

ForbesLife

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Shake the Tree

THE
FORBESLIFE
GIFT GUIDE

SAFARI
JONES:
NEW WAYS
OF LOOKING
AT AFRICA

DOING
ST. BARTH'S

DRESS
IT UP:
ENCHANTED
EVENING
WEAR

◀ THE
MILLION-
DOLLAR
CHRISTMAS
TREE
(SEE PAGE 7)



ESCAPES

Safari Joules

NEW
WAYS
OF
LOOKING
AT
AFRICA

Clockwise from top: Dusk settles on Namibia's Damaraland Camp; elephants roam near South Africa's Camp Jubaleni; the Delaire Graff restaurant in South Africa's wine country; a white rhino sizes up visitors to Kenya's Enasoit; coming in for a landing at the top of Kalambo Falls near Tanzania's Lupita Island; rolling on the Chobe River aboard the *Zambezi Queen*.



ESCAPES



Northern Kenya

Kenya's wildlife and rugged topography have lured visitors for centuries. Yet huge swathes of the country, populated chiefly by nomadic tribes and expat landowners, are still overlooked by mass tourism. North of Nairobi, for example, the lush, farm-laced hills gradually give way to the semiarid landscape of the Laikipia District, 2 million acres framed to the east by Mount Kenya, to the south by the Aberdare Mountains, and to the west by the fossil-rich Great Rift Valley.

This was the region Will Jones and his Journeys by Design zeroed in on when charged with developing an itinerary for "overlooked Kenya." Jones moved to Africa as an infant, founded Ethiopia's first community-managed nature preserve, and calls upon old friends and business colleagues to craft custom itineraries for his clients. (Ralph Lauren's visit preceded mine.) The country's expat community is more closely knit than my high school graduating class.

A quick private charter flight from Wilson airport in Nairobi dropped us deep into the heart of the wild: the 62,000-acre Lewa Conservancy. All but 14,000 of Lewa's acres are managed by the area's conservation-minded landowners—the rest is national forestland. Game is absurdly plentiful here: We saw the Big Five on our first evening, including a pair of lions who

began mating loudly in front of us. Sirikoi tented camp, in the middle of the conservancy, was built in a wetlands area, and animals casually strolled by on their way to a nearby watering hole. (Sheba, an orphaned cheetah, enjoyed stretching out on the dhurries on the patio and knocking over wineglasses at dinner.) Sirikoi's four luxury tents and two cottages have king-size beds, terra-cotta fireplaces, and ample bathrooms with blessedly abundant hot water. (The camp operates on solar power.)

As well-appointed as Sirikoi's tented suites are, I never felt cut off from the outdoors. Although sometimes accessibility has its flip side—late one night, as those same randy lions repeated their romp on what felt like my front yard, I had to suppress the urge to yell, "Get a room!" realizing that the nearest room was, well, my own.

The game-viewing checklist fulfilled, we turned to other explorations. A morning horseback ride provided excellent bird-watching; a lengthy, exceptionally bumpy jeep ride reminded us just how harsh and remote this terrain is even in the best of times. And the best of times this is not: The ill effects of a years-long drought have been exacerbated by the tradition of grazing herd animals indiscriminately over a large region, so that topsoil never replenishes. The jeep ride brought us to the Masai *menyatta* (camp) of Il Ngwesi, where I watched village elders play the strategic "counting game" with beans and pebbles and attempted unsuccessfully to glean the principles



From top: A porch at Enasoit overlooking the plains and Lolldaiga Hills; a resident feline.

ESCAPES

behind it. Although this is still a functioning village, some young Masai are beginning to leave the countryside for Nairobi, and I was struck by the number of cell phones among inhabitants.

To prove that different modes of transportation are necessary to fully appreciate the bush, Jones provided a Eurocopter AS350 B3, piloted by military-trained Chris Stewart and owned by a Norwegian shipping magnate who also has a 5,000-acre property, Enasoit, some 25 miles west of Sirikoi, near Lewa. The six-cabin property, available for rental only as a whole, evokes American ranch living: wide-open landscape, salt licks, watering holes, and a Western design aesthetic. (The cabins were built as temporary quarters while a larger home was under construction, but the owner liked them so much he kept them and ditched the house altogether.) Enasoit's pleasures come from its walking safaris and the access provided by the chopper. Ours for three days, we used it to swoop into a canyon for a picnic lunch on the banks of the Ewaso Nyiro River and inspected the jaw-dropping Ololokwe mesa in the Mathews Range of the Rift Valley (2,000 feet higher than any nearby peak, it's impossible to climb except by camel). We then landed on a ledge of another peak, where Stewart and Pete Glover, Enasoit's manager, were keen to show us the flora: the dominant podo tree, 250-foot cedars, and cycads, a prehistoric cross between ferns and palm trees. I felt like I'd awakened in *The Land of the Lost*.

One early-morning buzz around snow-topped Mount Kenya later, we landed near a glacial lake for a bracing bit of fly-fishing. Stewart bid us adieu when we landed near the banks of the Ewaso Nyiro River further north at Lemarti's Camp, run by

designer Anna Trzebinski and husband Loyapan Lemarti, a Samburu from Karisia Hills. Best known in fashion circles for her peacock-feather pashmina shawls, the German-born Trzebinski brings a flamboyant sense of style to the camp—"our home in the bush," as she refers to it. Part of the Koiya group ranch, which belongs to some 1,500 Samburu, Lemarti's is luxury without pretension. Each of the six platformed tents and outdoor bathroom areas outdoes the next, with chaise longues; kerosene lamps; tables carved from the wood of wrecked dhows and inlaid with ivory, bone, and shells; and an array of hide rugs. The equally appealing mess tent invites visitors to spend the day simply moving from cushion to cushion, and neighbors wander in for a drink and a chat—about the nearby elephant conservancy or the latest political gossip.

Although there's no electricity or plumbing to speak of, Lemarti's somehow feels posh. The favored mode of exploration is the guided walk: Lemarti or his Samburu cohort Boniface, armed with only a spear, leads visitors on journeys that can last from two hours to five days. We set out on our own during the late afternoon, ambling through yet another dry riverbed, and wound up at the top of a windswept peak at sunset: Lemarti and Boniface building a fire, Trzebinski embracing and whispering to her young daughter, Tacha, relaxed conversation, aperitifs on offer—and a communal sense of wonder. —LORRAINE CADEMARTORI

 Journeys by Design's platinum service includes at-home visits to clients to help craft a suitable bespoke itinerary. From \$50,000, all inclusive. 212-568-7639, journeysbydesign.com

Bringing the outside in at Lemarti's: enormous open-air bathrooms (right) and elegantly appointed tents (below). A Samburu warrior (far right), known by his red shuka, or robe, with his bride.

