

THE SOUL OF AFRICA TANZANIA

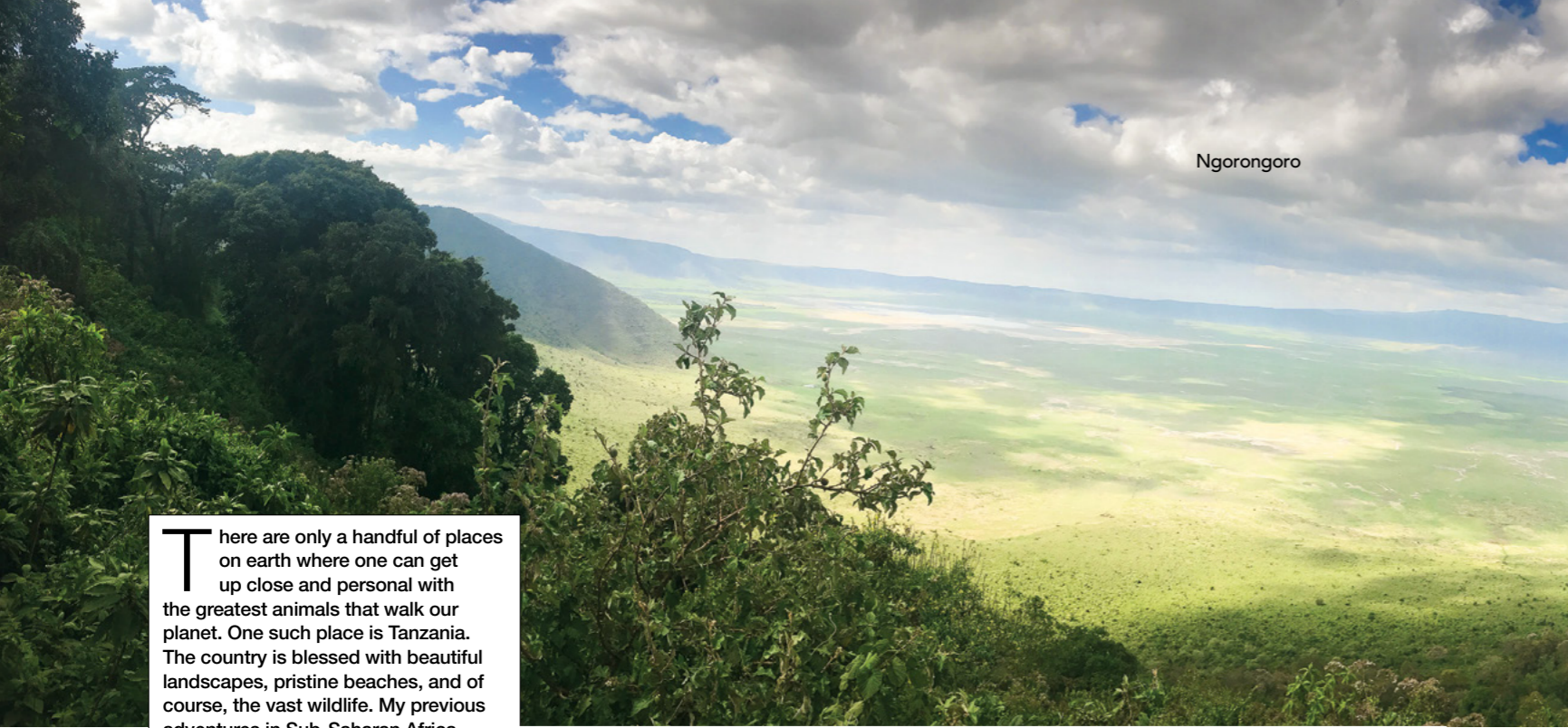
One Adventure, Many Stories



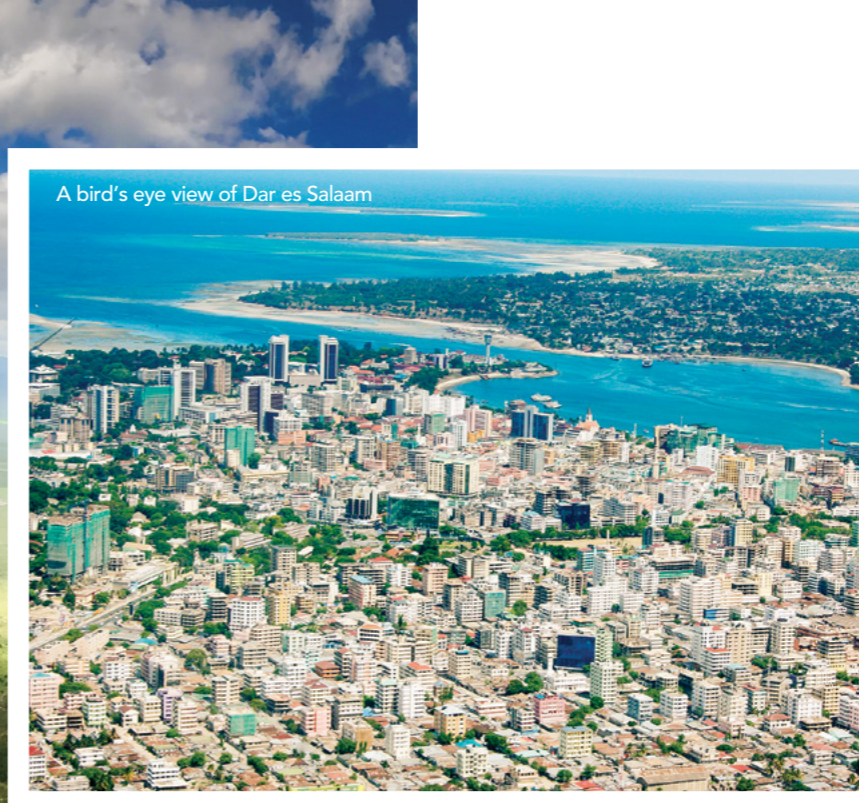
VIBHOR SOGANI, FOUNDER,
STUDIO VIBHOR SOGANI

Rajasthan-born artist and designer Vibhor Sogani specialised in Industrial Design from National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad before engaging in a range of creative projects spanning exhibition, graphic, retail and product design, for global brands. He is best recognised for the Sprouts and Kalpavriksha installation in Delhi and Ahmedabad respectively, and has recently been nominated by the Government as a member of the Governing Council of the India Design Council.

Serengeti National Park



Ngorongoro



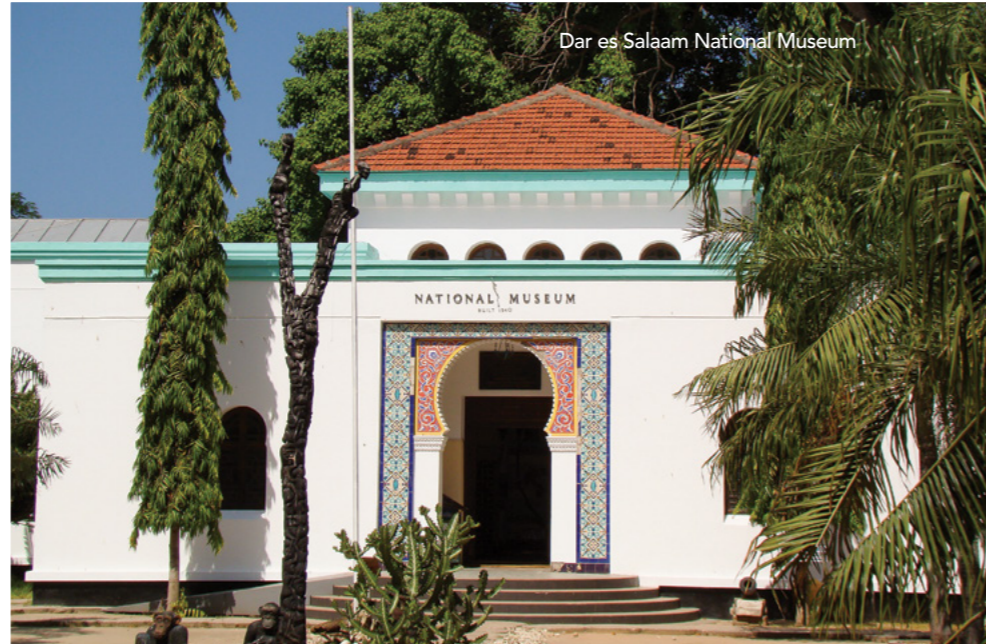
A bird's eye view of Dar es Salaam

There are only a handful of places on earth where one can get up close and personal with the greatest animals that walk our planet. One such place is Tanzania. The country is blessed with beautiful landscapes, pristine beaches, and of course, the vast wildlife. My previous adventures in Sub-Saharan Africa made me fall in love with this part of the world, but to be honest, I had little clue about what to expect from Tanzania. I had heard stories of its scenic beauty and safaris – but that was about it. Upon visiting, I realised that there was more to this country than just that; there's truly something here for everyone.

I was invited to Tanzania to showcase my travelling exhibition – 'Mahatma in Me - a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi' at the National Museum of Tanzania. The exhibition was supported by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the High Commission of India in Tanzania. It showcases Mahatma's values of peace, equality and non-violence through stainless steel installations. Subtle images of Gandhi and some impressions of his thoughts, expressed in reflective steel, make the viewer pause for a moment and seek the Mahatma within.

Present day Tanzania is the result of a merger between the mainland and Zanzibar in 1964, after both had gained independence. It is the largest of the East African nations, with a population of approximately 5.7 crores.

Known for its vast expanse of wilderness, the country possesses a geography which is as mythical as it is spectacular. In fact, over 100 different languages are spoken in Tanzania, making it the most linguistically diverse country in East Africa! It is also home to Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest point in Africa (19,340ft high) and is possibly the most breathtaking mountain imaginable.



Dar es Salaam National Museum



(This image and right) Mahatma in Me at the National Museum of Tanzania



(This image and below) Serengeti National Park



To the west of these peaks lies the Serengeti National Park, which has the greatest concentration of migratory animals in the world. The name 'Serengeti' comes from the word 'siringet' used by the Maasai, which means 'the place where the land runs on forever.' The miles-long drive to the park is scattered with picturesque landscapes. The guide informed us that the park was established in 1952, and is without a doubt the most famous wildlife sanctuary in the world. We were lucky to witness the greatest wildlife spectacle on earth – the migration of the zebra and wildebeest. I was captivated by the wildlife population in this vast park that includes lions, elephants, rhinos, giraffes, cheetahs and countless species of birds.

Tanzania is also home to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Ngorongoro, meaning 'Gift of Life'. Formed about two and a half million years ago from a large active volcano whose cone collapsed inwards after a major eruption, this marvelous eden consists of an extraordinary concentration and diversity of wildlife. The stretch has scanty vegetation and there are no large trees to hide behind. As a result, both prey and predator move to avoid one another and one can see the ongoing fight between them. Think of the Ngorongoro Crater as an entire ecosystem contained in one area with more predator-prey interactions per capita than almost anywhere else on the planet! The Crater is undoubtedly the showpiece of the conservation area, known both for its geological splendour, as well as for being a natural reserve that is home to some of the densest mammal populations found anywhere in Africa.

As we moved northeast, we reached a low, lush coastal strip, the location of its largest city, Dar es Salaam. Dar es Salaam is the embarkation point for Zanzibar, the fabled emerald isle that lies off the Tanzanian coast.

It is a growing metropolis of nearly five million people — most of them migrants from Tanzania's rural regions with Indian and Arab influences. A complete contrast from the serene landscape, the city is buzzing with casinos and pubs, exhibiting a type of organised chaos and a medley of cultural influences which can be seen throughout the architecture of the city. Tanzania is also home to a diaspora of ancient Indian migrants; it was fascinating to see so many people of Indian descent, who interestingly have never been to India, but have adopted the East African culture and are now living in this region with their families.

As we travelled further to Zanzibar, we saw its pristine white sand beaches lined with palm trees and surrounded by coral reefs that provide a perfect paradise for any tourist. There are numerous beach resorts laden with white sand, and underwater treasures that offer a peaceful, relaxed atmosphere, as one mingles on beaches with the locals and backpackers. Interestingly, the beaches of Zanzibar change twice a day, because of the strong tides, as water retreats several hundred meters during low tide.

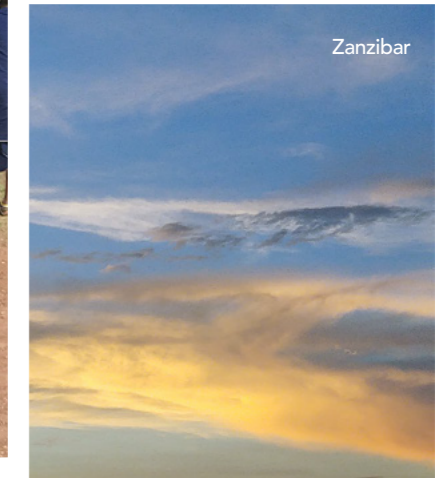
For me, the most exciting part of the trip was meeting the Maasai tribe. Wherever you go on the East African safari circuit of southern Kenya and northern Tanzania, the Maasai are a near-constant presence. These are self-sufficient tribes; they have their own markets, customs and traditions.



Statues of chained slaves in old slave market, Zanzibar



Maasai Tribe



Zanzibar

We spotted the brightly colored reds, blues and purples of their shūka (sheets worn wrapped around the body) standing out vividly against the landscape. One can also see them standing tall and proud alongside the road in small villages and modern towns, walking across the vast open pastures on which they continue to graze their cattle, as they have for more than 500 years now. While it may be the world-renowned wildlife that draws most travelers to Tanzania, it's the Maasai people who give the region its distinctive cultural flavor.

The local artists and craftsmen earn a living by making tourist souvenirs such as necklaces and bracelets. Speaking for myself, meeting the Maasai tribe and getting to know more about their life in the Savannah is an integral part of the East African travel experience. It was worth learning more about these semi-nomadic pastoralists on the visit and the trip accounted for one of the most enriching experiences of my life.



Uhuru Monument, Dar es Salaam



Azania Front Lutheran Church, Dar es Salaam



St. Joseph's Cathedral, Dar es Salaam



Dar es Salaam waterfront

