

VARD AFRICA | DESTINATION GUIDE

Northern Kenya and the Samburu Ecosystem

Africa's Last True Wilderness — Where Cultures, Wildlife and Ancient Landscapes Converge

Vard Africa | Ultra Luxury Destination Management | Nairobi, Kenya www.vardafrica.com

"Northern Kenya is not a destination for the timid, the hurried or the complacent safari traveller. It is Africa as it was before the roads came, before the fences came, before the idea arrived that wilderness needed to be managed for a comfortable visitor experience. The Samburu are still here, moving with their cattle across the same ground their grandfathers moved across. The elephants still follow the seasonal routes they have used for ten thousand years. The singing wells are still being sung. The land is still older than human memory a land of volcanic scarps and ancient lava beds, of jade-coloured desert lakes and cedar-forested sky islands, of endless sky and the specific silence of the African semi-arid landscape on a windless morning. To come to Northern Kenya is to come to one of the last places on Earth where the relationship between people, wildlife and landscape has not yet been fully disrupted. Come here with patience, with curiosity and with a genuine willingness to be in a place that has no obligation to make you comfortable and you will leave with something that no other destination in East Africa provides in the same measure: the understanding that you have been somewhere genuinely, irreducibly wild." — Vard Africa, Destination Curators.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR ALL OUR GUESTS

Altitude and Climate: Northern Kenya encompasses an extraordinary range of altitudes and microclimates from the baking desert floor of the Suguta Valley at **300 metres** above sea level (where temperatures regularly exceed 50°C) to the cloud-cooled cedar forests of the **Mathews Range** at 2,375 metres (7,790 feet). Plan your packing and your activity schedule to accommodate this extreme range within a single itinerary.

Malaria Status: Northern Kenya at lower altitudes including the Samburu National Reserve floor, the areas around the Ewaso Nyiro River and the Lake Turkana shores is a **malaria-risk zone**. Unlike the high-altitude Laikipia properties, most Northern Kenya lodges are in areas where malaria prophylaxis is recommended. Specific properties at higher altitude (Saruni Samburu on the Kalama mountains, Kitich Forest Camp in the Mathews Range at 1,330 metres, Desert Rose Lodge at 1,676 metres) carry lower but not zero risk. Consult your travel physician for appropriate prophylaxis for your complete itinerary.

Medical Evacuation: All guests travelling to Northern Kenya must carry comprehensive travel insurance including **AMREF Flying Doctors** emergency evacuation cover. AMREF covers the entire East African region. The Sarara group formally recommends the **AMREF Maisha Silver package** valid for a month across Kenya, Tanzania and Zanzibar. Nearest hospitals of adequate standard are in Nanyuki (approximately 2–3 hours from Samburu National Reserve) and Nairobi (reachable by AMREF air evacuation in approximately 45–90 minutes from most Northern Kenya airstrips).

Security: Northern Kenya has historically experienced instability from inter-tribal cattle raiding and the proximity to the Kenya-Somalia and Kenya-Ethiopia borders. All reputable lodges and conservancies in this guide have comprehensive security assessments and established protocols. Vard Africa does not book clients to areas of current elevated risk without specific briefing. At time of publication, all properties in this guide are operating normally and safely.

eTA Requirement: Kenya requires an **Electronic Travel Authorisation (eTA)** obtained from www.etakenya.go.ke before departure. Apply a minimum of 72 hours in advance. Failure to obtain confirmation means airlines will refuse boarding. Children also require individual eTAs.

Currency and Connectivity: Kenyan Shilling (KES); lodge billing in USD. Internet connectivity is sporadic to non-existent at many Northern Kenya properties Kitich Forest Camp has none; Desert Rose Lodge offers mobile signal only at a specific outdoor point called "Safaricom Rock." This is not a limitation; it is a feature of the genuine remoteness that distinguishes Northern Kenya from more developed safari circuits. Vard Africa provides comprehensive pre-travel connectivity briefing for all northern Kenya clients.

THE NORTHERN KENYA LANDSCAPE

An Introduction to Scale

If Laikipia is a conservation story in progress, Northern Kenya is something larger and more ancient: a landscape that preceded conservation by a very long time, and that is now being protected not because people have decided to protect it but because people who have always lived within it have decided that the relationship between wildlife and community that sustained their grandparents' lives can also sustain their own and their children's.

The **Northern Frontier District** as the vast territory beyond Laikipia and Samburu was known for most of the 20th century is not a single landscape. It is a succession of them, each distinct enough from the next to constitute a separate world. The scorched, ochre-red plains of the **Samburu National Reserve**, where the Ewaso Nyiro River cuts a thin green line through the near-desert. The **Kalama mountains** rising abruptly above those plains, their summit offering views across 240,000 acres of private wildlife sanctuary. The **Mathews Range** rising from the desert floor to forested peaks at 2,375 metres a "sky island" whose cedar and podocarpus forest is botanically and zoologically a completely separate ecosystem from the semi-arid landscape at its feet. The **Sera Conservancy** and its pioneering community-owned rhino sanctuary, where 23 black rhinos now breed in a landscape from which they had been absent for forty years. The **Namunyak Conservancy** and its 850,000 acres, holding Kenya's second-largest elephant population and Africa's first community-owned elephant sanctuary. And beyond all of these, at the end of a road that requires two days' driving from Nairobi, the **Suguta Valley** and **Lake Turkana** one of Earth's oldest and most extraordinary geological features, a desert lake of improbable size and improbable colour, the jade-green chemistry of its deep waters visible from space.

Each of these landscapes requires and rewards a different pace, a different patience and a different readiness to be surprised. Taken together, they constitute the most varied, the most ecologically complex and the most specifically unfamiliar safari landscape in Kenya — the destination

that most experienced safari travellers describe as the most different from everything they expected, and the most rewarding for having arrived with open eyes.

THE SAMBURU ECO-SYSTEM

Kenya's Butterfly People

The **Samburu** are the dominant community of northern Kenya a **Nilotic people** who speak **Sampur**, a language closely related to Maa (the language of the Maasai, from whom the Samburu are frequently distinguished by outsiders but who are, in their own understanding, a distinct and ancient people with their own specific history and specific relationship with this landscape). Their alternative name "**butterfly people**" comes not from any quality of delicacy or impermanence but from the specific bright colours of the women's beadwork and the warriors' decorations, which in the landscape of the northern frontier appear with the startling vividness of butterfly wings in desert scrub.

The Samburu are **semi-nomadic pastoralists** cattle, goat, camel and sheep herders who have moved with their animals across the northern plains in seasonal patterns determined by rainfall, grass cover and the locations of permanent water sources. Their economy, their social organisation, their cultural traditions and their relationship with the wildlife that shares their land all emerged from this nomadic pastoral life over centuries of inhabiting one of East Africa's most demanding environments. Unlike the Maasai of the south whose range has been progressively reduced by agricultural encroachment and wildlife reserve boundaries the Samburu of the north still occupy the majority of their traditional territory, still move in seasonal patterns across it, and still maintain the cultural forms the warrior system, the age-grade structure, the beadwork traditions, the cattle economy that their grandparents maintained.

Understanding the Samburu is inseparable from understanding Northern Kenya as a safari destination. The landscape, the conservancies, the wildlife and the lodge experiences described in this guide are all situated within or adjacent to Samburu community territory. The Samburu are not a backdrop to the safari experience; they are its foundation the people without whose conservation commitment across the past three decades, none of the wildlife recoveries described in this guide would have happened.

The Moran the Samburu warrior class are the most visually striking expression of Samburu culture that guests encounter. Young men between puberty and marriage enter the warrior class, during which they are responsible for the protection of the community's livestock and the demonstration of courage, endurance and physical excellence that the culture requires. They wear distinctive red-ochre body decorations, elaborate beaded jewellery, and the warrior's long, braided hair. They carry the long Samburu spear. They sing the warrior songs. And they are, in the conservancies, some of the finest wildlife guides in Kenya people who grew up tracking on this specific ground and who bring to every bush walk a knowledge of the landscape that no curriculum can teach.

The Women's Traditions — The Samburu women maintain the beadwork traditions that are one of the most sophisticated visual communication systems in Africa. Each colour, each pattern and each configuration of beads carries specific meaning: the wearer's age group, clan identity, marital status and social position encoded in a visual language that every Samburu person can read. The women build the homes. The women manage the daily operations of the homestead. The women, in the Reteti Elephant Sanctuary, have become the primary keepers of orphaned elephant calves a development that has transformed their economic position and their relationship with the wildlife that shares their land.

THE SPECIAL FIVE

Wildlife Endemic or Specific to Northern Kenya

The **Samburu Special Five** (sometimes Six) are species found in this specific ecosystem and not in Kenya's southern safari circuit the defining wildlife distinction that makes a Northern Kenya safari categorically different from a Maasai Mara or Amboseli experience:

- ✓ **Reticulated Giraffe** (*Giraffa reticulata*) — The most geometrically striking of the giraffe subspecies: liver-brown polygonal patches outlined by vivid white networks in a pattern of mathematical precision, like illuminated stained glass. Distinguished from the Maasai giraffe of the south by the sharp definition of its coat markings and the depth of the brown colouration. Found throughout the northern reserves and conservancies in impressive numbers Namunyak Conservancy holds one of the largest herds of reticulated giraffe in Kenya.
- ✓ **Grevy's Zebra** (*Equus grevyi*) — The world's largest zebra species and one of Africa's most endangered large mammals: approximately 2,500 individuals remaining in the wild, the majority in northern Kenya. Distinguished by narrow, precisely-spaced stripes that continue to the belly's edge (unlike the Common zebra's white belly), enormous rounded ears and a relatively horse-like profile. Male Grevy's are notably territorial and solitary, unlike the family-group social structure of the Plains zebra. Sasaab Lodge sits in one of the areas with the highest remaining Grevy's population in the world.
- ✓ **Beisa Oryx** (*Oryx beisa*) — The great straight-horned antelope of the north: grey body, black facial markings and flank stripes, long straight horns that can reach 120 centimetres. Built for extreme aridity able to raise its body temperature in the heat of the day to reduce water loss by sweating; capable of surviving for extended periods without surface water by metabolising moisture from its food. Architecturally one of the most beautiful antelope in Africa.
- ✓ **Gerenuk** (*Litocranius walleri*) — The giraffe-necked gazelle: an antelope that has evolved an extraordinarily elongated neck and the ability to stand upright on its hind legs, bracing its forelegs against thorny acacia branches, to browse vegetation inaccessible to competing antelopes. The resulting posture vertical antelope, neck extended skyward is one of wildlife photography's most recognisable and most specifically Northern Kenya images.
- ✓ **Somali Ostrich** (*Struthio molybdophanes*) — Elevated from subspecies to full species status in 2014 in recognition of its long evolutionary divergence from the Common ostrich of the south. Distinguished by the male's blue-grey neck and thighs (vs. the Common ostrich's pink), and the female's more distinctly brown colouration. Present across the northern reserves and conservancies.
- ✓ **Guenther's Dik-Dik** (*Madoqua guentheri*) — A sixth northern endemic sometimes included in the Samburu Special list: one of Africa's smallest antelope, distinguished by a distinctively elongated, flexible snout adapted for browsing and for thermoregulation in the heat of the northern plains. The dik-dik's name comes from the alarm call of the female.
- ✓ **Beyond the Special Five:** The northern ecosystem supports the complete Laikipia wildlife portfolio plus species specific to the more arid northern conditions:

- ✓ **The Black Leopard** — Melanistic (black) leopard have been camera-trapped and sighted in the Laikipia and northern Kenya landscapes. Sarara Camp has established a specific reputation for **quality leopard viewings** the Sarara Valley's waterhole and the specific terrain of the Namunyak Conservancy producing sightings of extraordinary quality.
- ✓ **African Wild Dog** — Two distinct packs documented within the Namunyak Conservancy, both observable at Sarara Camp.
- ✓ **De Brazza's Monkey** (*Cercopithecus neglectus*) — One of the Mathews Range's most remarkable and most rarely encountered primates: a large, distinctively marked forest monkey whose normal range is Central Africa's humid forests, occurring in Kenya only in the forest habitat of the Mathews Range. A Kitich Forest Camp guide who locates a De Brazza's for guests has delivered one of the finest wildlife encounters in Kenya.
- ✓ **Greater Kudu** — In the rocky escarpment terrain of the northern reserves and conservancies, particularly at Sarara Camp and the Mathews Range margins.
- ✓ **Striped Hyena** (*Hyaena hyaena*) — The northern replacement for the spotted hyena of the south: smaller, more secretive, more elegant and very rarely seen. Present across the Samburu and northern conservancy landscape.
- ✓ **The Singing Wells Wildlife** — At the Sera Conservancy's 'Kisima Hamsini' (Fifty Wells), elephants regularly come to the abandoned wells after the pastoralists and their cattle depart kneeling to reach their trunks into the well shafts to drink. This specific behaviour elephants using human-dug wells is one of the most specific wildlife encounters in Africa.
- ✓ **Nile Crocodile** — At Lake Turkana in extraordinary numbers. The lake historically held Africa's largest crocodile population: approximately **14,000 individuals** by 1968 estimates, concentrated on Central Island National Park, South Island National Park and the lake's northern shores.
- ✓ **Nile Perch** — Lake Turkana supports populations of Nile perch of extraordinary size catches of 200–300kg individual fish have been recorded. Sport fishing on Lake Turkana is among the most specifically dramatic freshwater fishing experiences in Africa.

THE ECO-SYSTEMS

The Samburu National Reserve and its Adjacent Reserves

The Samburu National Reserve covers **165 square kilometres** of semi-arid savannah on the north bank of the **Ewaso Nyiro River** Kenya's great northern river, originating in the Mount Kenya and Aberdare highlands and flowing north-east through Samburu before eventually disappearing into the Lorian Swamp in Kenya's arid north. The river is the Samburu Reserve's defining ecological feature: a permanent water source in a near-desert environment, drawing wildlife from across the northern landscape in concentrations that make the riverbank one of East Africa's finest game-viewing positions.

Adjacent to and ecologically continuous with the Samburu National Reserve are **Buffalo Springs National Reserve** and **Shaba National Game Reserve** together forming a protected complex of approximately **300 square kilometres** on the south bank of the river. Although administratively separate, the three reserves function as a single ecosystem, with wildlife particularly the enormous elephant herds, the lion prides and the Samburu Special Five moving freely between them.

The terrain: classic semi-arid savannah with **acacia thorn woodland** on the higher ground; **doum palm groves** along the river; **riverine forest** of fig, kigelia and other riparian species along the Ewaso Nyiro's banks; and the **red-ochre earth** that gives the entire Samburu landscape its immediately distinctive visual character the ochre soil, the specific quality of the afternoon light on it, and the contrast with the blue-green river below the bank providing the visual composition that defines the Samburu experience in the memory of every guest who has spent an evening there.

Elephants at Samburu: The Samburu ecosystem holds one of Kenya's most celebrated elephant populations herds of extraordinary size, individually monitored by **Save the Elephants** (which has operated one of the world's most comprehensive elephant research programmes from the Samburu National Reserve since 1997) and habituated to vehicles and boats at remarkably close distances. Elephants bathing in the Ewaso Nyiro adults and calves together in the shallow water, completely unconcerned by observers is the signature wildlife experience of the national reserve itself.

The Westgate Community Conservancy: Adjacent to the Samburu National Reserve's western boundary a 35,000-hectare community conservancy established in 2004, bordering Samburu National Reserve to the south-east, Kalama Community Wildlife Conservancy to the east and Namunyak Wildlife Conservation Trust to the north. Sasaab Lodge is located within the Westgate Conservancy, on a rocky ridge above the Ewaso Nyiro River, looking across to the national reserve and to Mount Kenya.

The Kalama Community Wildlife Conservancy: A 49,000-hectare (240,000-acre) community conservancy north of the Samburu National Reserve, established in 2002 and managed by the Samburu community of the Gir Gir Group Ranch. Saruni Samburu is the only lodge within these 240,000 acres providing the most exclusive access to the largest private wildlife area adjacent to the Samburu National Reserve. A vital **wildlife corridor** for elephants moving between Samburu and Marsabit. Member of the **Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT)**.

The Namunyak Community Conservancy and the Mathews Range

Namunyak Community Conservancy covers **850,000 acres** of north-central Kenya one of the largest community conservancies in Africa, surrounding the beautiful **Mathews Mountain Range** (*Lenkiyo Hills* to the Samburu people), whose forested peaks rise dramatically from the surrounding semi-arid plains to heights of **2,375 metres** at Ol Donyo Lenkiyo.

The conservancy's story is one of the most complete conservation restorations in East Africa. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the area was devastated by ivory poaching: **over 30,000 elephants and rhinos killed**, the landscape emptied of its wildlife. By 1985, there were no recorded elephants remaining in the Mathews Range. The black rhino which once roamed these mountains in abundance was effectively eliminated. The community was impoverished, the land degraded, and the atmosphere as former Namunyak Warden Johnstone Lemer keto has described genuinely dangerous. "Sera was known as a bandit area: a poaching zone, a place where cattle rustlers hid. Before, when people wanted to come to graze their cattle, they had to come in big numbers to be safe, prepared to face any kind of attack. People would sleep at night with their shoes on, in case there was an attack."

The turnaround began in **1993**, when **Ian Craig of Lewa Wildlife Conservancy** persuaded the neighbouring Il Ngwesi community to become the first community conservation initiative in northern Kenya. Two years later, in **1995**, the **Namunyak Wildlife Conservation Trust** was established a community-led conservation body that brought peace, protection and economic benefit to a region that had known none of these things for two decades.

In **1997**, Sarara Camp opened. The first guests at Sarara would "be lucky to catch a glimpse of any wildlife," the camp's own history records. What followed over the subsequent twenty-five years has been called one of the most profound and effective community conservation movements in the world. The elephants, with the specific intelligence and the specific memory that make them the most responsive of all large mammals to changes in human behaviour toward them, began returning when they understood they were safe. Other wildlife followed. The Mathews Forest recovered. The grasslands improved as the poaching pressure was removed and the ecosystem's own regenerative capacity reasserted itself.

Today: **Kenya's second-largest elephant population. One of Kenya's largest herds of reticulated giraffe.** The critically endangered Grevy's zebra. Wild dogs in documented packs. Leopards at exceptional quality. Greater kudu in the rocky mountain margins. And in the **Sera Community Conservancy** which received its first translocated black rhinos in **2015 23 black rhinos now breed** in a community-owned sanctuary, with the first calf born in the wild to a reintroduced female signaling the success of the most ambitious community conservation project in northern Kenya.

The Mathews Range as Ecosystem: The Mathews Range is what ecologists call a "**sky island**" an isolated forested highland whose specific climate and specific vegetation is completely different from the surrounding lowland desert. The range rises so abruptly from the plains below that the ecological transition from semi-arid scrub to montane cedar forest can be traversed in the course of an afternoon's drive, with all the disorientation and wonder that the transition produces.

The forest is ancient, unlogged and botanically extraordinary. The **podocarpus and cedar** trees some of enormous age and girth form a canopy that filters the light into the specific green-tinged quality of undisturbed equatorial highland forest. The forest floor is carpeted with endemic ferns, mosses and orchids. **Ancient cycads** botanical survivors of a world before flowering plants, unchanged for two hundred million years grow in specific colonies within the forest that Kitich Forest Camp's guides know precisely and return to with the reverence of people who understand what they are looking at.

The wildlife of the Mathews forest: **forest elephant** (quieter, more secretive and with different feeding behaviour from the plains elephant), **black leopard** (camera-trapped, occasionally glimpsed), **De Brazza's monkey**, **colobus monkey**, **giant forest hog**, **bushbuck**, **buffalo**, **wild dog** and an extraordinary diversity of birds including magnificent **turacos**, endemic forest species, raptors, and the **350+ bird species** that the range's habitat diversity supports. **150+ butterfly species** have been recorded in the Mathews the forest's flowers and specific microclimates producing a lepidopteran diversity that has attracted professional entomologists from international institutions.

The Sera Community Conservancy

The **Sera Community Conservancy** covers **350,000 hectares** (3,450 square kilometres) of northern Kenya a vast area of semi-arid savannah, seasonal river valleys and the specific doum palm landscapes that characterise this part of the country.

The conservancy was established in **2000** by the local community to protect the elephants which, at the time, were being severely poached. Within the conservancy, a **107-square-kilometre fenced sanctuary** was established in **2015** to receive the first translocated black rhinos the founding population of what has become the **first community-owned and community-operated black rhino sanctuary in Africa**.

The 23 black rhinos now living in the sanctuary represent Kenya's most ambitious community conservation achievement since the 1990s. The tracking of these rhinos on foot guided by expert Samburu trackers whose specific knowledge of each animal's personality and territory is the product of years of daily contact is what Saruni Rhino exists to provide: **the only walking-safari rhino tracking experience in East Africa**.

In **February 2024**, four white rhinos were successfully relocated from Lewa Conservancy in Laikipia to the Sera Conservancy sanctuary making Sera simultaneously a black and white rhino sanctuary, and the only community conservancy in East Africa to maintain a breeding population of both species.

The Suguta Valley

Africa's Most Extreme Landscape — One of Earth's Driest Inhabited Places

The **Suguta Valley** occupies one of the most geologically extraordinary and most climatically extreme positions in Kenya a **volcanic trough within the Great Rift Valley system**, directly south of Lake Turkana, whose floor sits at approximately **300 metres above sea level** while the escarpments to its east and west rise to **1,000 metres**. The temperature differential between the valley floor and the escarpment rim is extreme, the valley's low altitude and the heat-trapping effect of its confining walls producing midday temperatures that regularly exceed **50°C** making it one of the hottest inhabited places on Earth.

The valley is characterised by **volcanic cinder cones** dozens of them, in varying states of eruption and erosion, their craters accessible in some cases to walkers, their forms providing the visual vocabulary of a landscape that looks more like a lunar surface than an African one. The **Barrier Volcano** a broad volcanic complex separating the Suguta Valley from Lake Turkana to the north is the most dramatic of these formations. The **Losiolo Escarpment** on the eastern wall of the valley, rising 2,000 metres above the valley floor near Maralal, provides what multiple sources describe as one of the most dramatic views of the Kenyan Rift Valley.

At the northern end of the valley, **Lake Logipi** a shallow, highly alkaline soda lake maintains water through a combination of the seasonal Suguta River and saline hot springs. The lake's chemistry supports massive concentrations of **cyanobacteria**, which in turn support extraordinary **flamingo concentrations** sometimes exceeding tens of thousands of birds whose pink appears against the white salt flat and the ochre volcanic landscape with the surreal quality of a natural dream.

The geological history: approximately **8,000 years ago**, the Suguta Valley was occupied by a vast lake Lake Suguta which covered an area of approximately **2,150 square kilometres** and reached depths of 300 metres. The lake overflowed north into Lake Turkana during periods of maximum extent. The ancient shorelines wave-cut terraces and shoreline notches are clearly visible on the valley walls today, providing a direct physical record of a world radically different from the present. Walking the Suguta Valley floor while reading the ancient shorelines above is a specific encounter with geological time that no conventional safari provides.

The access reality: the Suguta Valley is most responsibly and most safely accessed by **helicopter** from lodges like Ol Malo, Sasaab, Saruni Samburu, Desert Rose or Segera a 30–60-minute flight depending on origin. Landing on the valley floor for sundowners among the volcanic cones, or at Lake Logipi's shore to watch the flamingoes, then returning to the comfort of a well-designed lodge is the standard Vard Africa programme. Ground access by 4WD vehicle is possible but requires specific security assessment and appropriate preparation.

Lake Turkana — The Jade Sea

World's Largest Permanent Desert Lake | UNESCO World Heritage Site | 6,405 Square Kilometres of Improbable Blue-Green Water.

- ✓ **Lake Turkana** is one of Earth's most extraordinary geographical features a body of water so large (covering **6,405 square kilometres**) that it is visible from space; so remote that it receives fewer visitors annually than a mid-sized European museum; and so ancient in its current form (over 200,000 years of continuous lake existence, with earlier lake phases extending through the Plio-Pleistocene) that its shores have yielded some of the most significant hominin fossil discoveries in the history of paleoanthropology.
- ✓ The lake was formerly known as **Lake Rudolf** named by the Austrian explorer Count Samuel Teleki and Lieutenant Ludwig von Höhnel when they became the first Europeans to reach its shores in **1888**, and given the name of Crown Prince Rudolf of Austria. The Kenyan government renamed it after the dominant community of its shores the Turkana in **1975**, during the presidency of Jomo Kenyatta.
- ✓ The name "**The Jade Sea**" comes from the lake's specific colour: an improbable, deep blue-green that derives from the **algae and cyanobacteria** that thrive in the lake's highly alkaline chemistry. This colour changes in different light conditions deepening toward turquoise in the midday sun, lightening toward grey-blue in overcast conditions, appearing almost emerald in the golden light of late afternoon but retaining at all times the distinctive, alien quality of water in a landscape where no water should exist.
- ✓ **Geological Context:** The lake lies within the **East African Rift System's eastern branch** the same tectonic structure that created the entire chain of East African Rift Valley lakes from the Red Sea to Malawi. The basement rocks of the Turkana region have been dated to **520–510 million years ago** among the most ancient surface geology in Kenya. The lake basin is surrounded by **volcanic cinder cones, basalt flows and tuff deposits** whose chemistry has been used by paleoanthropologists to date the fossil-bearing sediments that make the Turkana region the most important fossil site in the study of human evolution.

The Fossil Record: The eastern shore of Lake Turkana, at **Koobi Fora**, is the world's most productive site for hominin and associated animal fossils from the period of human evolution the **Plio-Pleistocene**, covering approximately 4 million to 1 million years ago. **Richard Leakey** began excavations here in **1968** and the subsequent decades of work have yielded the most extensive and most scientifically significant collection of hominin fossils anywhere in Africa, including specimens of *Australopithecus anamensis*, *Homo habilis*, *Homo rudolfensis*, *Homo ergaster* and *Paranthropus boisei*.

The shoreline of Lake Turkana today sits within a few kilometres of ground that human ancestors walked across **two million years ago**.

Wildlife at Lake Turkana:

- ✓ *Nile Crocodile* Lake Turkana holds one of Africa's largest remaining crocodile populations. A 1968 census estimated **14,000 individuals**. The crocodiles concentrate on **Central Island National Park** (a UNESCO World Heritage Site within the lake, home to three active volcanic craters that fill seasonally with water and serve as hatching grounds), **South Island National Park** and the lake's northern shores.
- ✓ Nile crocodiles of the Turkana are notably large the combination of the lake's vast fish resource and the relatively undisturbed conditions has allowed the population to maintain the body sizes that would have been typical before persecution reduced crocodile populations across most of Africa.
- ✓ *Nile Perch* The lake's fishery is one of the largest freshwater fish populations in Africa. Nile perch (*Lates niloticus*) reach extraordinary sizes individuals of 200–300kg have been recorded. Sport fishing on the lake for these fish is one of the most specifically dramatic freshwater fishing experiences available in Africa.
- ✓ *Hippopotamus* Present at Ferguson's Gulf and other sheltered sections of the lake's western shore.
- ✓ *Birds* Approximately **400 bird species** recorded at or near the lake, including migratory species using the East African Rift system as a flyway, endemic species of the northern arid zone, flamingos, cormorants, kingfishers, Nile skimmer, herons and waders of extraordinary diversity.

The Communities of the Lake Shore:

- ✓ The Turkana people have fished Lake Turkana for generations, their dugout canoe fishing traditions and lakeside communities providing one of the most directly human encounters with an extreme environment available in Kenya. The **El Molo** one of the smallest ethnic groups in Africa, reduced to a few hundred individuals' fish and hunt hippopotamus on the lake's southern shore near Loyangalani.
- ✓ The **Rendille, Gabbra and Daasanach** peoples each occupy specific zones of the lake's enormous drainage basin, their pastoral and fishing traditions among the most specifically adapted human cultures to arid conditions in East Africa.
- ✓ **Access to Lake Turkana:** The lake's shores are most efficiently reached by charter flight from Samburu/Nanyuki area or from Desert Rose Lodge at Mount Nyiru (50km south).
- ✓ **South Island National Park** is accessible by private boat from the shore a 90-minute crossing in calm conditions, longer in the **notorious Turkana winds** (the lake generates its own wind patterns due to the temperature differential between the water and the surrounding desert, and sustained winds of 50+ km/h are common in the afternoons). Ground access from Nairobi via Maralal, Loyangalani or the A1 highway to Ethiopia requires two days' driving.

The Mathews Range

A Biological Bonanza | Sky Island | Ancient Forests and Mountain Streams

Already described above in the context of the Namunyak Conservancy. The Mathews Range's **specific distinction** as a safari destination as opposed to its ecological significance within the Namunyak conservation system lies in what it offers to guests:

- ✓ **Walking in Primeval Forest:** The Mathews Forest has been undisturbed by logging or agriculture across the range of human memory. The trees are ancient, the canopy unbroken, the forest floor complex with accumulated organic matter and the specific micro-habitats of an old-growth equatorial montane ecosystem. Walking here with Samburu guides who know the forest as their cultural territory is walking in a world that most safari travellers have never encountered.
- ✓ **The Ancient Cycads:** *Encephalartos* species the cycads of the Mathews Range are botanical survivors of a world before flowers: seed-producing plants whose design was established 280 million years ago and has not needed to change since. They look like palm trees designed by an engineer who had never seen a tree. They live for centuries. The specific groves within the Mathews forest that Kitich's guides know and visit are not just remarkable in themselves; they are encounters with a biological timeline that makes the dinosaurs seem recent.
- ✓ **Swimming in Forest Pools:** The Mathews' springs and streams form crystal-clear mountain pools clean, cold, shaded by forest canopy that Kitich Forest Camp's guides bring guests to for swimming in conditions available nowhere else in Kenya's northern safari landscape.
- ✓ **The View from Above:** From the Mathews Range's higher points, the view across the northern Kenya plains the desert stretching away toward Lake Turkana in the north, the Samburu landscape in the south, the escarpments of the Rift in the west is one of the most complete geographical panoramas in Kenya, a single view that encompasses the full range of environments that this extraordinary ecosystem contains.

South Horr

Gateway Village to Mount Nyiru and Lake Turkana | Cultural Crossroads of the North

South Horr is a small Samburu and Turkana community village nestled in a forested valley between the **Nyiru Range** and the **Oi Donyo Mara Hills** one of the most beautiful village settings in northern Kenya. The valley's specific microclimate forested, well-watered, sheltered by surrounding hills creates conditions of relative fertility and shade in the midst of the surrounding arid landscape.

South Horr serves as the primary **overland gateway** to **Mount Nyiru** and **Desert Rose Lodge**, the jumping-off point for Lake Turkana expeditions from the south, and a weekly **market day** gathering point where Samburu, Turkana, Rendille and other northern pastoral communities converge to trade livestock, goods and news. The market day encounter available to guests staying at Desert Rose Lodge or passing through is one of the most genuine and most colourful traditional market experiences in Kenya.

The town is also the location of the **Lake Turkana Cultural Festival** held in May or early June of each year, bringing together a dozen tribal groups from across northern Kenya to dance, sing, participate in inter-community reconciliation workshops and display their finest traditional dress and cultural performance in one of the most extraordinary cultural gatherings available to any guest in Kenya.

THE CONSERVANCIES

Conservation Models and Community Ownership in Northern Kenya.

The Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT).

The **Northern Rangelands Trust** was established in **2004** co-founded by members of the Namunyak community and initially facilitated by **Lewa Wildlife Conservancy**. Today it is an umbrella organisation supporting **43 community conservancies** across 44,000 square kilometres of northern Kenya, covering an area considerably larger than Switzerland.

The NRT model is built on a simple but powerful principle: **pastoral communities who own land are the most effective wildlife conservationists when they have the economic incentives and institutional support to choose conservation**. The NRT provides conservancies with technical assistance, financial management support, ranger training, anti-poaching coordination and market access for community-produced goods. The tourism revenue from every lodge in this guide that operates within an NRT conservancy flows back to the community through a structured system of lease fees, bed-night fees and employment obligations.

The results across NRT conservancies have been consistent with what Laikipia demonstrated from the 1990s onward: when communities own the wildlife and benefit from its protection, wildlife populations increase. Across NRT conservancies, **wildlife populations have grown by 84%** in the period since the NRT's establishment, according to wildlife census data from the conservancy network.

Member Conservancies in this Guide: Westgate Community Conservancy (Sasaab), Kalama Community Wildlife Conservancy (Saruni Samburu), Namunyak Community Conservancy (Sarara, Kitich, Reteti), Sera Community Conservancy (Saruni Rhino).

The Namunyak Conservation Model — Blueprint for Africa

Namunyak has been visited by delegations from **Tanzania, Uganda, South Sudan, Rwanda and Ethiopia** seeking to understand and replicate its community conservation model. It represents something specific: **the proof that a community can take a devastated landscape and, through organised commitment and appropriate institutional support, restore it completely** not to what it was before human intervention, but to a functioning ecosystem where wildlife and pastoral community coexist in genuine productive harmony.

The specific features of the Namunyak model:

- **Community ownership** of all tourism facilities (Sarara Camp, Sarara Treehouses, Reteti House) the lodges are leased to operators but owned by the community
- **60% of annual income** goes to community projects; 40% funds conservancy operations
- The **Sarara Foundation** manages the nomadic Montessori education system (fully accredited by the Association Montessori Internationale), mobile health clinic, Eco Ranger rangeland restoration unit, and the Milk to Market programme
- **Reteti Elephant Sanctuary** — Africa's first community-owned and community-operated elephant sanctuary, employing Samburu women as elephant keepers
- **Milk to Market Programme** — over **800 Samburu women** sell goat milk to Reteti as a nutritious formula for elephant orphans, generating independent income for the first time in their lives

A SENSE OF HOMES FAR FROM THE FAMILIAR

Our Properties in Northern Kenya and the Samburu Ecosystem

The lodges and camps of Northern Kenya are not safari products deployed in a wildlife area. They are homes some of them literally the private homes of the people who founded them that express specific relationships with specific landscapes and specific communities. The following profiles are written to the depth those relationships deserve.

WESTGATE COMMUNITY CONSERVANCY

35,000 Hectares | Adjacent to Samburu National Reserve | Community-Owned Sanctuary | Home of the Samburu's Largest Grevy's Zebra Population.

SASAAB LODGE

The Safari Collection | 9 Luxury Suites | 18 Guests | Private Plunge Pools | Moroccan-Swahili Architecture | Global Ecosphere Retreat® | Condé Nast No.12 Best Resort in Africa 2024

Location and Setting: Sasaab Lodge occupies a position of **spectacular drama** above the Ewaso Nyiro River perched on a **rocky ridge within the Westgate Community Conservancy**, looking across the river toward the Samburu National Reserve beyond and south toward the distant snowcap of Mount Kenya on the horizon. This is not a metaphor or a marketing description; it is a geographical fact. Standing on the lodge's ridge and turning south, the iconic profile of Africa's second-highest mountain is visible, three hours' drive and three thousand metres of altitude away, defining the southern horizon with a precision that makes the distance between the mountain and this semi-arid river ridge feel like the most complete single expression of Kenya's landscape diversity available from any single viewpoint.

The Ewaso Nyiro River below northern Kenya's great lifeline, rising from the Mount Kenya and Aberdare glaciers and flowing north-east through the near-desert before disappearing into the Lorian Swamp provides the daily wildlife theatre that defines the Sasaab experience. Elephants bathing in the river's shallows. Grevy's zebra drinking at the bank in their dozens. Reticulated giraffe moving between the riverine trees with the specific deliberate grace that only this subspecies achieves. Crocodiles on the banks. The birds of the Ewaso Nyiro's riparian habitat kingfishers, herons, fish eagles, the extraordinary diversity that permanent water in a semi-arid landscape concentrate.

Introduction and History: Sasaab is a product of **The Safari Collection** one of Kenya's most respected luxury safari companies, whose portfolio includes Mahali Mzuri, Angama Mara and other award-winning properties and its founding in the **Westgate Community Conservancy** in **2004** reflects The Safari Collection's philosophy of community-centred tourism as the mechanism for wildlife protection.

The conservancy was established in the same year the lodge opened a parallel founding that reflects the co-dependency of conservation and tourism revenue that characterises the finest northern Kenya operations. The Westgate Community Conservancy covers **35,000 hectares** bordering Samburu National Reserve to the south-east, Kalama Community Wildlife Conservancy to the east and Namunyak Wildlife Conservation Trust to the north. Over **600 Samburu families** live within and around the conservancy, and the revenues from Sasaab paid as conservation and bed-night fees, supplemented by the employment of the majority of the lodge's team from the surrounding community provide the primary economic justification for maintaining the land as wildlife habitat rather than converting it to agriculture.

The lodge's **community partnership** extends into the most specific and most personal dimensions of Samburu life. The Samburu guides who lead Sasaab's game drives and cultural visits are not guides hired from the tourism industry; they are community members whose family homesteads are visible from the lodge's ridge, whose knowledge of the conservancy's wildlife is the knowledge of people who grew up watching it, and whose engagement with guests about Samburu culture is an expression of genuine pride in that culture rather than a performed presentation.

The Footprint Foundation The Safari Collection's social enterprise arm manages community projects specifically connected to Sasaab and the Westgate Conservancy: free school lunches for over **1,000 children**, a conservation scholars programme supporting **24 high-achieving students** at secondary boarding schools, annual health clinics, female empowerment workshops, HIV/AIDS and FGM awareness initiatives among youth. These projects are not peripheral to the safari experience at Sasaab; they are central to understanding what staying here means.

In **2024**, Sasaab was recognised by **Condé Nast Traveller UK** as **No. 12 in the Best Resorts in Africa** in the Readers' Choice Awards the most credible and most widely read luxury travel recognition available in the international market.

The Architecture — Moroccan Swahili Cool: Sasaab's design addresses the most fundamental practical challenge of the Samburu landscape: **heat**. The reserve floor temperature regularly exceeds 35°C and can approach 40°C in the pre-rain's months. Building luxury accommodation in this environment that remains genuinely comfortable without reliance on mechanical air conditioning is an architectural problem of some seriousness.

The solution that Sasaab's designers reached draws on two architectural traditions adapted to extreme heat:

Moroccan architecture — with its high ceilings, deep shade, central courtyard logic, and the specific thermal mass of stone and plaster that maintains coolness throughout the day by absorbing the morning's cool air and releasing it slowly through the afternoon's heat.

Swahili coastal architecture — with its cross-ventilation design, the specific placement of openings to maximise breeze, and the use of makuti thatch (dried coconut palm fronds, the traditional Swahili coastal roofing material) that insulates effectively while allowing air movement.

The result: large thatched roofs that provide complete shade over generous veranda spaces; canvas walls that can be fully opened to the breeze; rooms designed for cross-ventilation; and the specific cooling effect of the Moroccan courtyard logic applied to the Samburu riverscape context. The lodge feels, in the heat of the day, genuinely and effortlessly cool without a single mechanical air conditioning unit.

Intimate Luxury Safari Living — Rooms and Sleeping Arrangements:

9 luxury suites — 7 standard suites plus 2 family configurations, all positioned along the ridge for the maximum view of the Ewaso Nyiro River below:

Standard Suites (×7): Each suite exceeds **100 square metres** in size a scale that allows the Moroccan-Swahili interior logic to fully express itself. The canvas walls open completely to the west-facing veranda the specific orientation chosen so that every room catches the afternoon river breeze and faces the sunset's direction. The **four-poster king bed** is positioned for the view: lying in bed at Sasaab, the river is visible below the mosquito net's sheer edges. The private veranda carries **sun loungers** and a **two-person soaking plunge pool** positioned on the cliff edge, with the Ewaso Nyiro visible directly below and the game-rich riverbank on both sides. This is the Sasaab experience distilled to its most essential form: lying in the plunge pool, cold water against the afternoon heat, watching elephants on the river bank ten metres of vertical drop below.

The Enormous Open-Air Bathroom: Each suite's ensuite bathroom is one of the largest, most specifically enjoyable single amenity spaces at any Kenyan lodge a full open-air bathroom with **freestanding clawfoot bath**, double washbasins, walk-in rainfall shower and flush WC, all positioned on the cliff edge with the river visible from the bath and the shower. The quality of the light on this bathroom morning, midday, evening is something that guests remember long after the specifics of the suite itself have faded.

Family Suite (Rooms 8 and 9): A configuration designed specifically for families **two individual rooms sharing a central living area and a shared plunge pool**. Rooms 8 and 9 connect through the shared space, creating a family villa configuration with sufficient privacy for parents and children while maintaining the family proximity that young children require. The family suite can also be taken on an exclusive-use basis for a single-family party.

Rooftop Stargazing Bed: Each suite carries a **retractable rooftop bed** a sleeping platform that can be deployed on the suite's upper terrace for guests who want to sleep entirely under the northern Kenya sky. The Westgate Conservancy's altitude (approximately 900 metres) provides sufficient distance from any settlement to make the night sky genuinely extraordinary the Milky Way dense across the equatorial zenith, the specific star field of the northern hemisphere sky visible above the southern stars. The experience of sleeping on the Sasaab roof while the river sounds carry up from below and the sounds of the nocturnal Samburu bush complete the soundscape is one that previous guests describe as among the most specifically beautiful single experiences of their Kenya journey.

The Main Lodge Building:

- ✓ *The 'Mess Souk' — Communal Lounge and Dining:* The central communal space draws on the **Moroccan souk** aesthetic arched doorways, Moroccan lanterns, tile patterns, deep rugs and cushioned seating in the specific combination of sensory richness and complete comfort that the finest Moroccan riad interiors achieve. This is the heart of Sasaab's social life: the evening gathering space, the cocktail hour position, the late-night conversation hub.
- ✓ *The Open-Sided Dining Terrace:* Below the souk, a wide wooden dining terrace faces the river the morning's game visible on the opposite bank during breakfast, the evening's elephant bathing providing the dinner's entertainment. Meals are served here in the cooler hours; lunch in the shade of the souk; bush meals and sundowners at off-site positions.
- ✓ *The Infinity Pool:* Cliff-edge, oriented toward the river one of the finest pool positions in the Samburu ecosystem. Large enough for actual swimming; positioned for wildlife observation; shaded by the lodge's overhanging thatch during the most intense afternoon heat.
- ✓ *SpaSaab:* A full spa facility on the river bank its treatment rooms positioned for the Ewaso Nyiro view, its menu drawing on regional therapeutic traditions and international wellness techniques. SpaSaab is positioned specifically at river level: the therapeutic quality of listening to the river while receiving treatment is not incidental to the facility's design.
- ✓ *Organic Garden and Chicken Coop:* The lodge's own kitchen garden and free-range chickens provide fresh herbs, vegetables and eggs for the kitchen a genuine farm-to-table commitment in a setting where flying in fresh produce daily would be the easier option.

The 4C Cultural Centre: Following the model pioneered by Segera Retreats, Sasaab has established a dedicated **4C (Culture, Community, Conservation, Commerce) exhibition and engagement space** where guests can understand the lodge's conservation and community programme in depth.

Communication in the Wilderness:

- ✓ WiFi is available throughout the property.
- ✓ Mobile coverage (Safaricom) is generally available at the lodge's elevated ridge position and at most positions within the Samburu National Reserve.
- ✓ The conservancy's remoter areas may have limited coverage.

Health & Safety:

- ✓ The property is staffed by dedicated camp managers and fully trained guides.
- ✓ Emergency contacts and evacuation procedures briefed to all guests on arrival.
- ✓ The property is unfenced and located within an active wildlife zone guests are escorted after dark by experienced Masai security staff
- ✓ All guides KPSGA (Kenya Professional Safari Guides Association) silver certified minimum.
- ✓ Strict wildlife safety protocols.

- ✓ Malaria prophylaxis guidance provided.
- ✓ All vehicles are maintained to the highest safety standards.
- ✓ Advanced first aid trained staff on site at all times.
- ✓ Partnerships with flying doctors service (AMREF).
- ✓ 100% solar powered.

Heat: Samburu's temperatures require specific preparation.

Guests should: drink 3–4 litres of water daily; use sunscreen SPF50+ for all outdoor activities even on overcast days; avoid extended outdoor activities between 11am and 4pm in the hottest months; wear lightweight, light-colored clothing for game drives; carry and use a hat at all outdoor positions.

Water: The lodge provides treated and bottled water throughout the stay.

Drinking water is safe and provided in both reusable and conventional bottle formats.

What Is Included in Sasaab Rates:

- ✓ Full board accommodation |
- ✓ All meals |
- ✓ Soft drinks
- ✓ local beers, house wines and selected spirits
- ✓ Bush meals and sundowners at scenic positions
- ✓ Day and night game drives in custom vehicles
- ✓ Guided walks with armed ranger
- ✓ Cultural visits to Samburu villages
- ✓ Samburu market visits (twice weekly)
- ✓ Children's activities including bow-and-arrow making
- ✓ Laundry service
- ✓ WiFi

Activities at Sasaab Lodge:

- ✓ **Day and Night Game Drives — Into Samburu National Reserve and the Westgate Conservancy** — The lodge operates game drives in both the Westgate Conservancy (where off-road driving is permitted) and the Samburu National Reserve (where the standard national park rules apply vehicles on designated tracks). Both environments provide extraordinary wildlife: the national reserve for its concentrated game along the Ewaso Nyiro River elephants bathing, the Special Five at the riverside, lions on the Doum palm floors; the conservancy for the exclusivity of having 35,000 hectares of wildlife land to a single vehicle.
- ✓ *The Dawn Game Drive:* Departing before 6am to the Ewaso Nyiro River banks in the national reserve as the sun rises over the eastern plains — the light arriving from the direction of Ethiopia, the river catching the first gold while the wildlife is still at its most active. The dawn of a Samburu game drive is one of the finest things Kenya provides.
- ✓ *Night Drives:* In the Westgate Conservancy spotlights revealing the nocturnal community of the Samburu landscape: serval, genet, civet, honey badger, aardvark and the specific quality of the northern Kenya night sky uncontaminated by light from any settlement.
- ✓ **Camel Safaris** — Traditional northern Kenya camel expeditions: a few hours on camelback through the conservancy at the specific elevated perspective that the camel provides, with Samburu handlers who know their animals with the intimacy of people who have been camel herders since childhood. The camel's acceptance by the landscape's wildlife the animals completely unbothered by the camel's presence provides a quality of approach that no vehicle achieves.
- ✓ **Quad Bike Excursions** — Available at additional cost (USD 50 per person per hour): exploring the conservancy's terrain on ATVs, an activity that provides the most physically engaged and most terrain-covering access to the conservancy's landscape.
- ✓ **Guided Bush Walks with Armed Ranger** — On foot through the conservancy and along the Ewaso Nyiro's banks, reading tracks, interpreting plants and understanding the ecological relationships of the northern Kenya semi-arid landscape.
- ✓ **Samburu Cultural Village Visits** — Arranged with specific Samburu villages within and adjacent to the conservancy through community elder agreement. These are not tourist village displays; they are visits to working family homesteads where the community's cultural life continues in its normal form. Guides facilitate genuine conversation about Samburu traditions, the warrior system, the beadwork culture, the pastoral economy and the community's history.
- ✓ **Samburu Weekly Market Visits** — The traditional Samburu market held twice weekly near the conservancy where community members trade livestock, food and goods in the patterns of commercial exchange that have characterised northern Kenya pastoral communities for generations. Guests can move through the market freely with their guides, engaging with traders and understanding the specific economics of a pastoral society at the market interface.
- ✓ **Visits to the Conservation Scholar Programme and Community Projects** — The Footprint Foundation's active projects within the community: school visits, health clinic visits and the specific community engagement that makes staying at Sasaab a genuinely contributory experience.
- ✓ **Helicopter Excursions** — From Sasaab's own airstrip: the Suguta Valley, Lake Logipi, Lake Turkana and the northern Kenya wilderness. These excursions are among the most specifically extraordinary flying experiences in East Africa the transition from the Samburu riverscape to the Suguta Valley's volcanic moonscape in a single 30-minute flight being one of the most complete landscape encounters that Kenya aviation provides.
- ✓ **SpaSaab Treatments** — At the spa facility on the river bank: massage, beauty treatments and wellness therapies.
- ✓ **Stargazing** — From the rooftop star bed, guided by the lodge's night sky programme: the equatorial star field of northern Kenya, explained by guides with Samburu astronomical knowledge.
- ✓ **Fly Camping** — "From Sasaab, guests can also experience camping under the stars, in a new location every night, with only a mosquito net between you and the African sky" the mobile camp programme connecting guests to the conservancy's most remote positions in the greatest possible direct contact with the northern Kenya wilderness.

Culinary and Dining Experiences:

- ✓ Sasaab's kitchen operates with a **Moroccan influence** the connection to the architectural tradition expressed at the table: warm spices, tagine-influenced preparations, the specific hospitality of a culinary tradition that celebrates generosity and gathering.
- ✓ Fresh produce from the organic garden, free-range eggs from the lodge's chickens, fresh herbs from the riverside shamba and the finest available regional sourcing combine to produce meals of considerable quality and notable freshness.

"Strong emphasis is placed on the highest quality and freshest products, and the dishes are of a Moroccan influence."

Meals served: in the open-sided dining terrace with the river below; in the Moroccan souk interior; at bush positions within the conservancy; as sundowner sets at the conservancy's most dramatic viewpoints. The cocktail culture at Sasaab is particularly good the Moroccan influence producing a drinks menu of sophistication and warmth.

Why We Love Sasaab Lodge:

- ✓ We love Sasaab for the **plunge pool on the cliff edge** for the specific, irreplaceable, absolutely Sasaab experience of lying in cool water on the rim of a cliff above the Ewaso Nyiro River while elephants bathe in the river below and the Samburu landscape extends to Mount Kenya on the southern horizon. This is available at no other property in Kenya.
- ✓ And for the **rooftop star bed** for the northern Kenya night sky from a proper bed, with the river audible and the dawn arriving from Ethiopia.
- ✓ And for the Samburu guides for the specific, genuinely warm, completely unforced quality of a guide team that comes from this exact community, knows this exact landscape and is proud of both.

Vard Africa Insider Note: *Request rooms 1–7 for the single-room river view configuration. Reserve the star bed on the second or third night after the landscape has become familiar, sleeping under its sky is qualitatively different from doing it on arrival. And arrange the early dawn drive to the river on the morning of your first full day: the Ewaso Nyiro at 6am, before any other vehicle has left camp, with the light arriving from the east and the first elephants at the water this is the Samburu at its most perfect, and it is available at this specific hour, in this specific light, only on mornings when you are committed enough to leave the comfort of that cliff-edge plunge pool before sunrise.*

Families and Children:

- ✓ Sasaab is excellent for families.
- ✓ Children under 3 stay free.
- ✓ The family suite (rooms 8 and 9) provides ideal family configuration.
- ✓ Samburu guides teach children traditional skills bow and arrow making, fire starting, the specific knowledge of the bush that Samburu children learn from their earliest years.
- ✓ Baby-listeners and special children's meals by advance arrangement.
- ✓ The natural sliding waterslide in the 'lugga' (seasonal stream) near the lodge is particularly popular with children.

Getting There:

- ✓ *By Scheduled Flight (Most Common and Recommended):* Daily scheduled flights from **Nairobi Wilson Airport** to **Buffalo Springs Airstrip** (also referred to as Samburu Airstrip) the main airstrip serving the Samburu National Reserve complex on **AirKenya** and **Safarilink**. Flight duration: approximately **45–55 minutes**. From Buffalo Springs Airstrip, the road transfer to Sasaab through the Westgate Conservancy is approximately **1.5 hours** a scenic game drive that serves simultaneously as the arrival journey and the first wildlife encounter of the stay.
- ✓ *By Private Charter to Sasaab's Own Airstrip:* Sasaab has its own private airstrip within the Westgate Conservancy accepting private charter aircraft. Charter from Nairobi Wilson Airport: approximately **45 minutes**. From the private airstrip, the lodge is a short game drive of approximately **15 minutes**. This is the recommended arrival for clients whose time is the primary consideration and who want the most direct access to the lodge.
- ✓ *By Helicopter:* Charter helicopter from Nairobi Wilson or from Laikipia conservancies. Helicopter landing at the lodge's ridge helipad.
- ✓ *By Road:* Nairobi to Sasaab via the A2 highway past Nanyuki, continuing north through Isiolo to Archers Post, then north on the B9 to the Westgate Conservancy: approximately **340 kilometres, 6–8 hours** depending on road conditions and traffic. The road passes through extraordinary landscape the equator crossing north of Nanyuki, the terrain gradually shifting from highland cultivation to semi-arid scrub as the altitude drops. Road transfer can be arranged through the lodge.
- ✓ *Note on Routing:* The route from Nairobi north crosses the equator twice once northbound near Nanyuki (at approximately the same latitude as the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy) and remains north of it for the remainder of the journey to Samburu. The descent from the Kenyan highlands into the Northern Frontier is one of the most dramatic landscape transitions in Kenya the vegetation changing visibly over approximately 50 kilometres of road, the air becoming drier and hotter, the plants shifting from highland acacia to the specific dry-country species of the northern frontier.

Minimum Stay: 2 nights minimum. 3–4 nights recommended to experience the full activity portfolio including fly camping and a Samburu village visit.

Seasonal Closure: Sasaab is closed from approximately **16 November to 30 November** each year. These dates are subject to change confirm with Vard Africa when planning.

KALAMA COMMUNITY WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY

49,000 Hectares | Only Two Properties in 240,000 Acres | Community-Owned by the Samburu of the Gir Gir Group Ranch | Wildlife Corridor | Kalama Mountains

SARUNI SAMBURU

Saruni Basecamp Collection | 6 Eco-Chic Villas | 20 Guests | Gold Eco-Rating | Hilltop Inselberg Position | The Sunken Waterhole Hide | Italian-Influenced Kitchen | Pioneer of Community Conservation in Northern Kenya

Location and Setting: Saruni Samburu occupies one of the most dramatically positioned lodge sites in East Africa perched **atop a rocky inselberg** (an isolated rocky outcrop, the geological equivalent of a natural watchtower) within the Kalama Conservancy, at a height that provides a **360-degree panorama** across the entire northern Kenya landscape. Northward: the Matthews Range on the distant horizon. Southward: the Samburu National Reserve below, and beyond it, the faint profile of Mount Kenya. Eastward: the open Kalama Conservancy plains extending to further ranges. Westward: the continuation of the northern frontier.

This is not merely a beautiful view; it is a **geographical education**: the entire ecosystem the national reserve, the private conservancy, the community lands, the mountain ranges and the specific topography that determines how water, wildlife and people move across this landscape visible simultaneously from a single rocky summit.

Introduction and History: Saruni Samburu opened in **2008** making it the **pioneer safari lodge in the Kalama Conservancy** and the first commercially significant luxury investment in this specific 240,000-acre community-owned landscape. The decision to build here, on a rocky hilltop with views across an area that had no established tourist infrastructure, reflected the conviction that has defined the Saruni Basecamp company's philosophy across all its properties: that **community conservancies, properly supported by tourism revenue, are more effective wildlife sanctuaries than government-managed parks**, and that the finest safari experience comes from the exclusivity and ecological freedom that private community land provides.

The result 240,000 acres for a single lodge's guests; guides who are Samburu warriors passionate about their specific community and their specific landscape; a hilltop position that makes every other lodge's setting feel pedestrian by comparison has been consistently confirmed by the guests and the publications that have covered it. The Luxury Safari Company calls it "one of our favourite camps in Africa" and singles out "the most hilarious charming Samburu staff and guides in Kenya" and "the best view in Kenya." Safari Consultants describes it as "a first-class, unrivalled safari experience in a totally unspoilt environment."

The Conservation Model: Saruni Samburu was facilitated in the Kalama Conservancy's development by the **Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT)** and pays monthly lease fees and nightly bed-night fees to the conservancy funding that covers a significant percentage of the Kalama Conservancy's annual operational budget. The lodge employs the majority of its team from the Samburu community of the Gir Gir Group Ranch, and the financial contribution to the conservancy provides the economic foundation for the community's commitment to maintaining the 49,000 hectares of the Kalama Conservancy as wildlife habitat rather than livestock range.

The **Gold Eco-Rating** from Ecotourism Kenya reflects the lodge's comprehensive sustainability practices: a modern solar system that reduces generator use to backup status; biodegradable detergents; rainwater collection; seed-ball dispersal by guests for reforestation; and the deep community employment model that ensures the lodge's economic footprint reaches the Samburu families of the surrounding landscape.

Intimate Luxury Safari Living — Rooms and Sleeping Arrangements:

- ✓ **6 Luxury, Eco-Chic Villas** designed with the philosophy that the finest luxury is the one that connects most completely to its landscape. The villas are **built into the smooth rock** of the inselberg not placed on the rock but growing from it, the construction following the rock's own contours, the villa's floors and walls sharing the rock's material and its ancient, specific quality of permanence.
- ✓ **2 One-Bedroom Villas:** For couples the most intimate configuration. Each with a king-size bed positioned for the panoramic view; a large open-sided veranda that doubles as an outdoor lounge; an **outdoor shower** looking out across the conservancy plains below; and an ensuite bathroom with flush WC and twin basins. The veranda position is the defining feature: sitting in the veranda chairs at Saruni Samburu, with the conservancy spread hundreds of metres below and the wildlife at the waterhole visible without binoculars, is the most complete expression of what it means to live with a view rather than merely to have one.
- ✓ **4 Two-Bedroom Villas:** Each sleeping either 4 adults or 2 adults and 2 children the most flexible configuration and the most popular for families and friends travelling together. The two-bedroom design maintains the same architectural logic as the one-bedroom villas the rock, the view, the outdoor shower while providing the additional sleeping space for larger parties.
- ✓ All villas share: **king-size beds** with premium quality linens; large verandas with the conservancy view; outdoor showers with the specific pleasure of showering in the open air above an African landscape; ensuite bathrooms with flush WC and twin basins; the specific quality of light that a hilltop position at this latitude provides clear, unobstructed, changing through the day.

Communal and Shared Facilities:

- ✓ **The Main Lounge and Dining Area:** An open-plan communal space on the inselberg's summit open on multiple sides to the panoramic view, furnished with comfortable seating and the warm East African lodge aesthetic. Meals are generally served communally (the Saruni philosophy of shared experience rather than private dining for isolated groups), though private dining is easily arranged. The communal dining at Saruni Samburu a table of maximum 20 guests, with the conservancy visible in every direction, guided by Samburu warrior-guides who sit and eat with guests and tell the stories of the landscape is one of the finest dinner experiences available in northern Kenya.
- ✓ **The Samburu Wellbeing Space:** A spa facility with a range of massages and treatments. A **complimentary 30-minute massage per room** is included in the stay an unusual and generous inclusion that reflects the lodge's philosophy that wellness is part of the safari experience, not an additional luxury.

- ✓ **Two Infinity Swimming Pools:** Both positioned for the panoramic view the first accessible directly from the main lodge, the second at a lower terrace level. Both are cooled by the altitude's natural temperature differential from the valley below.
- ✓ **The Sunken Elephant-Proof Waterhole Hide:** Built into the rock below the main lodge at the level of the adjacent waterhole a concealed observation position from which elephant, hyena, leopard, giraffe, oryx and other wildlife can be photographed at ground level with the animals completely unaware of the human presence. The hide is designed specifically to be **elephant-proof** the walls high enough and substantial enough to protect from an elephant that investigates the structure at close range. The photographic opportunities from this position are extraordinary: eye-level wildlife observation at distances of 5–15 metres.
- ✓ **The Rock-Climbing Position:** The inselberg's own rock face provides natural climbing opportunities that the guides can set up for guests looking out across the Kalama Conservancy from an elevated position on the same rock that the lodge is built on.
- ✓ **'Pride Rock':** A specific named viewpoint on the inselberg that the guides take guests to a rock outcrop projecting above the surrounding landscape that provides the widest and most unobstructed panorama available from the property. Standing on Pride Rock at Saruni Samburu, watching the Samburu National Reserve below and the Matthews Range above, with the afternoon light doing what African afternoon light always does to a northern Kenya landscape, is the specific experience that most guests describe as the most powerful single moment of their stay.
- ✓ **The Cave with Ancient Samburu Rock Art:** Close to the lodge, accessible by a short walk a cave whose walls carry ancient Samburu paintings and carvings made during the *ilkiama* meat-eating feasts: a uniquely Samburu cultural practice in which warriors gather for extended periods of communal meat consumption and ceremony, and in which rock art was created as part of the ritual. The cave is known only to Saruni's guides and to the Samburu community that has maintained knowledge of it across generations. A visit here with a guide who can explain the cultural context of the paintings is one of the most specifically educational experiences in the Kalama Conservancy.

Communication in the Wilderness:

- ✓ WiFi is available in the main lodge areas and in the rooms.
- ✓ Mobile coverage is available at the lodge's elevated position; the hillside approach and some conservancy areas may have limited coverage.

Health & Safety:

- ✓ The property is staffed by dedicated camp managers and fully trained guides.
- ✓ Emergency contacts and evacuation procedures briefed to all guests on arrival.
- ✓ The property is unfenced and located within an active wildlife zone guests are escorted after dark by experienced Masai security staff
- ✓ All guides KPSGA (Kenya Professional Safari Guides Association) silver certified minimum.
- ✓ Strict wildlife safety protocols.
- ✓ Malaria prophylaxis guidance provided.
- ✓ All vehicles are maintained to the highest safety standards.
- ✓ Advanced first aid trained staff on site at all times.
- ✓ Partnerships with flying doctors service (AMREF).
- ✓ 100% solar powered.

Activities at Saruni Samburu:

- ✓ **Day and Night Game Drives — The Kalama Conservancy and Samburu National Reserve** — In the conservancy, with the exclusivity of 240,000 acres for the lodge's 20 guests and any Basecamp Samburu guests (the only other property in the conservancy), off-road driving is permitted and the wildlife encounters have the specific quality of complete privacy. In the national reserve, the standard park rules apply, but the reserve's wildlife particularly the elephants, the Special Five and the big cats provides game-viewing of extraordinary quality.
- ✓ **Walking Safaris with Samburu Warrior Guides** — Through the Kalama Conservancy's terrain with guides whose knowledge of the landscape is the knowledge of people who grew up in it. Walking here is not a supplement to the game drive; it is a genuinely different form of encounter with the landscape's ecology and its human dimensions.
- ✓ **The Photographic Waterhole Hide** — Eye-level wildlife photography at the sunken hide adjacent to the main lodge. Pre-dawn positioning for the first animals' arrival; late afternoon for the concentration as the day's heat forces wildlife to water.
- ✓ **The Ancient Samburu Rock Art Cave Visit** — A guided walk to the cave with the lodge's Samburu guides: understanding the cultural tradition of *ilkiama* and the specific rock art it produced in the context of this particular community's cultural history.
- ✓ **'Pride Rock' Sundowners** — The viewpoint above the lodge, at the specific hour when the northern Kenya light does what it does to landscapes of this character at the western horizon.
- ✓ **Samburu Village Visits** — To the Kalama Conservancy's Samburu community villages not tourist demonstrations but visits arranged through the guides' own community relationships, which is a fundamentally different thing.
- ✓ **Rock Climbing** — On the inselberg's own rock face, guided by the lodge's ranger team.
- ✓ **Cultural Education with the Warrior Guides** — Fire-starting with traditional materials; spear-throwing with training guidance from guides who carry spears not as costume but as functional tools; understanding the Samburu age-grade warrior system from within it rather than from outside.
- ✓ **Reteti Elephant Sanctuary Visit** — A full-day excursion to the Namunyak Conservancy and the Reteti Elephant Sanctuary approximately 90 minutes to 2 hours by road from the Kalama Conservancy.

Culinary and Dining Experiences:

The kitchen at Saruni Samburu draws on the Saruni Basecamp group's **Italian culinary heritage** the company's founder having brought Italian culinary sensibility to the northern Kenya wilderness in a combination that sounds unlikely and tastes extraordinary.

Fresh pasta, Italian-influenced preparations and the specific quality of a kitchen that takes its food seriously, combined with locally sourced proteins and herbs from the lodge's own garden. *"The food is Italian influenced, and better than any Italian restaurant served by the charming Samburu."*

Meals served communally in the main lodge area, with private dining available on request; bush dinners in the Kalama Conservancy; sundowners at the conservancy's finest positions.

Why We Love Saruni Samburu:

- ✓ We love Saruni Samburu for the **outdoor shower with the view** for the specific experience of standing under open-sky rainfall water with the entire Kalama Conservancy 300 metres below, the game at the waterhole visible without moving from the shower position.
- ✓ And for the **communal dinner with the warrior guides** for the specific quality of an evening where the people serving the meal are the same people who guided the day's activities and who come from the community visible on the conservancy below, sharing their knowledge of this landscape over dinner with the natural authority of people who genuinely possess it.
- ✓ And for the sunken hide: for 15 minutes of eye-level elephant observation at 10 metres, while sitting in complete concealment in a rock-walled structure built specifically for this purpose.

Vard Africa Insider Note: *Stay four nights at Saruni Samburu rather than the standard three. The first day is orientation the view, the position, the landscape. The second day is the national reserve at dawn, and you begin to understand the specific character of Samburu's wildlife density. The third day is the community visit, the rock art cave, and the conversation at dinner that only happens when guides and guests have been in each other's company for long enough to move beyond safari small talk. The fourth day is the morning when everything has settled into a rhythm and you understand, for the first time, what the inselberg position actually means not as a dramatic backdrop but as a specific relationship with the landscape below.*

Families and Children: Saruni Samburu is excellent for families. The four two-bedroom villas accommodate families of up to 4 or 5. Cultural activities the warrior demonstrations, the fire-starting, the spear-throwing are particularly engaging for children aged 8 and above. The waterhole hide is universally loved by children. The photographic hide's ground-level elephant encounters are the kind of wildlife moment that children carry with them permanently.

Getting There:

By Scheduled Flight (Standard): Daily scheduled flights from **Nairobi Wilson Airport to Kalama Airstrip** on AirKenya (approximately **45–55 minutes**). From Kalama Airstrip, Saruni Samburu is a **20-minute game drive** up the hillside to the inselberg summit a drive that already begins the wildlife encounter. The airstrip is located within the Samburu National Reserve area, approximately 7 kilometres from the Kalama Conservancy boundary.

By Private Charter: Direct charter from Nairobi Wilson to Kalama Airstrip: approximately 45 minutes.

By Road: Nairobi to Saruni Samburu via Isiolo and Archers Post: approximately **6–7 hours**. The lodge is 7 kilometres north of the Samburu National Reserve's northern boundary. Road transfer can be arranged.

Note on Samburu National Reserve Access: The core game-viewing areas of the Samburu National Reserve the Ewaso Nyiro River bank where the wildlife concentrates most densely are approximately **50 minutes' drive** from the lodge down the hillside. This means that the densest wildlife viewing requires a significant commitment of time per session, and guests should plan game drive schedules accordingly. Two game drives into the national reserve in a three-night stay is a realistic programme; more intensive access requires a 4-night minimum.

SERA COMMUNITY CONSERVANCY

350,000 Hectares | Africa's First Community-Owned Black Rhino Sanctuary | 23 Black Rhinos | 4 White Rhinos | The Singing Wells of Kisima Hamsini | 16,000 Samburu Pastoralists

SARUNI RHINO

Saruni Basecamp Collection | 4 Bandas | Maximum 8 Guests | East Africa's First Walking Rhino Safari | Doum Palm Riverbed Setting | The Original Out-of-Africa Rhino Experience

Location and Setting: Saruni Rhino occupies a position in the **Sera Community Conservancy** that feels like the physical expression of the word "remote" a dry riverbed lined with beautiful **doum palms** in northern Kenya's northern frontier, 350,000 hectares of conservancy landscape around it, accessible only by charter flight or a 2-hour 4WD journey from Saruni Samburu (which is itself not close to anything). The Kauro Lugga (seasonal river) dry for most of the year but sand-floored and cool under the doum palm canopy is the setting for most of what Saruni Rhino offers: a camp that has been designed not as a luxury accommodation seeking to distract guests from the environment but as a platform for an encounter with one specific, specific and irreplaceable wildlife experience.

Introduction and History: Saruni Rhino opened in **2017** built between beautiful doum palms on the banks of the Kauro River as the **first and only lodge in East Africa to offer safaris specifically focused on tracking the critically endangered black rhino on foot**. It is, by design, the most purpose-built and most narrowly focused luxury camp in the Saruni Basecamp portfolio: a camp whose reason for existence is one specific activity, and whose design, staffing and positioning have been optimised entirely around delivering that activity at the highest possible standard.

The **Sera Community Conservancy** was established in **2000** by the local Samburu community to protect the elephants which were being severely poached. The 3,450-square-kilometre conservancy is home to approximately **16,000 Samburu semi-nomadic pastoralists** one of the largest community populations of any single conservancy in northern Kenya. Within the conservancy, a **107-square-kilometre fenced sanctuary** was established in **2015** to receive the first black rhinos translocated from other parts of Kenya.

The sanctuary was and remains **Africa's first community-owned and community-operated black rhino sanctuary**: built, managed and protected by a Samburu community whose relationship with these animals across the previous three decades had been primarily adversarial (the rhinos having been hunted to extinction in the area by the 1980s), and whose transformation into the most effective rhino protectors in northern Kenya is one of the most specifically moving stories in African conservation.

The rhino population at the time of Saruni Rhino's opening (2017): approximately **10 black rhinos** in the sanctuary. By 2023: **23 black rhinos** with **12 calves** born since the 2015 reintroduction an increase rate that exceeds the targets the Kenya Wildlife Service set for the project. In **February 2024**: four white rhinos were successfully relocated from Lewa Conservancy in Laikipia to the Sera Conservancy sanctuary making Sera the first community conservancy in Kenya to maintain breeding populations of both black and white rhino simultaneously. As of 2024 KWS assessment, the sanctuary now holds 23+ black rhinos and at least one white rhino calf, the first born in the sanctuary.

"Every guest who stays at Saruni Rhino contributes directly to the protection of this iconic species," the Saruni Basecamp company accurately states. The financial mechanism is direct: every bed-night fee paid by guests at Saruni Rhino is channelled into the conservancy's operating costs ranger salaries, veterinary care, monitoring equipment and the community development programmes that sustain the community's commitment to protection.

Intimate Luxury Safari Living — Rooms and Sleeping Arrangements:

4 Bandas — a *banda* being a rustic stone cottage with a thatched roof and canvas roll-down windows, the architectural form of northern Kenya's frontier lodges. At Saruni Rhino, the banda is not a compromise or an apology for what cannot be provided in this remote setting; it is an honest and thoroughly appropriate architectural expression of what this camp is about:

Banda One (Family Banda): A **large open-plan house** sleeping up to **4 guests** in one double plus the possibility of 2 additional single beds, with a shared covered outside bathroom and toilet. Open-plan in style no room dividers with a beautiful private sandy terrace with chairs and tables overlooking the Kauro lugga (dry riverbed). The most generous single accommodation unit at Saruni Rhino.

Bandas Two and Three: Each sleeping **2 guests** in king-size bed configurations, with ensuite stone shower rooms and private sandy terraces facing the riverbed. The doum palm canopy provides natural shade and sound filtration; the riverbed below provides the visual and audio landscape that makes the camp feel simultaneously exposed to the wild and intimately sheltered.

Banda Four: The fourth banda, completing the quartet the same design logic as two and three.

All bandas share: **flushing toilets; hot and cold running water; natural stone showers** (the stone sourced locally, the bathroom design expressing the same honest architectural logic as the whole camp); private sandy terraces overlooking the lugga; canvas roll-down windows that allow full screening while maintaining maximum ventilation in the heat; and the extraordinary acoustic environment of a doum palm riverside the specific sound of wind in those palm fronds, the bird calls of the riverside habitat, the specific quality of silence between those sounds in the Samburu night.

Communal and Shared Facilities:

The Main Open-Fronted Area: A simple, honest open-sided mess area leading out to the campfire in the dry Kauro River stone walls on three sides, high thatched makuti roof, open front facing the riverbed. The décor is understated: a few sofas, a drinks cabinet, a dining table, **bright rhino artwork** on the walls that adds the colour that the surrounding landscape's ochre and stone tones don't supply. Meals are served here when the riverbed is not possible; most meals are served in the riverbed itself.

- ✓ *The Riverbed Dining*: The Kauro lugga's sandy floor shaded by doum palms, lit by lanterns in the evenings serves as the dining room, the cocktail lounge and the evening gathering space that most camps call the 'boma' or 'campfire area'. Breakfast in the riverbed before the morning rhino tracking. Dinner in the riverbed under the northern Kenya stars. The riverbed's specific atmospheric quality the sand underfoot, the palm canopy overhead, the night sounds of the Sera Conservancy makes every meal here a genuinely extraordinary experience.
- ✓ *The Swimming Pool*: Added to the camp to address the northern Kenya heat a welcome facility that has been described by multiple visitors as "very welcome in the northern Kenyan heat." Positioned for the riverbed view.
- ✓ *The 'Day Bed' Position*: A shaded outdoor relaxation area adjacent to the swimming pool and waterhole the position from which the waterhole's wildlife traffic is observed when guests are not on rhino tracking or game drives.
- ✓ *The Permanent Waterhole*: Immediately adjacent to the camp visited daily by **elephants, impala, kudu, oryx, monkeys and much more**, including the famous **sand grouse 'spectacular'** (seasonal): thousands of sand grouse descending to water at once in the dawn light, their collective noise and movement one of the most specifically striking wildlife displays available in the Sera Conservancy.

Communication in the Wilderness:

Power is available **24 hours a day** from the camp's solar system.

Charging facilities in rooms though not sufficient power for hairdryers or high-draw appliances.

Mobile signal is limited or absent.

Activities at Saruni Rhino:

- ✓ **Black Rhino Tracking on Foot — East Africa's Definitive Walking Safari Experience** The experience that makes Saruni Rhino exist, and the experience that no other lodge in East Africa offers.
- ✓ Each morning tracking walk begins with the ranger team's intelligence from the previous day's monitoring which individuals were seen where, which direction they were moving, what sign (tracks, dung, browse marks) the dawn rangers have found. The group assembles a maximum of 6 guests per walk, plus the Saruni guide and the conservancy ranger and moves into the sanctuary on foot.
- ✓ The black rhino is not easy to find. It is the most solitary and most secretive of the two African rhino species, and in the 107 square kilometres of the sanctuary it has sufficient space to be genuinely difficult to locate. This is not a game reserve where the rhinos are

habituated to vehicle approach and can be found by radio contact; this is a tracking experience in which the guide and the ranger use traditional tracking skills reading spoor, interpreting vegetation disturbance, understanding the specific character of the landscape at the specific season to locate animals that have no obligation to be found.

- ✓ When the rhino is found, the approach continues on foot slowly, quietly, reading the wind, making the adjustments in position that keep the human scent away from the animal's extraordinarily sensitive nose.
- ✓ A black rhino's eyesight is poor; its sense of smell is extraordinary. The approach must be conducted with the tracker's wind-reading knowledge constantly applied.
- ✓ The encounter: the rhino in the bush, at close range, aware of the human presence to varying degrees depending on the individual, continuing to browse or moving away or turning to investigate all of these are possible, all of these are extraordinary. A black rhino at 15 metres on foot, in the northern Kenya dawn, in the country it was reintroduced to after a decade-long absence, protected by a community that two decades ago had no reason to protect it this is the most specifically significant wildlife encounter available in East Africa, and it is available here and nowhere else.
- ✓ **White Rhino Observation** — The four white rhinos translocated in 2024 add a new dimension to the Sera sanctuary experience: both species observable in the same sanctuary, the contrast between the black rhino's secretive bush habits and the white rhino's more open grassland grazing providing the full rhino spectrum in a single visit.
- ✓ **Day and Night Game Drives** — Through the Sera Community Conservancy's vast landscape: the Special Five, elephants in significant numbers, wild dog (recorded in the conservancy), leopard, striped hyena, and the specific wildlife of the northern Kenya semi-arid landscape.
- ✓ **The Singing Wells of Kisima Hamsini** — The Sera Conservancy is home to 'The Fifty Wells' (Kisima Hamsini) a series of springs where local Samburu pastoralists take their livestock to water. As described in detail in the ecosystem overview above, this is one of Africa's most ancient living cultural traditions: warriors digging deep into the dry earth to find groundwater, forming a human chain to pass water up to the surface, singing their family's specific song as they work, the cattle recognizing their family's song and moving toward it, the elephants arriving after the cattle depart to kneel at the well shafts and drink. This experience is available to Saruni Rhino guests as part of the conservancy programme Vard Africa coordinates timing for dry-season visits when the wells are in active use.
- ✓ **Guided Walking Safaris** — On foot through the conservancy's landscape with the Samburu tracking guides.
- ✓ **Bird Watching** — The Sera Conservancy's bird diversity is outstanding: the sand grouse dawn spectacle (seasonal), the birds of prey along the escarpment edges, the riverine species along the seasonal Kauro and the dry-land specialist birds of the northern frontier.
- ✓ **Star-gazing and Campfire Evenings** — In the Kauro riverbed under the northern Kenya sky the doum palms framing the star field above, the campfire providing warmth against the night air that is cooler than the day's temperature suggests, the sounds of the conservancy completing the atmosphere.
- ✓ **Reteti Elephant Sanctuary Visit** — The Namunyak Conservancy's Reteti Sanctuary is accessible from Saruni Rhino by road or charter an extraordinary complement to the rhino tracking experience, completing the northern Kenya large-mammal conservation story.

Culinary and Dining Experiences:

The kitchen at Saruni Rhino operates with the same Italian-influenced quality that distinguishes all Saruni Basecamp properties, adapted for the remote camp setting. Fresh provisions are flown in for each group.

- ✓ Meals are served in the Kauro riverbed under the stars, by lantern light, with the doum palms overhead and the sound of the conservancy around.
- ✓ The simplicity of the setting enhances rather than diminishes the quality of what is served: people who have spent the day tracking black rhinos on foot in the northern Kenya bush are hungry in the most satisfying way, and the riverbed dinner that follows is one of the most genuinely earned and genuinely savored meals in the East African safari experience.

Health & Safety:

- ✓ The property is staffed by dedicated camp managers and fully trained guides.
- ✓ Emergency contacts and evacuation procedures briefed to all guests on arrival.
- ✓ The property is unfenced and located within an active wildlife zone guests are escorted after dark by experienced Masai security staff
- ✓ All guides KPSGA (Kenya Professional Safari Guides Association) silver certified minimum.
- ✓ Strict wildlife safety protocols.
- ✓ Malaria prophylaxis guidance provided.
- ✓ All vehicles are maintained to the highest safety standards.
- ✓ Advanced first aid trained staff on site at all times.
- ✓ Partnerships with flying doctors service (AMREF).
- ✓ 100% solar powered.

Why We Love Saruni Rhino:

- ✓ We love Saruni Rhino for the **specific thing it exists to provide** and for the courage of the design decision to build a luxury camp with a single purpose and to hold that purpose without compromise or distraction.
- ✓ Most luxury safari camps try to be everything to all guests; Saruni Rhino tries to be one thing to one specific type of guest the person who wants to track a critically endangered black rhino on foot in the African bush, in a community-owned sanctuary, guided by people who have dedicated their professional lives to the protection of that animal.
- ✓ For that guest, there is no better camp in East Africa.

Vard Africa Insider Note: *Book the rhino tracking for the first full morning rather than the second the specific quality of a first encounter with the Sera sanctuary, when everything is unfamiliar and the tracks in the sand are being read for the first time, produces an alertness and an attention that the second morning, however excellent, cannot entirely replicate. And stay for the Singing Wells if your timing falls in the dry season: the combination of the rhino tracking in the morning and the Singing Wells in the late afternoon is the most complete Northern Kenya conservation encounter available in a single day, and it is available only here.*

Getting There:

- ✓ **By Private Charter to Kauro Airstrip (Strongly Recommended):** The Kauro airstrip is adjacent to the camp a 5-minute drive from the landing strip to the banda entrance. Charter from Nairobi Wilson Airport: approximately 1 hour 10 minutes. Charter from Saruni Samburu's area: approximately 30 minutes.
- ✓ **By Scheduled Flight and Road Transfer:** Scheduled flight from Nairobi Wilson to Kalama Airstrip (near Samburu National Reserve), followed by a road transfer of approximately 1.5 hours to the camp, using the Ethiopian highway or the northern dirt track. Both routes are navigable by 4WD vehicle in dry conditions.
- ✓ **Combination with Saruni Samburu:** The most natural and most efficient itinerary combination places Saruni Samburu (3 nights) before Saruni Rhino (2–3 nights) the road or short charter flight connecting the two camps within the Saruni Basecamp portfolio. The combination provides the wildlife density and landscape beauty of the Kalama Conservancy before the specifically focused rhino tracking experience of the Sera.

NAMUNYAK COMMUNITY CONSERVANCY

850,000 Acres | Kenya's Second-Largest Elephant Population | Africa's First Community-Owned Elephant Sanctuary | The Mathews Range | Blueprint for Community Conservation

SARARA CAMP

Community-Owned | 6 Luxury Ensuite Tents + Sarara House | Namunyak's Foundation Property | Opened 1997 | The Mathews Range View | The Infinity Rock Pool | Ann: Africa's First Female Samburu Guide

Location and Setting: Sarara Camp sits on a hillside on the eastern side of the **Mathews Range** overlooking the sweeping wilderness of the Namunyak Conservancy's valley floor, the mountains rising behind and the 850,000-acre landscape spreading before, with Mount Kenya's distant profile visible on the clearest mornings to the south. The camp faces a **permanent waterhole** that serves as the focal point of the Sarara Valley's wildlife theatre: elephants in significant numbers at all hours of the day, the full range of the conservancy's species coming to water, and the specific quality of a waterhole that has been active year-round since the conservancy's restoration.

The name *Sarara* means "**meeting place**" in the local Samburu language apt for a camp whose 25-year history has made it the meeting place of the world's conservation community, the Samburu community's aspirations and the wildlife that has returned to a landscape that was empty of it within living memory.

Introduction and History: Sarara Camp opened in **1997** two years after the Namunyak Wildlife Conservation Trust was established, and in the specific circumstances that the camp's own history describes with characteristic honesty: *"The first guests at Sarara would be lucky to catch a glimpse of any wildlife."* In 1997, the wildlife restoration that the Namunyak Conservancy's founding had set in motion was only two years old. The elephants whose return would vindicate the entire project had not yet come back.

The founders of the Sarara project **Piers and Hillary Bastard**, who had been visiting Namunyak for photo safaris since the early 1960s and who returned after the ivory poaching era to help the community rebuild were betting on a future that had not yet arrived. The camp opened in 1997 because the community's conservation work required the tourism revenue that only an operational lodge could generate, not because the wildlife justified a luxury safari camp in conventional terms.

What followed across the subsequent 25 years is what justifies not only the camp but the conservancy model on which it is built. The elephants did return with the specific intelligence and specific memory that makes elephants the most responsive of large mammals to changes in human behaviour toward them. The wildlife followed the elephants. The Mathews Range forest recovered. The community prospered. By 2023, Sarara was one of the most celebrated and most specifically instructive conservation-tourism partnerships in Africa.

Piers Bastard's son Jeremy Bastard and his wife **Katie Rowe** took over the Sarara Foundation's management in **2010** and have been the central figures in the project's most transformative recent chapter co-founding the **Reteti Elephant Sanctuary** in 2016, developing the **nomadic Montessori education system** accredited by the Association Montessori Internationale, launching the **Milk to Market programme** through which more than 800 Samburu women sell goat milk to Reteti as elephant formula, and establishing the **Eco Ranger unit** doing rangeland restoration work across the conservancy.

The Current Hosts Michael and Ann: Since 2024, Sarara Camp's resident management couple has been **Michael and Ann** previously the managing team at Reteti House. Michael's natural gift for hospitality and Ann's extraordinary distinction she is **Africa's first female Samburu safari guide** define the specific character of the camp's current hosting. Ann's deep knowledge of the conservancy's ecology and cultural landscape, expressed through a guiding that combines formal naturalist education with the specific embodied knowledge of a woman who grew up in this landscape, is one of the most compelling reasons to stay at Sarara Camp.

Intimate Luxury Safari Living — Rooms and Sleeping Arrangements:

6 Spacious Ensuite Tented Suites positioned along the hillside for maximum views of the Mathews Range and the permanent waterhole below. Each tent: **solar powered** throughout; **24-hour hot and cold running water**; indoor wardrobe, toilet and sink; private outside bathroom with **solar-heated outdoor shower** with views of the conservancy below; **private veranda** with table and chairs the position for morning tea before the day's activities begin, the position for watching elephants at the waterhole, the position that Sarara guests are most often found in.

The tent interiors are described by Bush & Beyond as expressing "**raw wilderness with refined design and deep cultural connection: earthy textures, handcrafted details and classic safari romance**" a description that captures the specific quality of the Sarara aesthetic: materials and furnishings that belong to this landscape, chosen with taste and care, producing spaces that are simultaneously comfortable and completely honest about where they are.

Two suites are interconnected by an outdoor path making them the ideal family unit for parents and children wanting connected but physically separate sleeping spaces.

Sarara House — The exclusive two-bedroom private residence:

- ✓ *Design and Position:* A standalone house with a **spectacular private plunge pool**, private dining area and a spacious lounge with panoramic views across the conservancy. Completely separate from the main camp with its own dedicated team of staff, its own dedicated vehicle and guide, and the complete privacy of a private house in an 850,000-acre wilderness.
- ✓ *Accommodation:* Two ensuite bedrooms, each with king-size bed and full bathroom. Shared lounge. The plunge pool positioned for the Mathews Range view. Private dining on the house's terrace.
- ✓ *For whom:* Couples wanting the most complete privacy the conservancy offers; families with children who want a self-contained house rather than the camp's more communal arrangement; small groups of 4 who want exclusive-use accommodation.

The Main Camp Facilities:

- ✓ *The Natural Rock Swimming Pool:* One of the most specifically beautiful pool designs at any camp in Northern Kenya a swimming pool built using the natural rock of the Sarara hillside, the pool's walls and basin shaped by the rock itself. It overlooks the permanent waterhole the wildlife visible below as guests swim.
- ✓ *The Infinity Rock Pool Overview:* The pool's position directly above the waterhole creates the Sarara experience that most guests describe first: lying at the pool's edge, looking over its rim at the elephants drinking 50 metres below. This is wildlife observation from a completely comfortable horizontal position, with cold water beside you and the Mathews Range above.
- ✓ *The Dining and Lounge Area:* Under a large thatched roof with open sides facing the waterhole the communal space where all Sarara guests gather for meals and for the evening conversations that camps of this size and this quality produce.
- ✓ *WiFi:* Intermittent in main areas. Vard Africa prepares clients for the connectivity conditions of Namunyak which are part of its character rather than a limitation to be apologised for.

Communication: Intermittent WiFi in main camp areas. No WiFi in individual tents.

Activities at Sarara Camp:

- ✓ **Unrestricted Day and Night Game Drives** — Across 850,000 acres of private conservancy with no other tourist vehicles. The exclusivity of this land area for the number of guests at Sarara's properties (maximum 12 at the camp, additional at Reteti House and the Treehouses) produces game drive encounters of complete privacy. The Sarara Valley's resident leopards, the waterhole's elephant traffic and the conservancy's extraordinary wildlife density make the game drive here genuinely different from anything available in Kenya's national parks or more visited conservancies.
- ✓ **Walking Safaris in the Mathews Range Forest** — The signature Sarara walking experience: guided walks into the montane forest of the Mathews mountains, through the cedar and podocarpus canopy, to specific botanical destinations that the Samburu guides know with the intimacy of people whose community has lived in this forest for generations.
- ✓ **The Ancient Cycad Groves** — A specific destination within the Mathews forest walks: the colonies of ancient *Encephalartos* cycads survivors of a botanical world 280 million years old whose specific locations are known only to the guides and whose significance is explained with genuine reverence by guides who understand what they are looking at. *"The ancient cycad groves were magical."*
- ✓ **Hiking in the Mathews Mountain Forest** — For physically active guests: multi-hour or full-day hikes into the higher sections of the Mathews range, through the forest to specific viewpoints, accompanied by Samburu guides and rangers.
- ✓ **Horseback Safari with Lenewalla** — *"A horseback safari alongside Lenewalla, our Samburu cowboy, is a wonderful way to discover the magic of this landscape."* The Sarara horseback programme uses the specific relationship between horses and the northern Kenya landscape that the Samburu pastoral tradition has maintained across generations.
- ✓ **Visit to the Reteti Elephant Sanctuary** — The most emotionally engaging and most specifically important activity available from Sarara Camp. Reteti is approximately 1 hour from the camp by road accessible for half-day and full-day visits. The experience: watching the orphaned elephant calves come in from their daily walk in the conservancy for bottle feeding; meeting the Samburu keepers (including **Dorothy Lowaktuk**, one of the first female elephant keepers in East Africa, who has been with Reteti since its founding in 2016 and who now leads a team of 15 women); visiting the new **Reteti Visitor Centre** (opened 2024 by President Ruto, designed by MASS Design Group in partnership with Save the Elephants and The Sarara Foundation); understanding the **Milk to Market programme** through which Samburu women's goat milk provides the formula for the orphaned calves.
- ✓ **Samburu Village Visits and Cultural Encounters** — Through the Sarara Foundation's deep community relationships: visits to active Samburu homesteads, engagement with the specific cultural practices of this community, the women's beadwork, the warrior traditions and the specific stories of this landscape's conservation recovery told by the people who lived through it.
- ✓ **The Singing Wells** — Where seasonal conditions permit (dry season, approximately July–October): observing the Kisima Hamsini wells in active use. The walk to the wells, the waiting while the warriors dig, the first sound of the singing in the distance, the cattle moving toward their family's well and the elephants appearing as the cattle depart available to Sarara guests as part of the conservancy's cultural programme.
- ✓ **De Brazza's Monkey Hike** — A specific guided walk to the forest habitat of the De Brazza's monkey one of the rarest primates in Kenya, found in the Mathews Range in one of the southernmost populations of this Central African forest species. The hike requires patience and a specific knowledge of the forest that Sarara's guides possess.
- ✓ **The Blacksmith Visit** — *"Watch master blacksmith craft traditional tools and jewellery, a tradition passed down through generations."* The Samburu blacksmithing tradition is one of the most specific and most rarely accessible crafts visible to guests in northern Kenya: a technology of iron-working whose specific techniques have been transmitted through generations and that produces the knives, the jewellery components and the household tools of Samburu daily life.
- ✓ **Beading Workshops with Samburu Women** — *"Join Samburu women creating vivid beadwork, discovering each design's meaning and the lives of the 'Butterfly People'."* A workshop arrangement through the Sarara Foundation's community connections: sitting with Samburu women while they work, learning to read the patterns, beginning to create with guidance.

- ✓ **Fly Camping under the Stars** — An overnight in the wilderness beyond the camp's perimeter: dinner on an open fire, sleeping in the bush with the Mathews Range forest above and the conservancy sounds around. *"Spend a night under the stars, sleeping in your own mosquito-netting tent in the middle of a dry river bed, watching the stars in the clear sky above you."*
- ✓ **Helicopter to the Top of Orka with Overnight Camp** — For the most adventurous guests: a helicopter flight to the summit of Orka (one of the Mathews Range's prominent peaks) with an overnight fly camp on the summit. The view from this elevation across the entire Namunyak landscape, toward Lake Turkana in the north and Mount Kenya in the south is available from nowhere else in the ecosystem. *"Take to the sky by helicopter and spend the night on top of Orka."*
- ✓ **Quad Biking Through the Luggas and to the Local Village and Market** — The conservancy's terrain explored by ATV, with visits to the traditional Ngelai market on market days. *"For the adventurous, quad bike across through luggas, over the Samburu landscape visiting the local village or to the local, colourful market day at Ngelai."*
- ✓ **Swimming in Hidden Forest Rock Pools** — The crystal-clear mountain streams of the Mathews Range form specific deep pools in the forest interior known to the guides, accessible on the longer walking excursions, providing one of the most specifically physical and most genuinely refreshing activities in northern Kenya.

Culinary and Dining Experiences:

Katie Rowe's Prue Leith culinary training she trained at Prue Leith's renowned Cookery School in London shapes the philosophy and the standard of the food at all Sarara properties. The kitchen draws on produce from the camp's own vegetable garden, eggs from the camp's chickens and the finest available regional sourcing the results described by guests and by independent travel writers as among the finest camp cooking in northern Kenya. Fresh, flavourful, specific to the season and the garden, served with the warmth that a family-run operation produces.

Meals at Sarara Camp are served: in the open-sided dining area overlooking the waterhole; on the camp's terrace at the natural rock pool edge; in the conservancy at bush breakfast positions after the morning drive; in the forest on picnic lunches during the walking days; and in the specific riverbed or clearing positions that the guides know for sundowner and dinner positions.

Health & Safety:

- ✓ The property is staffed by dedicated camp managers and fully trained guides.
- ✓ Emergency contacts and evacuation procedures briefed to all guests on arrival.
- ✓ The property is unfenced and located within an active wildlife zone guests are escorted after dark by experienced Masai security staff
- ✓ All guides KPSGA (Kenya Professional Safari Guides Association) silver certified minimum.
- ✓ Strict wildlife safety protocols.
- ✓ Malaria prophylaxis guidance provided.
- ✓ All vehicles are maintained to the highest safety standards.
- ✓ Advanced first aid trained staff on site at all times.
- ✓ Partnerships with flying doctors service (AMREF).
- ✓ 100% solar powered.

Why We Love Sarara Camp: We love Sarara for the **1997 decision** for the specific courage of opening a camp when the wildlife hadn't yet come back, because the community's conservation work required the revenue and the faith that the wildlife would return. The elephants did return. They always return to a landscape that is safe. And for Ann for Africa's first female Samburu guide, who brings to every game drive and every walk the specific authority of a woman who grew up in this landscape and who shares its knowledge with the full confidence of genuine expertise.

Vard Africa Insider Note: *Combine Sarara Camp with a visit to Reteti on the third day after two days of the conservancy's landscape and wildlife, the specific encounter with the orphaned elephant calves at bottle feeding, with Dorothy explaining the Milk to Market programme and the conservation recovery of the elephants in this specific area, is the most complete expression of what Namunyak's conservation achievement means in human terms. And request the cycad grove walk: the ancient plants, the specific quality of walking in a forest where the trees were already old before the first humans arrived in this landscape, is the most specifically humbling experience that the Mathews Range provides.*

Families and Children: Sarara Camp is outstanding for families. The interconnected tent option; the Reteti visit (universally beloved by children of all ages); the horseback programme; the beadwork workshops; the waterhole wildlife from the rock pool's edge; and the specific warmth and engagement of Michael and Ann's hosting all create exceptional family experiences. Children are welcomed genuinely rather than accommodated reluctantly.

Getting There:

- ✓ *By Private Charter to Namunyak Airstrip (Recommended):* Direct charter from **Nairobi Wilson Airport** to **Namunyak Airstrip** adjacent to the Sarara properties: approximately **1 hour 10 minutes to 1 hour 20 minutes**. From the airstrip, Sarara Camp is approximately **10–15 minutes by road** through the conservancy.
- ✓ *By Scheduled Flight and Road Transfer:* Scheduled flight from Nairobi Wilson to **Kalama Airstrip** (near Samburu National Reserve approximately 45 minutes) followed by a road transfer to Sarara Camp of approximately **1.5 hours**. Total journey: approximately 2–2.5 hours. Alternatively, scheduled flight to **Lewa Downs Airstrip** followed by a **3.5-hour road transfer** through the northern Kenya landscape.
- ✓ *By Road:* Nairobi to Sarara Camp via Nanyuki, Isiolo and the northern route: approximately **7–8 hours**. The road passes through extraordinary landscape, but the distance makes road travel a significant commitment.
- ✓ *Special Offer:* The Sarara group periodically offers **complimentary roundtrip charter flights** for international guests staying at Sarara Camp, Sarara Treehouses or Reteti House contact Vard Africa for current availability of this offer.

SARARA TREEHOUSES (Sarara Tree Camp)

Namunyak Community Conservancy | Treetop Platform Accommodation | Opened 2016 | Unique Forest Edge Position | Walking Safari Base

Introduction: Sarara Treehouses also known as Sarara Tree Camp opened in **2016** as the second Sarara property in the Namunyak Conservancy, complementing the main camp with a radically different accommodation type: **treetop platform rooms** built into the canopy of the forest edge, providing the most directly immersive forest accommodation experience available in northern Kenya.

The treehouses are positioned at the junction between the open conservancy and the Mathews Range forest each platform built into the trees at sufficient height to be within the forest canopy structure, providing the specific experience of sleeping at tree height in an African forest: the birds at eye level, the canopy sounds at night, the specific quality of morning light filtered through tree leaves from directly above.

Getting There: As Sarara Camp same airstrip and road options apply.

Activities: The full Namunyak conservancy activity portfolio: game drives, forest walks, ancient cycad groves, De Brazza's monkey hike, Reteti Sanctuary visit, cultural visits, fly camping. The treehouse position at the forest edge provides a specific additional perspective the wildlife that moves between the open conservancy and the forest margin is observable from the platforms at different hours of the day.

Combined Programme: Vard Africa regularly combines Sarara Camp and Sarara Treehouses in a single 5–6-night itinerary the camp providing the waterhole wildlife theatre and the community engagement programme, the treehouses providing the forest immersion experience and the specific aerial perspective on the forest-savannah interface.

RETETI HOUSE

Namunyak Community Conservancy | 4 Standalone Rooms + 1 Family Suite | Exclusive-Use | Adjacent to Reteti Elephant Sanctuary | Private Ecolodge

Location and Setting: Reteti House is an **exclusive-use private ecolodge** the entire property reserved for a single group of up to 10–12 guests positioned in the **dramatic landscape of Namunyak** in immediate proximity to the **Reteti Elephant Sanctuary**. The house's design is described as blending "naturally into the dramatic landscape" stone, natural materials and the specific colour palette of the northern Kenya savannah used to create an architecture that is simultaneously beautiful and completely honest about its environment.

Introduction and History: Reteti House opened in **2021** the third Sarara Foundation property in the Namunyak Conservancy, developed in response to demand from guests who wanted the most complete possible engagement with the Reteti Elephant Sanctuary and its conservation story, in an accommodation that provided genuine luxury in an exclusive-use format.

The house is positioned to make the Reteti experience the central element of the stay: close enough to the sanctuary for guests to attend multiple feeding sessions, to spend time with the keepers, to understand the full range of the sanctuary's operations over an extended stay. It is the most complete way to experience Reteti's work not as a half-day excursion from Sarara Camp but as the organising principle of a 3–5 night stay in its own right.

Activities:

The full Namunyak activity portfolio game drives, forest walks, cultural visits, Singing Wells centred on daily **Reteti Elephant Sanctuary visits**: multiple feeding sessions per day if desired; time with Dorothy Lowaktuk and the keeper team; understanding the specific conservation story of each individual elephant calf in residence; visiting the new Visitor Centre; participating in the Milk to Market programme observation.

Why We Love Reteti House:

We love Reteti House for the **intimacy of the Reteti access** for the specific quality of spending 3–4 days as a semi-resident of the sanctuary, knowing the calves by name, recognizing their specific behaviours and personalities, watching the keepers' individual relationships with their charges develop through repeated daily contact. This is not the tourist encounter; it is something closer to being a temporary member of the Reteti community.

SARARA WILDERNESS (Sarara Mobile Camp)

Namunyak Community Conservancy | Fully Mobile Fly Camp | Remote Wilderness Positions | Helicopter Access | The Ultimate Northern Kenya Immersion

Introduction: Sarara Wilderness is the Sarara Foundation's **fully mobile camp** a travelling camp that sets up in new, remote positions within the conservancy and the broader Namunyak landscape, accessed by helicopter or by extended game drive from the permanent camps. No fixed location. No permanent infrastructure. Just the wilderness, the guides, a well-equipped camp and the specific freedom of sleeping in positions that no permanent facility can reach.

The mobile camp positions change according to wildlife activity, the season's specific wildlife concentrations and guests' interests the camp moving to wherever the most extraordinary experience is available on any given day or week. **Helicopter access to the top of Orka** for an overnight camp on the mountain summit. **Dry riverbed positions** under doum palms for star-bed nights in the lower conservancy. **Forest clearings** at the Mathews Range margin for nights surrounded by the sounds of the montane forest.

This is northern Kenya at its most direct, its most immersive and its most honestly wild and it is available from no other operator in the Namunyak landscape.

SAMBURU NATIONAL RESERVE

The Heart of Northern Kenya's Wildlife Circuit | The Ewaso Nyiro River | Kenya's Greatest Elephant Population per Unit Area.

SOROI LARSENS CAMP

Soroi Collection | 12 Luxury Tented Suites + 2 Family Units + 2 Deluxe Suites | River Frontage | Named for Explorer Eric Larsen | Ewaso Nyiro Riverbank | Ranked #1 Safari Camp in Samburu National Reserve

Location and Setting: Soroi Larsens Camp occupies one of the finest positions in the **Samburu National Reserve** on the **banks of the Ewaso Nyiro River**, its 12 tented suites, 2 family units and 2 deluxe suites arranged along the river frontage for maximum access to the wildlife that the river attracts continuously and the views that the riparian setting provides. The elephants that bathe in the river below the camp's dining area at dawn and dusk are not occasional visitors; they are daily presences, their individual identities known to the camp's guides and their movements understood as part of the daily rhythm of life at Larsens.

Introduction and History: The camp carries the name of **Eric Larsen** a celebrated explorer whose original camp was pitched on this precise section of the Ewaso Nyiro River. The **Soroi Collection** the family-run Kenyan hospitality company that operates Larsens rebuilt the camp in **2022**, transforming it from its previous scale into the current **boutique, intimate property** that the Company describes as a "new chapter in luxury safari experiences in Samburu." The reconstruction reduced the number of rooms for a more exclusive feel, upgraded the tented suite quality and repositioned the camp within the Soroi Collection's portfolio as its flagship northern Kenya product.

"Located along the banks of the Ewaso Nyiro River, Soroi Larsens boasts one of the best locations in Samburu."

Intimate Luxury Safari Living — Rooms and Sleeping Arrangements:

12 Luxury Tented Suites: Each featuring a **spacious king-size bed**, private en-suite bathroom, **generous wooden terrace with exclusive river frontage** the terrace furnished with comfortable lounge sofas, a writing desk and a large walk-in wardrobe. The riverfront position of each tent places the Ewaso Nyiro's wildlife, the palm grove opposite and the game-rich bank in the immediate foreground of every morning's waking view.

2 Family Units: Connected tent configurations for families with children the family units providing the most comfortable and the most practical arrangement for parents with young children in the Samburu heat and wildlife environment.

2 Deluxe Luxury Tented Suites: Described as having "amplified features" compared to the standard suites the most complete accommodation at Larsens, with the finest river frontage positions, the largest private terraces, the outdoor showers and **star beds** for sleeping under the river sky. The deluxe suites represent the most complete single accommodation unit available in the Samburu National Reserve.

Communal and Shared Facilities:

- ✓ *The Riverside Terrace and Dining Area:* The central gathering space commanding the river view, catching the afternoon breeze off the water, providing the morning and evening animal theatre of the Ewaso Nyiro in direct, unmediated proximity. *"You can eat indoors (with rhinos grazing on the lawn outside), outdoors on the deck or even by lamplight in the bush."*
- ✓ *The Infinity Swimming Pool:* River-facing a pool position that is genuinely fine, the wildlife visible across its rim throughout the day.
- ✓ *The Spa and Wellness Oasis:* *"Our bespoke treatments, infused with natural ingredients, offer a serene escape to nourish the body and soul."* Soroi Collection
- ✓ *The Sundowner Rock:* An elevated rock position near the camp used for the traditional sundowner experience the Ewaso Nyiro visible below, the Samburu landscape spreading in every direction, the evening light doing what it does to the northern Kenya savannah at the hour before dark.

Communication: Complimentary WiFi available in rooms and guest areas. Mobile coverage generally available at the riverbank position.

Activities at Soroi Larsens Camp:

- ✓ **Day and Night Game Drives in Samburu and Buffalo Springs National Reserves** The Ewaso Nyiro river circuit, the doum palm groves, the open game plains all in custom 4x4 vehicles with KPSGA-qualified guides whose knowledge of individual animal movements within the reserve is the product of continuous, daily observation. *"Shared scheduled game drives daily, in our specially-designed vehicles."*
- ✓ *The Bird Walk:* *"Larsens offers bird walks along the banks of the river. With almost 400 species setting up home in the reserve, there's certainly a lot to see on an hour or two-hour stroll."*
- ✓ **Samburu Cultural Experiences** — Village visits, traditional demonstrations, market visits to the Samburu market at Archers Post.
- ✓ **Wilderness Bush Dinners and Sundowners** — At the sundowner rock and at specific positions within the reserve.
- ✓ **Spa Treatments** — At the Spa and Wellness Oasis.

Culinary and Dining Experiences:

Full board meals with all beverages (soft drinks, local beers, selected spirits and house wines) included in the rate.

The kitchen sources the freshest available produce; the river setting and the specific atmosphere of the Ewaso Nyiro's banks make every outdoor meal a specifically fine dining experience regardless of the technical complexity of what is served.

Health & Safety:

- ✓ The property is staffed by dedicated camp managers and fully trained guides.
- ✓ Emergency contacts and evacuation procedures briefed to all guests on arrival.
- ✓ The property is unfenced and located within an active wildlife zone guests are escorted after dark by experienced Masai security staff
- ✓ All guides KPSGA (Kenya Professional Safari Guides Association) silver certified minimum.
- ✓ Strict wildlife safety protocols.
- ✓ Malaria prophylaxis guidance provided.
- ✓ All vehicles are maintained to the highest safety standards.
- ✓ Advanced first aid trained staff on site at all times.
- ✓ Partnerships with flying doctors service (AMREF).
- ✓ 100% solar powered.

Why We Love Soroi Larsens Camp:

We love Larsens for the **river** for the specific, irreplaceable quality of the Ewaso Nyiro at the camp's feet, its daily rhythm of wildlife arrivals and departures that makes the riverbank the finest wildlife-watching position in the national reserve and the finest sunrise position in the Samburu ecosystem.

Getting There:

- ✓ *By Scheduled Flight:* Daily scheduled flights from **Nairobi Wilson Airport** to **Buffalo Springs Airstrip** on AirKenya and Fly ALS: approximately **45–55 minutes**.
- ✓ Samburu Airport is **8.7 miles (approximately 14 kilometres)** from the camp approximately **20–30 minutes** by road transfer.
- ✓ *By Road:* From Nairobi north via Isiolo and Archers Post: approximately **300 kilometres, 5–6 hours** depending on road conditions.

KOROS CAMP

South Horr Valley | L'Donyo Mara Conservancy | Marsabit County | Northern Kenya

The Northernmost High-End Destination in Kenya | Exclusive-Use | Maximum 12 Guests | Sandwiched Between Ol Donyo Mara and the Sacred Ol Donyo Nyiru | The Gateway to Every Wild Thing the North Offers

"Koros is definitely off the usual tourist circuit. It works as a really good base, particularly for helicopter adventures. After a beautiful scenic helicopter flight, you land in camp, which is nice and shady with some decent trees. Instead of just going from one wildlife place to another, visiting Koros exposes you to a completely different experience. The scenic flying in this particular landscape is absolutely stunning."

THE LOCATION AND SETTING

To understand what Koros Camp is, you first have to understand where it sits. Not in the general sense of northern Kenya but specifically, geographically, in the exact context that makes this camp unlike anything else in the Vard Africa portfolio.

The **South Horr Valley** runs north to south in the far northern reaches of Marsabit County, in a landscape that most Kenyans have never seen and that most international visitors never reach. The valley is defined by two mountains: to the west, **Ol Donyo Nyiru** *the sacred mountain of the Samburu*, rising to 2,752 metres and carrying on its forested western face the cloud-forests and waterfalls that sustain this arid landscape's water system; to the east, **Ol Donyo Mara**, its lower but equally imposing counterpart framing the valley from the other side. Between them, the valley floor is semi-arid scrubland acacia, doum palm, dry riverbeds, red earth and the specific quality of light that exists at 800 metres altitude in equatorial northern Kenya. Hot. Still. Ancient.

Koros Camp sits at the **northern end of this valley**, where the topography begins to open toward the Turkana basin and the geological drama of the **Suguta Valley** one of the hottest and most geologically active landscapes on Earth becomes the backdrop rather than a distant rumour. Lake Turkana's southern shores are **45–60 kilometres** to the north. On clear mornings, the sky above the camp has a quality that is specific to this part of Kenya: it is not the highland sky of Laikipia or the savannah sky of the Maasai Mara. It is the sky of the north vast, unpolluted by any human light, carrying the specific silence of a semi-desert that is far from everything that generates noise.

The camp sits within the **L'Donyo Mara Conservancy** a community-owned conservation area whose Samburu custodians have chosen tourism, alongside their traditional pastoralism, as the economic model for this landscape. Koros Camp's presence here is not a concession from a national park authority. It is a partnership with the people whose land this is and whose ancestors have tended it for generations.

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

Koros Camp began as something entirely private. In the years preceding 2021, the camp existed as the **upcountry home of the Taylor family** built and lived in while the family was working with the **Lake Turkana Wind Power Project**, the largest wind energy project in sub-Saharan Africa, whose turbines now rise from the Turkana landscape to the north. The Taylor family's love for the South Horr Valley is visible in every detail of the camp's original construction: the specific care with which the buildings were positioned to capture the valley breeze, the attention to the views, the organic integration of the structures with the rocky hillside around them. This was not a hotel built for visitors. It was a home built for people who loved this place.

On **1 July 2021**, **Tropic Air Kenya** and **Lattitude Adventures** took over management of the property in a partnership that changed its character decisively while preserving its soul. The new operators understood immediately what the Taylor family had created a base that was honest, beautiful and genuinely rooted in the landscape and they chose to amplify rather than redesign it. In **2023**, the camp was **completely rebuilt and relaunched**: every structure redesigned for low environmental impact, new thatched rooms with stylish interiors, new communal spaces, a rock-cut swimming pool positioned at the camp's highest point to capture the valley breeze and the view simultaneously.

The result is a camp that carries two distinct legacies: the Taylor family's specific love for this valley, expressed in the original building decisions; and Amory and Karina's specific expertise in making remote places accessible and extraordinary, expressed in the activities portfolio, the community programme and the quality of the guest experience they create.

AMORY AND KARINA — THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE KOROS

Amory and **Karina** are both born and raised in Kenya. Both come from families who were at the **forefront of safari exploration in East Africa** families who understood the continent before the safari industry fully formed around them and who gave their children the specific knowledge that only deep familiarity with a landscape produces. They are not hotel managers who learned about northern Kenya at a training programme. They are Kenyans who know this place in their bones.

Through **Lattitude Adventures**, Amory has developed what he describes as "*innovative, lightweight safaris that reach remote and beautiful places with ease*" a philosophy expressed most completely at Koros, where the combination of Tropic Air's helicopter fleet, *Fiammetta* the Lake Turkana boat, the quad bikes, the camp vehicles and Amory's own specific knowledge of where in this landscape each activity finds its finest expression creates a programme that is simultaneously effortless for guests and deeply informed by local knowledge.

Karina brings **operational expertise and natural warmth** the specific hospitality intelligence that transforms a camp in the desert from an adventure base into a genuinely welcoming home. Guests describe the experience of being at Koros as being managed by people who are happy to be there and who extend that happiness generously. The camp's own website captures the quality: "*Koros is space, simplicity, and a deep connection to place.*"

They have lived at Koros. This is not a sentence that can be written about many camp managers in the Vard Africa portfolio. Amory and Karina are not commuting from Nairobi. They are here, in the valley, in the camp, in the landscape and their specific contentment in being here is the most powerful single recommendation the camp has.

INTIMATE LUXURY SAFARI LIVING

The Rooms and Communal Spaces

- ✓ **Six Private Rooms** — the camp accommodates a **maximum of 12 guests** exclusively. There are no other guests. There is no shared wildlife circuit with other camps. There is no game-viewing vehicle from another property at the same sundowner position. The entire South Horr Valley, the entire L'Donyo Mara Conservancy and the entire northern horizon are yours for the duration of your stay.
- ✓ **The Architecture:** Every room is built on a **wooden framework** with **mud walls** and a **thatched roof** the materials of the northern Kenyan vernacular, the materials that the Samburu and Rendille communities of this landscape have used for generations to build shelters that are cool in the day's heat and warm in the night's chill. The thatching is not a design statement; it is the most effective thermal regulation available at this altitude in this climate. The mud walls are not a compromise; they are the specific aesthetic of a building that belongs to its landscape rather than being imposed on it.
- ✓ The 2023 redesign added **stylish interiors** that give the rooms a character entirely different from their simple external appearance. The specific quality of the interiors: **canvas wardrobes** for clothing storage in the bush; **private en-suite bathrooms** with flush toilet and **safari-style bucket shower** the specific shower experience that requires a ritual (the request to the camp team, the filling of the overhead bucket with perfectly heated water, the knowledge that you have five good minutes and the specific pleasure of not wasting them) and produces a physical pleasure entirely disproportionate to the method. **Open-air sides** to the rooms, creating **270-degree views** across the valley floor to the mountains on either side the room itself functioning as a viewing platform rather than an enclosed sleeping space.
- ✓ The **wrought-iron beds** are large and specifically beautiful dark, heavy ironwork that provides the visual anchor of each room in the same way that the four-poster canvas bed anchors the classic East African safari tent. Canvas wardrobes for storage. Simple, specific, honest: *nothing is overdone*.
- ✓ **The Central Open-Air Mess and Lounge:** Under high thatch bar, bookshelves, games, comfortable seating arranged for conversation and for the view. The mess area is the camp's social heart. Meals happen here: the camp's specific culinary offerings the **pizza on blankets under stars**, the **succulent curries and smoked kebabs**, the full English breakfast on the veranda, the fresh fruit platters and muesli all served in the context of a space that is genuinely open to the landscape on every side. When the valley breeze comes through in the late afternoon, the mess area is the finest single outdoor room in northern Kenya.
- ✓ **The Rock-Cut Swimming Pool:** At the camp's highest point positioned not simply for cooling off but for the specific view from the pool's edge across the valley floor and up to the mountain faces on both sides. The position was chosen with intelligence: the highest point captures the breeze before it descends into the valley, making the pool area the coolest and most ventilated space in the camp during the hottest hours. A sundowner at the pool as the light changes on Ol Donyo Nyiru's western face is one of the specific, unrepeatable pleasures of a Koros stay.

The Campfire: Adjacent to the communal area the evening gathering point, the star-gazing platform, the specific experience of a fire in a landscape where the darkness is total and the Milky Way is a physical presence rather than a distant blur.

WiFi: Available throughout the communal areas.

The specific Vard Africa note: at Koros, the purpose of the WiFi is to prove to yourself, on the second day, that you are not missing anything important enough to justify using it. The valley has a way of making the world below seem less urgent than it did in Nairobi.

All Nine Staff from Anderi: The camp's entire team of nine staff members are from the neighbouring village of **Anderi** the specific community whose land the camp sits on and whose monthly borehole fee of **USD 35** the camp pays as acknowledgement of that privilege. This is not a staffing coincidence; it is a deliberate choice to put the economic benefit of the camp's operation directly into the hands of the community that hosts it. When a guest is served dinner at Koros, they are being served by someone who walked to work from the village that the camp is actively sustaining.

GETTING THERE

The arrival at Koros Camp is, more than at almost any other property in northern Kenya, an integral part of the experience. How you arrive defines the opening chapter of the stay. Vard Africa plans the arrival accordingly.

By Helicopter from Tropic Air — The Definitive Arrival:

Tropic Air Kenya's helicopter fleet provides the most specifically extraordinary arrival at any camp in the Vard Africa portfolio. The helipad is **directly adjacent to the camp** no vehicle transfer, no delay between landing and the camp team's welcome. The helicopter arrival from any northern Kenya starting point (Sarara, Sasaab, Desert Rose, Nanyuki or any Laikipia lodge) transforms the approach into a continuous aerial safari: the Mathews Range, the Ndoto Mountains, the Suguta Valley's volcanic drama or the Turkana basin's jade shimmer all visible en route depending on the flight path Amory and the Tropic Air pilots design.

The specific sequence Vard Africa recommends: arrive at Koros by helicopter from a Samburu or Laikipia property as part of the northern Kenya helicopter circuit Sarara to Koros, or Sasaab to Koros, or Lewa to Koros with the flight routing over the Suguta Valley's white sand dunes on the approach. Landing at Koros in the late afternoon, the camp in shade, the valley glowing behind it: this is the arrival experience that no road transfer can replicate.

By Charter Aircraft to Sadar Airstrip — The Practical Air Option:

Tropic Air operates private charter flights into **Sadar Airstrip** using their Cessna fleet. Sadar is approximately **20 kilometres from the camp** a road transfer of approximately **30 minutes** across the northern landscape, arranged by the camp.

From Nairobi Wilson Airport: approximately **1 hour 45 minutes** to 2 hours by charter. From Nanyuki: approximately **1 hour 15 minutes**.

Vard Africa note: When using Sadar, Vard Africa coordinates the vehicle transfer through the camp team to ensure the road journey is guided rather than simply transited the 20-kilometre approach through the valley offers specific wildlife and cultural observations that an uninformed driver will pass without noting.

By Road from Nanyuki — The Seven-Hour Overland:

Approximately **7 hours driving from Nanyuki** via Isiolo and Laisamis; **10 hours from Nairobi**.

The road is fully tarmacked to Laisamis the quality of Kenya's northern road infrastructure at its best along the A2 highway. At Laisamis, a **left turn onto murram road** begins the final section into the valley. This road is drive able by standard 4WD in dry conditions; Vard Africa recommends confirming road conditions at time of travel, particularly during the short rains (October–December) when the murram sections become less predictable.

The road journey north from Nanyuki is itself an experience of extraordinary landscape variety: from the highland equatorial farmlands around Nanyuki, through the Isiolo lowlands and the increasingly arid northern corridor, past the Samburu and Buffalo Springs landscape, into the specific character of the northern frontier zone. Guests who drive to Koros arrive having experienced the full geographical transition from Highland Kenya to northern desert frontier. The camp at the end of that road feels specifically and dramatically earned.

Google Maps Navigation: *The camp's own guidance:* "Simply search for Koros Camp on Google Maps and you'll be guided right to the doorstep." Vard Africa provides the specific road instructions and the Laisamis turn details to all driving clients as part of the pre-travel pack.

COMMUNICATION

WiFi is available at the camp in the communal areas. Mobile signal (Safaricom) is limited at camp level in the valley; there may be signal at elevated positions. The specific connectivity character of Koros is more remote than any Laikipia property but better connected than Kitich Forest Camp guests with business that requires daily communication should discuss their specific requirements with Vard Africa before the stay.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- ✓ **Malaria:** The South Horr Valley floor sits at approximately **800 metres altitude** significantly below the malaria-free threshold of 1,800–2,000 metres. Koros is in a **malaria-risk zone**. Anti-malarial prophylaxis is recommended for all guests travelling to Koros. Consult your travel physician for the appropriate medication for your complete itinerary. Mosquito nets are standard in all rooms; repellent should be carried personally.
- ✓ **Heat:** The South Horr Valley can reach **temperatures above 40°C** during the hottest months. The camp's architecture thatch for insulation, open-air sides for ventilation, the rock pool at the highest and breeziest point manages the heat more effectively than this temperature figure suggests. The specific activity planning at Koros: early morning and late afternoon for all outdoor activities; midday at the pool and in the shaded mess area. Guests should maintain high hydration throughout.
- ✓ **Medical Evacuation:** **AMREF Flying Doctors** cover is mandatory for all Vard Africa clients travelling to Koros. The nearest hospital of adequate standard is in Marsabit a significant drive; AMREF air evacuation from Sadar Airstrip or the camp's own helipad is the primary emergency medical response. Comprehensive travel and medical evacuation insurance is required.
- ✓ **Wildlife:** The valley supports **Grevy's zebra, reticulated giraffe, Beisa oryx, gerenuk, dik-dik, vervet monkey, jackal** and small cats. **Leopards** are resident; they are nocturnal and elusive but their presence should be respected in the standard bush protocols. The camp is not fenced. Night movement outside the immediate camp perimeter should be with a staff escort. One specific note from guest accounts: **a leopard** has been documented visiting the camp's waterhole after dark making the campfire hour a specific wildlife observation opportunity if guests are quiet and patient.

ACTIVITIES AT KOROS CAMP

- ✓ Koros offers the most specific and most varied activity portfolio of any camp in northern Kenya.

- ✓ This is the camp's primary distinction in the Vard Africa portfolio: not the accommodation or the food or even the landscape in isolation, but the specific combination of what Amory and Tropic Air can do from this base that nobody else can.
- ✓ The activities at Koros do not overlap with the activities at any other northern Kenya camp.
- ✓ They are the activities of this specific position at the intersection of the Suguta Valley, Lake Turkana, Mount Kulal, the Chalbi Desert and three distinct tribal cultures and they are available nowhere else.

THE HELICOPTER SAFARI — THE ACTIVITY THAT DEFINES KOROS

Tropic Air | Suguta Valley | Lake Logipi | Lake Turkana Aerial | The Painted Valleys | The Ndoto Mountains | The Most Extraordinary Aerial Landscape in Kenya

Tropic Air Kenya's helicopter operations are the reason Koros exists in the form it does. Amory's partnership with Tropic Air brings to this base the specific capability light, fast, flexible, able to land anywhere the ground is level that turns the northern landscape from a challenge of distance into a canvas of possibility.

The Suguta Valley at Dawn or Dusk:

The **Suguta Valley** is one of the most geologically dramatic landscapes in Africa. Running south from Lake Turkana into the depths of the Great Rift Valley, it is a landscape shaped by active volcanism, extreme temperatures and the specific processes of a rift valley floor that is still actively forming. The specific helicopter experience from Koros:

Departure at dawn or dusk from the camp's helipad the Suguta Valley lit by the low-angle light that turns the lava flows purple and the sand dunes gold. Flying north from the camp, the landscape below transitions from the scrubland of the South Horr Valley to the **lava flows, saline marshes and pockets of doum palms** of the Suguta's southern section. Within minutes of the valley entrance, the **white sand dunes** appear rolling formations of windblown volcanic sand that shift continuously with the prevailing winds, creating a landscape that looks different on every visit.

Landing on the dunes: feeling the sand fine, warm, volcanic between the fingers while the helicopter engine ticks in the silence. Then back in the air, continuing north to the **northernmost feature of the Suguta Valley: Lake Logipi**.

Lake Logipi a shallow soda lake no more than 3 metres deep, with a pH of **14** (highly alkaline, approaching the chemical limit of biological life in open water). The lake is jade-green and pink simultaneously: jade from the algal bloom that gives the Jade Sea its name; pink from the **tens of thousands of flamingos** that use its extreme chemistry as a feeding platform, filtering the lake's cyanobacteria through their characteristic sideways-held bills. Landing beside Lake Logipi: the specific sensory experience of standing on the lake's margins, the flamingo community audible before it is visible, the heat of the Suguta floor radiating upward, the helicopter behind you and 10,000 flamingos ahead.

This is the Suguta Valley helicopter safari. It is the finest single aerial experience in northern Kenya and possibly in Kenya as a whole. It is specifically, exclusively available from Koros.

The Ndoto Mountains:

The helicopter provides access to the **Ndoto Mountains** ancient crystalline basement rock rising from the Samburu lowlands in formations of extraordinary geological age. Helicopter access into the Ndoto allows walks in landscapes that no vehicle road reaches, encounters with the specific montane ecology of an isolated mountain range and the specific views that height and geological drama combine to produce.

Koobi Fora and Sibiloi National Park:

For clients with the appetite for the full Turkana circuit: helicopter north along the **eastern shores of Lake Turkana to Koobi Fora in Sibiloi National Park** the fossil site where the **Leakey Foundation** has unearthed some of the oldest known remains of *Homo habilis*, the earliest recognised member of the human genus. The specific encounter: standing at a paleoanthropological site that has changed the understanding of human origins, in the company of Tropic Air's expert pilots and Amory's contextual narration of what these discoveries mean.

The Painted Valleys and Silale Crater: The helicopter route from the south takes guests over the **Silale Crater**, up the **Suguta Valley**, through the **Hoodoo** and **Painted Valleys** geological formations whose colours shift from ochre to purple to deep red with the changing angle of the sun and down to the **Horr Valley** and Koros for landing. This full northern circuit is available from no other camp in Kenya.

FIAMMETTA — THE LAKE TURKANA BOAT EXPEDITION

The Jade Sea | 24ft Aluminum Boat | Twin 100HP Suzuki Engines | Nile Perch Fishing | Crocodiles | South Island | The World's Largest Desert Lake | The Cradle of Humanity

Lake Turkana is not a lake that requires superlatives the facts are already extraordinary. The world's **largest desert lake**. The world's **largest alkaline lake**. The most saline lake in East Africa, with a pH of 9.3, while Lake Logipi at its northern approach carries an extreme pH of 14. And according to multiple anthropologists, the **cradle of humanity** the region in and around the lake shore has produced more early hominid fossils than any comparable area on Earth, the landscape that humanity walked away from when it began its dispersal across the planet.

The specific encounter is aboard **Fiammetta** Latitude Adventures' **24-foot aluminium boat**, powered by **twin 100HP Suzuki four-stroke outboard engines**, with a deep-V hull and high sides designed for the lake's sudden squalls and its characteristic chop. Fiammetta carries **6 guests** and the crew, departing the lake shore for a day or overnight expedition.

- ✓ **On the Water:** The lake's jade colour the specific turquoise-green of Turkana water is not a metaphor or a tourist embellishment; it is the literal colour produced by the algae and the mineral chemistry of this specific alkaline body of water. It is as intensely coloured from the

boat surface as it appears in photographs. The dramatic **volcanic island formations** Central Island, South Island, North Island rise from the lake surface as the destinations of the expedition.

- ✓ **Nile Perch Fishing:** The lake is home to **Nile perch** of extraordinary size specimens regularly exceeding 100 lbs, the largest freshwater fish in East Africa by mass. Fishing aboard Fiammetta is conducted as catch-and-release for sport or catch-for-the-table by arrangement. The specific experience: feeling the weight of a large Nile perch on the line in the specific setting of a volcanic lake on the equator, the crocodiles visible on the distant shoreline. One guest account describes catching a **25-kilogram Nile perch** and eating it for dinner that evening cooked by the camp kitchen from the morning's catch.
- ✓ **Crocodile Observation:** Lake Turkana supports one of the world's largest Nile crocodile populations estimated at several thousand individuals along the lake's margins and on the islands. Viewing from the boat provides both proximity and safety: the crocodiles visible basking on the rocky shores of the islands, their prehistoric scale apparent from the water.
- ✓ **South Island:** A **UNESCO World Heritage Site** protected by the Kenya Wildlife Service the largest volcanic island in Lake Turkana, accessible by Fiammetta and offering the specific experience of landing on a volcanic island in the middle of a desert lake. Amory can arrange **overnight fly camping on South Island** sleeping on the island itself, under the Turkana sky, with the crocodiles on the margins and the flamingos feeding in the shallows.
- ✓ **Community Visits on the Lake Shore:** The **Turkana fishing communities** along the lake's southern shores maintain a way of life that has adapted to one of the most extreme environments on Earth. Visits to these communities arranged through Amory's long-established relationships with the lake shore people provide a specific cultural encounter of the kind that the helicopter overflight cannot: the experience of sitting in a fishing community on the Jade Sea, understanding how people live in this landscape by the evidence of daily life rather than by description.

THE CHALBI DESERT EXPEDITION

Kenya's Only True Desert | Ancient Lake Bed | The Gabra People | Dry Season Only | Almost Nobody Has Been Here

The **Chalbi Desert** whose name in the Gabra dialect means "*bare and salty*" is Kenya's only true desert: a vast, flat, ancient lake bed stretching across northern Kenya in a landscape so arid and so geologically exposed that it carries no vegetation and reflects the heat of the equatorial sun from its salt-white surface to produce temperatures that rank among the highest in Kenya.

"With more time, Koros is a good base for visiting the Chalbi Desert, which almost nobody ever goes to. It is wild and very remote."

The Chalbi is accessible from Koros in the **dry season only** the same rains that make the Suguta Valley's sand dunes shift and the lake shore roads impassable also close the Chalbi to vehicle access. In the dry season, the desert floor is hard enough for vehicle passage, and the specific character of the place its absolute flatness, its quality of negative space, the specific silence of a landscape with no plants, no water and no topography is one of the most specifically unusual and most specifically remembered single experiences available from any Kenya camp. The Gabra community who inhabit the Chalbi's margins have adapted to this extreme with a pastoral precision that represents one of the most specifically remarkable human achievements in northern Kenya.

MOUNT KULAL EXPEDITION

2-Hour Drive | 800m to 2,300m | Arid Lowlands to Misty Highland Forest | Endemic Plants, Birds and Reptiles | The Kulal White-Eye

Mount Kulal rises from the eastern shore of Lake Turkana to 2,285 metres a **UNESCO Biosphere Reserve** whose ecological significance derives from the extraordinary contrast between the lake shore desert below (800 metres, 40°C+) and the cool, misty alpine forest above (2,300 metres, 18°C). The transition, experienced in a **2-hour drive** from Koros, is the most compressed ecological gradient in northern Kenya.

The Kulal forest: an isolated cloud forest on an isolated mountain in the middle of the northern arid zone, its specific plant community and its specific fauna shaped by millions of years of geographical separation from the other highland forests of Kenya. **Endemic species** found nowhere else: the **Kulal white-eye** (*Zosterops kulalensis*) a bird found only on this specific mountain, whose limited range and specific habitat requirements make it one of the most specifically sought bird sightings in northern Kenya. Endemic reptiles. Endemic plants in the montane forest understorey.

On a clear day at the summit forest: **views across Lake Turkana** visible below the jade water of the world's largest desert lake spread across the rift floor 1,500 metres below the cloud forest. This specific combination misty highland forest above, desert lake below, visible simultaneously is one of the finest viewpoints in northern Kenya.

GUIDED BUSH WALKS AND LUGA WALKS

With Samburu Guides | Dry Riverbeds | The Valley Ecology | Wildlife Tracking

Walking in the South Horr Valley with Koros's Samburu guides staff members from Anderi village who have walked this landscape their entire lives is the most intimate available encounter with a place that the helicopter and the boat approach from a distance. The specific walks available:

- ✓ **Dry Riverbed Walks (Luga):** The dry riverbeds of northern Kenya lugas carry life even when they carry no water. The sandy floors are the tracks of every animal that moves through the valley; the guide reads these tracks the way a print reader reads text. **Grevy's zebra** tracks and **oryx** tracks and the small cat footprints that mean a leopard moved through the night before. The specific ecological knowledge that a Samburu guide brings to a luga walk the medicinal plants in the riverbank vegetation, the bird species that follow the luga's dry course, the specific knowledge of where water sits underground and where the livestock drink during the dry season is knowledge that took a lifetime to accumulate.
- ✓ **Valley Escarpment Hikes:** Ascending the rocky valley walls for the specific view back across the South Horr Valley floor the camp visible below, the mountains on both sides, the northern horizon opening toward the Turkana basin.
- ✓ **Ancient Rock Art:** The South Horr Valley contains sites of ancient rock art on the valley escarpments accessed by guided walk with the staff team.

QUAD BIKING

Across the Valley's Dry Riverbeds | For Families and Younger Guests | Amory at Full Speed

The camp's fleet of **quad bikes** provides the most physical engagement available with the valley's terrain. Amory leads at speed, across the dry riverbeds and the open valley floor, with the specific exhilaration of an open landscape that offers no obstacles for kilometres in any direction. *"Amory had us bouncing across dry mud fields at a good clip. It was a fun, but dusty ride."*

FLY CAMPING — SLEEPING UNDER THE NORTHERN STAR FIELD

On South Island | In the Suguta | In the Valley | The Most Complete African Night Sky Available

The **northern Kenya night sky** at 800 metres altitude, with no light pollution for 200 kilometres in any direction, is among the finest available anywhere in Africa. The Milky Way is visible as a physical object a genuine cloud of light rather than a faint smear. Koros offers fly camping at multiple positions:

- ✓ **On South Island, Lake Turkana:** Arriving by Fiammetta in the afternoon, setting camp on the island shoreline, sleeping to the sound of the crocodiles and the water, departing by boat at dawn. The most remote fly camp available in Kenya.
- ✓ **In the Suguta Valley:** Helicopter in for a sunset camp at the dunes or beside Lake Logipi, sleeping in the most geologically active landscape in Kenya, departing at first light.
- ✓ **In the Valley:** For guests who want the star camping experience without the Suguta's heat a camp set in the valley floor near the camp, with the mountains on both sides and the northern sky above.

CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS — THREE TRIBES AT A CROSSROADS

Samburu | Rendille | Turkana | The Most Culturally Dense Position in Northern Kenya

Koros sits at **the intersection of three distinct tribal territories**: the **Samburu** to the south and surrounding the camp immediately; the **Rendille** to the north-east; the **Turkana** to the north-west. No other northern Kenya camp has all three within a single day's range.

- ✓ **Samburu Cultural Visits:** The camp's immediate community the Anderi village, whose members are the camp staff offers the most specifically direct cultural encounter available at Koros. Community visits go beyond the performance of dance for visitors; they are visits to a place where the camp's economic presence has directly sustained livelihoods, funded schools and provided water infrastructure.
- ✓ **Samburu Traditional Dance:** A performance of Samburu cultural dance with **100 community participants** warriors and women arranged through the camp's community relationships. The performance fee of **USD 670** is paid directly to the dancers, not through the camp as an intermediary. This specificity of economic transfer the guests' money going directly from their hands to the community's is one of the most honest expressions of community benefit tourism available in Kenya.
- ✓ **The Samburu Women's Beadwork Cooperative:** The **group of 12 Samburu women** from the surrounding community who produce **beaded phone holders and manyatta-inspired lampshades** uniquely designed pieces that incorporate traditional Samburu beadwork patterns into objects of contemporary function. Available for purchase at the camp; proceeds go directly to the women's cooperative.
- ✓ **Turkana Community Visits:** Via Fiammetta on the Lake Turkana boat expedition visiting the fishing communities on the lake's southern shore whose daily life is as far from mainstream Kenyan modernity as any community in the country.
- ✓ **Rendille Encounters:** Through guided exploration of the northern valley margins where Rendille pastoralists move with their camels.

NILE PERCH CATCH-AND-RELEASE FISHING

Aboard Fiammetta on Lake Turkana as described in full in the Fiammetta section above.
The specific challenge: Nile perch growing to 100+ lbs in the most alkaline major lake in Africa.

CULINARY AND DINING EXPERIENCES

The Koros kitchen operates on the principle that meals in a remote camp should be the specific pleasure that the effort of remoteness earns. The camp's fully catered option delivers:

- ✓ **Breakfast on the Veranda:** Fresh fruit platters, muesli and yogurt, eggs prepared to order. The specific quality of this meal: eating on the open-air mess terrace as the valley comes to life in the morning cool, the mountains catching the first light, the camp waking slowly.
- ✓ **The Koros Signature Meals:** *"Succulent curries and smoked kebabs"* the description from Timbuktu Travel's property profile captures the specific register of the Koros kitchen: food that is substantial, flavourful and specifically suited to the environment. Not fine dining in the sense of elaborate plating; fine dining in the sense of food that is genuinely good and genuinely right for where you are.
- ✓ **Pizza on Blankets Under Stars:** The specific Koros evening experience blankets on the ground outside the mess area, pizza from the camp kitchen, the Samburu stories of the valley carried by the evening staff and the fire nearby, the northern star field above. This is the meal that every guest who has stayed at Koros describes first when asked what they remember. It is specific, unrepeatable and available nowhere else in northern Kenya.
- ✓ **The Self-Catering Option:** Koros is one of the few high-end northern Kenya camps that offers a **genuine self-catering option** for groups who want to bring their own provisions and cook in the camp's kitchen. Vard Africa coordinates the provisioning logistics food packing in Nairobi, cold chain management, delivery to the camp for self-catering clients.

THE COMMUNITY AND CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

Koros Camp's community programme is one of the most specifically documented and most specifically honest in the northern Kenya circuit. The camp does not describe general community intentions; it describes specific, named, ongoing commitments:

- ✓ **The L'Donyo Mara Conservancy:** Koros contributes to the conservancy through **guest conservation fees, monthly land rent and local employment** the three pillars of community conservation tourism economics. **Five scouts** are employed by the camp to protect the conservancy's wildlife and to maintain the integrity of the protected land.
- ✓ **The Nakron Nursery School:** On Lake Turkana's shore, 30 children attend a school whose classroom was funded by Koros Camp. The nursery school provides early education to children in one of Kenya's most geographically remote communities.
- ✓ **Sirichoi Primary School:** 250 students. The camp has funded a **renovated kitchen and toilets** the specific infrastructure improvements that change the quality of the school day for every student every day.
- ✓ **The Nakron Fishing Community:** Latitude Adventures employs members of the Nakron lake shore community to crew and maintain Fiammetta providing formal employment in an economy that has almost no other formal employment options. Regular donations of **basic food supplies and firewood** go to the community, whose nearest supply point requires a full day's journey.
- ✓ **The Mount Nyiru Spring Pipeline Fundraising:** The most ambitious community project associated with Koros a 10-kilometre pipeline that would bring spring water from the summit of Mount Nyiru to the Anderi and Koros communities, serving **1,350 people** in a landscape that receives less than 200mm of rainfall annually. The current pipeline is faulty; maintenance is a constant necessity. The fundraising effort to replace and upgrade it is ongoing.
- ✓ **The Borehole:** Koros maintains a functioning borehole and pays the Anderi community a monthly fee of **USD 35 (KES 5,000)** for the privilege of locating it on their land. The overflow water fills **livestock troughs** the specific additional benefit that turns a water extraction into a water sharing arrangement.
- ✓ **Eye Clinics:** Through a partnership with the **Health Yetu Foundation**, the camp supports the logistics of eye clinic operations for community members across the South Horr region.
- ✓ **The Samburu Women's Cooperative:** The **12-woman beadwork group** producing phone holders and manyatta-inspired lampshades items that incorporate traditional Samburu beadwork pattern knowledge into functional objects, creating a market for traditional craft that sustains the cooperative's members.

Health & Safety:

- ✓ The property is staffed by dedicated camp managers and fully trained guides.
- ✓ Emergency contacts and evacuation procedures briefed to all guests on arrival.
- ✓ The property is unfenced and located within an active wildlife zone guests are escorted after dark by experienced Masai security staff
- ✓ All guides KPSGA (Kenya Professional Safari Guides Association) silver certified minimum.
- ✓ Strict wildlife safety protocols.
- ✓ Malaria prophylaxis guidance provided.
- ✓ All vehicles are maintained to the highest safety standards.
- ✓ Advanced first aid trained staff on site at all times.
- ✓ Partnerships with flying doctors service (AMREF).
- ✓ 100% solar powered.

WHY WE LOVE KOROS CAMP

We love Koros for **the specific combination of things that are only available here**. There is no other camp in Kenya from which you can watch the sun set behind Ol Donyo Nyiru's sacred forest while eating pizza on a blanket on the valley floor, then be airborne at dawn over the Suguta Valley's white sand dunes, then on a boat in the middle of Lake Turkana by midday, then standing in a Samburu community hearing the story of how this camp has funded their children's school.

This specific sequence this particular accumulation of landscape, culture, adventure and community happens nowhere else.

- ✓ We love Koros for **Amory and Karina** — for the specific quality of operators who are living in the camp they manage, in the landscape they love, doing the work they have committed to as a life choice rather than a career move. The contentment they bring to the guest experience is not performed; it is the natural expression of people who are exactly where they want to be.
- ✓ We love Koros for **the northern night sky** — for the specific experience, available after the campfire at Koros, of looking up at the Milky Way from 800 metres altitude in a landscape with no light pollution, and understanding that what you are seeing is what all of humanity saw before electricity changed the sky.
- ✓ And we love Koros for **Squack Evans' specific assessment** — for the voice of the most experienced guides in East Africa confirming what we have known from the first time Vard Africa placed a client here: *"Instead of just going from one wildlife place to another, visiting Koros exposes you to a completely different experience."* That is exactly right. That is exactly what we are for.

GETTING THERE:

The arrival at Koros Camp is, more than at almost any other property in northern Kenya, an integral part of the experience.

How you arrive defines the opening chapter of the stay. Vard Africa plans the arrival accordingly.

By Helicopter from Tropic Air — The Definitive Arrival:

- ✓ Tropic Air Kenya's helicopter fleet provides the most specifically extraordinary arrival at any camp in the Vard Africa portfolio. The helipad is **directly adjacent to the camp** no vehicle transfer, no delay between landing and the camp team's welcome. The helicopter arrival from any northern Kenya starting point (Sarara, Sasaab, Desert Rose, Nanyuki or any Laikipia lodge) transforms the approach into a continuous aerial safari: the Mathews Range, the Ndoto Mountains, the Suguta Valley's volcanic drama or the Turkana basin's jade shimmer all visible en route depending on the flight path Amory and the Tropic Air pilots design.
- ✓ The specific sequence Vard Africa recommends: arrive at Koros by helicopter from a Samburu or Laikipia property as part of the northern Kenya helicopter circuit Sarara to Koros, or Sasaab to Koros, or Lewa to Koros with the flight routing over the Suguta Valley's white sand dunes on the approach. Landing at Koros in the late afternoon, the camp in shade, the valley glowing behind it: this is the arrival experience that no road transfer can replicate.

By Charter Aircraft to Sadar Airstrip — The Practical Air Option:

- ✓ Tropic Air operates private charter flights into **Sadar Airstrip** using their Cessna fleet. Sadar is approximately **20 kilometres from the camp** a road transfer of approximately **30 minutes** across the northern landscape, arranged by the camp. From Nairobi Wilson Airport: approximately **1 hour 45 minutes** to 2 hours by charter. From Nanyuki: approximately **1 hour 15 minutes**.
- ✓ *Vard Africa note:* When using Sadar, Vard Africa coordinates the vehicle transfer through the camp team to ensure the road journey is guided rather than simply transited the 20-kilometre approach through the valley offers specific wildlife and cultural observations that an uninformed driver will pass without noting.

By Road from Nanyuki — The Seven-Hour Overland:

- ✓ Approximately **7 hours driving from Nanyuki** via Isiolo and Laisamis; **10 hours from Nairobi**. The road is fully tarmacked to Laisamis the quality of Kenya's northern road infrastructure at its best along the A2 highway. At Laisamis, a **left turn onto murram road** begins the final section into the valley. This road is drive able by standard 4WD in dry conditions; Vard Africa recommends confirming road conditions at time of travel, particularly during the short rains (October–December) when the murram sections become less predictable.
- ✓ The road journey north from Nanyuki is itself an experience of extraordinary landscape variety: from the highland equatorial farmlands around Nanyuki, through the Isiolo lowlands and the increasingly arid northern corridor, past the Samburu and Buffalo Springs landscape, into the specific character of the northern frontier zone. Guests who drive to Koros arrive having experienced the full geographical transition from Highland Kenya to northern desert frontier. The camp at the end of that road feels specifically and dramatically earned.

Google Maps Navigation: *The camp's own guidance:* "Simply search for Koros Camp on Google Maps and you'll be guided right to the doorstep." Vard Africa provides the specific road instructions and the Laisamis turn details to all driving clients as part of the pre-travel pack.

VARD AFRICA INSIDER NOTE

Combine Koros with a helicopter arriving from Sarara Camp in Namunyak or from Sasaab at Westgate the flight over the Mathews Range into the South Horr Valley, watching the landscape change from the cedar forest of the Mathews to the arid grandeur of the Horr Valley, is one of the finest single aerial sequences in northern Kenya. And on the Koros side: book the Suguta Valley helicopter excursion for the first morning, not the last arriving at the camp and immediately being taken into the valley's most dramatic landscape at dawn sets the register for the entire stay. Use the Fiammetta day for the middle of the stay, when the specific scale of what Koros can access has been established. And accept the pizza under the stars for dinner every night that Karina offers it. It is the best meal in northern Kenya.

FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Koros is specific and excellent for the right family. The quad bikes, the helicopter flights, the Fiammetta boat and the lake fishing are activities that engage children from 8 years upward with a quality that very few northern Kenya camps can match. The Samburu cultural encounters, the rock art sites, the campfire storytelling by the staff team and the sheer physical engagement of a camp where every day involves a different landscape and a different mode of travel all make Koros one of the finest multi-generational adventure bases in northern Kenya.

The specific note for families: the heat at camp level (800 metres) is genuine the valley can exceed 40°C. Activity planning should account for this: dawn and dusk for the outdoor exploration, midday at the rock pool and in the shaded mess area. The children who leave Koros talking about it most are consistently those who had a Nile perch on the line or stood on the Suguta Valley sand dunes at sunrise.

Minimum Age Recommendation: 7–8 years for the standard activity programme. Boat fishing and helicopter flights from 4 years with appropriate safety briefings.

MINIMUM STAY RECOMMENDATION

3 nights minimum. A 3-night stay permits: one full Suguta Valley helicopter excursion; one full Fiammetta Lake Turkana day; one Mount Kulal drive or Chalbi Desert expedition; evening campfire and cultural encounter; the pizza dinner under the stars. Guests who stay 2 nights consistently describe feeling they had just reached the rhythm of the camp when they were leaving. Guests who stay 4 or 5 nights consistently describe it as the most memorable single stop of their northern Kenya circuit.

4–5 nights is the Vard Africa recommendation for guests combining Koros with a helicopter circuit of northern Kenya entering by helicopter from Sarara or Sasaab, spending 4 nights, and either departing by helicopter onward or returning by charter aircraft via Sadar.

KITICH FOREST CAMP

New African Territories | 8 Ensuite Tents | Gold Eco-Rating | Ngeng River Glade | Mathews Range Forest Reserve | Ancient Cycads | De Brazza's Monkey | Swimming in Rock Pools | Italy Meets Northern Kenya

Location and Setting: Kitich Forest Camp occupies one of the most extraordinary and most specifically beautiful positions of any camp in Kenya a **forest glade on the banks of the Ngeng River** on the **western slopes of the Mathews Mountains** at approximately **1,330 metres** altitude, in the **Mathews Range Forest Reserve** within the Namunyak Community Conservancy.

The physical setting: a clearing in dense montane forest where the Ngeng River a cool, clear, permanent mountain stream creates a flat, shaded glade among ancient trees. The sound: the river, constantly. The light: the specific filtered quality of forest light through an unbroken montane canopy green-tinged, changing through the day as the sun moves, never harsh. The temperature: cooler than the surrounding Samburu lowlands by approximately 8–12°C a physical relief that guests describe as one of the most immediately unexpected and most deeply welcome qualities of arriving at Kitich.

The camp sits at the end of the camp's own private access road, constructed by the camp's original founder *"one of the steepest motorable access roads in the world"* in Expert Africa's description, the final approach up a hillside track cut through bedrock that *"took Dick Hedges and his daughter a year to construct."* The approach drive arriving at the glade through increasingly dense forest is part of the experience, the forest darkening progressively as the elevation increases until the track levels and the river glade appear.

Introduction and History: Kitich Forest Camp was originally established in the **late 1970s** by **Miles Burton** a conservationist who recognised the Mathews Range forest's specific biological importance and established a camp that would provide funding for its protection. Burton died in a plane crash shortly after establishing the camp. The property was subsequently owned by **Giulio Bertolli** of the Italian olive oil dynasty who lived at the camp for 12 years, describing them as the best years of his life, and whose **Italian culinary tradition** entered Kitich's kitchen culture at this period and has remained there ever since. In **2009**, **Stefano Cheli** (a Kenya safari notable) purchased the camp, operating it until 2021 when it transferred to its **current owners New African Territories** who have maintained the camp's specific ethos while adding electricity throughout the night and expanding to 8 tents.

"The Mathews, referred to as a 'biological bonanza' and sky island, the massive range rises up from the desert floor to over 6,000ft." New African Territories.

Kitich holds the **Gold Eco-Rating from EcoTourism Kenya** the highest certification level and has been **nominated for the Travel + Leisure World's Best Award 2026** as well as the **Condé Nast Traveller Readers' Choice Awards 2026** recognition that has arrived in the camp's 45th year of operation and reflects both the consistency of its quality and the growing international awareness of what the Mathews Range experience offers.

Intimate Luxury Safari Living — Rooms and Sleeping Arrangements:

8 Ensuite Tented Rooms arranged under a dense tree canopy overlooking the Ngeng River valley. Each tent is on a raised wooden platform, with the forest and the river visible from the private veranda:

The tent design: **canvas walls and roof in the classic bush camp tradition** honest, direct, completely connected to the forest environment rather than protected from it. The canvas is good quality, properly maintained; the structural supports are solid; the sleeping is comfortable with quality linen and blankets appropriate for the Mathews nights (which at 1,330 metres can be genuinely cool).

The ensuite bathrooms: **flush toilets** and **bucket showers** the bucket shower being a specific Kitich tradition that has been part of the camp's character since its founding. A bucket shower in the Mathews Range forest at dawn, with the river audible below and the forest waking up around the bathroom's open walls, is one of those experiences that sounds like a compromise and turns out to be the best shower available anywhere.

From New African Territories: "A beautiful enchanting camp with only eight tents situated under a dense tree canopy, overlooking the stunning Ngeng River, this camp is a low-key classic with charming en suite bush bathrooms, bucket showers and flush toilets."

Each tent: **private veranda** overlooking the Ngeng River valley; comfortable beds with quality blankets; solar lighting and charging; the river view, the forest sounds, the specific quality of a camp that has been in this forest glade for 45 years and has been shaped by its relationship with the forest over all of those years.

"The forest is home to elephant, melanistic leopard, bushbuck, giant forest hog, buffalo, as well as ancient cycads, spectacular butterflies, Turacos and wild orchids."

Communal and Shared Facilities:

The Central Lounge and Dining Area: A **wood-shingle roofed, open-plan** lounge and dining space with the river glade visible on the open side the specific character of a camp that has been thoughtfully built and thoughtfully furnished over many years. **Sheepskin-draped deckchairs** and comfortable armchairs, coffee-table books of East African photography, a bar of well-stocked character. The communal dining table where a maximum of 16 guests eat together is the social centerpiece of the camp: *"Guests at Kitich usually eat together at the large communal dining table."*

The Floodlit River Glade: At night, the glade below the camp is lit the lighting designed to illuminate the wildlife that uses the river after dark. *"At night, the atmosphere is magical, and the glade is lit: look out for elephant, bushbuck and buffalo as they come to drink by the river."*

The Swimming Holes: The Ngeng River's pools *"natural rock pools of crystal mountain streams"* are accessible for swimming within a short walk of the camp. Swimming in a clear mountain stream in the Mathews Range forest, in water cooled by altitude and shade, is one of the most physically refreshing activities available from any camp in Northern Kenya.

Communication in the Wilderness:

There is **no internet or WiFi** at Kitich Forest Camp. Mobile signal is unavailable at the camp "Safaricom Rock" at Sarara Camp has an equivalent here: a specific outdoor position where a signal can occasionally be found.

This is not a limitation of the camp; it is an expression of its character. Guests who want to be genuinely disconnected from the digital world will find Kitich more effective at delivering this than any intentional "digital detox" programme.

Activities at Kitich Forest Camp:

Walking, walking and more walking. Kitich is not a game drive camp. If game drive frequency and national reserve access are the primary criteria, Kitich is not the right choice. What Kitich offers and what it offers in specific abundance is the **walking experience in a montane forest that almost no other camp in Kenya can provide.**

- ✓ **Forest Walks and Hikes with Samburu and Ndorobo Guides** — The defining Kitich experience: guided walks through the primeval Mathews Range forest with guides who know every plant, every animal track and every specific habitat transition within it. The guides are a combination of Samburu community members and Ndorobo (the forest-dwelling hunter-gatherer community of the Mathews Range) each bringing a different form of specific, embodied knowledge to the walk. The Ndorobo guide's knowledge of the forest's specific medicinal plants, the edible species, the animal sign and the forest's internal logic this is knowledge that no ecological training programme can reproduce.
- ✓ *"Hiking through pristine, primeval forest with Samburu trackers."*
- ✓ **The Ancient Cycad Groves** — The botanical highlight of the Mathews Range and one of the most specifically extraordinary experiences available in northern Kenya. The *Encephalartos* cycads of the Mathews forest are among the oldest living plant species in Kenya primitive seed plants whose design was established 280 million years ago, before the dinosaurs, before the flowering plants, before any of the contemporary plant families that now dominate East African vegetation. Their specific locations within the Mathews forest are known to the guides; their significance is explained with the knowledge of people who have grown up in the forest that contains them. *"The ancient cycad groves were magical."*
- ✓ **Swimming in Hidden Rock Pools** — The Ngeng River's mountain pools: clear, cold, shaded by forest canopy, accessible from the camp by short walk. A swim in these pools after a morning's forest walk in water cooled by the Mathews Range's altitude and filtered by the forest's own drainage system is a specific physical pleasure available nowhere else in northern Kenya.
- ✓ **Fly Camping in the Mathews Forest** — An overnight in the forest on the Milgis Lugga system, exploring the Mathews Range's most remote terrain on foot with the camp's guides.
- ✓ **The De Brazza's Monkey Hike** — A specific guided walk to the forest habitat of the De Brazza's monkey one of the rarest primates in Kenya, found in the Mathews Range in a small population at the extreme southern edge of this Central African species' range. The hike requires patience; the encounter, when it comes, is one of the most specific wildlife observations in Kenya's northern frontier.
- ✓ **Exploring the Milgis Lugga by Camel** — *"Exploring the Milgis Lugga by camel"* accessible from Kitich as a multi-hour or full-day excursion: the ancient dry riverbed system of the Milgis, with its doum palms and its specific fauna, traversed at camel pace with Samburu handlers.
- ✓ **Cycling Through the Valleys** — *"Cycling through the valleys"* the Mathews Range's forested valleys at cycling pace, accessible for physically active guests.
- ✓ **Swimming in a Waterfall** — *"Swimming in a waterfall"* the Ngeng River has specific waterfall positions within the walking range of the camp; swimming here, under the falling water, in the forest shade, is one of those experiences that defies easy description.
- ✓ **Rock Climbing in the Ndoto Mountains** — The Ndoto Mountains are accessible from Kitich as a day trip or multi-day excursion their granite faces providing excellent rock climbing in one of Kenya's most remote and most specifically beautiful settings.
- ✓ **Bird Watching** — *"More than 350 bird species and 150 species of butterflies"* in the Mathews Range. The forest's bird diversity is extraordinary and the specific species — Turacos, forest eagles, endemic birds that require the Mathews' altitude and habitat to survive make the camp a genuinely significant birding destination. James Christian's ornithological standard of guide knowledge is not available at Kitich, but the Samburu guides' accumulated knowledge of the forest's birds is extensive and the habitat is exceptional.
- ✓ **Cultural Visits — Ngelai Market Day** — The weekly market at Ngelai: a gathering of Samburu and other northern pastoral communities for trade and social exchange. Accessible from Kitich by vehicle or quad bike.
- ✓ **Night Game Viewing at the Floodlit Glade** — The river glade lit after dark, watched from the lounge or from specific viewing positions near the camp: elephant, bushbuck, buffalo and the forest's nocturnal community visible from the camp's own position without any vehicle.
- ✓ **Yoga** — *"Spend your time relaxing in hammocks, hiking through the forest, fly camping, exploring the Milgis Lugga by camel, swimming in a waterfall, cycling through the valleys, and doing yoga."* The Mathews forest's specific atmosphere the ancient trees, the river sound, the cool air makes it one of the finest yoga environments in Kenya.
- ✓ **Quad Biking** — Through the conservancy landscape to the local village and market.

Culinary and Dining Experiences:

Kitich's kitchen carries the **Italian culinary heritage** of the Giulio Bertolli era traditional Italian recipes passed down through generations of kitchen staff since the Bertolli decade, adapted to the forest setting and combined with local flavours and the camp's own kitchen garden produce. *"The daily set menu showcases traditional Italian recipes passed down through generations, influenced by local flavours, and using fresh organic ingredients sourced from the camp's kitchen garden."*

Meals are served communally at the large dining table the maximum of 16 guests around the same table for the same meal, with the river glade visible in the camp's lit night. This communal character is one of Kitich's most specifically valued qualities: conversations that develop across the dinner table between guests who came from different countries and different lives, united by the same forest experience and the same Italian pasta.

"An enclave of paradise with wonderful food, beautiful hiking and lovely people! We will be back soon. Asante!"

Bush picnics in forest clearings; sundowners by the river; morning coffee on the veranda before the day's walk begins each meal occasion in the forest environment rather than an interior position.

Health & Safety:

- ✓ The property is staffed by dedicated camp managers and fully trained guides.
- ✓ Emergency contacts and evacuation procedures briefed to all guests on arrival.
- ✓ The property is unfenced and located within an active wildlife zone guests are escorted after dark by experienced Masai security staff
- ✓ All guides KPSGA (Kenya Professional Safari Guides Association) silver certified minimum.
- ✓ Strict wildlife safety protocols.
- ✓ Malaria prophylaxis guidance provided.
- ✓ All vehicles are maintained to the highest safety standards.
- ✓ Advanced first aid trained staff on site at all times.
- ✓ Partnerships with flying doctors service (AMREF).
- ✓ 100% solar powered.

Why We Love Kitich Forest Camp:

We love Kitich for the **ancient cycads** for the specific encounter with plants that were already ancient when the first humans walked across the plains below this forest, and for the guides who can explain what they are looking at with the knowledge and reverence that those plants deserve. And for the **bucket shower at dawn** for the specific combination of cold mountain water and the sound of the Ngeng River and the forest waking up around the open bathroom walls. And for the **communal dining table** for the specifically Kitich quality of 16 people from different parts of the world, eating Italian pasta in a Mathews Range forest glade, having the conversation that the day's walking in an ancient forest always produces.

Vard Africa Insider Note: *Arrive with good walking boots and the willingness to be wet, muddy and happily exhausted by the end of each day. Kitich is not a property that rewards passive tourism; it is a property that rewards active engagement with a specific, extraordinary landscape. The cycad grove walk should be a half-day rather than a quick stop the guides who know these plants know their individual ages, their ecological relationships and the specific community ecology that the cycads anchor within the Mathews forest. Give that knowledge the time it deserves.*

Families and Children: *"Great for adventurous children of all ages."* The forest's natural learning environment; the river pools for swimming; the bird and butterfly diversity; the cultural encounters all engage children with genuine intellectual curiosity about the natural world. Children under 6 should be assessed for the walking distances and terrain.

Getting There:

By Private Charter to Ngelai Airstrip (Recommended): The airstrip at Ngelai is the primary charter access point a **45-minute drive** from the airstrip to the camp. Charter from Nairobi Wilson: approximately **1 hour to 1 hour 15 minutes**. Charter from Samburu/Kalama airstrip area: approximately **30–35 minutes**.

By Scheduled Flight and Road Transfer: Scheduled flight to **Kalama Airstrip** (near Samburu National Reserve) followed by an **overland transfer** approximately **3–4 hours of driving** through the increasingly remote northern Kenya landscape. The road journey is an experience in itself: the terrain changing dramatically from Samburu-area scrub through more arid frontier landscapes to the foothills of the Mathews Range.

By Road from Nairobi: An extended drive of approximately **8–10 hours** via Isiolo, Archers Post and the northern route to Wamba beautiful but demanding. Recommended only for guests with specific interests in the overland journey rather than the destination's efficiency.

Minimum Stay Recommendation: 3 nights minimum. 4 nights strongly recommended to include the fly camping option and the full range of forest walks.

MOUNT NYIRU AND LAKE TURKANA GATEWAY

Desert Rose Lodge — Kenya's Most Remote Luxury Lodge | 1,676 Metres on Mount Nyiru's Slopes | 50 Kilometres from Lake Turkana | The Most Specifically Extraordinary Arrival Experience in Kenya

DESERT ROSE LODGE

Built by Yoav and Emma Chen | 5 Unique Handcrafted Cottages | 12 Guests Maximum | Kenya's Northernmost Luxury Lodge | Open-Air Bathrooms | Hand-Carved Olive Wood Furniture | Samburu Staff

Location and Setting: Desert Rose Lodge occupies a position of almost mythological remoteness at **1,676 metres altitude** (5,500 feet) on the southern slopes of **Mount Nyiru** (*Ol Donyo Nyiru* "the dark mountain" in the Samburu language, named for the cedar forest that darkens its upper slopes), **50 kilometres south of Lake Turkana**, in one of the most geologically dramatic and most humanly isolated positions of any luxury lodge in Africa.

The mountain rises abruptly from the Elbarta plains the arid flatlands between the Karisia Mountains and Lake Turkana to forested summits that catch the moisture from the lake's evaporation and create a specific micro-climate of remarkable diversity and ecological richness in the middle of what, viewed from the plains below, appears to be pure desert. From the lodge's position on the southern slopes at 1,676 metres, the view is extraordinary: the forested mountain above, the Elbarta plains below, the Ndoto Mountains visible to the south-east and, on the clearest days, the faint shimmer of Lake Turkana visible to the north.

The Approach — The arrival at Desert Rose Lodge is, by multiple independent assessments, **one of the most specifically extraordinary arrival experiences available at any lodge in Kenya or East Africa:**

By air: a charter flight from Nanyuki or Nairobi that passes over the transition from the Kenyan highlands to the northern arid zone, followed by a landing at the desert airstrip below the mountain and then the drive. By road: the 10-hour journey from Nairobi through changing landscapes that ends with the mountain ahead and the approach track below. By helicopter: a direct landing on the lodge's terrace helipad.

But it is the access road itself constructed by **Dick Hedges** (who founded Desert Rose) and his daughter over **one year of manual work, cutting the track through solid bedrock** that provides the approach experience that guests consistently describe as the preparation for everything that follows. Expert Africa describes it: *"You drive through a deep valley where the Samburu village of Ewaso Rongai lies thickly shaded by huge acacia and fig trees, and then climb for about 2km up a mountainside track cut right through the bed rock. One of the steepest motorable access roads in the world."*

The views from this approach track the plains below, the forest above, the specific quality of a road that climbs through the mountain's geology rather than around it produce, in virtually every guest who travels it, the feeling that they are arriving somewhere genuinely, irreducibly different from anything they have experienced in the standard safari landscape.

Introduction and History: Desert Rose Lodge was built by **Yoav and Emma Chen** — the original owners who conceived and constructed the property using exclusively local materials, local labour and a design philosophy rooted in the mountain's own geological and botanical character. Every building material was sourced from the mountain or its immediate surroundings. Every piece of furniture was made on site by local craftsmen. The soap dishes are hand-hewn hardwood. The bathtubs are constructed from mountain stone. The dining table and library shelves are cedar and olive wood. The lodge is not a designed product; it is an accumulated statement-built piece by piece, carving by carving, stone by stone about what it means to live on this specific mountain and in genuine relationship with the Samburu community that inhabits it.

Journeys by Design describes the origin: *"Built by Yoav and Emma Chen, together with a team of Samburu, some camels and a Toyota Land Cruiser, Desert Rose is made entirely from local materials."*

The lodge employs **30 local people** from the Samburu village of **Ewaso Rongai** below the mountain, and has built a **primary school and vital medical clinic** for the village a community investment that has made Desert Rose Lodge one of the most deeply embedded and most genuinely integrated community partnership lodges in northern Kenya.

"The Luxury Safari Company Award for: Most remote location."

Intimate Luxury Safari Living — Rooms and Sleeping Arrangements:

5 Unique Handcrafted Cottages — 12 guests maximum — each one **different from every other**, each one **"individually carved out of locally acquired rocks and timber"** (the guest review's phrase captures the material truth of the design). No two cottages are the same; each was built in response to the specific character of the rock face into which it was set.

The Materials: Stone walls from the mountain's own rock. Slate floors from mountain quarrying. **Hand-woven rugs** from Samburu weavers. **Four-poster beds** made from wild olive wood the specific ancient olive trees of Mount Nyiru whose timber has the weight and colour of furniture that has always belonged to this mountain. Furniture and decorative objects: every single piece **hand-carved from local materials** including, in the detail that every description of Desert Rose eventually reaches, the **soap dishes, made of hand-hewn hardwood**. Even the smallest object is a craft object at Desert Rose.

The Bathroom Experience: Each cottage has a **private flush toilet** and an **open-air en-suite bathroom** — open to the mountain's air, to its sounds, to the views below, to the specific quality of light at whatever hour the bath is drawn. The **sunken baths** of natural stone with the views across the Elbarta plains below constitute, in the assessment of multiple independent reviewers, one of the finest bathing experiences available at any African lodge.

Room Configurations: 2 double cottages; 2 twin cottages; 1 family house sleeping 4. All with private patio and the mountain views.

Screen and Shutters: All cottages can be fully opened or fully screened according to the temperature and the preference — the mountain's cooler temperatures making this a practical rather than merely aesthetic choice.

The Main Lodge Building:

The Dining Room: Hand-crafted from locally quarried slate and cedar and olive wood *"both overlooking and encompassing the peace and stillness of their surroundings."*

The Library: A small but specifically chosen library of books about East Africa, its natural history and its human history, accessible to guests throughout the day.

The Open Plan Lounge: Looking toward the mountain above and the plains below simultaneously.

The Swimming Pool: Described by multiple sources as **"remarkable for its design and location"** a curvaceous pool that was built into the mountain's rock face at the same time as the rest of the lodge, its shape following the available space rather than any imposed geometry. The pool deck has the same views as every other part of the lodge the plains below, the forest above, the Lake Turkana horizon to the north.

The Garden: Planted with indigenous plants specifically chosen for the mountain's specific altitude and flora the garden is a botanical statement about what grows on this mountain and what has always grown here.

Getting There:

By Private Charter to Desert Rose Airstrip (Recommended): The lodge has its own airstrip on the mountain's lower slopes — charter from **Nairobi Wilson Airport** (via Nanyuki for fuelling or directly, depending on aircraft range): approximately **1 hour 20 minutes to 1 hour 40 minutes**. From the airstrip, the access road provides the arrival experience described above.

By Helicopter: Direct landing on the lodge's terrace — the most dramatic arrival available. Charter from Nanyuki or from Samburu area: approximately **45–60 minutes**. The approach from the air — the lodge appearing on the mountain slope as the helicopter descends, the plains spreading below — is described by guests as the most specifically dramatic helicopter approach they have experienced.

By Road: From Nairobi via Maralal, Baragoi and South Horr to the mountain access road: approximately **10 hours** — a significant overland journey through extraordinary landscape. The road is unmistakable in its challenge: *"By road, it's about a 500km drive to Desert Rose from Nairobi, a 10-hour journey by 4WD vehicle."*

From Samburu Area (Itinerary Combination): Private charter from the Samburu/Kalama airstrip area to Desert Rose: approximately **45–50 minutes**. This is Vard Africa's recommended routing for the Samburu-Desert Rose-Lake Turkana itinerary combination — the most complete northern Kenya circuit available.

Note on No Network: There is **no mobile network** at the lodge. "Safaricom Rock" — a specific outdoor position accessible by short walk — provides occasional signal when atmospheric conditions cooperate. Vard Africa provides comprehensive pre-departure emergency communication briefing for all Desert Rose clients.

Communication: No WiFi. No reliable mobile signal. Emergency communication through the lodge's own system. This is one of the genuinely most disconnected luxury lodges in East Africa — a quality that guests either love deeply or need to know about in advance.

Health and Safety at Desert Rose Lodge:

Malaria: At **1,676 metres**, Desert Rose Lodge is above the typical malaria transmission zone — the cooler temperatures of this altitude significantly reduce mosquito activity compared to the plains below. However, guests who also visit the plains (Lake Turkana, South Horr) during the same trip should carry prophylaxis for the lower-altitude sections.

Medical: Desert Rose is one of the most remote lodges in Kenya. The nearest medical facility of significance: approximately **4–5 hours by road** to Maralal or Nanyuki. AMREF Flying Doctors emergency evacuation from the lodge's own airstrip. **AMREF cover is absolutely essential for Desert Rose guests** — this cannot be over-emphasised. Vard Africa arranges AMREF cover for all Desert Rose clients as a mandatory component of booking.

First aid equipment maintained at the lodge; staff trained in basic first aid.

Wildlife Safety: Leopards and baboons are heard close to the lodge at dawn and dusk. Buffalo and other large game move through the mountain's lower slopes. Guests should exercise the standard caution of any bush property.

Road Safety: The access road is one of the steepest in Kenya. In rainy conditions, the road may be temporarily impassable. Guests travelling by vehicle should be aware of road conditions at time of travel.

Included in Desert Rose Rates: Full board accommodation | Water, tea and coffee | Guided walks | Airstrip transfers | Laundry service | Samburu cultural visit | Taxes

Not Included (at additional cost): Soft drinks, alcoholic drinks | AMREF evacuation cover | Air safaris to Lake Turkana | Samburu cultural entertainment performance (USD 100 per group) | Camel walks (USD 90 per person — book in advance) | South Island boat trip (USD 130 per person including park fees, minimum 4 guests) | Full-day 4×4 trip to Lake Turkana (USD 500 per car + USD 20 per adult community aid fee) | Day trip to Suguta Valley/Lake Logipi (USD 500 per car + USD 30 per adult community fee)

Activities at Desert Rose Lodge:

Guided Interpretive Walks on Mount Nyiru — The mountain's forest slopes provide walking of extraordinary quality: the cedar and podocarpus forest, endemic mountain species, the specific plants of the Nyiru microclimate and the guides' knowledge of every edible, medicinal and culturally significant plant within the range they cover regularly. Walks range from short morning interpretive strolls to full-day expeditions to specific viewpoints on the upper slopes.

"Walks in the forest, water sliding, and bird watching." — standard activity portfolio.

"Every walk is fascinating and individual, where one may encounter traces of wild boar, hunting dog, greater kudu, baboon and at night leopard, serval cat and aardvark." — Kenya Safari

The 'Lugga' Water Slide and Swimming — A specific feature of the lodge grounds: a natural rock water slide in the seasonal stream below the lodge that provides a genuinely playful recreational experience for children and adults alike.

Camel-Assisted Walks — From the airstrip, with Samburu handlers: the specific experience of northern Kenya travel at camel height, through a landscape that camels have been crossing for centuries. Half-day, full-day or multi-day camel expeditions. *"Camel-assisted walks, air safaris to Lake Turkana and its environments."*

Air Safari to Lake Turkana and South Island National Park — The definitive Desert Rose expedition: a charter aircraft from the lodge's own airstrip to Lake Turkana's southern shore, followed by a boat trip to **South Island National Park** — one of the most remote and most specifically extraordinary national parks in Africa, its volcanic crater rim and its Nile crocodile population among the most specifically dramatic wildlife encounters available anywhere in Kenya. Return to the lodge by air. *"The more intrepid can go fly-camping, camel trekking, paragliding and rock climbing or go sightseeing and fishing in Lake Turkana. Or guests can take a helicopter trip through the nearby Sagutu Valley."*

Full-Day 4×4 Trip to Lake Turkana — An overland expedition in the lodge's 4WD vehicle to the southern shores of Lake Turkana — the Jade Sea visible from the mountain but fully accessible only by this ground journey. USD 500 per vehicle, plus community aid fee.

Fishing at Lake Turkana — Nile perch fishing on the Jade Sea: one of Africa's most dramatically scaled freshwater fishing experiences. Charter or 4WD access from Desert Rose.

Helicopter Trip Through the Suguta Valley — The volcanic landscape of the Suguta Valley, visible from the mountain, accessible by helicopter in 20–30 minutes: the sand dunes, the volcanic cones, Lake Logipi and its flamingo concentrations. The most dramatically remote helicopter excursion available from any northern Kenya property.

Samburu Cultural Visits — To the village of Ewaso Rongai below the mountain — the community that provides the lodge's staff and whose school and clinic have been funded by the lodge's community contribution. Genuine cultural visits through a relationship of employment and genuine partnership rather than tourism display.

Cultural Visits to El Molo and Turkana Communities at Lake Turkana — Extended to the lake communities whose specific fishing and pastoral traditions are among the most specifically adapted human cultures to extreme conditions in East Africa.

Bird Watching — The Nyiru mountain's bird diversity — species specific to this altitude and habitat, raptors on the thermal currents from the mountain, and the specific birds of the Elbarta plains below — provide bird watching of quality and specificity unavailable at any other northern Kenya property.

Rock Climbing in the Ndoto Mountains — Accessible from Desert Rose as an extended excursion: the Ndoto Mountains' granite faces providing excellent climbing in one of Kenya's most remote mountain environments.

Paragliding — Available from the mountain's slopes: the Elbarta plains providing the thermal lift conditions for paragliding flights with the Lake Turkana horizon in the north. Arranged in advance through the lodge.

Star-Gazing — At 1,676 metres, in the absence of any light pollution from any settlement within at least 50 kilometres, Desert Rose provides one of the darkest sky positions in Kenya. The northern hemisphere star field above the equatorial position produces a specific density and brightness of stars that guests consistently describe as the finest night sky they have observed anywhere.

The Lake Turkana Cultural Festival — *"If you're able to be at the lodge in May or early June, you can attend the extraordinary Lake Turkana Cultural Festival, a tribal jamboree that brings together a dozen ethnic groups from the north to dance, sing, participate in reconciliation workshops and show off their best traditional finery."* This event — held annually in South Horr, accessible from Desert Rose — is one of the most extraordinary cultural gatherings in East Africa and an experience that no conventional safari itinerary provides.

Culinary and Dining Experiences: The kitchen at Desert Rose operates with the philosophy of **honest, fresh, organic hospitality** — produce from the lodge's own garden, eggs from free-range chickens, herbs from the mountain's microclimate and the finest available sourcing from the supply chains that reach this remote mountain lodge. The cuisine is described as *"first class"* — an assessment that reflects both the quality of the ingredients and the care of a kitchen team that takes seriously the privilege of cooking for guests who have reached one of the world's most remote luxury lodges.

Meals served: in the dining room; on the outdoor dining platform with its views; in the garden's shade during the hottest midday hours; at specific bush positions during game drive excursions.

Why We Love Desert Rose Lodge: We love Desert Rose for the **access road** — for the specific, completely unique experience of arriving at a luxury lodge by a road that took a year to build through solid mountain bedrock and that every first-time guest describes as the most dramatically memorable approach road they have ever experienced. And for the **hand-carved olive wood furniture** that makes even the soap dish an act of craft. And for the **open-air stone bath with the plains below** — the most specifically honest luxury bathing experience available in northern Kenya, because it asks nothing of you except to be in it, in the mountain air, looking at Africa spread below. And for the Nyiru forest, which has no obligation to be beautiful or to produce photogenic wildlife moments and is, in fact, extraordinary on its own terms.

Vard Africa Insider Note: *The most powerful Desert Rose itinerary combines 3 nights at the lodge with a Lake Turkana air safari on the middle day and a Suguta Valley helicopter excursion on the morning before departure. This sequence — the mountain, the lake, the volcanic valley — gives the guest the full geography of the northern Kenya frontier in three days. The Lake Turkana boat trip to South Island, with the Nile crocodiles and the volcanic crater and the specific quality of the Jade Sea in full afternoon light, is the moment that makes the entire northern frontier itinerary worth the effort of reaching it. And sleep on the lodge's upper terrace under the stars on your last night: the Nyiru sky, at this altitude, in the complete absence of light pollution from any direction, is the darkness that reveals what the night sky actually contains.*

Families and Children: Desert Rose is excellent for adventurous families. The lugga water slide is beloved by children. The camel rides are gentle and accessible. The cultural visits to the Ewaso Rongai village provide genuine educational encounters. The remoteness and the challenge of the access road create the specific family adventure that parents who choose Desert Rose are looking for. Children under 6 should be assessed for the access road's terrain demands.

Minimum Stay: 3 nights. The access investment makes anything less than 3 nights an insufficient return on the effort required to reach the lodge.

Lobolo Camp — A Note:

Lobolo Camp is a remote bush camp in the Lake Turkana/South Horr corridor — positioned for guests who want an even more direct and even more immersive engagement with the Lake Turkana frontier landscape. The camp is simple, honest and completely authentic in its setting — a northern Kenya bush camp without Desert Rose Lodge's craft and history, but with the same access to the Lake Turkana experience and the same quality of Samburu hosting. Vard Africa recommends Lobolo for adventure-oriented guests who want the Lake Turkana frontier experience in its most direct and least mediated form. Contact Vard Africa for current details.

PART EIGHT — EXPERIENCE THE MAGIC OF NORTHERN KENYA

What To Do in the Samburu Ecosystem and Northern Frontier

Northern Kenya's activities are not supplementary to the safari; they are its content. This is a landscape whose richness is cultural and geological and ecological simultaneously — where the finest days combine wildlife encounters with human encounters and landscape encounters in a sequence that the better-travelled guests describe as the most complete single-day experience available in East Africa.

I. THE RETETI ELEPHANT SANCTUARY

The **Reteti Elephant Sanctuary** is the most emotionally powerful and most specifically significant wildlife encounter in Northern Kenya — and one of the most significant in all of East Africa.

It was established in **2016** by the **Namunyak community** in partnership with Katie Rowe (who became co-founder of the sanctuary alongside the Samburu community elders) in response to the urgent need for a facility to receive and rehabilitate orphaned elephant calves in northern Kenya. Between **10 and 15 elephant calves are orphaned in Northern Kenya every year** — separated from their herds, stuck in wells, abandoned after their mothers are lost to drought or human-wildlife conflict — and before Reteti, there was no rehabilitation facility closer than Nairobi's David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, a journey that many calves could not survive.

What makes Reteti different from every other elephant sanctuary in Africa:

Community Ownership: Reteti is **owned entirely by the Namunyak community** — the first elephant sanctuary in Africa, and possibly in the world, to be owned, operated and managed by an indigenous community rather than by an NGO, a private company or a government agency. Every staff member is recruited from within the Namunyak Conservancy. Every management decision is made by community representatives. Every revenue stream goes to the community and to the sanctuary's operating costs.

Female Keepers: Reteti was the first elephant sanctuary in East Africa to employ **female elephant keepers** — a decision that overturned the traditional assumption that wildlife management was a male profession, and that has transformed the economic and social position of the Samburu women who work there. **Dorothy Lowaktuk** — one of the first three female keepers when Reteti opened, and now the leader of a team of 15 women — is one of the most celebrated figures in African conservation: a woman who grew up in a Samburu community that traditionally feared and distanced itself from elephants, and who has spent the years since 2016 sleeping beside orphaned elephant calves through their first terrifying nights in captivity, bottle-feeding them every three hours around the clock, and watching them grow from desperate, traumatised calves into the confident elephants of the **2024 Release Herd** — the first group of Reteti-raised elephants to be rewilded into the Namunyak Conservancy's wild herds.

The Milk to Market Programme: Over **800 Samburu women** sell goat milk to the Reteti sanctuary — the milk converted into a formula that provides the nutritional base for the orphaned calves' rehabilitation diet. This programme provides a reliable income stream for the women, reducing their economic dependence on their husbands' cattle economy, and provides the sanctuary with a sustainable, locally sourced nutritional supply that reduces dependence on expensive imported formula.

The 2024 Release Herd: In 2024, the first Reteti-raised elephants were successfully rewilded into the wild herds of the Namunyak Conservancy — wearing GPS collars to allow monitoring, accompanied by the keeper team for the first weeks of their transition, and gradually integrating into the established wild elephant community that now numbers several thousand in the Namunyak and Mathews Range area. This is the culmination of the sanctuary's founding vision: not a permanent captive facility but a rehabilitation bridge back to the wild.

The Visitor Centre — opened by **President William Ruto** in **2024** as part of the Maa Cultural Week Festival, designed by **MASS Design Group** in partnership with Save the Elephants and The Sarara Foundation — provides the most comprehensive and most beautifully designed interpretation of the Reteti story available, with multilingual displays in English, Kiswahili and Maa.

The Guest Experience: Arriving at Reteti by vehicle from Sarara Camp or Reteti House — approximately 1 hour's drive through the conservancy, passing Samburu homesteads, cattle herds and the wildlife of the Namunyak landscape — guests are met by a keeper who introduces the sanctuary's work and pairs each visitor with a specific keeper for the duration of the visit.

The **elephant feeding session** — at 3pm, the primary feeding of the day — is the experience's centrepiece: the calves coming in from their daily walk in the conservancy, the keepers carrying the bottles, the calves competing for position at the feeding station with the complete single-mindedness of hungry young animals. The calves' individual personalities are immediately apparent: the bold one who pushes to the front; the shy one who waits at the edge; the playful one who wraps its trunk around the keeper's leg after the bottle is empty. Dorothy introduces each one by name, with their history — where they were found, what their condition was, how long they have been at the sanctuary, what stage of their rehabilitation they have reached.

Standing at the viewing platform, watching the keepers feed the calves they have nursed through the night for the past months, understanding what the Milk to Market programme means for the 800 Samburu women whose goat milk feeds these animals, knowing that the oldest calves in the current group will follow the 2024 Release Herd into the wild within the next 2–3 years — this is one of those experiences that changes guests. Not dramatically, not performatively, but genuinely: the understanding of what community conservation actually means in practice, delivered through the most specific and most human possible encounter.

II. FLY FISHING

The Ewaso Nyiro River | Tilapia | Catfish | The Specific Peace of a Northern Kenya River Bank

Fly fishing in the Ewaso Nyiro River and in the conservancy dams and mountain streams of Northern Kenya provides the most contemplative and most specifically patient of the region's activities — sitting at the water's edge in the early morning, before the heat builds, with a line in the river and the wildlife arriving at the bank around you.

The Ewaso Nyiro's fish population includes **tilapia** and **catfish** — not the trophy fish of a sport fishing operation but the resident fish of a river that has been flowing through this landscape since before any human settlement in the northern frontier. The specific pleasure of fly fishing here is not the fish; it is the position — at water level, in the specific riparian habitat of the Ewaso Nyiro, with the elephants arriving at the bank, the kingfishers working the pool below the casting position and the morning light doing what it does to the northern Kenya river at 7am.

Available at: Sarara Camp and Kitich Forest Camp (mountain stream fishing in the Ngeng River and its tributaries — a completely different experience from the lowland river fishing, the mountain water cold and clear, the pools specific and known to the guides). Lake Turkana offers the most dramatic fishing in the region — Nile perch of 100–300kg in the Jade Sea, accessible by boat charter from Loyangalani or from South Island National Park.

III. MORNING AND EVENING GAME DRIVES

The Ewaso Nyiro River Circuit | The Kalama and Westgate Conservancies | 850,000 Acres of Private Land

The Northern Kenya game drive is a specific and different experience from its Laikipia or Mara equivalents:

The Dawn River Drive in Samburu: Departing before 6am for the Ewaso Nyiro River circuit — the Samburu National Reserve's river bank at the hour when the largest elephant herds use the water, before the day's heat drives them to shade. The elephants' comfort with the river in the early morning produces bathing, mud-wallowing and social interactions of extraordinary quality at very close range. The specific light: the equatorial dawn arriving fast, the river catching the first gold before any shadow lifts from the doum palm groves, the Special Five appearing from the bush in the order that the morning's temperature determines. This is the finest individual game drive experience in Northern Kenya, and it is at its best in the first 90 minutes of the day.

The Kalama Conservancy Exclusivity: 240,000 acres for one lodge's guests. A game drive here — in the Kalama mountain range's semi-arid savannah and rocky highland terrain — produces encounters with no other vehicle in sight, at any hour of the day, in any season. The specific wildlife of the conservancy at altitude: leopard in the rocky outcrops, greater kudu in the mountain margins, the elephant herds using the corridor between Samburu and Marsabit.

Night Drives: Available in all community conservancies. The nocturnal community of Northern Kenya — serval, genet, civet, honey badger, striped hyena, aardvark, porcupine, the specific nightjars of the northern frontier — is revealed by the spotlight in conditions of complete darkness in an environment with no light pollution from any settlement.

IV. HORSEBACK SAFARIS

The Northern Kenya Highland and Plains | Lenewalla at Sarara | The Specific Wildlife Acceptance of the Horse

Horseback safaris in Northern Kenya carry the same specific wildlife-encounter advantages described for Laikipia — the wildlife accepting the horse as a familiar pastoral companion rather than a threatening new presence — with the additional dimension of the specific northern Kenya landscape's terrain: the rocky conservancy highlands, the Ewaso Nyiro's riverine forest edge, the open grasslands of the Samburu plains.

Sarara Camp's Lenewalla programme — the Samburu cowboy guide who leads the camp's horseback safari — is one of the most specifically personalised equestrian experiences in northern Kenya: a horseback journey through the Namunyak landscape with a guide whose relationship with horses and with this specific terrain is the product of a lifetime in both.

For the most ambitious equestrian programme in northern Kenya, **Offbeat Riding Safaris** operates through several northern conservancies including Mugie and the areas adjacent to the Mathews Range — contact Vard Africa for current Offbeat availability and itinerary options.

V. GUIDED NATURE WALKS AND GAME WALKS

The Mathews Forest | The Ewaso Nyiro Riverbank | The Conservancy Plains

Walking in Northern Kenya is walking in one of Africa's least-visited wilderness areas — the landscape's specific remoteness and the community conservancy model's low visitor density ensuring that every walk feels genuinely exploratory rather than routine.

Forest Walks at Kitich and Sarara: As described in detail above — the Mathews Range montane forest's specific ecology, the ancient cycads, the De Brazza's monkey, the botanical diversity of an old-growth equatorial highland forest.

Riverbank Walks at Sasaab and Larsens: Along the Ewaso Nyiro, reading the overnight wildlife traffic in the river's sandy banks, interpreting the crocodile sunning positions and the elephant feeding patterns.

Conservancy Plain Walks at Saruni Samburu and Sasaab: Through the Kalama and Westgate conservancy terrain with Samburu warrior guides whose tracking knowledge is the knowledge of people who learned to track from their fathers in this specific landscape.

Armed Walking Safety: All guides on walking safaris in big game areas carry appropriate firearms. The walking experience in northern Kenya — where buffalo, elephant and lion are present across most conservancy landscapes — requires and receives professional armed guide presence on all activities beyond the immediate lodge perimeter.

VI. CAMEL TREKS AND SAFARIS

The Traditional Transport of Northern Kenya | Samburu Handlers | Half-Day and Multi-Day Expeditions

The camel is more deeply embedded in the culture and the economy of Northern Kenya than in any other part of Kenya's safari landscape. The Samburu, Rendille, Gabbra and Turkana communities have used camels as transport, milk and wealth for centuries. The camel safaris available from northern Kenya lodges are not novelty experiences; they are engagements with the primary traditional transport technology of this specific landscape.

Short Camel Walks (2–4 hours): Available at Sasaab, Sarara Camp and Desert Rose. Half-day excursions with Samburu handlers across the conservancy terrain — the camel's specific elevated perspective (approximately 3 metres at the saddle) providing a wildlife observation height between the vehicle and the walking guide, with the camel's complete familiarity to the landscape's wildlife ensuring an approach to Grevy's zebra, reticulated giraffe and plains game at distances no vehicle achieves.

Multi-Day Camel-Supported Expeditions: Through operators including **Wild Frontiers Camel Treks** (based in the Milgis River area, operating across the terrain between Lake Turkana and Laikipia) and the Sarara Foundation's own mobile camp programme. Multi-day camel safaris traverse the Milgis Lugga system, the Mathews Range foothills and the northern frontier between conservancies — the camels carrying all provisions and equipment while guests walk alongside, in the traditional northern Kenya travel mode.

The multi-day camel safari in northern Kenya is the most authentic and most specifically appropriate extended wilderness experience available in East Africa — the same mode of travel that the Rendille and Gabbra communities have used to cross this terrain for centuries.

VII. WALKING SAFARI ADVENTURES

Ann — Africa's First Female Samburu Guide | The Warrior Guides of Kalama | Walking in True Wilderness

Walking safaris in Northern Kenya are distinct from their Laikipia equivalents in several specific ways:

The Cultural Dimension: Walking with a Samburu warrior guide in Northern Kenya is not simply walking with someone who knows about wildlife; it is walking with someone whose cultural tradition — the warrior ethos, the knowledge of the landscape as both a natural and a human environment — is expressed in everything about how they move through the bush, what they notice, what they consider significant and how they explain it. This cultural-ecological synthesis is what distinguishes the finest northern Kenya walking guides from the finest guides anywhere else in Kenya.

The Specific Landscape: The northern Kenya semi-arid savannah and montane forest provide a walking environment categorically different from the Laikipia plateau. The specific terrain of the Mathews Range forest, the Samburu plains' rocky outcrops and the Ewaso Nyiro's riverine woodland all require different knowledge, different attention and different techniques from guides whose specific expertise is their native landscape.

The Scale: 850,000 acres at Namunyak. 240,000 acres at Kalama. 350,000 acres at Sera. Walking in these conservancies is walking in a scale of landscape that national park walking — where distance from vehicles and time away from designated areas is always limited — cannot replicate.

VIII. THE SINGING WELLS OF SAMBURU

Kisima Hamsini — The Fifty Wells | Available in Dry Season Only | Ol Pejeta and Sera

As described in detail in the Sera Conservancy section: warriors singing their family's specific song as they pass water up from deep wells in the dry riverbed; cattle recognising their family's song and moving toward it; elephants arriving after the cattle depart. One of Africa's most ancient living cultural traditions, available in the dry season at the Sera Conservancy's Kisima Hamsini and at other northern Kenya sites.

Timing: The Singing Wells are active during the dry season when the rivers run dry — approximately July through October and January through February. Vard Africa plans Northern Kenya itineraries to coincide with dry season timing when the Singing Wells are the primary cultural encounter requested.

Photography: Photography is typically not permitted at the Singing Wells, by request of the Samburu elders whose sacred sites these are. This request, approached with respect rather than disappointment, deepens the experience: sitting in the dry riverbed as the warriors sing water from the earth, without a camera between you and the experience, produces the full presence that the encounter deserves.

IX. HELICOPTER EXPEDITIONS AND SAFARIS

The Suguta Valley | Lake Logipi | Lake Turkana | The Matthews Range | Mount Nyiru | The Northern Frontier

The helicopter is the most specific and most transformative tool available in northern Kenya safari travel — making accessible in minutes landscapes that would otherwise require days of ground travel or be entirely out of reach.

The Suguta Valley Circuit: From Sasaab, Saruni Samburu or Desert Rose — a 30–60 minute flight to the Suguta Valley's volcanic floor, landing among the ancient cinder cones for sundowners, then continuing to Lake Logipi's shore to watch the flamingo concentrations at altitude before returning. The most dramatically remote and most specifically extraordinary helicopter excursion in Kenya.

Lake Turkana Flight: From any Samburu or northern frontier property — a 45–90 minute flight to the southern shore of the Jade Sea, with a boat charter to South Island National Park's Nile crocodile populations and volcanic craters. The most complete Lake Turkana experience available by helicopter, combining aviation and boat travel in the most remote significant national park in Kenya.

Mount Kulal Expeditions: From Desert Rose or from Saruni Samburu — the helicopter reaches the summit of Mount Kulal (the mountain overlooking Lake Turkana's eastern shore) for viewpoints across the lake and the northern frontier that no other transport mode provides.

The Mathews Range Overflight: From any Samburu-area property — the Mathews Range's forested peaks visible from the helicopter at the specific altitude that reveals the sky-island ecology: the forest canopy, the specific topography that creates the micro-climate, the relationship between the forest and the surrounding desert plain.

Overnight on Orka Summit: From Sarara Camp — the helicopter to the summit of Orka mountain in the Mathews Range for a fly camp on the summit ridge: the view across the entire Namunyak landscape, toward Lake Turkana and Mount Kenya simultaneously, from a position accessible only by aircraft.

X. PRIVATE BOAT EXPEDITIONS ON LAKE TURKANA

South Island National Park | The Nile Crocodile | Fishing for Nile Perch | The Turkana Communities | The Oldest Surviving Freshwater Fish Populations in Africa

Boat travel on Lake Turkana provides access to experiences unavailable by any other means:

South Island National Park: A UNESCO World Heritage Site on one of the lake's volcanic islands — with **active craters, Nile crocodile breeding populations**, dramatic volcanic geology and the specific atmosphere of a place that is genuinely among the most remote protected areas in Africa. Accessible by private boat charter from Loyangalani or from the southern lake shore — a 90-minute crossing in calm conditions. The Turkana wind's afternoon intensity makes morning departures essential.

Central Island National Park: The lake's primary crocodile breeding site — **14,000 Nile crocodiles** by historical estimate. Three volcanic craters filled seasonally with water serve as hatching grounds for Africa's most significant crocodile population. Accessible by boat; the approach to the island, with crocodiles visible at the waterline, is one of the most specifically dramatic wildlife experiences in Kenya.

Turkana and El Molo Community Visits: Boat travel to the El Molo community villages at the lake's southern shore — one of Africa's smallest surviving indigenous communities, the El Molo's traditional hippopotamus hunting and fishing culture surviving in contact with modernity at the specific junction that a desert lake's shore communities always occupy.

Nile Perch Fishing: Charter boat fishing for the lake's Nile perch — fish of 100–300kg that make the Turkana fishery one of the world's most dramatic for freshwater sport fishing. The specific combination of the Jade Sea's water colour, the volcanic landscape of the lake's islands and the extreme size of the fish creates an experience that has no equivalent anywhere in East Africa.

XI. FLY CAMPING

The Namunyak Wilderness | The Mathews Range Forest | The Ewaso Nyiro Sandbanks | The Suguta Valley Floor

The fly camp in northern Kenya is a qualitatively different experience from its Laikipia equivalent — more remote, more specifically wild and more directly dependent on the guide team's wilderness knowledge for its safety and its success.

In the Namunyak Conservancy: From Sarara Camp — overnight positions in the conservancy's wilderness, far from any permanent facility, with the Mathews Range above and the elephant population's movements audible through the night. The star bed option and the riverbed position are specific highlights of the Namunyak fly camp programme.

In the Mathews Range Forest: From Kitich Forest Camp — overnight positions in specific forest clearings or at the forest margin, with the forest's nocturnal acoustic world (owl calls, the specific night sounds of the montane forest, the distant rumble of elephant in the trees) as the soundtrack.

On the Kauro Riverbed at Saruni Rhino: The sandy riverbed lined with doum palms — dinner around an open fire, sleeping under the palm canopy with the northern Kenya stars framed by the palm fronds above.

In the Suguta Valley (Helicopter Access): From Desert Rose or Ol Malo — the helicopter delivers a fly camp to a position on the Suguta Valley floor among the volcanic cones or at Lake Logipi's shore. Overnight at altitude zero in one of Africa's most extreme landscapes, with a chef-prepared dinner around a fire and the volcanic terrain visible in the night's moonlight.

XII. QUAD BIKING ON THE ANCIENT LANDSCAPES

Samburu Plains | Namunyak Conservancy | The Lugga System

Quad biking (ATV riding) in the northern Kenya conservancy landscape provides the most physically engaged and most terrain-covering form of wildlife exploration available — particularly appropriate for guests who want to cover the broader landscape quickly and experience the specific physical engagement of the semi-arid terrain's variety.

Available at Sasaab (USD 50 per person per hour); Kitich Forest Camp (through the Ngelai market day circuit); and at other northern properties on advance arrangement. The quad bike is not a wildlife viewing vehicle in the same sense as a game drive vehicle — it is too fast and too intrusive for intensive wildlife observation — but as a means of covering terrain, reaching the market, visiting the community and experiencing the landscape's topography directly, it is uniquely effective.

XIII. MOUNT KULAL EXPEDITIONS

2,285 Metres | Overlooking Lake Turkana | UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve | Cloud Forest | The Turkana Sea from Above

Mount Kulal rises above the eastern shore of Lake Turkana to **2,285 metres** — dramatically enough above the desert floor that its summit catches cloud and supports a montane forest ecosystem of specific botanical and ecological interest. The mountain was designated a **UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve** in 1978.

From the summit, the view encompasses Lake Turkana's full eastern shore — the Jade Sea's specific colour visible from this elevation as a completely different visual experience from the ground-level perspective. The Turkana wind that makes boat travel hazardous in the afternoons becomes, from the mountain's summit, an atmospheric spectacle rather than a navigation challenge.

Access: helicopter from Desert Rose Lodge, Lobolo Camp or from a Samburu-area lodge with the range capability. Ground access via very extended 4WD from Loyangalani on the lake's eastern shore.

XIV. AUTHENTIC SAMBURU CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

Village Visits | Warrior Demonstrations | Beadwork | The Age-Grade System | Community Life

The Samburu cultural encounter is available in Northern Kenya at a depth and in a quality of authenticity that is unavailable elsewhere in Kenya's safari landscape — precisely because the Samburu are the founding and managing community of the conservancies in which all of the lodges described in this guide are situated, and the guide teams at every lodge are drawn from the same families that the cultural visits engage with.

Private Village Visits — Arranged through the guides' own community networks: not a tourist village maintained for visitor purposes but an active Samburu family homestead whose elder has agreed to receive guests. The compound's architecture; the livestock management; the specific social organisation of the extended family within the compound; the role of the women in building and maintaining the home; the warrior son's position in the age-grade system that will be his primary social identity for the next decade — all explained by a guide whose relationship with this specific family predates their guiding career.

Warrior Demonstrations — Not performances in a cultural park but demonstrations by the lodge's own guides of the skills they have maintained since their own time in the warrior class: fire-starting with traditional materials; spear-throwing at targets; the specific songs of the warrior culture that accompany their daily activities. The distinction between a performance and a demonstration of genuine skill is immediately apparent to guests who pay attention.

Beadwork — Samburu women's beadwork sessions available at most lodges: sitting with women who are creating their actual personal and community adornment, learning to read the pattern language, beginning to understand what the beads communicate about the wearer's identity within the Samburu social system.

Market Day Visits — The Samburu traditional market at Archers Post (accessible from Samburu Reserve properties) and the Ngelai market (accessible from Kitich and Sarara) on specific weekly market days. A genuine commercial and social gathering — not created for tourists, not adapted for their comfort, not managed for their photography. Real exchange between real community members, with the lodge guide providing the interpretation and the introduction.

An Evening at a Manyatta — The traditional Samburu family compound visited at the specific hour when the livestock return for the night: the cattle sorted by family ownership, the compound's specific sounds and smells and the elder's account of the day's pastoral activities combining to produce the most complete and most specific sense of what daily life means in the Samburu semi-arid world.

XV. ICONIC OUT OF AFRICA SUNDOWNERS

With Not a Soul in Sight — The Promise of Northern Kenya

The Northern Kenya sundowner differs from its Laikipia equivalent in one specific and irreversible way: the absolute certainty of being alone. The Samburu National Reserve's visitor volumes, distributed across multiple properties, are manageable. The community conservancies — 240,000 acres of Kalama for one lodge; 850,000 acres of Namunyak for three properties; 350,000 acres of Sera for one camp — make it mathematically impossible to share a sundowner position with any other vehicle. There is not a soul in sight because there literally is not a soul within several kilometres.

The sundowner positions in Northern Kenya:

'Sundowner Rock' at Sasaab — The specific kopje above the Ewaso Nyiro from which the Samburu landscape, the national reserve and the distant Mount Kenya profile are simultaneously visible in the western light.

'Pride Rock' at Saruni Samburu — The inselberg's summit above the Kalama Conservancy plains.

The Kauro Riverbed at Saruni Rhino — A campfire in the doum palm-lined riverbed as the northern Kenya darkness descends.

The Mountain Terrace at Desert Rose — Overlooking the Elbarta plains and, on clear evenings, the shimmer of Lake Turkana on the north horizon.

The Mathews Range Forest Edge at Sarara — The specific transition zone between the forest and the conservancy, where the cooling evening air descends from the mountain and the wildlife moves between the two habitats.

XVI. RIVER ACTIVITIES

The Ewaso Nyiro | The Ngeng Mountain Stream | The Kauro Lugga

River activities in Northern Kenya are simpler and more honest than their Laikipia equivalents less developed as tourism products and more directly expressions of what the rivers themselves offer:

Swimming in the Ngeng at Kitich — The mountain river's crystal pools: cold, clear, forest-shaded, accessible from the camp by short walk. The most physically refreshing activity in the Mathews Range landscape.

The 'Lugga' Water Slide at Desert Rose — The natural rock slide in the seasonal stream below the lodge: a genuinely playful and genuine local feature, used by Samburu children and available to lodge guests.

Fishing on the Ewaso Nyiro — As described above; available from Sasaab and Larsens.

XVII. LEARN TO THROW SPEARS LIKE A REAL SAMBURU WARRIOR

Specific Training from Warrior Guides | A Skill 1,000 Years Old

The Samburu warrior's spear the *lupes* is not a weapon of war in the contemporary sense (though its original purpose was both hunting and protection). It is a tool, a status symbol, a measure of skill and a specific cultural expression of the warrior identity that every Samburu man occupies for the decade of his early adulthood. The warrior guides at every northern Kenya lodge carry their spears not as costume but as functional objects of their daily identity.

The spear-throwing demonstration and the guest participation that follows is available at Saruni Samburu, Sasaab, Sarara and other lodges as a genuine cultural skills exchange rather than a tourist entertainment. The guide who demonstrates the throw has been throwing since he was a child; the specific technique the grip, the step, the release requires explanation, demonstration and patient practice to approach even basic competence. Guests who engage with this activity with genuine interest and genuine willingness to learn consistently describe it as one of their most memorable cultural encounters in Kenya.

XVIII. LEARN SAMBURU COOKING TECHNIQUES

The Kitchen at Sarara | Katie Rowe's Prue Leith Training | Forest Herbs | Traditional Preparations

At Sarara Camp and Reteti House, the Prue Leith-trained Katie Rowe's influence on the kitchen programme extends to **guest cooking sessions** — working alongside the camp's kitchen team to prepare specific dishes using the garden's herbs, the conservancy's produce and the specific techniques of both the traditional Samburu kitchen and the Italian-influenced camp cooking that defines the Sarara culinary character.

XIX. WILD TRACKING ACTIVITIES

The Sandy Riverbed as a Morning Newspaper | The Mathews Forest Floor | Reading What Happened in the Night

Every dry riverbed in Northern Kenya becomes, overnight, a perfect and complete record of everything that moved across it since the last disturbance. The track in the sand at dawn is the morning newspaper who came, which direction, when, what they were doing, whether they were hunting or hunted, whether they were alone or in a group.

Reading this record is a specific skill that the Samburu guides bring to every morning's tracking walk. Not the general tracking of prints — which any guide can demonstrate but the specific interpretation of northern Kenya's specific species in northern Kenya's specific terrain: the specific sand composition of the Kauro lugga that retains prints differently from the Ewaso Nyiro's riverbank; the specific pressure patterns that distinguish a cow elephant from a bull; the specific gait pattern of a Grevy's zebra at speed from one at rest.

Wild tracking at Saruni Rhino where the rhino tracking walks are entirely guided by sign in the sand and the rangers' accumulated knowledge of individual animals is the most technically sophisticated version of this activity available in Northern Kenya. Wild tracking at Sarara Camp and Kitich, where the forest floor and the mountain streams provide their own different tracking environments, provides different but equally specific insights.

XX. SLEEP UNDER THE AFRICAN SKY UNDER THE STARS

Rooftop Star Beds at Sasaab | The Fly Camp Night | The Orka Summit | The Kauro Riverbed

As described in the individual property sections above:

Sasaab's Rooftop Star Beds — Each suite's retractable rooftop sleeping platform, overlooking the Ewaso Nyiro River.

The Namunyak Fly Camp — An overnight at a remote conservancy position under the 850,000-acre sky.

Saruni Rhino's Riverbed — The doum palm-lined Kauro lugga under the northern frontier stars.

The Orka Summit — By helicopter from Sarara, an overnight at 2,000+ metres with the Namunyak landscape below and the Milky Way above.

Desert Rose's Mountain Terrace — 1,676 metres, no light pollution, the northern Kenya sky in its most complete and most uncompromised darkness.

XXI. GUIDED HIKE TO SEE ANCIENT CYCADS

Encephalartos spp. | 280 Million Years Old | The Mathews Range's Most Specific Botanical Encounter

As described in the Kitich Forest Camp and Sarara Camp sections: guided hikes to the specific cycad colonies within the Mathews Range forest, with guides who know each grove's location, the individual plants' approximate ages and the specific ecological role of these ancient botanical survivors in the Mathews Range's forest community. Available from Kitich Forest Camp and Sarara Camp.

XXII. BEADING WORKSHOPS

The Language of Colour | Samburu Women's Cooperative | Each Pattern a Biography

Available at Sarara (through the Sarara Foundation's Eco Beading programme), Sasaab (through the Footprint Foundation's community projects), Saruni Samburu (through the guide team's community connections) and other northern Kenya lodges.

XXIII. VISIT A TRADITIONAL VILLAGE MARKET

Archers Post | Ngelai | South Horr | Every Tuesday and Saturday — Market Days

The northern Kenya pastoral market is a specific and specific institution the point at which the pastoral economy's self-sufficiency is supplemented by exchange, where goods move between communities, where social connection is renewed and where the specific commerce of a semi-nomadic culture takes place.

- ✓ **Archers Post Market** — The largest market accessible from the Samburu reserve area; held on specific weekly market days. Livestock, household goods, foodstuffs and the specific array of goods that northern Kenya pastoral communities require for their mobile lifestyle.
- ✓ **Ngelai Market** — Accessible from Kitich Forest Camp; a smaller, more specifically Samburu market that feels less touched by tourism influence than the Archers Post gathering.
- ✓ **South Horr Market** — The most northerly of the readily accessible markets, at the base of Mount Nyiru; attended by Samburu, Turkana and Rendille communities from a wide catchment area.

XXIV. AN EVENING AT A MANYATTA

The Samburu Family Compound | The Returning Cattle | The Elder's Account | The Fire at the Compound Centre

As described in the Laikipia section's equivalent activity but with the specific northern Kenya character of a Samburu manyatta whose pastoral traditions are more intact, whose relationship with the surrounding landscape is more directly expressed in daily life, and whose elder's account of the compound's history is the account of a people whose continuity in this specific landscape extends far beyond any conservation programme's timeline.

GETTING THERE

The Complete Guide to Northern Kenya

Air Access from Nairobi Wilson Airport

Nairobi Wilson Airport — The departure point for all northern Kenya domestic flights. Located on the western outskirts of Nairobi, 20–30 minutes from the city centre.

Scheduled Services — Samburu Area: AirKenya and Safarilink operate daily scheduled flights to **Buffalo Springs Airstrip** (also known as Samburu Airport) and **Kalama Airstrip**:

- Wilson Airport to Buffalo Springs/Samburu: approximately **45–55 minutes**
- Wilson Airport to Kalama (via routing): approximately **45–55 minutes**
- Airstrip transfers to lodges: 15–90 minutes depending on property

Charter Services — Northern Frontier: All airstrips beyond the immediate Samburu area are served by charter only:

- Wilson to Namunyak Airstrip (Sarara/Reteti area): approximately **1 hour 10–20 minutes**
- Wilson to Ngelai Airstrip (Kitich Forest Camp): approximately **1 hour to 1 hour 15 minutes**
- Wilson to Kauro Airstrip (Saruni Rhino/Sera Conservancy): approximately **1 hour 10 minutes**
- Wilson to Desert Rose Airstrip (Mount Nyiru): approximately **1 hour 20–40 minutes**

Internal Charter Connections:

- Samburu area to Namunyak: approximately **30–40 minutes**
- Namunyak to Ngelai: approximately **20–25 minutes**
- Samburu area to Desert Rose: approximately **45–50 minutes**
- Any Laikipia property to Samburu: approximately **30–45 minutes**

Recommended Charter Operators: Tropic Air, Safarilink Charter, Wilson Aviation contact Your Vard Africa designer for current aircraft availability and pricing for all charter requirements.

Road Access

- ✓ **Nairobi to Samburu National Reserve:** Via A2 North to Nanyuki, continuing north via Isiolo and Archers Post: approximately **340 kilometres, 5–7 hours** depending on traffic and road conditions. The route crosses the equator north of Nanyuki and descends from the highland climate into the northern semi-arid zone with dramatic landscape transition.
- ✓ **Nairobi to Namunyak/Sarara Area:** Via Nanyuki, Isiolo, Archers Post and north through the Mathews Range access roads: approximately **7–8 hours** road journey. The road condition beyond Archers Post varies seasonally; 4WD is essential.
- ✓ **Nairobi to Kitich Forest Camp:** As above for the Namunyak route, then west into the Mathews Range via Wamba: approximately **8–10 hours** total. 4WD essential; the final approach to Kitich is on the famous steep access road built by Dick Hedges.
- ✓ **Nairobi to Desert Rose Lodge:** Via Maralal, Baragoi and South Horr to Mount Nyiru's access road: approximately **10 hours** total. This is a serious overland journey that requires experienced 4WD drivers, appropriate vehicle preparation and careful planning. Road conditions vary significantly by season.

Best Time to Visit Northern Kenya

- ✓ **The Dry Season (July–October and January–February):** The finest wildlife viewing animals concentrated at permanent water sources, vegetation thinned by drought revealing wildlife that the wet season's growth conceals. The Singing Wells active. The Ewaso Nyiro River running strongly. The Mathews Range accessible. The lake at lower levels. Strongly recommended.
- ✓ **The Green Season (November–December):** Short rains bring the landscape to life extraordinary colour, animal births, breeding plumage on birds. Some roads may be challenging. Wildlife more widely dispersed as temporary water makes concentrated water-point viewing less reliable. An excellent season for guests who value solitude and the specific beauty of the green northern Kenya landscape.
- ✓ **March–May:** Long rains. Some camps close or reduce operations. Road access to the more remote properties may be temporarily impossible. Not generally recommended for first-time Northern Kenya visitors.

Northern Kenya in Combination with Other Kenya Destinations

- ✓ **The Classic Kenya Circuit — Samburu → Laikipia → Maasai Mara:** The most complete Kenya safari, combining all three of the country's most important wildlife landscapes in 10–14 days. Fly between all three Samburu to Laikipia via charter (30–45 minutes); Laikipia to Mara via scheduled or charter (45–75 minutes).
- ✓ **Northern Kenya Only — Deep North:** Samburu → Namunyak → Kitich → Desert Rose → Lake Turkana: the most ambitious and most specifically adventurous northern Kenya circuit, requiring 12–16 days and significant charter flight planning. Vard Africa has designed and executed this circuit for multiple clients.
- ✓ **Samburu Standalone (3–4 nights):** The most efficient introduction to Northern Kenya three nights at Sasaab or Saruni Samburu providing the full Special Five experience, the cultural encounter and sufficient time to explore both the national reserve and the community conservancy.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The questions our clients most consistently ask about Northern Kenya answered with the depth and specificity that a destination management company of Vard Africa's standard owes its clients.

Q1. Is Northern Kenya safe to visit?

Northern Kenya has a complex security reputation that requires careful and honest assessment rather than either reassurance or alarm.

The **Samburu National Reserve, its adjacent conservancies (Westgate, Kalama) and the Namunyak Conservancy** are all safe to visit and have been so consistently for years. These areas are well-managed, with established security protocols, community ranger forces and the specific security advantage that comes from the economic dependence of the surrounding community on the tourism that the lodges generate. When a community has invested in the infrastructure and trained the people that tourism requires, that community has the most powerful possible economic motivation to ensure that guests arrive safely, leave safely and return with positive recommendations.

The challenges in northern Kenya relate primarily to the **porous border areas** the Kenya-Ethiopia and Kenya-Somalia frontiers, and the cattle-raiding traditions of specific pastoral communities in the Pokot, Samburu and Turkana ethnic boundary zones. These challenges are primarily relevant to travellers who intend to access the most remote northern frontier areas by road without proper preparation or local guidance.

Vard Africa's position: We do not book clients to areas of current elevated security concern without specific and current briefing and risk assessment. All properties in this guide have been assessed for current security conditions at time of publication. We maintain real-time security awareness through our network of lodge partners and our own Kenya-based team.

Practical advice: Follow lodge security guidance at all times. Do not travel beyond conservancy boundaries on your own initiative. Do not attempt to access the Suguta Valley or Lake Turkana by ground vehicle without security clearance from your lodge and, where appropriate, from the relevant Kenya Police Service post.

Q2. How does Northern Kenya compare to the Maasai Mara for wildlife?

This is the most common comparison question from clients who are planning their first Kenya safari, and it deserves an honest answer.

Wildlife Density and Reliability: The Maasai Mara particularly during the wildebeest migration (July–October) provides the highest wildlife density and the most reliably spectacular game viewing of any Kenya destination. For first-time safari visitors who want to maximise the probability of seeing the Big Five and large predators in a single destination, the Mara is the appropriate choice.

Wildlife Uniqueness: Northern Kenya offers the Samburu Special Five (reticulated giraffe, Grevy's zebra, Beisa oryx, gerenuk, Somali ostrich) species not found in the Mara plus the specific experiences of rhino tracking on foot at Sera, elephant sanctuary at Reteti and the landscapes of the Mathews Range, the Suguta Valley and Lake Turkana. These are not available anywhere near the Maasai Mara ecosystem.

Exclusivity and Freedom: The community conservancies of Northern Kenya offer a quality of exclusivity and activity freedom that the Mara's high-density tourism cannot replicate. 240,000 acres of Kalama for a single lodge. Off-road driving. Night drives. Walking safaris in big game areas. Cultural encounters with communities whose relationship with tourism has not yet been complicated by over-familiarity with visitors.

Our Recommendation: The finest Kenya safari combines both. Three nights in Samburu or Namunyak for the northern species and the cultural encounter; three nights in a Maasai Mara conservancy (Mara North, Naboisho or Olare Motorogi) for the wildlife density and predator action. For clients with only one northern Kenya destination and the Mara, Samburu or Namunyak is the appropriate choice. For clients who have already done the Mara, Northern Kenya is the natural progression.

Q3. What is malaria risk in Northern Kenya and what should I do about it?

The Risk: Most of Northern Kenya below 1,700 metres including the Samburu National Reserve, the Westgate and Kalama Conservancies, the Namunyak valley, the Ewaso Nyiro River corridor and the Lake Turkana shore is in a **malaria-transmission zone**. This is different from the Laikipia plateau properties, most of which are in a malaria-free zone at altitude.

The Exceptions: Desert Rose Lodge (1,676 metres) and Kitich Forest Camp (1,330 metres) are at altitudes that significantly reduce malaria mosquito activity, though they are not entirely outside the risk zone. Saruni Samburu's elevated hilltop position provides some natural protection.

What To Do: Consult your travel physician or travel medicine clinic **at least 6 weeks before departure** for appropriate prophylaxis advice covering your complete itinerary. Common options include doxycycline (daily), Malarone (atovaquone/proguanil, daily) and Lariam (mefloquine, weekly with specific contraindications). Your physician will recommend based on your medical history and complete itinerary. In addition: apply DEET-containing insect repellent at dawn and dusk; wear long sleeves in the evenings; use all mosquito nets provided; ensure your accommodation screens are properly in place.

Vard Africa's Practice: We provide all clients with a specific health and safety briefing for Northern Kenya as part of the pre-travel documentation package. This includes current prophylaxis recommendations, vaccination requirements and the contact information for AMREF Flying Doctors in the event of a medical emergency.

Q4. Do I need the Kenya eTA and how do I get it?

Yes. The Kenya **Electronic Travel Authorisation (eTA)** is mandatory for all international visitors to Kenya. It replaced the previous e-Visa system in January 2024.

How to apply: www.etakenya.go.ke apply online with your passport information, travel dates, travel itinerary and accommodation details. Current fee: approximately USD 34.09 per person (subject to change).

Important: Apply a minimum of 72 hours before your international flight. Airlines will not allow boarding without the confirmed eTA. The eTA is required for all foreign visitors including children even children under 3 who may be sharing a room with parents.

Exceptions: Kenyan citizens and East African Community (EAC) partner state residents are exempt. Check the eTA website for the current list of exempt nationalities.

Vard Africa Assistance: We provide all clients with the eTA application link and a step-by-step guide as part of the pre-travel documentation. We do not apply for the eTA on behalf of clients, but we are available to answer questions about the application process.

Q5. What is AMREF Flying Doctors and why is it essential for Northern Kenya?

AMREF Flying Doctors (now branded as the AMREF Health Africa air ambulance service) operates the finest and most comprehensive emergency medical evacuation service in East Africa. From their bases at Nairobi Wilson Airport and Nanyuki Airport, AMREF aircraft can reach any airstrip in the northern Kenya safari circuit within 30–90 minutes of an emergency call.

Why Essential for Northern Kenya: Unlike the Maasai Mara or Amboseli, where hospitals of adequate standard are within reasonable road distance of the lodges, Northern Kenya's remoteness means that road evacuation to a hospital for serious medical emergencies is not a viable option. A serious injury or illness at Sarara Camp requires air evacuation to Nanyuki or Nairobi. An AMREF aircraft from Nairobi Wilson can reach the Namunyak Airstrip in approximately 1 hour. Without this service, a serious medical emergency in Northern Kenya could have outcomes that are unacceptable.

Coverage: AMREF's Maisha Silver package specifically recommended by the Sarara Foundation for Namunyak guests provides emergency evacuation coverage for one month across Kenya, Tanzania and Zanzibar. This is the most appropriate single AMREF product for a Northern Kenya safari itinerary that may also include Laikipia and the Maasai Mara.

Cost: Approximately USD 100–200 per person depending on the package selected. This is not a negotiable cost or an optional upgrade for Northern Kenya travel; it is a fundamental safety requirement. Vard Africa treats AMREF cover as mandatory for all northern Kenya bookings.

Q6. What is the Samburu Special Five and where is the best place to see each species?

The **Samburu Special Five** are five species endemic to or most reliably found in Kenya's northern ecosystem:

- ✓ **Reticulated Giraffe:** Most reliably seen at Namunyak Conservancy (Sarara Camp one of Kenya's largest herds) and in the Samburu National Reserve along the Ewaso Nyiro River. Also present in all other northern Kenya conservancies.
- ✓ **Grevy's Zebra:** Sasaab in the Westgate Conservancy specifically markets itself as being in one of the world's largest remaining Grevy's populations. Also reliably seen at all Samburu reserve lodges and in the Kalama Conservancy.
- ✓ **Beisa Oryx:** Throughout the Samburu ecosystem — most reliably visible in the open plains of the Samburu National Reserve and the Westgate and Kalama conservancies.
- ✓ **Gerenuk:** Throughout the thorny acacia scrub of the northern reserves — most reliably seen in the Samburu National Reserve's dense thorn woodland. The gerenuk's habit of standing on its hind legs to browse is most frequently observed in the mid-morning hours when it is actively feeding.
- ✓ **Somali Ostrich:** Throughout the northern reserves and conservancies, most concentrated in the open plains sections of the Samburu National Reserve.
- ✓ The **sixth special species** sometimes added to the list is **Guenther's Dik-Dik** the smallest antelope in the northern ecosystem, found throughout the thorn scrub.

Q7. What is the Reteti Elephant Sanctuary and how do I visit?

Reteti Elephant Sanctuary is described in full in the activities section above. The short summary for planning purposes:

- ✓ **What it is:** Africa's first community-owned and community-operated elephant sanctuary, established 2016 in the Namunyak Conservancy, caring for orphaned elephant calves until they can be rewilded into the conservancy's wild elephant herds.
- ✓ **Visiting:** Guests staying at Sarara Camp, Reteti House or Sarara Treehouses have the most direct access — Reteti is approximately 1 hour by road from the Sarara properties. Guests at other northern Kenya lodges (Saruni Samburu, Sasaab, Kitich) can access Reteti as a day trip by charter flight to the Namunyak Airstrip followed by a short drive. Contact Vard Africa to include a Reteti visit in any Northern Kenya itinerary.
- ✓ **Best Time to Visit:** The 3pm feeding session is the primary visitor experience. Arrival by 2:30pm is recommended to allow time for the Visitor Centre and the keeper introductions before the calves return from their daily walk.
- ✓ **Entrance:** An additional conservation fee applies for all guests beyond the Sarara properties' inclusive rates. Contact Vard Africa for current pricing.
- ✓ **Children:** Universally appropriate for all ages — the combination of the calves' adorable behaviour, the keepers' warmth and the conservation story's accessibility make Reteti the finest family wildlife encounter in Northern Kenya.

Q8. What is the Sera Conservancy's rhino tracking experience and what should I know before booking?

- ✓ **The Experience:** Walking on foot in the Sera Conservancy's fenced rhino sanctuary, guided by Samburu trackers and armed conservancy rangers, to locate and approach the conservancy's black rhino population. Currently 23 black rhinos and 4 white rhinos (translocated February 2024). One of only two walking rhino experiences in Africa (the other is in Zimbabwe), and the only one in a community-owned sanctuary.
- ✓ **Minimum Age:** 16 years. This is non-negotiable and reflects the safety requirements of the tracking activity in big game terrain.
- ✓ **Duration:** Tracking walks typically take 2–4 hours depending on the rhinos' location on the given day. There is no guarantee of a sighting — this is a genuine tracking experience in which the outcome depends on the trackers' skill and the rhinos' movements. In practice, the success rate is high: the Saruni guides' knowledge of the individual animals and the sanctuary's terrain makes sightings achievable on most mornings.
- ✓ **AMREF Requirement:** Participation in the rhino tracking experience requires evidence of emergency evacuation service membership. Vard Africa arranges AMREF cover as mandatory for all Saruni Rhino clients.
- ✓ **Physical Requirement:** The tracking walks involve extended walking on uneven terrain in significant heat. Reasonably good physical fitness is required. Guests with mobility limitations should discuss the activity's specific terrain with Vard Africa before booking.

Q9. What is the best season for Northern Kenya?

- ✓ **July to October (Dry Season, Peak):** The finest wildlife viewing. Animals concentrated at permanent water. Vegetation thinned to reveal wildlife. The Singing Wells active. Lake Turkana accessible. The Ewaso Nyiro running well. Ideal for first-time visitors.
- ✓ **January to February (Dry Season, Shoulder):** A secondary dry season — shorter and less absolute than July–October but producing similar wildlife concentration benefits. Less busy than the peak season; some lodges offer value rates. Good for visitors who cannot travel in the peak months.
- ✓ **November to December (Short Rains):** Beautiful green landscape; animal births; bird breeding plumage. Some road access challenges. Good value. Wildlife more dispersed but the landscape's beauty is specifically extraordinary.
- ✓ **March to May (Long Rains):** Several lodges close for maintenance. Road access to remote properties may be impossible. Not generally recommended for Northern Kenya unless guests have specific botanical or ornithological interests that the rains' abundance serves.

Q10. Can I combine a Northern Kenya safari with the Samburu National Reserve and a community conservancy?

Absolutely and this is Vard Africa's standard recommendation for clients spending 5+ nights in the northern ecosystem.

The combination most commonly recommended: **2 nights in the Samburu National Reserve** (at Soroi Larsens for the river access and the reserve's concentrated wildlife) **followed by 3 nights in a community conservancy** (Westgate at Sasaab, Kalama at Saruni Samburu, or Namunyak at Sarara, depending on the specific wildlife and cultural interests of the group). This sequence provides the contrast between the national reserve's density and wildlife variety and the community conservancy's exclusivity, cultural depth and specific northern species.

The reverse sequence also works well: begin in the conservancy for the cultural depth and exclusivity, then move to the national reserve for the wildlife density and the elephant bathing at the river.

Q11. What currency do I need in Northern Kenya and what about tipping?

Currency: USD is the billing currency at all Northern Kenya luxury properties. Kenyan Shillings (KES) are useful for market visits, small purchases at community stalls and direct community contributions (such as the USD 20 community development fund at the Samburu market). ATMs are available in Nanyuki 240km south of Samburu and in Isiolo. There are no ATMs at any northern Kenya property or in any conservancy.

Credit Cards: Most lodges accept Visa and Mastercard for final billing. Confirm before arrival.

Tipping Norms — Northern Kenya:

- ✓ *Guides (individual):* USD 20 per person per day — tipped directly to the guide on departure, in cash.
- ✓ *Lodge staff tip box (shared among all lodge staff):* USD 15–20 per guest per day — contributed to the communal tip box at checkout.
- ✓ *Cultural visit community contribution:* USD 20–50 per group for village visits (contributing directly to the community that hosted the visit). This is separate from the lodge's conservation fee.
- ✓ *Samburu cultural entertainment performance:* USD 100 per group (at Sasaab) — paid to the community group directly.
- ✓ *Camel handlers:* USD 5–10 per camel ride session.
- ✓ *Tracker rangers on rhino tracking (Sera):* A small personal tip to the ranger who led the walk — USD 10–20 — is warmly appreciated and goes directly to the ranger, not to the conservancy.

Q12. How do the lodges support the Samburu community?

Each lodge has a specific, documented and audited community support mechanism:

- ✓ **Sasaab (Westgate Conservancy):** Conservation and bed-night fees to the Westgate Community Conservancy; Footprint Foundation social projects (school lunches for 1,000+ children, conservation scholars programme, HIV/FGM awareness); employment predominantly from the surrounding community; Grevy's Zebra Trust support.
- ✓ **Saruni Samburu (Kalama Conservancy):** Monthly lease fees and nightly bed-night fees covering a significant percentage of the Kalama Conservancy's annual budget; majority employment from the Samburu community; support for community water access and school infrastructure.
- ✓ **Sarara/Reteti/Sarara Treehouses (Namunyak Conservancy):** All tourism facilities are community-owned; 60% of annual income to community projects; 40% to conservancy operations; Sarara Foundation manages the nomadic Montessori education system, mobile health clinic, Eco Ranger unit, Milk to Market programme; Reteti Elephant Sanctuary operation.
- ✓ **Saruni Rhino (Sera Conservancy):** Every bed-night fee contributes directly to the Sera Conservancy's rhino sanctuary operations ranger salaries, veterinary care, monitoring equipment.
- ✓ **Kitich Forest Camp (Namunyak Conservancy):** Employment from the Samburu community of the Mathews Range; collaboration with the Namunyak Conservation Trust; community development contributions.
- ✓ **Desert Rose Lodge:** Employment of 30 local people from Ewaso Rongai; primary school and medical clinic funded and maintained for the village.

Q13. Is Northern Kenya suitable for children and what age is appropriate?

Northern Kenya is excellent for children with the specific caveat that the destination's remoteness and its heat require age-appropriate preparation.

Best Age Range: Children from 5 years upward are typically suitable for the cultural activities, the conservancy game drives, the Reteti Elephant Sanctuary and the camel rides. For walking activities in big game areas, a guide assessment of the child's physical capability and wildlife awareness is appropriate most guides recommend 8+ years for walking safaris in unfenced conservancy terrain.

The Rhino Tracking Exception: The Saruni Rhino walking rhino tracking experience has a **firm minimum age of 16 years** non-negotiable and not subject to parental assessment.

Specific Family Highlights in Northern Kenya:

- ✓ *Reteti Elephant Sanctuary* — The finest family wildlife encounter in Northern Kenya, appropriate for all ages.
- ✓ *Camel rides* — Gentle, accessible, universally loved by children from 3 upward.
- ✓ *Samburu warrior cultural activities* — Fire-starting, spear throwing, bow-and-arrow making; particularly engaging for children aged 8–16.
- ✓ *The Ngeng River swimming pools at Kitich* — Crystal Mountain water in a forest setting; universally loved by children of all ages.
- ✓ *Desert Rose's lugga water slide* — Specifically designed as a playful family activity.
- ✓ *Night game drives* The spotlight's nocturnal revelations: universally engaging for children who have gone to bed in the lodge and been woken for a night drive.

Practical Family Preparation: Pack children's insect repellent; children's sunscreen SPF50+; the specific clothing layers for the cool mornings and hot afternoons; and the willingness to allow the pace to slow on days when the children's energy determines the programme.

Q14. What vaccinations do I need for Northern Kenya?

Required for Kenya Entry (if applicable): Yellow Fever vaccination certificate required if arriving from a Yellow Fever-endemic country. The list of endemic countries changes; check the current Kenya government eTA website or your travel physician for the current list.

Recommended for All Kenya Visitors:

- Hepatitis A (contracted through contaminated food and water)
- Hepatitis B (if engaging in activities with any exposure risk)
- Typhoid
- Tetanus update (ensure within 10 years)
- Meningococcal meningitis — particularly recommended for northern Kenya where the risk is higher than in southern Kenya
- Rabies pre-exposure course — recommended for extended bush stays and for children

COVID-19: Current requirements — check the Kenya government's current status before travel.

Specific to Northern Kenya: Meningococcal meningitis vaccination is more strongly recommended for northern Kenya than for the southern Kenya safari circuit the semi-arid conditions and the specific climate patterns of the northern frontier increase the background meningitis risk compared to the highland areas.

Vard Africa Practice: We provide all clients with a specific vaccination recommendation list as part of the pre-travel health briefing. We strongly recommend consulting a travel medicine specialist or GP travel clinic for personalised advice based on individual medical history.

Q15. How does the weather and climate differ across the Northern Kenya properties?

Northern Kenya encompasses an extraordinary climate range:

- ✓ **Samburu National Reserve (elevation ~900m):** Hot year-round midday temperatures of 35–38°C in the dry season; slightly cooler in the wet season. Evenings pleasant (20–24°C). Very little rainfall in the dry season; the Ewaso Nyiro maintains its flow year-round from highland sources. The **Samburu heat** is the defining practical challenge of the national reserve lodges, and the finest lodges (Sasaab, Saruni Samburu's elevated position) are designed specifically to manage it.
- ✓ **Kalama Conservancy Hilltop (elevation ~1,200m):** Saruni Samburu's elevated position provides significantly cooler conditions than the valley floor 5–10°C cooler than the reserve below. The hilltop catches the breeze that the valley floor does not, making the lodge more comfortable at midday than the river-level camps.
- ✓ **Namunyak Valley (elevation ~600–800m):** Significantly hotter than either Laikipia or the Samburu hilltops the Sarara Valley and the elephant country below the Mathews Range are among the hotter environments in the northern Kenya safari landscape. Dawn and dusk activities, midday shade, and generous hydration are essential.
- ✓ **Mathews Range (Kitich, elevation ~1,330m):** Dramatically cooler than the surrounding plains the forest's shade and the altitude's temperature reduction producing conditions that feel genuinely temperate rather than tropical. Comfortable for walking at any time of day. Evenings can be genuinely cool a fleece or light jacket is appropriate for Kitich Forest Camp's evenings.
- ✓ **Desert Rose Lodge (elevation ~1,676m):** The coolest of the northern Kenya lodges Nairobi-equivalent temperatures during the day, genuinely cool evenings. The mountain's specific micro-climate (cloud cover, forest moisture) can produce unexpected cooling even at midday. The plains below (visible from the lodge) are extremely hot; the lodge's altitude makes it a genuinely comfortable base.
- ✓ **Lake Turkana (elevation ~375m):** One of the hottest environments in Kenya temperatures exceeding 40°C regularly, with the Turkana wind adding a further desiccation effect. Access by helicopter from Desert Rose or by boat from the lake's southern shore is strongly recommended. Extended ground stays at the lake shore require specific heat management.

A VARD AFRICA FINAL NOTE ON NORTHERN KENYA

There is a story that the Samburu tell about the land. It goes like this: the earth was made, and then the grass was put on it, and then the trees, and then the animals, and then the people. The people were last because they needed everything else that had been made before them in order to survive. This is not a myth about human superiority; it is a myth about human dependence. We are the last thing, not because we are the finest but because we require everything else to exist before we can exist.

Northern Kenya keeps this truth more visible than most places. The land here has not yet agreed to accommodate human comfort without some cost in effort, patience and the willingness to be in a place on its own terms rather than ours. The heat, the remoteness, the bone-corrugated access roads, the specific quality of silence that the northern frontier's scale produces on a windless morning these are not inconveniences to be apologised for. They are the conditions under which the landscape is itself. And they are the conditions under which the Samburu people, the elephants, the Grevy's zebras and the black rhinos of the Sera Conservancy have been living since long before the first charter flight arrived at any northern Kenya airstrip.

Come to Northern Kenya with the understanding that the finest reward is not a game drive statistic. It is the specific, irreversible experience of having been somewhere that asked something of you patience, physical presence, genuine curiosity about a culture and a landscape that operates on its own ancient logic and having given it. The guests who leave Northern Kenya most changed are not the ones who saw the most animals. They are the ones who understood, for a few days, what it means to live in relationship with a landscape rather than in control of it.

We are deeply grateful to the Samburu community to the families of the Westgate, Kalama, Namunyak and Sera conservancies whose decades of conservation commitment have made this destination possible; to Dorothy Lowaktuk and her team of keepers at Reteti; to Ann, Africa's first female Samburu guide; to the rangers of the Sera Rhino Sanctuary who protect 23 black rhinos in a landscape that had none thirty years ago; and to every Samburu guide who has shared the knowledge of this specific, extraordinary landscape with the guests who have been fortunate enough to come here.