

## *Angama Mara: Kenya's latest luxury safari lodge*



Wake up to Kenya's Great Rift Valley: the gobsmacking view from Angama Mara. "



**a Carruthers**

*Opening 60 hotels and luxury safari lodges in Africa since 1982 is a milestone by any measure. So what's the harm in just one more? That was the reasoning a few years ago of African hospitality power couple Nicky and Steve Fitzgerald when they embarked on their most recent project, [Angama Mara](#). An ultra exclusive lodge, it comprises two separate camps of 15 luxury tents, each with stellar views over Kenya's Great Rift Valley – Karen Blixen territory where *Out of Africa* was set. “Just one more lodge’ became a \$US18 million investment at a time [2014] when fears of the [Ebola epidemic](#) reigned in western Africa,” reflects Nicky. “Luckily there were no cases in Kenya, but we were still badly hit by a drop in tourist arrivals.” Kenya has also experienced a number of terrorism attacks since 2011. To top it off, the Fitzgeralds had 10 months to build a 9500-square-metre lodge during wet season*

*on a hilltop in the middle of nowhere. Well, no one ever said opening luxury lodges would be easy. “What a roller-coaster ride it’s been,” say Nicky, “but we’d do it all again in a heartbeat.”*

*The result is that at Angama Mara you get extremely experienced safari operators with a private, family-managed, small-scale feel. The couple entered the hospitality industry in the early ’80s when they “inadvertently fell” into building the luxurious [Arniston Spa Hotel](#) in South Africa’s Western Cape province.*



African hospitality power couple Nicky and Steve Fitzgerald

*“What a lark, we thought – it was just 11 rooms back then, it’s changed a lot today. ‘We can do this for a couple of years, then get real jobs’, we thought,” says Nicky.*

*After spending the next 15 years building, opening and running more hotels and restaurants in Western Cape, Steve had a midlife crisis and a heart attack on the same afternoon – and decided he wanted to be a game ranger. “Well, sort of,” Nicky qualifies.*

*The couple packed up their Cape life and two young daughters and moved to Johannesburg to help form CC Africa, which went on to become luxury travel company andBeyond in 2008.*

*“That next chapter also flew past in the blink of an eye: new lodges literally sprouted*

*out of the ground overnight in every beautiful wilderness corner of sub-Saharan Africa,” says Nicky. “We somehow survived every storm and hurdle that came our way.”*

*Said hurdles have included baboons trashing a pantry, lodges washed away by El Niño, finding a cobra in the bottom of a guest’s loo, and leaving a diving guest at sea (“thankfully immediately rescued by another dive boat – not our proudest moment”).*



The view from Angama Mara.

*There’s also been the heartache of losing staff and colleagues to HIV/AIDS, and the never-ending, albeit rewarding, task of collecting money from generous guests to help fund the building of classrooms, clinics and libraries in the villages where they operate.*

*“Doing well by doing good was, and remains, our North Star,” says Nicky.*

*With the Fitzgeralds both now in their early 60s, Nicky just can’t promise they’ll open a 62nd lodge.*





See the silverback gorillas in Rwanda

***When in Africa ... Don't miss  
Gorilla trekking in Rwanda: Most of our guests do this in conjunction with a stay at***



*Angama Mara. Sitting seven metres from a 200kg silverback gorilla is simply indescribable. Your heart just stops. Buy two gorilla permits – costly as they are, one is not enough. You've travelled all this way, spoil yourself! And take a porter – it's the right thing to do. On your third day, hang out with the golden monkeys.*

**Nairobi:** *Yes, you read that right. This crazy town is filled with the warmest people you'll ever meet. Even the traffic isn't so bad these days. Don't miss Denys Finch Hatton's grave in the Ngong Hills, Dame Daphne Sheldricks's enchanting elephant and rhino orphans, Karen Blixen's beautiful home and high tea with giraffes at Giraffe Manor.*

**Camping in Tanzania's mighty Serengeti:** *Pop over the border from Kenya to get up close and personal with half a million wildebeest. There are great camping operators who will glamp you up a storm. Nicky Fitzgerald*



Glamping it up in the Serengeti National Park, Tanzania

### ***Saving rhinos***

*The [Rhinos Without Borders](#) initiative is working to stop poaching and to relocate 100 rhinos from South Africa (where the problem is most prevalent) to safe havens in Botswana. The scheme is sponsored by andBeyond, which has just announced the*

*upcoming refurbishment of its Bateleur Camp in Kenya's Maasai Mara, from November this year through till June 2018. From November 15, the company is offering three nights for the price of two until January 2018.*

*[Abercrombie & Kent](#) are also in deal mode: book their 10-day luxury Out of Africa journey (priced from \$18,640 per person) and receive a free hot-air balloon ride over the Maasai Mara and an extra night free at Angama Mara. Meanwhile, [Sanctuary Retreats](#)' flagship Chief's Camp property in Botswana – refurbished last year – also has "stay longer, pay less" deals.*



To prevent poaching, Rhinos Without Borders are relocating 100 rhinos from South Africa to Botswana.