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Big Five's bold new direction in Kenya

Company turns to private conservancies for its guests

Stuart, FL (Apr 19, 2011) -- Kenya has for generations been *the* safari destination. Nearly every serious traveler, nature lover and animal enthusiast dreams of going on safari to see the magnificent wildlife. Indeed, who can imagine Kenya's Masai Mara or Tanzania's sweeping Serengeti plains without the mass annual animal migrations? But are we in danger of loving it to death?

"We have all heard of or witnessed scenes of a dozen vehicles surrounding one poor lion trying to catch a nap," said Ashish Sanghrajka, president of Big Five Tours & Expeditions.

Human overcrowding in the national parks and reserves, poaching, and habitat loss all represent devastating threats to the health of Africa's animal populations, both migratory and resident.

"How we balance the needs of animals, local communities and visitors are critical to the future survival of the animals and ecosystems of Africa," he added.

The International Livestock & Research Institute puts the decline in giraffe populations in Masai Mara at 95%! Statistics for the big cats are equally dramatic. One study determined that there are some 20,000 lions left in the wild, a drop from 450,000 just 50 years ago. Cheetah fared no better, with only 12,000 left today versus 50,000 five decades ago.

"I grew up in Kenya, and I see the drastic changes every time I go back," Sanghrajka said. "Unless some serious decisions are made soon, there may be no reason for my son or his children to go on safari."

But there is hope. Small, privately held conservancies that include small-scale tented camps dot the landscape of Kenya. With them comes a more holistic approach in three equally vital areas – game management, habitat conservation and cultural preservation.

The Northern Rangelands Trust, comprised of 15 community conservancies; Ol Pejeta Conservancy between the Aberdares and Mount Kenya; Olare Orok, bordering the Masai Mara Game Reserve; and Selenkay, north of Amboseli National Park, are just some of the examples that offer alternatives to the often crowded national game parks.

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At the same time, these private concessions are enriching the safari adventure for their guests. By virtue of the fewer number of visitors at any one time, safaris are more personal and satisfying. The camps often have just six or eight luxury tents, creating a much more intimate and authentic experience of the bush. They also offer bush walks and night game drives, not allowed in national parks.

What makes conservancies even more valuable is that they work hand-in-hand with local communities. They present real opportunities for better lives through education, medical clinics, and training and employment opportunities. They also pay fees – either directly to local landholders or to the community through a community trust.

Sanghrajka interviewed his Maasai guides while visiting a conservancy adjacent to the Mara. He asked them to speak about the benefits of conservancies. The videos can be seen on YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/bigfivetravel>.

Big Five has committed to supporting the conservancy model in Kenya to the fullest extent possible. “It is just a richer experience for our guests and a better alternative for the people and animals of East Africa,” said Sanghrajka.

For more information, please contact one of our Africa specialists at (800) 244 3483, (772) 287 7995, info@bigfive.com.

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