

THE CONFESSIONS OF A WELLNESS SEEKER

*How the bush taught me
to reconsider wellness*

It's not possible to go to my doctor, or very expensive therapist, or exemplary yoga teacher, or even my gym trainer (the one who pushes me to climb Everest or Mars, depending on his mood), to ask them for some wellness.

Sure, in part and in their own way, they can offer me a service, and yes, it can improve my life in some very specific manner, but wellness is much bigger than that. Much, much bigger. It feels like it may be hard work, but with a dynamic resourcefulness and, hopefully, my swarthy sense of humour, maybe it isn't so difficult to find after all. So I head off in search of less *Eat Pray Love* and maybe more "Read. Bush. Think".

READ

Having recently read cancer conqueror Greg Anderson's book *The 22 Non-Negotiable Laws of Wellness: Feel, Think and Live Better Than You Ever Thought Possible*, where he describes wellness as "the complete integration of body, mind and spirit", the feisty realisation that everything we do, think, feel and believe affects our state of wellbeing wasn't far behind.

Anderson goes on to describe wellness to be both a choice and a process. This had me thinking: perhaps wellness is simply a conclusive decision to move towards optimum health and maximum life.

Anderson also believes that wellness strives for a new standard; unlike medicine, which treats a symptom, wellness calls for "continuing improvement and self-renewal in all areas of a life".

And so I recall one of the 22 laws that Anderson refers to in his book, called *The Law of Esprit – the living of life with joy*. He relates how people who consider how to improve their physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing every day (read: continuing) begin to see three values emerge: a satisfaction, a creativity and a wisdom. I definitely want all three of those, and if Julia Roberts gets to eat extra gelato, then so should I.

BUSH

The choice of where to find this wellness inspiration was rather easy – the conservation and luxury brand Singita, of course. Titled a "place of miracles", the brand has a collection of 12 luxury lodges and camps located in South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. All perfect travel destinations for a New Yorker living in a city of millions and heading to down-south for a peregrination.

Africa, known as the final frontier, has the ability to take you closer to the wild than ever before. Singita takes pride in offering just that: a life-changing experience in the wild that incorporates both nature and nurture. So what does that mean for wellness, exactly?

Besides adding aesthetic joy, thanks to the design house Cecile and Boyd's, who make all the lodges more than beautiful, the brand has historically nurtured the gist of wellness. From the physical to the mental, all the way to the spiritual, Singita opts to cover all the bases and gives me the perfect reason to explore it.

Luke Bailes, CEO of Singita, aptly notes: "That is why Singita resonates so deeply with our guests. There's an authenticity of place at each of our lodges that is not only a

rarity, but touches guests on every level: spiritual, emotional and physical.

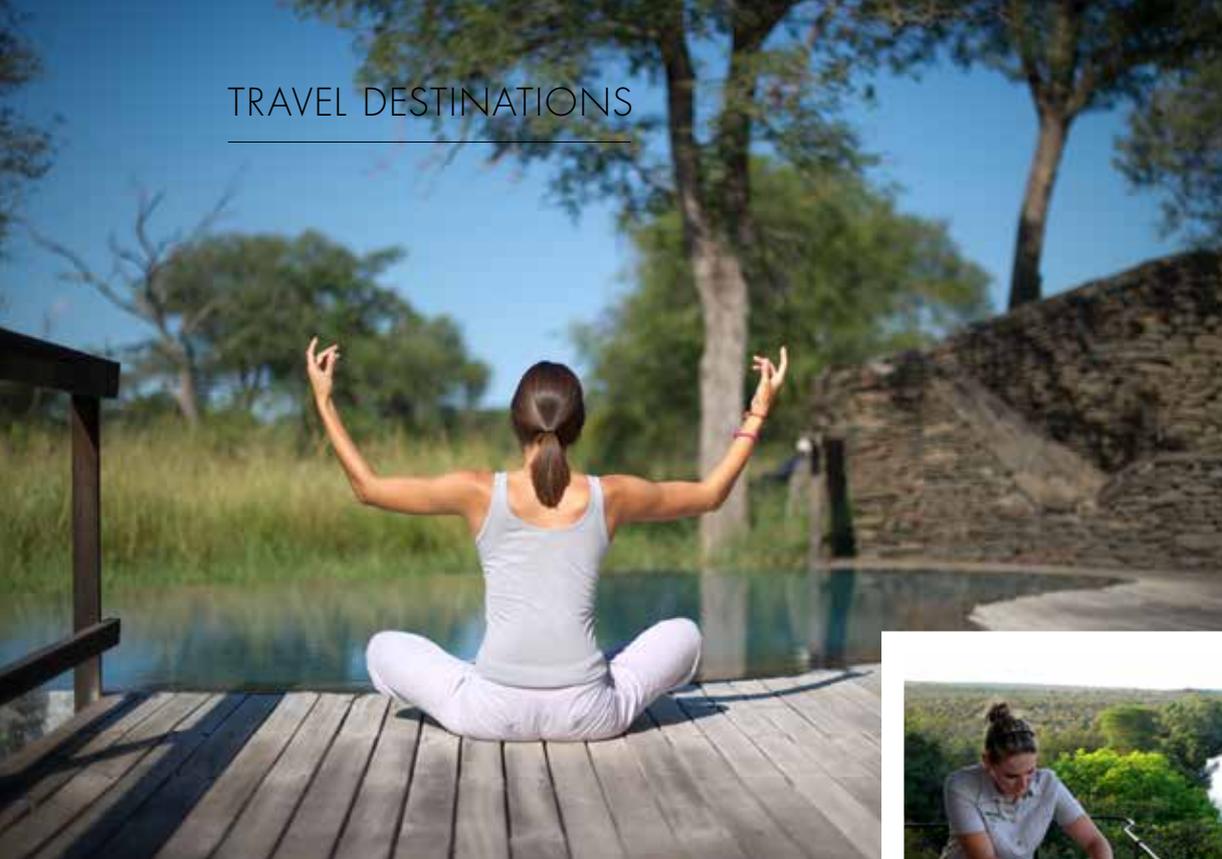
"Being in the wilderness heightens the senses beyond anything that could ever be experienced back at home. People feel good, precisely because they are out of their comfort zone. They have a sense of wellbeing, as if they are participating in something far bigger than themselves."

I, too, was out of my comfort zone, away from erections of the city that prop me up: my yoga class at the gym, my organic bodega on the corner and, of course, my beloved trainer. I had no choice but to reconsider these props and trade them for what Singita was now willing to offer me. Starting with a drive into the wild.

And so the wellness just spreads. From spending time with a game ranger talking about biomimicry, to seeing an anthill and all its complexities, I knew that I was merely plugged into a matrix of the universe and playing out my chosen role. Less Shakespeare and more DSTV *Girls*, I thought.

Speaking to nature's wayfarer, Peter Raimondo, owner of Purely Wild, the system of wellness and all its arteries become so much clearer. He believes the wild shows us that there is a "fabric to the universe". Raimondo currently takes Singita's

TRAVEL DESTINATIONS



Singita Castleton is opening this month in the Kruger National Park, with a renewed focus on wellness. See www.Singita.com for more on this new addition.

internals on walks in their own game lodges, and says everything is in a place where it's meant to be. "Recognising and trusting the implicit direction and containment of life, choices cease, and you will see action as spontaneous and appropriate. With that, whatever pain or joy there may be is also okay." Profound, and perfectly in line with my exploration of wellness and all it seems to encompass.

Returning to the lodge, spa treatments were on my mind. It was time for me to consider my physicality and an unbuttoned mental state right now. The spa menu has been created to complement the wilderness, and seeks to incorporate peace and vibrant energy, to revitalise and nourish guests. I certainly was ready for something like that.

The signature African body ritual, Ndzi Lorhe Africa ("I Dreamed of Africa"), began with a full-body exfoliation, followed by a soothing body wrap, and finished with a balancing full-body massage. Of course, my curiosity was sparked when monkey oranges, part of the calabash family, were used as tools to massage certain pressure points.

And I was wondering what the sustenance would be. Green juices, superfood, berries (including my personal favourite, the goji), health drinks and smoothies, of course.

I headed down to my room, overlooking the handsome river, and a yoga mat awaited me. With that African beam and giver of life setting on the skyline, my sun salutations and stretches somehow feel more meaningful as a holistic part of this bush experience.

And then sleep, that slumber nourished by the sounds of the bush, the silence of the wilderness. Mark Witney, Singita's head of operations, describes the bush's ability to "connect you with nature as the thing that makes people change and transform". And it's a night when everything shuts down, bar a few million stars.



THINK (AND READ A LITTLE MORE)

Morning light, and a quick phone call to my friend Megan de Beyer, a Cape Town change catalyst, who reveals her thoughts on how people are looking for the wild – "a connection to something bigger than themselves". She likens it to thinker Carl Jung, who calls it "one of the paths of healing". And so the penny, or maybe it was a Krugerrand, drops.

In Jeremy Dean's 2013 book *Making Habits, Breaking Habits: Why We Do Things, Why We Don't, and How to Make Any Change Stick*, he discovers (first via Google and then thanks to some hardcore library research) that a habit takes 21 days to form. Unfortunately, I can't stay at Singita for three weeks, but maybe that's beside the point right now.

This 21, a magical number, may be accurate if what you're learning is rather simple, like drinking an extra glass of water. But the more complicated, the longer the learning formation will take. So how long is that proverbial piece of wellness string, then? At what point can I think about wellness less and just get acclimated to the concept?

Wellness can be a habit – very easily so. Perhaps going to Singita every day, or every year, isn't exactly possible for everyone. But the inspiration gained from following a holistic wellness plan, sparked by Singita's example, may take the cul de sac out of the equation and replace it with paths leading to health, happiness and personal satisfaction. I'm reminded of something I was once told: It's not what happens to you, it's what you do with it. Wellness, wherever that means, feels exactly like that to me. ■