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Gerald Lawless (right) and Rory McIlroy team up to promote luxury hotel brand's winning ways

Family Safaris

If your clients want to take their children on an African excursion, here's what they—and you—need to know.

African safaris may not seem like the most obvious choice for a family vacation, but if you know the right places to go to and the right hotels (or game reserves) to stay in, moms, dads and kids alike can have a terrific experience. We reached out to several safari specialists for their recommendations on where families should go.

Where to Go, Where to Stay

One of the most important things to keep in mind when booking a family safari vacation is making sure the destination is in a malaria-free zone. Fortunately, there are plenty of options. Jim Holden of **African Travel** (www.africantravelinc.com) recommends **Grootbos Private Nature Reserve** (www.grootbos.com), **Pezula Resort Hotel** (www.pezula.com), and **Bushman's Kloof** (www.bushmanskloof.co.za) in South Africa's Cape (all malaria-free), and **Kapama Private Game Reserve** (www.kapama.co.za) near the Kruger Park (lots of activities for younger guests). In East Africa, look into **Borana Ranch and Safari Lodge** (www.borana.co.ke), **Lewa Wildlife Conservancy** (www.lewa.org)—where Prince William proposed to Catherine Middleton—in Kenya's Laikipia area, and **Malo House** (www.olmalo.com) in the north. In Tanzania, he recommends **Campi ya Ka** (www.maasai.com).

David Herbert of **Great Safaris** (www.greatsafaris.com) advises only bringing kids aged 10 and older on a safari, and suggests choosing a lodge that has a sturdy fence to keep out any “unwanted guests.” South Africa and Kenya have better facilities for children, he says, and recommends **Singita** (www.singita.com) properties like **Boulders Lodge** and **Ebony Lodges** and the **Fairmont Mara Safari Club** (www.fairmont.com/marasafariclub).

CULTURAL IMMERSION can be just one of the experiences on a family safari. Riding camelback is another.



WILD LIFE VIEWING (here) creates amazing memories for the entire family.

AGENT INSIDER:

Marcia Cole of Uniglobe Accent Travel recommends limiting safaris to visitors aged 12 and up. "Getting anyone up at 5 a.m. for a game drive is tough, but children are always tougher," she quips.

"We send them to **Madikwe Game Reserve** (www.madikwegamereserve.net) because it is malaria-free. We use a number of lodges there—the nicest five-star is **Jaci's Private Game Reserve** (www.madikwe.com), which caters to children. It's a great camp with great people and a good place for families, with lots of activities for kids.

"Agents booking families should find out about ages. Some camps will not allow children under 12. Some camps will not allow children, period. There is nothing worse than an agent investigating a lodge, thinking it is perfect for the family and then being asked about ages and having to backpedal to get out of sending them there.

"I always recommend that anyone going to Africa gets a tetanus shot, children as well as adults. You don't want them to take any medication they don't have to, and I prefer always to put families in Madikwe because it's a malaria-free area. Also on the way to Madikwe is **Sun City** (www.sun-city-south-africa.com). I seldom use any of the hotels in Sun City, but I do like Bakubung, as it is about two hours outside of Johannesburg, overlooks the Pilanesburg National Park and gets the kids ready for the private game preserve."

Kenya's Maasai Mara, Tanzania and Botswana are good for teenagers, he says.

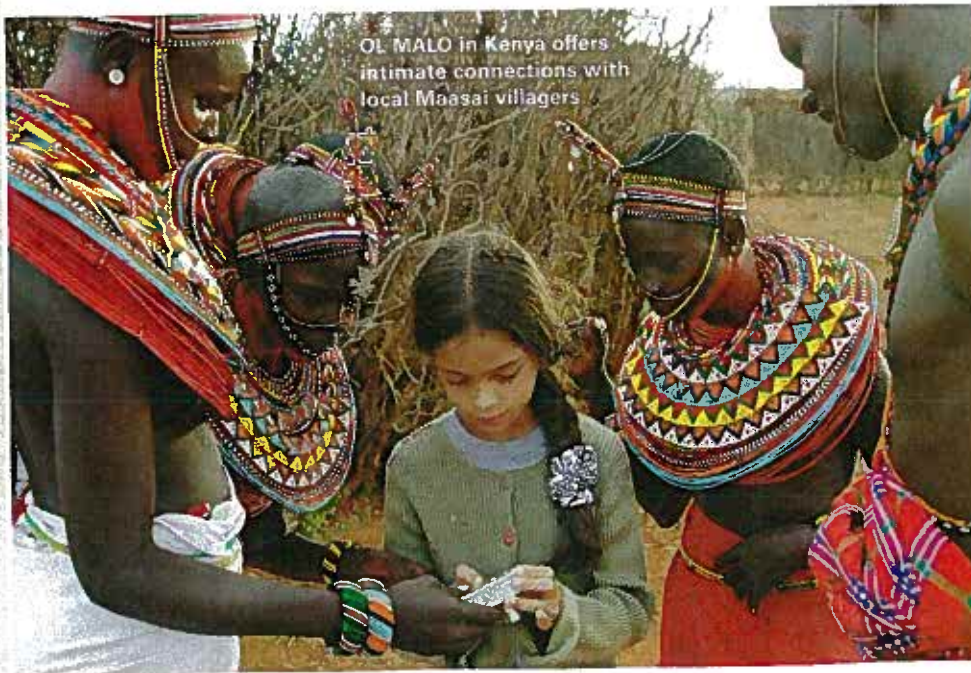
Dennis Pinto, managing director of **Micato Safaris** (www.micato.com), also points out the need for infrastructure at the destination that is good enough to guarantee safety while traveling. He recommends the new Singita Explore mobile camping option in Tanzania's Serengeti (good for children 12 and up), which brings families right up to the giraffes, zebras and wildebeest of the wild. In Botswana, the Okavango Delta offers game-viewing by canoe, elephant, helicopter and, of course, safari vehicle. (Families looking for some exercise can also go hiking on the delta.) Likewise, **Camp Jabulani** (www.campjabulani.com) in Heedspruit, South

Africa, has elephant-back safaris and a great program for kids called Team Tusker. Like Holden, Pinto also likes Grootbos, which organizes "seaside safaris" (think whale watching, shark cage-diving, and horseback riding on the beach). What makes it great for the younger set? Kids can play on a farm with ducks, rabbits and ponies; dine on an extensive children's menu; and go on organized treasure hunts.

Ol Donyo Lodge (www.greatplainsconservation.com/odl) in Kenya's Chyulu Hill provides great game-viewing on horseback, hiking, biking, elephant-viewing from a special hide and tracking with bloodhound. The star beds are also great fun for the young (and young at heart!).

Marcia Gordon of **Extraordinary Journeys** (www.ejafrika.com) keeps Africa in the family: Her daughter (and co-worker, and one of sister publication **Travel Agent's To 30 Under 30**) Elizabeth was born in Kenya. As such, she has firsthand knowledge of how families can get the most out of their time on a safari.

Look for swimming pools at any hotel or lodge, she says, as they can keep kids occupied while parents get some rest. She also advises including villas and private homes for at least part, if not all, of the program. **Mara House** and **Accacia House** (www.nomadicencounters.com) are good options outside of the Maasai Mara—but should be combined with a camp closer to the main park. (They have a great deal of game, but it is not as easy to see as it is in the more traveled areas.) What makes them unique is their longstanding relationship with the local Maasai community, which



OL MALO in Kenya offers intimate connections with local Maasai villagers.

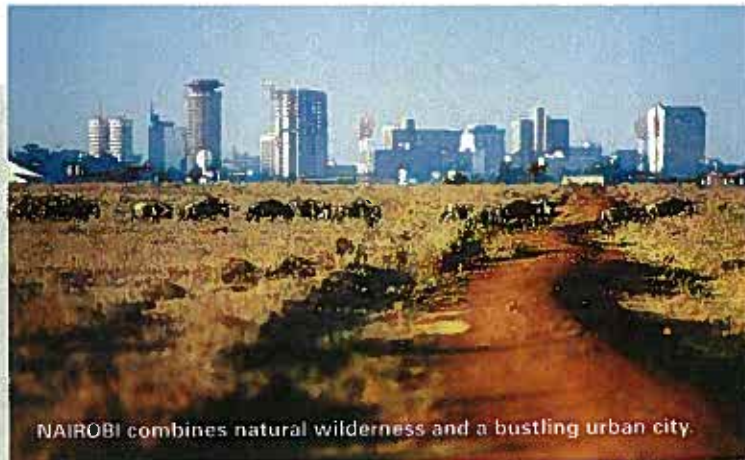
URBAN SAFARIS

Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, is a contemporary urban hub with everything one would expect from a major city. It is also one of the few major cities with a national park just four miles from the city limits—making it ideal for families who want to combine the convenience of a city with a genuine safari.

In the city, the **Tribe Hotel** (www.tribe-hotel.com), a luxury boutique property, offers four-wheel-drive vehicles and trained safari guides to take guests into the park, where they can see lions and rhinos. (Encourage your client to get photos of wildlife against the backdrop of urban skyscrapers.) In the city, families can do some shopping at the Eastern Village Market, East Africa's largest shopping and recreation complex with more than 150 retail and service outlets.

Best options for families at the Tribe would be the interconnecting Superior Rooms or the Junior Suites (which can fit two adults and a child), but the Presidential and Penthouse suites sound fantastic as well.

The hotel's six-room Kaya Spa offers manicures for younger guests, and moms and daughters can try the BFF package together in the Couple's Suite (think a hand-and-foot ritual followed by a Kaya Massage and customized facial for two, with plenty of time to relax in the suite's Jacuzzi). Contact Spa



NAIROBI combines natural wilderness and a bustling urban city.

Director Amondi Buyu (amondi@tribehotel-kenya.com; 011-254-20-720-0444) for reservations or more information.

Head concierge Cameline Kiragu (concierge@tribehotel-kenya.com; 011-254-20-720-0301) can arrange plenty of unique experiences for families, like helicopter transfers and sundowners on the escarpment, picnics in the nearby secure Karura Forest, private city tour by helicopter or a national park excursion with breakfast in the park.

Luxury travel advisors should reach out to Moses Mutahi (reservations@tribehotel-kenya.com; 011-254-20-720-0107) or General Manager Mark Somen (gm@tribehotel-kenya.com; 011-254-20-720-0223).

lets families interact with the people and learn about a very different culture.

For camps with good children's programs, Gordon recommends **Samburu Intrepids** and **Mara Intrepids** (www.heritage-eastafrika.com) and **Mara Safari Club**.

Another favorite is Elsa's Kopje, due to the interesting topography with lots of great

kopjes (rock outcrops) to climb. When not rock climbing, children can watch the cute hyrax found everywhere. Rooms work well for families, as all of them have extra room, space and beds.

Gordon feels that the ultimate family vacation is a few days (or weeks) at the cottages at **Singita's Sasakwa Lodge**, where

every family can get its own villa. While all the villas do not have kitchens, meals can be delivered. When not touring the Serengeti, families can tennis, ride horseback or just unwind in the spa. The nearby Faru Faru Lodge (also part of Singita Serengeti) has what Gordon calls "a mad biologist air" to it that will bring out the inquisitive child in adults and youngsters alike.

Driving tours can be a good option for families in East Africa. Advise your clients to keep travel days short, make sure there are plenty of breaks and stay in each place for four to six days.

Gordon also picks Zambia as a great family destination with some good private villas. She recommends **Chongwe River House** (www.chongweriverhouse.com) and **Luangwa House** (www.robinpopesafaris.net), each of which has its own specialist guide who can help keep kids interested and involved. At Livingstone, close to Victoria Falls in Zambia, **Sussi & Chuma** (www.sanctuaryretreats.com) has a little family house, and Tangala House is also a good option for families.

Good to Know: Many camps and lodges have age limits for kids, or restrict certain activities to certain ages (for example, no kids are allowed on gorilla trekking in Uganda and Rwanda).

—Jena Tesse Fox

SINGITA SABI SAND'S Ebony Family Suite is ideal for reconnecting as a family.

