



## ASSOCIATED PRODUCT

# FIRST-HAND FEEDBACK

**Qwabi Letamo Lodge - Qwabi Private Game Reserve, Waterberg, South Africa**

Tanya Wichmann (Reservations Manager: Latin & Retail) visited this reserve in December, and was blown away by the beautiful scenery and landscape of the Waterberg region. It's only three hours' drive from Johannesburg, so ideal for those on a budget. Of interest is that the Waterberg Biosphere is a UNESCO site. They have all the sought-after large mammals (currently re-introducing buffalo), and Tanya had amazing sightings of sable and eland. There is also San rock art in the region. Tip: ask for April to guide you. He is of San descent, and very informative about the region and his culture. Letamo Lodge is surrounded by manicured lawns, and offers 58 Afro-chic rooms. The other two lodges on the Qwabi Reserve, Semela and Bahobi, are opening in the next few months. It's like the "Sun City of the bush", with the three lodges offering budget, mid and high-end accommodation. Letamo is exceptional for families, with a kids' club, garden play areas, kids' swimming pool and special menus. The food was top notch. They currently have the Cape Town chef from Newmark training the staff. Letamo is a great option for families, groups, and first-time safari goers.

**Labotessa- Cape Town, South Africa**

Roberto Viviani (Head of Sales: EMEA and Oceania) recently stayed at Labotessa for a night. He loved the offering, from the attention to detail in the spacious suites to the quaint location on historic Church Square. Labotessa has just six suites and one amazing penthouse apartment, and speaks quiet refinement. The Café on the Terrace offers scrumptious breakfasts and light lunch options. The in-room menu and service is by none other than the famous Fyn Restaurant, which is next door. A very fine city option for those who like to experience the urban vibe.

**AsDunas – Vilanculos, Mozambique**

Colleen Wooi (Travel Designer: Owned Brands) visited AsDunas on 9 December 2022. A lovely property. I would compare it to our Wilderness Classic Camps, with a touch of Adventure. I preferred the tented accommodation over the cottages as it can get very hot in Mozambique, and the owner prefers not to close the sides of the tent (net windows) at night, so you get an awesome breeze coming through. Most of the food is made in-house, including the jams, bread and rolls. Dinner is usually a tasting menu with a good variety. They have iPads in the rooms with all the necessary information, including the menu for the meals of the day. Rates include one spa treatment per day. Owners are very hands-on, and make you feel at home. The dune walk was good, but just please warn guests that it is uphill in very soft sand. The spot where the guests can enjoy sunsets is not private, so non-guests have access as well.

Leanne Dost (Product Destination Manager: Kenya), Kylee Bester (Product Destination Manager: Tanzania), Karabo Mathe (Travel Designer: Owned Brands), Audrey Radebe (Travel Designer: Owned Brands), Mbali Madonsela (Travel Designer: Europe and UK), Cecelia Sanderson (Travel Designer: Latin America), Tamlyn Titus (Travel Designer: Owned Brands), Rosa-Leigh Thurston (Travel Designer: Owned Brands), and Annelize Breetzke (Travel Designer: Owned Brands and USA), travelled to East Africa (Kenya and Tanzania) from 9 to 22 November 2022, visiting a number of properties along the way. Here is their feedback.

**Hemingways Nairobi – Nairobi, Kenya**

Ideally located in the Karen area on the outskirts of Nairobi, close to activities like the Giraffe Centre, Sheldrick's and the Karen Blixen Museum, this luxury property reminded me of a combination of The Oyster Box in Umhlanga and the Victoria Falls Hotel in Zimbabwe. It has an old world feel to it with the

luxury of a 5-star hotel. We arrived very late due to the time the flight arrived, but everyone was waiting to welcome us at reception and took us to our rooms and did a full room orientation. For those rooms that are further away, they offer transport via a golf cart, making this hotel perfect for even those guests with mobility issues. The rooms are exquisite with all the amenities you could ask for. We only stayed for one quick night, but even in this short time it really made an exceptional impression on us. The breakfast in the morning was extensive, with everything you could ask for, from fruit, to cold meats, to cereal, and a hot menu to choose from. This is definitely a property you can sell with confidence, knowing your guests will be looked after and have a great stay.

### **Karen Gables – Nairobi, Kenya**

Karen Gables is also located in the Karen Area of Nairobi, which is close to Sheldrick's, the Giraffe Centre and Karen Blixen Museum. Built in the Cape Dutch style, it has been converted into a hotel, so it has a very colonial feel to it, with wooden floors that do creak. If you are in a downstairs room, you might hear the people above you. Access to the property is via a driveway that takes you through the back-of-house, which is not ideal as the neighbour is building a huge structure, so you look onto a building site, but once you are in the house, the garden is exquisite, with lawns that go down to a river at the bottom of the property, providing stunning views.

### **Four Points Sheraton – Nairobi, Kenya**

For a one-night stay close to the airport, this is the perfect hotel for guests. It has everything for those guests only planning to overnight, and not spend any length of time in Nairobi. Tazama Restaurant, which is open to the public, overlooks Nairobi National Park and is the ideal place to just relax. There are some rooms that overlook the national park, but then others that either overlook a warehouse loading area or an open car park, so you need to carefully manage your guests' expectations when it comes to the view. That said, the rooms are spacious, comfortable, and the window glazing is heavy enough to ensure that sleep is not affected by outside noise.

### **254 Ole Sereni Hotel & Emara Sereni Hotel – Nairobi, Kenya**

Located directly across from Nairobi National Park, and offering great views of the park from the rooms, both these hotels are great for an overnight stay for those guests coming into or out of Wilson Airport, which is a short 12-minute drive from the hotels. We felt 254 Ole Sereni was a more low-end 4-star offering, and was rather dark and dated. However, we felt Emara Sereni was the total opposite. It is the 5-star option and is bright and modern, having only opened at the end of 2019. Of the two properties we would definitely suggest you offer guests Emara over 254 Ole Sereni. Emara Sereni has a "Sandton Sun" feel about it, very modern and accommodating for families.

### **Laragai House – Borana Conservancy, Kenya**

This exclusive-use house in the heart of the Borana Conservancy is ideal for large families or groups travelling together. Accommodating a max of 16 guests in eight rooms, this is ideal for a multi-generational family. This was one of the original houses where one the four brothers who owned the Borana Conservancy used to stay – and to meet us was his wife Bimby, who was really such a welcoming, friendly person. Only a short 25 – 30 minute drive (depending on what you see en route) from the airstrip, this colonial-style home has amazing views from the pool area over the conservancy. With its own vegetable garden, the salads that we had for lunch were out of this world, and exactly what we felt like after our flight. The only thing I would say to note is that being an original house, it is very colonial, so the rooms are antique-styled, with heavy beds, and toilets that looks like thrones.

### **Lengishu House – Borana Conservancy, Kenya**

Lengishu House is also an exclusive-use house, which used to belong to one of the four brothers. It is located in the heart of the Borana Conservancy and is a great place for guests wanting to see Grévy's zebra and rhino. This six-bedroomed house (two of the rooms are adjoining, and two of the rooms are separated by a lounge) can accommodate up to 12 guests, and is ideal for multi-generational families with its kiddies' room, as well as a room for teens, where they can also play pool. This house is more modern than Laragai, and the views from the rooms are exceptional as the house sits high on a hill. Food and staff were great, but we felt the staff did not always understand what we were asking, and there were items on the menu that were not available. That said, the food that we did have was delicious. This is a very stunning property, but accessing two of the rooms requires some fitness, as it has a lot of steps, and not ideal for guests with mobility issues. They do have a golf cart but it can only reach a certain point, after which you still need to walk.

### **Borana Lodge – Borana Conservancy, Kenya**

Borana Lodge is the only lodge in the Borana Conservancy that is not booked on an exclusive basis. It has eight rooms, with two family rooms, one with its own swimming pool, and one that has a nursery, making this property great for families. Each meal is plated and set up in a different room of the lodge, so guests get to eat in a new venue each night of their stay. The staff are amazing, and even though we didn't get to eat and sleep here, we did get to sample some of their bespoke cocktails, which were truly one of a kind and so tasty. The lodge is very close to Lengishu House, set on the opposite side of the hill to Lengishu. It also has a wheelchair-friendly room and a helicopter pad.

### **Elewana Lewa Safari – Lewa Conservancy, Kenya**

Located within the Lewa Conservancy, and a 40-minute direct drive from Lewa Downs Airstrip, is Elewana Lewa Safari Lodge. Despite only doing a site inspection of this property, we found that there is a lot to do from the property, i.e. camel and horseback rides (an hour's drive from the property, and at extra cost), as well as hiking and bush walks. The property itself is a little dated, with an orange colour scheme that does make it a little dark. The rooms are all tented and spacious, but again rather dark with the green tents. Just to note that there are some rooms where the en-suite bathroom does not have any privacy screens, so the bathroom is open to the bedroom. In addition to a curio shop and spa, the lodge also has a photo lab.

### **Elewana Kifaru House - Lewa Conservancy, Kenya**

Elewana Kifaru is also located in the Lewa Conservancy, just a short 15-minute drive from Lewa Downs Airstrip. At extra cost are the camel and horseback rides, set an hour's drive from the property. Elewana Kifaru is very beautiful, and the rooms are very spacious, with doors that open up fully onto a grassed area overlooking the Lewa Reserve. With only five thatched cottages (one is a family room), this is a very private, intimate lodge.

### **Lewa Wilderness – Lewa Conservancy, Kenya**

Lewa Wilderness is a gem in the Lewa Conservancy, and just a quick 15 minutes' drive from Lewa Downs Airstrip. It is from this lodge that the camel and horseback riding activities take place. It also has a tennis court, gym, and massage room, as well as fly camping for the more adventurous guest.

This is a great property for families, with dedicated family rooms and activities for children. All rooms are very spacious with large decks overlooking the reserve and fireplaces to keep you warm in winter. Staff were very friendly and welcoming, and the tea and cake they served us was divine. I honestly think that this property is a very easy sell for all markets; it is perfectly located to ensure you get the most out of your stay in the Lewa Conservancy.

#### **Elewana Loisaba Tented – Laikipia, Kenya**

Located in the Loisaba Conservancy, a short 15-minute drive from the well-equipped Loisaba Airstrip, this tented camp offers so much for all guests. They have guided walks, mountain biking, horseback riding and camel rides. This stunning stretch-tented camp has exquisitely appointed, spacious tents with the entire front rolling up to show off the views down into the valley below. With three family tents (one with its own private infinity pool), this is a great family-friendly option. Just to note the reserve does not have rhino, so combining this with a stay in the Borana or Lewa conservancies would work very well.

#### **Elewana Loisaba Star Beds – Laikipia, Kenya**

A short 10-minute drive from Tented Camp and Lodo Springs you will find this totally unique offering, which is very different to what you imagine a traditional Star Bed experience to be. There are three double rooms, and one family room which can accommodate a family of four. The entire front of each room is open and the bed is on wheels so you can push it into or out of the room, weather depending. I think it is for a more adventurous person as it is very open, but the views from the high point on the hill really make for a once-in-a-lifetime stay.

#### **Elewana Loisaba Lodo Springs – Laikipia, Kenya**

Located just a short drive from its sister properties within the same reserve, I would say Lodo Springs is the 5-star offering of the three, and also the newest, having only opened in 2019. Once again it is situated on a hill with views across the plains below, making for the most remarkable sunsets. With the walls made of glass and the roof tented, the feels is very open, modern and clean, taking full advantage of the views. Rooms are very big – so much so that you could add another bed without impacting on the spaciousness of the room. I really loved this property and the staff.

#### **Angama Mara – Mara Triangle, Kenya**

Angama is not located within the Mara itself, but high on a cliff overlooking the Mara Triangle. It takes approximately 45 minutes to get to the Oloololo Gate, which is the closest gate into the Mara Triangle from Angama. It is about a five-minute drive from the Angama airstrip, but this airstrip only has charter flights coming in. For seat flights on either AirKenya or Safarilink, you would need to land at Kichwa Tembo Airstrip, which is approximately 45 minutes' drive. Angama is the setting for the movie *Out of Africa*, and is an experience in itself beyond the lodge. They have so much all in one place that even a three-night stay is not enough to experience everything. From their map room, with maps dating back to the 1800s, to their camera lab with a dedicated photographer to help you will all your pictures, and their curio shop with its beading area, where you can watch the ladies making beaded bracelets, and even get one made for you with your name on it, this camp is just exquisite. The rooms are all very modern, and huge, with floor-to-ceiling glass windows showing off the epic view down the cliff into the Mara below. You can also have a picnic on the same spot as the scene in the movie was filmed, while just next door is their boma, which has a view that no other boma has. Made up of two wings each with their own main area, this property has everything for everyone.

### **Sanctuary Olonana – Mara Triangle, Kenya**

This Lodge is not in the reserve itself but on the border, about 30 minutes' rough dirt road drive from Oloololo Gate and Kichwa Tembo Airstrip. Guests will need to travel this (very bumpy) road each time they do their game drives in the park. The lodge itself is nestled within a forest along the Mara River, with each room having a view onto the river. The rooms are very big, spacious and modern, with a small atrium next to the shower making it feel like part of the surrounds. Our welcome was very warm, with a Maasai guide playing the flute, which he continued to play the entire time he escorted us to the main area, where we were given a short briefing before having lunch. Lunch was served outside on the deck, which is located right on the river. The food and service was amazing. The only fault I noted is that in an effort to take advantage of the wonderful weather and view, they put everyone on the veranda for lunch, making it very packed and difficult to exit your table, but on the whole, this is an amazing high-end property, which is a very comfortable sell.

### **&Beyond Kichwa Tembo – Mara Triangle, Kenya**

Just a short drive from Sanctuary Olonana towards the Oloololo Gate is &Beyond Kichwa Tembo. Located 10 minutes' drive from the gate and Kichwa Tembo Airstrip, we arrived to a wonderful welcome, with staff waiting for us, singing and playing the drums. They welcomed us with drinks and showed us through to the main area, which was very busy at the time but spacious and spread out enough to allow for more than enough space to accommodate all 80 of their guests when fully booked. This camp is perfect for groups as well as families, with their Wild Child kids' programme as well as three family tents. Just note that the Classic tents are very far from the main area and we would not recommend them for people with walking challenges, and elderly guests. Rather we suggest the Superior rooms, which are much closer to the main area.

### **&Beyond Bateleur Camp – Mara Triangle, Kenya**

Bateleur is right next door to Kichwa Tembo, so we just continued on the path that lead to Bateleur. By the time we reached the main area it was raining very hard, so we all had to rush to get undercover. We all managed to fit into the main area, but even though we were only 12 people, it was a little cramped (the camp can accommodate up to 36 guests). But besides this, I loved this property. It has a very antique, old-style safari feel to it, with large framed windows set in the tent walls. The bath is located in a little alcove made entirely of glass, so even the roof allows for some amazing views of the sky while relaxing in your bath. The doors from the bath area open out onto a courtyard with a private outdoor shower. It also has its own gym, spa and rim-flow pool with views onto the plains. I think this is a great group option for those wanting old-world luxury; also honeymooners, as the privacy and offering is perfect for romance.

### **Elewana Elephant Pepper – Mara North, Kenya**

Elewana's Elephant Pepper camp, located in the Mara North is about 30 to 45 minutes from the Mara North Airstrip. This classic-style tented camp was another of those camps that I really liked, and quickly felt at home. Named after the elephant pepper tree, it has an authentic African feel, and only 10 rooms, two of which are family rooms. I loved that outside each room is a private hammock where you can relax and take in the views over the savannah. The staff are all first aid trained, and offer Mara village tours, walking safaris and bush breakfasts.

### **Offbeat Mara – Mara North, Kenya**

Located within the Mara North an hour's drive from the Mara North Airstrip, this fully tented camp is a true back-to-basics camp. With nice spacious rooms, 20-litre bucket showers and solar-powered

lights, this is a great property for those guests wanting a basic but still luxurious African tented experience. They have two family rooms, each of which can accommodate a family of five and offer beading, fishing and bow-and-arrow shooting for the kids, making it a great option for families. The staff were amazing and very welcoming, with one of the Maasai staff members giving us a full history of the iconic Maasai *shuka* cloth, which I found very fascinating. You can also go on a run with the Maasai guides if you are energetic enough. I loved the feel of this property and honestly think that guests will also love the light footprint it has on the reserve.

#### **Offbeat Ndoto – Mara North, Kenya**

From Offbeat Mara we proceeded on to sister property, Offbeat Ndoto, which is the newest addition to their portfolio, having opened in late 2021. This is where we had lunch. This property is totally different to its sister camp. With only four tents, all with running water, and accepting children from 7 years and older, this luxury camp is a great option for honeymooners and those wanting a private experience. The spacious rooms allow for triples for those guests who do bring their children. We had lunch in the bush just a short walk from the main area. The setting was just magical and the food perfectly complemented the setting.

#### **Richard's Camps – Mara North, Kenya**

Richard's Camp was the final camp we saw in the Mara North area, and is one-and-a-half hours' drive from Mara North Airstrip. They do also have their own helipad for those guests who want a more scenic arrival. This is another tented camp, but the tents are a little different, with the roof of each tent having its own bespoke pattern – which are remarkably beautiful. The tents are exceptional big and bright, the only disadvantage being that each room only has an outdoor shower, i.e. no indoor shower or bath. However, one of the two family rooms has an indoor bath. With that said I still loved this property and found it stunning and very unique, compared to what we had seen before.