

# The World's 10 Most Luxurious Safari Camps

The ultimate pampering for a trip of a lifetime.

by Eric Rosen

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As we saw when *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* ladies visited South Africa's Shamwari Game Reserve a few years back, getting back to nature doesn't mean you have to give up the creature comforts. When it comes to safari in style, there are phenomenal choices all over Africa, Asia, and Australia. Here are some of the best.

## 1. Angama Mara, Kenya

Anyone who's seen *Out of Africa* can't help but be enchanted by the primordial landscape of Kenya's Masai Mara. Even old Africa hands Steve and Nicky Fitzgerald, who helped build one of the premiere luxury safari brands, and Beyond, settled on it as the place to set up shop when they decided to open their own lodge last year. **Angama Mara** perches on the brink of the dramatic Oloololo Escarpment with sweeping views of the Mara Triangle's plains. The entire establishment consists of two 15-tent camps that share a pavilion with an infinity pool and gym. The buildings are constructed of local wood and bricks on platforms that seem to float over the escarpment. Inside the loft-like rooms, the aesthetic is mid-century chic meets African tribal, with colorful textiles, graceful wood furnishings, and floor-to-ceiling windows that optimize the views. That is, for the time that guests are here instead of out on the plain tracking big game, or visiting local Masai villages.

## 2. Aman-i-Khás, India

Just because it's safari doesn't mean it's in Africa. Once the hunting grounds for the maharajahs of Jaipur, Rajasthan's Ranthambore National Park is one of India's best Bengal tiger reserves, and **Aman-i-Khás** is right on its doorstep. With just 10 guest tents, this isn't your average campground! Inspired by luxurious Mughal pavilions, these habitations are kitted out with pared-down colonial-style furnishings, hearkening to a bygone era. Contemporary touches include air conditioning and heating, stone soaking tubs, walk-in showers, and plush beds. Guests can unwind after a dusty day out in the park with an Ayurvedic treatment in the resort's spa tent (or an outdoor yoga session) before drinks along the divans surrounding the outdoor fireplace. The grounds produce many of the ingredients served on the Indian and Western menus guests can enjoy in the main dining tent. Then it's off to bed early along the lantern-lit paths before another day out tracking tigers, leopards, jackals, sambar deer, and crocodiles in the park.

### **3. Belmond Eagle Island Lodge, Botswana**

Botswana's Okavango Delta is one of the world's premier safari destinations thanks to a diverse range of ecosystems, a profusion of land- and water-based wildlife, and some of the best lodges in Africa. Among them is the gem **Belmond Eagle Island Lodge**, located on its own private island. It reopened in November after a near-total rebuild that included the incorporation of more wildlife motifs and traditional crafts in the design. The lodge has just 12 tented rooms, each with its own outdoor deck and plunge pool as well as walled outdoor showers overlooking the delta waters. Inside, they feature custom-designed and crafted canvas and leather furnishings and oversize beds with copper headboards, not to mention little touches like mini-bars made in the style of hand-stitched explorer's trunks. The main restaurant has both indoor and outdoor dining areas as well as a new lounge and library with a cocktail bar constructed from locally sourced timber. It's the perfect place to plan the next day's activities, which range from motorboat and canoe safaris to guided bush walks and private helicopter tours.

### **4. Four Seasons Tented Camp, Thailand**

Thanks to its checkered past, few regions bear the exotic allure of the Golden Triangle, that precarious piece of land shared among Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar. So perhaps it's fitting that that is where you'll find one of the world's most exclusive upscale camping experiences at the **Four Seasons Tented Camp**. Its stilted tents sit on a ridge overlooking the jungle and the Ruak River, across which you can catch glimpses of neighboring Laos and Myanmar from your private outdoor deck. During the days, guests can enjoy elephant excursions as they learn the commands *mahouts* use to guide the beasts, and bathe with these gentle giants in the river, or visit a Burmese border town to see the recent and sweeping changes overtaking the rapidly opening-up country. Post-massage in the jungle spa, guests can sip sundowners in the Burma Bar. Then after a multi-course dinner in the gourmet poolside restaurant, they can head back to their turned-down tents, each of which features unique amenities like hand-beaten copper tubs, overstuffed leather armchairs, and various antiques meant to evoke a romantic version of 19th-century exploration in the region.

## 5. Singita Explore Camp, Tanzania

Luxury operator Singita actually boasts four lodges in the Grumeti Reserve alongside Tanzania's famous Serengeti National Park. While **Singita Explore Camp** is like an Edwardian manor with individual cottages, Faru Faru has more of a Zanzibari island feel, and the tented Sabora Camp is in the heart of the action on the savannah plains, it is perhaps the Explore Camp that the company bills as "a return to the true essence of safari" that best embodies the adventure of safari. Best of all, the camp is mobile, meaning it can be moved to follow the flow of wildlife through the reserve. The six-tent settlement can be booked on a private-use basis, so you won't have to share it with strangers. Though guests will "rough it" by sleeping under canvas and dining under the stars, those meals will come courtesy of a private chef, and those tents have en-suite bathrooms and interiors designed by Cecile & Boyd. However, Singita aims to minimize its environmental impact with features like solar power and bucket showers. This area is particularly known for the unparalleled wildlife viewing during the Great Migration, so bring your binocs. Game-viewing excursions are tailored to each day and guest, with both driving and walking adventures, and visitors can even relax with a Dermalogica spa treatment to ease the cares and hardship of being waited on hand and foot.

## 6. Sal Salis, Australia

Few spots on earth are as isolated as Ningaloo Reef on the northern coast of Western Australia. But just because it takes a while to get there doesn't mean you can't enjoy a bit of luxury once you arrive. The only accommodation within wild Cape Ranges National Park, **Sal Salis** is a sixteen-tent eco-retreat that seems to sprout from the red sands along the Indian Ocean. Guests here come to spend their days on oceanic safaris swimming with the whale sharks that migrate here from April through August, not to mention catching glimpses of humpback whales, turtles and other marine creatures. Back on land, activities include hiking the rugged Mandu Mandu Gorge and Yardie Creek in search of rare rock wallabies and prickly echidnas. All that should help work up an appetite for the daily changing multi-course menus of local specialties like kangaroo steaks and succulent Exmouth Gulf prawns, all paired with Western Australian wines, of course.

## 7. Londolozi Game Reserve, South Africa

Family-run **Londolozi** was a pioneer in South African safari, and dates to 1926. It was also the first safari camp to become a member of the prestigious Relais & Chateaux family of properties worldwide. There are actually five lodges on the 35,000-acre concession bordering Kruger National Park. But if you're short on time, book a stay at the exclusive Tree Camp. Here, villas come with individual *salas* or decks for contemplating the surroundings and wildlife, private swimming pools, outdoor showers, and Ralph Lauren décor and accent furniture with animal prints. They also have enormous mosquito-netted beds, and bathroom suites with deep soaking tubs and separate walk-in showers. And if you want to socialize with the other guests, there's a tranquil outdoor swimming pool, a tony little library that's perfect for after-dinner drinks, a tree-shaded deck for leisurely breakfasts, and an alfresco restaurant lit by candles and a central fire pit.

## 8. Chena Huts, Sri Lanka



India's island neighbor to the south, Sri Lanka, also boasts some spectacular national parks. The first created here was Yala, in the island's south, and is home to a large population of leopards, not to mention herds of elephants and water buffalo, sloth bears, as well as crocodiles, mongoose and peacocks. While the park itself is quite busy, luxury lodging has been lacking. Until now. Just opened in December, beachfront [Chena Huts](#) is right outside the park and comes courtesy of Sri Lankan hospitality group, Uga Escapes. Chena is the local word for a herdsman hut, but the comparison ends there since the 14 guest pavilions here come with hand-hewn wooden furniture, private decks with plunge pools overlooking the jungle, ocean and lagoon, brass light fixtures...oh yeah, and 42-inch flatscreens with satellite channels. During the day, guests take game drives through the park, while at night, they can enjoy local Sri Lankan specialties by candlelight on the sandy beach in front of the resort's restaurant and bar.

## 9. andBeyond Matesi River Lodge, Zimbabwe

Long off travelers' maps, Zimbabwe is experiencing a somewhat stable period at the moment, as evidenced by the opening of a slew of new lodges including this one by [andBeyond](#), which is slated to welcome guests this summer. The lodge is just 25 miles from Victoria Falls along the Zambezi River and within one of the area's largest wildlife concessions. There are two camps on the property, each with nine tents that incorporate local elements like copper fixtures and furniture created from salvaged driftwood. The main lodge will house a gym, spa, and a rim-flow pool stretching along the riverbank. Perhaps the piece de resistance: a semi-subterranean wine cellar looking out onto the river at eye level. Big spenders can book the private four-bedroom villa, which has its own kitchen, dining rooms both indoors and out, a full-size private pool, and a fire pit for evening gatherings. During the day, guests can enjoy trips to the falls, walking and traditional vehicle safaris, river cruises, and canoe trips.

## 10. Chinzombo, Zambia

Less well-known than some of the other African safari countries, Zambia is an up-and-coming destination that will soon be on every jet setter's must-visit list. That's partly thanks to wildlife-rich parks like South Luangwa, as well as new luxury properties like **Chinzombo**. Located on the site of one of safari pioneer Norman Carr's original camps, Chinzombo has just six gorgeous riverfront villas, each of which contains touches like explorer-style leather-and-wood desks, state-of-the-art ventilated mosquito-netted beds, and enormous tree-shaded private desks with sunken sitting areas, outdoor dining areas, and even private plunge pools. You know, for if you want to wallow like the hippos down on the riverbank just a few feet from you. The park itself is uncrowded and offers some phenomenal chances to view big game including prides of lions, leopards, hyena, zebra, various species of giraffe, and more.

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