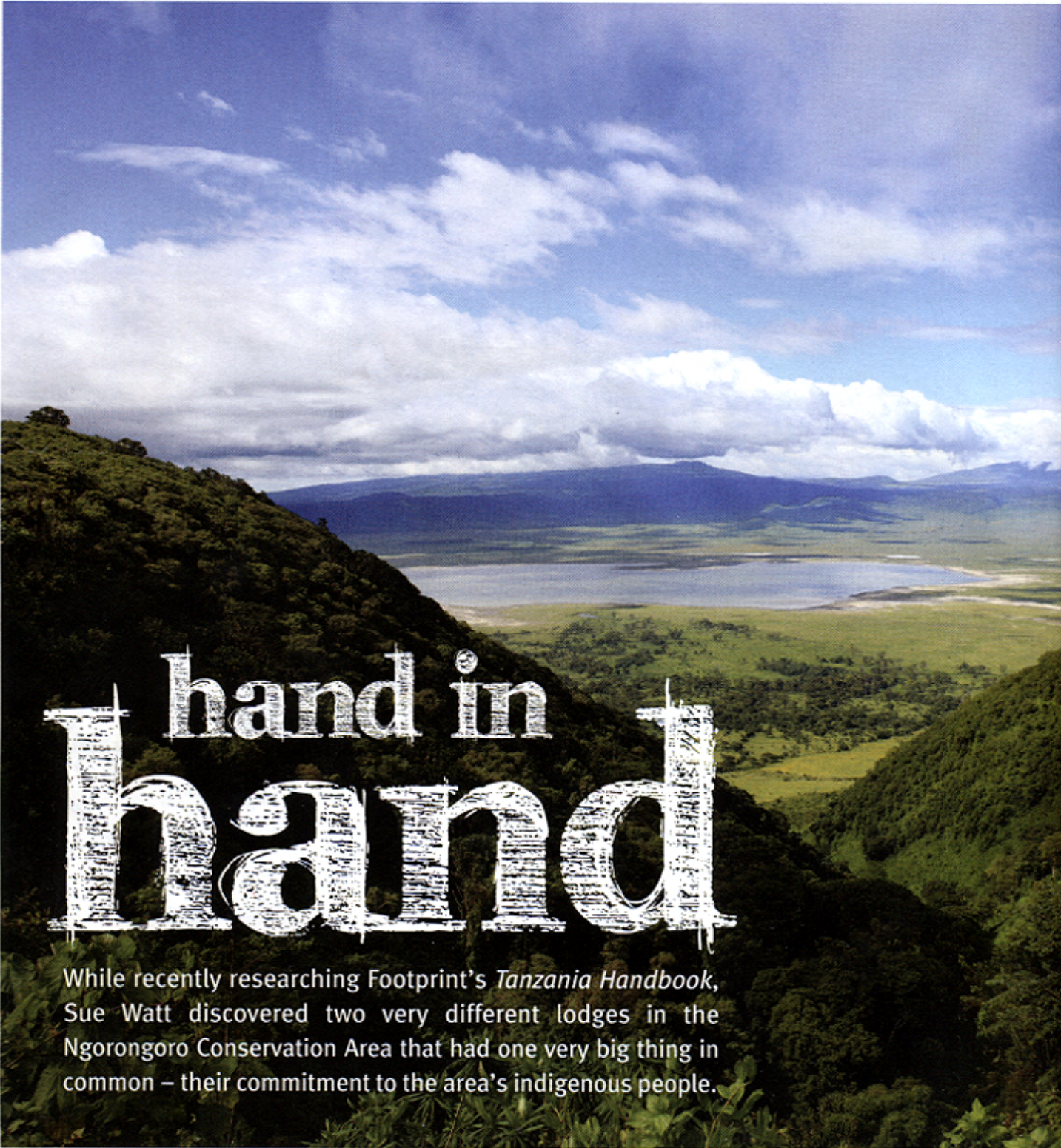




# Hand in hand

While recently researching Footprint's *Tanzania Handbook*, Sue Watt discovered two very different lodges in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area that had one very big thing in common – their commitment to the area's indigenous people.



SUE WATT



GLOBE'S FARM



GLOBE'S FARM



After falling in love with Africa on a gap year in 2004, **Sue Watt** became a freelance travel writer who's since travelled extensively across the continent, particularly around Tanzania. Last year, she co-authored Footprint's *Tanzania Handbook*.

**W**ispy clouds, like strands of sugary-pink candyfloss, are drifting across the sky. Below me, across an uninterrupted expanse, some 30,000 animals are waking up too. I'm watching dawn break over the Ngorongoro Crater.

There may be a cool morning chill outside and an inviting fire and fresh cup of tea in my room behind me, but this scene is just too captivating to leave.

A former volcano, which once towered to the same dizzying heights as Kilimanjaro, the 265-square-kilometre caldera was created 2.5 million years ago after a massive eruption caused the mountain's cone to collapse inwards.

Ngorongoro Crater's year-round water supply and fertile grasslands nurture hundreds of East Africa species, including elephant, leopard, lion, buffalo and the endangered black rhino. The caldera floor is complete with lush swamps, a hippo pool and a soda lake that transforms into a blanket of pink as flamingos descend in their thousands. While the steep, 600m-high, rugged crater rim emphasizes the beauty of this landscape, inviting dramatic cloud formations and encircling vast panoramas of what's frequently called 'Africa's Eden', it's also likely to be the reason one of the region's iconic animals is missing – it's thought giraffe find its slopes too steep to negotiate.

Also residing within the Ngorongoro Conservation Area are some 52,000 Maasai people who are trying to survive alongside the development of tourism and the restrictions related to wildlife conservation. Their life as semi-nomadic pastoralists, herding cattle, goats and sheep, seems a sharp contrast to the decadence of life in the luxury lodges on the crater rim. My current room at the Ngorongoro Crater Lodge, for instance, where an attentive staff member has just poured tea and stoked the fire, is brimming with raw silk, velvet and beautiful antiques. But increasingly, these two worlds do come together, as some lodges demonstrate a commitment to local people that is becoming as important to their ethos as their immaculate service to guests. Ngorongoro Crater Lodge, which is part of the luxury safari group e-Beyond, is a perfect example.

Perched on the crater's southwestern rim, this sumptuous lodge offers an eclectic mix of baroque style and African influences. To help you relax after wildlife drives, it even provides caviar and champagne to go with its glistening chandeliers, Persian rugs and roaring fires. ▷



IT'S A MAASAI MASSAGE

**Main image:** Visitors never forget their first look down into the Ngorongoro Crater  
**Opposite, left:** Dawn breaks over the caldera  
**Opposite, middle:** A soothing Maasai massage at Gibb's Farm  
**Opposite, right:** Views over the plantations of Gibb's Farm  
**Left:** Home sweet home: a zebra patrolling the parched grasses within the crater



The Maasai's life as semi-nomadic pastoralists, herding cattle, goats and sheep, seems a sharp contrast to the decadence of life in the luxury lodges on the crater rim

▷ It's easy to indulge in its opulence, but guests can satisfy their conscience here too, because the lodge supports a variety of community projects through a combination of ways: direct cash contributions; guest donations; and through the e-Beyond Foundation, an NGO initially established in 1992. While they've already invested thousands of dollars providing electricity for the local clinic and clean water supplies for those living in the area, their main priorities are healthcare and education.

"They are our focus, because healthcare and education are sustainable and benefit hundreds without discrimination – they are issues that affect everyone," explains Francis Majambele, the lodge's general manager. Discussing e-Beyond's Positive Health Programme, which started in the late 1990s in response to the African AIDS crisis, Francis continues: "People here don't have

the internet, so we're giving them the information they need." Today, the programme also includes advice on diabetes, gout, malaria, hypertension and exercise. Obviously, all of this is also good management – a thriving business needs a healthy workforce. But the lodge extends its healthcare beyond its 160 staff (of whom 90 per cent are local), providing seven-day training courses to village elders who in turn hand down their newfound knowledge to their communities. Grace John, the Positive Health Programme's staff 'champion', also attends schools to spread the message.

The e-Beyond team are heavily involved in five local schools, which together educate over 2000 children. Besides helping to build and refurbish classrooms, offices and teachers' accommodation, they provide desks (over a thousand and counting), teaching materials and equipment. The team also leads skills training on carving, building, weaving and ironmongery.

Conservation lessons provided by the lodge are particularly popular. "Previously, children never had the opportunity to visit the crater, nor somebody to explain the relationship between wildlife, conservation and tourism. Not only do we bring them here, but we also show them the world map to help them understand how far tourists have come and how important visitors are in

Top left: While wildlife thrives in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, more work is being done to ensure local people lead comfortable, secure lives  
Top right: Life moves fast in Karatu, 'Safari Junction'  
Bottom left: Tea for two on at Ngorongoro Crater Lodge  
Bottom right: Atop the caldera's rim, the Ngorongoro Crater Lodge



contributing to the area and conserving wildlife. It can change children's lives," says Francis.

Indeed, the life of one 13-year-old boy changed dramatically when, following one such conservation visit, he found a wallet dropped by a guest from the lodge containing over US\$1000. Newly aware of the value of tourism to his community, instead of handing it to his father, he secretly took it to the village elder and together they walked the 7km to return it to Francis. The lodge now pays for his education and will sponsor him through university. In this modern parable, the boy has become an excellent role model to his peers and is a local hero.

Twenty-five kilometres away is Karatu, a bustling town known as 'Safari Junction' due to its location on Tanzania's northern safari circuit and for its key role in providing provisions for those venturing into the region's national parks. With a population of around 20,000 people (mainly of the Iraqw tribe), the town stretches out along a busy road, which is lined with petrol stations, shops, bars and budget accommodation. But venture 4km up the slopes into the Ngorongoro Forest and you'll reach my next destination, a peaceful haven called Gibb's Farm. An atmospheric colonial guesthouse built in 1929 by German settlers, it is still operating as a working farm and coffee plantation.

My lunch of delicious organic curry, produced from homegrown organic ingredients, is served on the terrace overlooking colourful flower gardens and densely forested hills. The tasteful farmhouse cottages – although calling them cottages is a bit like calling Kilimanjaro a hillock – are definitely designed for two (or more), with totally private outdoor showers to luxuriate in under the stars and romantic 'wrap-around' fireplaces to warm both the living room and bathroom.

Perfectly positioned for leisurely strolls through the Ngorongoro Forest, or for more demanding hikes to the crater rim, Gibb's Farm offers the ultimate indulgence to help you recover from your aches and pains – its unique African Living Spa. Led by third-generation healer Dr Labiki, it provides Maasai massages in the intimacy of your cottage or in the Engishon Supat, which translates to 'house of life'. Other healing treatments include an exfoliating olkaria clay painting, a firming coffee scrub and massages using aromatic hot wood or freshly made milk-oil. Staying true to their culture, you pay in terms of cattle – the mainstay of Maasai life – at the rate of US\$40 per cow, and you decide how many cows a treatment is worth.

Gibb's Farm takes its belief in indigenous medicine seriously, donating US\$10,000 towards research at

**Top left:** Open the doors to relaxation at Gibb's Farm  
**Top right:** Living within the restrictions related to wildlife conservation is not easy for the 52,000 Maasai in the Ngorongoro Conservation  
**Bottom left:** Half of Ngorongoro's zebra vacate the crater each wet season  
**Bottom right:** Heaven sent, Ngorongoro Crater

▷ the National Museum of Kenya's Phyto-Chemistry Department and Nairobi University's School of Medicine, which both explore the link between Western medicine and the ten most common treatments used by Dr Labiki. Importantly, the Gibb's Farm's 150 staff and their dependents, totalling some 500 people, also benefit from his work – the Osero Forest Clinic, funded by the Farm and run by Dr Labiki, provides healthcare for them and grows traditional medicinal plants.

The farm actually helps educate its staff, not just in vocational training but also in reading, writing, maths, community healthcare and even indigenous cultural knowledge. They extended their focus on education to the wider community too, establishing the Karatu Education Fund in 2000. This non-profit organisation supports local schools by building classrooms, teachers' accommodation and latrines, as well as providing desks, installing electricity and sponsoring many children on to further education. They've also provided clean water to Karatu, maintained roads and infrastructure, and sponsored Mazingira Bora Karatu, a local conservation group that is rehabilitating the region's native forests and denuded lands.

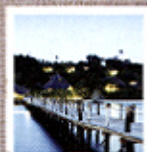
Along with their excellent eco-credentials, Ngorongoro Crater Lodge and Gibb's Farm demonstrate the importance of achieving that careful balance between conservation, community and tourism. More new upmarket lodges are planned for Ngorongoro Conservation Area in the near future, so with luxury paradoxically becoming commonplace, let's hope they follow their neighbours' examples to ensure that the truly priceless elements here – the fragile natural environment and its indigenous people – are properly considered and protected. 🌿

## Other groundbreaking eco-tourism initiatives in Tanzania



### SAADANI SAFARI LODGE

The only lodge in Saadani National Park, it is comprised of nine beachside cottages. They work closely with local schools, sponsoring children and providing equipment. They also founded SANA, a non-profit company, to focus on conservation and communities in coastal Tanzania. [www.saadanilodge.com](http://www.saadanilodge.com)



### FUNDU LAGOON

This beautiful lodge on Pemba Island runs the Wambaa Village Community Fund, which is building a school for 600 children, a mosque and water wells. Their Light Up Wambaa Project is providing solar lamps for 600 homes to cut the village's dependency on kerosene. [www.fundulagoon.com](http://www.fundulagoon.com)



### OLD BOMA HOTEL

An old fort at Mikindani, it was converted into a training hotel for local staff, which is run by the charity Trade Aid UK. They provide micro-finance for sustainable initiatives like beekeeping and furniture making, helping 150 locals establish their own businesses. [www.mikindani.com](http://www.mikindani.com)



### CHUMBE ISLAND

A private marine conservation project on Zanzibar, with seven eco-bungalows, this lodge uses its profits to fund conservation of local marine life, including turtles, dolphins, 200 species of coral and over 400 species of fish, and to educate Zanzibar's school children about marine conservation. [www.chumbeisland.com](http://www.chumbeisland.com)



### THE SELOUS PROJECT

A former hunting concession that is now focusing on conservation through exclusive photographic safaris, it allows guests to help with game counts and patrols in low season. The project works with local communities, providing medical care, micro-finance initiatives and employment. [www.theselousproject.com](http://www.theselousproject.com)



## Plan your trip

### Getting there

Kenya Airways ([www.kenya-airways.com](http://www.kenya-airways.com)) has daily flights from Heathrow to Dar es Salaam via Nairobi. British Airways ([www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)) flies from Heathrow to Dar es Salaam three times a week.

### When to visit

The Ngorongoro Crater is great to visit at any time of the year. The rains in April and May can make things wet, but it is also the least crowded during this period.

### Visas

Most visitors need visas. Single-entry visas can be acquired for US\$50 at most points of entry, including Dar es Salaam Airport. UK passport holders can also

purchase single- or multiple-entry visas from the Tanzania High Commission in London ([www.tanzania-online.gov.uk](http://www.tanzania-online.gov.uk))

### Books

Footprint's *Tanzania Handbook* (2nd edition, 2009) by Lizzie Williams and Sue Watt  
Lonely Planet's *Tanzania* (4th edition, 2008) by Mary Fitzpatrick  
Bradt's *Tanzania with Zanzibar, Pemba and Mafia* (6th edition, 2009) by Philip Briggs

### Find out more

Ngorongoro Crater Lodge ([www.andbeyond.com](http://www.andbeyond.com))  
Gibb's Farm ([www.gibbsfarm.net](http://www.gibbsfarm.net))  
Tanzanian Tourist Board ([www.tanzaniatouristboard.com](http://www.tanzaniatouristboard.com))