

SAFARI, SO GOOD

Get up close and personal in Kenya

BY CAPPY DEVLIN



Let sleeping leopards lie. Inset, The lion, still king of the jungle. Courtesy of Micato Safaris.

If you haven't put a safari on your bucket list, do it now.

My safari in Kenya was a life-changing experience. Not that I was particularly an animal lover. Growing up, I went to the Bronx Zoo and thought "savannah" was just the name of a city in Georgia. It was only after reading Ernest Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" and Isak Dinesen's "Out of Africa" that I yearned to go on safari. And then there I was, flying to Nairobi.

There are a few excellent safari outfitters, but Micato Safaris stands out as Travel & Leisure's nine-time winner as the World's Best Safari. I like Micato Safaris for many reasons. First of all, founders Jane and Felix Pinto live in Kenya. Africa is their home. Indeed, the most memorable meal for our clients is always the welcome dinner at their home in Kenya. Nothing compares with dining at a private residence where you have a unique opportunity to see how the local people live and experience the gracious hospitality found throughout Africa. The Pinto family is also dedicated to their company nonprofit, the America Share Foundation, which supports more than 1,000 children in schools and orphanages around Nairobi.

I had a great conversation with Dennis Pinto, managing director of Micato's New York office and Jane and Felix's son, about

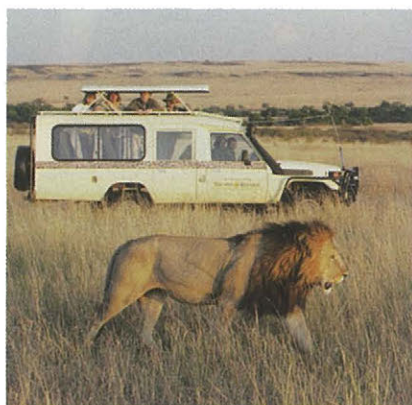
safari travelers today. Dennis agreed that "there has been an evolution of family trips that include the grandparents, their children and their grandchildren." He told me, "On a family safari, there is nothing so beautiful as to see it through the eyes of your grandchildren." Travelers today want smaller lodges and tame adventure, including hiking, biking and horseback riding.

With the help of Dennis Pinto and his colleagues, I want to share "A Day on Safari" for our WAG readers:

6 a.m. Sunrise: A brilliant blanket of light over a golden land. I've never seen anything quite like this and never heard anything quite like the accompanying savannah silence. The driver gives me a steaming cup of coffee. Now I'm ready for my game run.

7 a.m.: The dew is fast disappearing and the predators are on the prowl. My driver expertly sets off in pursuit of the herds. The ever-changing menagerie is mesmerizing – wildebeest, rhinoceros, eland, buffalo, zebra, gazelle, giraffe, klipspringer, all easily within my view.

9:15 a.m.: Back at the lodge, I eat an



English breakfast and have a few hours to relax and share my first game drive experiences with my fellow travelers.

12:10 p.m.: I didn't know if I would like "safari cuisine." However, meat, vegetables and fruit arrive daily in the bush, fresh

from the surrounding area's rich farmlands. An extravagant variety of delicious foods is served at lunch on the veranda, overlooking the watering hole. Then we have a couple of hours to spend at the pool or revel in the sounds of chattering monkeys, chortling hippopotamuses, roaring lions and splashing elephants as they bathe on the river's banks.

3:15 p.m.: A proper English tea on the veranda is followed by an afternoon game drive. There's a staggering variety of sleek cats – lions, leopards and cheetahs – each embodying a ferocious grace. The sound of a thundering herd of elephants rushes by us. There are exotic birds I've never seen before in every conceivable shape, size and color. The sun is making its way down the horizon. We are going on another game drive.

6:48 p.m.: We return to our welcome

lodge. A piping hot shower or a leisurely bath removes a thin veil of red dust. "Sundowners" at the bar precede dinner, a delectable meal of continental and local cuisine. It's delicious and we compliment the chef.

9:12 p.m.: After sitting quietly on the veranda for a spell, watching game converge on the watering hole, we make our way to the fire. The star-speckled canopy inspires wonder and humility, with the crackling flames and esprit de corps adding a feeling of warmth that is hard to define. That's when Africa feels most untamed and most beautiful – the silence broken only by the distant lion's roar, the air sweet with the fire's smoky scent.

10:04 p.m.: Tired, but exhilarated, I go to my deluxe accommodations – so rustic and so very African from the outside, yet welcoming and luxurious inside. Micato has provided for my every comfort. Drifting off to sleep, I wonder what tomorrow will bring and whether the dreams can compare with another day of safari. Maybe I will see all of the "Big Five" – lion, Cape buffalo, rhino, leopard and the African elephant. I also dream of going air ballooning over Kenya in the early, early morning over the Maasai Mara and then feasting on a Champagne breakfast.

For more, visit Cappy's Travel at 195 N. Bedford Road, Mount Kisco. Call (914) 241-0383 or email Cappy@travel-by-net.com. ■