



Kifaru House

Rhino Heaven in Kenya's Lewa Wildlife Conservancy



DELTA WILLIS, the author of *The Hominid Gang* and publicist for Audubon, Earthwatch, and the Survival Anglia TV documentaries.

My day began with an outdoor shower by moonlight, and only got better after the sun rose to shine on a single, lone rhino, or *Kifaru* in Kiswahili. Then I noticed a ranger sitting next to the rhino. He was there to protect this mature calf, whose mother is blind.

Lewa Conservancy near Mt. Kenya is famous for their rhino. It all began with Anna Merz, who moved to Kenya to retire, but became a champion for black rhino. Merz persuaded David and Delia Craig to set aside 5,000 acres as a rhino reserve.

Starting in 1984 with 15 black rhino, the population has grown to such an extent that successful relocations expand their range.

In 2013, 11 Black rhino were moved to contiguous Borana Conservancy, and in 2014, 10 rhino were moved to Sera, a community

conservancy supported by the Northern Rangelands Trust. Then the fence between Lewa and Borana was removed, creating a 93,000-acre range for rhino, one of the biggest private rhino reserves in Kenya. By 2017, the landscape had a combined Black rhino population of 83 as well as 74 White rhinos, which constitute 14 per cent of Kenya's rhino.

"What Joy Adamson was to lions, Dian Fossey was to gorillas, and Jane Goodall is to chimpanzees, Anna Merz is to rhinos," wrote Desmond Morris, the zoologist and author, in his foreword to her book *Rhino At the Brink of Extinction*. Tourists on safari were inspired to meet Merz, followed around by a grown orphan

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PHOTO BY: DELTA WILLIS

named *Samia*. When Anna Merz died in 2013, she left no family survivors, but 70 Black rhino, one born on the day she died.

Despite their species names, all rhino tend to be grey. Black rhino, with a pointed lip, are browsers, eating leaves and fruit. The White moniker is from an Afrikaans or Dutch word for “wide” which refers to a lip adapted to mow grass. There are other differences; for example, White rhino are larger. But the greatest impression is that you are in the presence of a creature that has existed on this earth for 40 million years.

I am a little envious of the Lewa ranger’s job, outdoors all day, birds all around in one of the most beautiful places on earth, with rare Grevy’s zebra. Then I note his radio, and wonder if he is armed.

Rhinoceros (which means “nose horn”) have been hunted for centuries, their horns used to make dagger handles in the Middle East, and ground into powder sold as an “aphrodisiac” or fever cures in Asia. The recent slaughter escalated when a rumour began in Vietnam in 2008 that rhino horn had cured a VIP of cancer. The price shot up, rhino killings soared, and greed prevailed. In Paris, a rhino was killed at a zoo.

My visit to Lewa was months ago, and looking at a cell phone cannot compete with the spectacular landscape of Lewa, or the knowledge imparted by my guide and driver, who managed to get me close to a herd of elephant so far on the horizon it took binoculars to find them. The



PHOTOS BY: ELEWANA KIFARU HOUSE

LEFT PAGE: Lewa is famous for rhino, a conservation success story.

TOP: A Lewa ranger escorts a rhino whose mother is blind.

BELOW: A guide describes botany and paleontology on a walking safari.

guides at Elewana Kifaru House are from local communities and certified Bronze or Silver by the Kenya Professional Safari Guides Association. Along with birds, botany, and paleontology, they know individual rhino, cheetah and lion families.

During my game drives, we encountered not one other vehicle. This does not mean Lewa is not popular; it is a favored retreat for Prince William, who spent a year here before going to university, and returned to propose to Kate Middleton at nearby Rutundu cabin on Mt. Kenya.

Lewa was also the setting for Anthony Bourdain’s last *Parts Unknown* episode for CNN, when he experienced first hand what has made Lewa’s model successful, and the Conservancy’s work with its neighbours in initiating development. The entire crew visited the

ON SAFARI



Fireplace mantel recycled from wrecked dhow boat.



Organic reed-thatched roof over spacious cottage



Pool with a nice view of Mt. Kenya.

PHOTOS BY: ELEWANA KIFARU HOUSE

adjoining community of Il Ngwesi to experience their culture, learn about their relationship with wildlife, and discussed how this has shifted in the last few decades.

I chose the edge of the rainy season in April, and was blessed by a rain overnight that left spectacular prisms on every blade of grass. Clouds cleared just in time for my moonlit shower, and because of the organic reed-thatched roof over my bedroom, I had not heard the rain. But when I stepped outside, the landscape sparkled with tiny rainbows, and Mt. Kenya, once taller than Kilimanjaro until she blew her top.

Kifaru House, like all lodges and camps represented by *Elewana*, (meaning Harmony in Kiswahili) strives to use sustainable practices. The lodge got a head start thanks to another woman who championed conservation, Susan Lyall, an American who designed Kifaru House. Powered by sun and wind, the five bedrooms and great sitting room feature fireplace mantels built from wrecked dhows. The swimming pool uses salt water and no chemicals.

Profits and conservancy fees generated by Kifaru House are invested into conservation efforts, which include education and health benefits to local communities, as well as training a security team that is unparalleled. Guests can meet the tracker dog team that provides anti-poaching support. The long ears of bloodhounds help scoop scents up to their sensitive noses. You (or your grandkids) can help the hounds practice by playing hide and seek after providing a sample scent from your footprint. A bloodhound's sense of smell is 40 times greater than ours; so be prepared to be found and licked.

For more detail on Kifaru House and the rest of the Elewana Collection please visit:

www.elewanacollection.com

At Lewa, it is possible to have the landscape all to yourself.

