

## BACKGROUND FEATURE

### **Safari with a spa in the middle of Africa**

Severin Safari Camp: New pleasurable holidays in Tsavo National Park in Kenya

”Only a tent wall separates my guests from the wilderness“, says camp owner Severin Schulte. And after their safari guests can enjoy wellness – in the wilderness. The new African experience. We have tried it.

Africa is not a place for late-risers. The hours in the early morning are too precious (and pleasantly cool). And those who want to catch lions, should rise early anyhow because the majestic wild cats like to doze hidden in the bush as the day warms up. We therefore start off at 6 am from Mombasa on the Indian Ocean to Tsavo National Park, the biggest park in Kenya. With its two parts West and East it is bigger than Israel, and has been classified as a game reserve since 1948. We drive 250 km, on tarmac roads to the gates of the park, and murram roads within the park. We exchange the warm sea water and quivering palms for red earth, acacias and brushwood. The main road reveals Kenya’s grand landscape: Green hills stretch to the horizon, conical mountains seem to blink curiously in the sun. These are the “rolling hills of Africa” which bewitched US author Ernest Hemingway for the rest of his life.

Ten percent of Kenya’s countryside is under protection; more than fifty National Parks are being maintained: A natural treasure which is being preserved for the rest of the world. Wait a moment, what is rustling over there in the coppice? Grey bottoms, huge as trucks, are moving through the dried up bush. Directly beneath Tsavo’s entrance, a family of elephants is grazing placidly. The baby elephant only reaches up to its mother’s knee, but it already moves its trunk quite elegantly. “Since the clamp down on poachers, there are more than ten thousand elephants back in Tsavo“, explains safari guide Kevin Apidi: ”But we have plenty of space for many more.“ World-famous are the “red elephants” – named after the red soil, in which they love to wallow. They have a reason for this: The extremely ferrous earth is a natural beauty product for elephants. It keeps away all kinds of insects and protects even the thickest elephant skin from sunburn. If this isn’t a useful introduction to our wellness safari!

#### **Every journey is a safari**

Without their silverware, white table clothes and Gin for their ”sundowner“ the British – Kenya’s former colonial masters – would not have dared to venture into the bush. But in Swahili, the Kenyan national language, safari means simply ”journey“. Big game hunting is still fashionable but of course the animals are now hunted with cameras and zoom only. Since poaching has been forbidden in Kenya, the “Big Five” – lions, rhinos, buffalos, elephants and leopards – have become more trusting. Just like two legged models with perfect body mass, two ostriches strut in front of our open-air jeep. The males have black-feathered bellies because they are hatching the eggs at night, explains Kevin. Who would have thought that emancipation has progressed this far in Africa!

A beige shadow at the waterhole, could it be..? Yes! The camera lens shows, not far from us, a lion’s coat. The lions of Tsavo, the only ones in the world without manes, made a supernatural name for themselves. During the railway construction in 1898 they killed 28 workers. The dry-season has enticed the lion to the waterhole. Kenya’s whole country thirsts for rain, which lets explode the dry nature into a paradise of colours twice a year, in May and November.

## Severin\_kenya

In the evening we arrive dusty and tired at the four-star Severin Safari Camp, Noah's civilized Ark with its 27 tents and suites, a cosy lobby with green couches, a bar and restaurant with a hauntingly beautiful view over the wide savannah and - a wellness spa. About fifty employees led by the German managing couple Manja Seifert and Jürgen Pietz care for the guests. A monogram of the camp has been embroidered on the white bed linen in our safari tents. Africa knows how to spoil its visitors.

### **Apricot peeling at the beauty kraal**

Beatrice controls every part of my body. The creamy white curtains of the massage parlour are blowing softly in the wind and the pool's fresh spring water is bubbling gently. In the distance, a hippo is grunting. KENBALI Spa at Severin Safari Camp is adapted from a traditional African kraal, the inside of the 430 sq. m. area, completely built from wood, lava rocks and other natural materials, offers exquisite African beauty secrets. KENBALI stands for Kenya and Bali, a unique mixture of African and Asian relaxation methods. With an apricot-sesame scrub, Beatrice removes all the dead dry skin from my body. With relaxation massages like "African Dream" with avocado oil rich with vitamins, three specially trained beauty therapists make my skin soft and smooth.

A spa within the bush... Why? The answer is quite logical: "The current trend is for longer safaris over several days", says Cornelia Schulte who has developed the Kenbali concept. She is a trained cosmetician and wife of the camp owner, Severin Schulte "Letting go and enjoying the freedom of senses within the untouched nature", that is the motto of the spa. Even safari newcomers discover quickly that there is plenty of time left for beauty treatments in between the obligatory early morning- and evening game drives, The amazing part is that natural cosmetics grow more or less on trees in Africa. For example the marula oil which is obtained from the fruits of the African elephant tree – Namibian women have been using it for many centuries to fortify the natural skin protection. Or take the mash of papaya which is rich in calcium: It is supposed to have toning effects when used as a moisturising mask. Under Beatrice's trained hands I indulge in my own African Dream. I think about the elephants that will hopefully not confuse the pool with a waterhole. Then I calmly doze off.

### **Green paradise with solar energy**

The savannah is at midday siesta. Only the unusual singing of the "Go-Away Bird" – one of six hundred different birds at Tsavo National Park – peeps into my safari tent. Some frogs are croaking, from the distance I hear some employees laughing. The roofs thatched with Makuti straw keep the tents with cosy double beds, mosquito nets, their own terrace and bathroom pleasantly cool. The hot shower water is solar heated spring water. This symbiosis of nature and comfort during our safari is a wellness factor in itself.

The ecological luxury within the bush has its reasons: "Within a nature's paradise like Kenya, we don't want to leave environmentally harmful footprints", says camp owner Severin Schulte and guides me on a back-of-the-house tour through the 250 000 sq. m. of his haven. Sophisticated solar technology, silent generators with highest possible energy efficiency and a biological waste water treatment plant are hidden in a "Service Manyatta", named after the Masai villages. Kitchen waste is dried in so-called "monkey cages" and later burned in a lava oven. "Composting is impossible in Africa", explains the 55 year-old German owner who crossed the Black Continent with his car when he was 20. "It would attract the monkeys. " All other waste products leave the park for their disposal in the same way they entered it – with jeeps and on trucks. "The Park's ecological balance has to be maintained at all costs" says Schulte, whose father founded the Severin hotels in Kenya during the 70s. His green paradise will be thankful.

### **An error of nature: snow at the equator**

Severin Kenya  
Action is announced for our third day on safari. Africa's highest mountain, Mt. Kilimanjaro, has set the pace when he woke up early to show us his 5895 m. high peak without any clouds during breakfast. Like icing on a cake the snow is poising above the steppe – the German

missionary Johannes Rebmann called it an “error of nature” when he first discovered Africa's snowy roof in 1848.

Like with a black-white-green pearl necklace Severin Safari Camp is adorned by the volcanic Chyulu hills, the lovely Maktau mountains and the magestic “Kili“. At a distance of about 30 km the Tanzanian frontier is located. Today we could visit the “Rhino Sanctuary”, an exemplary protection effort where fifty rhinos are being kept and released back into the wild, or we could watch the track of Shetani – the “devilish” lava river – which was left after the volcanic eruption 200 years ago. We could enter a tank with portholes and watch crocodiles within the shady Mzima Springs, which not only supplies our camp, but also ten thousand Kenyans at the coast with clear water. Just like Karen Blixen in “Out of Africa” we could enjoy a bush breakfast with mango juice and omelettes under a Baobab tree, or climb up for sundowner on top of “Poacher's Lookout”. Here, visitors learn why Tsavo means „place of slaughter“ in the Kamba's language. On this plain stretch of endless savannah, the First World War was fought with Germans and British engaging in battle here, later it was poachers against elephants and today it's rangers against poachers. The battle continues.

#### **Masai wellness: toothpicks from the tree**

But we decide to try the most original of all activities, the bush walk, because it promises both fitness and some lessons in nature awareness. Only a few national parks allow walking in the bush. Masai Ketukei, 35, leads with his spear. He shows us the Oltermeletei-“toilet paper“-tree with leaves of two soft coats. He explains that elephant dung mingled with grass is sun-bleached and burned by the Masai at night against mosquitoes. The thorns of the acacias can be used as toothpicks, says Ketukei, the acacia's root sap helps against fever. The hyenas' excrements are nearly white from all the calcium of the bones they chew. Masai guide Ketukei shows us the importance of every little thing in the wilderness. He reads nature just like a dictionary. And suddenly it dawns to us: Africa's lessons in life awareness may just be the cradle of all wellness.

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*Photos complementing this story can be downloaded at:*

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