

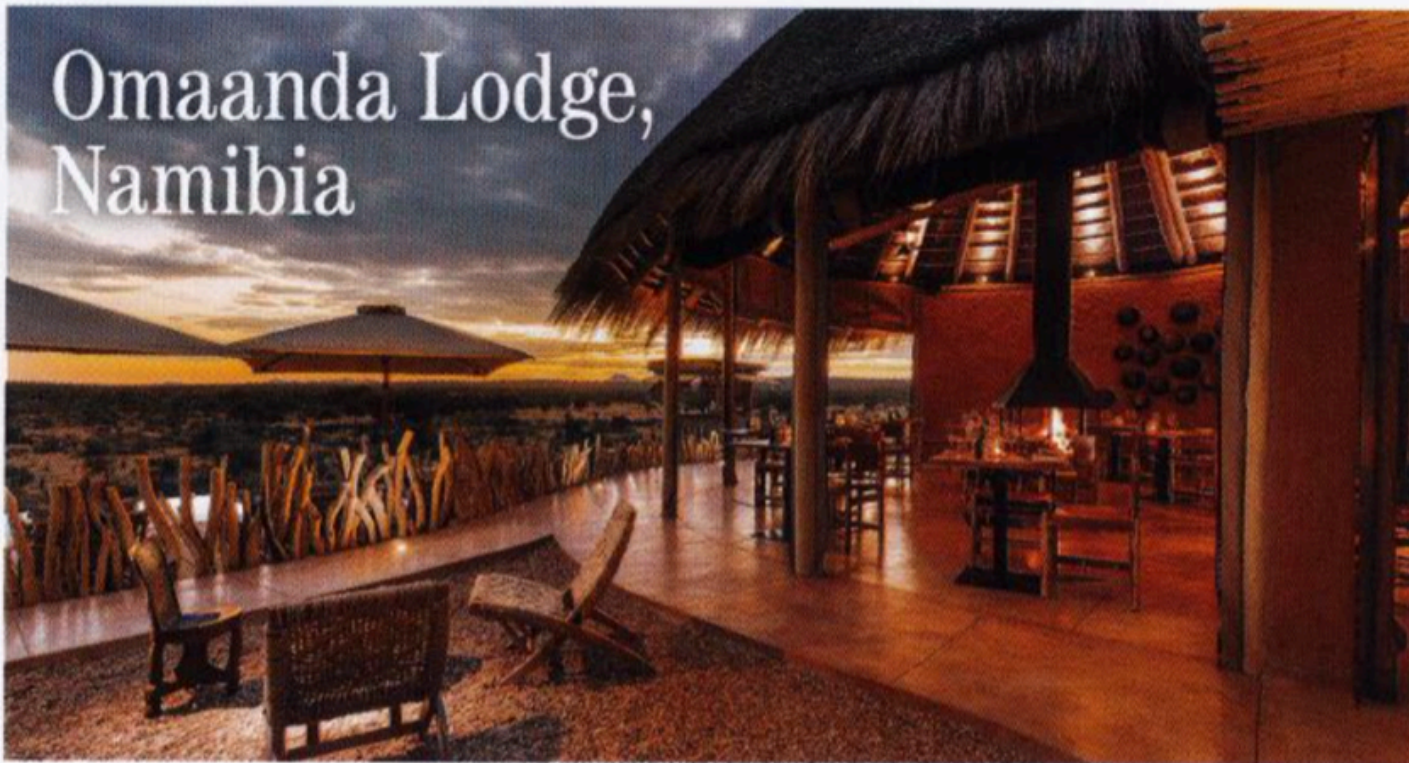
COUNTRY LIFE[®] TRAVEL

Time for a change



WINTER 2018/19

Omaanda Lodge, Namibia



NAMIBIA'S star is burning bright—2018 saw the launch of several exclusive properties, such as architectural wonder Shipwreck Lodge and remote Hoanib Valley Camp. Omaanda is the latest arrival.

After a half-hour, dusty drive from Windhoek, you'll find 10 thatch-roof huts, connected by snaking, timber walkways. The property is ringed by a zig-zagging wooden fence, in the style of a traditional Namibian *kraal* (village)—a handy barrier between you and your new neighbours, including the giraffes, cheetahs and rhinos that roam the 22,240-acre savannah.

The backstory to Omaanda reads like a Hollywood script, with leading roles played by Arnaud Zannier, the hotelier behind the Cambodian eco-retreat Phum Baitang; Angelina Jolie, who considers Phum Baitang a home away from home; and Namibian conservation heroes Marlice and Rudie van Vuuren. Hearing that this wilderness, close to Mr and Mrs van Vuuren's wildlife rehabilitation centre, was threatened, Miss Jolie called M. Zannier. Within weeks, plans for a low-impact property and reserve took shape.

The result is astonishing. Seemingly sun-baked, Omaanda's earthy-hued clay huts look as if they've been here forever. Outside,

the Auas Mountains dance in the distance; inside, there's an open fireplace, a king-size bed, weighty khaki curtains and safari-style armchairs. Interior designer Geraldine Dohogne is responsible for the hand-woven South African baskets, pressed local plants in antique pots and near floor-to-ceiling windows. The views from the terrace and bathtub are equally impressive.

Guests can catch up and compare wildlife sightings on the bright scatter cushions next to the infinity pool, in a cosy lounge kitted out with vintage furniture or at a rustic shack bar, where bartender Boston will rustle up a Kalahari Sunset cocktail.

In the spa hut, experts pummel away any remaining knots using flower oils. In the Ambo Delights restaurant, you can feast on quinoa-stuffed butternut squash and lemon-meringue tart. Spoiling breakfasts include banana-pecan pancakes and yoghurt with lashings of pineapple coulis.

Whether it's a sunrise dip in the pool, as warthogs gambol by the watering hole, or a sunset game drive surrounded by silhouetted giraffes, Omaanda cannot fail to stir the soul. *Ianthe Butt*

The Luxury Safari Company offers three nights, all-inclusive, from £1,000 per person, excluding flights (01666 880111; www.theluxurysafaricompany.com)