



PRIDE OF AFRICA

The past 18 months have seen a flurry of boutique, design-led lodges, while big hotel names are launching their own safari-driven stay with Botswana and Tanzania leading the charge. Suzy Pope reveals the hotspots and camps to watch in 2024

WATERSIDE LODGE, SOUTH AFRICA

Liz Biden, owner of the Royal Malewane collection, has eschewed the classic khaki and beige decor traditionally beloved of safari lodges for a maximalist riot of colour at Waterside Lodge. Think free-standing tubs in vibrant crimson and walls of buttercup yellow. The eight accommodation options range from king-sized rooms to a four-bedroom private villa with its own swimming pool, and every room is kitted out with a plunge pool, maxi bar and outdoor shower.

With its position on the banks of a busy watering hole, all the wildlife action can be observed from the hide or from

your private veranda, while game drives into the surrounding Thornybush Private Game Reserve give guests the chance to spot the Big Five, and morning bush walks let you explore the flora and fauna in careful detail. Activities are led by the 'Harvard of the Bush' – an overwhelmingly qualified team of rangers, featuring three of the world's seven Master Trackers.

Dinner comes courtesy of a Caribbean-inspired gourmet restaurant and is served at tables nestled among the fever trees at the edge of the watering hole for maximum immersion in nature. From £1,098pp. theroyalportfolio.com/royal-malewane

WATERSIDE LODGE,
ROYAL MALEWANE



WILDERNESS USAWA SERENGETI



WILDERNESS USAWA SERENGETI, TANZANIA, AND MOKETE, BOTSWANA

Wildlife doesn't stay still, so why should your accommodation? Wilderness Usawa in Tanzania's Serengeti National Park, is a hamlet of canvas and wood that can move with the migration of the Serengeti's herds. Six en-suite safari tents are erected by the liveliest watering holes or put up in the shade of umbrella acacias, with gourmet meals rustled up in the dining tent using clever techniques to minimise food waste. Solar panels provide high-speed Wi-Fi and hot water, and a shallow footprint in the dust is the only thing left behind as the camp moves on.

At Wilderness Mokete in Botswana's Mababe region, it's possible to watch lions stalk buffalo on game drives through the seemingly endless plains. The camp is a permanent pitch with a dining room beneath the sky and canvas rooftops in bedroom tents that open up to reveal whorls of stars. There are no solid walls, so there's nothing between you and the cackle of a hyena at night. *From £780pp (Tanzania), £1,165pp (Botswana).* wildernessdestinations.com

KHWAI LEDIBA, YELLOW ZEBRA SAFARIS



KHWAI LEDIBA, BOTSWANA

Testament to the leading role recently taken by Botswana when it comes to safari, this luxury bush camp on the banks of the Khwai river offers direct access to Moremi National Park – the oldest protected section of the Okavango Delta. With wooden supports, hardwood floors and a lavish spread of king-sized beds, sofas and indoor and outdoor showers in all seven rooms, the only thing that feels like camping is the presence of canvas walls. Alongside wildlife-spotting from your private deck and game drives revealing leopard, lion and giraffe, there are Mokoro river safaris by traditional canoe and accompanied bush walks. Each day ends poolside or toasting a glorious sunset in the sunken outdoor lounge. *From £485pp.* yellowzebrasafaris.com

LOLEBEZI SAFARI LODGE, AFRICAN BUSH CAMPS



LOLEBEZI SAFARI LODGE, ZAMBIA

Set within the Lower Zambezi Unesco World Heritage site, Lolebezi goes a luxurious step beyond a glamping experience. Each cabin, made from recycled materials, has its own plunge pools and private terrace shaded by traditional straw lapa. This area around the Zambezi river is famed for its abundant leopard population, so game drives throughout the day can reveal the Big Five's most elusive member. Guided bush walks follow in the giant footsteps of the many elephant herds that call this wilderness home and there are opportunities for boat trips and catch-and-release fishing excursions. With activities and itineraries designed for children to join in, plus a pool and outdoor cinema for evening entertainment, Lolebezi is an excellent choice for families. *From £494pp.* africanbushcamps.com

MOLORI MASHUMA, THE RORA PRIVATE COLLECTION



LOAPI TENTED CAMP, SOUTH AFRICA

Meaning 'the space below the clouds' in Setswana, Loapi is not your average safari camp, with separate abodes – or mini camps – at least 50m apart so each sleek steel and glass accommodation enjoys the utmost privacy and it feels as though you're truly in the wilderness. Spread across the wild savannah grasslands, all six safari homes have an interactive kitchen staffed with a private chef, a pantry for snacks between meals, and a cellar of crisp South African chenin blancs and bold pinot noirs. You won't find any shared facilities here – a private safari vehicle and dedicated guide comes with the mini camp – but that doesn't mean missing out on hotel-level luxuries as in-room spa treatments and a butler service are available with every stay.

Plunge pools are the place to cool off after a game drive and sundowners are best enjoyed by the glow of your fire pit. Those who don't like so much as a layer of canvas between them and the universe can opt for a night beneath the stars with a luxury open-air sleeping experience. In addition to private game drives, guests here can enjoy quieter safaris on foot, horseback riding and morning visits to the clan of meerkats that have been habituated nearby. Loapi's love of the Kalahari desert can be seen in their research and conservation programmes that span all manner of the area's history, from endangered rhinos and vultures to desert plant life and the study of 2,000-year-old rock drawings discovered nearby. *From £2,030pp. tswalu.com*



LOAPI TENTED CAMP, TSWALU

MOLORI MASHUMA, ZIMBABWE

In the vast conservation area of the Mana Pools National Park, this tented safari camp enjoys views over the 'pans' (watering holes) that see a litany of creatures visit throughout the day. Towards the end of the dry season, when water is sparse elsewhere, the pools attract herds of elephants and cape buffalo alongside the year-round roster of lions, zebra and antelope. At night, with candlelight from the vast outdoor deck shimmering in the water, this place feels enchanting. By day, you can spot game and birds from lounge sofas on the terrace or retire to your private deck. Tented suites sit on the banks of Mashuma Pan with four-poster beds and free-standing tubs facing floor-to-ceiling glass that enable you to spot all manner of wildlife visiting the water for a drink. *From £1,450pp. roraprivatecollection.com*

ONGUMA CAMP KALA, NAMIBIA

Possibly one of the most exclusive safari camps in southern Africa, Camp Kala consists of just four guest suites linked by raised walkways, with the entire complex floating above the vast Onguma Nature Reserve. On the wooden decks overlooking the busy watering hole, you'll find a plunge pool and a hot tub along with plenty of spots to enjoy a G&T at sunset. Come twilight, a fire pit crackles to life, so late evenings can be spent searching for shooting stars. The ground-level hide means you might snap a photo of a lion stalking its prey or a herd of zebra taking a drink, all from the comfort of a plush lounge with picture-frame windows. Bedrooms have free-standing bathtubs and fully stocked bars and there's a discreet butler service for an extra touch of opulence. *From £1,075pp. onguma.com*

ONGUMA CAMP KALA



ATZARÓ OKAVANGO



ANGAMA AMBOSELI



BEST OF THE REST

OL DONYO LODGE, KENYA

Explore Kenya's national parkland by mountain bike, horseback and on foot. Within the Chyulu Hills, this Great Plains lodge boasts expansive views, an infinity pool and a restaurant fed by the on-site farm. *From £1,924pp.* greatplainsconservation.com

JW MARRIOTT MASAI MARA LODGE, KENYA

On the River Talek in Masai Mara National Reserve, 20 'tents' could be mistaken for luxury hotel rooms. Outdoor lounges and plentiful dining options too. *Doubles from £2,055.* marriott.com

SITATUNGA PRIVATE ISLAND, BOTSWANA

Built without using a single plank of new wood, this camp found on a slip of an island in the Okavango Delta has impressive sustainability credentials and a design based on ancient fishing baskets. It's one of the few places to spot its namesake, a rare aquatic antelope. *From £1,277pp.* okavangodelta.com

4 RIVERS, BOTSWANA

By a lagoon in the Kwara Reserve, tents come with big beds, outdoor showers and verandas. Amphibious vehicles and seasonal mokoro canoe trips offer a chance to spot aquatic wildlife as well as classic big game. *From £520pp.* kwando.co.bw

NGORONGORO LODGE MELIÁ, TANZANIA

A world away from khaki-green canvas, this lodge is pure modern luxury. You might spot elephants and zebra traversing the marshland from walls of glass in each luxury bedroom, or from the breakfast table in the vast restaurant. Alongside game drives, you can also take a guided rim walk around the edge of Ngorongoro Crater. *Doubles from £1,135.* melia.com

OLKERI CAMP, TANZANIA

Between gnarled baobab and acacia trees on the edge of the Tarangire National Park, wooden-floored tents come with en suites for a glamping experience, and drinks from the mess tent are sipped around the campfire. *Doubles from £1,050.* entara.co.tz



ON THE HORIZON

Keep a lookout for these new openings coming soon

ATZARÓ OKAVANGO, BOTSWANA

Situated around a lagoon in the Okavango Delta, 12 suites will have their own swimming pools. On top of daily game drives and a fully stocked bar, there's a fine-dining restaurant with an impressive wine cellar. *Opening April 2024.* atzaro-okavango.com

TAWANA, BOTSWANA

The thatched-roofed Tawana camp blends into its Moremi Game Reserve surrounds – Natural Selection have teamed up with Chief Tawani Moremi to ensure the precious ecosystem remains protected without skimping on luxury in eight airy suites. *Opening May 2024.* naturalselection.travel

KIBALE LODGE, UGANDA

The fifth of Volcanoes Safaris' deluxe offerings, these lodgings set in the heart of Uganda's Kibale National Park will look out over the verdant Queen Elizabeth plains and Kazinga Channel, perfectly positioned for chimpanzee trekking. *Opening early 2024.* volcanoessafaris.com

THE HOMESTEAD, SOUTH AFRICA

On the Nambiti Game Reserve, The Homestead will offer ultra luxury in eco-friendly surroundings, with indigenous grasses planted into the roof allowing the building to blend into the landscape. *Opening early 2024.* homesteadlodge.com

ANGAMA AMBOSELI, KENYA

Surrounded by the Kimana Sanctuary – Kenya's first community-owned conservancy – among the fever trees you might spot some of Africa's last Super Tuskers (elephants with tusks so large they drag on the ground) from the rocking chair on your veranda. *Opening November 2023.* angama.com

KITBONG HILL AND LONGOSA LODGE, TANZANIA

Kempinski are promising two luxury lodges: rooms at the Kitbong Hill, in the untamed Tarangire region, overlook the parkland, while the second, Longosa Lodge, deep within the Serengeti, will include a spectacular three-bedroom Presidential Villa with its own plunge pool. *To be announced.* kempinski.com

SERENGETI EXPLORER, TANZANIA

Up in the Nyaboro Hills, this is one of the best places to watch wildlife traverse the plains. Each room of the luxury lodge has a balcony with sweeping Serengeti views and there's a relaxing spa on site too. *Opening January 2024.* elewanacollection.com

