

RETURN OF THE BLACK RHINO

In 1970, after decades of poaching, the number of black rhino grazing the planet's grasslands had fallen to 70,000. By 1993, that figure had dropped to 2,475. Thanks to international efforts, and the first ever black rhino safari project in Kenya, numbers are on the rise

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PHOTOGRAPHY
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“We could not imagine that it [rhino poaching] would have such a great effect. It is shocking,” said Dr Desire Dalton, one of the authors of an international research study, published in February 2017, entitled *Extinctions, Genetic Erosion and Conservation options for the Black Rhinoceros (Diceros bicornis)*. The study was conducted to look at the well-documented poaching of black rhinos and the subsequent demise of their population. It found that there was a loss of 69 per cent of the species’ variation between 1775 and 2008. The study also raised fears that the species could disappear from the wild within the next two decades.

A light at the end of the tunnel shines in the form of Saruni Rhino, a new safari property located in the Sera Community Conservancy Wildlife Reserve in northern Kenya. Saruni, a collection of luxury properties, has opened the first ever opportunity in east Africa to track the

black rhino on foot. The 350,000 hectare reserve is the first in Africa to own and operate a sanctuary dedicated to the conservation of this species, and marks the return of the rhinos to this land – where they were historically absent for a quarter of a century.

A dozen rhinos were relocated to the Sera Community Conservancy in 2015 and on 11 March 2016, a female black rhino gave birth. It was the first of its kind to be born on community land in northern Kenya in more than 25 years. The rhinos on the reserve have their horns microchipped, and the guides, using a radio transmitter, lead you through the bush on foot to see the giants.

According to the WWF, populations of the black rhino fell to 70,000 in 1970 and by 1993, there were only 2,475 in the wild. Numbers now appear to be around the 5,000 mark, but the species is still on the critically endangered list.

In traditional Chinese medicine, rhino horn is said to help treat fever, and in

Vietnam it’s reported that it can cure cancer. Global trade in rhino horn is banned by a UN convention – but because of the demand, a profitable black market exists. It’s reported that rhino horn is worth more than its weight in gold.

In March 2017, two events brought the topic into focus. In a zoo near Paris, poachers broke in and shot a rhino dead, before cutting of its horn with a chainsaw. In the same month, Thai customs confiscated 21 horns with an estimated value of around £4.1 million – the largest haul in recent years.

Although critically endangered, the black rhino does have some hope, especially with the assistance of the Sera Community Conservancy and the Saruni Safari destination, where you can see the enchanted giants in the flesh. ©

From \$630 (USD) pppn sharing plus an additional \$175 pp conservation fees, all bookings require a minimum stay of 2 nights at Saruni Rhino and 2 nights at nearby Saruni Samburu. sarunimara.com