

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Personalization, sustainability continue to shape luxury travel in Africa

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Roar Africa specializes in luxury safari experiences. Image credit: Roar Africa

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Forward-thinking hospitality groups are emphasizing sustainability and personalization as they help affluents discover unique experiences in Africa, a continent that still holds untapped potential for luxury tourism.

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Roar Africa has been offering bespoke, ultra-luxury safaris for almost two decades and has been on the ground floor of experiential travel in the region. The brand curates customized itineraries across 13 African countries centered on wildlife and culture, with an emphasis on responsible tourism.

"[Clients] want to travel with purpose and need to know that they are traveling responsibly and making a difference for the planet as a whole," said Deborah Calmeyer, founder and CEO of **Roar Africa**. "They also want unique experiences and exclusive access moments that they did not even know existed and seek out the luxury of privacy that a natural paradise brings.

"More than ever, there is a pressing need to get off the grid have no WiFi or cellphones," she said. "This fulfills the desire for greater immersion into the local culture and communities."

In this Q&A, Ms. Calmeyer discusses what makes luxury excursions in Africa a unique opportunity for affluent travelers. Here is the dialogue:



Deborah Calmeyer, founder and CEO of Roar Africa. Image courtesy of Roar Africa

How has luxury travel in Africa changed over the course of your career?

I have seen so many positive changes, particularly in the area of conservation, and this is very heartening to me. Not only is there a greater focus on ecotourism among travel consumers, more property owners are committed to educating and engaging their communities on how much tourism can positively impact their lives.

I also find that although luxury will never go out of style, people are reverting to more basic comforts and not necessarily wanting over-the-top luxury that they don't feel is necessary.

As for the future of luxury travel to Africa, younger people want more and more experiences, which I think is wonderful. With this comes ever increasing demands from this important market segment.

What can affluent travelers expect when they visit the African continent for the first time?

They can expect a level of luxury, both in terms of lodging and services, that is truly the best they will ever experience. Africa's wildlife, beauty and communities will also provide them with unexpected life-changing moments that are as fulfilling as they are inspiring.

And perhaps less significant but still important, they should also know that distances between places are actually much larger than they might think. I often get asked if it is feasible for a seven-day trip to include visits to Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and South Africa, and the answer is no.

How are Roar Africa excursions different from other bespoke safari options?

I would say there are three differentiators.

First, to truly know Africa and be able to share it in the way I do comes from my family's 329-year history in South Africa. I am sharing Africa from its roots, and the indelible moments we curate come from spending time in places I have always loved.

Second, our company is based in New York and Cape Town, and I live between both cities. This allows me and our bi-cultural team to have the deepest understanding of how sophisticated Americans want to travel while also being fully plugged into what's happening on the ground.

This, combined with our lifelong relationships in Africa, enables us to provide refined, insider access to the best of the best.

Thirdly, our operational activities are handled in-house and this is unique in the industry. We do not outsource any aspect of an itinerary, thereby allowing us to stay in complete control every step of the way. This provides a seamless and uncomplicated experience from the moment our guests step off the plane.



Roar Africa is based in New York City and Cape Town. Image credit: Roar Africa

Why is personalization so important in the travel industry?

I can speak to why personalization is so important to Roar Africa's travelers. They are informed, intellectually curious and have a deep understanding of the earth.

As connected as our clients may be in their everyday lives, it is impossible for them to know how to find the types of locations and experiences in a foreign land that meet their discerning needs. This is what we do.

And the only way to achieve this is by having the level of expertise that we have through our all-Africa team, all 100 percent employed by us combined with our extraordinary dedication to making every detail perfect for every individual guest.

What do you think is next for luxury travel in Africa?

Certainly experiences with a focus on conservation and an extremely light travel foot print. This includes interacting with resident environmentalists or historians or specialists in whatever the field of interest to gain a more intimate lens.

I also see a greater demand for specialized travel and intimate group journeys with niche themes, and to best accommodate this growing trend we have introduced a handful of curated experiences in the culinary, wellness and women's empowerment space.

Finally, there is an increased desire to discover what I call Africa's other Big Five food, fashion, art, culture and design, and a heightened demand for beach experiences in Africa off the coast of Mozambique, Kenya and the Indian Ocean Islands.

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