

STORY DANIEL SCHEFFLER

WILD AND WONDERFUL

'Glamping' is the perfect marriage of five-star luxury and a rare look at some of the most beautiful sites nature has to offer

PHOTO: MARK WILLIAMS

Singita's latest Mara River Tented Camp in the Lamai Triangle, Serengeti, Tanzania. Wild animals come close to the site.

WE CREATE A FIVE-STAR HOTEL EXPERIENCE MIXED WITH EXPOSURE TO THE WILDERNESS **DESIGNER BOYD FERGUSON**

Camping has been around for as long as man has sought shelter from the elements. From native Americans setting up temporary homes to armies on the move in the last two centuries, camping has been a way of lighter living in the wild. But it was only in the later part of the Victorian era when camping changed from being a pragmatic function to a recreational activity. A British travelling tailor, Thomas Hiram Holding, stoked the leisure fires and wrote a book in 1908 called *The Camper's Handbook* to share his enthusiasm for the great outdoors – and more than 100 years later, the enthusiasm is inextinguishable.

Around the same time that camping turned to enjoyment, “glamping” – glamorous camping – started to come into favour. European and American travellers were exploring Africa but unwilling to abandon the good life and all the thrills of a luxury lifestyle. Free from the hassles of pitching a tent or the unhappiness over the lack of hot water African escapades could be enjoyed in total and utter splendour – all the way from Colorado’s Dunton Springs to Africa’s Maasai Mara and India’s Rajasthan.

BELOW
The simple but chic interior of Singita’s Mara River Tented Camp.



And in response to the excess of the 1990s, the world has been paring down and stripping back in order to get back to the basics. “Glamping is the antithesis of a gilded overdone classical hotel model,” says Boyd Ferguson of Cile and Boyd, designers of lodges for the African luxury safari company Singita.

“Some people have experienced camping before – for instance, as a child in a tent or at a camping site, where it’s stripped and utilitarian, and usually even compromises basic comforts. But now we are able to create a five-star hotel experience in a fabric shell that offers extreme human comfort mixed with exposure to the wilderness.”

For Singita, there had to be a careful balance between utility and creature comforts in terms of design for the ultimate experience – ample hot showers, extra-comfortable beds, delicious top-tier food, sublime lighting and privacy, such as at the exclusive-use mobile-tented camp Singita Explore and its latest, the Mara River Tented Camp.

“Building with an impermanent tent and a deck allows one to consider sites that are more remote and less serviced than one would with a built hotel – therefore, allowing a true commune with nature like never before,” Ferguson says. “Even the less-habituated wild animals that are further away from urban or semi-urban areas and the threat of man, as predator, will naturally come closer to these camps.”

As glamping means fabric walls and no glass windows or wooden doors, it truly unites the senses with the natural surroundings in the most immediate and extreme way. “The sounds, sights and smells of the bush are quite alarming – it can make guests feel naked, as they are in total unity with their surroundings. It’s a never-felt-before sensation in a man-made setting, whether urban or rural,” Ferguson says.

This new way of approaching adventure takes glampers out of their comfort zone, pushing them to use their faculties in a more challenging manner. Mridula Tangirala, director of operations of Taj Safaris, believes that “people crave memorable experiences, especially as they become increasingly time-poor”. And so, in conjunction with &Beyond, the Taj Safaris combine the finest private luxury experiences, such as world-class spa services,

PHOTO: MARK WILLIAMS



ABOVE
The Banjaar Tola tents by Taj Safaris offer stunning views.

LEFT
The luxe interior of a Banjaar Tola tented suite





ABOVE
Sujan's Jawai Leopard Camp indulges in its safari setting.

RIGHT
The trendy interior of the Jawai Leopard Camp

OPPOSITE
Aman-i-Khas on the border of Rajasthan's Ranthambore National Park offers 10 ultraluxury tents.



bespoke yoga, personal butlers and cooking with a chef from market to table, with direct access to the wilderness. The Banjaar Tola tents with a river flowing below and uninterrupted views of the national park, and sleeping with the sounds of the jungle at the Baghvan property in India present nature in a way that's not easily accessed.

Deep in the pristine wilderness, where privacy prevails as the utmost extravagance, there is also a focus on conservation, and that is where Sujan has pitched its home. With three campsites in India, each with only a handful of simple yet utterly stylish tents, Sujan offers the experience of getting close to the wild with the luxury of privacy in the most conscious way. The camps are deeply committed to nurturing culture and wildlife. This commitment is evident in its latest offering, the Jawai Leopard Camp – a low-impact eco-safari with local community involvement. In addition, the regal Sher

PHOTO: JASAL SINGH



PEOPLE CRAVE MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES AS THEY BECOME TIME-POOR

MRIDULA TANGIRALA, TAJ SAFARIS

Bagh site has "for over 40 years played an active part in the conservation effort at Ranthambhore and witnessed regeneration – a life cycle of the wild in motion and evolved with the changing narrative of this magical land". And the Serai spa is the place to find peace and solace, with treatments using ayurvedic products that are made with ingredients from the Thar Desert nearby.

And then there is the ultimate in opulent glamping. When it comes to the pundits of luxury, the Aman Resorts have created the Aman-i-Khas on the border of Rajasthan's Ranthambore National Park with 10 ultraluxury tents. In hefty canvas and the

finest cottons, the tents are modelled after antiquated Moghul fine travelling caravans. Inside, the splendour of mahogany and leather forge the ultimate boudoir, while outside, tigers roam the grasslands and forests nearby.

And so, as luxury starts to shed the bling, glamping fits right in. Enhanced by the access to privileged wilderness and the awareness of the importance of conservation, relaxing with your massaged feet up while holding a glass of the finest Champagne at a watering hole makes for the perfect marriage of five-star luxury and some of the most beautiful sights nature has to offer. **T**



UNEXPECTED BENEFITS

In addition to a unique look at nature and opulent arrangements, experts say glamping experiences are rewarding in a variety of other ways.

"The quiet of nature and amazing scenery provide an ideal place for reflection. It also encourages interaction in the best way, sitting around a fire, telling and listening to stories – and making new ones. All of this is refreshing for the soul."

Jonny Bealby, owner of Wild Frontiers (pictured), an adventure tour operator with luxury tent trips in Northern India's Ladakh

"There's an authenticity of place at these lodges that is not only a rarity but also touches guests on every level – spiritual, emotional and physical. Being in the wilderness heightens the senses beyond anything that could ever be experienced back at home. People feel good, precisely because they are out of their comfort zone. They have a sense of well-being, as if they are participating in something far bigger than themselves."

Luke Bailes, CEO of Singita, an African luxury safari company