



A young Maasai boy herds goats into the kraal All images © Cheri Morris



A Maasai woman captured mid-song

# MAGICAL KENYA TRAVEL EXPO

27 September to 5 October 2018 saw the *Event* explore the multifaceted travel wonder of Kenya on a week-long familiarisation Tour, as well as produce the inaugural Digital Daily News for East Africa's largest travel-trade gathering. Cheri Morris shares her experience.

## The FAM Tour

I bubbled with excitement as I peered from plane window onto Kenya National Park. Although steeped in the fast-falling shadows of dusk, I could make out proud African baobabs waving a warm welcome, "Karibu Kenya!" Before us lay ten days of epic exploration courtesy of Kenya Tourism Board (KTB).

After timely baggage collection at Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, we were delivered to the only city-hotel bordering Kenya's National Park, Ole Sereni. It wasn't until the following day that I realised what an awe-inspiring view lay behind the blackout curtains: undulating flatlands of grass contrasted by burly clouds, interrupted only by the lackadaisical concession of zebras, buffalo,

and buck taking their morning drink. Ole Sereni's restaurant looks directly onto the watering hole and its tail-swinging users.

After a leisurely breakfast, we met with KTB PR Officer Erick Omenda to plan the next few days of video shoots. Erick became our personal portal to the unmissable intricacies of Kenyan travel. He had us eating and drinking like locals — Nyama Choma (skewered chunks of seasoned goat meat) for Gary Randall, the *Event* Business Manager, and creek-caught Red Snapper for me, both served with traditional sides of kachumbari salad, ugali, and pints of Tusker beer.

**I caught up with General Manager Karl Hala to hear about Ole Sereni's impressive conference space expansion.** Pleased with our first video

interview, I embraced the heat of the day by sampling Ole Sereni's well-equipped gym and then shook it with a dip in their impossibly-blue pool.

The next day we caught the first-class train from Syokimau to Emali; a journey that cuts straight through the National Park and affords passengers panoramic views of untouched expanses. From Emali, we then clambered into two game-drive vehicles that would deliver us to the dusty orange gates of Amboseli National Park. We were delightfully received by a welcoming committee of galloping giraffes and the peaks of Mount Kilimanjaro emerging from thick clouds.

Upon arrival at Amboseli's splendid Ol Tukai Lodge, we watched in awe as an entire herd of elephants crossed our

path. From there we explored an authentic Maasai settlement, stopping only to breathe in flamingo-speckled vistas, greet grazing buffalo, and watch as four large elephant bulls had a Mexican stand-off. We were treated to a spectacle of traditional Maasai song and dance. They welcomed us into their homes and offered insight into age-old customs. After parting ways with some KSH at their crafts market, we sucked on Tuskers while watching the auburn orb sink into the rolling valleys from the most glorious lookout point I've ever seen, Observation Hill.

The next morning, we caught a Safarilink flight straight out of Amboseli (an airstrip amid wallowing hippos and galumphing elephants) onward to the Kenyan coast of Watamu. We arrived at the Moroccan-style castle of beachside magic that is Medina Palms and were treated to cocktails and fresh oysters.

The following day, our group meandered through the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest amid the ancient archaeological wonder of the Gedi Ruins. Our cups adequately filled with historical information dating back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, **we made our way down to UNESCO World Heritage Site Malindi-Watamu Biosphere Reserve to learn about the intimate relationship between mangrove forests, marine life, and local livelihood.**

That evening, we enjoyed a poolside gourmet fish braai and spent some hours dancing in the heart of Watamu's vibrant nightlife. I arose early to shoot

a video interview of Medina Palms' Director Max Cheli to find out what value exhibiting at MKTE offers his brand. An unrivalled breakfast in a beach villa of dreams was followed by a visit to the Watamu Turtle Watch Centre, where we learnt about marine conservation efforts and saw a green turtle and loggerhead turtle recovering in the clinic.

I twisted our amazing KTB host's arm, Christine Kinyeru, to take us down to Garoda Beach so I could submerge myself into the toasty-fresh waters of the Indian Ocean. **It was in that moment that I realised: Kenya isn't just a game-holiday destination. It's pristine beaches, balmy weather, and warm ocean make Kenya a serious contender for beachy-getaways.**

## The Expo

Upon return to Ole Sereni in Nairobi, we had a day's leisure visiting the famed Giraffe Centre (I kissed a giraffe) and the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, where we got personal with orphaned baby elephants. That evening, I finished compiling Day 1 of the inaugural MKTE Digital Daily News which would be sent to almost 6000 inboxes the next morning. With the Day 1 news successfully delivered, Gary and I arrived at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC) shouldering camera equipment and ready to submerge ourselves in the action-packed agenda.

KICC's world class event space came to life; stands were abuzz with back-to-back meetings between exhibitors and

hosted buyers from across the globe, and seminars were underway. Day 1 saw the launch of an innovative new feature, Market Presentation Platforms. These educational seminars unpacked various markets over the course of the event— including the US, Chinese, African, Indian, and Australian markets — in an effort to help businesses better understand what these markets are seeking from their travel experiences.

Between live entertainment, a media briefing by Kenya Tourism Board's CEO Dr Betty Addero Radier, and extravagant lunches on KICC's picturesque rooftop terrace, Day 1 and Day 2 saw the shooting of six more video interviews starring the likes of Jacinta Nzioka for Kenya Tourism Board, Chris Mears for African Travel & Tourism Association, Gladys Kogei for Kenya Wildlife Service, Azahar Hussain from Fingerprint Events, Peter Olale from Intercontinental Hotels, and Rosemary Mugambi from Serena Hotels. Each explained why they continue to exhibit at MKTE and what an incredibly successful initiative it has proved to be, not only for Kenya's tourism industry, but that of its neighbouring countries as well.

**MKTE 2018 hosted 25 countries, 150 Hosted Buyers, 190 exhibitors, and over 20 international media personnel.** KTB Chief Executive Officer Dr Betty Radier says increased participation is a testament to the growing recognition of MKTE as Africa's show of choice, as well as Kenya's global stature as a meetings, incentives, conference and exhibition destination. 📍



KICC comes alive with the buzz of 190 exhibitors



Many business cards were exchanged