



The People We Meet Along the Way: Kenya



Courtesy Cottar's Camp

Home to the Maasai Mara Reserve, the urban capital Nairobi and Big Five safari game, [Kenya](#) enchants and transforms travelers with its complexity. Described as “the cradle of humanity,” the country’s magnitude is palpable in its savanna landscapes and vibrant tribal cultures. On her recent trip, Indagare founder Melissa Biggs Bradley met with four of the country’s leading experts on conservation and sustainable tourism. Here, they reveal the work currently being done, the greatest threats to Africa’s wildlife and how travelers can make a positive impact.

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Melissa Biggs Bradley in Kenya

Jamie Gaymer, Wildlife and Conservation Manager at [Ol Jogi](#)

Where are you from originally?

I was born in Nairobi and grew up on Crescent Island in Lake Naivasha in the Rift Valley.

How did you get into the safari business?

The island where I grew up remains a small wildlife conservancy to this day. I became the GM of Oserian Wildlife Sanctuary in 2003. In 2007, I moved to Ol Jogi. In 2013, we opened the Ol Jogi Home to rentals as a response to the acute inflation in the illegal price of rhino horn on the consumer markets. We needed to generate more revenue in order to compensate for the additional security expenditures required to combat the surge in demand for rhino horn. Part of my mandate as the Conservation Manager is to ensure economic security for our conservation initiatives, and we had the opportunity to use my grassroots experience to give our guests a unique “behind-the-scenes” look at modern-day conservation. We are a not-for-profit, and all tourism revenue is reinvested into our conservation work. In this way, the more tourism revenue that we generate, the more we can invest in the protection and biological management of our wildlife.



Ol Jogi, Kenya, Photo by Melissa Biggs Bradley

What work are you most proud of?

When I arrived at Ol Jogi, we had 34 rhinos, including 25 black rhinos and nine white rhinos. Today, we have 91 rhinos, including 62 black and 29 white. We originally had 45 rhino monitoring rangers, and now we have only 24, yet we have improved our rhino monitoring to an average of 1.00 per day Average Sighting Frequency (ASF). This is the highest of any rhino conservancy in Kenya. We have maintained an annual incremental growth rate of more than six percent (five percent is required by the National Rhino Action Plan).

What are the biggest challenges in wildlife conservation today?

One, space with the capacity to protect wildlife; two, poaching; and three, sustainable economic models to protect biodiversity.

Can you point to signs of progress?

Despite the challenges, there are many small wins, like the ones I mentioned. Additionally, the formation of conservancies, the reduced poaching of rhinos and elephants in Kenya over the past few years and constructive policy change (e.g., the legislated penalties for crime against wildlife in Kenya) are all signs of progress.



Jamie Gaymer

How can travelers have an impact on conservation?

Travelers can have both a positive and negative impact on conservation. Irresponsible travelers can have a significant ecological footprint, though this is largely outweighed by the fact that they create employment and contribute significantly to our GDPs, which makes wildlife relevant in Kenya's development strategies and forces the protection of our biodiversity. Travelers who select destinations that are picking up the underlying conservation cost (rather than "piggy-backing" the system for profit) are likely to have a bigger positive conservation impact.

What makes Ol Jogi so unique?

One, its true exclusivity; two, its diversity of habitat; three, its diversity and quantity of endangered and critically endangered wildlife species; and four, its unique level of luxury and service in an otherwise remote wildlife area.

What is the biggest misconception around wildlife conservation?

That you just have some land with animals on it, and it all looks after itself. The world is always manipulated by humans, be it through encroachment into wildlife habitats, global warming, demand for natural resources, etc. Wildlife conservation is a very complex mosaic of moving parts that require management and resources.

What is your favorite region in the country and why?

Ol Jogi! I truly believe that Ol Jogi is one of the most beautiful private sector conservancies in Kenya, given the diversity of landscapes and abundance of wildlife. I also love the northern Rift Valley. It is a diverse and harsh environment that few people have the opportunity to explore. There are hardly any people there, as the environment is undeveloped and truly inhospitable.

What do you think is a must for first-time visitors to Kenya?

I think that first-timers to Kenya must visit the Maasai Mara. The sheer volume of fauna sustained by that ecosystem is mind-blowing. They can tick all of the boxes off their bucket list.

What do you recommend for someone who has been to Kenya many times?

They should get off the beaten track and start learning about what goes on behind-the-scenes, the diversity on offer, the cultural diversity and go see Kenya as it was 100 years ago!



Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya, Courtesy Henrik Hansen

Captain Sam Mbugua, Executive Grand Caravan Line Pilot

When did you start flying and where did you learn?

I started flying in 2004 at the Kenya School of Flying, where I also ended up getting my first job as a flight instructor.

What makes scenic pilots different from other pilots?

We don't just fly from A to B! We have the opportunity to actually guide as well as fly, and we have the freedom to make our own decisions to fly wherever we think will be the most interesting.

What do you love most about your job?

Being part of the travelers' experience—especially for first-time visitors to Kenya or even Africa as a whole—and showing them around the best way we know how.

What makes a scenic flight so special?

The best thing about flying over Africa is that you get to see a lot of seasonal changes within a short period of time, including changes in soil, vegetation and settlements. Through these changes, we can learn a lot about earth formations, rich culture and changes both past and present. Seeing this rich scenery from the air is unforgettable,

not to mention the great animal spotting that happens when you fly over game reserves and parks just before your game drive.



Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya, Courtesy Sutirta Budiman

What are your favorite flying routes in Africa?

To me, northern Kenya is one of the most beautiful places on earth, with rich, untapped scenery, different animal species and different cultures. On a clear day, in [Tanzania](#), the sight of the snow peaks on the roof of Africa, Mt Kilimanjaro, the breathtaking active volcano (*Ol Doinyo Lengai*) and the vast, endless savannah grasslands of the Serengeti make my day every time I visit. Going in and out of [Rwanda](#) is always easy and hassle-free, and I always look forward to meeting great personalities there.

What are your favorite seasons to fly?

Well, this is relative, and it depends what “favorite” is to you. Since there is fairly great weather year-round here in East Africa, you definitely get to see a lot during any given flight. I enjoy any time that is not bumpy! I like the rainy season because of the cloud formations, but not the thunderstorms. I like the summer because it is usually clear, but then it is also hot, so it can get bumpy. I have noticed that, due to the effects of global warming, the shifts in seasons are happening so fast.

What surprises people the most about the experience?

The whole experience will wow you. I think people don't expect to see such a nice interior in a small aircraft. When you couple the flying with the informative guiding, the

experience is so entertaining and engaging that, before they know it, passengers find themselves back on the ground and asking for more!

Mark Boyd, Community and Conservation Manager at The Safari Collection

How long have you been with The Safari Collection?

Just under six years now, but somehow it seems like just yesterday that I started!

Describe your job and what you enjoy most about it.

I'm the Community and Conservation Manager at The Safari Collection, which is a role with two main parts. Firstly, I help make The Safari Collection a company with as small an environmental footprint as possible and one that is as sustainable as possible and beneficial to the communities of people and wildlife peripheral to the areas where we work. This includes initiatives such as eliminating single-use plastic and uncertified palm oil from our supply chains, ensuring that all the chemicals we use are biodegradable and overseeing a gradual transition from non-renewable to renewable energy sources. Secondly, I also fundraise in order to create or run different community and conservation projects around Kenya and Africa. Last year, this included work with the Giraffe Conservation Foundation and the Mara Predator Conservation Programme, as well as our own Feeding Young Minds (which provided more than 140,000 free school meals in 2018) and Conservation Scholars (which funds 23 talented students from disadvantaged backgrounds to continue with their education). In 2018, we disbursed more than 1 million USD to our partners and programs. I've planned a community rangeland rehabilitation program that will restore a huge area of habitat for the highly endangered Grevy's Zebra and an event to donate 122 footballs to three youth sports groups in Kibera, Nairobi. It's fulfilling to know that my day-to-day work really helps conserve the wildlife of Kenya and improves the lives of the communities we work with.



Mark Boyd

How did the giraffe sponsorship come about?

Though it's not well known, giraffes have become highly endangered in many areas of their range and have already gone extinct in seven different countries. There are now just 97,000 remaining giraffes in Africa—down from millions several centuries ago—and they have disappeared from 90 percent of their former range. With this context in mind, we are constantly looking for ways to raise even more money for giraffe conservation, and the giraffe sponsorship at [Giraffe Manor](#) was something we'd wanted to initiate for some time. Since the start, it's been a brilliant success with our guests, and we have raised more than \$30,000 for conservation and community projects, including more than \$15,000 for the Giraffe Conservation Foundation in 2018.

What work are you most proud of?

Recently, we have dedicated a lot of work to engaging what we call our "internal community" (the special people working on our sustainability programs throughout Kenya) in all of our community and conservation work. Without them on board, none of what we do would be possible.

What are the biggest challenges in wildlife conservation today?

Without a doubt, the high rates of human population growth in areas with important wildlife populations is our greatest challenge. Kenya's population is set to double in the

next 35 years, and the majority of this growth will take place in rural and wilderness areas where wildlife exists outside of formally protected boundaries. People, livestock and agriculture compete for space with the wildlife—and the wildlife inevitably loses out. This is a pattern that has been repeated across the globe, as humans and livestock already account for 96 percent of mammalian biomass on earth.

Can you point to signs of progress?

We've been working with two amazing organizations in northern Kenya, CHAT and Marie Stopes Kenya, to provide free cancer screenings and family planning clinics to the communities, in partnership with local government medical centers, but we have a lot more we can do!



Courtesy Giraffe Manor, Kenya

How can travelers make a positive impact on conservation?

With their travel choices: this is an incredibly powerful tool. By choosing destinations with a strong conservation ethos, travelers can create an economic imperative for destinations to ensure they are heavily involved with local conservation efforts and have a genuine sustainability ethos.

What is your favorite region in the country and why?

Samburu. I love the solitude and authenticity of northern Kenya.

What do you think is a must for first-time visitors to Kenya?

The Maasai Mara. There are very few, if any, better places to view wildlife in the world.

What do you recommend for someone who has already been to Kenya many times?

Kenya has so much diversity in terms of landscapes, wildlife and culture that you could visit hundreds of times and still have so much left to experience and explore.



An elephant in the Lewa conservancy, Kenya, Courtesy David Clode

Douglas Nagi, Conservation, Culture and Community Manager at [Cottar's Camp](#)

Where are you from originally?

I was born and raised on the slopes of Mt. Kenya, after which I left for college in Nairobi.

How did you get into the safari business?

During my early days in school, at age 12, I joined the environmental club. I was fortunate enough to travel all over the country visiting national parks and reserves and other heritage sites. By the time I finished my education, I was so invested in conservation that there was no looking back.



Cottar's Camp, Kenya, Courtesy Michael Poliza

How long have you been at Cottar's?

For the last 15 years. I had interned at Cottar's as early as 1996 and was impressed with the work they were doing with conservation and the community, so I always wanted to return.

What makes the location of Cottar's so unique?

It has very diverse habitats, from the mountain ridges where the camp is situated to Acacia woodlands below camp, plus open savannas, scrub and even a riverine forest with lots of springs. We have a very high concentration of browsing animals throughout the year. Our close proximity to the Serengeti border means that we are among the first to see the migration as it comes into the Mara, and we are the last to see it as it heads back to the Serengeti. The property also operates with a very unique conservancy model which is community-owned.

Can you explain the 4 C's and how it connects to the mission of Cottar's?

The 4 C's (Conservation, Community, Culture and Commerce) is a holistic framework that was initiated by The Long Run with an aim of promoting sustainable tourism. Cottar's mission is to be financially successful and sustainable for the next 100 years, remaining true to the family tradition of providing authentic and individualized safari experiences by ensuring a legacy of wilderness and security and honoring a balance between the 4 C's. We have to incorporate the 4 C's in every aspect of the business in

order to achieve this.

What work are you most proud of?

The existence of a working conservancy that has changed people's lives. The community joining hands in creating this conservancy, and participating fully in running it, is something I am very proud of.

What are the biggest challenges in wildlife conservation today?

The biggest challenge is securing land for wildlife. The growing human population has led to loss of habitats and declining species across the board.

Can you point to signs of progress?

70 percent of Kenya's wildlife lives outside of the national reserves and national parks. The fact that many of these communities adjacent to the parks and reserves choose to participate in activities that conserve the region's biodiversity brings a lot of hope and shows the progress we have made.

Is there anything every first-time visitor to Kenya should do or know?

Kenya has a diverse natural and cultural heritage that its people value and work hard to protect. Visitors should come here to enjoy and respect the land and always engage in tourism that supports local communities.

Contact Indagare to plan a conservation-focused trip to Kenya.

- Melissa Biggs Bradley on April 25, 2019

