

## Travel

### Sasaab, Kenya: there's nowhere better for safaris

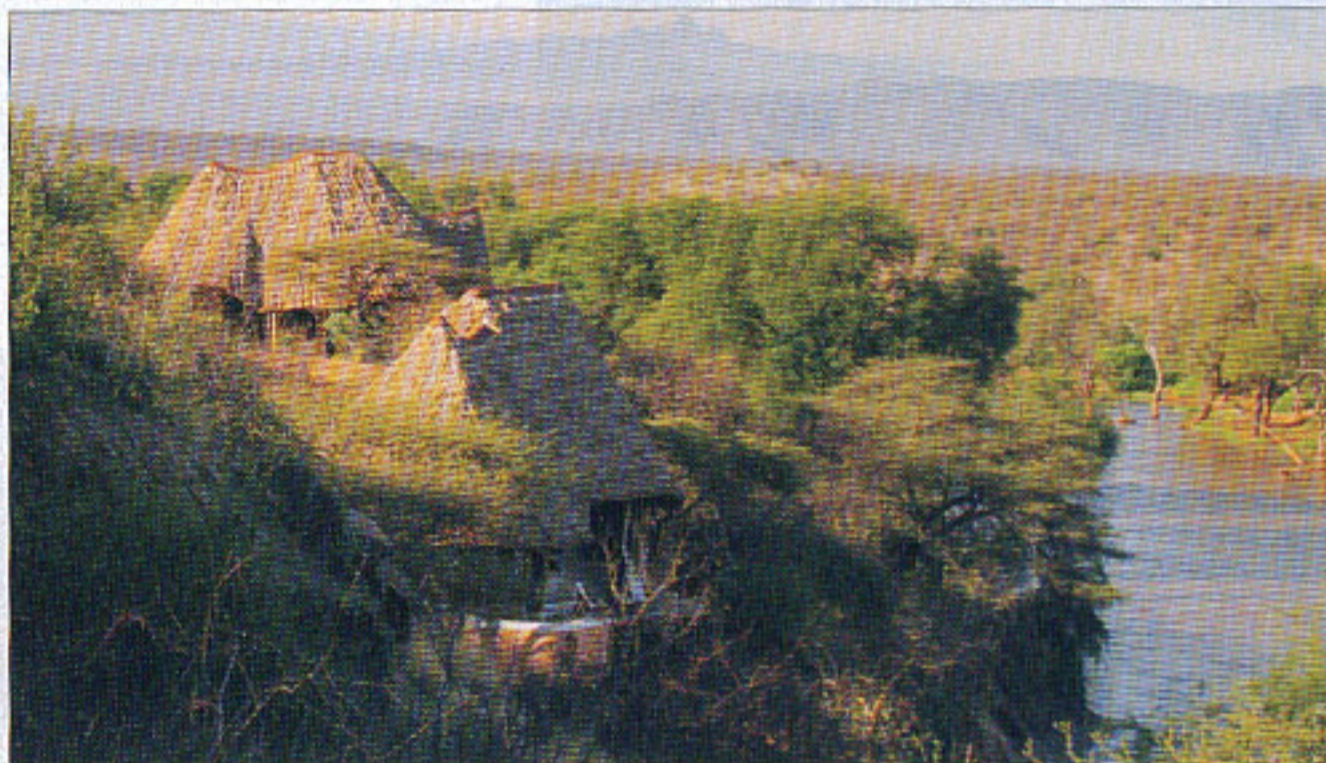
By Ruth Jackson

A safari doesn't have to be a gruelling dusk-til-dawn, back-to-basics hunt for animals. Pick the right part of the world and the right lodge and you can enjoy a relaxing holiday complete with secluded rooms, private pools, three-course meals, and short but fruitful trips into the wild.

The first thing to do is book a flight to Kenya. The country hit the news for all the wrong reasons last year when riots broke out after elections, but don't be put off. The turmoil didn't affect tourists at the time and is long gone now. Kenya is back to doing what it does best – making guests welcome. With great beaches and plains that are home to 'The Big Five' – lions, leopards, elephants, buffalos and rhinos – it's easy to see why the country has been attracting tourists for decades.

Most tourists who arrive at Nairobi head straight to the Masai Mara, Kenya's most famous reserve, where the BBC's *Big Cat Diary* was filmed. As a result, it's choc-full of 4x4s stuffed with binocular-wielding tourists. To avoid the mob, visit the less well-known Samburu national reserve in central Kenya. The big cats can be found here along with elephants, buffalos and hippos – and you won't get stuck in a traffic jam. The easiest way to get to Samburu is by plane from Nairobi. SafariLink offers flights between Nairobi and Samburu on small planes carrying 13-37 passengers.

Around and within the Samburu park a wide choice of accommodation awaits, but the decision is easy. Book into Sasaab. There is nowhere better in Kenya. Situated just outside the park in a conservation area, the lodge offers a level of luxury that leaves its rivals standing. It consists of nine individually located tents – although with concrete floors and thatch roofs these are more canvas villas than tents – each with a private plunge pool and a fantastic view stretching over 100 miles. There's also a large communal pool, and a mess where guests can relax, drink and dine,



Each luxury 'tent' in Sasaab has concrete floors and thatched roofs, as well as fantastic views

although private dining in your room can also be arranged.

Sasaab is managed by Tony and Ali, an Anglo-Kenyan couple who will tend to your every need during your stay. Ali organises the meals, delicious three-course, Moroccan-themed affairs with fantastic traditional desserts, including a chocolate pudding that I would walk over hot coals for.

Tony's seemingly unending knowledge of the local wildlife makes him an excellent guide on game drives. And when there is a rare lull in wildlife, you can find out more about the local way of life from the tribesmen that the lodge employs as game spotters and guides. Game spotting can be done from cars, on foot or by camel – which is surprisingly comfortable – with all trip lengths and destinations designed around what guests want to see. The best animal spotting is early in the

morning or late afternoon, with sundowners available on the latter.

Sasaab supports the local community, whether it's providing employment or raising money to build schools and bring water to local villages. This along with the fact the lodge is incredibly eco-friendly – solar power is used to great effect thanks to the glorious weather – makes this a guilt-free holiday where you feel your presence is helping the local community rather than exploiting it.

*Rooms at Sasaab cost from \$530 per person, per night (two sharing, all inclusive). Visit [www.sasaab.com](http://www.sasaab.com) or call 00 254 20 892 234. You can fly from Nairobi to Samburu from \$130 one way with SafariLink Kenya ([www.safarilink-kenya.com](http://www.safarilink-kenya.com); 00 254 20 600 777). For more on other destinations in Kenya contact the Kenya Tourist Board (020-7367 0903; [www.magicalkenya.com](http://www.magicalkenya.com)).*