

Put These Ultra-Hot Places on Your Travel List for 2018

By Allison Olmsted



Jabala Ridge Lodge, Ruaha, Tanzania

Travel industry “Hot Lists” come out all the time, but not all carry equal weight. In order to know what the top new resorts and experiences are in the world of travel requires expertise, and **when it comes to Africa, India and all things wildlife, no company has more expertise than Micato Safaris**. Celebrating over 50 years as the world’s leading safari group and bespoke tour outfitter, Micato has an impeccable reputation for staying on top of all the quality vendors in the industry, and steering its clients only to the very best.

I’ve had the pleasure of traveling with Micato several times, to half a dozen countries in Southern and Eastern Africa, and I know from first-hand experience that their planning, knowledge, hotel selection and staff experience is travel perfection. But it’s not just me - they are the only company ever to win Travel + Leisure Magazine’s Award for #1 World’s Best Safari Outfitter an unprecedented nine times. Other top industry acclaim includes Travel + Leisure’s World’s Best Value and Trips of a Lifetime (twice); Conde Nast Traveler’s World Savers award (5 times), National Geographic Traveler and National Geographic Adventure’s Best Outfitter on Earth (twice); Best African Safari Tour Operator from Porthole Cruise Magazine (9 times); and both Best Escorted Tour Operator and Best Active Tour Operator - four years in a row - from Virtuoso, the leading consortium of luxury travel agents.



See gorillas in style with the Singita Kwitonda Lodge in Rwanda.

So to put it simply, Micato knows Africa and India like no one else. But after more than half a century of operation, this is the first time the company has ever issued its own Hot List detailing the best places and activities in these destinations, right now, and because I've had the chance to check out a couple of them myself, I know they are right on the mark.

As Micato puts it, "With a touch of immodesty we don't mind pointing out that our opinion is pretty informed after decades of operating luxury safaris and India journeys. During that time we've seen lots of lodgings, attractions and experiences come and go... sometimes with sadness, sometimes not. And, quite simply, we can tell the difference between the things that are hopelessly trendy and those that, deservedly, will be around for a little while. So here now is Micato's look at what's ultra-hot right now, what's about to get smoking hot, and what's been quietly hot all along as well as highly unusual. These are just our opinions, but we're sticking to them."

One of the spots on the list is Ol Jogi Ranch, a private estate in Kenya that is rented to just one party at a time, private island-style, but has resources rivaling the finest African safari lodges open to multiple guests in hotel fashion. Ol Jogi occupies nearly 60,000 acres, has its own airstrip, full resort-style spa and fitness center, every imaginable amenity from private cinema to billiard room to lavish pool complex, plus a staff of 300 including rangers and chefs, and, importantly, amazing wildlife. This includes 65 highly endangered rhinos, 15% of the world's remaining population of Grevy's zebras, all the big cats, elephants, giraffes and just about every creature you could want to see, plus an animal rehabilitation center where you can meet baby rhinos and the like. It is fairly new, I've been there, and it is one of the most amazing vacation destinations on earth - the perfect choice for such a Hot List.



Among the ruins in Hampi, South India. Image: Ardeep Asrani

Another is the new Singita Lodge, scheduled to open next year and already taking reservations near the entrance to Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda. It's the best place on earth to meet gorillas face to face, and the park and its gorilla experience is amazing, I was there last year, but the one weak link has long been an absence of luxury lodging on par with the other top safari destinations in Africa. Singita is one of the most acclaimed luxury lodge operators in Southern and Eastern Africa, they do an amazing job, and this new lodge is going to change the face of upscale gorilla trekking vacations.

These are the ones I can vouch for personally. Other ultra hot-spots on the list include:

- The Silo, a new boutique hotel in South Africa's Cape Town.
- Helicopter flightseeing safaris in Southern and Eastern Africa.
- Alila Fort Bishangarh in Jaipur, India. Alila is a leading Asia-based luxury resort operator and spent the past decade renovating this historic hilltop fort into a new resort.
- Narendra Bhawan in India's Rajasthan, another palatial new resort.
- Shipwreck Lodge in Namibia's Skeleton Coast, a booming African travel destination.
- Hot Air Ballooning in Botswana's Okavanga Delta. This aerial activity has long been popular elsewhere in Africa, but the vast wetlands teeming with wildlife are arguably the best spot for it.
- Taj Exotica Resort & Spa in India Andaman's Islands. Taj is one of the world's leading luxury hotel chains and this 30-acre beach property is the newest member of its portfolio.



Fossil Hunting with the Leakeys. Photo: Duncan Willetts

- **The Ultimate Traveling Camp (TUTC), Hampi, India.** Hampi is a 14th century UNESCO World Heritage Site, and this luxury mobile camp practices a zero carbon footprint sustainability aesthetic, amongst miles of ruins and ancient temples from Southern India's last Hindu Kingdom.
- **Jabal Ridge Lodge,** an architecturally amazing lodge of eight Eagles-nest inspired suites atop a peak in Tanzania's largest national park (pictured at top).
- **Nay Palad Bird's Nest,** a treetop style tower with 360-degree views that is the newest accommodation at Kenya's topnotch Segera Retreat.
- **The Highlands,** a new luxury tented camp with 10 units at the fabled Ngorongoro Conservation Area in Tanzania.
- **Rainforest Eco Lodge,** comprised of stunning chalets in a rain forest and UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in Sri Lanka, one of the world's hottest up and coming eco-tourism and adventure destinations.
- **Fossil Hunting with the Leakeys.** The Leakeys are world famous paleoanthropologist, and the family is longtime friends of Micato's owners, the Pintos, who organize private visits with the researchers at a worksite in Kenya's Turkana Basin.
- **Extreme 19th Golf Hole, South Africa.** The Legends Golf Resort has a course designed by 18 leading golf architects from around the world, and a truly one of a kind 19th hole, a par-3 with a tee perched on ledge 1,200 feet about a green in the shape of Africa. To play it requires a helicopter ride up to the tee - and it's free if you make par.

For more details and the entire hot list visit [Micato's new blog](#).