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hotels that pamper and pay it forward

Text and photos by Amanda Castleman

Travelgirls can have their cake and treat others too, thanks to destinations that give back to their communities and the environment. So pack your bags in the name of philanthropy, and book a getaway to somewhere generous this holiday season.



1. SERIAN BUSH CAMP *Masai Mara, Kenya*

The world's finest game viewing unfolds on the golden savannah of the Rift Valley Province. From July to October, big cats — lions, leopards and cheetahs — stalk the 1.3 million wildebeests thundering from their Serengeti calving grounds to the lush grasslands of “the Mara” reserve. Animal viewing certainly crests during the Great Migration, but year-round visitors can spot rhinos, zebras, giraffes, buffalos and elephants, not to mention more than 450 recorded bird species vying for space in the azure skies.

Take a ringside seat as crocodiles and hippopotamuses surface in the river below this luxury camp in the private Mara North Conservancy, bordering the reserve. The seven wood-floored, canvas-walled tents tuck into the hillside and have a remote, Neverland-treehouse feel. Each contains a double bed, a writing desk and a large stone bathtub in an open-air bathroom on the deck. Keep an eye out for the three resident servals — slender, spotted, petite wildcats — that sometimes slip in

and shred the toilet paper rolls at night.

Serian's eco-chic and low-density, low-impact approach have made it home base for many BBC and National Geographic documentaries. This, along with lion research for the Mara Predator Project, has honed the guides' skills to an extraordinary degree, especially when it comes to big cats. Bring a long camera lens and a sense of awe.

The bush camp helps track and conserve the last 23,000 lions in Africa. It also supports the conservancy, the Maswa Makau reserve, and several children in secondary and vocational training. Happily, 100 percent of donations go to the programs and people. “With your support we can change the world we live in,” says founder Alex Walker, a fourth-generation East African who guides, designs camps and makes conservation documentaries.

www.serian.net

Opposite page: James Kipetu, a Serian Bush Camp guide, discovered this cheetah lounging on the Masai Mara. Afterwards, he drove right to a pride of lions, then a rare daytime leopard sighting. Epic! Above: An eco-chic outdoor lounge at Serian, which supports lion studies, nature conservation and local schoolchildren.

2. SPICE ISLAND BEACH RESORT *Saint George's, Grenada*

Trade winds cool this seven-mile long island nation, just 12 degrees north of the equator. Here Amerindian traditions blend with African and European ones to produce a culture as rich and complex as Grenada's signature export: nutmeg.

Lounge under lemon and almond trees at Spice Island, while staring at the peacock-colored Caribbean. Or sip rum beside one of the suites' private 16-by-20-foot swimming pools. This family-run boutique hotel just wrapped up a multi-million-dollar renovation to keep its five-star elegance shining bright. But the resort is more than just another tropical paradise. "Here at Spice, we're involved in charities and foundations on island, and support a number of other causes in the Caribbean and overseas," explains owner Sir Royston Hopkin.

Spice Island's nearest and dearest project unfolds at the Grand Anse School, a ten-minute walk east, where it bankrolls scholarships. The resort also encourages guests to reach out: recently honeymooning opera singers Rodney Clarke (a British baritone) and Louise Callinan (an Australian mezzo soprano) shared stories of performing around the world with the Tourism Education class. More volunteers are welcome.

www.spiceislandbeachresort.com



3. SPIRIT RIDGE VINEYARD RESORT & SPA *Osoyoos, British Columbia, Canada*

Mild winters and hot, dry summers make the Okanagan Valley perfect for growing more than 80 types of grapes. Some of its oldest and most award-winning vines flourish around Spirit Ridge, where the Osoyoos Indian Band (tribe) first planted slopes in 1968.

Thirty-four years later, the tribe opened the continent's first aboriginal-owned and -operated winery: Nk'Mip Cellars ("In-ka-MEEP"). It stands beside a luxury resort: a jumble of golden buildings amid Canada's only desert. Wander down the vineyard rows to the sparkling lake, where guests can rent

canoes or paddleboats.

Thanks to the vision and drive of Chief Clarence Louie, 511 Osoyoos Indians employ 800 people and generate more than \$29 million annually. A good chunk of this change goes into the Band's health, social, education and municipal services — reason to feel extra good about that glass of Qwam Qwmt Syrah or that red-clay body wrap with sage oil at the resort's full-service Solterra Desert Spa!

www.spiritridge.ca

Opposite page: A jogger heads down Grande Anse Beach in Grenada, passing the five-star Spice Island Resort. This page: The Osoyoos Indians pioneered vineyards in Canada's Okanagan Valley — and later added a luxurious resort that funnels money into social services.



4. THE LODGE AT TIBURON Marin County, California, U.S.A.

A 20-minute ferry ride from San Francisco, a village stretches from the Pacific coast's oldest yacht club up a forested hillside. To the northwest lie redwoods and foggy coves where elephant seals bellow in winter. To the northeast sprawl the vineyards of Napa and Sonoma. Go south and you find the loopy, lovely city that Paul Kantner of Jefferson Airplane described as "49 square miles surrounded by reality." Even if your GPS tanks, you can't go wrong.

Shuttered balcony doors let the bay breezes into The Lodge at Tiburon. Once a funky, spa-themed hot spot in the '70s, the boutique property has now been elevated with a sophisticated, maritime makeover. In particular, the tavern wins fans with its sprawling outdoor patio, which doubles as an organic farm

box drop-off for the community, via a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program.

Local third graders are now farming too, thanks to the lodge's Executive Chef Jamie Prouten. He set up an herb and vegetable garden at Bel Aire Elementary School this year. Not only do the kids grow cilantro, spinach and snap peas — among other green goodies — but the restaurant also buys their produce, which funnels money into school programs. And finally, the Lodge at Tiburon is building an outdoor classroom and hopes to get the students baking dog biscuits in a solar oven: treats that would anchor the tavern's new pet-friendly "Yappy Hour."

www.lodgeattiburon.com

Above: Take a one-mile ferry ride from California's Tiburon to Angel Island, where eight miles of biking trails wind through an old U.S. Immigration Station. Opposite page: The Tokoriki staff band greets visitors on the shoreline with a warm Fijian welcome.



5. TOKORIKI ISLAND RESORT Mamanuca Islands, Fiji

Orchids unfurl and goldfish circle in this Asian-influenced adults-only resort, tickled by clear, bright waves. Wood and thatch-roof villas, known as "bures", line the sweep of the cove, with a helipad, stone church and sushi restaurant also set among winding inland paths.

"So many places in the world have sun, sea and sand. And it's all here," says owner Andrew Turnbull. "But we also have the Fijians. Two movies and you're here from L.A. There's no tipping. Almost everyone speaks English. And they're naturally friendly. You can come back five years from now and people will remember your name."

The warm welcome isn't just reserved for guests at Tokoriki, the resort has been protecting and re-seeding giant clams since 2000. The mollusks start small; some are the size of pinky fingernails when divers plant them on the reef. But at maturity, some can stunt-double for bathtubs. Beyond the beauty of their sassy colors and disco-ball speckles, each clam filters hundreds of liters of water daily, removing nutrients that encourage coral-killing algae. Today snorkelers can float over the repopulated colony at the gorgeous dive site nicknamed "Magic Mushrooms."

While its clam project has become a model worldwide, Tokoriki has never rested on its laurels. Ten years ago, it helped found the Mamanuca Environment Society (mesfiji.org), which employs a full-time biologist to monitor the archipelago west of Fiji's main island. Now the resort is contributing to solar panels for the Yanuya Village School, so it can divert generator-fuel money into books and computers. Guests also can chip in on this dream of clean, green, reliable power that will allow children to study at night (iitime.org).

www.tokoriki.com

