

# TRAILBLAZING

For a country as rich in wildlife as Kenya, there are plenty of conservancies and organisations doing great work in protecting wildlife and their habitat. Here are some of our top picks:

PHOTOGRAPHS: BRIAN SIAMBI, BIG LIFE FOUNDATION

## SERA CONSERVANCY

Tracking black rhinos on foot in Sera Conservancy is a unique and thrilling experience that allows wildlife lovers to contribute to the protection of these critically endangered species. This is said to be the first time black rhinos are back in their habitat in the north after 30 years following a translocation, with a population of at least 13. One is almost guaranteed a sighting, with the highest number on record being six in one session. Tracking is done via both traditional skills and modern technology. A ranger will for instance use a GPS transmitter to search for a signal being sent from a microchip implanted in the horn of a black rhino, while a Samburu guide will shake a small cloth dispersing ash particles into the air, a method that was traditionally used to tell wind direction in order to keep one's natural scent away from the rhino's strong olfactory sense. You can also visit the wildlife sanctuary at feeding time to see calves that were either orphaned or abandoned by their mothers. For accommodation, we were set up at the luxury Saruni Rhino camp who helped plan our trip. [www.saruni.com](http://www.saruni.com).

## RETETI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Reteti was formed in the wake of the 2011 drought which hit Northern Kenya hard. Elephants were falling down wells, dying in conflict and from drought consequences. The community was simultaneously asking for assistance and opportunities. Tolerance levels were falling and human wildlife conflict increasing. With the full backing of the community, a partnership with a host of organisations such as Conservation International brought employment to the locals as custodians of their own heritage. Kenya Wildlife Service and Northern Rangelands Trust have also been invaluable partners. Everyday at dawn the keepers hand over medical instructions and little elephants on life support. Elephants rouse themselves from sheltered stables or from social groups that have huddled together



in night bomas watched intently by their human guardians. The gates open and the day brings familiar smells, sounds and sights; a landscape of familiarity for a wounded elephant and one that is vital in rebuilding their desire to live. Midday brings the mud wallow followed by an afternoon of wild and stewarded freedom from which the elephants return home to a bottle of formula every three hours. Visitors are welcome to watch the animals via a viewing platform during feeding times.

[www.retetielephants.org](http://www.retetielephants.org)

## OL PEJETA CONSERVANCY

As well as conserving wildlife, preserving wilderness and providing sanctuary to endangered species, Ol Pejeta has a host of activities bound to keep even the most active visitor happy. Those who are interested in their innovative conservation techniques can 'get their hands dirty' working behind the scenes with the rangers. Tracking lions, working with anti-poaching dogs, visiting the endangered species enclosure, participating in feeding time with the chimpanzees at their sanctuary and dropping in on the



local communities are just some of the ways rangers spend their days. For those who enjoy safari, there are many ways to view the animals and birds: game drives, bush walks, bird watching and more. For the most energetic of all, try a safari on horseback or mountain bike, stop for photos at the equator sign then slake your appetite with one of Morani Restaurant's famed burgers or a healthy fresh salad. For anyone living in Nairobi, this is a great day trip to make on your next day off. We however spent the night, staying at Ol Pejeta Safari Cottages. [www.olpejetaconservancy.org](http://www.olpejetaconservancy.org)

**ORGANISATIONS TO KNOW**

**Big Life Foundation-** Protecting over 1.6 million acres of wilderness in the Amboseli-Tsavo-Kilimanjaro ecosystem, Big Life partners with local communities to protect nature for the benefit of all. Since its inception, it has expanded to employ hundreds of local Maasai rangers—with more than 30 permanent outposts and tent-based field units, 13 Land Cruiser patrol vehicles, 3 tracker dogs and 2 planes for aerial surveillance. Co-founded in September 2010 by photographer Nick Brandt, conservationist Richard Bonham and entrepreneur Tom Hill, Big Life was the first organization in East Africa to establish coordinated cross-border anti-poaching operations. [www.biglife.org](http://www.biglife.org)

**Born Free Foundation-** They work tirelessly to ensure that all wild animals, whether living in captivity or in the wild, are treated with compassion and respect and are able to

live their lives according to their needs. Born Free promotes 'compassionate conservation' to enhance the survival of threatened species in the wild and protect natural habitats while respecting the needs and safeguarding the welfare of individual animals. Their nine working priorities include eliminating trophy and canned hunting, ending illegal wildlife trade as well as creating awareness. [www.bornfree.org](http://www.bornfree.org)

**Maa Trust-** Their goal is to ensure the success of conservation through sustainable community development in the Maasai Mara ecosystem. They work in partnership with Maasai-owned conservancies and their neighbouring communities to improve the lives of local families in an environmentally sustainable way. They have a wide range of projects that benefit the local landowners involved in conservation. These include schools, honey production, conservation education, beadwork, water and sanitation, health clinics and bursary programs. [www.themaatrust.org](http://www.themaatrust.org)