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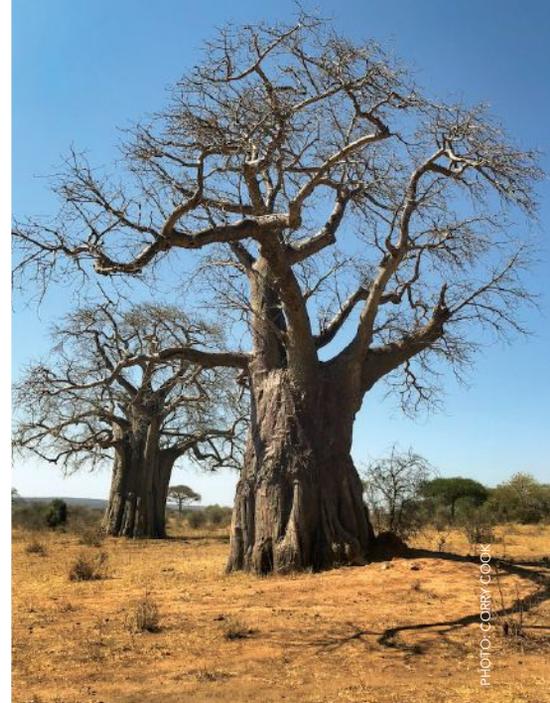


PHOTO: COBBY COOK



PHOTOS OF SAVANNAH AND TARANGIRE TREETOPS, COURTESY OF THE ELEWANA COLLECTION

# THE NEW BIG 5

In a world where time is our most precious luxury, one bespoke safari outfit delivers once-in-a-lifetime moments of discovery and adventure in East Africa.

BY CORRY COOK

*Good morning, sunshine,” I said to a lone baboon making its way past my private sundeck on a recent mindblowing trip to East Africa. Baboons are a common sight in the Tarangire National Park, yet soon this fellow’s soft rustle evolved into a loud frenzy as the entire cast of Planet of the Apes traversed the terrain in front of me. More in awe than afraid, my recent safety instruction from a local expert came to mind: baboons are normally harmless, but it is important to take the necessary precautions, educate yourself, and act appropriately. Still, there was nothing said to describe how to survive a baboon encounter of epic proportions in my pajamas, so I just stayed quiet and still. Within minutes they were gone. Was I still dreaming?*

The natural world makes no promises, no guarantees. Not everyone will experience all that it has to offer—and that very fact makes it appealing. Experienced safari fanatics know that banking all our happiness on close encounters with East Africa’s big five—the African elephant, lion, leopard, Cape buffalo, and black rhinoceros—is no longer *en vogue*. With that in mind, it’s critical to choose a safari experience that delivers something greater.

Founded by one of East Africa’s most respected luxury adventure trailblazers, Karim Wissanji, the Elewana Collection of boutique lodges, camps, and hotels is known for its unique accommodations in East Africa’s most iconic locations. Not stopping at 16 lavish and sustainably driven properties on the ground, Wissanji has conquered the skies as well. A masterpiece both on land and in the air, the Elewana Collection’s SkySafari experience maximizes our most precious resource—time—and clears the way for immersion into an experience that delivers endless delight. Far more than just five impressive snapshots, getting in touch with authentic, real-life joy, awe, fantasy, fear, and compassion is priceless.

## JOY: THE TREETOPS

*Global Coordinates: 3°46’31.01”S 36° 9’17.03”E*

Once on board the Elewana Collection’s state-of-the-art Executive-class Cessna Caravan, eight VIP guests, plus me on behalf

of Gentry, relaxed and settled in pre-flight en route to the first stop on our eight-day Tanzania Classic SkySafari experience—Tarangire National Park. With thousands of flying hours each, our pilots were intelligent, professional, and as experienced as they come. My fellow flyers, for their part, were not only accomplished travelers but also great company!

All the comfort, ease, and timesaving elements of private aviation enveloped us right from the start. As white wine and stimulating conversation flowed freely, the excitement in the air was palpable. After a serenely smooth landing on the Kuro airstrip, Elewana’s Tarangire Treetops team orchestrated a wonderfully warm welcome before an afternoon game drive in Tarangire National Park. Most recognizable by its expansive baobab-studded landscape, Tarangire National Park covers an astounding 2,600 square miles. Huge, old, and endangered, my new favorite tree is the baobab, gorgeous and nearing extinction.

The park is known for its unrivaled elephant sightings; with nearly 2,500 in number, it is home to the largest elephant population in northern Tanzania. It also has the greatest concentration of wildlife outside the Serengeti ecosystem—making for a tasty smorgasbord for predators—from migratory wildebeest to zebra, buffalo, impala, gazelle, and hartebeest. Our guide God-Bless (named by his grandfather as “the one who will come help people”) lived up to his name, answering our questions with enthusiasm while identifying an endless array of wildlife as well as infamous critters—from termite mounds to vultures high above in the trees, scanning the scene just to steal somebody else’s fresh kill.

The theme of our day was love not war, however, as we spotted a family of elephants, a pair of lions spooning in the shade, and a spectacular ostrich mating ritual—the male doing a form of fan dancing to attract the female, crouching down and alternately bringing his black-and-white wings forward, one after the other, feathers flying everywhere. Tarangire National Park is known to have over 500 species of birds. Bird-lovers in the know keep an eye open for small and sensational specimens like the Lilac-Breasted Roller or Scarlett-chested Sunbird, as well as this stocking-thighed ostrich, the world’s largest bird.



PHOTOS: THE MANOR AT NGORONGORO EXPERIENCE, COURTESY OF THE ELEWANA COLLECTION

For the record, being invited to an African sun “downer” is anything but. Elewana’s extraordinary attention to detail unfolded in front of us with white covered tables, delicious local fare, and plenty of adult beverages as a jaw-dropping sunset completed the picture. As one of the most iconic locations that Tarangire National Park has to offer, Sunset Hill is the perfect location to bask in the euphoria of a grand safari experience, with tall tales, belly-aching laughs, and heavy pours. Under the clear and sparkling African stars, we made our way to our first evening’s accommodation, catching an occasional glimpse of wildlife at night.

Think you’ve outgrown the treehouses of childhood? Think again. Nestled inside the Tarangire National Park, southwest of Arusha, the Elewana Collection’s **Tarangire Treetops** property is a salute to childhood joy with its world-renowned paradise above ground. Twenty luxury suites meander through the branches of thousand-year-old baobab and Marisa trees. Made with local natural materials and embellished with modern décor, each suite rests on a sturdy elevated platform and features an exotic double shower and *en suite* bathroom, not to mention one of the largest bedrooms and outdoor decks to be found in any camp or lodge in East Africa.

Whether inside your private suite or sipping cocktails on the deck of the restaurant, access to wildlife is unprecedented at Tarangire Treetops—zebra, elephants, baboons, and more make regular pit stops for their daily hydration at the Lodge’s watering hole, perfectly situated in the center of the property for maximum viewing. With all the animal eye candy, you’ll be

forgiven for missing the world’s largest baobab tree, which commands the lodge’s lobby. Legend has it that it’s hollow and filled with bats, and more than one guest has seen one.

“Forgive me for interrupting your dessert,” whispered God-Bless, “but a family of lions has arrived at the Lodge. It is best to speak in hushed tones.” In complete silence, we made our way with adrenaline-inspired dexterity towards the watering hole. Sure enough, a family of lions seemed not to notice us as they took turns drinking. The sky was crystal clear, the air cool, and the stars so bright it almost seemed that the flashlights might not be necessary, but I dared not say a word to break the spell. Both locals and guests sat in silence, a bonding moment, watching the extraordinary scene.

#### FANTASY: THE MANOR

*Global Coordinates: 3°18'8.55"S 35°38'26.66"E*

After another short and seamless flight, SkySafari continued to dazzle with a new day of exploration filled with awe and indulgence. Soon we discovered that every stop on our Tanzania SkySafari journey brought new levels of care and attention. We happily settled into a divine routine both in the sky and down on earth—warm greetings, ice-cold towels, tasty local beers and bites, and a flurry of other personal touches were the norm before we were off in search of another dream day.

Just as Elewana made my every treehouse fantasy come true, the Elewana Collection has outdone itself with **The Manor at Ngorongoro**; it captures the grandeur and romance of *Out of Africa*. A step back in time, The Manor, located on a huge coffee



estate adjacent to the **Ngorongoro Conservation Area**, offers magnificent views over the coffee bushes to far-flung African horizons. Designed to celebrate the Cape Dutch settlers' influence in the region, its sparkling, white-painted, ornate gables are set off perfectly amongst the mature indigenous and exotic trees. There are 18 individual guest rooms, all with open fireplaces, in nine Manor Cottages, as well as one Stable Cottage (for families) equipped with three guest bedrooms. Refined and sophisticated, days spent at the Manor involve well-dressed guests from around the world enjoying horseback riding, croquet, and a beautiful pool with a nearby spa for luxurious local body treatments.

The Ngorongoro Crater in Northern Tanzania, once a gigantic volcano, is the largest intact caldera in the world. Some maintain that before it erupted, it would have been higher than Mt Kilimanjaro, the highest peak in Africa. Today, long since having collapsed and eroded, it is an extensive highland area with the famous 600m-deep Ngorongoro Crater as its focal point. Nearly 3 million years old, the ancient caldera shelters one of the most beautiful wildlife havens on earth.

Endangered black rhino are protected within its rim, giant tusked elephants wander the forests, black-maned lions stalk the grasslands, and flamingoes crowd the soda lakes. An estimated 25,000 large mammals reside in this bowl of plenty, including a population of approximately 6,000 resident wildebeest, 16 highly endangered black rhino, and around 70 lions. Cheetahs move in and out of the Crater, while leopards are most often encountered in the spectacular Lerai Forest.

Our day was filled with in-your-face wildlife encounters—lions just steps away, hippos in the mud so close you could smell them, and a baby hyena seeking shade under our precious custom-designed safari vehicle. “Don’t run over the hyena!” someone cried. Our guide, highly skilled at calmly addressing hyena hijinks and traveler hysteria, issued a rallying directive: “Make noise and jump around!” We did—and it ran out from under us and back to its pack. It was hilarious.

Back at the Manor, yet another memorable sundowner unfolded as we sat outside in the warm air by a roaring fire, watching the sun go down across the coffee fields and bougainvillea-covered cottages, before an evening of sophisticated up-country hospitality and classic American films about Africa in the billiard room. Later, after strolling the grounds in an almost dream-like trance, I arrived back at my private cottage to the site of a glorious turndown, including a bubble bath sprinkled with wildflowers, a hot water bottle under my covers, and a special African proverb on my pillow: “If you think you’re too small to make a difference, spend a night with a mosquito.” Thanks to the Elewana Collection’s expert attention to pre-trip preparation, I hadn’t met one yet.

#### **FEAR: THE SERENGETI**

*Global Coordinates: 2°40'6.74"S 34°44'6.08"E*

Next stop on the Classic Tanzania SkySafari journey—the **Elewana Collection’s Serengeti Migration Camp**. Located along the route of one of the world’s great wonders—The Migration—the Camp rightfully boasts impressive access to raw wilderness



PHOTOS: SERENGETI MIGRATION CAMP AND ARUSHA COFFEE LODGE EXPERIENCES, COURTESY OF THE ELEWANA COLLECTION



on a level never imagined. The stunning landscape is also home to resident hippos that bark and wallow their days away.

**Serengeti Migration Camp** includes 20 large elevated canvas tents featuring hardwood floors and luxurious furnishings. Each of the tents is surrounded by its own 360-degree verandah deck, which in turn creates your very own private sanctuary to enjoy the constant game sightings and the ever-present sounds of the bush. The main “tent” has a split-level lounge, a swimming pool, restaurant, and viewing platforms that offer views across the river and the rugged landscape beyond. But it is the drama and proximity of the wild that takes the experience of this camp to an altogether higher level.

Feeling brave at check-in, I decided to accept the honor of one of the camp’s most coveted tents known for being as close as can be to the epic wilderness in every direction, including the resident hippos and their private water habitat. Have you ever heard two hippos fight to the death? I have. And I respect you too much to BS my way through this one, so I’ll admit it: I was terrified!

Sometime after midnight, a bloody battle between two male hippos had evolved. Forget that slow, sluggish herbivore reputation; hippo aggression and the resulting danger are no joke. Weighing in at an average of 5,000 pounds, male hippos are serious business—extremely territorial when it comes to water, food, and sex. Only the strongest and most powerful will survive. What started as long deep groans and grunts advanced to high

pitch howls, almost laugh-like, and it was chilling. Eventually all the destructive chaos gave way to silence, and I drifted back to a restful sleep, imagining myself as Lara Croft, a most brave and fearless female adventurer.

The next morning, the hippo drama was all anybody could talk about. Fight? Confirmed. Deceased? 1. Possible love connections? Eight! The new dominant male will certainly have his work cut out for him. We set off early with a champagne picnic breakfast, excited to experience where sprawling grassy plains meet endless blue skies in the world-famous **Serengeti National Park**. Designated an UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1981, Tanzania’s oldest national park has attracted and inspired naturalists, filmmakers, writers, conservationists, and travelers for many years with its abundance of wildlife, and it plays host to one of nature’s greatest spectacles, the Great Migration.

Over a luxurious outdoor picnic in the center of it all, we gazed at the zebra-studded scene before us and discussed the marvel of the natural world. Yes, the migration is the star of the show here, but it should be remembered that not all the animals in the Serengeti opt to join the wildebeest in their time-honored circuit to find the best grazing. Many species, such as the leopard and lion, are quite happy with their own territory, which makes a day’s game driving in the Serengeti unforgettable.

Well-informed and attentive, our guide Joe taught us how to look for leopard tails dangling in the trees, to listen to the sounds the baboons make when they warn other animals of a



nearby lion, the timing of mating rituals, and more. Memorable sightings arrived at every turn, including two cheetahs on a run, a pack of hyenas mid-kill, and an entire pride of lazy lions napping together under a tree!

#### COMPASSION: THE ARUSHA COFFEE LODGE

*Global coordinates: 3°22'28.78"S 36°38'37.68"E*

Unable to process that our final flight had arrived, we touched down in Arusha and said goodbye to what had become our beloved crew and our private Cessna. SkySafari has its own small fleet of Executive-Class Cessna's. The planes have custom-designed interiors, replete with bespoke white leather seating and mahogany embellishments paired with rigorous and regular safety maintenance, meeting the highest international standards. After a full week of effortless comfort and movement between iconic locations in Tanzania, it was a sad farewell.

Nestled amongst one of Tanzania's largest coffee plantations, the Elewana Collection's **Arusha Coffee Lodge** is surrounded by some of Africa's most famous landscapes and national parks. Beautifully positioned below the rugged peak of Mount Meru, this is the perfect sanctuary to immerse yourself in pure luxury. It is a most peaceful pre- and post-safari retreat to relax and unwind before a long journey home.

*The Land & Life Foundation* is Elewana's commitment to responsible tourism, ensuring future generations can enjoy the wonders of Africa and safari adventure. At each stop along the

way on our SkySafari, Elewana's passionate and knowledgeable team provided just the right amount of encouragement to minimize environmental impact, support the Tanzanian people, and promote learning about efforts to safeguard the country's flora and fauna.

For those last souvenirs, the Coffee Lodge is no exception, offering as it does, a vast array of sophisticated and locally made luxury goods, providing ample opportunity to put dollars back into the local economy. Crucially, every Tanzanite stone found at the Tanzanite Experience shop is not only gorgeous, it has followed an ethical route to the gemstone market. This is *the* place to put your purchasing power to work in the name of positive social, economic, and environmental impact in Tanzania.

Each day of our journey with the Elewana Collection was filled with incredible smiles, attention, education, and expertise. The Tanzanian people are known for being warm and hospitable, and this reputation is well deserved. Having the chance to contribute to a multitude of people, communities, and wildlife throughout our journey filled me with pride and reminded me of the importance of giving back to others and the world around me. Will I visit again soon? Do you even need to ask? ♦

*For more information about the Elewana Collection, visit [www.elewanacollection.com](http://www.elewanacollection.com). Additional information about SkySafari experiences can be found at [www.skysafari.com](http://www.skysafari.com). Starting at \$5,950 per person (double occupancy), SkySafari experiences are available throughout the year in both Kenya and Tanzania with availability in 2019.*