

SOUTHERN AFRICA'S

# TOP 10 ECO-STAYS

From the shores of Lake Malawi to the deserts of Namibia and beyond,

Lauren McShane explores some of southern Africa's finest eco-minded destinations

Eco-tourism is rightfully starting to play a bigger role in the way we travel and interact with local communities and how lightly we tread the earth. The United Nations has declared 2017 the Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, so it's a good time to choose destinations that offer everything you'd expect from a natural paradise, but with an eco-conscious intention to do things better.



## 1 BUSANGA BUSH CAMP, ZAMBIA

Take a hot-air balloon trip over the plains of the Kafue National Park, glamp on an island of sycamore fig trees and dine under the stars. View the famous Busanga Plain lions, as well as puku, red lechwe, buffalo and wildebeest in one of the wildest and most remote game areas on the continent.

This Wilderness Safaris Lodge's year-round funding of local anti-poaching activities has ensured that the elephant, lechwe and puku populations have all increased.

Over 150 casual labourers assisted with initial camp construction and 130 local people are now employed in eco-tourism positions. The Wilderness Wildlife Trust – an independent entity – was also registered to facilitate fundraising for deserving local conservation projects, community upliftment and habitat management and preservation. This is definitely one of the best spots to enjoy the diversity of Zambia's wildlife, with over 750 species of bird, big cats, hippo, crocodile and elephant.

Visit: [www.wilderness-safaris.com/camps/busanga-bush-camp](http://www.wilderness-safaris.com/camps/busanga-bush-camp)

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## 2 VUMBURA PLAINS, BOTSWANA

A luxury eco-retreat in the very heart of the Okavango Delta, Vumbura Plains has 14 stylish rooms raised off the ground with ample opportunities to view game from your plunge pool, sala (viewing platform) or outdoor shower. A deck built out into the floodplain is ideal for evening campfires, sundowners, game-viewing and star-gazing. The Children in the Wilderness NPO was started in Botswana to teach life skills and conservation education to rural children living in remote communities beside Wilderness Safaris lodges.

While positively impacting the lives of over 10 000 children, and scholarships provided for more than 300 children each year, many alumni have gone on to join the eco-tourism industry later. The group also conducted Africa's biggest-ever international black rhino relocation and partnered with the Botswana Government's Department of Wildlife and National Parks, donors and the National Defence Force to restore the locally extinct rhino population. Anti-poaching monitoring now takes place 24/7, 365 days a year in Botswana. Visit: [www.wilderness-safaris.com/camps/vumbura-plains](http://www.wilderness-safaris.com/camps/vumbura-plains)

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© Mon Choix

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**3 MON CHOIX, MAURITIUS**

A little way from the beach, at the foot of the Vallée des Prêtres mountains, is where you can check into Mon Choix – the island’s first internationally graded eco-lodge.

The lodge works hard to promote a greener Mauritius, with measures such as rain water collection, gas-operated kitchens, candle-lit entrances and dining rooms, compost production, growing its own fruit and vegetables and a 100% local team.

Hiking trails are being created in the surrounding mountains for guests to enjoy and visitors can also take part in the labelling of rare and endangered plant species (to ensure better protection). This natural sanctuary is located in a 2,8ha private park with its own rivers and walkways. You can enjoy the indigenous garden, complete with giant fruit bats, endangered bird species and river shrimps or head down to the coast for para-sailing, scuba diving, water-skiing or kite-surfing.

Visit: [www.ecomauritius.com](http://www.ecomauritius.com)



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**4 MUNGA ECO LODGE, ZAMBIA**

You’ll find this lodge close to Victoria Falls, under a canopy of indigenous thicket and trees, where elephants roam and blue waxbills play. It’s probably the only place you can swim in a *siliba* “water-hole” pool, surrounded by bulrushes, waterlilies and dragonflies. Even better, you won’t have to leave the property to see up to 60 species of birdlife.

Eco-friendly thatched roofs and rammed-earth buildings make for a chic African hideaway. With elegant rooms, solar geysers and reed/recycled tin lampshades created by local artisans, this lodge is a treat for both the creative and environmentally conscious.

An indigenous tree nursery aids local reforestation efforts, and organically grown fruit and vegetables are served at the lodge. Take a cruise on the nearby Zambezi, try micro-lighting or visit the spectacular Victoria Falls.

Visit: [www.mungaecolodge.com](http://www.mungaecolodge.com)



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**5 nTHAMBO TREE CAMP, SOUTH AFRICA**

Watching elephants sip from the splash pool, game-viewing from your tented cabin on stilts and living at eye-level with the foliage of the trees in the Southern Klaserie Reserve are all in a day’s stay at nThambo Tree Camp. With the Drakensberg Mountains in the distance, a small watering hole in front of the camp and optional breakfast in the bush, you’re bound to love this intimate experience. nThambo is a non-permanent camp and should they decide to move it, it’s said that no traces of the lodge would exist within a year.

Aside from its leave-no-trace philosophy, the camp uses a grey

water system, solar power and has an in-house recycling system. The Klaserie Reserve hosts the Mabula Ground-Hornbill Project, which collects data to promote the survival of this species.

The reserve also hosts the Children’s Environmental Training Programme to educate kids from the local community about their environment, how to conserve it and its impact on South Africa’s future.

Visit: [www.nthambo.com](http://www.nthambo.com)

**6 CAPE MACLEAR ECOLODGE, MALAWI**

Walk right onto the shores of Lake Malawi, scuba dive with a myriad of fish, take a cruise at sunset or kayak in the coolness of the morning at this

eco-friendly escape.

Cape Maclear is staffed entirely by residents of Chembe village and maintained and operated by non-profit NGO HEEED (Health, Education, Environment and Economic Development).

Visitors can enjoy the tranquil lakeside surroundings and well-priced accommodation, while playing a role in supporting ongoing projects such as fish monitoring and conservation, HIV/Aids education, organic gardening, briquette-making from organic waste as a firewood substitute and the production of fuel-efficient mud stoves. When you’re not hiking into the green hills or snorkelling in this great African lake, you can join one of the volunteer programmes that teach English, aquaculture, bilharzia snail-sampling or environmental conservation.

Visit: [www.heeedmalawi.net/cape-maclear-eco-lodge](http://www.heeedmalawi.net/cape-maclear-eco-lodge)

**7 NKASA LUPALA TENTED LODGE, NAMIBIA**

Experience the remote wilderness of Caprivi at this tented lodge on Lupala Island, the first lodge to operate in the region of the Nkasa Lupala National Park (Mamili). No fence separates you from the large mammals roaming these wetlands and woodlands and here, at last, you can get a true sense of the wild. Owned by the Italian Micheletti family and built on the banks of one of the Kwando-Linyanti river channels, the 10 luxury tents are fashioned from steel,



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canvas and wood and were designed to be small, with low environmental impact.

Totally self-sufficient, using solar power for water heating and electricity, the lodge employs only local people from the Wuparo Conservancy (including in management positions). It’s assisting with the construction of a kindergarten in Sangwili and buys local materials from the community whenever possible.

Lion, elephant, buffalo and rare wetland species such as lechwe, sitatunga and reed buck live in the area, and guests will be educated about the cultures of the Wuparo conservancy’s inhabitants.

Visit: [www.nkasalupalalodge.com](http://www.nkasalupalalodge.com)



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**8 ANVIL BAY BEACH CAMP, MOZAMBIQUE**

Somewhere in the Maputo Special Reserve in southern Mozambique – where loggerhead turtles nest, coastal elephants roam and coastal forest meets a magical marine world – is the home of Anvil Bay, Ponta Chemucane. Sleep in thatched canvas tents just off the beach in one of the world's 25 most biologically rich and most endangered terrestrial eco-regions.

The Chemucane Tourism Company was formed as a joint venture between the Chemucane community and the Bell Foundation and a portion of your tourism spend benefits the community, while concession fees support conservation. Go snorkelling, cycling on the beach, whale watching, stand-up paddle boarding or dune forest trailing in this secluded paradise. Visit: [www.anvilbay.com](http://www.anvilbay.com)



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**9 GONDWANA GAME RESERVE, SOUTH AFRICA**

Fancy trying your hand at a bit of cheetah tracking, vegetation surveying and eco-excursions, all before a good night's rest in a luxury tent? Gondwana Game Reserve's new Eco-Camp offers all that plus Big Five encounters within a fynbos reserve. You'll also get the chance to learn important bush skills and be an active participant in veld and wildlife management. It's not all work here,



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© Gondwana Game Reserve

though, and after an eco-activity or two for visitors of all ages, the reservoir pool, game drives, riverbed walks and fireside dinners beckon.

Expect wholesome meals such as oxtail stews, game pies and braais. Families with young kids can join a Junior Ranger programme during specified weeks, which includes treasure hunts, fishing and crafts.

This malaria-free 11 000ha camp is entirely powered by solar energy or gas. The Gondwana Conservation Foundation NPO was started to help conserve the country's threatened and endangered wildlife and vegetation through skills development, training and active management. Visit: [www.gondwanagr.co.za](http://www.gondwanagr.co.za)

**10 BULUNGULA, SOUTH AFRICA**  
Having been named the Second Best Eco-Lodge in

the World by *Lonely Planet* and the UK *Guardian*, and one of the World's Top 25 Ultimate Ethical Travel Experiences by *Rough Guide*, Bulungula Lodge offers an environmentally friendly experience. Owned entirely by the Nqileni Village, the lodge is located in one of South Africa's most isolated and spectacular locations, two-and-a-half hours from Coffee Bay, on the Wild Coast.

Expect the sweet simplicity of mud huts overlooking a glorious estuary, rolling green hills, and evening campfires. The lodge is run on solar power, with compost toilets and paraffin rocket showers. The Bulungula Incubator NGO helps villagers start their own businesses – such as kayaking tours, fishing, sewing and guiding companies, funded the building of two mini clinics and four pre-schools and helps run various agricultural projects. Visit: [www.bulungulaincubator.org](http://www.bulungulaincubator.org)



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