



EL KARAMA LODGE

L A I K I P I A

SUSTAINABILITY

100% solar power and renewable energy

From the very beginning we have been a 100 percent solar powered environment. Our system was a huge investment but supports all operations in the lodge including lighting, electricity, water heating, wifi internet access, a eco-washing machine, the chemical free swimming pool equipment and all our behind the scenes needs. We rely exclusively on renewable energy for all our operations.

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

You will see that our lodge was built using recycled materials such as fallen wood, stone from the ranch, Recycled cottons from the mitumba, wine bottles and glasses as re-purposed vessels and vases and so Much more. It is our hope that we can continue to grow our products from any potential waste items Produced here in meaningful ways. Anything we cannot recycle goes to a recycling unit in Nanyuki, our nearest town.

Responsible water use

We have invested in 1.5 Million litres of water storage Capacity here, installing 8 water metres, which monitor and control all water use daily in our operations. We report on all water use daily to ensure any areas for improvement can be implemented swiftly. Efficient solar heating (last solar water heating upgrade November 2019) and plumbing Systems ensure we do not waste water and that we use no firewood for heating systems here meaning we are entirely reliant on solar energy for our consumption. Our monitoring and metering allows us to read daily water use and consumption in every department. We grow all our vegetables using recycled water from a small calf-friendly dairy and metered / rationed water from our long term storage facilities. The dam also created 8 dams over the property to ensure there is annual water for wildlife should the Ewaso Nyiro river stop flowing due to climate change, population pressure and unregulated extraction.

No plastic bottles or single-use plastic

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Building our community: local procurement strategy

We believe in the ripple effect and the power of small business and relationships to create positive change. So we support local and organic suppliers through our buying.

Anything we cannot grow or rear on-site comes from local entrepreneurs and local businesses within a 70km radius of our lodge. This ensures that the provenance of our food is the best, but also that our business directly contributes to the local economy and our growing community. We thrive on these connections and our colleagues in the region keep us Updated on how this secure strand of business has created positive change in their livelihoods and access to opportunity.

Farm to Fork food

The provenance of our goods is vital to the quality of our guest experience and to our positive impact on this landscape. We have a large organic garden and orchard where we grow at least 80 percent of our food using recycled water from a small calf friendly dairy at the farm HQ.

Sheep, milk products and hay used at the lodge all come from the farm and pork, beef and trout are sourced within 60km of the lodge from organic/pasture fed sources. We have personally visited every one of our suppliers to see how they operate and make sure we are contributing to a positive cycle of production, ethical practices and environmental impact.

Light and noise pollution

Our aim is for this lodge to be as sensitive to the environment and wildlife around us as possible. We are aiming for a small footprint in everything we do and that includes light and noise pollution. All bulbs in the lodge are low energy led variety. We have no outdoor flood lights or spotlights and the pathway lighting is also low level solar led lighting ensuring no halo or glow into the sky. We also ensure that car numbers from our lodge are no greater than four, ensuring minimal impact on the area and wildlife around us.

Carbon emissions

By producing most of our own food, storing fuel in a fuel station of our own in bulk allows us to make minimal trips to town in a vehicle. We have ensured that our carbon emissions are monitored and controlled. We understand that every vehicle that moves or transport element required adds to our own footprint. Our reforestation project 2020 is also about making a positive impact on the landscape, also offsetting both carbon emissions attached to travel, effects of livestock and the major Damage on trees here caused by providing safe haven to so many elephant!

People and community

We believe that businesses can bring about positive change in an industry, through ethical employment strategies and personal development goals for team members that creates a nurturing environment. We aim to also inspire our guests and to connect with the natural world in a meaningful way: through adventure, education and fun!

We like to share our journey with young people from our region and encourage school visits all through the year. We have also created a 6 week internship in our lodge for 2 local students annually and engage in mentoring program for young women through a local school. We host an annual events programme open to the public that brings interesting people for lectures, foodie experiences, science and music based experiences. We currently do all our outreach and events on a self-funded basis, setting aside profits from our business to provide what we feel is a positive service to our community.

We are Founder members of the Laikipia Wildlife Forum and Laikipia Tourism Association and active members of Eco Tourism Kenya, ATTA, Nature Kenya, Kenya Professional Guiding Association and supporters of Lion Landscapes, The Flipi Flopi project and Daraja Academy, School for Girls.

Birds: habitat management

The mixed habitat on El Karama attracts an impressive number of birds. Our current bird list stands at 431 bird species. We have also been included in the important bird area status. We strive to ensure that the lodge environment is maintained to provide suitable habitat for as many species as possible. We do this by ensuring proper cover in the form of shrubs remain for nesting and protection. We encourage flowering and fruiting indigenous species to offer sufficient food for birds. We build nesting boxes to assist certain species and also build buildings with eaves that allow striped swallows, white rumped swifts and other species to make nests using the structures in place. Birding provides an incredible activity and through our guide team we seek to educate and inspire as many guests as possible to the wonder of birds in our environment! We hold a bird count on the conservancy once a year and do bird counts in the lodge compound every 3 months.

Bees and honey

Eco system services create important opportunities not only for high quality food and produce, but also for jobs and knowledge creation in communities. We have set up hives in our lodge compound for encouraging pollinators and providing fresh honey to our guests. We use Langstrothe Hives suspended on poles and wires - because of predation by honey badgers! - and only harvest the top supers leaving the brood box honey to the Queen and colony. This approach ensures that we harvest honey in the most sustainable way and that we do not injure or harm the colony in the process. At this stage our honey production is on a small scale and for domestic use only, adding value to the guest experience but also providing a habitat for bees, but in the future we hope to scale these hives up and creating education and learning opportunities for young people.

Research and monitoring

We have long been using trail cameras with guests to understand the movements of different species. These wildlife monitoring activities are embedded in the guest experience and add a richness to the safari that goes well beyond expectation. The lodge recently self-funded and established a new predator Project : The Leopard Mirror Project in collaboration with Murray Grant. Using a new innovation in Kenya pioneered by Murray, a technique that combines large stationary mirrors and trail cameras, we have been able to successfully monitor and ID the Leopard of El Karama. The information we are gathering is allowing us to not only ID individuals, but map their territories, observe mating and breeding behaviour/ locations and to build really interesting family trees. The monitoring work we do in eco-tourism as guides can lend enormous value to conservation and gives extra depth to our guests' understanding of these extraordinary eco-systems. El Karama Conservancy Rangers use smart technology to collect information on Lion sightings and Lion IDs. Although we do not use collars here for various reasons, the ranger and guide team submit sighting reports daily into a system that can be shared on a regional and national level when required.

Culture: learning and development

Our tourism business is so much more than a Safari. We have tried to create a specific culture here through our team and our guests that inspires a love of the natural world, a sense of responsibility and stewardship for the environment we live and work in and a duty to serve it well. Our Bush School ensures that the younger generation fills their time here with fun, adventure, arts, crafts and traditional bush skills. Our internship seeks to offer hands on experience of eco tourism to a new generation of young people on our doorstep. Learning-based, interactive conservation activities here bring new knowledge and understanding to visitors. We invest in our team through training and learning opportunities annually, in confidence that they will transfer their knowledge and passion onto clients who in turn will reconnect positively with the natural world and leave wanting to be part of the movement that protects it. We open all training courses to other local guides in the region and ensure that exposure trips around Kenya are also incorporated into our development strategy for our team. These experiences are rewarding for us all.

Reforestation

One of the major challenges these delicate eco systems are facing relate to trees. As migration paths and habitats diminish for Elephants, they stay longer in safe havens such as El Karama. The more Elephant and the longer they stay the more damage to trees as they push against, knock down the most delicious and nutritious varieties. Fallen trees are of course great habitat for insects and invertebrates as well as nesting birds, but the loss of certain species has been exponential here. Forested plains are opening up into savannah and entire micro-ecologies are altering.

The widespread impact of this ecological change is something we hope to combat in creating our Acacia Nilotica Tree Nursery and Reforestation Zones. The Nilotica are a beautiful, long-lived, hardwood indigenous tree specie that favour red sandy loam soil with a high mineral content. The tree attracts multiple mammal, bird and insect species and its pollen is of great use to important pollinators such as the African Honey Bee. We are seeking to begin our reforestation efforts by extending the fence line of the lodge to 185 acres and in January 2020 began collecting and germinating seeds successfully for eventual planting.

By the end of 2020 we aim to have planted over 500 new nilotica in this protected area, following that with the introduction of more bee hives for honey and protection from elephant pressure. This self-funded project will create a secure tree zone near the river offering succour to many species of bird, insects and mammals, but we also hope it will become part of a model that could be replicated over the conservancy, to other similar habitats and even into our neighbouring community land that is in dire need of tree cover to improve the soil, rainfall and eco system services available.