

VARD AFRICA | DESTINATION GUIDE

Tsavo East & Tsavo West National Parks, Kenya

Africa's Largest Wilderness — Where Kenya's Most Ancient Safari Story Is Still Being Written

"Tsavo arrives differently from other parks. There is no crescendo, no single moment when the landscape announces itself as extraordinary. It simply expands red earth, dry acacia, the Galana River in the distance until you realise, somewhere in the third or fourth hour of driving without seeing another vehicle, that you have entered one of the last genuinely wild places on Earth. The elephants here are not the same elephants you have seen elsewhere. They are older, redder, more deliberate. They have been doing this living in this enormous space, following these ancient routes to water since before recorded history. You understand, finally, what wilderness actually means." — Vard Africa, Destination Curators

DESTINATION INTRODUCTION

Tsavo East & Tsavo West National Parks

22,000 Square Kilometres of Untamed, Uncompromising African Wilderness

Together, **Tsavo East** and **Tsavo West National Parks** form one of the most extraordinary protected areas on the African continent a combined expanse of **22,812 square kilometres** that makes Tsavo, by any reasonable measure, the largest national park complex in Kenya, one of the largest in Africa, and among the most significant wildlife conservation areas in the world. The two parks separated by the historic **Nairobi–Mombasa highway and railway** that bisects southeastern Kenya are radically different in character, yet belong to the same ancient ecosystem: the **Tsavo Conservation Area**, a vast wilderness stretching from the Galana River in the east to the Chyulu Hills in the west, from the volcanic highlands of Tsavo West to the semi-arid red-earth plains of the eastern reaches, encompassing within its boundaries one of the most diverse and most biologically significant assemblages of wildlife, geology and landscape in East Africa.

Tsavo East is Kenya's largest national park at over **13,747 square kilometres**, approximately nine times larger than the Masai Mara and it is the park's sheer, overwhelming scale that defines it. Driving here, guests can travel for hours through the open savannah and acacia woodland without encountering another vehicle. This is Africa at its most primeval and most undisturbed vast, sun-drenched, silently magnificent and the animals that inhabit it reflect the quality of their freedom. The **elephants of Tsavo East** are among the most celebrated in Kenya: enormous herds, individually among the continent's most impressively tusked survivors, coated in the distinctive **iron-oxide red dust** that gives Tsavo its most famous visual signature. The red colour is not a separate subspecies or a genetic trait it is the dust of Tsavo's ancient red laterite soils, caked into the elephants' skin through generations of dust-bathing and wallowing, creating a visual effect of almost painterly beauty that photographers travel from around the world to capture.

The park's geological character is equally extraordinary. The **Yatta Plateau** rising above the Tsavo plains on the park's western side is the longest lava flow in the world at over **300 kilometres**, a raised geological feature of ancient volcanic origin that provides one of the most dramatic skylines in the East African landscape. The **Galana River** the park's most important permanent water source and the lifeline of its eastern ecosystem flows through the park for nearly 100 kilometres from the Kenyan highlands to the Indian Ocean, its banks lined with fig trees, doum palms and riverine forest that support a completely different ecological community from the surrounding semi-arid savannah. **Lugard Falls** on the Galana where the river has carved a series of dramatic water-worn rock formations through the red sandstone of its bed provides one of the most visually striking features in the park; the swirling water patterns in the polished rock are extraordinary photographs of geological time compressed into a few metres of riverbank. **Mudanda Rock** a 1.6-kilometre inselberg of stratified rock that acts as a natural water catchment, supplying a dam below provides spectacular vantage points for watching hundreds of elephants converge to drink during the dry season.

Wildlife beyond elephants is abundant and diverse. **Maneless lions** the Tsavo lions' most famous characteristic, with males that lack the impressive manes of their East African relatives, believed to be an adaptation to the harsh, thorny environment patrol vast territories across the plains. **Leopards** inhabit the riverine forest and rocky kopjes. **Cheetahs** are more commonly encountered in Tsavo East than in many other Kenyan parks. The semi-arid environment supports species rarely seen further south: **gerenuk** (the long-necked gazelle that browses standing on its hind legs), **lesser kudu**, **fringe-eared oryx**, **Hirola** (Hunter's hartebeest, one of the world's most critically endangered antelopes), **Somali ostrich** and the remarkable **desert warthog**. Over **500 bird species** have been recorded across the Tsavo ecosystem making it one of the richest avian environments in Kenya, particularly notable for **raptors**, **migratory species** (birds travelling from as far as Oman, Iran, Germany and Russia use the Tsavo corridor), and the extraordinary waterbird concentrations around the Galana River, Aruba Dam and the park's seasonal watercourses.

Tsavo West offers a completely different landscape and a completely different safari character. Where Tsavo East is vast, open and semi-arid, Tsavo West is more **compact, verdant, volcanic and dramatically beautiful** its landscape shaped by ancient volcanic activity that produced the extraordinary **Shetani Lava Flow** (the name means "*devil*" in Kiswahili, reflecting local belief about the lava's fiery supernatural origins), the **Ngulia Hills**, volcanic craters, hot springs and the extraordinary geological diversity that marks this as one of the most visually distinctive national parks in Kenya. The park's most celebrated natural feature **Mzima Springs** is an oasis of crystal-clear water fed by an underground reservoir beneath the Chyulu Hills: hippos and Nile crocodiles inhabit the pools, an underwater viewing chamber allows guests to observe them from below the surface, and the surrounding vegetation supports a remarkable diversity of waterbirds, monkeys and smaller wildlife. The springs supply water to Mombasa a city of more than a million people through a pipeline that traverses the length of Tsavo.

Kilimanjaro Africa's highest peak is visible from Tsavo West on clear days, its snow-capped summit rising above the Tanzanian border as the park's most dramatic backdrop. The **Chyulu Hills** a range of extinct volcanic cones rising to over 2,100 metres, covered in the extraordinary **Chyulu Cloud Forest** provide hiking, scenic flights and some of the most otherworldly landscapes in Kenya: the forest, with its mosses, orchids, ferns and ancient trees draped in Spanish moss, has been described by botanists as among the most biodiverse habitats in East Africa. The **Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary** within Tsavo West provides a carefully managed refuge for **critically endangered black rhinos** the sanctuary's population is one of the most significant in Kenya, and a visit provides a unique and deeply meaningful encounter with one of Africa's most threatened large mammals.

The name "**Tsavo**" meaning "**a place of slaughter**" in the Kamba language references the park's most famous and most dramatic historical episode: the **Man-Eaters of Tsavo**. In **1898**, during the construction of the Uganda Railway across the Tsavo River, two maneless male lions killed an estimated **130 construction workers** over nine months before being shot by Lieutenant Colonel John Henry Patterson. The incident became one of the most celebrated and most extensively documented cases of large predator aggression in recorded history, the subject of Patterson's own memoir, multiple films and continued scientific study. The lions were subsequently mounted and displayed at the Field Museum in Chicago, where they remain today. The railway itself described by its critics as the "**Lunatic Line**" for the audacity of its construction through 900 kilometres of unmapped East African wilderness is now Kenya's **Standard Gauge Railway (SGR)**, connecting Nairobi and Mombasa and providing one of the most convenient and most scenic surface access routes to the Tsavo ecosystem.

The **Tsavo Conservation Area**, of which the two national parks form the core, encompasses an even larger network of community and private conservancies, ranches and wildlife corridors including the extraordinary community lands of the Shompole and Olkirimatian Conservancies in the south and the **Mbulia Conservation Area** adjacent to Satao Camp that together protect the dispersal range and migratory routes of the Tsavo elephant population across a landscape many times the size of the parks themselves. Conservation organisation including **Tsavo Trust**, **Save the Elephants**, the **David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust** and the **Big Life Foundation** operate across this broader landscape, deploying aerial surveillance, rapid-response anti-poaching units and community engagement programmes that collectively represent some of the most effective wildlife protection operations in East Africa.

THE VARD AFRICA PERSPECTIVE

Why We Love Tsavo and Why It Is a Vard Africa Essential

We love Tsavo for its **obstinate refusal to perform**. Unlike the Masai Mara where the density of game drives, the concentration of animals and the frequency of Big Five sightings create an experience of remarkable intensity but sometimes of remarkable similarity from one vehicle to the next Tsavo simply exists, vast and indifferent, and invites guests to find it in its own terms and on its own schedule.

We love it for the **silence**. In Tsavo East, driving through the open plains an hour from the nearest camp, the silence is of a quality and a depth that is increasingly rare in the world not the silence of absence, but the silence of wilderness so large that the sounds of human activity simply disappear into it.

We love it for the **David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust's extraordinary portfolio** of eco-lodges: three properties Ithumba Hill, Ithumba Camp and Ithumba Private in the north, Galdessa Camp and Galdessa Little on the Galana River, and the extraordinary Umani Springs in the Kibwezi Forest that together constitute the most important and most moving conservation-focused accommodation offering in East Africa. To stay at any of these properties, to participate in the elephant orphan programme, to watch a young elephant encounter a wild herd for the first time, is to be involved directly, personally and unforgettably in one of the great conservation achievements of our era.

We love **Finch Hattons** for its name and for what it stands for the memory of a man, **Denys Finch Hatton**, who understood before most people that the African wilderness was worth protecting rather than exploiting, and who lived that conviction with the style and the seriousness that the conviction deserves. More than 30 years of luxury safari excellence in Tsavo West is the tribute his name has earned.

And we love **Tsavo** because it is, genuinely, one of Kenya's best-kept secrets less visited than the Mara, less marketed than Amboseli, less understood than the northern parks, but no less extraordinary than any of them, and in certain specific, irreplaceable ways, far more.

OUR ACCOMMODATION & TRADE PARTNERS IN TSAVO EAST

The following properties are presented in order of their position within the Tsavo East ecosystem from the remote northern zone at Ithumba through the central park territory to the southern sector on the Galana River.

ITHUMBA HILL CAMP

David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust | Northern Tsavo East | The Elevated Sanctuary

Location: Ithumba Hill Camp occupies an **elevated position halfway up Ithumba Hill** in the **remote northern area of Tsavo East National Park** one of the most rarely visited and most pristinely wild sections of a park whose total area already dwarfs most national parks in Africa. The property commands **breathtaking views** across Tsavo's northern landscape, with giant baobabs silhouetted in the foreground and the ancient Yatta Plateau visible on the horizon. **Accessible by air** from Nairobi's Wilson Airport in approximately **50 minutes** to the Ithumba Airstrip, or by the **new Kenya SGR railway** (2 hours from Nairobi to Kibwezi Station, followed by a 1–2-hour road transfer on good roads).

Introduction & History

Ithumba Hill Camp opened in **2015** as the newest and most luxurious property in the **David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (DSWT)**'s portfolio of eco-lodges created specifically to offer a level of refined comfort that allows guests visiting the Trust's extraordinary **Ithumba Elephant Reintegration Unit** to do so in surroundings of genuine architectural beauty and physical elegance. The Trust, founded by **Dame Daphne Sheldrick** in memory of her husband David Sheldrick (the first warden of Tsavo East National Park), operates the world's most successful orphaned elephant rescue and rehabilitation programme rescuing, hand-raising and reintegrating into the wild over 260 orphaned elephants since the programme began in the 1970s, a conservation achievement of global significance and emotional power that has changed the world's understanding of elephant intelligence, family bonds and the capacity for recovery from trauma.

The **Ithumba Reintegration Unit** located close to the camp is the facility where young elephants, after their initial hand-raising at the DSWT's famous **Nairobi Nursery**, are transferred to begin the gradual, multi-year process of reintegration with the wild herds of northern Tsavo. Wild-born babies from the ex-orphan elephants who have successfully returned to the wild now visit the stockades regularly bringing with them the

most extraordinary evidence of the programmes success: wild-born calves, the next generation of the Tsavo elephant population, whose very existence is the Trust's most profound achievement.

Ithumba Hill Camp directly contributes to the conservation of the northern Tsavo East wilderness through **supporting KWS Anti-Poaching operations, donating equipment to the KWS Rapid Response Unit, helping refurbish KWS headquarters, maintaining the northern boundary electric fenceline, digging boreholes and waterholes** to provide water for wildlife, and **maintaining the road network** used for security and anti-poaching patrols.

Ownership & Management.

Ithumba Hill Camp is **owned and managed by the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust** a globally recognised conservation organisation whose work in elephant rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration is the gold standard of its kind in Africa. All revenues from the camp contribute directly to the Trust's conservation operations in the northern Tsavo area.

To stay at Ithumba Hill Camp, guests must be current foster parents to one of the DSWT's orphaned elephants. Adoption can be arranged through the Trust's website at the time of booking.

Intimate Luxury Safari living— Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements.

Ithumba Hill Camp accommodates **up to 8 guests** in **4 spacious ensuite raised tented bedrooms** on **exclusive use** basis no other guest group shares the property during your stay.

Each tent is set on an elevated wooden platform with **Lamu-style carved wooden doors, floor-to-ceiling netting** that allows the landscape to enter the tent visually and the Tsavo breeze to flow through continuously. The **ensuite bathrooms** are exposed to the African sky an open-air shower under the stars that is among the most memorable bathing experiences in East Africa. Each tent has a **generous raised balcony with lounge chairs** for private wildlife watching and reading in the bush.

The **mess area** connected by impressive elevated walkways includes a dining room and lounge offering fabulous views over Tsavo's northern landscape. High on the hill, commanding magnificent views backed by granite boulders, the **private swimming pool and terrace** is curved into the rocks for complete seclusion the ideal place for sundowners, stargazing and the midday rest that the Tsavo heat demands.

The **Special Access Pool Terrace** at the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust's Ithumba Reintegration Unit is available to Ithumba Hill guests for sunbathing and stargazing a privilege of considerable rarity.

Solar-powered electricity. Self-catering basis with a **trained resident chef** guests provide their own food and drink (comprehensive shopping list provided on request). WiFi intermittently available.

Amenities & Facilities

The camp operates with a trained chef, waiters, room stewards and guides. The hilltop pool is one of the most spectacular private plunge pools in the Tsavo ecosystem its rock-carved design and panoramic views make it exceptional. Elevated walkways connecting all areas. Private sundowner locations.

Activities at Ithumba Hill Camp

The Elephant Orphan Visits (Exclusive Access) The defining experience of Ithumba Hill Camp. Guests are invited to join the Trust's elephant orphans and their wild friends at the **Ithumba stockades at sunrise and sunset**, and at the celebrated **midday mud bath and feeding session** at 11am. Wild ex-orphans frequently return with their wild-born calves the extraordinary living evidence of the programmer's success. This is not a performance or a tourist attraction but a genuine, deeply personal encounter with young animals whose lives have been shaped by human care and who are returning, on their own terms, to the wild. It is among the most moving wildlife experiences available anywhere in Africa.

- ✓ **Game Drives in the Northern Area of Tsavo East** The northern zone of Tsavo East is one of the least visited and most pristinely wild sections of the park ideal for **wildlife photographers** whose requirements include extraordinary light, magnificent views and the freedom to position the vehicle without competing with other vehicles. **Mudanda Rock** (the mile-long inselberg above a natural dam that draws hundreds of elephants in the dry season), the **Yatta Plateau** (the world's longest lava flow), **Lugard Falls on the Galana River** (the water-worn rock formations at the falls are among Tsavo's most photographically extraordinary features) and the remote northern plains where lion, leopard, kudu, gerenuk and wild dog are all regularly encountered.
- ✓ **Guided Bush Walks along the Tiva River** — Accompanied by an **armed Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) ranger**, guests explore the riverine woodland and rocky terrain around the Tiva River on foot an experience of complete immersion in the Tsavo ecosystem at ground level, where tracks in the sand tell the story of the previous night's wildlife movements and where the scale and the silence of the north Tsavo wilderness becomes fully comprehensible.
- ✓ **Guided Hike up Ithumba Mountain** — A longer, more strenuous walk for active guests: the summit of Ithumba Hill provides a panoramic view of the northern Tsavo East landscape that is genuinely extraordinary the Yatta Plateau visible in one direction, the distant Galana River in another, and the vast, apparently endless savannah in every direction.
- ✓ **Night Game Drives** — The nocturnal world of northern Tsavo East includes **lions, leopards, spotted hyena, genets, civet cats** and the remarkable bat-eared fox all best encountered after dark on drives that give guests access to the park's hidden evening life.
- ✓ **Bird Walks** — Northern Tsavo East is outstanding for birdwatching, with **raptors, hornbills, bee-eaters, starlings** and migratory species all accessible within and around the camp grounds.
- ✓ **Stargazing** — The minimal light pollution of northern Tsavo East produces a night sky of extraordinary density. The camp's elevated hilltop position provides an unobstructed 360-degree view of the African sky one of the finest stargazing environments available from any Kenyan safari camp.
- ✓ **Bush Sundowners** — The camp team sets up private sundowner locations across the surrounding wilderness, with the Tsavo sunset among the most vivid and most photographically spectacular in Kenya.

- ✓ **Conservation Work Engagement** — Guests can learn about the KWS anti-poaching operations supported by the camp and the Trust's broader conservation work in northern Tsavo, including the electric fenceline maintenance, borehole operations and aerial surveillance programme.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

- ✓ Self-catering with a private resident chef who prepares all meals from guest-supplied provisions.
- ✓ The kitchen is fully equipped with refrigerator, freezer, cooker, oven, gas barbecue and ice cream machine.
- ✓ Meals are taken in the elevated lounge/dining room with views across northern Tsavo, on the pool terrace or al fresco under the baobabs.

Health & Safety

- ✓ Children under 5 not encouraged due to elevated decks and walkways.
- ✓ Children over 5 must be supervised at all times. Solar electricity; hot water solar-powered.
- ✓ No WiFi.
- ✓ Armed KWS ranger accompanies all walks.

Why We Love Ithumba Hill Camp

We love Ithumba Hill for the **moment you see the ex-orphans return with their wild-born calves** wild baby elephants born free in the Tsavo bush, approaching the stockades where their mothers were once rehabilitated, as curious and as unafraid as if the boundary between wild and habituated had no meaning. That moment distils the entire David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust programme into a single, overwhelming image of what conservation can achieve when it is pursued with patience, love and absolute commitment across decades.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Book the 11am mud bath visit on your first day watching the orphan elephants play in the red mud while the keepers who have raised them since infancy stand among them is a sensory and emotional experience that permanently changes your relationship with these animals. Then take the bush walk along the Tiva River early on the second morning the tracking and the silence and the scale together produce the experience of being genuinely small in a genuinely large wilderness.

Families & Children

- ✓ Ithumba Hill Camp is outstanding for families with children over 5 years.
- ✓ The elephant encounters uniquely accessible and deeply personal are among the most formative wildlife experiences that a child can have in Kenya.
- ✓ The pool, the wildlife, the elevated walkways and the camp's overall character of wilderness adventure make it ideal for curious, active children and their parents.

ITHUMBA PRIVATE CAMP

David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust | Northern Tsavo East | The Baobab Sanctuary

Location: Ithumba Private Camp occupies a **stunningly crafted elevated position between natural granite kopjes and giant baobab trees** — an independent annex to Ithumba Hill Camp, offering a completely distinct aesthetic and physical experience within the same extraordinary northern Tsavo East landscape. The two camps share the Ithumba Airstrip (50 minutes from Nairobi's Wilson Airport) and provide different but equally extraordinary access to the DSWT's Ithumba Reintegration Unit.

Introduction & History

Ithumba Private Camp was created as a **luxury and intimate annex to Ithumba Hill** a property whose design concept is defined by a **fusion of natural elements** that blend seamlessly with the outside, exploiting the extraordinary raw material of its position among granite kopjes and ancient baobabs to create an experience of almost complete immersion in the Tsavo landscape. Where Ithumba Hill derives its character from its elevated hilltop panorama, Ithumba Private derives its character from the intimate relationship between its built structure and the natural rock formations, trees and vegetation within which it is positioned.

The **wooden walkways weave between the branches of giant baobabs** the great grandfather trees of the Tsavo landscape, some estimated to be over a thousand years old in a design that prioritises the preservation of every existing natural feature. The result is a camp of remarkable visual beauty that feels less like architecture and more like an exceptionally comfortable natural platform from which to observe the wild world.

Like Ithumba Hill Camp, Ithumba Private is **owned and operated by the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust**, and **all revenues support the Trust's conservation operations** in northern Tsavo East. Guests must be **current foster parents** to one of the Trust's orphaned elephants.

Intimate Luxury safari living — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Ithumba Private accommodates **up to 6 guests** across **3 beautifully appointed ensuite bedrooms** exclusive use only, in the same tradition as all DSWT properties.

Each bedroom features the same quality of design as the camp's extraordinary exterior the fusion of natural materials (wood, stone, thatch), generous mosquito-netted bedding, en-suite bathrooms and private verandas with views across the baobab-studded landscape. The sense of being positioned within the natural world rather than placed alongside it is consistent throughout. Solar lighting and power. Self-catering with a trained chef. WiFi and mobile reception intermittently available.

Activities at Ithumba Private Camp

All activities available at Ithumba Hill Camp are equally available to Ithumba Private guests:

- ✓ **The Elephant Orphan Visits (Exclusive Access)** — The same extraordinary access to the Ithumba stockades at sunrise and sunset and the 11am mud bath session as Ithumba Hill guests — the defining experience of all three Ithumba properties.
- ✓ **Game Drives in the Northern Area of Tsavo East** — The spectacular northern zone with Mudanda Rock, the Yatta Plateau, Lugard Falls and the remote northern plains.
- ✓ **Guided Bush Walks along the Tiva River** — Accompanied by an armed KWS ranger along the extraordinary riverine environment of the Tiva.
- ✓ **Guided Hike up Ithumba Mountain** — The panoramic summit view across northern Tsavo East.
- ✓ **Night Game Drives** — The nocturnal wildlife of northern Tsavo including lion, leopard, hyena and the smaller nocturnal carnivores.
- ✓ **Bird Walks** — Northern Tsavo's exceptional avifauna including raptors and migratory species.
- ✓ **Baobab Tree Exploration** — The ancient baobab trees within which the camp is positioned are among the most magnificent in Tsavo. Guided explorations of these extraordinary trees — some over a thousand years old, their hollow trunks used as water sources by elephants for generations — provide a different and deeply botanical dimension to the camp experience.
- ✓ **Stargazing from the Kopje Terraces** — The granite kopje terraces of the camp provide exceptional elevated stargazing positions with the added character of the ancient rock formations framing the sky.
- ✓ **Conservation Engagement** — All guests can learn about and engage with the Trust's conservation operations, anti-poaching activities and elephant reintegration programme.
- ✓ **Bush Sundowners and Dining** — Private sundowner locations selected within the camp's extraordinary kopje and baobab landscape.

Why We Love Ithumba Private

We love Ithumba Private for its **architectural intelligence** for the decision to build between the baobabs and through the kopjes rather than despite them, producing a camp whose character is entirely derived from the extraordinary natural features it inhabits.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Ithumba Private is the ideal choice for smaller families or couples who want the most intimate and most personal version of the Ithumba experience. Request the tent that opens most directly toward the largest baobab and set your alarm for before dawn on at least one morning, when the light on the ancient tree in the first minutes of sunrise produces one of Tsavo's most beautiful natural photographs.

Families & Children

- ✓ Ithumba Private is ideal for small families or groups of 4 to 6 guests.
- ✓ The baobab and kopje environment provides extraordinary natural exploration for older children.
- ✓ Children under 5 not encouraged due to elevated structures.

ITHUMBA CAMP

David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust | Northern Tsavo East | The Original Bush Home

Location: Ithumba Camp sits at the **base of Ithumba Hill** in the remote northern sector of Tsavo East National Park the original and most characterful of the three DSWT Ithumba properties, described by those who know it as *"rustic simplicity at its very best"*. The camp overlooks the extraordinary views of the Yatta Plateau and commands a small waterhole that attracts resident wildlife throughout the day.

Introduction & History

Ithumba Camp is the **original** of the DSWT's bush properties the camp *"to be built following the creation of the Ithumba Rehabilitation Unit"* and the one that established the model of exclusive-use, conservation-focused accommodation that the Trust has refined across all its subsequent properties. Where Ithumba Hill and Ithumba Private are newer and more architecturally refined, Ithumba Camp possesses the particular character that comes from being the original expression of an idea: the feeling of having arrived not at a hotel that happens to be near a conservation project but at the conservation project's own home, where the boundary between guest accommodation and working wildlife unit is deliberately permeable.

The camp is the most rustic and the most authentically *"safari home"* of the three Ithumba properties and for many guests who have stayed at all three, it is their favourite precisely for this reason.

Intimate Luxury Safari living — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Ithumba Camp accommodates **up to 8 guests** across **4 large safari tents** under **makuti thatched roofs** each connecting to an **open-air bathroom** (the outdoor shower experience under the Tsavo sky is one of the most celebrated features of the camp) and featuring a **dressing room** and spacious **furnished veranda** with views of the camp waterhole and the surrounding wilderness.

Exclusive use: no other group will be booked simultaneously.

The main building comprises a dining room, lounge and a small roof terrace with views into the bush the **heart of the camp**. Self-catering with a skilled resident cook. Well-equipped kitchen. Limited solar electricity.

The camp waterhole attracts **resident wildlife throughout the day** guests report leopards, lions, elephants, buffalo, dikdik and numerous bird species visiting during their stays.

Activities at Ithumba Camp

- ✓ **The Elephant Orphan Visits (Exclusive Access)** — The same access to the Ithumba Rehabilitation Unit at sunrise and sunset and the 11am mud bath as at the other Ithumba properties. The camp's proximity to the unit makes these visits particularly immediate and particularly moving.
- ✓ **Game Drives in the Unique Northern Area of Tsavo East** — The remote northern zone with its extraordinary wildlife, minimal vehicle pressure and the specific photographic opportunities of its excellent light and magnificent vistas.
- ✓ **Guided Walks along the Tiva River** — The riverine environment, guided by armed KWS rangers, with tracking, birdwatching and the specific pleasures of exploring a wild African waterway on foot.
- ✓ **Guided Hike up Ithumba Mountain** — The panoramic summit experience from the hill directly above the camp.
- ✓ **Night Game Drives** — Nocturnal Tsavo including lion, leopard, hyena, genet and the remarkable lesser galago (bushbaby) that inhabits the camp's acacia trees.
- ✓ **Waterhole Watching from Camp** — One of Ithumba Camp's most characterful activities: simply sitting on the mess building terrace or the tent veranda and watching the wildlife arrive at the camp waterhole throughout the day. The intimacy of having animals come to you — rather than driving to find them — is a safari experience of a different and deeply pleasurable quality.
- ✓ **Bird Walks** — Tsavo's extraordinary avifauna explored with a guide in the early morning, when bird activity is at its peak.
- ✓ **Star Gazing** — The dark sky of northern Tsavo from the camp's open positions produces a star field of exceptional density and beauty.
- ✓ **Excursions to the Tiva River and Yatta Plateau** — Extended game drives that reach the Galana River's principal features and the extraordinary geological spectacle of the Yatta Plateau.
- ✓ **Bush Sundowners** — Private sundowner locations set up by the camp team in the northern wilderness.
- ✓ **Community and Conservation Engagement** — Anti-poaching programme visits and conservation briefings from the Trust's team.

Why We Love Ithumba Camp

We love Ithumba Camp for the **outdoor shower**. It sounds like a small thing, but standing under a hot shower on an open platform with the Tsavo night sky above and the sounds of the African bush around you is one of those experiences simple, physical, immediate that permanently enriches the memory of a safari. Everything else that Ithumba Camp is flows from the same directness, the same refusal to separate the guest experience from the natural world it inhabits.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Ithumba Camp is the ideal Tsavo East introduction for guests on their first elephant-focused safari its intimate scale, the outdoor shower, the waterhole watching and the closeness to the elephant unit combine to produce a safari home experience of extraordinary warmth and authenticity. Ask the cook to prepare a full bush breakfast on the terrace on your first morning: the combination of the food, the view and the first sighting of elephants at the waterhole is the perfect Tsavo beginning.

Families & Children

Ithumba Camp is excellent for families with children over 5.

The camp's intimate scale, the outdoor bathroom adventure and the close wildlife encounters make it a genuinely memorable first safari property for younger travellers.

GALDESSA CAMP

David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust | Galana River, Southern Tsavo East | The River Palace

Location: Galdessa Camp sits on the **southern bank of the Galana River** concealed under a magnificent copse of **doum palms** and overlooking a reach of the river that is one of the most consistently wildlife-rich positions in all of Tsavo East. Located 15 kilometres upstream of the celebrated **Lugard Falls** and close to the ancient **Yatta Plateau**, the camp is accessible by **charter flight** (approximately 60 minutes from Nairobi) to Galdessa Airstrip, a few minutes from camp, or by road approximately **4.5 hours from Nairobi** or **3.5 hours from Mombasa**.

Introduction & History

Galdessa Camp is, by widespread agreement among those who know Tsavo East most intimately, one of the finest safari camps in East Africa a property whose combination of **river setting, wildlife density, architectural quality and culinary excellence** produces an experience that guests describe with a consistency of superlatives that is almost unique in the Kenya safari market.

The camp's position on the Galana River is at the heart of its extraordinary character. The river is the **lifeline of southern Tsavo East** in a semi-arid park where water is the organising principle of all wildlife movement, the permanent water of the Galana acts as a magnet that draws the park's wildlife to a single, extended ribbon of green riverine vegetation and fresh water. Hippos inhabit the pools directly in front of the camp their grunts and splashes audible from the dining area and the tented bedrooms throughout the day and night. **Resident bull elephants** visit the camp regularly to feast on the doum palm fruit that falls at the river's edge one in particular, known affectionately by the camp team as "**Eddie**", is a regular and very particular presence in the camp landscape.

The camp was acquired by the **David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust** and has been developed to the highest standards of eco-luxury while maintaining its foundational character: the **Galana stone floors**, the **thatched roofs with their distinctly coastal atmosphere**, the driftwood beams and the doum palm fronds that give the main building its extraordinary visual quality. The **Italian culinary heritage** of the original camp founders lives on in the kitchen the food at Galdessa is consistently described as exceptional.

Within the vicinity of Galdessa, the Trust has worked closely with **Kenya Wildlife Service** on the **black rhino reintroduction project** making Galdessa the gateway to the largest unfenced black rhino population in Africa, with **over 51 black rhinos** inhabiting the surrounding area in the Trust's unique management arrangement.

Ownership & Management

Galdessa Camp is **owned and operated by the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust**. **Foster parents** to the Trust's orphaned elephants receive special access to the Voi Reintegration Unit during their stay (approximately 1.5 hours' drive from camp).

Intimate Luxury Safari living — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Galdessa Camp is divided into **Main Camp** (accommodating 10 guests across 5 tents) and the adjacent **Private Camp** (accommodating 6 guests across 3 tents in exclusive-use format, with its own lounge, dining area and personal chef). Both sections can be booked together for larger groups of up to 16 guests.

Main Camp Tents (5) — **Thatched bandas** (semi-tented bungalows) on **wooden platforms** with canvas walls and **open verandas** — each positioned to provide views of the Galana River through the doum palm fronds. En-suite bathrooms with **hot showers** and flush toilets. Large beds with **mosquito netting**. Lounge chairs. Natural décor in earthy, river-toned neutrals. Solar lighting. Eco-friendly bath products. **Two luxury suites** feature **private viewing platforms** where the camp staff will serve meals — the most intimate and most exclusive accommodation option in the main camp.

Private Camp (3 tents) — A fully separate camp section with its own lounge, dining area, personal chef and dedicated service team. Three beautifully appointed tents with the same quality of finish as the main camp. Available on exclusive use for groups of up to 6 guests. The definitive Galdessa experience for privacy and personal service.

The **central building** of the main camp houses a spacious dining area, bar and large comfortable lounge where guests gather and relax. The **Galana stone floors** and **thatched roof** give it the specific coastal atmosphere that was the original owners' most distinctive architectural gift to the property.

Amenities & Facilities

- ✓ **Swimming pool** in the main camp with views of the Galana River.
- ✓ **Massage room** with professional masseuses available on request.
- ✓ Solar power and water treatment plant.
- ✓ Full camp staff including chef, waiters, room stewards and guides.
- ✓ Self-catering basis (guests provide food and drink; comprehensive shopping guide provided).

Activities at Galdessa Camp

Galana River Wildlife Watching from Camp — The most immediate and most effortless of Galdessa's wildlife experiences. The Galana is alive from morning to evening hippos in the pools, Nile crocodiles on the banks, elephants crossing and recrossing to reach the doum palm fruit, buffalo watering at dawn, and the extraordinary resident bull elephants (including Eddie) who visit the camp with a regularity that makes them as much a part of the camp's daily life as the staff. Wildlife encounters are guaranteed simply by sitting on the veranda of one's tent or at the dining table.

Morning and Afternoon Game Drives in Southern Tsavo East — Expert guides in custom 4×4 vehicles explore the extraordinary southern Tsavo East landscape — the Galana River system, the Yatta Plateau, Lugard Falls, Mudanda Rock and Aruba Dam, where wildlife concentrations during the dry season are extraordinary. The park's **red elephants** in large herds, **lions**, **cheetahs**, **Grevy's zebra**, **lesser kudu**, **gerenuk**, **fringe-eared oryx** and the full range of Tsavo's remarkable wildlife diversity. Very few other vehicles in the area.

Walking Safaris along the Galana River and Sand Rivers — Guided walks along the river bank and the park's seasonal sand rivers provide ground-level encounters with Tsavo's ecosystem of extraordinary intimacy. The guides' knowledge of tracks, signs, plant ecology and birdlife transforms a bush walk from exercise into a complete natural history lesson.

Access to the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust's Black Rhino Conservation Area — One of Galdessa's most distinctive offerings: exclusive access to the area where over 51 black rhinos roam in the largest unfenced black rhino population in Africa. Game drives in this section are accompanied by sanctuary rangers and provide sightings of these critically endangered animals in conditions of near-complete wilderness.

Bush Breakfasts — The camp team sets up breakfast tables in extraordinary positions across the surrounding landscape — beneath enormous fig trees on the river bank, on a rocky outcrop above the Galana, or beside the Yatta Plateau's ancient lava edge. The combination of food, setting and wildlife is the defining Galdessa morning experience.

Bush Picnics and Sundowners — Extended game drive excursions with picnic lunches set in remote Tsavo locations. Private sundowner positions at the Galana River as the light turns gold over the doum palms.

Foster Parent Access to Voi Elephant Orphans — For guests who are DSWT foster parents, an exclusive day excursion can be arranged to visit the **Voi Reintegration Unit** and the Voi elephant orphans' private afternoon mud bath (approximately 1.5 hours' drive from camp, with significant sections passing through outstanding game viewing country).

Birdwatching — The Galana River ecosystem supports an extraordinary diversity of waterbirds, forest birds and the park's over 500 recorded species. Morning birdwatching walks with the camp's guide produce exceptional species counts.

Night Game Drives — The nocturnal world of southern Tsavo East includes leopard, spotted hyena, civet, genet, bush baby and the remarkable concentration of owls that inhabit the riverine forest. Night drives from Galdessa consistently produce encounters of exceptional quality.

Cultural Visits to Local Villages — Arrangements can be made for visits to the Kamba and Maasai communities who live in the landscapes surrounding the park boundary.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

The **Italian culinary heritage** of Galdessa's founders has been carried forward and refined: the food is genuinely and consistently exceptional by any standard, described by guests as the finest they have eaten at any Tsavo property.

The riverside dining experience with hippos audible in the water below and the doum palms swaying in the river breeze above creates a setting for meals that is unique in the Kenyan safari landscape. River-fresh Nile perch appears on the menu when conditions allow.

Health & Safety

All wildlife activities are guided by experienced KWS-licensed guides. The Galana River contains **hippos and Nile crocodiles** river swimming is not permitted. Solar-powered. Water treatment plant. Medical assistance accessible via charter flight. Vard Africa emergency network coverage.

Why We Love Galdessa Camp

We love Galdessa for **Eddie** — the resident bull elephant who arrives at the camp at his own convenience to eat doum palm fruit, utterly indifferent to the presence of guests within 10 metres, as if the camp is simply a feature of his personal range that happens occasionally to contain people. That specific quality of intimacy a wild elephant so accustomed to the camp's presence that the boundary between wildlife and guest dissolves is what the best Tsavo East camps produce. And for the food, which is extraordinary.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Book the Private Camp if you are a couple or a family group of up to 6 the dedicated chef and personal dining area make the experience of the river significantly more intimate. And arrange the dawn game drive to Lugard Falls: the Galana River at first light, with the mist rising from the water and the hippos returning from their night grazing, is one of Tsavo East's most beautiful hours.

Families & Children

Galdessa Camp is excellent for families. The river wildlife watching from camp completely safe, endlessly engaging and requiring no physical exertion is particularly suitable for children of all ages. The Private Camp's exclusive configuration is ideal for families wanting complete privacy.

GALDESSA LITTLE

David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust | Galana River, Southern Tsavo East | The River Intimate

Location: Galdessa Little occupies the **same remarkable position on the Galana River** as its larger neighbour Galdessa Camp the same doum palms, the same river views, the same Yatta Plateau backdrop in a compact, intimate format that accommodates smaller groups in conditions of complete privacy and complete exclusivity.

Introduction & History

Galdessa Little is the smaller, more intimate companion to Galdessa Camp a **three-tent exclusive-use property** on the Galana River that delivers the full power of the Galdessa location and experience in a format tailored to small groups, couples and families who want the entire camp to themselves. Owned and operated by the **David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust**, Galdessa Little can also be booked in tandem with Galdessa Camp for **larger groups of up to 16 guests** creating, in combination, one of the most complete and most generously equipped private safari experiences available anywhere in Tsavo.

Intimate Luxury safari living — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Galdessa Little accommodates **up to 6 guests** across **3 beautifully appointed tented bandas** the same design quality and material vocabulary as the main camp, with thatched roofs, Galana stone floors, wooden platforms and river-facing verandas.

- ✓ En-suite bathrooms.
- ✓ Large mosquito-netted beds.
- ✓ Exclusive-use only.

The central buildings provide a spacious dining area, bar and lounge with the signature coastal atmosphere the thatched roof and Galana stone floor and the river view that makes every meal at Galdessa a wildlife experience as well as a culinary one.

Activities at Galdessa Little

All activities available at Galdessa Camp are equally available to Galdessa Little guests, including:

- ✓ **Galana River Wildlife Watching from Camp** — The same extraordinary river dynamic with hippos, crocodiles, elephants and the resident wildlife.
- ✓ **Morning and Afternoon Game Drives** — Lugard Falls, Yatta Plateau, Mudanda Rock, Aruba Dam and the park's southern plains in private 4x4 vehicles.
- ✓ **Walking Safaris along the Galana River and Sand Rivers** — Guided bush walks in the riverine environment.
- ✓ **Access to the DSWT Black Rhino Conservation Area** — Escorted access to Africa's largest unfenced black rhino population.
- ✓ **Foster Parent Access to Voi Elephant Orphans** — For DSWT foster parents: the exclusive afternoon mud bath visit.
- ✓ **Bush Breakfasts, Bush Picnics and Sundowners** — Remote Tsavo dining experiences set in extraordinary locations.

- ✓ **Night Game Drives** — Leopard, hyena, civet, genet and the nocturnal world of the Galana River ecosystem.
- ✓ **Birdwatching** — River and savannah birds throughout the ecosystem with expert guides.
- ✓ **Bush Dining** — Romantic candlelit dinners on the river bank or extended private bush picnic experiences.

Why We Love Galdessa Little

We love Galdessa Little for offering **everything that makes Galdessa extraordinary in a format that is perfectly calibrated for the most intimate and personal safari experience**. A couple alone at the Galana River, watching Eddie arrive at dusk to eat doum palm fruit, with no other guests and their own chef this is African wilderness at its most complete and most personal.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Galdessa Little is the finest choice for honeymoon couples in the Tsavo East ecosystem the exclusivity, the river, the food and the wildlife combine in a configuration of almost perfect romantic completeness. Book at least 3 nights to experience the full rhythm of the Galana River across its daily and nightly cycles.

Families & Children

Galdessa Little's intimate scale and exclusive-use format make it ideal for small families or multi-generation family groups seeking the Galana River experience in complete privacy.

UMANI SPRINGS

David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust | Kibwezi Forest, Chyulu Hills | The Forest Oasis

Location: Umani Springs occupies a uniquely special position within the greater Tsavo Conservation Area not within either national park but within the **ancient 18,000-acre Kibwezi Forest** at the **eastern foot of the Chyulu Hills**, bordering **Chyulu Hills National Park**.

This extraordinary groundwater forest one of Kenya's last remaining groundwater woodlands, gazetted in 1936 and now managed by the DSWT in partnership with the Kenya Forest Service under a 30-year conservation concession is accessible by road in **3 to 4 hours from Nairobi**, or in just **2 hours via the SGR railway** to Kibwezi Station, followed by a 15-kilometre drive through the forest to the camp.

Introduction & History

Umani Springs is the most **atmospherically distinct** of all the DSWT's eco-lodges an oasis of cool, green, bird-rich woodland that provides the most striking possible contrast to the sun-baked, ochre-red landscapes of the Tsavo parks. Entering the Kibwezi Forest from the hot plains of the Tsavo corridor is like walking through a door from one world to another: the temperature drops, the light changes from the harsh directness of open savannah to the dappled, green-filtered quality of ancient forest, and the sounds change from the dry-land calls of Tsavo's acacia birds to the extraordinary richness of a forest ecosystem that supports species found nowhere else in the Tsavo Conservation Area.

The **Kibwezi Forest** is a **biodiversity hotspot** renowned internationally among ornithologists, botanists and entomologists for its extraordinary wealth of **butterflies** (over 200 species), **birds** (including multiple forest-specialist species and significant populations of rare and endemic birds), **botanical diversity** (ancient groundwater forest plants including species restricted to this and very few other East African localities) and the extraordinary **crystal-clear springs** that give the camp its name and that feed the surrounding landscape with water of exceptional purity.

The **Umani Springs Reintegration Unit** the DSWT's newest and most specialist facility houses physically compromised elephants: orphans who, due to injuries or disabilities, require a different kind of reintegration environment from the open savannah of the Ithumba and Voi units. The unit provides a protected forest sanctuary where these special-needs elephants can live semi-wild lives within the security of the forest, and guest access to this unit is among the most emotionally powerful wildlife encounters in the DSWT's entire operation.

Since **2011**, the Trust has made **enormous progress in reversing environmental degradation** of the Kibwezi Forest its wild residents are flourishing, the natural springs are protected, and the broader ecosystem is rapidly regenerating under the Trust's management.

Ownership & Management

Umani Springs is **owned and operated by the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust**.

All revenues from the camp are used to offset the concession fees payable to the Kenya Forest Service and to fund the conservation and protection of the Kibwezi Forest ecosystem.

Foster parents to the Trust's orphaned elephants receive exclusive access to the Umani Springs Reintegration Unit.

Intimate Luxury safari living — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Umani Springs is a **small luxury bush home** intimate, personal and extremely comfortable accommodating **up to 10 guests** across **3 cottage-style bedroom areas** on exclusive use.

- ✓ **Cottage 1 (Family Unit, 2-storey)** — Built with families in mind: a twin bedroom with ensuite bathroom and private sitting room downstairs, a double bed upstairs with outdoor bathroom. A two-storey balcony wraps around the entire unit, allowing guests to sit literally amidst the Kibwezi Forest canopy.
- ✓ **Cottage 2 (2 generous twin beds)** — An ensuite bathroom, private sitting area, outdoor shower and a generous deck that overlooks the waterhole — one of the camp's most extraordinary wildlife viewing positions.
- ✓ **Cottage 3 (2 rooms)** — First room features generous single beds and ensuite bathroom; second features a double bed with outside bathroom. The entire unit is joined by a deck with stunning views of the Umani glade and its waterholes.
- ✓ The **main building** two structures connected by a walkway houses a large communal lounge and bar (with oversized furniture perfect for post-activity relaxation), a stylish dining area with a long dark wooden table and the camp's natural spring-fed **swimming pool**

surrounded by beautiful gardens.

The camp is designed in a **coastal style** with high thatched ceilings, large netted windows, alfresco showers and sweeping verandas.

- ✓ Fully staffed: trained chef, waiters, room stewards.

Two waterholes and a salt lick in the camp grounds draw elephants, bushbuck and an extraordinary variety of birdlife throughout the day.

Activities at Umani Springs

- ✓ **The Umani Springs Elephant Orphan Visits (Exclusive Access)** — The most uniquely moving of all the DSWT elephant encounter experiences. The Umani Springs unit houses physically compromised elephant's orphans with disabilities or conditions that require specialist care who have found, in the forest sanctuary, a protected environment where they can live full and enriched lives. The stockade visits at sunrise and sunset and the midday mud bath provide an encounter with animals whose stories are particularly poignant and whose resilience is particularly inspiring.
- ✓ **Guided Forest Walks in the Kibwezi Forest** — Walking through one of Kenya's last remaining ancient groundwater forests with an expert naturalist guide is one of the most enriching natural history experiences available from any camp in the Tsavo Conservation Area. The guides interpret the extraordinary botanical diversity, the butterfly populations, the bird calls and the ecological significance of the groundwater forest environment with a depth of knowledge that transforms a walk in beautiful woodland into a complete natural history lecture.
- ✓ **Birdwatching from the Elevated Birding Platform** — The camp's dedicated elevated birding platform overlooks the forest canopy and the waterhole, providing exceptional positions for observing the extraordinary forest bird community, the waterhole birds and the numerous migratory species that pass through or stop at the Kibwezi Forest on their East African journeys.
- ✓ **Forest Drives in the Kibwezi Forest and Surrounding Areas** — Game drives through the forest and into the broader Kibwezi conservation area explore the full range of the forest's wildlife diversity.
- ✓ **Nature and Game Drives to Explore the Broader Tsavo Conservation Area** — Day excursions to Tsavo West's **Mzima Springs** (hippos and crocodiles in crystal-clear water, with an underwater viewing chamber), **Chyulu Hills hiking**, **Kisula Caves in the Chyulu Hills** (exploring the lava tubes of this volcanic landscape), and the full range of Tsavo West's attractions accessible from the Kibwezi Forest base.
- ✓ **Foster Parent Access to Voi Elephant Orphans** — For DSWT foster parents: an exclusive day excursion to the Voi unit for the private afternoon mud bath (additional arrangement).
- ✓ **Swimming in the Natural Spring-Fed Pool** — One of the most distinctive facilities at any DSWT camp: the camp's swimming pool, fed by the pure waters of the Umani Springs themselves, is surrounded by extraordinary gardens and provides a setting for swimming unlike any conventional pool.
- ✓ **Badminton, Croquet and Volleyball** — The camp's lawns provide the setting for a range of lawn games that are particularly popular with families and groups on longer stays.
- ✓ **Butterfly Observation and Photography** — The Kibwezi Forest's extraordinary butterfly diversity makes it one of the finest locations for butterfly observation and photography in Kenya. A specialist butterfly guide can be arranged for guests with particular interest in this remarkable aspect of the forest's biodiversity.
- ✓ **Botanical Walks** — For guests with an interest in East African flora, guided botanical walks through the forest with interpretation of the groundwater forest's remarkable plant communities, including species found in very few other East African locations.
- ✓ **Stargazing** — The forest clearing above the camp provides excellent stargazing positions with the forest canopy framing the sky.
- ✓ **Conservation Programme Engagement** — Guests can learn about and engage with the Trust's Kibwezi Forest conservation programme: the anti-poaching patrols, the electric fenceline maintenance, the reforestation programme and the broader story of the forest's recovery under the Trust's stewardship.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

- ✓ Self-catering with a skilled resident chef.
- ✓ The camp kitchen produces meals of warmth and quality that reflect both the forest environment and the DSWT team's care for guest wellbeing. The spring-fed pool setting, the forest clearing, the lawn and the main building's multiple indoor and outdoor dining positions provide beautiful settings for every meal.
- ✓ The camp's green, shaded environment makes al fresco dining a particular pleasure.

Health & Safety

- ✓ The Kibwezi Forest is a managed conservation area all wildlife activities are guided.
- ✓ Solar-powered.
- ✓ Spring-fed water supply.
- ✓ Medical assistance accessible via Nairobi (2 hours by SGR).
- ✓ Vard Africa emergency network coverage.

Why We Love Umani Springs

- ✓ We love Umani Springs for its **specific quality of comfort** the way in which the cool forest air, the crystal-clear pool, the extraordinary birdlife and the intimate setting of the three cottages combine with the emotionally powerful encounters at the Umani Springs
- ✓ Reintegration Unit to produce a camp experience of almost therapeutic completeness.
Guests arrive from the heat of Tsavo and enter a world of green, cool, bird-filled forest that feels like restoration.

Vard Africa Insider Note

The early morning visit to the elephant stockades at Umani Springs when the mist is still in the forest and the birds are beginning their dawn chorus and the physically compromised elephants emerge from the forest with their keepers for the first milk feed of the day is one of the most quietly powerful moments in any Kenyan safari. Bring a naturalist's notebook and spend a morning at the birding platform with the guide: the Kibwezi Forest's avian diversity is extraordinary.

Families & Children

- ✓ Umani Springs is **outstanding for families** the forest environment, the butterfly and bird diversity, the lawn games, the spring-fed pool and the elephant encounters all provide exceptional family activities of great depth and range.
- ✓ The family cottage configuration is specifically designed for parents with children. Children of all ages are warmly welcomed.

SATAO CAMP

Southern Cross Safaris | Central Tsavo East | The Classic Waterhole Camp

Location: Satao Camp sits in the **heart of Tsavo East National Park** the only camp in a vast stretch of over **1,000 square kilometres** of the park's central zone, its tents nestled among ancient **tamarind and acacia trees** overlooking the camp's own **natural waterhole**. Located approximately **160 kilometres from Mombasa** and **326 kilometres from Nairobi**, accessible by **Satao Airstrip** (approximately 1 hour from Nairobi by charter), by **road** or by the **SGR railway** to Voi Station (1 hour from camp).

Introduction & History

Satao Camp is named after **Satao** the legendary Tsavo East elephant, one of Africa's largest and most famous tuskers, who was tragically killed by poachers in 2014. His memory is honoured in the camp's name and in the conservation ethos that **Southern Cross Safaris** one of Kenya's most established and trusted safari operators has embedded in every aspect of the property's operation.

The camp's defining characteristic is its **waterhole** a natural water source in the seasonal Voi River ecosystem that has been enhanced and maintained to create a permanent wildlife magnet of extraordinary vitality. Watching from the camp's main lounge or from the private veranda of a tent, guests see the waterhole used by **elephants, zebra, buffalo, giraffe, impala, warthog, lions** and the remarkable variety of birds that gather at any permanent water source in a semi-arid environment. The **night-lit waterhole** extends the watching experience through the hours of darkness a genuine Around-the-Clock wildlife encounter that few Kenyan camps can match.

The **observation tower** provides an elevated vantage point for watching the waterhole after dark, adding the specific pleasure of seeing nocturnal species **genets, civet cats** and the remarkable **pearl-spotted owlette** that inhabits the tamarind trees that daylight drives rarely reveal.

Satao is a **member of the "Out of Africa Collection"** a selection of eco-luxury camps covering Kenya's principal national parks, whose shared commitment to authentic safari experience, conservation support and genuine African character connects them across the country's diverse safari landscapes.

Ownership & Management

Satao Camp is **owned and managed by Southern Cross Safaris (Mombasa)** one of Kenya's oldest and most respected safari companies, with decades of experience in operating authentic, responsible and high-quality camps in the Tsavo ecosystem. The camp is an **eco-friendly and conservation-committed** property that supports the **Global Alliance of National Parks**.

Awards & Recognition

Consistent listing by **Expert Africa, Africa Sky Safari** and multiple international luxury travel operators as one of the most authentic and most characterful camps in Tsavo East National Park. The camp's waterhole setting and the solitude of its location the only camp in a vast area of the park are its most consistently praised qualities.

Intimate Luxury Safari living — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Satao Camp accommodates guests across **20 authentic safari-style ensuite tents 16 standard and family tents and 4 suites**. All are positioned to overlook the waterhole.

Standard and Family Tents (16) Constructed with **sisal and boroti poles** topped with a **makuti roof** an ancient and climatically perfect construction that keeps the interior cool in Tsavo's heat while providing the authentic aesthetic of the safari camp tradition. Each tent features: an antique writing desk; racks with shelves for clothing and equipment; a **private furnished patio** with table and chairs overlooking the waterhole; and a **permanent en-suite bathroom** at the rear with shower, slate floors, single or double basins, and flush toilet. Queen, twin or family bed configurations available. **Wheelchair-accessible design** throughout; modified game drive vehicles available for guests with disabilities.

Suite Tents (4) — Larger than the standard tents and positioned **closest to the waterhole** the most intimately placed accommodation in the camp. The suites provide expanded living space, upgraded furnishings and the finest waterhole views from any Satao accommodation.

Amenities & Facilities

- ✓ **Restaurant** — The main dining room overlooks the Satao Oasis. The famous **200-year-old tamarind tree** shades the outdoor lunch area where guests watch elephants at the waterhole while eating. The kitchen produces local and international cuisine of consistent quality.
- ✓ **Bar** — The camp bar has become something of a legend in Tsavo East: the regular **genet** who drapes himself on an overhead rafter above the bar is one of the camp's most celebrated residents.
- ✓ **Campfire** — Evening gatherings around the fire for the sharing of the day's game drive stories and encounters.
- ✓ **Night-Lit Waterhole** — The illuminated waterhole provides continuous wildlife watching through the hours of darkness.
- ✓ **Observation Tower** — Elevated viewing platform for nocturnal wildlife watching and overview of the waterhole and surrounding savannah.
- ✓ **Swimming Pool** — Provided for guest comfort and relaxation between activities.

Activities at Satao Camp

- ✓ **Morning and Afternoon Game Drives in Tsavo East** — The camp's most celebrated activity: expert driver-guides lead guests through **over 1,000 square kilometres of park territory** in which Satao Camp is the only accommodation. The freedom to drive for hours without encountering another vehicle uncommon in most Kenyan parks is Satao's most profound distinction. The guides' knowledge of the Tsavo ecosystem, the **red elephants**, the maneless lions, the **Lugard Falls and Galana River** ecosystem and the extraordinary dry-country specialist species is exceptional.
- ✓ **Exclusive Waterhole Viewing** — Private, unobstructed views of the camp's waterhole from the lounge, the restaurant and every tent veranda throughout the day and night. The waterhole management team maintains the water source and monitors wildlife patterns, providing guests with expert interpretation of the species and behaviour they observe.
- ✓ **Bush Breakfasts in Remote Tsavo Locations** — The camp team sets up breakfast tables in extraordinary positions across the surrounding wilderness — beneath the thousand-year tamarinds on a dry riverbed, at the edge of the Yatta Plateau's ancient lava, or beside the Galana River with Lugard Falls in the background.
- ✓ **Bush Sundowners** — Private sundowner setups in locations selected for the quality of the evening light and the Tsavo sunset — among the most vivid and most saturated in East Africa.
- ✓ **Visits to Tsavo Landmarks** — Extended game drives to **Lugard Falls, Mudanda Rock, Aruba Dam** and the **Yatta Plateau** — the principal geological and wildlife-viewing landmarks of Tsavo East's central and southern zones.
- ✓ **Birdwatching** — Satao's waterhole creates a permanently productive birdwatching environment. **Hornbills, barbets, starlings, guinea fowl, pearl-spotted owlettes** and over **300 species** recorded in the immediate camp area alone. The Tsavo ecosystem's full list of over 500 species is accessible on guided bird walks with the camp's ornithologist guide.
- ✓ **Night Drives** — Nocturnal game drives that reveal the remarkable after-dark life of Tsavo East's central plains leopard, spotted hyena, serval, bush baby and the extraordinary nocturnal world of the tamarind and acacia woodland around the camp.
- ✓ **Photographic Safaris** — The camp's waterhole, the Tsavo light and the wildlife are exceptional subjects. Photographic guidance and positioning is available from the camp's experienced guides.
- ✓ **Cultural Visits to Local Maasai Communities** — Arrangements for visits to the Maasai communities who inhabit the pastoral lands bordering the park, providing an introduction to the specific culture and way of life of the Taita and Maasai people whose history is inseparable from the Tsavo ecosystem.
- ✓ **Conservation Engagement** — The camp provides education and engagement around Tsavo conservation issues, including anti-poaching, human-wildlife coexistence and the specific conservation challenges of one of Africa's most important elephant populations.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

Satao Camp's kitchen delivers **full board meals of genuine quality** breakfasts served under the great tamarind tree with the waterhole as backdrop, picnic lunches in the bush, and dinners in the restaurant overlooking the illuminated waterhole. The grill menu reflects Tsavo's setting fresh ingredients, open-fire cooking, the specific pleasures of eating well in a remote African wilderness.

Health & Safety

- ✓ Satao Camp is **unfenced** wildlife moves freely through and around the camp.
- ✓ All night movement between tents and the main area requires staff escort.
- ✓ Medical assistance accessible via Voi (approximately 40 minutes).
- ✓ Flying Doctors and Vard Africa emergency network coverage.

Why We Love Satao Camp

We love Satao Camp for the **genet in the bar** the wild cat who has decided that the Satao bar's overhead rafters are perfectly suited to his evening purposes and who has been observing guests with complete indifference from his elevated position for years. It is the specific quality of Tsavo wildlife curious, direct, unperformed concentrated into a single, unforgettable detail.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Book the suite tents for the most intimate waterhole proximity and arrange at least one full-day game drive to Lugard Falls and the Galana River: the combination of the falls, the river, a picnic lunch in the wilderness and the long drive back through Tsavo's afternoon light is the definitive Tsavo East day.

Families & Children

Satao Camp is **excellent for families** the night-lit waterhole is a genuinely thrilling experience for children of all ages, the game drives are accessible and appropriate for curious children, and the camp's warm and genuinely child-friendly team ensures that younger guests feel as completely served as their parents. Children of all ages are welcome.

OUR ACCOMMODATION & TRADE PARTNERS IN TSAVO WEST & THE ELEPHANT CORRIDOR.

THE HILDANA LODGE

Mwatate Sisal Estate, Taita Hills | The Elephant Corridor Sanctuary

Location: The Hildana Lodge sits within a **private 5,000-acre sanctuary** at the **foot of the Taita Hills** positioned in the heart of the **Tsavo elephant corridor** that links Lake Jipe in Tsavo West with the Galana River in Tsavo East, creating one of Africa's most important wildlife movement routes. Located approximately **37 kilometres from Voi town** along the Taveta Road conveniently accessible from the **Voi SGR**

station (the modern Kenya railway, just 45 minutes' transfer from the station to the lodge through the extraordinary sisal estate landscape). The lodge has its own **private airstrip on the farm** (Mwatate Airstrip), available to all guests.

Introduction & History

The Hildana Lodge opened in **2021** as a new and entirely distinctive addition to the Tsavo private accommodation landscape a family-owned sanctuary lodge that occupies an unusual and uniquely compelling position between the two parks, rather than within either one, and derives its identity from the **elephant corridor** that makes this position so ecologically significant.

- ✓ The lodge is **adjacent to the Mwatate Sisal Estate** — the **second-largest sisal producer in the world**, a working agricultural estate of extraordinary size and ecological complexity whose history in the region spans generations.
- ✓ The founding family's **passion and commitment to the conservation of wildlife** within the sisal estate's surrounding sanctuary is the origin story of Hildana Lodge a decision to protect the wildlife that has always moved through this corridor and to invite guests to share in the experience of watching that movement.
- ✓ The sanctuary's **waterholes** are seasonal gathering points for **large elephant herds** on their ancient migration routes, and the experience of sitting by the lodge pool itself positioned to overlook the waterhole watching elephants arrive in the late afternoon light for their daily drink, is one of the most purely satisfying wildlife encounters available from any Tsavo-area property.
- ✓ The lodge's **Mediterranean design influence** — reflecting the heritage of the founding family gives the rooms and public spaces a distinctive aesthetic: four-poster beds, cream sofas, tapestry cushions, ochre tiles, basket-ware, woven rugs and generous proportions. A **farm-to-fork culinary philosophy** uses produce grown on the estate's sustainable farm, the fish farm and the hydroponic project run from the factory's wastewater to create meals of genuine quality with an ecological integrity that few lodges can claim.

Ownership & Management

The Hildana Lodge is **owned and managed by the founding family** whose personal involvement in the lodge's conservation mission and guest experience is expressed in every aspect of the operation. The entire management team dines alongside guests, sharing insights into lodge life, community engagement and the surrounding wilderness. The lodge is solar-powered and follows a comprehensive sustainability programme including recycled kitchen waste as fertiliser, treated wastewater for lawn irrigation and an on-site medical clinic for staff.

Intimate Luxury safari living — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

The Hildana accommodates **up to 20 guests** across **8 luxury rooms** in a beautifully designed Mediterranean-Swahili aesthetic:

- ✓ **Honeymoon Suite (1)** — The most romantic configuration in the lodge: generous private spaces with the most intimate waterhole views, designed around the specific pleasures of a romantic stay in a wild setting.
- ✓ **Luxury Doubles (5)** — Spacious ensuite rooms with four-poster beds, cream linens, private verandas and the lodge's distinctive ochre tile aesthetic. Each room is individually furnished with basket-ware, woven rugs and carefully chosen decorative objects that reflect the family's heritage and the African setting.
- ✓ **Family Units (2)** — Larger rooms with flexible sleeping configurations for family groups, maintaining the same quality of design and the same verandah views of the waterhole and surrounding sanctuary.
- ✓ All rooms are ensuite with generous bathrooms.
The **swimming pool** shaded by a towering ancient baobab tree and positioned to overlook the elephant pathway to the waterhole is the lodge's most celebrated social space.

Amenities & Facilities

The **swimming pool under the baobab** is one of the finest pool positions at any Tsavo-area property the combination of the ancient tree's shade, the pool's waterhole view and the arrival of elephants along the path below creates an al fresco pool experience of great theatrical beauty. **Spa treatments** available for guests seeking wellness programming in the bush setting. Restaurant, bar and open-air dining. **Private airstrip** for fly-in guests.

Activities at The Hildana Lodge

Elephant Watching from the Pool and Waterhole Terrace — The lodge's most effortless and most immediately rewarding wildlife experience. The elephant corridor's ancient routes pass through the sanctuary, and the waterholes attract herds that can number in the dozens during peak migration periods. Watching from the pool terrace or the waterhole viewing area as a family of elephants arrives at dusk is a wildlife experience requiring no vehicle, no guide and no effort — simply the willingness to be present and patient.

Morning and Evening Game Drives in the Sanctuary — Private game drives through the 5,000-acre Hildana sanctuary, guided by the lodge's knowledgeable rangers who understand the specific wildlife patterns of the elephant corridor. **Resident cheetah, lion** and the critically endangered **African wild dog** all make regular appearances — the wild dog sighting in particular is described by guests as one of the most extraordinary wildlife encounters of their Kenyan journey.

Game Drives into Tsavo East and Tsavo West National Parks — The lodge's position at the heart of the corridor makes it an ideal base for excursions into both parks: **Tsavo East** for the red elephants, Galana River, Lugard Falls and the vast plains; **Tsavo West** for the Shetani Lava Flow, Mzima Springs, the Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary and the Chyulu Hills.

Nature Walks and Bird Watching in the Taita Hills Forests — The **Taita Hills forest reserves** — one of the most important areas for **endemic bird conservation in East Africa**, home to the critically endangered **Taita Thrush**, the **Taita Apalis** and other species found nowhere else in the world — are accessible by a short drive from the lodge. Guided walks through the cool highland forest with ornithologist guides provide encounters with species that no Tsavo game drive can produce.

Guided Farm and Sisal Estate Tour — One of the lodge's most distinctive and most intellectually engaging activities: a guided tour of the **Mwatate Sisal Estate** — the world's second-largest sisal producer — including the sisal processing factory, the extraordinary hydroponic

growing operation that uses factory wastewater, the **fish farm** and the broader agricultural management of a sustainable estate that supports thousands of local families. For guests with an interest in sustainable agriculture, agribusiness or industrial ecology, this tour provides insights of genuine depth and fascination.

Visit to the Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary (Tsavo West) — Day excursions to the Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary in Tsavo West, where **critically endangered black rhinos** are protected and monitored in one of Kenya's most important rhino conservation programmes.

Bush Breakfasts and Sundowners — The Hildana team sets up bush breakfast and sundowner experiences at **four dedicated bush activity venues** within the sanctuary, each with stunning views of the Taita Hills, the sanctuary, the adjacent Tsavo plains and on clear days **Mount Kilimanjaro**.

World War One Heritage Tour — Rangers at the lodge are specially trained in the **WWI history of the Taita-Taveta region** a pivotal and often overlooked theatre of the East African Campaign of 1914–1918. This extraordinary guided tour interprets the WWI battlefield sites, the military strategies of the Von Lettow-Vorbeck campaign and the specific events that took place in and around the Taita Hills making the lodge's location not just ecologically but historically significant.

Cultural Visits to Local Taita Communities — The lodge has developed partnerships with local cultural groups from the **Taita community** — the indigenous people of the Taita Hills — providing guests with authentic cultural encounters that include traditional music, craft demonstrations and insights into the Taita's deep relationship with this landscape.

Birdwatching in the Sanctuary — The Hildana sanctuary's position at the junction of semi-arid lowland and highland forest environments creates exceptional birding diversity. The **Taita Thrush** and other Taita Hills endemics in the adjacent forest reserves combine with the savannah and waterhole bird communities of the sanctuary to create a birdwatching programme of considerable range.

Conservation Patrols and Anti-Poaching Engagement — Guests can accompany the lodge's conservation rangers on their regular sanctuary patrols, learning about the specific wildlife protection challenges of the elephant corridor and the lodge's approach to monitoring, patrol and community engagement.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

The Hildana kitchen operates on a rigorous **farm-to-fork philosophy** fresh produce from the estate's greenhouse and organic garden, fish from the on-site farm, and the full repertoire of Mediterranean-influenced cuisine prepared with the family's specific culinary heritage. Guests dine alongside the management team, making every meal a conversation as well as a gastronomic experience.

Bush breakfasts and **sundowner dining** at the four wilderness venues add the outdoor dimension that completes the Hildana culinary programme.

Health & Safety

- ✓ The sanctuary is unfenced; wildlife moves freely through the grounds.
- ✓ The 5,000-acre extent and the dedicated ranger team ensure guest safety at all times.
- ✓ Solar-powered.
- ✓ On-site medical clinic for staff with guest medical assistance available.
- ✓ Vard Africa emergency network coverage.

Why We Love the Hildana Lodge

We love The Hildana for what it represents: a **family's decision to protect the land they farm and to share that protection's rewards with guests** who want to be part of something larger than a game drive. The elephant corridor that runs through the sanctuary, the endemic birds of the Taita Hills, the extraordinary farm tour, the WWI heritage and the pool under the baobab watching the elephants arrive these are experiences of a specificity and an authenticity that no purpose-built wildlife lodge can manufacture.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Book the WWI heritage tour with one of the specially-trained rangers the Taita-Taveta region's role in the East African Campaign is one of the most extraordinary and most completely unknown chapters in Kenya's history, and hearing it told in the landscape where it happened is a history lesson of rare power. And spend a full evening at the waterhole: the elephants arrive in the most beautiful light and depart into the darkness with a majesty that the pool terrace frames perfectly.

Families & Children

The Hildana Lodge is **excellent for families** the farm tour is particularly engaging for children with curiosity about food production and sustainable agriculture, the elephant watching from the pool is thrilling for all ages, and the family unit configuration provides appropriate space and privacy for parents with children.

FINCH HATTONS LUXURY TENTED CAMP

Virgin Limited Edition | Tsavo West National Park | The Classic of the West

Location: Finch Hattons Luxury Tented Camp occupies a **35-acre private concession** in the **southern corner of Tsavo West National Park** positioned around **three natural, spring-fed pools** fed by the underground water reservoir beneath the Chyulu Hills, with views of **Mount Kilimanjaro** (on clear days) and the extraordinary volcanic landscape of the **Chyulu Hills** as the camp's constant backdrop. Accessible by **Finch Hattons Airstrip** (4 kilometres from camp, transfers included, approximately 60 minutes from Nairobi by charter aircraft) or by road

approximately **4 hours 20 minutes from Nairobi** or **3 hours from Mombasa**. The Madaraka Express SGR stops at **Mtito Andei** (approximately 1 hour from camp).

Introduction & History

Finch Hattons Luxury Tented Camp is named for **Denys Finch Hatton** the British aristocrat, big game hunter turned passionate conservationist, explorer and aviation pioneer who spent much of the 1920s and early 1930s in Kenya and who is best remembered as the romantic hero of **Isak Dinesen's "Out of Africa"** (portrayed by Robert Redford in the 1985 film). Finch Hatton died in 1931 when his Gypsy Moth biplane crashed near Voi fittingly, in the very landscape that the camp bearing his name now occupies.

The camp's foundational philosophy of **elegant, purposeful safari engagement with the African wilderness**, guided by expertise and animated by genuine love for the land is the tribute that Finch Hatton's legacy deserves and receives.

The camp has been pioneering luxury safari standards in Tsavo West for **over 30 years** an extraordinary longevity in an industry that is constantly evolving and following an **extensive refurbishment completed in 2015**, now operates as part of **Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Limited Edition** collection of exceptional properties worldwide. This combination of three-decade experience and world-class hospitality group standards produces a property of rare consistency and depth.

The camp's **natural spring-fed pools** — flowing from underground sources beneath the Chyulu Hills are the ecological heart of the property. **Resident hippo pods** inhabit these pools and are visible from every tent, from the dining area and from the infinity swimming pools that overlook them. Buffalo, elephants, lions and leopards visit the pools throughout the day and night creating the most continuous and most immediately rewarding wildlife viewing environment of any Tsavo West property.

Ownership & Management

Finch Hattons is **part of the Virgin Limited Edition collection**, managed by an experienced professional team whose standards of service, sustainability and conservation commitment reflect the group's global reputation.

The camp supports **community engagement with the adjacent Itilal Maasai village** and conservation partnerships across the Tsavo West ecosystem.

Awards & Recognition

Consistent listing by **Condé Nast Traveller**, **Travel + Leisure**, **TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice** and the world's leading luxury travel operators as one of the finest safari camps in Kenya.

Part of the **Virgin Limited Edition** award-winning luxury hospitality collection

Over 30 years of consistent excellence in Tsavo West one of the longest-standing luxury tented camps in Kenya's national parks

Intimate Luxury Safari living— Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

Finch Hattons offers **17 luxury tented suites** of considerable spatial generosity and architectural quality each positioned for **unobstructed views of the natural spring-fed pools**,

- ✓ **14 Luxury Tented Suites (105 m²)** — Spacious, exquisitely furnished and elevated on wooden platforms. Each suite features: complete open-front design for pool and wildlife views; **free-standing copper bathtub** positioned against the tent opening with views of the pools; **two outdoor showers** and one indoor shower; a private veranda for morning coffees and evening cocktails; **maxibar with homemade snacks** and local liquor; **pillow menu**; complimentary WiFi; ceiling fan; Cinnabar Green bath products.
- ✓ **2 Two-Bedroom Family Suites (205 m²)** — Even larger, with two private ensuite rooms sharing an extended viewing deck overlooking the hippo pools and a common lounge. Perfect for families or small groups traveling together. Each bedroom features a copper bathtub, two outdoor showers, indoor shower and the full suite amenities.
- ✓ **The Presidential Suite (200 m²)** — The most exclusive accommodation at the camp: a spacious master bedroom with extended viewing deck and **private heated plunge pool**; a separate lounge and dining area; a small private kitchen; a **private butler and personal chef**; exclusive use of a dedicated safari vehicle. An experience of complete private luxury in the most extraordinary Tsavo West setting.

Amenities & Facilities

Two Infinity Pools — The main swimming pool and a separate adults-only pool at the Chyulu Spa, both positioned to overlook the natural spring pools and their resident hippos. **Chyulu Spa and Wellness Centre** a comprehensive spa using **Africology products**, with massage rooms, a hammam, a **yoga pavilion** with an elevated deck from which game can be spotted during practice, and the entire range of body treatments and therapeutic massages. **Fully equipped gym** with modern exercise equipment. **Kids' activity room** with age-appropriate programming for younger guests. **Business centre** for guests requiring connectivity. **Safari shop**. **Cigar lounge**.

Activities at Finch Hattons Luxury Tented Camp

- ✓ **Twice-Daily Game Drives in Tsavo West National Park** Expert guides lead game drives through the dramatic volcanic landscape of Tsavo West in custom safari vehicles. **Lions, leopards, cheetahs, elephants, black rhinos, buffalo, giraffe, zebra, hippos** (in the camp's own pools), **fringe-eared oryx** and the extraordinary diversity of the park's wildlife are encountered across the landscape. The **Chyulu Hills backdrop** and the **Mount Kilimanjaro skyline** provide one of the most dramatic safari settings in East Africa.
- ✓ **Natural Spring Pool Wildlife Watching** — The camp's most effortless and most continuously productive wildlife experience. The hippo pods in the spring-fed pools are visible from every suite, from the dining area and from the infinity pools. Elephants, buffalo, lions and leopards visit the pools throughout the day and night.
- ✓ **Bush Walks and Night Drives** — Guided walking safaris through the extraordinary Tsavo West landscape volcanic rock formations, lava flows and ancient acacia woodland provide a dramatically different walking environment from Kenya's highland parks. Night drives reveal leopards, civet cats, genet cats and **bush babies** in their natural nocturnal habitat.
- ✓ **Guided Hike in the Chyulu Cloud Forest** — One of Finch Hattons' most extraordinary and most unique experiences: a guided hike through the Chyulu Hills' **cloud forest** an otherworldly environment of orchids, ferns, moss-draped ancient trees and extraordinary

endemic plant communities that exists at the top of the extinct volcanic cones above the camp. The contrast between the red-earth heat of Tsavo below and the cool, mist-drenched forest above is remarkable. **Sunrise breakfast** in the cloud forest, surrounded by volcanic views and forest birdsong, is one of Tsavo West's most memorable experiences.

- ✓ **Volcanic Landscape Exploration — Shetani Lava Flow** Day drive to the **Shetani Lava Flow** the vast black expanse of hardened ancient lava that covers the valley floor in a landscape of extraordinary otherworldly beauty. Walking guides interpret the geological history of the flow, the volcanic forces that created it and the remarkable ecological communities' plants, animals and birds that have colonized it over the centuries since the eruption.
- ✓ **Visit to Mzima Springs** — The extraordinary crystal-clear underground springs in Tsavo West where hippos and crocodiles can be observed from an **underwater viewing chamber** one of Kenya's most remarkable wildlife experiences. The springs feed the pipeline that supplies water to Mombasa.
- ✓ **Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary Visit** — Day excursion to the **Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary** in Tsavo West, where critically endangered **black rhinos** are protected. Guided by sanctuary rangers, this is one of the most reliably excellent rhino viewing opportunities in Kenya.
- ✓ **Birdwatching** — Tsavo West's position at the junction of highland, volcanic and coastal biomes creates exceptional bird diversity. **Over 500 species recorded** in the park, accessible from the camp's spring-pool garden, on game drives and on foot. The Ngulia Hills are famous among ornithologists as one of East Africa's most significant **migratory bird trapping and ringing stations** used to study the annual movements of millions of birds across the continent.
- ✓ **Stargazing** — The **remote Tsavo West location** and minimal light pollution create extraordinary night skies. Evening stargazing from the camp's decks or on a dedicated bush dinner stargazing evening produces one of Kenya's finest night sky experiences.
- ✓ **Bush Breakfasts and Sundowners in the Chyulu Hills** — The camp team sets up breakfast tables and sundowner positions in extraordinary locations across the park and in the Chyulu Hills often with **Mount Kilimanjaro** visible on the horizon as the light fades behind the mountain.
- ✓ **Cultural Visit to Iltilal Maasai Village** — The camp has developed a close relationship with the adjacent Iltilal Maasai community, arranging authentic cultural visits that provide genuine insight into the Maasai way of life, traditional practices and their relationship with the Tsavo West landscape.
- ✓ **Lake Jipe Excursion** — Day trip to **Lake Jipe** — the hidden gem on the remote southern border of Tsavo West a bird lover's paradise home to the **pygmy goose, black egret, black coucal** and numerous other species. The lake's beauty and remoteness make it one of Tsavo West's finest undiscovered destinations.
- ✓ **Historical Tsavo Rail Bridge Visit** — Day excursion to the **historic Tsavo Rail Bridge** — a structure of considerable historical significance, built during the construction of the Uganda Railway and the site of the famous Man-Eater incidents of 1898.
- ✓ **Day Excursion to Amboseli National Park** — For guests wanting to extend their wildlife experience, a day trip to the adjacent **Amboseli National Park** — with its enormous elephant herds and iconic views of Mount Kilimanjaro can be arranged with game viewing and lunch included.
- ✓ **Spa and Wellness at the Chyulu Spa** — The full range of Africology treatments, the hammam experience, the yoga pavilion classes and the relaxation pool provide a complete wellness programme for guests who want to balance their safari activities with body and mind restoration.
- ✓ **Children's Activities** — The camp's dedicated children's programming provides age-appropriate activities including nature discovery, tracking, birdwatching introduction and the camp's natural pool wildlife watching.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

- ✓ Finch Hattons' culinary programme uses **fresh, seasonal and local ingredients** to create a gourmet safari dining experience of genuine quality.
- ✓ The **talented chef team** produces both formal fine dining and intimate bush settings for every meal **candlelit dinners on the spring-pool deck** with hippos visible below, **breakfast in the Chyulu Cloud Forest, sundowners in the Chyulu Hills** as Kilimanjaro's silhouette forms against the fading sky.
- ✓ The camp's **maxibars with homemade snacks and local liquor** in each suite provide the freedom of self-mixed sundowners on the private veranda.

Health & Safety

Finch Hattons maintains full health and safety compliance consistent with its position as a Virgin Limited Edition property.

Medical assistance accessible via charter flight to Nairobi or Mombasa.

Ramps in communal areas; wheelchair-accessible suite available; specialised vehicle for guests with mobility challenges.

Why We Love Finch Hattons

- ✓ We love Finch Hattons for **the name and for what the name demands** the understanding that a camp called Finch Hattons must earn that name daily, through excellence of guiding, depth of culinary craft, seriousness of conservation commitment and the specific kind of elegance that the real Denys Finch Hatton embodied. For over 30 years, this camp has earned it.
- ✓ The cloud forest breakfast, the Kilimanjaro sundowner, the hippos in the springs below the dining deck and the copper bathtub overlooking the pool these are the specific pleasures of a property that has been refining its excellence for three decades.

Vard Africa Insider Note

The Chyulu Cloud Forest sunrise hike followed by breakfast in the forest is the most memorable single experience at Finch Hattons book it for your second morning, when you are acclimatised to the camp's rhythms and ready to appreciate what the forest's complete sensory difference from the Tsavo plains below means. And request the Presidential Suite for the most complete possible expression of what Finch Hattons luxury is.

Families & Children

- ✓ Finch Hattons is **outstanding for families** the kids' club, the family suites, the spring pool wildlife watching and the full range of age-appropriate activities make it one of the most comprehensive family safari experiences at the Tsavo West level.
- ✓ Children over 5 are welcomed; the camp's programming is designed to engage and inspire younger guests in the extraordinary natural environment that surrounds them.

SALT LICK SAFARI LODGE,

Taita Hills Wildlife Sanctuary | The World's Most Photographed Lodge

Location: Salt Lick Safari Lodge sits at the **heart of the Taita Hills Wildlife Sanctuary** a private wildlife conservancy of **28,000 acres** at the foot of the Taita Hills in southeastern Kenya, adjacent to and directly connected with Tsavo West National Park. The sanctuary is accessible by road approximately **6 hours from Nairobi** or **3 hours from Mombasa** or by **charter flight to the sanctuary's own airstrip** (approximately 30 minutes from Mombasa, 1 hour from Nairobi). A complimentary shuttle connects Salt Lick with the adjacent **Taita Hills Safari Resort & Spa**.

Introduction & History

Salt Lick Safari Lodge has been, for decades, one of Kenya's most iconic and most immediately recognisable lodges internationally famous as one of the **"World's Most Photographed Lodges"**, its distinctive circular rooms on stilts connected by elevated walkways having become among the most reproduced images in the history of East African safari photography.

The lodge's design concept is extraordinary in its functional elegance: **96 circular rooms elevated on stilts** across two levels, connected by suspended walkways, oriented toward the **permanent waterholes** around which the entire architectural composition is organised. From every room, every walkway, every public space and every dining area, guests look down onto waterholes that attract **thousands of animals daily** elephants, buffalo, zebra, impala, giraffe, warthog, bushbuck and the full complement of the sanctuary's wildlife population, alongside the **predators** who follow them. The **night-lit waterholes** extend wildlife watching through the darkness; an **underground tunnel** provides a ground-level perspective that makes guests, for a few extraordinary minutes, part of the waterhole scene rather than observers of it.

The Taita Hills Wildlife Sanctuary was established by **Hilton Hotels** as a private conservation area adjacent to Tsavo West National Park, and has subsequently been operated under its current management as a flagship property of the Kenyan coast and Tsavo tourism circuit. The sanctuary has maintained its position as one of the most reliably excellent wildlife viewing environments in southeastern Kenya its relative seclusion from the main tourist circuits giving it a quality of **authentic exclusivity** that its 96-room scale might suggest would be impossible to deliver.

The sanctuary runs a **comprehensive eco-programme**: solar power, water from natural springs, natural cleaning products and toiletries, a strict recycling policy, an **organic garden** (2.5 acres producing the majority of fresh produce used by the kitchen) and a **reforestation programme** (over 10,000 indigenous trees planted since 2010) in which guests are invited to participate.

A **WWI museum** at the adjacent Taita Hills Safari Resort & Spa documents the history of the Taita-Taveta region during the East African Campaign one of Kenya's most remarkable and most completely unknown historical chapters.

Ownership & Management

Salt Lick Safari Lodge is **owned and managed by Taita Hills & Salt Lick Wildlife Resorts Limited** a professional management company with decades of experience in the Tsavo West and Taita Hills tourism circuit.

Awards & Recognition

"World's Most Photographed Lodge" one of the most widely recognised designations in the history of East African safari photography Consistent listing by international travel platforms and luxury travel operators as a uniquely iconic Kenyan safari destination Sustained TripAdvisor recognition for the quality of waterhole wildlife viewing and the unique architectural character

Intimate Luxury Safari living — Rooms & Sleeping Arrangements

- ✓ **96 circular rooms** across two levels — all with the same extraordinary architectural concept of stilted, elevated circular design connected by suspended walkways, but offering different views and different configurations.
- ✓ **Park View Rooms** — Offering breathtaking views across the Taita Hills sanctuary landscape and the Tsavo plains beyond, these rooms provide a panoramic perspective on the greater wilderness surrounding the waterholes.
- ✓ **Waterhole View Rooms** — The most sought-after rooms at Salt Lick: positioned for direct views of the waterholes, providing the continuous, intimate, ground-level-upward perspective on the wildlife activity that makes Salt Lick's design concept so extraordinary. Guests report watching elephants drink from their private balcony while eating breakfast — an experience that few safari properties anywhere in the world can replicate.
- ✓ All rooms feature: **en-suite bathrooms** with rainfall showers; **mosquito nets** over large, comfortable beds; **ceiling fans**; **digital safes**; **tea and coffee maker**; **writing desk**; complimentary bottled water; **bathrobe and slippers**.
- ✓ The elevated architecture means all rooms are **accessed by stairs** an integral part of the treehouse design.
- ✓ No elevators.

Amenities & Facilities

- ✓ **Bura Restaurant** — The main dining venue, elevated above the waterholes with views across the sanctuary and the Taita Hills. Pan-African, Pan-European and Pan-Asian cuisine using produce from the lodge's own 2.5-acre organic garden, the resident herb garden and fresh local sourcing. Live cooking counters for specialty dishes.
- ✓ **Vuria Bar Lounge** — The social heart of the lodge, positioned with spectacular views over the main waterhole. Sunset cocktails here, with the waterhole below and the Taita Hills above, are among the most atmospheric in the Tsavo ecosystem.
- ✓ **Underground Tunnel** — The lodge's most distinctive architectural feature: an underground passage that leads from the main building to a position at waterhole level, where guests can observe the approaching wildlife at eye level looking up at elephants from below their feet, watching crocodiles emerge from the water at face height, experiencing the waterhole from within its own perspective rather than from above it.

- ✓ **Night-Lit Waterhole** — The waterholes are illuminated throughout the night, ensuring that nocturnal wildlife activity is continuously visible from the lodge's rooms, walkways and public areas. The night watch at Salt Lick observing the waterhole from the bar or from a room balcony is one of the most quietly compelling wildlife experiences the lodge provides.
- ✓ **Swimming Pool and Spa** — Accessible through the complimentary shuttle at the **sister property Taita Hills Safari Resort & Spa**, where the full-service **Afya Bora Spa** provides massages, facials and wellness treatments, and the **large free-form swimming pool** is available all day for Salt Lick guests.
- ✓ **Organic Garden** — The 2.5-acre kitchen garden produces the majority of the fresh produce served in the restaurant. Guests are invited to tour the garden and to participate in the **tree-planting programme** as part of the lodge's comprehensive conservation engagement.
- ✓ **WWI Museum at Taita Hills Safari Resort** — A curated museum displaying **World War One memorabilia** from the East African Campaign, with ranger-guided interpretation of the events that took place in the Taita-Taveta region one of the most significant and most overlooked theatres of the Great War.

Activities at Salt Lick Safari Lodge

- ✓ **24-Hour Waterhole Wildlife Watching**- The lodge's most continuous and most immediately available wildlife experience. The waterholes surrounding the lodge attract animals throughout the entire 24-hour cycle the specific mix of species changes dramatically from dawn to midday to dusk to night, creating an ever-changing programme of wildlife encounters that requires no vehicle and no guide. The **underground tunnel experience** adds the ground-level dimension to what is otherwise an elevated observation.
- ✓ **Morning and Evening Game Drives in the Taita Hills Sanctuary**- The sanctuary's extensive route network covers the full 28,000-acre area in custom game drive vehicles with experienced rangers who know the corridor's wildlife patterns, the seasonal elephant movements and the predator territories intimately. **Elephant herds, lions, cheetahs and the occasional African wild dog** are regularly encountered.
- ✓ **Game Drives in Tsavo West National Park**- Extended game drives into the adjacent Tsavo West National Park the Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary, Mzima Springs, the Shetani Lava Flow, Lake Jipe and the broader park landscape are all accessible on day excursions from Salt Lick.
- ✓ **Taita Hills Forest Birding** -The Taita Hills forest reserves accessible by short drive from the lodge contain some of the world's most threatened and most critically endangered endemic bird species, including the **Taita Thrush, Taita Apalis** and **Taita White-eye**. Guided birding excursions with ornithologist guides to these extraordinary habitats provide an experience of avian conservation significance that complements the sanctuary's broader wildlife programme.
- ✓ **WWI Heritage Tour**- Guided by rangers with specialist WWI training, this tour covers the history of the East African Campaign in the Taita-Taveta region the German and British positions, the battles, the extraordinary personalities (Von Lettow-Vorbeck, Jan Smuts) and the specific events that took place in this landscape. The WWI Museum at Taita Hills Resort provides the documentary context.
- ✓ **Kudu Point Bush Dinner**- The most celebrated dining experience at Salt Lick: an evening at **Kudu Point** the highest location in the sanctuary where the extraordinary views of **Mount Kilimanjaro** (weather permitting) and the Tsavo plains provide the backdrop for a barbecue dinner accompanied by a trio of local musicians. This combination of spectacular scenery, live music, bush cooking and Kilimanjaro's silhouette against the evening sky is one of the most atmospheric dining experiences available from any Kenyan safari property.
- ✓ **Bush Breakfasts in the Sanctuary** — Four dedicated **bush activity venues** within the sanctuary provide stunning views of the Taita Hills, the sanctuary, the adjacent Tsavo plains and Kilimanjaro for champagne bush breakfasts in the morning light.
- ✓ **Taita Cultural Experience** — The lodge has partnered with local Taita cultural groups (since 2019) to offer authentic cultural encounters with the indigenous Taita community one of Kenya's most distinctive and least-known cultural groups, whose relationship with the Taita Hills is among the most enduring in the country.
- ✓ **Tree-Planting Programme** — Guests are invited to participate in the sanctuary's ongoing reforestation programme planting one of the indigenous trees whose species and ecological role a ranger interprets before planting. Over 10,000 trees planted since 2010.
- ✓ **Swimming and Spa at Taita Hills** — Access via complimentary shuttle to the sister property's full-service spa and large swimming pool providing resort amenity access for guests who want a comprehensive wellness dimension to their sanctuary stay.
- ✓ **Night Waterhole Watching** — The illuminated waterhole's night programme of wildlife activity observed from the bar, the walkways or room balconies produces encounters with nocturnal species that day wildlife watching cannot reveal.
- ✓ **Photography of the Iconic Salt Lick Architecture** — The lodge's extraordinary visual character the circular rooms on stilts, the elevated walkways, the waterholes below, the Taita Hills above is one of the most photographically compelling safari lodge settings in East Africa. Dedicated photography sessions at the lodge and at the waterhole are a productive and genuinely rewarding activity for photographers at any level of experience.

Culinary & Dining Experiences

- ✓ Salt Lick's culinary programme combines Pan-African, Pan-European and Pan-Asian cooking with the freshness of its own organic garden produce and the authenticity of live cooking counters.
- ✓ The **Bura Restaurant's waterhole view** makes every meal a wildlife experience; the Kudu Point bush dinner under the stars with Kilimanjaro visible is the crowning experience; and the four bush breakfast venues provide the full range of outdoor dining positions that the sanctuary's magnificent landscape deserves.

Health & Safety

- ✓ The sanctuary is managed for guest safety; rangers accompany all walking activities.
- ✓ The elevated architecture and walkway design means the lodge is **not accessible for guests with significant mobility limitations** there are no elevators and all movement is via stairs.
- ✓ Children over 5 years permitted.
- ✓ Medical assistance via the Taita Hills Resort clinic and Vard Africa emergency network.

Why We Love Salt Lick Safari Lodge

We love Salt Lick for its **democratic genius** for the insight of its founders that the finest safari experience is the one where the wildlife comes to you, rather than requiring you to spend exhausting hours going to find it. The waterholes, the elevated rooms, the underground tunnel, the night-lit viewing all of it serves a single, brilliantly simple idea: put the guests in the middle of the wildlife's daily life and let Africa do the rest.

Vard Africa Insider Note

Request a waterhole-view room it fills fast, because watching elephants drink from a private balcony while eating breakfast is a genuinely irreplaceable experience. And do the Kudu Point bush dinner on your final evening: the combination of the Kilimanjaro sunset, the live music, the bush barbecue and the day's game drive memories creates the perfect conclusion to any Tsavo stay.

Families & Children

- ✓ Salt Lick Safari Lodge is **excellent for families**.
- ✓ The continuous waterhole wildlife watching (no game drives required), the underground tunnel adventure, the tree-planting programme and the WWI museum tour all provide family experiences of different depths and different characters.
- ✓ Children over 5 are welcomed; under-5s are free of charge.

GETTING THERE & LOGISTICAL SUPPORT

Air Access to the Tsavo Ecosystem

- ✓ **Tsavo East** is served by multiple airstrips throughout the park:
- ✓ **Ithumba Airstrip (Northern Tsavo East)** — 50 minutes by private charter from Nairobi's Wilson Airport. Primary access point for all three Ithumba DSWT properties.
- ✓ **Galdessa Airstrip (Southern Tsavo East)** — 60 minutes by private charter from Nairobi. Also accessible from Mombasa/Diani on charter. Primary access for Galdessa Camp and Galdessa Little.
- ✓ **Satao Airstrip (Central Tsavo East)** — Approximately 1 hour by charter from Nairobi. Primary access for Satao Camp.
- ✓ **Voi Airstrip (Tsavo East)** — Scheduled flights from Nairobi on Air Kenya and Safarilink. Road transfer of approximately 40 minutes to Satao Camp.

Tsavo West is served by:

- ✓ **Finch Hattons Airstrip** — 4 kilometres from the camp; 10-minute transfer included in rates. Approximately 60 minutes from Nairobi by private charter.
- ✓ **Kilaguni Airstrip (Tsavo West)** — Scheduled flights from Nairobi; approximately 2.5 hours road transfer to Galdessa.
- ✓ **Manyani Airstrip (Northern Tsavo East)** — Charter flights from Nairobi (60 minutes); 30-minute drive to Galdessa.
- ✓ **Taita Hills Sanctuary Airstrip** — Private airstrip serving Salt Lick Safari Lodge and Hildana Lodge. Charter services from Nairobi (approximately 60 minutes) or Mombasa (approximately 30 minutes).

Standard Gauge Railway (SGR)

- ✓ The **Kenya Madaraka Express SGR** — connecting Nairobi and Mombasa — provides a scenic and comfortable surface option for Tsavo-area travel:
- ✓ **Mtito Andei Station** — 37 miles from Finch Hattons; hotel transfers cost US\$200 each way for a 6-seater vehicle. The station is opposite the main Tsavo gate; the road transfer is effectively a game drive through the park boundary.
- ✓ **Voi Station** — Approximately 40 minutes from Satao Camp. Accessible to Hildana Lodge (45-minute transfer through the sisal estate). Lhildana guests who arrive by SGR pass through the extraordinary sisal estate landscape en route to the lodge.
- ✓ **Kibwezi Station** — 2 hours from Nairobi by SGR, then 15 kilometres by road to Umani Springs in the Kibwezi Forest. The most convenient and most environmentally responsible access option for the Umani Springs camp.

Road Access

Tsavo is accessible by road from both Nairobi and Mombasa via the **Nairobi-Mombasa Highway (A109)**, with major park gates at Mtito Andei (halfway point) and Bachuma and Voi gates further south.

Mombasa-based guests have excellent road access to both parks.

4WD vehicles are strongly recommended for all in-park travel.

Vard Africa Logistical Support

Vard Africa provides complete end-to-end logistical support for all Tsavo journeys charter flight bookings, road transfer arrangements, park entry fee pre-payment via the KWS eCitizen platform (strongly recommended for all Tsavo properties to avoid payment issues at remote gates), DSWT elephant adoption facilitation, activity pre-booking for all DSWT properties, and 24-hour in-destination emergency support via the AMREF Flying Doctors and Vard Africa's emergency network.

Best Time to Visit

- ✓ **June to October** — The long dry season. **Best wildlife viewing** as animals congregate around water sources. Clear skies with lower humidity. Cooler temperatures in the evenings. **Kilimanjaro** most frequently visible from Tsavo West.
- ✓ **January to March** — The short dry season following the November short rains. **Excellent wildlife viewing**. Very hot (January and February can be extremely hot in Tsavo East) but exceptionally productive for elephant encounters.
- ✓ **November to December** — Short rains. Some roads within the parks may become difficult. Green and beautiful landscape. Bird diversity at its peak with migratory arrivals. Generally avoided for game drives but extraordinary for photography.
- ✓ **April to May** — Long rains. Some camps close. Roads in Tsavo East can be washed out. Generally avoided by most visitors. Extraordinary landscape photography opportunities for those comfortable with the logistics.