

# HAPPY VALLEY

The Hadzabe tribe of Tanzania live a Stone Age existence, hunting, foraging and eschewing all material goods. It's one hell of a way to live

By CHRISTA D'SOUZA

**LOOK OUT, KID**  
The Yaeda valley, northern Tanzania, with the region's characteristic stone kopjes

There is a palpable excitement in camp. A young fellow named Mwapo has managed to bag a bush hyrax and by the looks of it, she's pregnant. In the dry

season, when animals congregate around water sources, you can easily snag an impala or a warthog, or even a baboon—the latter a particular favourite of the Hadzabe tribe. But now, it being the hot, rainy season, pickings are slim. While the women and girls cluster around cauldrons of boiling water, in the shade of a baobab tree, Mwapo and his buddies find a clearing, build another small fire and sling the swollen little bush hyrax—kind of a cross between a guinea pig and a lemming—on to it for a couple of seconds to singe the fur. Mwapo then shaves it and puts it back on the fire, lightly toasting each side, then with his handcrafted knife makes a split in the sac. Out come the innards, oozing forth like great creamy slugs, followed by—hurrah!—a foetal sac containing two baby bush hyraxes. Mwapo slashes that open, then slings them back on the fire after smashing their tiny heads to extract the brains and generously gesturing to the others to dig in. There is no point in being sentimental. And besides, this is nothing. I should be there when a leopard tortoise is bagged, they tell me. Those are roasted alive, and when they try to escape are simply kicked back in.

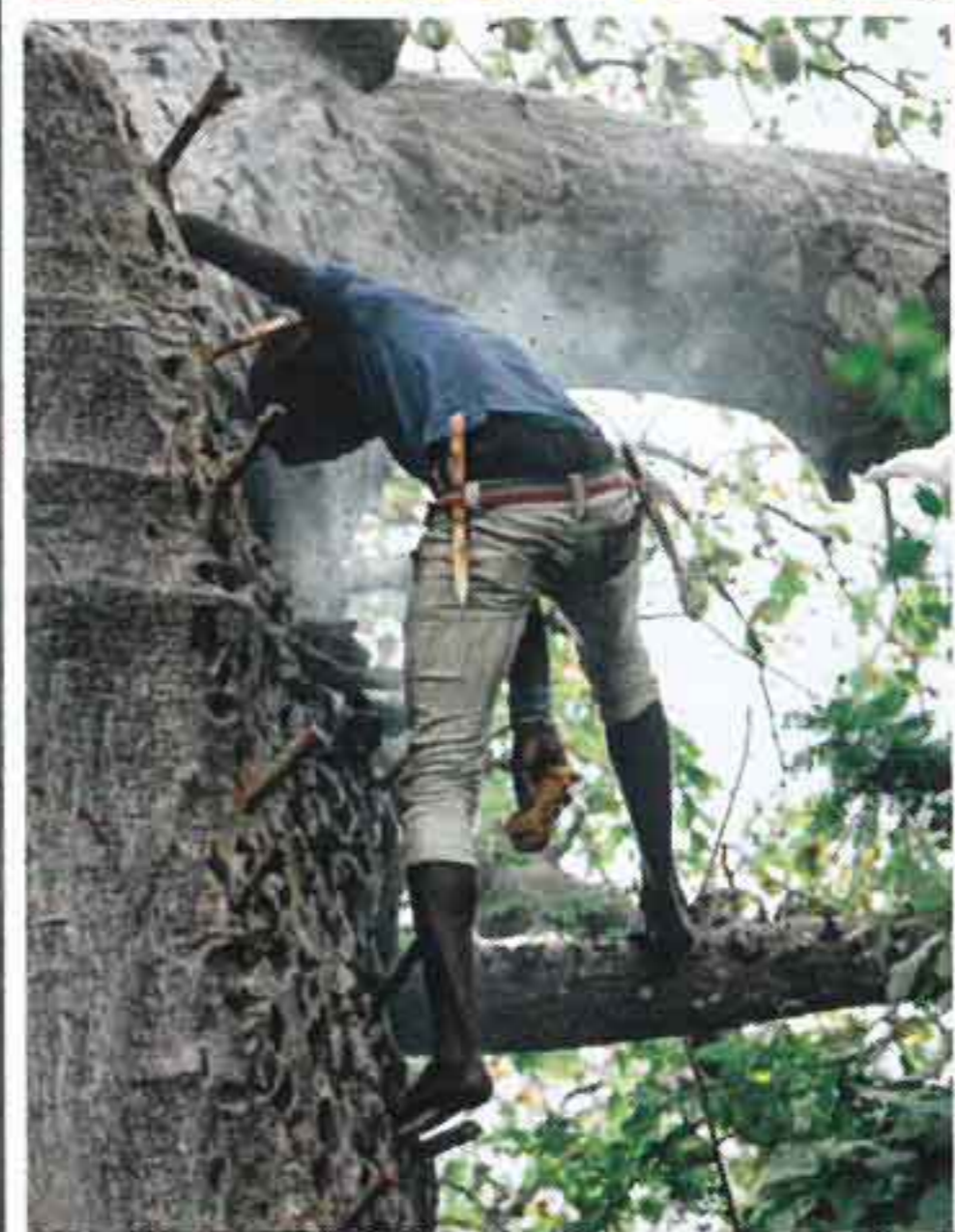
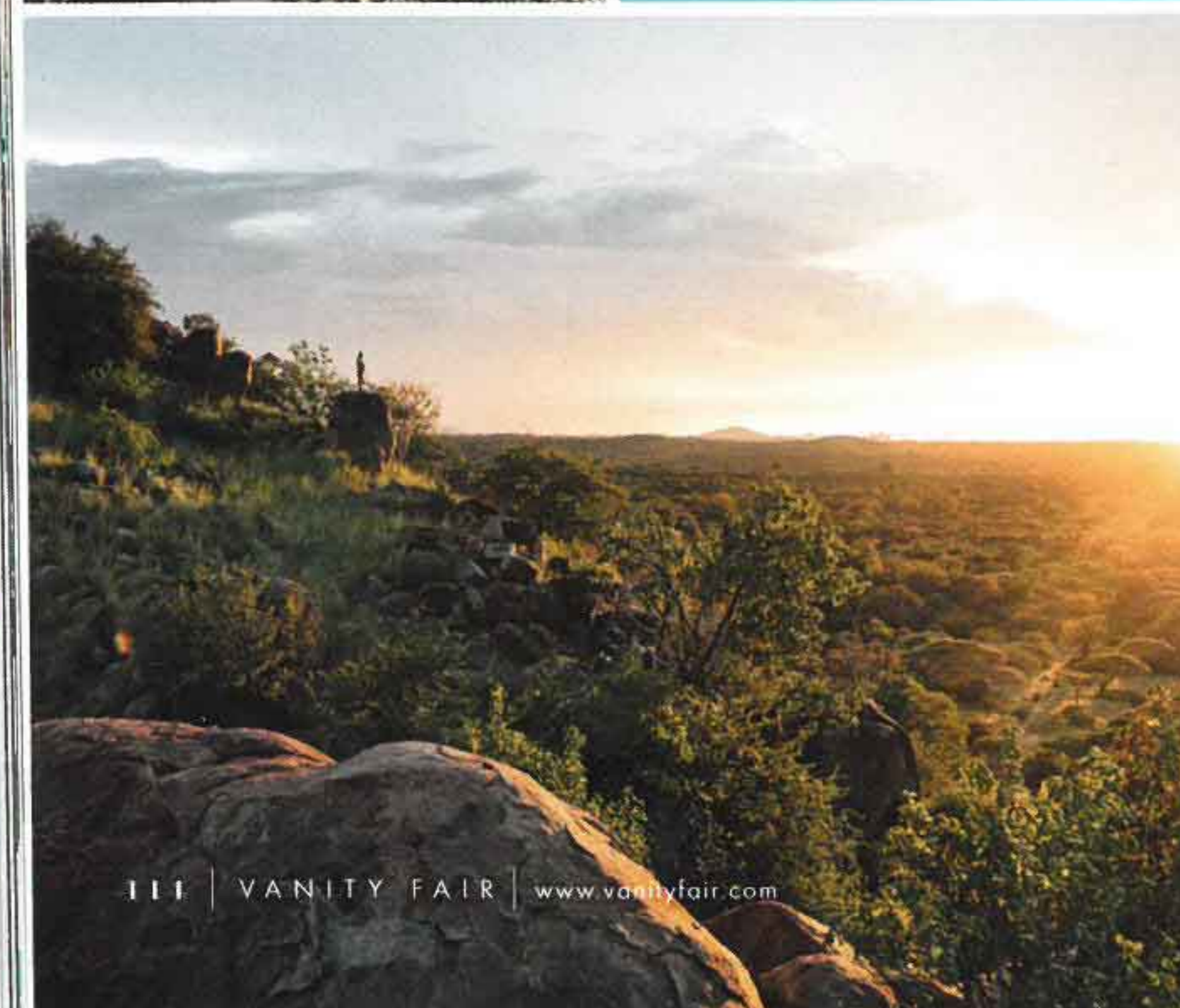
Welcome to the Hadzabe of northern Tanzania, which is—along with the Aché in Paraguay and the !Kung of the Kalahari—one of the last nomadic hunter-gatherer tribes in the world. If you want to know how we lived in the Stone Age, how the real Flintstones fared, this is it. It's the reason

why the Hadza people are such catnip to social anthropologists and jaded vacationers.

Bored of the whole eco-luxury experience with the white starched linen picnics in the bush and the dull-eyed greeting ceremonies in full “authentic” costume? Sick of the kids getting absolutely *nothing* out of it? Then this might be your thing. But if it is, you'd better hurry. There are fewer than 1,000 members of the community left, and because of rival tribesmen encroaching on their lands and illegal poaching—and, of course, the ineluctable pull of modernity—their numbers are fast dwindling.



**SHARP PRACTICE**  
 Clockwise from top left: the Hadza's formidable arrows, regularly re-tempered in an open fire; a small boy wields a bow and arrow; the sharp pointed sticks used by women for tuber foraging; Regina, a tribeswoman, in traditional headdress; sunrise over the plain; rubbing sticks together to light a fire. Centre: the hunt for honey. Benja climbs a baobab tree using handmade twig pegs to reach a beehive. He is pictured smoking out the bees with lit torches and will use an axe to remove the hive



Inevitably, a degree of modernity has been introduced into the Hadza community. Through a compulsory government directive, children go to school (though many, forced to go to boarding school, become so homesick that they run away, back to the bush). Some have found employment with local farmers, one or two have even gone on to university and become teachers at the local schools. But despite being forced to adapt and losing almost 90 per cent of their homelands, there are still 300-400 of them who still live almost entirely the way they did in the late Stone Age, before agriculture and farming came along, hunting with home-made bows and arrows, foraging for tubers, berries and honey, literally making fire by rubbing two sticks together. They have no medicine, running water or electricity. Although some of the younger members may have cellphones, most information is transmitted via "foot telegraph" between camps.

Asides from Tausi and Elena, there is Hadiya, a pretty, smiley woman married to Mahia. Then there is Herta, Elena's mother, to whom the baby is constantly passed, back and forth, the moment it struggles or utters the slightest whimper. Herta has three grandchildren in total. Once they are partially weaned, she says, on her back they

expensive material goods such as cellphones and bicycles—how, they reason, do you share a cellphone or a bicycle without engendering resentment? That's another characteristic of the Hadza. They hate confrontation and will do anything to avoid it, making them rather ineffectual guardians of their homelands. When there is a disagreement in camp, meanwhile, rather than argue it out, one of the parties will migrate to another camp until the tension simmers down, which seems to me a supremely civilized method of resolution.

They are, like most primitive tribes, non-sexist by nature, with women always participating in the decision-making. Tasks are naturally allocated by gender, though: the women do the foraging of berries and tubers; the men do the hunting and honey gathering. As we all prepare for the daily foraging expedition, Herta takes the baby from her daughter and straps it on to her back with a kanga. On the way, berries are picked and stored in kangas or eaten. Crucial to foraging the tubers that are a staple of the tribe's diet is a *ts'apale*—a special pointed digging stick each woman makes for herself and that is initially used to tap the ground. There is a specific sound that resonates, apparently, when there are tubers underneath the surface, and the older

petticoats. Mika shrugs. Weed is better than alcohol, and alcoholism has become a big problem for the Hadza in recent years, with their spirit of choice the locally produced Konyagi. You'll often come across miniatures of the stuff scattered across the bush.

By the third day, the lack of creature comforts has become somewhat less appalling. Not having Wi-Fi, electricity, running water or mirrors is strangely liberating. And I speak as someone who couldn't be less of a free spirit or a happy camper if she tried. It is nice, too, going to bed soon after the sun sets and waking just as it rises—as though I'm fully in tune with my circadian rhythms, sleeping exactly as God meant me to.

The following day I'm out on a honey run led by Piwa and Benja, an extraordinary-looking young man in a tattered Arsenal T-shirt, ragged diamanté-studded jeans and a belt buckle that, on closer inspection, is decorated with a hologram of Michelle Obama and the kids. Benja is whistling—and lo! The honeyguide bird whistles back, leading us to an almost imperceptible little waxy nub high up on a baobab tree, behind which, hopefully, is a hive bearing honey. Benja gets to work immediately, creating climbing pegs out of twigs to hammer into the bark. They've got to be the right twigs, too: being a succulent, baobab has soft bark. As Mika explains, many of the younger guys, in their haste to get their sugar fix, fall to their death because of dodgy pegs. Piwa, meanwhile, lights home-made torches to smoke the bees out (the smoke makes the bees drowsy). Up the baobab Benja goes, then, with his smoking torches and his axe. Despite getting stung maybe 10, 20 times, and groaning with pain from the smoke, he is undeterred. Not only do the Hadza love honey, they can also use it as currency at the local market. We're in luck: it's a massive honeycomb dripping with honey and larvae. Not a particular fan of honey? Me neither, but this truly is the nectar of the gods.

Back home, safe and sound with my Starbucks, my starched sheets, my Poilâne sourdough and so forth, I find myself missing all sorts of things. The taste of that honey. Those banoffee-ish kongorobi berries. But also, weirdly, the act of zipping myself at night into my tiny little tent and falling instantly to sleep in my tiny little camp bed with the rain pounding over my head. If there is a next time, maybe I might even brave a bit of bush hyrax. Hanging with the Hadza can change a person in all sorts of ways. □

## EXTREME MELLOWNESS IS ONE OF THE HADZA'S DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS. MAYBE IT'S THE PRODIGIOUS AMOUNT OF MARIJUANA THAT THEY SMOKE

go. How different to the lot of a Western baby, left to cry alone in its cot for hours courtesy of draconian feeding schedules, or plonked in a nursery before he or she can talk. This is one of the reasons why there is no word for depression in the Hadza language—I'm sure of it.

The men, meanwhile, are gathered a couple of feet away and are doing what they do best: shooting the breeze while melting their spearheads in the fire to re-sharpen the tips and cough-cough-coughing as they inhale the remnants of someone's stash in their handmade stone pipes. Hadza culture is such that everything, but everything—weed, meat and all—must be shared. This is partially why they do not like to own

you are the better you get at recognizing it. Digging for the tubers is harder and less fun than it might look. As the day heats up, the stingless wasps become more and more insistent and I feel like that character from *Peanuts* with a halo of them buzzing round and round my head. I notice Hadiya has bits of leaf stuck in her ears, and think that, if I come out again, I might bring some beekeeper helmets with me.

Extreme mellowness is one of the Hadza's defining characteristics. Maybe it is the prodigious amounts of marijuana they smoke. Oh boy, do the Hadza love their weed, the women storing it in little knots in their kangas, not unlike the way Marie Antoinette sewed her diamonds into her

So here I am with Mike Peterson, our guide from Dorobo Safaris, whose American-born father Daudi, the son of a Lutheran missionary, has been campaigning for Hadza rights since the 1960s. A blond blue-eyed Mowgli wearing flip-flops made out of car tires, Mike, 27, was brought up in the bush with his two brothers, speaks fluent Swahili and even a smattering of Hadzabe, the local dialect, characterized by three distinct “click consonants”.

The drive from Arusha that we took, past Lake Tlawi, up through the the Rift escarpment, was seven hours long, part road, part dirt track, and peppered along the way with Maasai and Datoga tribesmen chivvying along their herds. Just 50 years ago the land would have been liberally sprinkled with giraffe, rhino, zebra and lion, but 75 per cent of the wildlife has been decimated by safari hunters and competing tribesmen protecting their cattle. It is because of the Datoga clearing the land to raise their animals and plant maize that game, the Hadzabe's only source of protein, has become increasingly scarce. They narrowly escaped complete eviction in 2007 when the Tanzanian Government considered selling off their lands as a private hunting reserve for the Royal Family of Abu Dhabi. An international campaign spearheaded by Daudi and a coalition of NGOs forced the government to withdraw the deal. Illegal hunting is still going on, though. Twenty minutes from camp, Mike pointed out a lone gazelle about 200 metres away frantically running parallel to our car, a signal that drive-by poachers—another potential nail in the hunter-gatherer coffin—were at play.

Our temporary camp is on the western side of the Gideru ridge and overlooks the Ngorongoro Highlands. Echoing the Hadza tradition for respecting the land, we take up as little space as possible: my tent is of about the same size and grandeur as the one my 18-year-old takes to Glasto. The “loo” is a seat with a hole dug under it, set up in a canvas cubicle; the shower, a portable solar-powered jobbie in another slightly larger canvas cubicle. In other words, if you are the type who needs a lock on the door and a scented candle to “relax”, this could be a challenge.

At sunset we climb a clump of *kopies*—giant granite plugs left behind millions of years ago in volcanic eruptions—overlooking the lake and the Rift Escarpment. We are joined by Piwa, one of the male elders, a nimble, wiry figure with his raggedy red

beanie, and knobby knees and sawn-off thumb (it had to be severed after a gangrenous infection). He must be 70-plus, but he scales the turd-like rock formations as quickly and gracefully as a young man. With him are his precious bow and arrows, each intricately secured with buffalo or giraffe sinew and decorated with baboon tails. When he's out hunting, the tips of the arrows will be dipped in poison harvested from the sap of the desert rose shrub, enough to fell a giraffe or a lion, though it may take them half a day to actually keel over and die. Lighting up one of the handcrafted stone pipes they all carry—one for weed, one for tobacco—he takes a massive drag and rheumily surveys the landscape before him. As an elder, he remembers well the days when the bush below us was plentifully scattered with game. He likes the taste of rhino best, because it has a lot of fat on it, but lion is good too, if a little mushy. Its fat is often

used for medicine. Also with us are Mahia (or Yassandede—Hadza slang for pothead—as he is nicknamed), Regina, a beautiful girl in her teens who has attended secondary school, and her friend Maggie, who is a little older and has two kids and a husband back home in Bukulu. My first night I meet none of the older women, possibly because they are too busy looking after their daughters' children. Nobody seems particularly fazed or even interested by the presence of another crazy *mzungu* (that's me, the white person). But then they've seen us come and go. Take Jeff, the microbiome scientist who came out a couple of years ago with his turkey baster, taking samples of all their poos. (The Hadza are reputed to have the healthiest guts in the world, with the highest levels of bacterial diversity, and therefore their faecal matter is of particular interest to nutritional science.)

The following day, we are up at 6am when the air is still cool and the sun is yet to rise. On average the Hadza rarely work more than three or four hours a day—going out hunting or foraging only early in the morning and early in the evening, and consuming what they find almost immediately. They do not see the point of rearing cattle or growing corn because their culture depends on that immediate return. In that sense, they are the ultimate example of living in the present, never hoarding, always believing that the following day, there will be enough to go round. The opposite, in fact, of Western society, which is why they find it so difficult to integrate, to compete in any kind of conventional work sphere, to hold down “normal” jobs.

Despite a deep-seated fear of insects, and a low- to mid-level of panic that a hyena or honey badger (the fearless little bastards that go for wildebeests' scrota) might smell the protein bars at the bottom of my bag and dig its way into my tent, I find I have slept well and dreamt cinematically. After drinking the delicious locally produced coffee out of plastic cups round the fire

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while watching dawn break, we embark on foot on the 3km journey to Bukulu, a mere stretching of legs to the average Hadza tribesperson who is used to walking 50km or more a day. When we arrive, a group of women, including Tausi and Elena, a young-looking girl in a yellow T-shirt who is suckling a child, are all sitting outside a hut shaped like an upside-down nest, constructed of twigs and long grass, its gaping holes plugged up with bits of cardboard and material. These are the temporary shelters the Hadza, with their exemplary invisible footprints, are known for, melting away to nothing when they leave camp. Despite the encroaching heat of the day, a fire has been lit, and on its burning embers is a small bowl of murky-looking water, collected from a source at least an hour's walk away. We are going into the hot rainy season, but water is trickier to procure than ever, not least because of the lowered water table courtesy of the interloping Datoga and their cattle.

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**GAME PLAN**  
Clockwise from left: Piwa, an elder of the Hadza tribe, with his bow made with animal sinew, and handmade arrows, which are poison-tipped for hunting; re-sharpening spears and mending arrows around the fire; the vitamin C-rich fruit of the baobab tree; young mother Elena with her daughter; raw honey; Benja, a member of the tribe, climbs a baobab to forage for honey; a picnic by a watering hole. Centre: Mike Peterson of Dorobo Safaris finds the Yaeda valley on a map of Tanzania

