

Ahead of the game: Book a luxury suite at Mara Plains to see the African bush at its very best

Associate editor Sacha Forbes escaped to Mara Plains Camp, deep in Kenya's Masai Mara game reserve, where she discovered the exceptional knowledge of guide Daniel Sumare



THE JHAZI FAMILY SUITE AT MARA PLAINS Andrew Howard

Set in 35,000 acres of conservancy deep in Kenya's Masai Mara game reserve, Mara Plains Camp is one of the Great Plains camps set up by conservationists, Dereck and Beverley Joubert.

Sleeping 14 guests, it is a haven for prolific game-viewing and birdlife. Last year's addition to the camp, The Jahazi family suite, is an elegant two-bedroom luxury tented pavilion and sitting room filled with leather sofas, comfy armchairs and books, and, thoughtfully, a camera and zoom lens for each guest. Huge heavy teak doors from Lamu and canvas and directors chairs complement the contemporary interiors overlooking the outside decking, where you can sit and listen to baboons screeching and birdsong. And at the end of a busy day, relax in the huge copper bath.



MARA PLAINS CAMP HIDES IN THE THICK FOREST ON A BEND IN THE NTIAKITIAK RIVER Andrew Howard

But it is the staff here who run the camp so efficiently and are so expert at making you feel at home. Daniel Sumare, one of many experienced guides at Mara Plains Camp, grew up just an hour away. His humour is as good as his encyclopaedic knowledge of the 50 species of birds at Mara Plains. He navigates the acres of grasslands, delivering the excitement of close-up predators, prides of lions, or a 30 year old roaming buffalo, herds of

elephants and their young, and knows in which territories the hyenas hide with their pups.



THE BRILLIANT DANIEL SUMARE

If the morning drive is too busy with potential sightings, breakfast is driven out and laid up with fruit, bacon and eggs and mango juice. Evening game drives are followed by fireside cocktails from a well-stocked bar. It's no surprise that nothing is too much trouble for the chefs here, with guests enjoying four-course suppers of seasonal menus, such as grilled steaks, lamb, and delicious cheese platters from the kitchen (with vegetarian menus and gluten free bread also on offer). Wine lovers can request dinner in the candlelit wine-room. A stay at Mara Plains Camp guarantees a truly immersive experience, a close up of the African bush at its very best.



A SLICE OF LUXURY IN KENYA'S MARA PLAINS CAMP Andrew Howard

Journeys by Design tailor specialist wildlife safaris to much of Africa. For a four-night safari to Mara Plains costs start from £3,995 per person on a fully inclusive basis. Direct return flights to Nairobi from Heathrow London are approximately £975 per person. Journeysbydesign.com