



A-list Africa

JENNY COONEY CARRILLO
IS ONE HAPPY CAMPER ON
THIS ULTRA-LUXE SAFARI

After a long, hot day viewing the Big Five at the Sarova Mara Game Camp, it's time for a cold drink at sundown

Dear Grazia,

I've never been a big camper. My idea of roughing it is room service at a Four Seasons hotel. But when I was promised a "luxury safari camp" experience in Kenya, I couldn't resist!

To get in the mood, I rented *Out Of Africa*, the 1985 Oscar-winning Meryl Streep/Robert Redford movie that takes place in Kenya. So naturally I was excited when I arrived at Nairobi's classic The Sarova Stanley hotel and discovered I was staying in the Karen Blixen suite (Meryl's character).

My friend Nana Gecaga, who runs the luxury travel service Bora Uboru (Swahili for "nothing but the best"), took me to lunch at Muthaiga Country Club, the oldest private club in Kenya, where they shot the New Year's Eve party scene in *Out Of Africa*. I left without a twirl from Redford, but was very happy with my lunch of stir-fried

wild monkeys dancing on the lawn.

Flying into Masai Mara National Reserve, I was completely delirious at the sight of my first elephant casually strolling alongside the road. After a few days, you get used to the idea that it's their turf and you're just visiting.

There are more than 450 species of wildlife in this 1500sq km grassland but most visitors only care about the Big Five – the lion, elephant, buffalo, rhinoceros and leopard.

We were greeted at Sarova Mara Game Camp by a Masai tribe who performed a traditional song and offered refreshments before we headed off in an open four-wheel drive, ready to start checking the animals off the list. I had to settle for four out of five – all the more reason to come back one day and find that elusive rhino!

The luxury tented cabins at Masai Mara are fenced in, even so, I held my

sauntering past our deck although I knew they couldn't get any closer.

At the second campsite on our agenda – the super exclusive Mara Explorer – there are no fences at all, only walkie-talkies in your room so you can call for an escort after dark when you want to head to the common area for dinner.

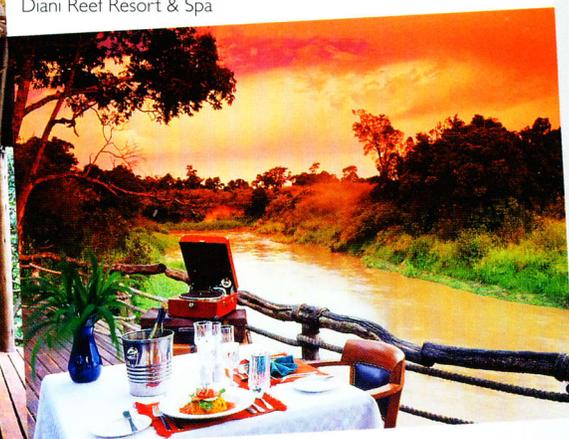
There are only 10 tents at Mara Explorer, ensuring plenty of privacy and pampering. This is where Tom Cruise and Penelope Cruz stayed when they were dating. There's a full bathroom and king-size bed in each tent, and a bathtub on the deck overlooking the Talek River where hippos swim.

Vincent, a Masai guide taller than Michael Jordan, took us out for an early morning game drive before we headed back to camp in time for eggs benedict and smoked salmon for breakfast.

Driving around the wilds of Africa in an open-top jeep is addictive, but it



Accommodation is open-air luxury at the super exclusive Mara Explorer with king-size beds, and dinner on the terrace. Bottom: bliss out in the beautiful surrounds of the Diani Reef Resort & Spa



joined other jeeps all photographing the same pride of lions lunching on an impala they'd just killed.

After all that dust, I was ready for some sea. We headed to Diani Reef Beach Hotel & Spa on the east coast of Kenya, where you dip your toes in the warm waters of the Indian ocean and swim with whale sharks and turtles at the nearby protected Kisite Marine National Park.

But the big attraction is the world-class Nirvana Health and Wellness Spa. My husband and I checked out the Twin Bliss couples treatment. After finishing our side-by-side massages and sharing a herbal spa cocktail in the flower-strewn bath for two, I wondered why anyone would want to get out of Africa!

Love Jenny x

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