



As the Modern Safari Turns 50, a Look at How the Experience Has Changed

Dennis Pinto on the transformation he's seen

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Fifty years ago, Felix and Jane Pinto started Micato Safaris with no professional travel experience. Felix developed agriculture in Kenya, and Jane was a professional (and champion) table tennis player. When the couple started taking people on safaris in 1966, they weren't tethered to the standard practices of other outfitters.



For example: “We entertain all of our guests from our home,” says Dennis Pinto, managing director for Micato and son of Felix and Jane. “It was something that they just assumed one did, because during their travels, they enjoyed it when people would welcome them into their houses.” Guests on safari in Kenya are still welcomed into the family home for dinner, but other than that, much of the industry has transformed.

Below, Dennis Pinto talks about the evolution of the [safari](#) experience and how Micato is adapting to new types of travelers.

The Rise of the Photographic Safari

“Fifty years ago, going to look at animals with a camera was just a sliver of people going on safari, as most people who came to Africa, came to hunt. My parents got into the business at the right time, because shortly thereafter, hunting started to become banned in many countries, and the photographic safari as we know it today began to evolve. Back when people came to hunt, the levels of comfort were fairly basic. You would have mobile camps that you would move from location to location. As photography came into being, we saw the developments of camps and lodges became more luxurious.”



A More Discerning Traveler

"I guided as a high school student, and if I said 'look, there's a lion, there's a leopard, there's a cheetah,' you would be really happy with your experience.

Now, guides need to go into a lot more detail when describing what you are seeing. They are describing breeding habits, gestation periods, and migration patterns. A lot more detail is required in order to try and provide the kind of experience that today's traveler needs."

"Additionally, the typical safari traveler is getting younger. In our case, the average age excluding people under 21 hovers around 50 years-old. Fifteen or twenty years ago that average age would have been closer to 70. As a result, many guests are more athletic. They want to get out and hike, bike, canoe, or horseback ride versus sitting in a vehicle for the entire game viewing experience."

The Urge for More Free Time

"There was a time when many itineraries were packed with activities. It was a similar model to the European bus tours, where one would bounce from country to country or from one museum to the next. Every moment of your



day was accounted for with some kind of activity. Now, we're seeing that there is a tendency for people to just want down time. They'll go out on a veranda and look at the landscape and wildlife, or simply pick a rock somewhere to sit and think."

The Battle for Connectivity

"As far as connectivity is concerned, it's a real balancing act. I think we all like to be connected if we choose to, but as parents, you also don't want your kids spending their entire vacation glued to a device. We are still transitioning in terms of finding the perfect balance. Obviously 50 years ago this wasn't much of an issue."

Conservation is Driving the Conversation

"Conservation will continue to be top-of-mind. Travelers hear about all sorts of issues, from poaching to the ivory crisis. I think that it resonates greatly with the younger generation, as they recognize that some of these animals won't be around in 10 or 20 years' time. Farmers will talk about how their crops get destroyed by elephants, while others emphasize the importance of protecting the elephant herd. How do you deal with those issues? I think it opens up a discussion and makes for a much more interesting trip."