

## Why Your Next Wellness Retreat Should Be An African Safari

BY ANNA HAINES

An African safari is not the first trip to come to mind when dreaming of your next wellness vacation. But as the definition of wellness travel expands from the generic yoga retreat to prioritize personal discovery and connecting to nature, the African safari is gaining appeal beyond its typical animal-lover clientele.

Recognizing that what nourishes everyone—physically, mentally and spiritually—is different, wellness tourism is shifting from a one-size-fits-all-approach towards highly personalized programming.



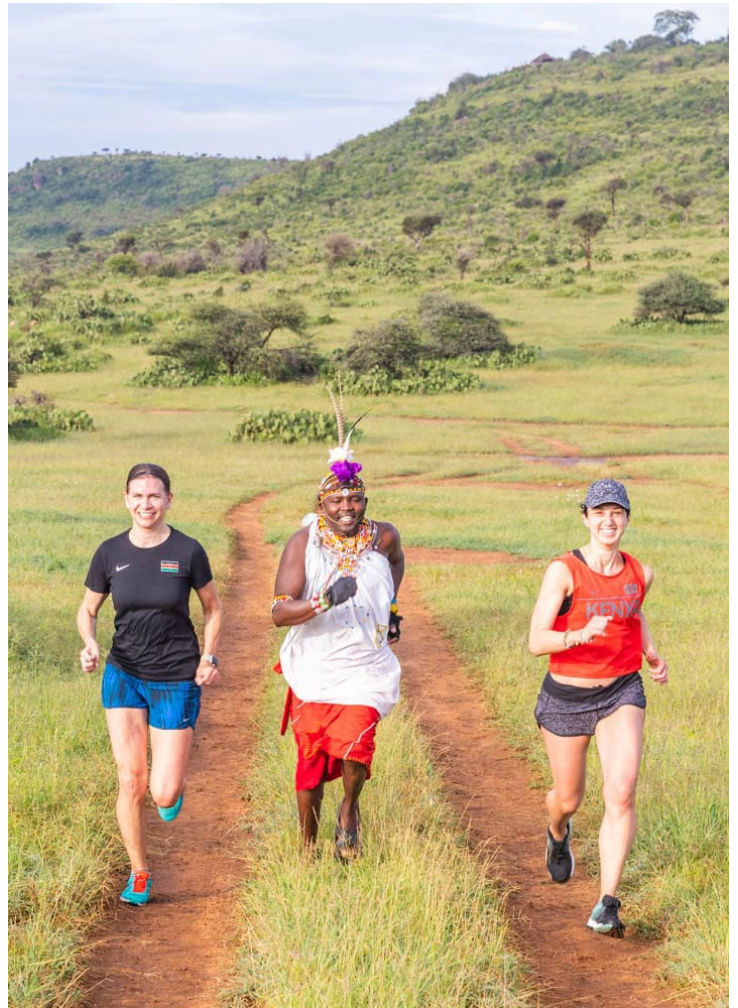
**Luxury outfitter Micato Safaris is leading the charge**, as they excel at taking the time to understand their guests wellness goals.

“No two Micato travellers define wellness the same way,” says Micato managing director Dennis Pinto. “Before we suggest to a guest what they could see or do on safari, we ask them first, ‘what are you hoping to get out of your safari?’ And that question sometimes gets us very quickly to an issue the guest is trying to solve: getting away after the recent death of a loved one or reconnecting with a child or spouse in a relationship that has lost its way, for example. Our safari specialists and directors aren’t trying to be counselors, but in many ways that’s a trusted role they end up playing, and that helps them map out what the guest’s wellness journey ought to be.”

No matter the type of wellness safari, nature is always the main focus. While wellness-oriented hotels in North America increasingly recognize the health benefits of spending time in nature, and make every effort to incorporate the outdoors into their programming—whether that be through hiking excursions, gardening or moving their fitness classes outdoors—the African safari treats nature not as an activity slotted into a schedule, but the entire purpose of the trip.

**And on a Micato safari, the outdoor experiences are unparalleled.** Rather than “eating outdoors” looking like breakfast on a patio (what you’d expect to see at the typical North American wellness resort), it looks like flying a helicopter to the top of Mount Kenya for a picnic breakfast. From sunrise hot air balloon rides to nighttime game drives under the Milky Way, almost every moment is spent completely immersed in—and in awe of—nature.

“For nearly six decades, Micato has equated wellness with the guest’s direct connection to the natural world on safari,” says Pinto. It’s why Micato chooses properties that provide complete immersion in nature, without sacrificing comfort. Tents at Finch Hatton’s Camp, for example, have outdoor showers, giant bathtubs and chandeliers. Tea and coffee is delivered through a slit in the tent, to be savoured on the guest’s private veranda overlooking a pond that attracts all kinds of wildlife. Electricity runs only at certain hours, enabling guests to completely disconnect from technology. At Cottar’s Safari Camp, rooms in the private bush villa feature wooden vaulted ceilings and floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the verdant valley.



By selecting properties located within conservancies, Micato enables a more authentic connection to nature. Unlike the typical game parks that, because of their unlimited entry, have safari vehicles lining up every time there’s an exciting sighting, conservancies have fewer visitors. This means guests of a Micato safari can witness a pride of 11 lions eating a fresh buffalo kill on the way to their bush dinner in silence, without the distraction of other vehicles racing to the scene.

Staying within conservancies also means more casual animal interactions throughout the day, like a giraffe wandering by during breakfast, and more bespoke services such as private massages and wellness classes. “Beyond relishing the nearly boundless benefits of communing with nature, many of our guests are embracing the luxury of safari by doing that communing on private conservancies, taking exclusive use of a safari villa or private estate, where Micato can arrange for masseuses and yoga instructors to come to them,” says Pinto.

The immersion in nature extends to connecting with the animals too. For the sustainability-minded wellness traveller who feels most spiritually nourished when they can return home knowing they’ve made a difference, **Micato offers many opportunities to partake in conservation.** At one of their properties, Mount Kenya Safari Club, guests can get up close to rescue animals like a three-legged leopard or orphaned cheetah at the hotel’s onsite orphanage. At another Micato property, Ol Jogi, visits to the rhino sanctuary—Save the Rhino International—enable guests to pet orphaned and injured rhinos as they learn about the importance of protecting the over-poached species. For those who want to stay connected to the animals long after their trip ends, Micato offers elephant sponsorships through Sheldrick Wildlife Trust.

Since nourishing food is an essential part of any wellness trip, Micato doesn't let the remote nature of their safaris compromise the culinary experience. Guests can expect extravagant multi-course meals and lavish buffets with a variety of colorful vegetables and luxurious proteins like A5 wagyu. Chefs at Micato properties get creative with their onsite gardens to create plant-forward dishes like pesto zucchini pasta and pumpkin soup with fried pumpkin leaves. Guests also don't have to worry about reminding the kitchen of their food preferences every



time they arrive at a new hotel. Unlike typical safari outfitters, where each camp provides a different guide, Micato has one safari director accompany guests for the entirety of their trip so they notice and communicate each guest's dietary needs and preferences to the staff.

While the connection to nature is Micato's wellness focus, the most traditional component of a wellness trip—the spa—is not forgotten either.

The emphasis on being immersed in the African environment is expressed through spa treatments inspired by nature. At Cottars, outdoor bubble baths—complete with tub-side champagne and local snacks—take place in a canvas tent overlooking the lush valley. At Finch Hattons, treatments are influenced not only by the surrounding environment, but the culture too. The 'Maasai Oringa Massage,' for example, uses a traditional Maasai wooden baton carved from the eucalyptus tree to apply deep pressure while the 'Soul of Tsavo' incorporates warmed poultices filled with volcanic pumice sourced from the Chyulu Hills. Treatments take place in breezy rooms below the yoga deck and spa pool to a natural soundtrack of the birds chirping outside. Guests at Ol Jogi can bathe like the elephants in an exfoliating mud treatment. The Moroccan-inspired spa is also home to a hammam steam room, jacuzzi and gym.

Pampering continues outside the spa, with Micato's high-touch service. Every night, a surprise gift with a handwritten note from Micato awaits guests on their bed. They can also expect a nightly bedtime story on their pillow, gently discouraging them from scrolling on their phone. But what really makes Micato stand out for the wellness traveller is that they don't have to worry about any of the typical travel logistics. Travellers might not realize how much the little tasks of going through the airport, moving luggage, checking in and figuring out tips wears them down. Micato is unique for pre-arranging everything. Guests never have to check in to hotels or carry their luggage. All tips are included—for everyone from housekeeping to drivers to restaurant staff. For private groups taking chartered flights between camps, guests don't have to go through airport security. All the coordination behind the scenes means guests can feel relaxed throughout their entire trip.

With wellness travel becoming less about an impressive spa or gym and more about creating personalized programming based on a deep understanding of the guest's wellness goals, and then intuiting their needs so they are constantly at ease—**Micato Safaris is well-positioned to make the African safari the next big thing in wellness travel.**