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## Basecamp Explorer: Delivering Sundry Safari Adventures In The Masai Mara

Think you can throw a spear far and accurate? Just borrow this trusted tool of life on the savanna from one of your Maasai trekking escorts and see how well you do. Not so great, huh. It's all in fun for sure, but on your morning hike starting from the [Basecamp Explorer](#) company's [Dorobo Mobile Camp](#) in Kenya's southwest Mara Naboisho Conservancy, your respect for the traditional Maasai cattle herding people only grows stronger when you see your hosts easily nail their targets in the distance.



Basecamp Explorer's Dorobo Mobile Camp is camping in the truest sense.

CREDIT: KEN GEIGER/BASECAMP EXPLORER

After a few nights in one of Basecamp Explorer's comfy lodges, an alternative night, or several, at the Dorobo Mobile Camp brings you ever closer to the natural world that you're exploring in the Mara. It's not like you're really roughing it all that much in your tiny zip front tent; after all, you're sleeping on a cushy mattress and a hot water bottle has been slipped under the heavy covers. A bowl of wash water has been set on a stand for you under the tent awning and you've got your trusty flashlight to find the portable potty, which is set nearby and spares you a trip down the river bank at night.

With story telling around a bonfire over sundowner drinks and beef stew dinner, you won't much worry that you actually have no idea where precisely you are since you arrived at dusk. That strange high-pitched sound you hear at night is just zebras braying. No worries anyway as spear-equipped watchmen will be staying up all night to give you peace of mind. Perhaps some rain will fall, or if you're lucky the stars are out like you've never seen them before. By morning, coffee and eggs by the fire seldom taste so good.

Perhaps Big Moses, Co-founder and Head Guide of Basecamp Explorer, will be your guide the next morning for an hour hike across the savanna from Dorobo to the stationary [Eagle View](#) camp. Dressed as always in the signature Maasai red, burly, shaved-headed Moses will give you a master class on the wild. He'll tell you to be silent as you cross the creekbed as there might be an elephant or buffalo around the corner and to always walk downwind of lions. He'll stop to explain the composition of elephant dung (if you dry it for three weeks, then soak, boil and filter it, you can drink it as medicine ). A sandpaper leaf and a toothbrush tree stick can be used for just what their names suggest.



Basecamp Explorer guide Big Moses (third, left) leads a morning bush walk from the Dorobo Mobile Camp to Eagle View camp.

CREDIT: KEN GEIGER/BASECAMP EXPLORER



You might also book one of five tents in the secluded Saddle Valley that make up Basecamp's small [Wilderness Camp](#) which the company touts as an homage to the early days of safari tourism. Tents do have a private bathroom, but like the old days you bathe in a "safari-shower." It's just you, the stars and wildlife out there.

[Basecamp Masai Mara](#), the company's original camp that lies on the Talek River on the border of the Masai Mara National Reserve, consists of more than a dozen tents spread over a large compound, including some with private terraces overlooking the river that lies below steep banks. You could spend hours watching the giraffes who wander over to the opposite bank to munch the leaves in high tree as if they had arrived just for your viewing pleasure.

Whether you're booked into Basecamp Masai Mara or not, a visit ensures that you'll leave with a deeper respect for the nearly 200-square-mile Mara Naboisho Conservancy which was established in March 2010 as one of nine private conservancies next to the larger National Reserve.



Basecamp Masai Mara on the Talek River across from the National Reserve is Basecamp Explorer's original tent camp.

CREDIT: KEN GEIGER/BASECAMP EXPLORER

In the conservancy, six hundred landowners, who represent some ten thousand people in total, hold shares that range between ten and 150 acres. Founded a little more than twenty years ago by Norwegian-born Svein Wilhelmsen, Basecamp Explorer pays a set monthly lease fee to the landowners.

The benefits of conservation thus don't only mean that wildlife can migrate more freely, but locals, whose only previous source of income was derived largely from their cows, gain employment to the tune of about five hundred jobs as rangers and security. Then, there is the addition of classrooms, health centers and grazing

management education to go along with ancillary jobs as well: When a Jeep breaks down in the middle of nowhere, it's a relatively quick fix with trained mechanics and parts on hand.

Maasai women are known for their bead work. Since 2005, more than 150 women have come daily to create jewelry and crafts at the [Basecamp Maasai Brand](#) women's project. Cow horns are used for bracelets and leather bags or belts can take a week to complete. The women, who use recycled goods from sisal thread waste to plastic containers cut into strips, can swiftly turn an air freshener can into a key chain.



The Maasai start young in learning the ways of herding life.

CREDIT: KEN GEIGER/BASECAMP EXPLORER

So successful is the arts commerce project, which is a member of the [World Fair Trade Organization](#), that more than half of the women's work is sold online internationally, with the rest in the camps. When you make a purchase, 75% of an item's price goes to the creator, 25% to staff costs. The women use their earnings for land, housing, cows and school for their kids who also now eat better. Whereas previously most women cooked with wood, now they do so with gas or solar panels.

In 2006, a U.S. Senator from Illinois and his family planted trees here. And after you receive a demo on soil, sand and dung prep on a visit to the camp nursery, you too can plant a tree in the Obama Forest and add to the 170,000 plants and trees in twenty-six species that have been planted to date. From flycatchers and kingfishers to iridescent sunbirds and bright yellow weavers, the forest now serves as a home to over 300 bird species as well.

You'll just have to come back someday and see how your trees are doing.

*Travel Notes:*

*In the fall of 2018, [Kenya Airways](#) inaugurated the first ever non-stop flight between Nairobi and New York City. The Boeing 787 Dreamliner makes five flights a week based on seasonality, with a fourteen-hour westbound and fifteen-hour eastbound timeframe. On arrival in Kenya, visitors pay a visa fee of \$51.*

*From Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, travelers headed to Basecamp sites in the Masai Mara can break up their journey with an overnight stay in the ten-story [Villa Rosa Kempinski Nairobi](#) near the central business district and the National Museum. Among the property's many dining venues, the Levantine-themed Tambourin restaurant is designed to mimic the traditional Arabic Majilis style of reception rooms. Guests there enjoy shared dishes such as mezze platters, while a belly dancer performs daily.*

*In order to reach the Mara, Basecamp Explorer guests will transfer the next day to Nairobi Wilson airport for a charter flight in a [Safarilink](#) aviation company Cessna Caravan propeller plane to the Mara Naboisho airstrip.*

*In addition to the five Basecamp Explorer safari destinations in the Masai Mara, the company operates five camps on Spitsbergen island in the Svalbard Archipelago in the Norwegian Arctic, including [Basecamp Hotel](#) at Longyeardalen town, the [Nordenskiöld Lodge](#) and [Trapper's Station](#) with its teams of Alaskan huskies.*