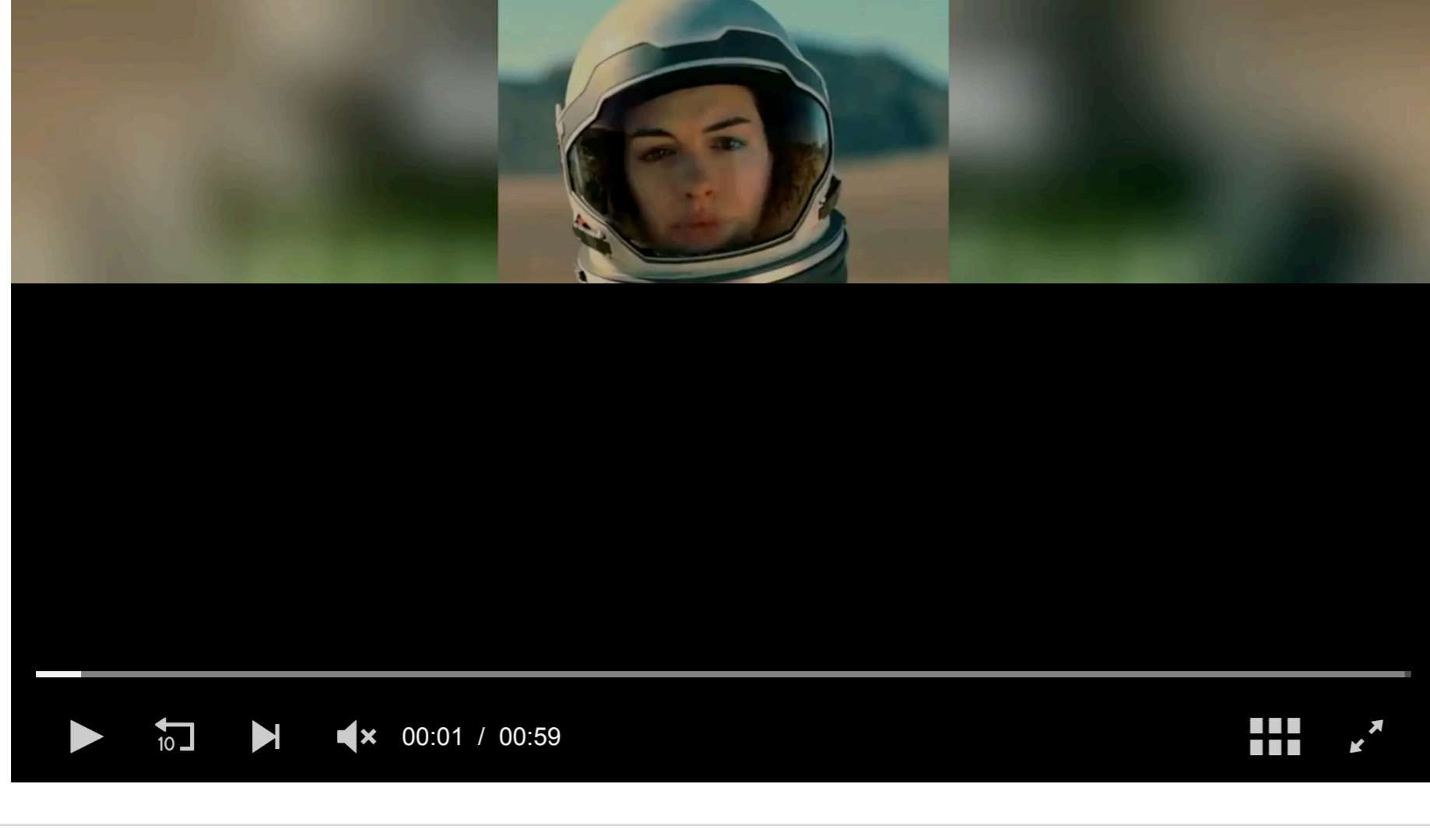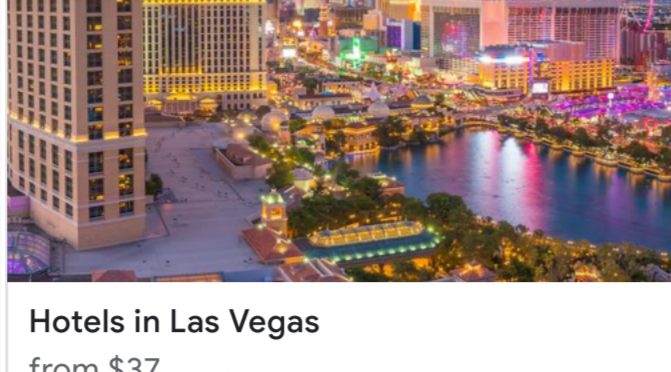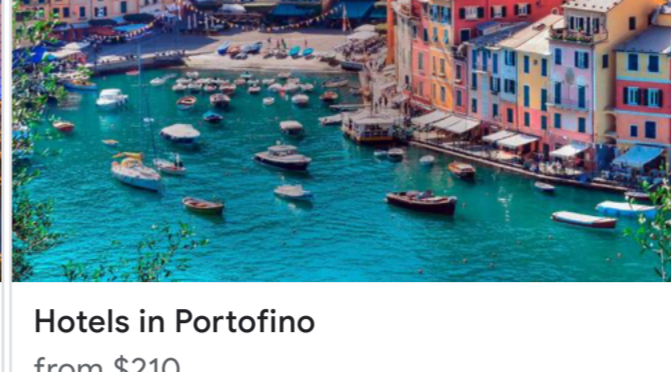# Edward Norton and the Maasai: A Mission of Conservation

Reinventing the Outdoors Contest: An Edward Norton role you might not have heard of: fundraiser to protect the treasures of the Maasai wilderness.

By Amara Holstein
April 9, 2011

UPDATED! Launched on Monday April 4, GOOD and the 2011 Ford Explorer will be devoting six weeks to the Reinventing the Outdoors Contest, which showcases amazing organizations like this one that are redefining the way we live, work, and play outside. Check in every day for a new story about the people, celebrities, and programs behind each organization. Help your favorite group win the $50,000 grand prize by voting for them starting Monday, May 16 through Friday, May 20.
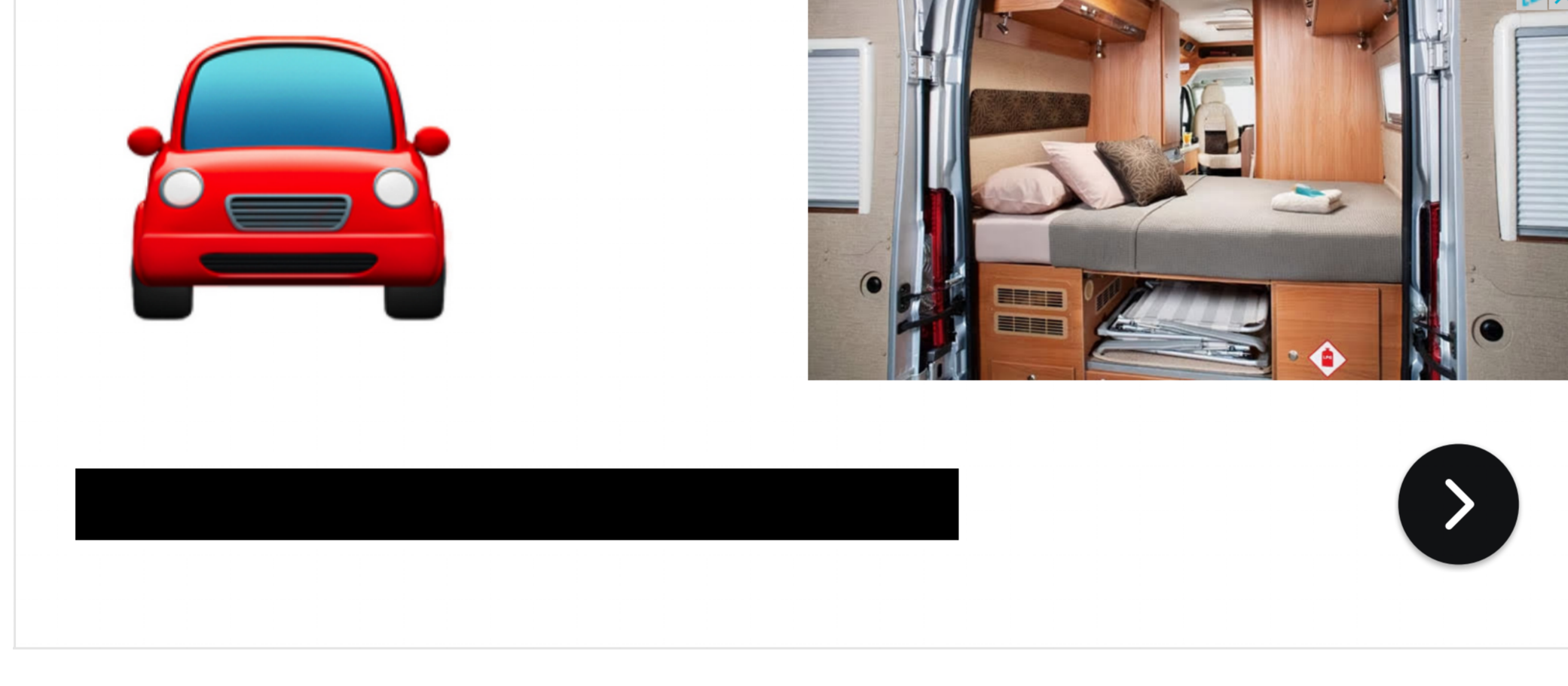
Edward Norton's face is instantly recognizable thanks to starring roles in movies such as *American History X*, *Fight Club*, and *The Incredible Hulk*. But what you may not be aware of is his dedication to charity work—and that he's currently the president of the U.S. arm of the Maasai Wilderness Conservation Trust. Norton became involved in the Trust a decade ago after visiting its eco-lodge, Campi ya Kanzi, as a guest. He developed a friendship with its founder, Luca Belpietro. Impressed by the nonprofit's dedication to environmental protection, he agreed to head up the U.S. office a few years ago. Volunteering is not a new passion for him; Norton has long been committed to conservation. "[The environment] was a longstanding passion of my father," he said in an interview with the Public Broadcasting Service in 2005. "My brother and I spent vacations working for the Park Service in the Grand Canyon....It's part of what we grew up in."

In the past few years, he's been busy raising money for the Maasai, with several noteworthy examples. In 2006, Norton teamed with Cartier, the luxury brand, on the Charity Love Bracelet. Celebrities were invited to represent their nonprofit of choice, and Cartier donated $100 from the sale of each bracelet to the chosen charity. For Norton, the MWCT was an easy pick, and his bracelet with a green band represented the colors of the Kenyan area that people helped support.

And when it came to walking the walk, Norton literally ran. Along with three Maasai and thirty other supporters, Norton took on the 2009 New York Marathon to raise support for the MWCT cause. He updated people on his training and news via a Twitter feed and put out the word to celebrity friends to join in the event (Alanis Morissette, David Blaine, and MWCT founder Belpietro were among those who ran for the MWCT team). The result was an astonishing $1.2 million raised for the Trust, which topped up the nonprofit's 2010 budget and helped put money towards the $1 million needed for 2011. Oh yes—and his race time was a very respectable 3:48.

As a result of that enormously successful grassroots fundraising effort, Norton helped create an online fundraising site called Crowdrise, where people can give as little—or as much—as they want to their favorite nonprofits, as well as starting events and donation sites for other worthy organizations. Norton's MWCT page on that site has raised more than $11,000 so far, and the donations keep rolling in. "His leadership and guidance towards supporting the Trust are invaluable," says Belpietro.

And for Norton, what is the appeal of the MWCT—and why support a nonprofit literally a continent away? "The world increasingly relies on many traditional communities like the Maasai to protect the ecological treasures that exist within the land that they own," explained Norton on Crowdrise. "Figuring out how people in developing countries can thrive and grow without destroying some of the world's most important natural resources is going to be one of the great challenges of the 21st century."
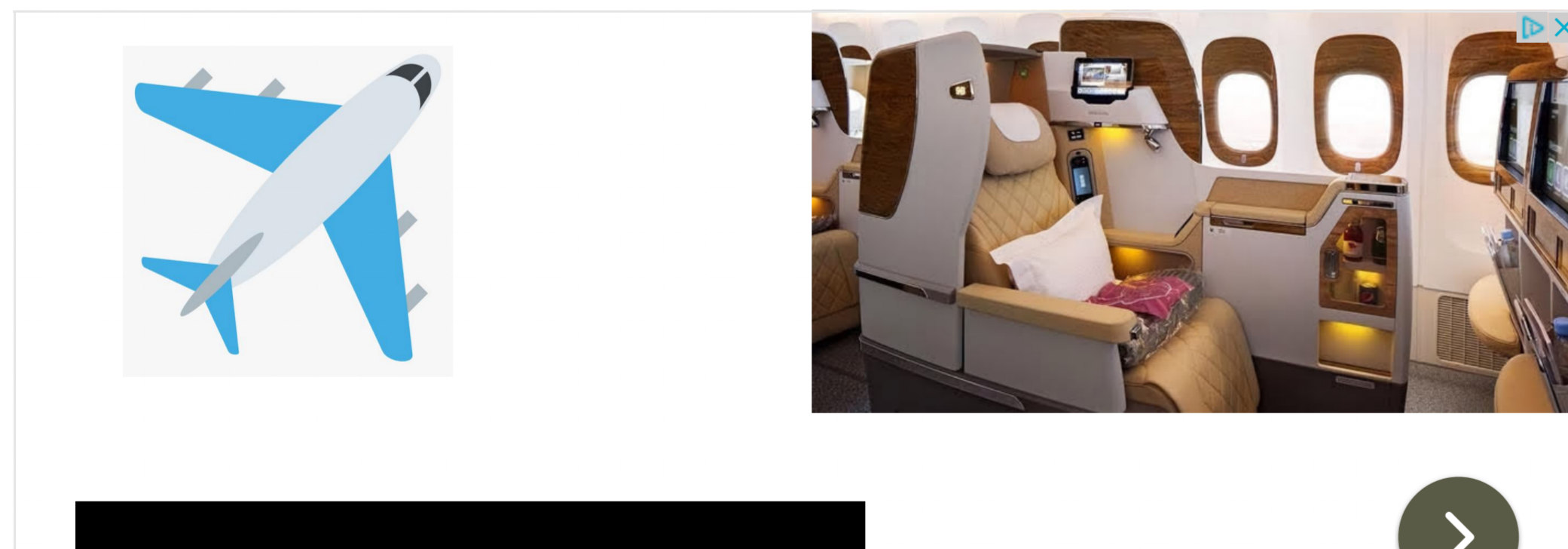
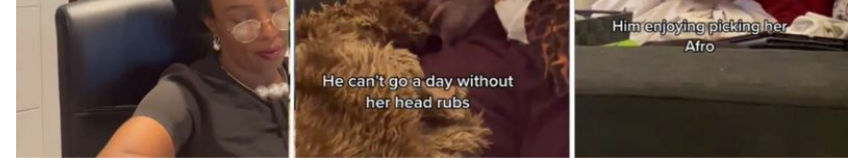*Image 1 and 3 from Crowdrise. Image 2 from Campi ya Kanzi.*
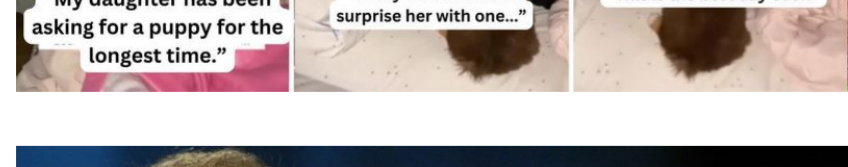
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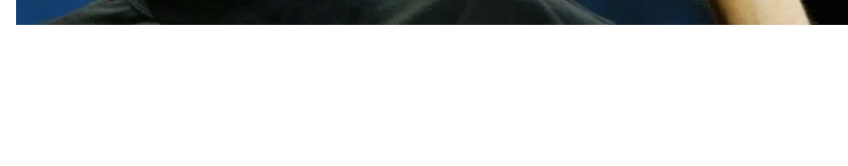
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