

TRAVEL

## These Women Are Changing The Safari Space In Kenya

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*I cover adventure, luxury and family travel.*

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Mother cheetah with two-month-old cubs in the Maasai Mara in Kenya. GETTY

In a field dominated by men, female safari guides have become the pioneers in championing education and careers for Maasai girls in Kenya.

[Basecamp Explorer](#) realized that by hiring female guides they were giving women an opportunity to make financial decisions for themselves and their families. They were empowering these women by giving them opportunities outside the traditional role of taking care of their husbands, kids and livestock. Maasai women have the option to become guides through Basecamp's scholarship program. The program awards select females the chance to go through the Koiyaki Guiding School (KGS)— about 80% of all guides in Masai Mara and Amboseli are graduates of KGS.



## A Role Model



Currently at Basecamp Explorer Kenya there are two female guides including Nashipae Ntokoiwuan, known as "Nash" for short. [-] NANCY EDWARDS

Currently, at Basecamp there are two female guides including Nashipae Ntokoiwuan, known as "Nash" for short.

Nash is the youngest of six children and when she was a young girl living in her village near the Maasai Mara, she would see the safari guides going on game drives. It sparked an interest in animals and when she was in high school, she told her mother she wanted to become a guide. Her mother was not educated, but she encouraged her daughter on this path. Nash applied for and won a scholarship to the guiding school. She became a guide in 2016.



“My mother and family were very supportive of me,” says Nash. She notes that in the Maasai culture women generally raise the children and become housewives. It’s not common for them to work, or if they do work, they become teachers. “If I couldn’t become a guide, I would have been a teacher, but I really wanted to see if I could be a safari guide.”

Her son, who is now 13, goes to a good boarding school that is paid for through Nash’s guiding job. “He’s getting a very good education and I’m proud I’m able to provide for him,” says Nash.

## Women in Key Positions



Women in the Maasai Village NANCY EDWARDS



“Women will always be mothers, so it’s important for companies to provide support so women can have careers as well,” says Miriam Obegi, Chief Operating Officer Basecamp Explorer Kenya. In addition to safari guides, women have many leadership positions at Basecamp Explorer Kenya including camp managers. Christine, the Assistant Camp manager at [Eagle View](#), had a baby a year ago. She was given three months of maternity leave. Basecamp Explorer provides housing for mother and child at the camp for up to three years. A nanny watches the baby while Christine works. If Nash has more children, this would be the same situation.

This type of support from the company allows women to balance work and family and opens up a variety of opportunities that were previously reserved for men. “Fifty percent of management level positions at Basecamp Explorer Kenya are occupied by women,” says Obegi. In addition to [Eagle View](#), there’s [Basecamp Maasai Mara](#) and [Leopard Hill](#).

Having economic freedom empowers women to make decisions in all aspects of their lives. In Maasai culture, it is not uncommon for men to have multiple wives. When Nash was asked what she would do if her husband were to take a second wife, she replied: “I would leave him.” Having financial independence allows her to make decisions that are keeping with what she wants—not what society or social norms dictate. She explains that uneducated women don’t have many choices. The key for women to make their own decisions in regards to marriage and work really depends on education and financial independence.

When asked if she thinks women are better guides, Nash says she doesn’t think it’s a matter of one gender being better than the other. It’s a matter of both men and women having the opportunity to do it.

Nash is a bit of a celebrity when she’s out and about. Children in the village run out to greet her. Elders in the community also take notice. When she drops her son off at school the other students get excited to talk to her. Her son is very proud of her. She stands out in a field dominated by men. And now if other girls are walking to school and dream of becoming a guide, they can be inspired by Nash. She’s a role model that girls can do all the things boys can.



## How Does This Affect the Guest Experience?



The Basecamp Maasai Brand is a community-based handicraft workshop that empowers Maasai women and ... [+] NANCY EDWARDS

Many female guides are extremely proud and passionate about what they are doing and that excitement is contagious. Travelers have commented on not only how unique it was to have a female guide, but also how much they learned not only about safari but about life within the Maasai community and the role of women in day-to-day activities.



In addition to hiring female guides, Basecamp has also created [The Basecamp Maasai Brand \(BMB\)](#)—a community-based handicraft workshop that empowers Maasai women and preserves the Maasai beading tradition at the same time. The fair trade certified BMB enables Maasai women to apply their beading skills to produce and sell their handcrafted products, providing them with a reliable source of income. Travelers are invited to visit with the women and can purchase the products. Each item includes a tag indicating which woman created it. Seventy-five percent of the money from each product goes directly to that woman, enabling her to provide for her family in much the same way Nash does. The program is not only a way for these women to gain financial independence, but it's a way to educate travelers about the culture of the Maasai and the lives of these women.

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