

# WATER

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Peter Mandelson

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by Petronella Wyatt

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AMIS?



# THE DREAMERS

It takes a magical sort of place to inspire someone to set up a hotel when they've never done it before. But, from Africa to Antarctica, that's just what these adventurous Brits did. They tell *Tatler* about their incredible journeys

By Daisy Finer



Lunch on the Karoo, South Africa. Below, the swimming-pool at Samara

## Samara, South Africa

## Sarah Tompkins

**Sarah and her financier husband Mark were living in Paris in 1996 when they decided to buy a vast plot in the Karoo, having been captivated by the land on which Samara now sits. They set about procuring all 11 farming ranches in the area, pulling down the fences and giving the 28,000 hectares of private reserve nine years to recover before opening their lodge to guests**

**Why did you decide to set up a safari lodge?** We bought Samara because we fell in love with the area and wanted to do something for land conservation and endangered species. We only opened it to the public after many years of resting the land and restocking it with indigenous game. **What made you choose this location?** It's not only heartstoppingly beautiful, it is so remote that I've never locked a door here. It is an ancient area of South Africa that time forgot. No noise or light or pollution. The night skies are extraordinary, with the Milky Way so close you can almost reach out and touch it.

**Do you have any early safari experiences?** I'd go to the Kruger with my grandparents and parents, so my views were moulded by Londolozi and later Singita. I was

inspired by the passion of the Vartys (of Londolozi) and Luke Bailes (of Singita), who brought a chic idiom to the industry.

**How did you bring the wow factor to Samara?** Safari lodges have become too similar to 'New York apartments in a tree', to borrow a phrase I once heard. What we have tried to recreate here is a laidback style – real *Out of Africa* within South Africa. All the artefacts are African; everything was made in our nearest village, 33 miles away, by local craftsmen.

**Was it hard getting the lodge up and running?** Yes, largely because no one had ever heard of our area. Our marketing had to be extra-special as we were breaking new ground.

**What are you most proud of?** It may sound self-promoting but the fact that we have so many return visitors. We are only in our fifth year and already we have a couple who have visited Samara five times. Our guests say they leave feeling like they are part of the extended family.

**Any tricky moments?** The pronunciation of food that they've never heard of can be difficult for local staff – mange tout pronounced 'mangie tow' can leave guests a little befuddled.

Ring 00 27 49 891 0558 or visit [samara.co.za](http://samara.co.za).





Lodges at  
Kapawi in the  
Ecuadorean  
rainforest

## Kapawi, Ecuador

Zoë Tryon

**The daughter of Australian fashion designer Kanga and Anthony (Lord) Tryon, family friends of Prince Charles, this eco-warrior couldn't now be further removed from her grand Wiltshire roots. After studying anthropology in Sydney, she went to Ecuador, where she met Kistupa Peas, leader of the Achuar people, who invited her to work with the tribe to set up Kapawi, a lodge deep in the rainforest**

**Where is your original homeland?** The Durnford Valley, Wiltshire. I am a nomad really, but I've been based in Ecuador for three and a half years.

**How did you get involved with Kapawi?** The Achuar are the natural custodians of one of the most stunning, biodiverse places on earth. They formed Kapawi to protect their lands from oil development and to give outsiders a chance to experience their forest and their culture. I leapt at the chance to support this vision. I went there to help teach them, but they taught me far more about life – and I didn't even speak their language.

**What do you love about the location?** The isolation – it's a three-week walk from the nearest road and only accessible by small plane. It is in the heart of pristine, primary rainforest. You are completely surrounded by life – a typical four-square-mile patch contains up to 1,500 species of flowering plants, 750 tree species, 125 mammal species, 400 bird species, 100 reptile species, 60 amphibian species and 150 butterfly species.

**What kind of place do you want Kapawi to be?** Kapawi is unique in that it is a world-class eco-lodge, and yet guests also meet with and learn from the Achuar. The guides give people a once-in-a-lifetime experience, from spotting rare birds, to telling cosmological tales and demonstrating how to use plants for curing all kinds of illnesses.

Everyone piles into the bar after canoeing in the lagoons, fishing for piranha or visiting the communities. They are full of stories and laughter.

**What are you most proud of?** The Achuar commitment to Kapawi and their rainforest. I know it was incredibly hard for them to learn how to run a lodge in the standard to which guests are accustomed. Warriors and hunters now work in the kitchens, clean rooms and act as guides. For a people whose houses have no walls – just a roof, no electricity or running water – and who can find everything they need in the forest, it has been very challenging.

**What do you miss about England?** My wonderful family. Being able to lie on the grass in summer (without being eaten alive). The countryside, the seasons, bluebells, pub lunches in winter. The humour, weekends with friends in the country... I better stop or I'll get too homesick.

**What do you miss when you are away from Kapawi?** I miss the forest the most – the sounds of millions of insects, frogs, nocturnal monkeys, birds calling to each other at dusk, the electric-blue flash of a Morpho butterfly gliding through the canopy. I miss being able to stand in the warm rain under a huge banana leaf, with my Achuar friends. I miss lying in a hammock listening to stories of how the potoo bird came to be or of the Tsunki spirits beneath the rivers.

Ring 00 5932 600 9333 or visit [kapawi.com](http://kapawi.com).

## Isle de France, St Barth's

### The Reverend Charles & Mandie Vere Nicoll

**Charles and Mandie first came to St Barth's on their honeymoon in 1985. When the Isle de France hotel came up for sale in 2000, Charles quit his job as a finance director at the Regal Hotel group, persuaded a few friends to invest with him and swapped Berkshire for the West Indies. He retrained with the church and now juggles his time between acting as the island's resident Anglican vicar and running its smartest hotel**

**How did this all come about?** The first time I visited St Barth's I ordered a Planter's punch at the bar of the Isle de France, turned round and saw Elle Macpherson sitting next to me. That sold it to me. We'd holidayed here for many years – it was my favourite hotel in the world on my favourite island in the world, so I decided to buy it!

**What do you love about the island?** St Barth's has French culture and beautiful French women. It feels like going to St Tropez but in the Caribbean. Our hotel is on the best beach on the island – Flamands – with the most beautiful white sand and stunning blue sea and the best people-watching on the planet.

**How did you put your stamp on the place?**

The hotel was already open when we bought it but we have added a number of new suites and a spa. We've basically sexed it up but made sure that it remains very unstuffy, casual and laidback. Our personality is very much there in the details – as wonderful as the spa treatments at Isle de France are, it's the homemade ice cream that everyone raves about.

**What's it like for the guests?** Stressed-out guests arrive and seem totally neurotic. We aim to change their mindset without their knowing – 24 hours later they're completely chilled out. A lot of celebrities turn into normal people when they're here.

**What are the best moments about running a hotel?** Sharing a bottle of crisp white burgundy with smiling guests. And then seeing them return year after year.

**What are your favourite hotels?** I am a real fusspot (my manageress tells me that I was one of the most difficult guests when I stayed here before buying it), but I like JK Place on Capri, 60 Thompson, New York, and, 10 years ago, the K Club Barbuda. □

Ring 00 59 590 27 6181 or visit [isle-de-france.com](http://isle-de-france.com).

It feels like  
going to  
St Tropez but  
in the  
Caribbean

Seaview from Isle de  
France, St Barth's

