



EAST AFRICAN EXPEDITION

A SAFARI ADVENTURE OFFERS AN INTIMATE VIEW OF ONE OF THE MOST SPECTACULAR EVENTS IN NATURE.

BY SANDRA MACGREGOR

The spread: Courtesy of Micato Safaris

Each year, starting around April, more than a million wildebeests begin a perilous 1,800-mile round-trip pilgrimage in search of better grazing. They travel across the mighty plains of the Serengeti in Tanzania to the Masai Mara in Kenya. This annual journey, which typically ends around November, is known as the Great Migration. Witnessing it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

During their trek, the herds, accompanied by other animals such as zebras and antelope, face a number of predators. Lions, leopards, river crocodiles and others take advantage of the mass joining of prey. An estimated 250,000 wildebeest die en route, making the journey among some of the most awe-inspiring displays of beauty and brutality in wildlife.

“The Great Migration is one of the most impressive mass movement of animals anywhere on the planet,” says Peter Felix, safari expert at Wild Frontiers, an adventure company. “... Quite simply, it’s such a significant experience because ... you won’t see anything on this scale anywhere else on the planet. A mass movement of animals on this scale only happens here.”

It’s no wonder that sub-Saharan Africa typically tops the bucket lists for travelers with





OFF THE WILD SIDE

TANZANIA AND KENYA FEATURE A WIDE RANGE OF EXPERIENCES IN ADDITION TO SAFARI ADVENTURES. HERE, DISCOVER JUST A SAMPLING OF THE OPTIONS AVAILABLE THROUGH THE REGION'S LUXURY LODGES.



Located in Kenya, just south of Mombasa, AfroChic Diani Beach offers guests a chance to relax on one of the continent's most picturesque beaches. This beachfront retreat has only 10 guest rooms so solicitous service and serenity are guaranteed. If guests desire a more lively activity other than unwinding beachside, they can arrange to go diving or snorkeling; play a round of golf at a nearby championship golf course; or go for a guided tour of Mombasa, Kenya's second largest town. Far from the rugged Sahara desert, Kilindi Zanzibar is a paradise set on 50 acres of verdant tropical gardens. Guests stay at contemporary pavilions, each with its own plunge pool overlooking the sea. Here, the focus is on romance and recharging. Possible activities include touring a spice farm, deep sea fishing or sailing into the sunset on a traditional dhow boat.

For a chance to indulge in Tanzania's local culture, stay at Arusha Coffee Lodge. Nestled on one of the country's largest coffee plantations, the lodge provides a truly unique chance to immerse in the area's coffee culture. At the lodge, 30 bespoke plantation houses are peppered among the crop fields that surround the original landowner's home. Here, as the cool night air is slowly replaced by the warming morning breeze, guests enjoy an African sunrise unlike any other as the sweet aroma of homegrown coffee fills their surroundings.



Experienced guides (above) help travelers make the most of a safari adventure.

Elewana Collection. "There are lots of predators around so the potential for kills is higher."

Guests who stay at the award-winning Serengeti Migration Camp are ideally situated to view the wildebeest voyage to Masai Mara, as the camp is located right in the heart of the migration path.

Moses Baynet, the camp's guide, explains how the lodge adds its own special touches to the migration viewing experience. "We have a special access road [which is only open to Elewana vehicles] that we can take to Masai Mara river in only an hour," Baynet says. "We will take a picnic lunch, snacks and drinks, and go out into the middle of the migration when it is passing through. We also go to the Mara River bank and, with luck, we will watch maybe hundreds of wildebeest crossing the river, avoiding the big African crocodiles. It is very exciting."

On the Kenyan side, the Sand River Masai Mara is located close to the Tanzanian border within the Masai Mara National Reserve—directly on the migration path. Between June, July and August, there's even the chance that guests may find themselves (safely) surrounded by wildebeest as they come through the camp.

Elephant Pepper Camp is in the Mara North Conservancy, a less busy area of the Masai Mara region. The Masai Mara National Reserve is buffered by numerous conservancies like Mara North, which have fewer cars and visitors, affording a more exclusive migration viewing. While Elephant Pepper Camp is more remote,

wanderlust. While there are myriad ways to travel the continent, a safari is the quintessential experience when one thinks of Africa. It is also one of the best means to immerse yourself in the inimitable African landscape and wildlife, and to witness this great spectacle in nature.

FRONT ROW SEAT

Many travelers journeying to Africa to see the Great Migration look to balance the rugged outdoor experience of a safari with upscale, comfortable lodgings. Among a wide range of high-end safari options, Elewana Collection, part of the Global Hotel Alliance that Omni Hotels & Resorts is also a part of, ranks as one of the most popular and well-equipped to shepherd the experience. It includes award-winning luxury camps, lodges and boutique beach hotels in Tanzania and Kenya.

Integrating Africa's remarkable backdrop with elegant accommodations, Elewana Collection properties in the Masai Mara in Kenya and the Serengeti in Tanzania are carefully sited to ensure that guests have access to viewing the Great Migration throughout the year.

In Tanzania, two lodges, Serengeti Pioneer Camp and Serengeti Migration Camp, cover 90 percent of



the Serengeti so guests have a front row seat to various cycles of the migration. Visitors staying at the Serengeti Pioneer Camp are best situated to see the beginning and end of the migration cycle. There, they can observe the calving season from January through March and the start of the wildebeests' journey to Kenya in April through June. "The calving season is quite a spectacle with some 400,000 calves born in a few short weeks," says James Haigh, director of sales and marketing for

Top left: Courtesy of Micato Safaris; Top right: Elephant Pepper Camp, Kenya; middle row: From left: Courtesy of Micato Safaris, Sand River Masai Mara, Kenya; Serengeti Migration Camp, Kenya; Bottom: Elephant Pepper Camp, Kenya

Left, top and bottom: Courtesy of Micato Safaris; sidebar, top: AfroChic Diani Beach, Kenya

it still provides easy access to all areas of Masai Mara, including the Mara River, a potentially deadly barrier where wildebeests must contend with famished crocodiles as they cross.

EXPERT-LED TOURS

Accommodations and locale are only part of the equation on a Great Migration adventure. An experienced guide is equally important. Safari tours are typically done by game drives, where guests and their guides venture out in the African bush in an open-air, four-wheel drive vehicle. Game drives last about three or four hours and are meant to be experienced in small groups.

"Good guides will plan ahead, following the Great Migration from the very start," says Felix, whose Wild Frontiers company works with the full range of Elewana Collection properties in both Kenya and Tanzania. "At any given time, they will know where the bulk of the herd is, where the river crossings are and where the animals will most likely head to next, based upon following the weather and the quality of grazing."

At Micato Safaris, a luxury safari operator, guests and two highly credentialed experts set out in pursuit of the herd just as the morning dew is dissipating. All vehicles are fully stocked with beverages and snacks, binoculars and guide books. The tour lasts approximately two hours

DISCOVER SELECT GUEST® BENEFITS

Omni and the Elewana Collection are both part of the Global Hotel Alliance (GHA), which consists of more than 550 hotels in 76 countries. Omni Select Guest members receive global benefits and status recognition through the DISCOVERY loyalty program. Qualifying nights at DISCOVERY hotels count toward tier status in the Select Guest program and that status is recognized when staying at other DISCOVERY properties. DISCOVERY benefits for Gold level members include discounted room rates, free Wi-Fi, and bottled water, while Platinum members can also enjoy room upgrades, late check-out and Local Experience awards. Black level members enjoy all of these benefits plus more.

TRIP TIPS

WITHOUT A DOUBT, AN AFRICAN SAFARI CAN BE ONE OF THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE ADVENTURES. TO ENSURE AN ENDEAVOR THAT IS BOTH SAFE AND SENSATIONAL, FOLLOW THESE THREE GUIDELINES.

1. Get Vaccinated: Malaria is almost always a concern in Kenya and Tanzania. Speak to a doctor about preventative vaccinations or medications that may be needed when traveling in Africa. Ensure that any prescription medications are also covered for the duration of the trip.

2. Pack Smart: Don't assume that all the clothing needed is shorts and T-shirts. Temperatures in Africa dip at night and through the early morning until the sun rises. Look for special safari pants that are designed to attach easily onto shorts. Also, bring a light jacket, socks (especially important for hiking in the bush), a hat and, of course, sunscreen.

3. Be Prepared: A great safari depends mainly on two things: weather and wildlife. Unfortunately, these elements are also the hardest to control, so it's important to set expectations with your guide ahead of time and plan for unforeseen situations. Embrace each unique experience. Visitors may not ever be fully prepared for what the raw, rugged beauty of the African desert will reveal.



Travelers to Africa can balance the rugged safari experience with upscale, comfortable accommodations. The Elewana Collection includes luxury camps and lodges that are carefully sited to ensure guests have prime viewing of local wildlife.

and typically includes a group of less than 18 guests. Participants enjoy views of a menagerie of wildebeests, cheetahs, rhinos, hyenas, gazelles, giraffes and more, all from a prime window seat.

“It’s a jaw-dropping spectacle that must be seen to be believed,” says Dennis Pinto, managing director of Micato Safaris. “It’s an amazing sight that a good photo can only begin to capture.”

Baynet, Serengeti Migration Camp’s guide, has been living in the Serengeti for more than 23 years. His familiarity with the area means that he understands the rhythms of the region and can predict where the prime sightings will be. At Serengeti Migration Camp, game drives can be arranged for a full day that includes a picnic lunch out on the savannahs. Here, guides know every inch of the park, including where the “big five” (buffalos,

rhinos, elephants, lions and leopards) can be sighted.

“Good guides know the terrain of the Serengeti and the Masai Mara well and, thus, can deliver the best vantage points for viewing so guests can take great photos of this incredible event,” Felix says. “They will also know where to head to next to avoid the tourist crowds, which can be considerable in places at times.”

With a perfectly positioned accommodation and a highly qualified expert in tow, visitors to East Africa are guaranteed to have an experience of a lifetime encountering this incredible event.

“The Great Migration is truly one of those experiences where you just have to be there to know,” Pinto says. “There is really nothing quite like the thundering sound of 2 million animals moving en masse across the vast savannahs of East Africa.” •