



WILDERNESS
SAFARIS

ESSENCE OF THE OKAVANGO DELTA

Lao

Jao is a place that is dedicated to the conservation of the Okavango Delta and its unique ecosystem – the waters and the dry land, and the plants, birds and wildlife that call it home.



A PLACE IN THE HEART OF THE OKAVANGO



The new Jao Camp, a superlative high-end offering, encapsulates the Delta in its design, décor and colours. A palette of creams, greens, soft purple and yellow incorporate a unique botanical theme with special emphasis placed on the water lily abundant in the Delta. The walkways further speak to the sinuous channels of the Delta itself and sense of exploration of Jao Island.





The camp comprises a new main area, elevated into the tree canopy, two new exclusive villas and five twins all with private plunge pools, lounge and dining areas, en-suite bathrooms, including indoor and outdoor showers. Two Jao Villas, accommodating four people each in two identical guest rooms, share a main area, and will also have an exclusive vehicle, guide, chef and butler.

The fresh and contemporary design, in the same lovely location, continues the sense of adventure that Jao has always prized, adding an element of surprise and delight in ever-evolving sculptural and architectural language.

Underpinning it all is our commitment to the pristine environment around Jao, minimising our footprint and allowing our

guests to experience the Delta in its fullest sense. Innovative insulation ensures comfort, while gauze and glass panels let natural light and the outside in.

The suites and villas are cooled with a silent evaporative cooler, at a fraction of energy used by conventional air-conditioning, and self-igniting Calore stoves provide heating during the colder months.

Materials were reused, such as rosewood and leadwood, furniture was repurposed for fitting out other camps on the Reserve, and the balance donated to villagers and staff members.

Jao is 100% solar powered, with the largest Victron off-grid lithium battery system in the world having been installed here.



THE VALUE OF WELLNESS

The spa is tucked away in a palm forest for utmost privacy surrounded by water for added tranquillity, and complete with stackable doors that open to nature. Signature Terres d'Afrique spa treatments are based on Africa's unique botanical heritage with organic baobab- and sausage tree-infused skincare products that nourish skin and soul.

For the energetic, there is a fully-equipped gym, while the main pool, with its unique nest-like canopy pavilion for dappled shade, projects out over the waterways.



DELTA SEASONS

The Okavango evokes the movement of seasons in the ebb and flow of its waters. At times, the waters are high, and some of the larger mammals must learn to swim if they are to live there. At other times, in Angola (the source of the Okavango) the rains cease early, or do not come. Then the blue gives way to brown and green, and the land-loving animals rejoice.





From above, the Okavango Delta looks like a surreal painting, with swirls of blue, green and brown on the flat landscape that is its canvas. Once on the ground, the colours remain, but now the blue waters wind their way through tall reeds, on which cling tiny reed frogs, and through which, for the lucky, peep the brown eyes of a sitatunga antelope.

In drier periods, the habitat created is more familiar to those who dream of the Africa showcased in nature documentaries: open plains covered in long grasses and dotted with tree islands and thickets.



DELTA DIVERSITY

The Jao Reserve comprises 60 000 hectares (150 000 acres) of grasslands and water channels that cut their way through the papyrus and reed beds, lush palm islands that dot the water, and in the west, Hunda Island, the largest area of dry land.

Around the immense Jao Flats, spectacular herds of red lechwe are followed by their predators – lion and leopard. Hippo and Nile crocodile are regularly sighted. Other game includes blue wildebeest, impala, tsessebe, southern giraffe, African elephant, spotted-necked otter and even the occasional sitatunga. The drier west harbours similar species, with greater concentrations of Burchell's zebra and blue wildebeest.

The birds of Jao are numerous, with “Delta specials” such as African pygmy-goose, Luapula cisticola, swamp boubou, coppery-tailed coucal, Pel's fishing-owl, lesser jacana, Hartlaub's babbler and southern brown-throated weaver.





CENTRE OF KNOWLEDGE

A fascinating new feature is the museum and gallery, with its emphasis on learning and knowledge sharing of the area and its denizens, from a giraffe skeleton that soars two storeys high to geographical maps and artworks.

It is here that Jao presents the history of the Kays family in the Delta, their love of and commitment to its conservation. This also creates a space where visiting scientists and researchers will share their research with guests and staff.

The gallery on the upper level features a series of botanical pressings made by Cathy Kays' great-grandfather, EE Galpin, who was one of the pre-eminent botanists of his time, with a number of plants being named after him. Known as the "Prince of Collectors", he left 16 000 sheets to South Africa's National Herbarium.





PURPOSE INTO ACTION

The Delta is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that provides critical habitat for various specialist wildlife species. Preserving the integrity and biodiversity of the Jao Reserve is of great importance, with research and monitoring being a vital component of its conservation.

Over the last 11 years, annual, aerial strip-count surveys have collected valuable data for central Okavango mammal populations, which have shown that the Jao Reserve harbours significant and increasing populations of key species such as red lechwe, sitatunga, African elephant, tsessebe and hippo.

Bird atlasing is also being conducted, through the Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP2) and the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, aiming to map the distribution and abundance of birds. Guests are encouraged to become citizen scientists and join in this project on their visits to Jao.



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