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Review Of Bushtop Camps In Kenya's Masai Mara



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One of my wife's favorite surprises during her travels through 29 African countries was when she entered her Masai Mara tented camp at Bushtops and found a lion in her bed.

It was just a stuffed lion but she still squealed with delight.

And no, my wife is not an eight-year-old sucker for stuffed animals.

She just loves it when a luxury lodge does something remarkable to put a smile on their guest's face.



Francis Tapon

On your Bushtop Camp bed, you will find a flower on your bed . . . and a lion (see the background).

The Masai Mara is covered with wild animals and luxury accommodations. While you can enjoy the endless animals, most of us can only afford one romantic luxury lodge. Let's take a look at one of the best: the [Mara Bushtops Camp](#). It achieves near perfection.

Watch The Video Summary



Is The Amani Spa Africa's Best Spa?



Mara Bushtops Camp

These two spa-goers are either in heaven or they're dead.

The Mara Bushtops Camp's Amani Spa won the 2017 Luxury Spa Award for Best Luxury Safari Spa in Africa. That sounds impressive, but that award ceremony offers *hundreds* of spa awards so it seems like entrants have a decent chance of winning some award. For instance, that competition gave awards to 53 African spas, including Africa's Best Luxury Hideaway Spa, Africa's Best Luxury Wellness Spa, Africa's Best Urban Escape Spa and Africa's Best Luxury Garden Spa.

With so many categories in that contest, it dilutes the Amani Spa's claim to fame. Still, it's an utterly sumptuous spa in the middle of the bush.

Mara Bushtops guests have exclusive access to the spa. Non-guests can't even pay a fee to use the spa, so the Bushtop guests have it all to themselves. This means that even during the high season, you'll often have the spa to yourself.



Francis Yapou

The infinity pool at the Mara Bushtops reflects its luxury.

The Amani Spa's steam shower is powerful and has an inviting eucalyptus aroma. It has waterproof cushions inside, so you can sit or lie down. It includes a cold water spray inside so you don't have to leave the steam shower to cool off.

However, if you really want to cool off quickly, a small cold pool is nearby for crazy people to jump into after they reach boiling temperatures (at which point they can return to the steam shower to get overheated again). This Scandinavian tradition works in Africa. The dry sauna is also inviting.





Mara Bushtops Camp

After you boil yourself in the steam shower or dry sauna, you can freeze yourself in this small pool.

Use of all the spa facilities, including the gym, is free for guests. The only thing that costs extra is the treatments, which include facials and massages. For example, massages cost over \$1 per minute. A 60-minute facial costs \$85. The four-hour "Indulgence Journey" treatment costs \$260.



Francis Tapon

The Mara Bushtop Camps gym is small but clean and modern.

Food For A Foodie

Food and drinks are included. Yes, you can drink all you want.

Although the selection is diverse, it's not all free. There are a few premium drinks that cost extra. For example, you can have all the Amarula you desire, but Baileys costs extra. Jack Daniels also falls into the "premium" category.

This is an excellent feature because it gives the guest plenty of options, both in the free and premium categories. Of course, we'd all love everything to be free, but as any savvy Forbes reader knows, a business must remain profitable to continue. One thing is clear: it's easy to get drunk at Bushtops.

Speaking of drinking, the Mara Bushtops Camp attracts all sorts of wildlife because it has one of the few salt licks in the Masai Mara. Most mammals need salt. One reliable source is the salt lick that is right next to the restaurant. Every day, wildlife visits this salt lick. During the rainy season, the trickle of salty water turns into a stream. You can see the salt in the soil all around the property. All this translates into abundant, guaranteed wildlife viewing for you.





Francis Topon

Dilemma: Check out the yummy menu or check out the wildlife in the background at the salt lick.

The food is varied and everything is *à la carte*. Given the remoteness of the camp, it's remarkable that the chefs can make such high-quality food in the bush.



Francis Topon

Since three meals a day is included in the Mara Bushtop Camps, you can expect to get fat like a hippo unless you use their gym.

They have a small organic garden where they cultivate the vegetables that appear in your food.

Moreover, solar power supplies all the energy needs, except when Mara Bushtops Camp is at full capacity - that's when they switch on the backup diesel-powered generator.

Attention To Detail

In general, Bushtops has an extraordinary attention to detail, which is absolutely essential in luxury travel. Here are some examples.





Francis Tapsoe

To thwart the chilly nights in July, Bushtops slips a hot water bottle in your bed while you're eating dinner.

Instead of a boring "do not disturb" sign, Mara Bushtops has you place a real spear on the floor (see the video at the top of the page).



Francis Tapsoe

After handing Bushtops your passport, they return it to you in a Bushtops bow. Nice touch.

Push a button in your room and a Masai escort will come to accompany you back to the restaurant (or help you with whatever you need).





Francis Tapon

Bushtops is obsessed with the safety of their guests. We were escorted to a rarely seen Masai cave, where the Masai boys perform rite-of-passage rituals. Such tours are [-]

At night, they don't just put a standard chocolate on the bed, but they also deliver a letter and postcard that informs you that they are ready to serve.

Bushtops is obsessed with branding everything. The Bushtops Camp logo appears on their umbrellas, pens, towels, bathrobes, slippers and even their toilet paper.



Francis Tapon

Bushtops brands everything, including the toilet paper.

Some may think that this ubiquitous branding is a turn-off, but I love it. It demonstrates unusually high attention to fine details. Ultimately, the difference between nice accommodations and luxury accommodations is attention to details. However, even detail-obsessed Mara Bushtops slips up.

Mara Bushtops Camp Shortcomings





Francis Tapon

The antique telescope is nice to look at, but not to look through.

I could only find three things wrong with the Mara Bushtops Camp:

1. **Failing telescope.** Each room has an antique telescope. Although it's pleasant to look at, I couldn't look into mine. It was broken. I couldn't zoom into the far away wildlife. Lawrence Abura, the attentive Mara Bushtops manager, admitted that Bushtops needed to repair a couple of them. It's safe to assume that they'll fix this minor problem in 2018.
2. **Tepid pools.** June to August has pleasant days and cool nights. Mara Bushtops Camp has two pools. One isn't heated at all (so it was cold); the other is heated by solar panels (but was just tepid and a bit too cold for someone who isn't going to swim vigorously). If you visit during a hot time of year or you don't mind crisp pools, then you won't mind. Furthermore, there is a hot tub, which has a pleasant temperature. Lastly, they can make an outdoor, private, hot bubble bath (with rose petals) in your room whenever you want it.
3. **The rocky road.** When you spend thousands of dollars on a hotel, you might expect that the road that leads to it would be smooth. However, once you take your turn off the main road (which is being repaired), it takes about seven minutes of bumpy riding to get to the Mara Bushtops Camp reception. Some may love the rustic road because it makes you feel you're in wild Africa. Others may wonder why Bushtops can't invest in improving the private road that leads to their Mara camp.

These minor shortcomings would be easier to forgive if Bushtops weren't so pricey.

2018 Prices

In 2018, from April to May (the rainy/green season), the Mara Bushtop Camp costs \$800 per person, per night, based on double occupancy. For example, a couple will pay \$1,600 per night in the low season.

If you come in the peak season (July through Oct and December 23 to January 19, 2019), expect to pay \$1,090 per person, per night (\$2,180 per night for a couple sharing the same room).

To help alleviate your sticker shock, you should realize that this is an *all-inclusive resort*. That means you get:

- Three delicious meals a day.
- All-you-can-drink beverages (including alcoholic beverages).
- Shared safari outings (Masai Mara park fees not included, which run about \$90/person/day).
- Access to the gym, steam shower, sauna, swimming pool and spa (treatments are extra).
- Wifi

And don't forget that you get your own pet lion.

Add up all these amenities and you'll get something worth a few hundred dollars. That doesn't turn Mara Bushtops into a bargain, but when has luxury ever a bargain?

VERDICT: 9 out 10 stars.

Disclosure: I received a press rate at Bushtops.

- Francis Tapon

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