

# Conscious SAFARIS

*Eco-destinations  
that promote  
sustainability of  
both the environment  
and the community.*  
by SHARON VAN WYK

**i**t's easy to conjure up the images when the word "safari" is mentioned. It's a yearning for gin and tonic, cucumber sandwiches and croquet – a kind of "pass the pith helmet" moment.

But these images belong to the past, replaced by a slick industry selling the dream of the ultimate bush holiday to a global travelling public.

Of course, any safari (the word means "journey" in KiSwahili, the common tongue of East Africa) relies 100 percent on Africa's precious natural resources – its last remaining wild places and the plants and animals which inhabit them. So that makes safari operators more sensitive to the environment, right?

Sadly, not necessarily. When it comes to safaris, the world's holidaymakers have been fed a steady diet of "eco-tourism this, enviro-tourism that" over recent years, to such an extent that it often makes it difficult to figure out exactly what the impact of a holiday in the wilds of Africa has, not just in terms of carbon footprints, but in terms of land and people management.

Take Kenya, for example. The "home" of the safari, the Maasai Mara, is so flooded with mass tourism during the annual wildebeest migration that the impact of hundreds of vehicles crowded onto the banks of the Mara river, waiting for crossings, has become a major

environmental concern. And a huge tourism let-down.

Our rich natural heritage is used to marketing anything to do with safaris. Most purport to be "green", "community-conscious" or "Big Five-friendly", making it virtually impossible for tourists to work out who the "greenwashers" are, and which products are actually doing good deeds.

The good news is that South Africa is a world-leader when it comes to responsible eco-tourism, and this includes Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa (FTTSA), an organisation dedicated to eco-friendly principles.

This means that you can rest assured that a FTTSA-accredited destination is one that is both conservation- and community-minded, making sure that future generations enjoy wildlife in its natural habitat, while giving back to the community as well.

Here is a selection of some of the best fair trade bush destinations:

