

The dining table in the mess tent, Jack's Camp, Botswana



BEST ADVENTURE

Jack's Camp, Botswana

This is the Makgadikgadi Salt Pans, a relic of the world's largest super-lakes, dried up thousands of years ago. Amid the endless crunch of a white lunar d there's exhilarating quad-biking and walking safaris with bushmen, who will how to make a fire from nothing and extract water from indigenous plant ro here to be blown away by the landscape, to watch the meerkat research pro in action, to see the biggest baobab tree in Botswana and to be educated ab greater-than-great outdoors. Outstanding staff include zoologists and biolo among them, the cream of Oxford graduates – each one brimming with in knowledge. On cool nights, eat beneath the brightest stars, with hot coals u seat to keep you toasty. The camp itself is huge fun – lots of wooden cabinets st full of animal skeletons, photos of Jack (now deceased, one of the legendary killers of Africa), a long mess table dotted with pots of Marmite, and proper o tents, with antique Indian four-posters, bucket showers and oil lamps.

Abercrombie & Kent (tel: 0845 618 2162; abercrombiekent.co.uk) offers four nights from £5,440 a person, fully inclusive, with flights and transfers

Outdoor dining on the banks of the Ewaso Ng'iro river, Lemarti's Camp, Kenya



At night, listen to the guffaws of the hyenas and the howls of the lions



A bedroom, Shompole, Kenya

MOST BEAUTIFUL

Shompole, Kenya

Elemental and exciting, this house was the trailblazer that left canvas tents and wooden huts in its wake. Here, clinging to the edge of the Nguruman Escarpment, is a holistically designed, eco-friendly, whiter-than-white house with one great open side. Anthony Russell's freeform approach has spawned a number of imitators but Shompole is king. The eight rooms have shallow streams of water running through them, tactile pebble mosaics, so-smooth-you-want-to-touch-them walls, plunge pools edged with huge boulders and enormous beds.

There can be few better places from which to watch the African sunrise, open to the elements with nothing between you and the great outdoors but your mosquito net, and views all the way to the Ngorongoro Crater and the Serengeti. The reserve is swarming with game – listen to the guffaws of the hyenas and the howls of the lions at night, and don't miss the millions of coral-coloured flamingos paddling in Lake Natron.

African Explorations (tel: 0844 504 1907; africanexplorations.com) offers six nights from £3,690 a person, fully inclusive, with flights and transfers.

MOST AUTHENTIC

Lemarti's Camp, Kenya

A special place to go to really get under the skin of Africa. There's something charmingly nostalgic and old-fashioned about Lemarti's. The five Bedouin tents sit on the banks of the Ewaso Ng'iro river, shaded by palms and acacias. The camp is small but has been perfectly formed by owner Anna Trzebinski and her Samburu husband, Loyaban Lemarti. Anna has personally designed every detail, from the huge swings hanging from the boughs of the enormous, ancient fig trees, to the tribal-print floor cushions and woven rugs in the mess tent as well as the totally open-air bathrooms, with tin bathtubs and twinkling paraffin lamps dangling from overhanging branches. Simple, but it's glamorous: no electricity, no signal on your BlackBerry, no one else for miles and miles. The host Boniface will take you on trips to the market at a local school, on bush walks and mountainbike rides. You may not tick off masses of game but you'll get a real insider's view into the Samburu way of life.

Original Travel (tel: 020 7978 7333; originaltravel.co.uk) offers four nights from £2,980 a person, inclusive, with flights and transfers.