

Vacations Of A Lifetime



The World's Best Safaris

by Larry Olmsted

(NAPSA)—Let's face it, you can have a truly great safari experience no matter where in Africa you go. But in many ways, *who* you go with is more important than where you go. For me, whether it's Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Botswana, side trips to Zanzibar or Victoria Falls, or gorilla tracking excursions to Rwanda, my choice of tour operator is always the same—Micato Safaris.

When you are excellent at something for a long time, people tend to notice, and that is the case with Micato. It doesn't surprise me that Travel+Leisure just named Micato the "World's Best Safari Outfitter"—again. It was no fluke, since they won the same award last year—and the year before. In fact, it's the ninth time in the past decade the magazine has given Micato that distinction.

Travel+Leisure is not alone. Micato has been called the best by National Geographic Traveler, Condé Nast Traveler, Virtuoso (an exclusive consortium of the nation's best travel agents) and many others. But while these accolades reflect well on the amazing job Micato does, these awards are not why I called them for my trip.

Micato's insider clout makes things happen

I called Micato because I have traveled with them before. I've written previously about how enamored I am with Butterfield & Robinson, the world-class bicycle tour operator. Well, Micato is the equivalent for safaris, and both companies succeed over and over again by emphasizing the same things: excellence of guides, local employees, offices and equipment; utilizing the very best accommodations and cuisine; and decades of firsthand knowledge and insider clout to make things happen that others simply can't.



Whether you're enjoying a quiet drink at sunset in the bush...

Micato Africa was started by Felix and Jane Pinto in 1966. They are both Kenyans with long personal connections to their homeland. Every Micato trip to East Africa includes a meal at their private home—Lavington. On my first visit to Kenya, I was lucky enough to meet both of them.

In addition to personal attention from the Pinto family, there are other special Micato-only touches. Guests routinely meet Maasai elders and enjoy other "invitation only" experiences such as meeting with paleontologist Louise Leakey, granddaughter of the world's most famous paleontologists, Louis and Mary Leakey.

Personalized service, every step of the way

Many tour operators, especially safari companies, are essentially booking agents, turning over actual operations to local companies that handle the ground transportation and guiding. Not Micato, which has its own fleet of first-rate safari vehicles. But the company's biggest asset is a cadre of highly trained, multilingual, expert safari guides, drivers, tour leaders, and trackers. From the moment you get off the plane until the moment you leave, your trip is personally supervised.



...or luxuriating in the many amenities of a luxury camp at the end of the day, there are few things as delightful as an African safari.

For every safari they sell, Micato sends a child to school

Micato packs appeal for another reason, too. In an age when hotels and other travel entities are suddenly trying to cast a socially responsible image, the company has been a leader in philanthropic travel long before it became a fashionable marketing tool. Micato has been doing philanthropic work for 25 years through its charity arm, America-Share, whose programs provide educational support and community outreach to impoverished Kenyan families.

Micato also has a One for One Commitment: For every single safari they sell, Micato pays the expenses and fees to send an African child to school. Their philanthropy earned them Condé Nast Traveler's World Savers Award in 2010, which Micato just won again for 2012, in two different categories: Education and "Doing It All."

Scheduled and customized itineraries, all departures guaranteed

Micato has a unique product called the "Bespoke Collection," accommodations consisting of private ranches, family homesteads, and country estates throughout Kenya and Tanzania, many with-

in private game reserves, to which Micato guests have exclusive access. Itineraries custom-built around these accommodations include anniversary, wedding, celebratory, honeymoon and graduation-themed trips, itineraries using private planes or jets, and unique safaris by horseback, camel or on foot.

For its scheduled group trips, Micato has an unusual guaranteed departure rule—sign up for a published trip and you are going, even if no one else does. Last year I tried to go on a specialized European trip with a different high-end tour operator only to have it canceled because they said not enough people signed up. That won't happen with Micato.

Major inclusions, plus no tipping necessary

Unlike some other tour operators, Micato adds no surcharges or supplemental fees to their published or quoted prices, and includes many things in their rate that other companies will nickel and dime you for: airport transfers, park entrance fees, and all bottled water and soft drinks. And Micato has a "no tipping necessary—ever" policy. All gratuities are included, from porters to waiters to safari directors, drivers and guides.

There are a lot of different reasons to love Micato Safaris, but for me at the end of the day it comes down to confidence. Just as you might seek out the best possible surgeon for an operation or the best architect to design your home, there is peace of mind that comes from knowing you are in the best hands and have a true expert in your corner.

To find out how to book your own incredible safari, log on to www.micato.com or call 1-800-MICATO-1.