

VARD AFRICA | DESTINATION GUIDE

The Amboseli & Chyulu Hills Ecosystem, Kenya

Where Africa's Highest Mountain Watches Over the World's Most Famous Elephants

"There is a moment in Amboseli it comes in the first few minutes of the first morning game drive, when the mist is still clearing and the light is still gathering itself for the day when Mount Kilimanjaro, 150 kilometres away across the Tanzanian border, simply appears. Not gradually. Not in stages. Simply appears: the full 5,895 metres of Africa's highest mountain, the snow-cap incandescent in the early light, rising from the flat, grey morning plain as if it had not been there the previous evening and had arrived in the night. And below the mountain, moving toward the swamp, a line of elephants twenty, thirty, forty of them their forms dark against the brightening sky, their movement unhurried, their tusks catching the first light. This is the image that defines Amboseli. This is what people come for, and this is what stays with them, unchanged, for the rest of their lives." — Vard Africa, Destination Curators.

DESTINATION INTRODUCTION

The Amboseli & Chyulu Hills Ecosystem

Kilimanjaro's Shadow — Kenya's Most Iconic Safari Landscape

The **Amboseli ecosystem** is, by the widest possible margin, Kenya's most photographed safari landscape and for the simplest possible reason: no other place on earth produces with such regularity the image of a great African elephant, surrounded by its family, walking across a red-earth plain, with the white cone of **Mount Kilimanjaro** suspended against a blue sky above. This is an image that has appeared on the covers of magazines, the screens of documentary films, the walls of galleries and the memories of safari travellers for as long as people have been coming to East Africa. And it is an image that Amboseli produces, not occasionally or artificially, but as the natural daily expression of its extraordinary ecology.

Mount Kilimanjaro — at **5,895 metres** the highest mountain in Africa and the highest free-standing mountain in the world, rising from the Tanzanian plains just across the border from Amboseli is the defining geographical fact of this ecosystem. Its glaciers and snowfields feed an extraordinary underground hydrological system: snowmelt from the summit percolates down through the volcanic rock of the mountain's base, filtered over millennia by the same geological material that formed Kilimanjaro itself, and re-emerges in the heart of what would otherwise be a harsh, semi-arid plain as a series of crystal-clear springs and permanent swamps. The **Enkong Narok** and **Oi Okenya swamps** emerald oases in the centre of the 392-square-kilometre national park provide year-round water and year-round vegetation in a landscape that without them would support only a fraction of its current wildlife density. They are the ecological heart of Amboseli, the reason the elephants are here, and the reason the image of Kilimanjaro-and-elephants exists at all.

Amboseli's name comes from the Maa word **Empusel** — meaning *"salty, dry place"* a reference to the ancient lake bed that constitutes much of the park's western section: a flat, white expanse of dried mineral deposits from the **Pleistocene-era Lake** that once filled the basin, surrounded by acacia woodland, thorn scrub, grassland and the extraordinary swamp systems. The diversity of habitats within 392 square kilometres dried lake bed, sulphur springs, savannah, woodland, swamp and wetland supports an extraordinary range of wildlife: **large herds of elephants** (the park's most celebrated residents), **lions**, **cheetahs**, **leopards** (rare and elusive), **hippos** and **crocodiles** in the swamps, **Maasai giraffe**, **Burchell's zebra**, **wildebeest** (resident, non-migratory populations genetically distinct from the Serengeti-Mara herds), **buffalo**, **impalas**, **Thomson's and Grant's gazelles** and the remarkable **bat-eared fox** one of Amboseli's rarest and most charming sightings.

The park's elephant population more than **1,600 individuals** in approximately **50 family groups** is the most intensively studied wild elephant population in the world. The **Amboseli Elephant Research Project**, established by the legendary researcher **Cynthia Moss** in **1972** and now entering its sixth decade of continuous observation, has produced the most comprehensive data set on wild elephant behaviour, social structure and ecology in existence. The guides at Amboseli's finest camps know individual elephants their names, their family relationships, their histories with an intimacy that transforms game drives from wildlife viewing into something closer to visiting old friends. There is nowhere else in Africa where the relationship between human observers and elephant subjects is as well-documented, as deep and as genuinely moving.

Amboseli is **UNESCO designated as a Man and Biosphere Reserve** (since 1991) and was gazetted as a national park in **1974**, though it was established as a game reserve in 1948 following its original designation as a Southern Reserve for the Maasai in 1906. The park's management relationship with the surrounding **Maasai communities** who own the conservancy lands that buffer the national park and have for centuries maintained a pastoral lifestyle across the same ecosystem is one of the most complex and most important human-wildlife relationships in East African conservation, and understanding it is central to understanding Amboseli.

Beyond the national park, the Amboseli ecosystem extends across a much larger landscape of **private conservancies and community group ranches** the **Kitirua Conservancy**, the **Kimana Sanctuary**, the **Elerai Conservation Area**, the **Selenkay Conservancy** and the broader Maasai-owned lands to the north, south and east that together constitute the full range of the elephant migration, the predator territories and the birdlife corridors that make Amboseli ecologically complete. Staying in a private conservancy outside the park's boundaries as several of Vard Africa's preferred properties do provides access to experiences (night drives, walking safaris, camel walks, unrestricted vehicle movement) that the national park's regulations do not permit, while remaining within a short drive of the park's extraordinary wildlife spectacle.

THE AMBOSELI ECOSYSTEM

Three Distinct Zones

The Amboseli National Park

The **national park** 392 square kilometres at the foot of Kilimanjaro is the ecological core and the most immediately rewarding wildlife-viewing environment in the Amboseli ecosystem. The park is organised around the **Ol Tukai woodland** and the **swamps** at its heart, which provide the year-round water that makes Amboseli one of the most consistently wildlife-dense parks in Kenya. Morning game drives through the park ideally in the first hour after sunrise, when the light is extraordinary and Kilimanjaro is most likely to be visible before the day's cloud builds represent one of the finest wildlife photography experiences available anywhere in East Africa.

Only three properties are located within the park boundaries. The remainder of the ecosystem's finest properties are positioned on the conservancies and private land that surround and connect with the park, with traversing rights that allow guests the best of both worlds: the wildlife density and iconic landscapes of the national park combined with the exclusivity, flexibility and additional activities of private land.

The Kitirua Conservancy

The **Kitirua Conservancy** a **30,000-acre private wildlife conservancy** on the **south-western edge of Amboseli National Park** is the most celebrated of the private conservancies surrounding the park, providing the finest and most exclusive alternative wildlife-viewing environment outside the park itself. Positioned away from the crowded eastern side of Amboseli, the Kitirua provides face-to-face views of Kilimanjaro (the mountain is closest and most dramatically visible from the south-western approach) and offers game viewing of exceptional quality across a landscape of acacia woodland, seasonal wetland and open plain that hosts elephants, lions, cheetahs, hyenas, giraffes, wildebeest and zebra in significant numbers. **Night game drives** in the Kitirua not available inside the national park reveal the extraordinary nocturnal world of aardvark, porcupine, serval, civet and bat-eared fox that daylight drives rarely produce.

The Kitirua Conservancy gained particular fame as the private concession of **Elewana Tortilis Camp** Kenya's first eco-lodge, established in 1993 and is now also home to the newly opened **Kitirua Plains Lodge by A&K Sanctuary** (opened June 1, 2026), adding a second world-class property to what is already Amboseli's most distinguished private land.

The Kimana Sanctuary

Kimana Sanctuary holds a uniquely significant place in Kenyan conservation history: established in **1996**, it is widely recognised as **Kenya's first community-owned wildlife sanctuary** a 5,700-acre oasis of fever tree forest, savannah plain and seasonal marshland owned and managed by **844 Maasai family members** who chose, in a remarkable act of collective foresight, to protect their land for wildlife and community benefit. The sanctuary occupies a critical position in the greater Amboseli ecosystem: positioned at the junction of the national park, the Chyulu Hills and Tsavo West National Park, it forms one of the most important **wildlife corridors in southern Kenya** the primary movement route for the ecosystem's famous **Super Tusker elephants** and for the full range of Amboseli's wide-ranging wildlife.

Super Tuskers elephants whose tusks are so large that they drag along the ground as the animal walks, each weighing as much as 100 pounds are among the most rare and most celebrated animals in Africa. Amboseli and Kimana are among the last remaining habitats where these extraordinary animals survive, and the opportunity to encounter them in the intimacy of Kimana's private game drives is one of the most genuinely extraordinary wildlife experiences available anywhere on the continent.

Since **Angama Amboseli** secured exclusive access to the sanctuary in 2023, only guests of that property may drive within Kimana an exclusivity of access that makes every game drive here a genuinely private encounter with Africa's most magnificent elephants.

THE VARD AFRICA PERSPECTIVE

Why We Love Amboseli

We love Amboseli for the **mountain**. Not primarily for the wildlife though the wildlife is extraordinary but for the specific quality of the emotion produced by the combination of Kilimanjaro and the elephants. It is an emotion that defies adequate description: something between wonder and humility, the feeling that you are in the presence of forces geological, biological, temporal that make every human concern seem briefly and beneficially small. The mountain has been here for two million years. The elephants' ancestors have been crossing this plain for longer than our species has existed. And you, for a few extraordinary mornings, are permitted to watch.

We love the **Amboseli Elephant Research Project** the longest-running study of wild elephants in the world and what it has done to the quality of knowledge that the best Amboseli guides carry. When a guide can tell you not just that the elephant approaching your vehicle is a female with calves but that she is the daughter of a matriarch named after the Greek alphabet who has been observed by the research project for 50 years when the elephant in front of you has a biography the experience of watching her is transformed.

We love **Kimana's Super Tuskers**. We love **Campi ya Kanzi's lava tube dinner**. We love the **ol Donyo star bed** and the morning when Kilimanjaro clears over the Chyulu Hills and you are lying on a rooftop in the dark watching it emerge. We love the **Chyulu cloud forest** and the colobus monkeys in the ancient fig trees and the sense, hiking there, of being in a completely different world from the plains visible through the mist below.

COMMUNICATION IN THE WILDERNESS

What To Expect Beyond the City

One of the most frequently asked questions Vard Africa receives from guests preparing for their Kenya safari journey is: *"Will I be able to make phone calls? Will I have WiFi? Can I stay connected?"* The answer, across most of our partner properties, is: *sometimes, partially, and better than you might expect but not always, and not everywhere, and this is deliberate.*

Understanding the communication landscape of the Kenyan wilderness before you travel allows you to plan appropriately, inform your family or business contacts, and most importantly to arrive at your camp with the right expectations and the right openness to what real disconnection can provide.

WiFi and Internet

WiFi availability varies dramatically between properties and is described in individual property profiles. As a general guide:

Properties in **accessible locations** (Amboseli's eastern side, Tawi Lodge, Satao Elerai, Tortilis) generally have some WiFi available in social areas, though speeds are limited by satellite connection constraints. WiFi in individual tents or rooms is less common and is specifically noted where it exists.

Properties in **remote locations** (Ithumba, Galdessa, Shompole, Lentorre, Campi ya Kanzi) operate with minimal or no WiFi. Campi ya Kanzi is specific: *"appropriate luxury, which is less about WiFi in your tent"*. Ithumba Hill confirms: *"Ithumba Camp has no WiFi"*.

Angama Amboseli provides WiFi in the main guest area and social spaces, consistent with its position as a recently opened contemporary luxury property with satellite infrastructure designed for guest connectivity.

Emergency Communication

All Vard Africa partner properties maintain **satellite telephone and radio communication systems** for emergency use, regardless of their mobile coverage situation. In case of medical emergency, vehicle breakdown or other urgent situation, the camp's communication infrastructure is always operational and connected to the nearest emergency services and Vard Africa's in-country support team.

AMREF Flying Doctors — Kenya's premier medical emergency service provide evacuation coverage across virtually all parts of the Kenyan bush; Vard Africa ensures that all guests travelling with us have appropriate Flying Doctors membership as part of our comprehensive travel arrangements.

Vard Africa's Recommendation

- ✓ We actively encourage guests to embrace the communication wilderness that the finest safari camps provide.
- ✓ Some of the most significant experiences in a guest's Kenya journey occur in the hours between game drives, when the distractions of digital connectivity have been removed and the available sensory experience is the landscape, the animals, the silence and the company.
- ✓ The best safari conversations happen at the campfire, not on WhatsApp. The most powerful photographs are taken on the game drive, not on Instagram.
- ✓ We provide all contact details needed by families and emergency contacts, ensure that all our properties have emergency communication protocols, and invite guests to treat the disconnection as one of the gifts the Kenya wilderness provides rather than an inconvenience to be worked around.

OUR ACCOMMODATION & TRADE PARTNERS IN AMBOSELI

Every property in this guide has been personally vetted and curated by the Vard Africa team. Our recommendations are based on quality, character, setting, service and the capacity of each property to deliver the transformative experience that defines a Vard journey.

SOROI AMBOSELI

Heart of Amboseli National Park | The Mountain-Facing Sanctuary

Location: Soroi Amboseli sits at the **heart of Amboseli National Park** nestled within a **serene forested enclave** of the park's acacia woodland, each tent positioned to capture **uninterrupted vistas of both Mount Kilimanjaro and the distant Mount Meru** of Tanzania. The position offers a dual mountain perspective available at few other Amboseli properties both peaks visible from every tent when conditions are clear.

Introduction & History

Soroi Amboseli is the Amboseli expression of the **Soroi Collection** a family-run portfolio of boutique luxury camps that includes celebrated properties at the Maasai Mara, Samburu, Lumo Community Wildlife Sanctuary, Tsavo and Nairobi.

The Soroi Collection's defining philosophy *"family-run luxury hideaways that blend boutique charm with the excitement of raw, untouched nature"* finds its most icon-laden setting in Amboseli, where the combination of the Mountain, the elephants and the extraordinary quality of the park's open landscape creates the definitive Soroi experience.

The camp is designed around the specific pleasures of the Amboseli forest setting: the filtered light of the acacia canopy, the movement of wildlife through the woodland, the specific quality of the morning air as the mist clears from Kilimanjaro's slopes. The design philosophy

harmonises **rustic elegance with modern indulgences** natural textures, plush furnishings and private decks creating a camp of considerable comfort and genuine aesthetic intelligence.

Ownership & Management

Soroi Amboseli is **owned and managed by the Soroi Collection family** whose personal investment in each property in their growing portfolio ensures a consistency of quality, warmth and genuine hospitality that corporate management rarely achieves.

Intimate Luxury Safari Living — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Soroi Amboseli offers a thoughtfully designed range of accommodation within the park's forested setting:

Luxury Safari Tents — Spacious canvas tents on elevated wooden platforms, each positioned within the acacia woodland for maximum privacy and optimal Kilimanjaro orientation. Under canvas roofs, guests enjoy interiors adorned with **natural textures, plush furnishings and private decks** that provide the ideal position for the mountain views that give Amboseli its identity. Each tent features en-suite bathrooms with hot running water.

Family Tents (2) — Beautifully furnished with handmade furniture and spacious interiors, comfortably accommodating families of up to four guests. Designed with the specific generosity of space that travelling families require.

Each accommodation features: ceiling fans for warm-season comfort; en-suite bathroom with hot shower; generous mosquito-netted beds with quality linen; private deck with the Kilimanjaro view.

Communication in the Wilderness

- ✓ Soroi Amboseli is situated **within the national park** the most accessible and most intensively visited section of the Amboseli ecosystem.
- ✓ Mobile coverage (Safaricom) is generally available in the park's central areas.
- ✓ WiFi is available in social areas.
- ✓ For the specific current connectivity situation at the property, Vard Africa provides full pre-travel briefing.

Amenities & Facilities

- ✓ **Swimming Pool** — Set to merge with the horizon, providing the specific pleasure of cooling down with the Kilimanjaro vista as backdrop.
- ✓ **Lounge and bar areas** for social engagement with fellow guests and guides.
- ✓ Gourmet indoor and **outdoor dining** that incorporates the mountain views into every meal.
- ✓ A **dedicated pool and lounge area** where sundowners and the end-of-day reflection are framed by Africa's highest peak.

Activities at Soroi Amboseli

- ✓ **Morning and Afternoon Game Drives in Amboseli National Park** — Expert guides lead drives through the park in open safari vehicles, covering the principal wildlife-viewing zones: the swamps and their extraordinary elephant concentrations, the dry lake bed, the acacia woodland where lions rest in the midday heat and the open plains where cheetahs hunt in the golden hours of dawn and dusk. The **Amboseli Elephant Research Project's data** enriches every elephant encounter with specific individual and family history.
- ✓ **Kilimanjaro Photography** — Soroi Amboseli's guides know the park's finest photography positions for the Kilimanjaro-and-elephants image the morning swamp positions, the woodland breaks that frame the mountain cleanly, the specific light conditions of the dry season and the green season that produce different but equally extraordinary images of Africa's highest peak.
- ✓ **Birdwatching** — Amboseli's **400+ bird species** are accessible from the camp's forested setting and on game drives through the park's diverse habitats swamp specialists, woodland birds, open-country raptors and the extraordinary waterbirds of the swamp edges.
- ✓ **Observation Hill** — The park's most celebrated non-driving experience: a short hike to the **hilltop viewpoint** that provides a panoramic overview of the entire Amboseli basin the swamps, the elephant herds, the distant Tanzania border and Kilimanjaro rising above it all. The view from Observation Hill at sunset is one of Amboseli's finest. Guides provide full interpretation of the landscape's ecological and geological character.
- ✓ **Guided Nature Walks** — Within the park's designated walking areas, guided walks with expert guides provide the ground-level perspective that game drives cannot deliver: tracks in the dust, the specific vegetation of the acacia woodland, the birds in the canopy overhead.
- ✓ **Maasai Village Cultural Visits** — The Amboseli ecosystem is surrounded by Maasai communities whose relationship with this landscape spans centuries. Village visits arranged by the camp provide authentic cultural encounters: the *manyatta* (homestead) architecture, the beadwork, the pastoral traditions, the specific Maasai understanding of wildlife and land.
- ✓ **Hot Air Balloon Safaris** — Amboseli's open, flat terrain and Kilimanjaro backdrop make it one of the world's finest hot air balloon safari destinations. An aerial perspective at dawn rising above the swamps as the elephants emerge from the water, with Kilimanjaro catching the first light to the south — produces one of the most extraordinary photographs available from any Kenyan balloon.
- ✓ **Bush Breakfasts and Sundowners** — The camp team sets up private dining positions within the park for early morning bush breakfasts after the first game drive, and private sundowner locations as the day's light reaches its most dramatic quality over the Kilimanjaro horizon.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

- ✓ Soroi Amboseli's chefs prepare **gourmet meals infused with local flavours** using fresh, locally sourced ingredients.
- ✓ The indoor-outdoor dining philosophy meals served on the camp deck or in the dining room according to weather and occasion ensures that the mountain and the woodland are always part of the culinary experience.
- ✓ Star-lit al fresco dinners with Kilimanjaro visible in the distance represent the camp's most complete dining experience.

Why We Love Soroi Amboseli

- ✓ We love Soroi Amboseli for the family warmth that the Collection's owner-managed character consistently produces and for the dual mountain view.
- ✓ There are very few positions in the Amboseli ecosystem where both Kilimanjaro and Mount Meru are simultaneously visible; Soroi's tent orientation makes the most of this rare atmospheric alignment.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Arrange the hot air balloon safari for your first morning rising from the swamp at dawn, with the mountain and the elephants and the first light all simultaneously present, is the most purely beautiful experience Amboseli provides, and setting that as the beginning of the journey frames everything that follows in the most generous possible way.

Families & Children

Soroi Amboseli is **excellent for families** of all configurations. The family tent format, the children's welcome from the Soroi Collection team, the balloon safari (minimum ages apply) and the Observation Hill walk all provide age-appropriate engagement with the Amboseli ecosystem.

ELEWANA TORTILIS CAMP

Kitirua Conservancy, South-Western Amboseli | Kenya's First Eco-Lodge

Location: Tortilis Camp occupies a privileged position on the **south-western edge of Amboseli National Park**, overlooking the **30,000-acre Kitirua Wildlife Conservancy** the most privately positioned and most Kilimanjaro-facing location available to any camp in the Amboseli ecosystem.

Named after the flat-topped **Acacia Tortilis** tree that dominates the surrounding landscape and has become the symbol of the African savannah, the camp sits facing the mountain directly south-west the direction from which Kilimanjaro presents its fullest, most dramatic profile.

Introduction & History

Tortilis Camp is not merely the finest camp in the Amboseli ecosystem; it is one of the most historically significant properties in the entire African luxury safari landscape. Built in **1993** by **Stefano Cheli** the renowned safari operator and conservationist whose vision of responsible luxury tourism has shaped the industry for three decades Tortilis Camp holds the distinction of being **Kenya's first eco-lodge** and one of the first in East Africa. Long before sustainability became a marketing requirement, Tortilis was demonstrating that luxury safari tourism and genuine environmental commitment were not merely compatible but inseparable.

The camp's foundational credentials are exceptional: **100% solar powered** since its founding no generator noise, no diesel consumption, no air pollution in one of Africa's most pristine landscapes **Gold-rated by EcoTourism Kenya** the highest certification available from Kenya's national eco-tourism body **Tourism for Tomorrow Award** winner the globally recognised accolade for sustainable tourism excellence **Waste reduction pioneer:** glass, engine oil, tyres, scrap metal, PET plastic and e-waste all recycled; all organic matter composted; refillable "anti-bottles" issued to guests, reducing plastic bottle use by 90%

Community investment leader: Tortilis employs approximately 60% of its staff from the local Maasai community, providing training from scratch in professional guiding, bartending and hospitality; it builds and equips schools and offers conservation-based educational scholarships

Today, as part of the **Elewana Collection** one of East Africa's most respected luxury safari portfolios Tortilis Camp has maintained and deepened its founding commitments while delivering a quality of guest experience that consistently ranks it among the finest camps in Kenya. That the camp has not compromised either its environmental credentials or its hospitality standards in three decades of operation is perhaps its greatest achievement.

The **Kitirua Conservancy** the private 30,000-acre wildlife area that Tortilis overlooks and that its guests have exclusive access to is the ecological complement to the national park, providing a completely different and entirely private wildlife experience: the western plains, the acacia woodland, the seasonal waterholes and the wildlife migration routes that cross this land without the game drive traffic that the park's more accessible sections attract.

Ownership & Management

Tortilis Camp is part of the **Elewana Collection** with the Cheli family's founding conservation philosophy embedded in every operational decision. The camp employs **Kenya Professional Safari Guides Association certified guides** at bronze, silver and gold levels, ensuring that the quality of guiding matches the quality of the setting.

Awards & Recognition

- ✓ **Gold-Rated, EcoTourism Kenya** — sustained recognition for the highest level of sustainable tourism practice **Tourism for Tomorrow Award** global recognition for environmental excellence.
- ✓ Consistent listing by **Condé Nast Traveller**, **National Geographic Traveller** and leading luxury travel operators as one of the finest eco-luxury camps in East Africa.
- ✓ Recognised by the safari industry as the pioneer of the eco-lodge model in Kenya.

Intimate Luxury Safari Living — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Tortilis Camp offers **16 spacious ensuite Safari Tents** plus a **Private House** (for exclusive-use family groups or couples who want the full-service experience of a private home within the camp setting) and a dedicated **Family Tent** configuration:

- ✓ **Standard Safari Tents (16)** — Built on wooden platforms with canvas walls and thatched roofs, positioned across the camp for privacy and Kilimanjaro orientation. Each tent features: a luxurious **king-size or twin bed** with premium linen; **en-suite bathroom** with hot shower and eco-friendly natural products; a **private furnished veranda** with chairs and table for mountain-watching; ceiling fan; solar lighting; **charging points** on inverters that replenish while on game drives; no hairdryers (solar system does not support high-voltage appliances).
- ✓ **The Private House** — A fully equipped private residence within the camp's grounds, providing the complete camp infrastructure (access to guiding, dining, activities) combined with the independence of a private home. Ideal for families booking exclusively or couples seeking the most complete privacy within the Tortilis experience.
- ✓ **Family Tent** — A larger-format tent specifically designed for family groups, with flexible bedroom configurations and extended outdoor living space.

WiFi is not available in individual tents; this is a deliberate and explicit commitment to the "*natural, unplugged safari atmosphere*" that Tortilis Camp has always championed. WiFi is available in the social areas. Mobile signal varies according to position within the conservancy.

Communication in the Wilderness

Tortilis Camp is positioned in the **remote south-western sector** of the Amboseli ecosystem specifically chosen by its founders for its distance from the park's busier eastern areas. Mobile coverage can be limited; the camp advises guests that "*signal strength may vary due to the remote location.*" This is not a deficiency but a feature: the camp's remoteness is its most significant advantage and the source of the wildlife quality and the silence that have made it famous. Vard Africa provides complete pre-travel connectivity briefing.

Amenities & Facilities

- ✓ **Swimming Pool** — Set in the shade of Acacia Tortilis trees with views of the mountain and the conservancy's wildlife. Regularly visited by colourful tropical birds who use the water source.
- ✓ **Spa treatments** (massages, manicures, pedicures) available for relaxation between activities.
- ✓ **Campfire area** for evening storytelling and star-gazing.
- ✓ A **fully-stocked bar** of considerable warmth and hospitality.

Activities at Elewana Tortilis Camp

- ✓ **Twice-Daily Game Drives in Amboseli National Park (Western Sector)** — Tortilis Camp's most important distinction is its exclusive access to the **western sector** of the national park far less crowded than the eastern gate areas that the majority of Amboseli properties use. In custom-designed open 4×4 Land Cruisers with padded camera rests, three-tier seating and charging sockets, guests explore Amboseli with Maasai guides whose knowledge extends to the individual elephant families documented by the Amboseli Elephant Research Project. Every elephant sighting comes with a story.
- ✓ **Exclusive Game Drives in the 30,000-Acre Kitirua Conservancy** — The conservancy's private territory provides a completely different and entirely exclusive wildlife experience from the national park drives. **Night game drives** reveal the aardvark, porcupine, serval, civet, bat-eared fox and owl populations that daytime drives cannot access. The conservancy's lions, cheetahs and hyenas move more freely after dark.
- ✓ **Walking Safaris with Maasai Guides** — Guided walks through the Kitirua Conservancy and designated areas around the camp with the expert Maasai guides who carry deep knowledge of the land "*every plant and animal tells a story*". Walking safaris focus on the smaller details often missed from a vehicle: tracks, insects, medicinal plants and the wide variety of birdlife that thrives in the Kitirua's diverse habitat.
- ✓ **Access to the Amboseli Elephant Research Project** — Guests at Tortilis Camp have the opportunity to learn from and engage with researchers from the world's longest-running study of wild elephants the most important single source of knowledge about elephant behaviour, family structure and ecology in existence. The guides' individual elephant knowledge is enriched by their relationship with the project's data.
- ✓ **Cultural Visits to Maasai Communities** — Maasai cultural visits that are respectful, authentic and genuinely enriching arranged through the camp's long-term relationships with neighbouring communities. The experience provides insight into the extraordinary Maasai relationship with the Amboseli landscape that has endured for centuries.
- ✓ **Hot Air Balloon Safaris** — Private balloon safaris arranged through the camp over Amboseli's iconic landscape the mountain, the swamps, the elephant herds with champagne breakfast on landing.
- ✓ **Bush Breakfasts and Private Sundowners** — The camp sets up bush breakfast tables in extraordinary positions across the conservancy after morning drives, and private sundowner locations as the Kilimanjaro light builds toward its most beautiful expression at the end of the day.
- ✓ **Spa Treatments** — Massages, manicures and pedicures available in the camp's dedicated treatment space providing a wellness dimension to the safari experience that complements the physical demands of active days in the bush.
- ✓ **Birdwatching** — Over **400 species** in the combined national park and Kitirua Conservancy habitat, with specialist birding walks available for committed birdwatchers alongside the camp's standard ornithological game drive interpretation.
- ✓ **Photography Workshops and Guidance** — The camp's guides provide photographic positioning and technical advice for guests seeking to maximise the extraordinary visual opportunities of the Amboseli landscape. The Kitirua's western Kilimanjaro orientation provides some of the finest photography positions in the ecosystem.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

Tortilis Camp's culinary programme reflects the Italian founder's sensibility and the Elewana Collection's consistently high food standards. The kitchen uses **fresh seasonal and locally sourced ingredients** to create menus that honour both the cultural diversity of the camp's international guests and the specific character of the Amboseli landscape.

Bush breakfasts on the plains, sundowner catering in the conservancy and campfire dinners under the Kilimanjaro sky create a range of dining experiences that are inseparable from the camp's distinctive sense of place.

Why We Love Tortilis Camp

We love Tortilis Camp for its **historical courage**. To have built Kenya's first eco-lodge in 1993 when the luxury safari industry had no requirement for environmental credentials, when solar power was considerably less efficient and more expensive than it is today, and when the commercial risk of pioneering a new model of hospitality was entirely real required a specific combination of conviction and courage that the camp's three decades of sustained excellence have since vindicated completely.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Request a driving guide who has worked with the Amboseli Elephant Research Project the difference between a guide who knows elephants generally and one who knows these specific elephants individually and can tell you their family history is the difference between a great Amboseli game drive and a transformative one.

Ask for the guide who knows Cynthia Moss's data. And request the western sector park drive for the Kilimanjaro photography: the angle from the south-west, with the flat plain below and the mountain rising directly ahead, is the finest single Kilimanjaro view in the Amboseli ecosystem.

Families & Children

Tortilis Camp is **excellent for families**. The Private House configuration, the family tent, the children-friendly approach of the Maasai guides, the balloon safari (minimum ages apply), the Observation Hill walk and the elephant research project engagement all provide experiences of genuine depth and age-appropriate range. Children under 6 are recommended to stay with guardians at all times.

TAWI LODGE

Kilitome Private Conservancy, Eastern Amboseli | The Eco-Award Oasis

Location: Tawi Lodge sits at the **foot of Mount Kilimanjaro** within the **3,000-acre Kilitome Private Conservancy** positioned just **5 minutes from the Kimana Gate** along the eastern boundary of Amboseli National Park.

The lodge occupies what Expert Africa describes as one of the finest lodge locations in the ecosystem: looking **down onto the Amboseli National Park in one direction** and **up at Mount Kilimanjaro in the other** a dual orientation that arguably provides the best single viewpoint available from any Amboseli accommodation.

Introduction & History

Tawi Lodge opened in **2009** as an **independent luxury safari lodge** with a clear founding vision: to demonstrate that eco-friendly operation, genuine community engagement and world-class hospitality are not merely compatible but mutually reinforcing. The word *Tawi* means **"branch"** in Kiswahili a specific reference to the branch of the acacia tree that provides the signature shape of the Amboseli skyline and an expression of the lodge's foundational commitment to being rooted in, and growing from, the landscape it inhabits.

The lodge has won **multiple eco-tourism awards** in recognition of its commitment to sustainable operation solar power, water recycling, organic garden, community employment and the careful management of its 3,000-acre conservancy in partnership with the surrounding Maasai families. The **bio-pool** a natural filtration system using plant biology to clean the swimming water without chemicals is one of the most distinctive sustainability features at any Amboseli property.

The lodge is an **andBeyond** recommended property listed by one of Africa's most respected luxury safari groups as a property of exceptional quality in the Amboseli ecosystem. This endorsement from andBeyond whose quality standards are among the highest in African safari hospitality reflects the consistent excellence of both the physical setting and the guest experience.

Ownership & Management

Tawi Lodge is **independently owned and managed** its family character and personal investment in every aspect of the guest experience expressed in the warmth of the welcome, the quality of the guiding and the attention to detail that owner-managed properties consistently deliver.

Intimate Luxury Safari Living — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Tawi Lodge's **15 ensuite cottages and large Suite** represent one of the finest room collections in the Amboseli ecosystem all positioned to face Mount Kilimanjaro and all featuring the specific quality of design that the lodge's founder's aesthetic sensibility demands:

Standard Cottages (13) — Spacious, stone-floored cottages with **dark wooden four-poster beds** on **rich wooden floors** under **high canvas walls and a thatched ceiling** — a design that references the traditional East African safari aesthetic while delivering contemporary luxury.

Each cottage features: a **full ensuite bathroom** with bathtub AND shower (twin basins, genuine quality of finish); a **private wooden-deck veranda** with table and chairs commanding Kilimanjaro views; an **individual fireplace** for cool evenings; high-quality linen and bedding; large lockable wooden chest for valuables.

Two of the cottages are joined by an extended veranda making them ideal for families who want separate sleeping space within a connected configuration.

The Suite — The most generous accommodation at Tawi Lodge: consisting of one double and one twin room, separated by a central dining and lounge area with its own fireplace. Each room has its own entrance and private veranda, and the suite includes a **private plunge pool** an extraordinary addition to a property already distinguished by its natural setting and views.

Solar-powered electricity and water heating throughout. Hot water available in all rooms. Lighting system solar-powered.

Communication in the Wilderness

Tawi Lodge's position near the Kimana Gate and the eastern Amboseli boundary provides **good mobile coverage** (Safaricom) at many positions on the property. WiFi is available in social areas. The conservancy's 3,000 acres provide a buffer from the connectivity of Kimana town while remaining within reach of reliable signal at the lodge itself. Vard Africa provides full pre-travel connectivity briefing.

Amenities & Facilities

- ✓ The **two-storey main building** with a welcoming reception and lounge with fireplace, a dining area with tall thatched ceilings, a cosy bar in a corner nook, a second small sitting area upstairs with viewing deck over the lodge gardens, library and gift shop of Maasai art creates a social centre of considerable warmth and character.
- ✓ **Bio-pool** the natural filtration swimming pool, lit at night, set in stone paving and providing the midday respite that the Amboseli heat demands.
- ✓ **Spa and massage area** with hot bath.
- ✓ **Wine cellar** with a selection of fine wines.
- ✓ **Restaurant and bar** of consistent quality.

Activities at Tawi Lodge

- ✓ **Morning and Afternoon Game Drives in Amboseli National Park** 15 minutes from the Kimana Gate, the park's full range of wildlife and Kilimanjaro positions are accessible in well-maintained 4x4 vehicles with experienced Maasai guides. The eastern sector of the park particularly the Sinet Delta area and the Amboseli swamp edges provides excellent wildlife density and some of the finest birdwatching positions in the ecosystem.
- ✓ **Night Game Drives in the Kilitome Conservancy** — One of Tawi Lodge's most distinctive offerings. The conservancy's private land allows night drives that reveal the extraordinary after-dark world of the Amboseli ecosystem: **aardvarks** emerging from their burrows, **porcupines** crossing the moonlit plains, **serval cats** hunting in the long grass, and on the most fortunate nights an **African civet** or **aardwolf** in the specific habitat of the conservancy's acacia thickets.
- ✓ **Guided Bush Walks and Bird Walks** — Expert guides lead walks through the conservancy's diverse habitat the waterhole, the acacia woodland, the conservation area's seasonal drainage lines interpreting tracks, plants, insects and the 400+ bird species of the Amboseli ecosystem. The walks provide the ground-level perspective that most safari guests never access from a vehicle.
- ✓ **Camel Walks** — One of Tawi Lodge's most distinctive and most characterful activity offerings. Walking through the Amboseli landscape on camelback with the Kilimanjaro rising above the acacia plain and the lodge's resident camels providing an entirely different speed and angle of view is one of those specifically Tawi experiences that no other Amboseli property offers.
- ✓ **Hot Air Balloon Safaris** — Scenic flights over the Amboseli ecosystem arranged through the camp, providing the aerial perspective on the mountain-and-elephants landscape.
- ✓ **Maasai Village Visits** — Authentic cultural encounters with the Maasai communities of the Kimana area, arranged through the lodge's long-term community relationships.
- ✓ **Scenic Flights over the Chyulu Hills and Kilimanjaro** — A remarkable addition to any Amboseli stay: private scenic aircraft flights over the extraordinary volcanic landscape of the Chyulu Hills and on the clearest days a circumnavigation of Kilimanjaro itself from the air.
- ✓ **Mountain Biking** — Cycling through the 3,000-acre conservancy on guided mountain bike excursions a different pace and a different physical engagement with the Amboseli landscape.
- ✓ **Bush Breakfasts and Bush Sundowners** — The lodge sets up private outdoor dining experiences in the conservancy and at selected park positions morning breakfast picnics after the first game drive, and sundowner setups at the most dramatically Kilimanjaro-facing positions of the conservancy as the day's light reaches its golden peak.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

- ✓ The lodge's culinary programme is built around **fresh, locally sourced ingredients** prepared daily by a kitchen team of considerable skill.
- ✓ The menu changes seasonally with local produce availability; dietary requirements are accommodated with warmth and competence.
- ✓ The main dining area's tall thatched ceilings and veranda positions provide the light and the natural character that the finest Amboseli dining demands.
- ✓ Private bush dinners and picnic lunches extend the culinary experience into the conservancy's extraordinary landscape.

Health & Safety

- ✓ Tawi Lodge is **fenced against larger wildlife** allowing children and adults to move freely within the lodge grounds.
- ✓ The conservancy outside the fence contains the full range of Amboseli wildlife; all excursions beyond the fence are guided.
- ✓ One suite is wheelchair accessible.
- ✓ Pool supervision essential; no lifeguard on duty.

Why We Love Tawi Lodge

We love Tawi Lodge for the **combination of dual mountain view, the bio-pool, the camel walks and the suite's private plunge pool** a property that has invested in the specific rather than the generic, and has produced in its cottages and its conservancy an experience of Amboseli that is more intimate and more personal than any comparable property in the ecosystem.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Take a camel walk at sunrise before the first game drive: the specific pace of the camel through the Amboseli scrub, with Kilimanjaro rising ahead and the birds beginning in the acacia canopy, is one of those uniquely Tawi experiences that no other camp in Kenya provides.

And book the Suite for the private plunge pool experience watching Kilimanjaro over the pool edge in the early morning, with the plains below and the mountain above, is among the finest private views in the entire Amboseli ecosystem.

Families & Children

Tawi Lodge is **outstanding for families**. Children of all ages are welcomed; the fenced lodge grounds are safe for independent exploration; the pool (parental supervision required) is the children's most beloved facility; the camel walks are accessible from age 3 upward; and the conservancy's night drives provide the most thrilling wildlife encounters for curious children.

SATAO ELERAI CAMP

Elerai Conservation Area | The Closest Kilimanjaro View

Location: Satao Elerai Camp is positioned **12 kilometres south-east of Amboseli National Park** in the **private Elerai Conservation Area** at a slightly elevated position that gives it what is arguably the most direct and most dramatic Kilimanjaro view available from any Amboseli ecosystem property. The camp looks **down onto the Amboseli National Park** in one direction and **up at the full face of Kilimanjaro** in the other a perspective available from no other camp in the ecosystem with quite the same combination of elevation, proximity and unobstructed sight-lines.

Satao means "**giraffe**" in the language of the local Waliangulu people a reference to the resident giraffe population that moves through the Elerai Conservation Area and that guests regularly encounter from their tent verandas, the camp waterhole and the conservancy game drives.

Introduction & History

Satao Elerai Camp opened in **2007** and has established itself over nearly two decades as one of the most consistently beloved camps in the entire Amboseli ecosystem. Its community model is the foundation of its identity: the camp is the central component of the **Satao Elerai Project** a collaboration between the camp management, the **African Wildlife Foundation** and the **Elerai Maasai community** that has created a sustainable income from tourism for one of the communities most directly affected by human-wildlife conflict in the Amboseli ecosystem.

The **5,000-acre Elerai Conservation Area** — leased from the Maasai families who own it is managed as a private wildlife conservancy that bridges the gap between the national park and the surrounding Maasai pastoral lands.

The Maasai families who formed the Elerai Ranch grow maize, beans, wheat and tomatoes and graze approximately 1,000 cattle and 2,500 sheep and goats on the land not under conservation management creating a working landscape in which wildlife and pastoral agriculture coexist in the same uneasy, evolving balance that characterizes the entire Amboseli ecosystem.

The camp's position on this community land allows it to offer activities night drives, extended game walks, Maasai cultural visits that are specifically **non-commercial and authentic** that park-based properties cannot provide.

Ownership & Management

Satao Elerai Camp is **independently owned and managed** by its founders, whose commitment to both the community conservation model and the quality of the guest experience is reflected in the camp's sustained quality across nearly two decades of operation.

Intimate Luxury Safari Living — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Satao Elerai Camp offers **12 Deluxe Ensuite Mountain-Facing Tents** and **5 Large Luxurious Cottage Rooms** a distinctive dual accommodation offering that provides different characters of luxury within the same extraordinary setting:

Deluxe Safari Tents (12) — Generous canvas tents on **solid concrete stone plinths** with rustic wooden furniture and the specific quality of natural materials that defines the finest tented camps.

Each tent faces **directly toward Mount Kilimanjaro** the view from every verandah, every bed and every shower position is the mountain.

En-suite bathrooms with **eco-friendly solar-heated hot water**; large mosquito-netted beds with **top-quality mattresses and premium linen** ("the most comfortable beds in Kenya" as more than one guest has described them); private verandah with large deck and soft seating for the all-important mountain-watching hours. Large sliding doors open the tent completely to the mountain view.

Luxury Cottage Rooms (5) — More solid and more architecturally complete than the canvas tents, the cottage rooms are built from **natural rock and acacia wood** giving them the specific character of the Elerai landscape itself. Each features large sliding doors onto a private verandah; a luxurious bathtub with its own mountain view (designed from natural rock and acacia wood in a "design unique to Elerai"); a hot shower; twin basins; and the full complement of room amenities. Two of the cottages (numbers 4 and 5) are built close together and face each other ideal for families wanting connected privacy. The cottage rooms have views of the camp waterhole rather than directly toward Kilimanjaro a different but equally rewarding perspective.

Solar-powered electricity throughout. Hot water solar-powered. WiFi available in the camp.

Communication in the Wilderness

- ✓ Satao Elerai's position **south-east of the park** and on the elevated Elerai Conservation Area provides good connectivity.

- ✓ Mobile coverage is generally available; WiFi is available in the camp.
- ✓ The specific connectivity details are covered in Vard Africa's pre-travel briefing.

Amenities & Facilities

Infinity Pool Providing the extraordinary combination of the mountain view from the water's surface; the pool's infinity edge creates a visual merging of the pool water and the Kilimanjaro horizon. **Upstairs lookout point** for sundowners with the mountain view and the Amboseli plains spread below. **Floodlit waterhole** adjacent to the lodge attracting the camp's resident elephants (who are regularly seen from the comfort of rooms and the dining area), giraffes, zebras and the full range of the conservancy's wildlife throughout the day and night. **Cosy lounge and bar area** with fireplace for social evenings.

Activities at Satao Elerai Camp

- ✓ **Game Drives in Amboseli National Park** — The national park is approximately a **1-hour drive** from the camp through the eastern corridor. All-day Park drives are arranged with picnic lunches in the park's most spectacular positions. The camp's Amboseli game drives cover the park's full range swamps, dry lake bed, Observation Hill with guides who know the Cynthia Moss elephant research data and can provide individual family histories for the elephants encountered.
- ✓ **Game Drives and Walking Safaris in the Elerai Conservation Area** — The private conservancy provides exclusive, crowd-free game viewing across grassland and acacia woodland for elephant bulls, giraffe, eland and a remarkable variety of birdlife. Walks with experienced guides and Maasai guards provide the most intimate wildlife encounters in the Amboseli ecosystem.
- ✓ **Night Game Drives in the Elerai Conservation Area** — The conservancy's night drives reveal the aardwolf, serval, genet, civet and owl populations that darkness releases from hiding. The conservancy's elevated position gives night drives here a quality of open-sky stargazing that makes them as valuable for astronomical observation as for nocturnal wildlife.
- ✓ **Bush Walks in the Elerai River Gorge** — One of the most distinctive walking experiences in the Amboseli ecosystem: guided walks through the **gorge in the nearby river** a geological feature of considerable drama, with the acacia canopy above, the rock walls on either side and the mountain visible at the gorge's exit. The variety of micro-habitats within the gorge shaded water-cut rock, sandy riverbed, riparian vegetation produces a different birdwatching environment from the open plains.
- ✓ **Elerai Cultural Village Visit** — The most specifically authentic and specifically non-commercial cultural encounter available from any Amboseli camp. The **Elerai Cultural Village** is a real traditional Maasai village inhabited by Elerai community members not a tourist recreation. Guests are invited on **invitation basis only**, ensuring that the experience retains its genuine character. Activities include: traditional dances performed for (and with) guests; fire-making demonstration using traditional tools; guided introduction to the medicinal uses of local trees and plants; explanation of Maasai social structure, cattle management and spiritual practice. The guides can escort guests to **walk with the cattle herders** as they take the livestock to the day's grazing the most direct possible engagement with the pastoral way of life that has co-existed with Amboseli's wildlife for centuries.
- ✓ **Mountain Biking** — Guided cycling through the conservancy's grassland and woodland terrain a different pace and a dramatically different physical relationship with the landscape and the wildlife.
- ✓ **Birdwatching** — The conservancy's position on the Amboseli-Kilimanjaro corridor supports exceptional avifauna; the camp's ornithologist guide provides species interpretation and identification for all levels of birding interest.
- ✓ **Hot Air Balloon Safaris** — Arranged from the camp over the Amboseli ecosystem the summit perspective on the mountain, the elephants and the swamps from above.
- ✓ **Bush Sundowners and Private Bush Dinners** — The Elerai conservancy's positions overlooking the Amboseli plains and the Kilimanjaro skyline provide extraordinary sundowner and private dining locations. On clear nights, dinner on the terrace with Kilimanjaro illuminated by the moon is one of the camp's most celebrated experiences.
- ✓ **Kilimanjaro Night Photography** — The camp's position and the mountain's proximity make Satao Elerai one of the finest locations in the Amboseli ecosystem for night photography of the mountain the star field above, the snow-cap catching the moonlight, the silhouette of the acacia trees against the sky.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

The kitchen at Satao Elerai serves **full à la carte meals** using **locally grown vegetables and fruit** a specific commitment to local sourcing that reflects the camp's partnership with the Elerai community and the agricultural production of the Ranch. On clear evenings, tables are set on the terrace where the mountain can be seen lit by the moon while dinner is served. The camp's culinary programme is consistently praised for its quality and its variety; dietary requirements are accommodated with warmth and skill.

Why We Love Satao Elerai Camp

We love Satao Elerai for its **absolute directness** the tents face the mountain unambiguously, the gorge walks are genuinely wild, the community village visit is genuinely authentic, and the waterhole's elephant arrivals are genuinely unpredictable. This is a camp that does not manufacture its experiences; it positions itself correctly in a remarkable landscape and allows the landscape to do the work.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Book the gorge walk for the late afternoon of your second day the specific light in the gorge at that hour, combined with the birdsong and the rock formations and the mountain visible at the gorge exit, produces a walking experience that is completely unlike anything available in the more accessible sections of the Amboseli ecosystem. And request the terrace dinner on a clear night when the moon is full Kilimanjaro lit by moonlight over a candlelit dinner table is one of the most genuinely romantic settings in Africa.

Families & Children

Satao Elerai Camp is **excellent for families**. The cottage rooms' connected configuration (rooms 4 and 5) provides ideal family privacy, and the conservancy's walking safaris and cattle herding visits offer deeply engaging experiences for children with genuine curiosity about the natural world and its human communities.

KITIRUA PLAINS LODGE

A&K Sanctuary | Kitirua Conservancy | A&K's Return to Safari's Birthplace

Location: Kitirua Plains Lodge is positioned on a **128-acre private concession bordering Amboseli National Park** just 10 minutes from the park's main gate and within the broader **Kitirua Conservancy** landscape that also hosts Elewana Tortilis Camp. The lodge commands **uninterrupted views of Mount Kilimanjaro** rising on the horizon above sweeping savannahs, emerald-green marshes and acacia woodlands.

Introduction & History

Kitirua Plains Lodge opens on **1 June 2026** marks one of the most resonant moments in the recent history of Kenyan luxury safari hospitality: the return of **Abercrombie & Kent** the company that invented the modern luxury safari to the very landscape where it all began, more than **60 years after Geoffrey Kent first led guests on thrilling adventures** with a trailblazing safari camp unprecedented in its sophistication.

In **1962**, Geoffrey Kent established his first luxury safari camp in the Amboseli region featuring Nairobi's finest chef, bartender and maître d'; power for electric lights and refrigeration to chill food and champagne; four canvas tents furnished with antique rugs, bathtubs and crystal martini glasses. This was the founding document of what would become the gold standard in luxury adventure travel; the blueprint that every subsequent luxury safari camp has followed, consciously or otherwise.

Over 60 years later, A&K Sanctuary the luxury lodge and camp collection of A&K Travel Group, under CEO **Cristina Levis** returns to Amboseli with an explicit tribute to that founding legacy: *"a return to our roots, and a bold leap forward."*

The lodge has been designed in partnership with **Luxury Frontiers** one of Africa's most celebrated sustainable safari architecture firms in a **deliberately design-led vision** that departs from the conventional tented camp aesthetic while maintaining deep connection to place and material culture. The **undulating black roof** is inspired by traditional Maasai buildings; **lath screens** based on indigenous construction methods enhance ventilation and shade; **natural textures, woven-rush detailing and thoughtful design nods to the Maasai way of life** ground the experience in a strong sense of place.

Pared-back interiors allow the vast, cinematic views of the savannah and Kilimanjaro to take centre stage.

Ownership & Management

Kitirua Plains Lodge is **owned and operated by A&K Sanctuary** the luxury lodge collection of A&K Travel Group, one of the world's most respected and most experienced luxury travel organizations.

Awards & Recognition

A&K Sanctuary's existing Kenya properties **Olonana Lodge** in the Maasai Mara and **Tambarare Camp** in Ol Pejeta Conservancy are consistently listed among Kenya's finest lodges. Kitirua Plains Lodge completes the three-lodge Kenya circuit, providing A&K guests with a safari experience that covers the Great Migration of the Mara, the conservation success of Ol Pejeta and the elephant kingdom of Amboseli within a single, coherent itinerary.

Intimate Luxury Safari Living — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Kitirua Plains Lodge offers **13 organic standalone suites — 11 single-bedroom suites** and **2 two-bedroom suites** all oriented to frame the iconic Kilimanjaro view:

- ✓ **Suites (11)** — Contemporary, design-led spaces that combine natural textures with a pared-back interior philosophy that places the Kilimanjaro view as the room's defining feature. Each suite features: super-king or twin beds with premium linen; an expansive private deck; the connection to the wilderness that floor-to-ceiling glass and canvas walls provide; spa and wellness connections; modern amenities of the highest standard.
- ✓ **2-Bedroom Suites (2)** — For families or small groups seeking connected private space two complete ensuite bedrooms within a shared suite structure, with expanded outdoor living areas and the full range of A&K's hospitality signature.
- ✓ **Communal Boma** — A specifically designed evening social space that comes alive under the stars with storytelling, fire and the convivial atmosphere that A&K's decades of hospitality expertise create.

Amenities & Facilities

- ✓ **Spa and Wellness Centre** — Providing the full range of treatments and therapies expected from an A&K Sanctuary property. **Gym.**
- ✓ **Swimming Pool.**
- ✓ **Boma** for evening gatherings.
- ✓ Wifi available.
- ✓ Private airstrip access.

Activities at Kitirua Plains Lodge

- ✓ **Daily Game Drives in the Private Concession and Amboseli National Park** — Access to both the private Kitirua Conservancy and the national park's full range of wildlife habitats and Kilimanjaro photography positions.
- ✓ **Cultural Visits to Maasai Communities** — A&K Sanctuary's long-established approach to authentic community engagement, expressed through meaningful visits that provide genuine insight into the Maasai heritage of the Amboseli region.
- ✓ **Hot Air Balloon Safaris** — Optional experience over Amboseli's iconic landscape.
- ✓ **Night Drives in the Private Concession** — The Kitirua's nocturnal wildlife encounters, including the full range of Amboseli's after-dark species.

- ✓ **Walking Safaris** — Expert-guided walks through the conservancy with A&K's high-quality naturalist team.
- ✓ **A&K's Legacy Conservation and Community Programming** — The specific engagement with the Amboseli ecosystem's conservation story, including the elephant research project and the Maasai community's extraordinary wildlife-human coexistence, that A&K's 60-year relationship with Kenya uniquely empowers.

Why We Love Kitirua Plains Lodge

We love Kitirua Plains Lodge for the **audacity of its return** for A&K's willingness to come back to the landscape they invented modern luxury safari in and to make a statement about how luxury safari hospitality should evolve: bolder in design, deeper in conservation commitment, more community-integrated, and still fundamentally, irreducibly about the combination of great wildlife and great champagne in a great African landscape.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Kitirua Plains Lodge opens 1 June 2026. Vard Africa has secured early booking access for our preferred guests. Contact us immediately for availability the opening season of a property of this significance and this heritage is an opportunity of genuine rarity.

Families & Children

Kitirua Plains Lodge warmly welcomes families, with the 2-bedroom suite configurations and A&K's comprehensive family service infrastructure ensuring that multi-generational and family groups are as well accommodated as couples and solo travellers.

ANGAMA AMBOSELI

Kimana Sanctuary | *The Kimana Fever Tree Experience*

Kenya's First Community Conservancy — Exclusive to Angama Guests

Location: Angama Amboseli sits at the **heart of the 5,700-acre Kimana Sanctuary** nestled within a stunning grove of **yellow fever acacia trees** (*Vachellia xanthophloea*), with uninterrupted views of Mount Kilimanjaro from every suite, every social space and every activity position within the sanctuary.

Accessible by **daily Safarilink flights** from Nairobi's Wilson Airport to the **sanctuary's own private airfield** (approximately 45 minutes); by **private charter** from the Maasai Mara or other safari circuits; or by **road from Nairobi** (approximately 3.5 hours on the well-maintained Namanga highway).

The Amboseli National Park is 45 minutes' drive from the lodge.

Introduction & History

Angama Amboseli opened in **October 2023** is the second property of **Angama** (following the celebrated Angama Mara in the Masai Mara), created by safari industry pioneers **Steve and Nicky Mitchell** whose 30-year career building more than 60 luxury safari properties across Africa and India culminated in the Angama brand's singular philosophy: the **"slow safari"** an approach to safari hospitality that prioritises depth and intimacy over breadth and speed, encouraging guests to inhabit a single extraordinary place fully rather than moving quickly through many.

The sanctuary within which Angama is set is one of the most historically significant wildlife conservation areas in Kenya. Established in **1996** as **Kenya's first community-owned wildlife sanctuary** created by 844 Maasai family members who collectively decided to protect their land for wildlife and community benefit Kimana Sanctuary occupies a position of extraordinary ecological importance: a **5,700-acre oasis** at the precise junction of **Amboseli National Park, the Chyulu Hills and Tsavo West National Park**, forming the most critical wildlife corridor in southern Kenya. The corridor's narrowest point is just **85 metres wide** squeezed between agricultural land and an active highway and at this pinch point, the entire future of the greater Amboseli ecosystem's wildlife movement depends on the community decision made in 1996 being sustained in perpetuity.

Angama has taken exclusive access to the sanctuary through a **lease agreement** under which **annual lease fees** paid by Angama flow directly to the 844 Maasai families who own the land ensuring that the all-important corridor used by the region's famous **Super Tusker elephants** for centuries will continue to be protected by the families whose decision has made its protection possible.

The **Super Tuskers of Kimana** are the sanctuary's most celebrated resident's elephants with tusks so impossibly large that they drag along the ground as the animals walk, each tusk weighing up to 100 pounds. One of the most famous, **Tolstoy** whose right tusk was more than 100 inches long and whose combined tusk weight approached 250 pounds frequented the sanctuary until he died in 2022 after sustaining injuries from what is believed to have been a crop-raiding incident. Replica casts of his tusks are displayed near the lodge entrance as a memorial and as a reminder of what the Kimana corridor is protecting.

Angama's **conservation partnership** with the **Big Life Foundation** the non-profit organisation dedicated to conserving the Greater Amboseli ecosystem provides the community, ranger and canine tracking infrastructure that keeps the corridor active and the wildlife safe. Supported additionally by the **Sheldrick Wildlife Trust**, the Kimana operation represents the most complete example of multi-partner community conservation in the Amboseli ecosystem.

- ✓ The design of Angama Amboseli is a deliberate and intelligent tribute to its subject: **elephants**.
- ✓ The exterior walls of the buildings incorporate their dung mixed with concrete as a texture that is simultaneously practical and poetic.
- ✓ The **round infinity pool** sits above a lowered water trough specifically designed for resident elephants to drink.
- ✓ The **chartreuse semicircle sofa** in the main lounge is inspired by the leaves of the Acacia trees above.
- ✓ The **observation tower (Mnara)** is built for watching the elephants that love to visit the surrounding marshland.

- ✓ Every design choice references the animals that the sanctuary was created to protect.

Ownership & Management

Angama Amboseli is **owned and operated by Angama** co-founded by **Steve and Nicky Mitchell** and managed by a team that completed three months of training at the sister property Angama Mara before the Amboseli property opened. The consistency of service quality and attention to detail for which Angama is internationally renowned is expressed at Amboseli with the specific warmth and personal care that the Kimana setting and the 844-family ownership story demand.

Awards & Recognition

- ✓ Consistent listing by **AFAR, Condé Nast Traveller, Travel + Leisure, The Times** and leading international luxury travel operators as one of the finest new safari lodges in Africa since its 2023 opening The Kimana Sanctuary's **first-community-conservancy** status is internationally recognised as a model of community-based conservation.
- ✓ Angama Foundation the charitable arm of the Angama brand contributes US\$20 per guest per night to community healthcare, education and conservation across the Kimana area.

Intimate Luxury Safari Living — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Angama Amboseli accommodates a maximum of **20 guests** across **10 tented suites** the most intimate scale of any Amboseli luxury property including **two sets of interconnecting family accommodations**:

8 Individual Suites — Designed as private sanctuaries, each with the design philosophy of Angama's specific aesthetic intelligence: **canvas, concrete, rattan and elephant dung** in earthy neutral tones accented by the greens and reds of the Kimana landscape. Each suite features:

- **Super-king bed** positioned for the Kilimanjaro view — the mountain visible from bed, from the shower and from the private patio
- **Floor-to-ceiling screened doors** opening onto a **private patio with lounge area and outdoor shower** — the Angama signature outdoor living space
- **Set of outdoor rocking chairs** — the Angama signature invitation to linger, to watch the elephants in the distance and to allow the sanctuary's pace to become your own
- **Personalised drinks armoire** — a specific and generous Angama detail: your own minibar curated to your preferences
- **Butler's lobby** at the suite entrance
- **Writing desk** and dressing area connecting bedroom to bathroom
- **Double vanity and double shower** in the ensuite bathroom
- **Binoculars provided** in every suite

2 Interconnecting Family Suites — Two pairs of suites connected for family use, each pair providing independent sleeping for parents and children while sharing an extended outdoor living space. The most family-oriented configuration at any Amboseli luxury property.

Communication in the Wilderness:

- ✓ Angama Amboseli provides **WiFi in the main guest area and social spaces**.
- ✓ Individual suite connectivity is limited preserving the specific quality of seclusion that the Kimana forest setting provides.
- ✓ Mobile coverage is available at the lodge and in accessible areas of the sanctuary.
- ✓ The lodge's infrastructure includes full satellite communication for emergency purposes.

Amenities & Facilities:

- ✓ **Rim-Flow Swimming Pool** — Elevated above a drinking trough designed specifically for the resident elephant herds who frequent this area of the camp; the pool's rim-flow edge creates a visual connection between the water above (guests) and the water below (elephants). A piece of design intelligence that perfectly expresses Angama's founding philosophy.
- ✓ **The Mnara (Observation Tower)** — A striking purpose-built tower providing **360-degree views** of the sanctuary, the Chyulu Hills and Kilimanjaro — designed specifically for watching the elephants who visit the surrounding marshland. The finest single viewing platform in the Kimana sanctuary.
- ✓ **The Studios Complex** — An extraordinary addition to the safari lodge programme: a hub of **creativity, storytelling, education and collaboration** that includes a **Safari Boutique, Games Room, Art Gallery, Weaving Studio** and **Photographic Studio**. The Photographic Studio offers safari photoshoots, camera and equipment hire and expert tutorials a serious commitment to helping guests document the extraordinary visual material that Kimana provides.
- ✓ **Baraza with Fire Pit** — The social heart of the lodge's evening programme: a communal fire space for storytelling, cocktails, roasting marshmallows and the unscripted conversation that the best safari evenings produce.
- ✓ **Indoor-Outdoor Dining Area** — The main guest area's dining space, connecting seamlessly to the outdoor patio with Kilimanjaro views.

Activities at Angama Amboseli:

- ✓ **Exclusive Game Drives in Kimana Sanctuary** Angama Amboseli has **exclusive traversing rights** throughout the entire 5,700-acre Kimana Sanctuary. No vehicles from outside the property may enter. Every game drive here is a genuinely private encounter with the sanctuary's wildlife the Super Tusker elephants, the resident predators, the extraordinary bird diversity of the fever tree forest in conditions of absolute exclusivity.
- ✓ **Unrestricted game viewing at any time of day or night** a freedom available at no other Amboseli property to the same degree.
- ✓ **The Pyjama Safari** — One of Angama's most celebrated and most specifically Kimana experiences: a dawn game drive departing directly from bed in whatever you slept in, before the day demands the formality of preparation. The early morning Kimana sanctuary mist in the fever trees, the elephants emerging from the marshland, Kilimanjaro catching the first light in pyjamas and blankets with warm coffee in hand. This is the slow safari philosophy made physical.

- ✓ **Day Excursions to Amboseli National Park** — Half- and full-day excursions into the national park, 45 minutes from the lodge, for the famous elephant herds and Kilimanjaro photography positions of the park's swamp areas. Picnic lunches arranged at private positions secured exclusively for Angama guests.
- ✓ **Big Life Foundation Conservation Engagement** — The most immersive conservation activity in the Amboseli ecosystem. Guests visit **Big Life Foundation HQ** to witness conservation operations in action: the **control room and camera-trap monitoring system** that tracks wildlife across the Greater Amboseli landscape; **ranger patrol participation** alongside the community rangers who protect the sanctuary; **canine tracking unit demonstrations** the detection dogs and their handlers who are the most effective anti-poaching tool in the Big Life operation. For guests with a serious interest in conservation science and practice, these encounters with one of Africa's most effective wildlife protection organisations are genuinely transformative.
- ✓ **Walking Safaris in the Sanctuary** — Expert-guided walks through the fever tree forest and the sanctuary's diverse habitats, interpreting tracks, vegetation and the ecological relationships of the Kimana corridor with the depth of knowledge that the Big Life partnership and the 844-family ownership history provide.
- ✓ **Night Game Drives in the Sanctuary** — The sanctuary's nocturnal wildlife the aardvark, the serval, the bush baby and the owl populations of the fever tree forest accessed exclusively and without time constraints.
- ✓ **Hot Air Balloon Safaris** — Scenic flights over Amboseli National Park from the sanctuary's airfield the aerial perspective on Kilimanjaro, the Super Tusker corridors and the park's swamp ecosystem.
- ✓ **Photographic Safari Sessions** — The Photographic Studio's expert tutorials and camera hire combined with the sanctuary's extraordinary visual material and the Kilimanjaro backdrop create photographic safari sessions of real ambition and real achievement. Camera loans (guests keep the memory card) provide the technical capability to match the landscape's visual generosity.
- ✓ **Cultural and Community Visits** — The 844-family ownership structure of the Kimana Sanctuary creates the most authentic possible cultural engagement available from any Amboseli property: visits with the families whose collective decision made this conservation oasis possible, and who continue to receive the lease fees that make its continuation viable. These encounters genuine, respectful, mutually beneficial are the human dimension of the Big Life conservation story.
- ✓ **Star Gazing and Night Sky Photography** — The Kimana's minimal light pollution and the Kilimanjaro proximity combine with Angama's Photographic Studio's expertise to create a night photography and stargazing programme of exceptional quality.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

- ✓ Angama Amboseli's chefs prepare meals using **simple, fresh ingredients** many locally sourced, all carefully chosen across a culinary programme that ranges from a lavish breakfast spread (guests consistently cite the homemade granola as outstanding) to multi-course dinners and the lighter meals that active safari days demand.
- ✓ **Private candlelit dinners in the Art Gallery** surrounded by elephant-themed paintings are available for special occasions.
- ✓ **Bush dining at the Mnara observation tower**, with Kilimanjaro visible at sunset, represents the camp's most spectacular dining position.

Health & Safety

- ✓ All activities within the sanctuary use Angama-trained guides and Big Life Foundation conservation staff.
- ✓ Night drives in the sanctuary are conducted by experienced guides familiar with every section of the 5,700 acres.
- ✓ Medical assistance via Angama's communication infrastructure and AMREF Flying Doctors. Children of all ages are welcomed.

Why We Love Angama Amboseli

- ✓ We love Angama for **Tolstoy's tusks**. For the weight of what those replica casts represent the 100-inch length of the right tusk, the 250-pound combined weight and for the fact that the reason we need replica casts of Tolstoy's tusks rather than photographs of a living Super Tusker is the single most powerful argument for the conservation of the Kimana corridor that the lodge embodies.
- ✓ Every lease fee, every conservation levy, every guest who arrives at the sanctuary's airfield and steps into this extraordinary environment is a vote for the decision made by 844 Maasai families in 1996 to protect their land.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Book the Pyjama Safari on your first morning the specific permission of being in the Kimana sanctuary in your pyjamas before dawn, with the fever trees and the elephants and the mountain and the mist all simultaneously present, is the most complete expression of the Angama slow safari philosophy available anywhere in Kenya. It is also one of the most reliably excellent photographs guests bring home from Amboseli.

And visit Big Life Foundation HQ: the control room with its camera-trap network spanning the Greater Amboseli ecosystem, the canine unit with its remarkable detection dogs, and the rangers whose community employment creates the economic incentive for wildlife protection this encounter with conservation as it is actually practised, rather than as it is aspirationally described, is genuinely life-changing.

Families & Children

Angama Amboseli is **outstanding for families** the interconnecting family suite configurations, the pyjama safari's specific appeal to children, the Art Gallery special dinner, the Weaving Studio and the Big Life conservation education all create an extraordinary range of family experiences. Children of all ages are welcomed year-round.

THE CHYULU HILLS ECOSYSTEM

The Chyulu Hills

Hemingway's Green Hills of Africa — Kenya's Most Dramatic Volcanic Landscape

The **Chyulu Hills** are, in the judgement of the writers, naturalists and conservationists who have known Kenya best, among the most beautiful landscapes in East Africa. **Ernest Hemingway** who spent months in the foothills of the Chyulu Hills in the 1930s and who set his great African

hunting story, "*The Snows of Kilimanjaro*", in this landscape called them the "**Green Hills of Africa**": a description that captures their most extraordinary quality perfectly. Where the Amboseli plains below are flat, dry and ochre-red, the Chyulu Hills are green, rolling, dramatic and alive with a biodiversity that the volcanic soil and the specific microclimate of the highland interior support in extraordinary abundance.

The hills are of **volcanic origin** formed by a series of eruptions within the last **relatively recent** 8,000 years, making them among the youngest volcanic formations in East Africa and producing a landscape of remarkable geological complexity: the **Shetani Lava Flow** that borders Tsavo West to the east; the **extinct volcanic cones** that give the hills their distinctive rolling profile; the **ancient lava tubes** that run beneath the plains extraordinary geological tunnels that serve, in the most famous of them, as the setting for one of Africa's most remarkable private dinner experiences at Campi ya Kanzi; and the **underground springs** that feed Mzima Springs in Tsavo West (providing water to the city of Mombasa) from their source beneath the hills.

The hills' **cloud forest** on the highest summits above 2,000 metres is a world entirely apart from the savannah below: misty, ancient, hung with mosses and lichens, populated by colobus monkeys in the fig trees and a remarkable variety of forest birds, its floor carpeted with ferns and orchids that exist here and in very few other East African locations. Walking the cloud forest with the Kilimanjaro-facing plains visible through gaps in the mist is one of the most specifically Chyulu experiences, available nowhere else in Kenya.

The western side of the Chyulu Hills is managed as the **Chyulu Hills National Park** (eastern flank, 471 square kilometres); the broader landscape to the west and south encompasses the **Maasai Group Ranches** most significantly the **Kuku Group Ranch** (Campi ya Kanzi, 280,000+ acres) and the **Mbirikani Group Ranch** (ol Donyo Lodge, 275,000 acres) whose Maasai community owners have partnered with conservation operators to create the most extensive and most ecologically significant private wildlife areas in southern Kenya.

The Chyulu Hills are also critical for Kenya's most elusive conservation challenge: **black rhinoceros**. The dense thickets of the Chyulu Hills hide the last wild-roaming black rhinos in southern Kenya closely guarded by rangers supported by the **Big Life Foundation** and the **Maasailand Preservation Trust** (now part of Big Life).

Every visitor to ol Donyo Lodge contributes directly to the protection of these animals through the conservancy fee structure.

The wildlife diversity of the broader Chyulu Hills ecosystem which spans the corridor between Amboseli to the north, Tsavo West to the east and the Mbirikani plains to the south includes all the species of the Amboseli ecosystem plus the specific highland and forest specialists: colobus monkeys, forest elephants, the rare **gerenuk** (found at this southern limit of their range at ol Donyo), the extraordinary **fringe-eared oryx** and the complete Big Five (elephant, lion, leopard, buffalo and the elusive black rhino).

OUR ACCOMMODATION & TRADE PARTNERS IN THE CHYULU HILLS

CAMPI YA KANZI

Kuku Group Ranch, Chyulu Hills | The Pioneer of Regenerative Safari

Location: Campi ya Kanzi sits at the **foot of the Chyulu Hills cloud forest** on the extraordinary **Kuku Group Ranch** 280,000+ acres of pristine Maasai wilderness forming a natural corridor between **Amboseli National Park** to the north, **Tsavo West National Park** to the east and **Mount Kilimanjaro National Park** to the south, with the foothills of Kilimanjaro just 35 miles away. Accessible by **charter flight** from Nairobi's Wilson Airport to the camp's own airstrip (approximately 60 minutes), or by road. The altitude ranges from **920 metres** on the plains to **2,100 metres** in the Chyulu Hills cloud forest.

Introduction & History

Campi ya Kanzi was founded in **1996** by **Luca Belpietro and Antonella Bonomi** Italian conservationists and safari pioneers who arrived in the Chyulu Hills with a vision of what ecotourism could be when it was built as a genuine partnership with the Maasai community rather than a transaction with it. The name *Campi ya Kanzi* means "**Camp of the Hidden Treasure**" in Kiswahili and the hidden treasure is not a physical object but the extraordinary combination of landscape, wildlife, Maasai culture and conservation partnership that this camp has been exploring, deepening and sharing for nearly three decades.

The camp is the **tourism arm** of its partnered NGO, the **Maasai Wilderness Conservation Trust (MWCT)** also founded by Luca Belpietro, with the explicit mission of protecting the Chyulu Hills ecosystem and improving the lives and livelihoods of the Maasai communities whose land is its foundation. The MWCT's impact is measurable and extraordinary: employment of **rangers who protect and patrol the ecosystem from illegal activities**; employment of **young Maasai warriors to protect the lion population and mitigate human-wildlife conflict**; support of **5 health facilities** serving nearly 19,000 community members; support of **26 schools, 62 teachers and over 8,800 students**. Every guest who stays at Campi ya Kanzi contributes a **USD 150 conservation fee per night** (USD 75 per child) that funds this programme directly.

The camp's environmental credentials are among the most genuine and most technically advanced in African safari hospitality: **First photovoltaic (solar-powered) lodge in Kenya** 20 years ahead of the industry trend **Rainwater collection** for pool and water supply no borehole extraction **All wastewater recycled** in a wildlife pond Now operating with **electric Rivian EV safari vehicles** silent, emission-free game drives that approach wildlife without the engine noise that conventional vehicles require.

Carbon emissions fully offset through the **UN REDD+ Chyulu Hills Carbon Project**

The result is a camp that may legitimately claim to be operating on a carbon-negative basis giving back more to the natural environment than it takes.

The **main building**, *Tembo House* originally Luca and Antonella's own home is one of the most characterful and most genuinely personal spaces in the East African safari landscape: stone walls, a wide chimney, a thatched roof, and one side entirely open to the most expansive view of the plains and Kilimanjaro available from any building in the Chyulu Hills.

Ownership & Management

Campi ya Kanzi is **owned and personally managed by Luca Belpietro and Antonella Bonomi**, who are resident at the camp and whose personal involvement in every guest's experience and whose deep knowledge of the Maasai community, the Chyulu Hills ecology and the greater East African wilderness gives the camp its most irreplaceable quality.

Luca himself is available, by prior arrangement, for exclusive private hosting (at an additional fee) a level of personal engagement with the camp's founder that no corporate-managed property can offer.

Awards & Recognition

Multiple international eco-tourism awards across nearly three decades of operation including recognition as one of the most consistently excellent and most genuinely committed eco-lodges in Africa, **Condé Nast Traveller** and the world's leading luxury travel operators as one of the finest boutique eco-lodges in East Africa.

The **Maasai Wilderness Conservation Trust** has received international recognition for its conservation achievements in the Chyulu Hills ecosystem Pioneer of the photovoltaic lodge model in Kenya now widely replicated across the industry

Intimate Luxury Safari Living — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Campi ya Kanzi offers **6 tented cottages, 2 tented suites** and the separate **Kanzi House** private villa all positioned on either side of Tembo House, spaced for privacy and individual wildlife viewing:

- ✓ **Tented Cottages (6)** — Positioned on **sturdy wooden decks beneath thatched roofs** in the classic safari tradition 2 **king-size double** and 4 **twin** configurations. Each cottage features: a wooden-framed bed (double or twins) with quality linen; a **private veranda** with armchairs for Kilimanjaro-watching; **distinctive wildlife artwork** on the canvas walls; snug rugs on wooden floors; an ensuite area with **flush toilet, bidet, twin washbasins and walk-in shower**; solar lighting; hot running water (solar-powered). One double and one twin are positioned close together ideal for families with children. Each cottage has its own **Maasai attendant**.
- ✓ **Tented Suites (2)** — Larger than the standard cottages, with expanded living space and the most generous ensuite bathroom configurations at the camp. The suites provide the additional space and privacy appropriate for honeymooners or guests celebrating significant occasions.
- ✓ **Kanzi House** — A **private villa** ideal for larger families and groups: featuring an **18-metre swimming pool** (rainwater-fed), a Jacuzzi, a fire pit, a **beautiful view of Mount Kilimanjaro** and a private outdoor dining area. Kanzi House guests are served by a dedicated cook, waiters, safari guide and vehicle. The pool uses only rainwater collection no borehole, no chemical treatment, and it also serves as the camp's anti-fire reservoir.
- ✓ **Note on Connectivity**: Campi ya Kanzi provides what Luca describes as *"appropriate luxury"* WiFi is available in social areas but is not provided in individual tents. This is an explicit and deliberate choice: the camp's philosophy prizes the immersive wilderness experience over the digital connection, and guests who arrive prepared for this informed by Vard Africa's full pre-travel briefing invariably find it one of the camp's most welcome characteristics.

Activities at Campi ya Kanzi

- ✓ **Game Drives in Electric EV Safari Vehicles** One of Campi ya Kanzi's most extraordinary distinctions: **silent, electric Rivian EV vehicles** that approach wildlife without the engine noise that alerts and disturbs animals at critical moments. The specific quality of wildlife encounter available from a soundless vehicle the closeness, the stillness, the animals' complete lack of alarm is an experience unavailable from any conventional game drive vehicle.
- ✓ **Walking Safaris with Maasai Guides and Trackers** — *"Each step across the verdant tapestry of the Chyulu Hills will weave together a profound narrative of cultural heritage and the untamed wild."* The Maasai guides at Kanzi are among the finest in Kenya their knowledge of the land, the wildlife, the medicinal plants, the tracking arts and the cultural lore of the Kuku Ranch is encyclopaedic. Walking safaris range from short plains walks to full-day cloud forest treks. All walks are guided by Maasai trackers armed with spears the traditional implement of the Maasai warrior, sufficient in the bush for the dangers encountered.
- ✓ **Chyulu Cloud Forest Treks** — One of the most extraordinary natural environments in Kenya: hiking into the cloud forest on the Chyulu Hills summits, through ancient fig trees hung with moss, past rare orchids and ferns, while colobus monkeys and forest hornbills fill the misty canopy above. Views of Kilimanjaro through the cloud forest visible from an angle and in a quality of light that the plains cannot produce are among the camp's finest natural spectacles.
- ✓ **Lava Tube Dinner** — Campi ya Kanzi's most specifically and most unforgettably unique experience: a **private dinner set deep inside an ancient lava tube** a geological cave carved by the flow of molten rock thousands of years ago, its walls polished by the heat of that passage and now perfectly still, perfectly silent and perfectly extraordinary. The combination of candlelight, fine wine, great food and the ancient geological environment of the lava tube is one of those experiences that guests describe, years later, as among the most remarkable they have ever had. Pre-booking required; minimum guest numbers apply.
- ✓ **Horseback Safaris** — Riding across the Chyulu Hills plains alongside zebra and giraffe the most intimate and most historically authentic approach to East African wildlife. Available for experienced riders; an extraordinary immersion in the landscape. For more experienced riders, the lodge offers **horseback fly camping** a multi-night expedition on horseback across the plains and into the hills.
- ✓ **Scenic Flights around Kilimanjaro and over the Chyulu Hills** — The aerial perspective on the Chyulu Hills landscape the volcanic cones, the cloud forest, the lava flows, the distant Kilimanjaro is one of Kenya's finest airborne views. The scenic flight with a champagne breakfast (additional cost) is a signature Kanzi experience of considerable romance and visual impact.
- ✓ **Conservation Safaris** — Wildlife counts, lion collaring and monitoring, lion tracking with the community conservation team. For guests with serious interest in conservation science and practice, these participatory research activities provide encounters with fieldwork of genuine importance.
- ✓ **Visit to the MWCT Research and Conservation Centre** — Presentations by the conservation scientists working on the Chyulu Hills ecosystem, with specific focus on the lion monitoring and protection programme, the community health and education work, and the broader landscape ecology of the 280,000-acre Group Ranch.
- ✓ **Maasai Village Visits** — The guide's own village; the authentic encounter with the specific Maasai community whose land this is and whose economic partnership with Kanzi has made the conservation of the Kuku Ranch possible.

- ✓ **Birdwatching** — 63 species of large mammals and an extraordinary diversity of birds across the savannah, riverine habitats and cloud forest of the Kuku Ranch.
- ✓ **Yoga and Transcendental Meditation** — Available at the camp for guests seeking the specifically contemplative dimension of the Chyulu Hills' extraordinary quiet.
- ✓ **Kanzi Amani Spa** — The camp's spa and wellness centre, with Maasai masseuses using traditionally sourced oils and the ancient Maasai massage technique refined through generations. The setting, within the camp's garden and with the forest behind and the plains in front, makes every treatment a sensory experience that extends well beyond the physical.
- ✓ **Visits to Tsavo National Park and Mzima Springs** — Day excursions to Tsavo and the famous crystal-clear hippo-and-crocodile pools of Mzima Springs fed by the very underground springs that flow from beneath the Chyulu Hills through which the game drive passes on the way.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

The kitchen at Campi ya Kanzi is, by the consistent testimony of those who know the Chyulu Hills well, one of the finest in southeastern Kenya. Luca and Antonella's Italian heritage expresses itself in the cooking with an elegance and a specificity that has been built over nearly three decades of fine-tuning: the finest local ingredients, classic Italian technique, the specific richness of a Maasai wilderness pantry vegetables from the **organic farm**, local honey, fresh herbs, the wild mushrooms of the cloud forest in season.

Meals are served in the spectacular open-sided Tembo House overlooking the plains and Kilimanjaro; at the Kanzi House pool terrace; at the lava tube; at sundowner positions on the volcanic ridges; and for the most committed guests at fly camp positions in the hills.

Why We Love Campi ya Kanzi

We love Campi ya Kanzi for **Luca and Antonella** for the 28-year project they have been building in the Chyulu Hills, simultaneously protecting one of Kenya's most extraordinary landscapes, supporting a Maasai community of nearly 19,000 people, pioneering the electric game drive, and preparing remarkable Italian food with an organic farm and a lava tube dinner table. This is not a hospitality product. It is a life's work.

Vard Africa Insider Note

The lava tube dinner is non-negotiable. Book it on your second evening, when you know the camp well enough to appreciate what it is not a gimmick but a genuinely ancient and genuinely extraordinary natural environment made accessible by a camp that has spent 28 years earning the right to use it. And go on a cloud forest walk: the colobus monkeys in the ancient fig trees, the mist and the mosses and the orchids, and then the sudden opening where the plains are visible below and Kilimanjaro is above this is the moment that Hemingway was writing about when he called these hills Africa's most beautiful.

Families & Children

Campi ya Kanzi warmly welcomes **children of all ages**. The Kanzi House private pool villa is the ideal family configuration. The cloud forest walks, the electric game drives, the Maasai village visits and the conservation activities all provide deeply enriching experiences for younger guests with genuine curiosity about the natural world.

OL DONYO LODGE BY GREAT PLAINS

Mbirikani Group Ranch, Chyulu Hills | The Great Plains Masterpiece

Location: Ol Donyo Lodge is positioned on the **south-western flank of the Chyulu Hills** perched on a hillside on the **Mbirikani Group Ranch**, a privately owned Maasai community ranch of **275,000 acres** between **Tsavo West** and **Amboseli National Parks**, with views across open plains to **Mount Kilimanjaro** on the horizon. Accessible by **private charter flight** from Nairobi's Wilson Airport to the lodge's own **Chyulu Airstrip** (approximately 1 hour), or by road.

Ol Donyo means "**the hill**" in the Maa language a description of the specific volcanic rise on whose slopes the lodge has been built, and from whose vantage point the combination of plains, hills and Kilimanjaro creates the most spectacular single view available from any property in the Chyulu Hills ecosystem.

Introduction & History

Ol Donyo Lodge has a history of remarkable complexity and remarkable evolution. Originally established as *Ol Donyo Wuas Lodge* by the pioneering conservationist and safari operator **Richard Bonham** who created the **Maasailand Preservation Trust** (now part of the **Big Life Foundation**) as the community conservation mechanism that made the lodge possible the property became, over the following decades, one of Kenya's most celebrated and most exclusive safari lodges.

In **2008**, when the lodge joined the **Great Plains Conservation** portfolio founded by safari industry legends **Dereck and Beverly Joubert**, National Geographic Fellows and Academy Award-winning wildlife filmmakers it underwent a transformation of both physical quality and conservation ambition that has positioned it, consistently since, among the finest safari properties in Africa. Today, as a **Great Plains Conservation Réserve-Collection** camp, Ol Donyo combines the design intelligence of one of Africa's most sophisticated hospitality groups with the conservation infrastructure of the **Big Life Foundation** and the community partnership of the **Mbirikani Group Ranch's 4,000 Maasai owners**.

The lodge was built from the **volcanic lava rock** of the Chyulu Hills themselves the stone from which Kilimanjaro's eruptions created this landscape, shaped into a building of extraordinary organic beauty whose **stone, thatch and wood construction** has the quality of something grown from the hillside rather than placed upon it. The **iron-ore chandeliers, indoor gardens, arched doorways, bronze sculptures, big wood doors and Victorian furniture** of the main public areas create an atmosphere of sophisticated colonial romanticism that is simultaneously deeply African and deeply personal.

Great Plains' commitment to sustainability is expressed here in specific and meaningful terms: the **Mbirikani Group Ranch's per-guest conservancy fee and annual lease fee** go directly to the community of 4,000 Maasai; **two primary schools and one boarding school** on the ranch have been established with lodge support; **20 government-certified teachers' salaries** are sponsored annually; and the **black rhino protection programme** guarding the last wild-roaming black rhinos in southern Kenya is funded in part by every guest who stays at the lodge.

In partnership with the **Big Life Foundation's 4Ocean initiative** (since 2024), Great Plains is also supporting **ocean clean-up activities** an expression of the group's expanding understanding of conservation as a systemic rather than a site-specific challenge.

Ownership & Management

Ol Donyo Lodge is a **Great Plains Conservation Réserve-Collection camp** owned and operated by **Great Plains Conservation**, the safari hospitality group founded by Dereck and Beverly Joubert and dedicated to the conservation of Africa's wild places through the specific economic model of high-value, low-volume tourism.

The lodge is also a member of **Relais & Châteaux** the prestigious global association of the world's finest independent hotels and restaurants, whose membership criteria include exceptional quality, individual character and the specific warmth that owner-managed hospitality generates.

Awards & Recognition

Relais & Châteaux member one of the world's most selective hospitality associations.

Consistent listing by **Condé Nast Traveller, Travel + Leisure, The Sunday Times, The Telegraph, National Geographic** and leading international luxury travel operators as one of the finest safari lodges in Africa Great Plains Conservation recognised internationally for pioneering conservation-based tourism model.

The Big Life Foundation's work at Mbirikani supported by ol Donyo receives consistent recognition as among the most effective community conservation operations in East Africa.

Intimate Luxury Safari Living — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Ol Donyo Lodge accommodates a maximum of **16 guests** across **7 Deluxe Suites** and **1 Family Suite (Sambu Suite)** providing the most intimate scale of any Great Plains property and ensuring that every guest receives the level of personal attention that the Relais & Châteaux membership demands:

Deluxe Suites (7) — Among the most generously appointed and most architecturally accomplished safari rooms in Kenya. Each suite is a complete private world:

- **Separate bedroom section** with oversized bed, premium Great Plains linen, and expansive windows to the plains and Kilimanjaro
 - **Private dressing area** connecting the bedroom to a bathroom of exceptional quality
 - **Spacious ensuite bathroom** with **indoor and outdoor showers** (the outdoor shower position, with the plains and Kilimanjaro as backdrop, is one of the finest bathing experiences in East African safari tourism)
 - **Private outdoor veranda and deck** with chairs, tables and the full panoramic plains view
 - **Private plunge pool** — each suite has its own plunge pool on the private deck, providing the specific luxury of cooling down in complete privacy with Africa's most dramatic view
 - **Rooftop sleeping deck with star bed** — the extraordinary Great Plains signature: an open-air sleeping platform on the roof of the suite, under a canopy of stars, where guests can choose to sleep under the sky or simply lie and watch the constellations rotate above the Chyulu Hills. On clear evenings, Kilimanjaro's silhouette is visible in the darkness
- ✓ **The Sambu Family Suite** — A specifically designed family configuration: two en-suite bedrooms connected by a common lounge and outdoor space, with its own private plunge pool and star bed. Ideal for parents with children, or for groups of friends travelling together. Children 5 years and above are welcome at ol Donyo.
 - ✓ **Main Area and Dining** — The extraordinary main building whose stone, thatch and wood construction, iron-ore chandeliers, indoor gardens, arched doorways and completely open side facing the plains constitutes one of the most architecturally extraordinary public spaces at any Kenyan safari lodge.
 - ✓ The **Infinity Pool** on the level below the main area provides an elevated viewing position for the waterhole activity.
 - ✓ The **Spa and Gym** (new, fully equipped) complete the lodge's wellness infrastructure.

Communication in the Wilderness

The Mbirikani Group Ranch's remoteness provides a quality of disconnection appropriate to its position between Tsavo and Amboseli. Mobile coverage is available in some positions on the property; the lodge provides WiFi in social areas. Individual suites are deliberately limited in connectivity the specific seclusion of the star bed and private plunge pool experiences is part of the design intention. Vard Africa provides full pre-travel connectivity briefing.

Amenities & Facilities

- ✓ **Infinity Pool** Providing elevated views of the waterhole and the plains below; often occupied by giraffes, zebra and elephant as guests swim above.
- ✓ **Waterhole Photography Hides** Two discreet hides overlooking the waterhole: one a new **sunken hide** (completed with coffee machine and fridge for extended stays), one an open-air hide. Both provide the most intimate possible wildlife photography positions, with animals coming to drink at eye level within metres.
- ✓ **Spa** Full range of treatments using Great Plains' specific product partnerships.
- ✓ **Gym** New, fully equipped.
- ✓ **Helicopter** Based at the lodge for pre-booked scenic flights. **Safari Shop**.
- ✓ **Young Explorers Programme** Great Plains' specifically designed children's conservation education programme.

Activities at Ol Donyo Lodge

- ✓ **Day and Night Game Drives in Open 4×4 Vehicles** — The Mbirikani Ranch's extraordinary wildlife diversity all Big Five present, including the rare gerenuk and fringe-eared oryx, plus cheetah, wild dog, Grevy's zebra and the remarkable variety of small cats explored in custom open vehicles with Great Plains' certified naturalist guides across a landscape of volcanic plains, ancient lava flows and acacia woodland that changes character completely from dawn to dusk to the extraordinary quality of the Chyulu Hills night.
- ✓ **Horseback Safaris** — Day and multi-day riding safaris across the Mbirikani plains, accompanied by experienced guides. For intermediate and experienced riders: the most intimate approach to the wildlife of the Chyulu Hills ecosystem. The **fly camp option on horseback** a multi-night horseback expedition with mobile camp on the plains represents the most adventurous activity available from any Chyulu Hills property.
- ✓ **Guided Bush Walks and Wildlife Tracking** — Walking the volcanic landscape with expert guides who know the individual animals, the migration routes, the specific ecological relationships of the Mbirikani Ranch's extraordinary biodiversity.
- ✓ **Lava Tunnel Exploration** — Guided exploration of the ancient **lava tubes** beneath the Chyulu Hills plains a geological underground world of remarkable character and beauty.
- ✓ **Waterhole Photography from the Hides** — The sunken hide and open-air hide provide the finest wildlife photography positions at any Kenyan Chyulu Hills property. Elephants at eye level, giraffes at close range, the full complement of the waterhole's daily visitors captured without disturbance.
- ✓ **Star Bed Night Experience** — The rooftop sleeping deck of each suite provides the most intimate relationship with the African night sky available from any Kenyan safari property. The combination of complete darkness (the remote Mbirikani plains have no light pollution), the extraordinary star field of the equatorial African sky and the possibility of Kilimanjaro's silhouette visible against the Milky Way creates an experience of profound natural beauty.
- ✓ **Mountain Biking and E-Biking** — Cycling across the volcanic plains of the Mbirikani Ranch a different pace and a different physical engagement with one of Africa's most extraordinary private wilderness areas.
- ✓ **Guided Walks in the Chyulu Hills** — Day trips into the national park section of the hills for the specific character of the volcanic landscape and the extraordinary cloud forest.
- ✓ **Helicopter Scenic Flights** — The lodge's resident helicopter provides pre-booked aerial tours of the Chyulu Hills landscape, the Mbirikani plains, the Amboseli ecosystem and on clear days the full profile of Kilimanjaro from above.
- ✓ **Conservation and Community Engagement** — Day trips to the **local market** and community cultural encounters; visits to the **Great Plains Foundation's community development projects** on the Ranch; specific conservation programme briefings on the black rhino protection and lion monitoring operations; the **Great Plains Young Explorers Programme** for children.
- ✓ **Day Trips to Amboseli National Park** — Extended excursions into the national park (additional park fees payable locally) providing the Kilimanjaro-and-elephant photography positions that the Chyulu Hills' specific vantage point complements rather than replicates.
- ✓ **Wild Studio Yoga** — Yoga sessions on the lodge's extraordinary volcanic plains setting, with the Kilimanjaro skyline as the backdrop and the Mbirikani wildlife as the audience.
- ✓ **In-Room Massage** — Professional massage treatments in the suite for guests whose activities have been more demanding than their bodies anticipated.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

- ✓ Ol Donyo's kitchen is consistently described as among the finest in southern Kenya a reflection of Great Plains' specific investment in culinary quality as an expression of luxury hospitality and a tribute to the extraordinary pantry that the lodge's community relationships and local sourcing provide.
- ✓ Meals are served in the spectacular main building, on the terrace overlooking the waterhole, at bush positions across the Ranch, and in the specific intimacy of the private suite terrace beside the plunge pool.
- ✓ The lodge's rates include **premium wines and spirits** a specific generosity that reflects Great Plains' understanding that the al fresco sundowner, with Kilimanjaro behind and the plains below and the right wine in hand, is the most quintessentially perfect Chyulu Hills moment.

Health & Safety

- ✓ All activities are guided by Great Plains-trained naturalists; horseback safaris require prior riding assessment.
- ✓ The unfenced ranch environment requires that wildlife encounters are managed by experienced guides at all times.
- ✓ Medical assistance via the lodge's helicopter and AMREF
- ✓ Flying Doctors.
- ✓ Children 5 years and above welcome.

Why We Love Ol Donyo Lodge

We love Ol Donyo Lodge for the **star bed**. More specifically, we love it for the specific quality of thought that produced the star bed: the understanding that the rooftop of a suite is not merely an architectural feature to be filled with a service terrace and a branded umbrella, but an opportunity to give guests a relationship with the African night that the suite ceiling would otherwise prevent. The star bed's genius is the same as the outdoor shower's genius and the plunge pool's genius: the specific intelligence of removing the barrier between guest and landscape that lesser properties keep in place.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Book the sunken waterhole hide for a full morning not a 20-minute visit but a genuine 3-to-4-hour session, with coffee and snacks delivered by the kitchen team, in which the waterhole's daily programme of arrivals and departures from the dawn giraffe to the midday elephant to the lions that occasionally arrive unannounced unfolds at eye level within 10 metres of your position. It is the finest wildlife photography experience in the Chyulu Hills, and one of the finest in Kenya. And sleep on the star bed on at least one night: the Mbirikani sky, without competition from any artificial light source for a hundred kilometres in every direction, is one of the great natural spectacles of East Africa.

Families & Children

Ol Donyo Lodge is **excellent for families** with children aged 5 and above.

The Sambu Family Suite's configuration, the Young Explorers Programme, the horseback safari introduction (minimum ages apply), the waterhole hide and the star bed all provide experiences of genuine depth and age-appropriate range.

Children under 5 are not accommodated.

GETTING THERE & LOGISTICAL SUPPORT

Air Access to the Amboseli Ecosystem

Amboseli Airstrip (within Amboseli National Park) receives **scheduled daily flights** from Nairobi's Wilson Airport on **Safarilink, Air Kenya** and other carriers (approximately 45–55 minutes). From the park airstrip, road transfers to the various ecosystem properties range from 15 minutes (Angama via private airfield) to 90 minutes (Satao Elerai private airstrip).

Most properties use the Amboseli Airstrip as their primary fly-in point.

Kimana Airfield (inside Kimana Sanctuary) receives **scheduled daily Safarilink flights** from Nairobi (approximately 45 minutes). This is the exclusive airfield for Angama Amboseli, providing the most convenient and most atmospheric arrival experience for guests of that property rolling out of the aircraft directly into the fever tree forest.

Private Airstrips exist at Tawi Lodge (Tawi Private Airstrip), Satao Elerai (Elerai Airstrip) and Kitirua Plains Lodge all accepting private charter flights from any Kenyan airstrip.

Air Access to the Chyulu Hills

- ✓ **Chyulu Airstrip** (on the Mbirikani Ranch) serves Ol Donyo Lodge receiving private charter flights from Nairobi Wilson Airport (approximately 60 minutes) and from the Amboseli ecosystem.
- ✓ **Campi ya Kanzi Airstrip** (on the Kuku Group Ranch) serves Campi ya Kanzi — receiving private charter flights from Nairobi (approximately 60 minutes).
- ✓ **Road Access**
Amboseli — 240 kilometres from Nairobi via the Namanga road (approximately 4–5 hours by road). The route via the **Standard Gauge Railway (SGR)** to **Emali Station** (approximately 2 hours from Nairobi) followed by road transfer is an increasingly popular and comfortable alternative — Tawi Lodge specifically offers SGR arrival at Emali followed by a 2-hour road transfer as a standard option.
- ✓ **Chyulu Hills** — Approximately 4–5 hours from Nairobi by road via the Nairobi-Mombasa Highway to Kibwezi, then onto the ranch access roads. Not recommended as a first approach; fly-in is strongly preferred for Chyulu Hills properties.

Vard Africa Logistical Support

Vard Africa provides comprehensive end-to-end logistical support for all Amboseli and Chyulu Hills journeys including flight bookings, road transfer arrangements, park entry fee coordination, activity pre-booking and 24-hour in-destination emergency support.

Best Time to Visit

- ✓ **January to March (Dry Season)** — Finest wildlife viewing. Driest conditions. Best Kilimanjaro visibility. Excellent for photography.
- ✓ **June to October (Long Dry Season)** — Consistently excellent. Wildlife concentrations around water sources. Cooler temperatures. Outstanding photography light.
- ✓ **November to December (Short Rains)** — Green landscape; excellent for birdwatching. Kilimanjaro views affected by cloud but wildlife remains excellent.
- ✓ **April to May (Long Rains)** — Some camps reduce activities; game drives remain possible but roads can be difficult. The Amboseli basin can flood. Avoid for beach combination trips.