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*January 2026 Blog*  
*The Best Open Air Safari Experiences in East Africa*

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## **Sleepouts, Skybeds and Starbeds: The Best Open-Air Safari Experiences in East Africa**

There's a moment on every safari when the night sky pulls your attention away from everything else. The bush settles, the air cools, and the stars begin to decorate the sky. For many, this is when East Africa feels its most magical, and we completely understand why travellers want to make that feeling last.

Sleepouts, skybeds and starbeds take these precious moments and stretch them into full, truly unforgettable experiences. These are some of the most [unique safari experiences](#) in all of East Africa, giving guests a chance to stay out under the open sky with only the sounds of the wild for company.

At ARP Africa Travel, we help travel providers craft bespoke African safaris that create lifelong memories. Under the African sky sleep experiences are becoming one of the most requested additions we see, not just for seasoned safari enthusiasts but also for travellers who want something intimate, immersive and unforgettable.

In this blog we'll cover each style of open-air safari experience, what makes them special and who they might suit best. Read on to find out more!



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Representing



## Sleepouts: Simple, Wild and Authentic



A sleepout is quite possibly the purest form of open-air [safari accommodation](#). It is just how it sounds - a raised platform or dedicated clearing in the bush, a comfortable bedroll or mattress with bedding, lanterns glowing nearby and the vast African sky above. Sleepouts are often hosted near a mobile camp or offered as part of a walking safari, carefully curated to be peaceful and deeply connected to the land.

### What a sleepout involves

As a traveller, you would be escorted to a prepared spot where all the essentials have been set up. Guides and rangers stay close by throughout the night, ensuring safety while giving you your own private space. The experience is usually topped by a fire-cooked dinner and quiet conversation before everyone settles in for the night.

### What makes sleepouts special

A sleepout allows guests to hear the movement of the bush as it shifts from day to night. You might fall asleep to lions calling in the distance, wake up as hyenas whoop across the plains, or hear [elephants](#) pass in the early hours. The minimalistic setup means all the focus is on the stunning environment you're surrounded by.

### Who sleepouts are best for

Sleepouts are perfect for adventurers who enjoy simplicity and want an extremely authentic safari experience. They suit travellers comfortable with being close to nature and those who want to feel the raw energy of East Africa without distractions. They are also ideal for people who prefer experiences which feel grounded rather than highly luxurious.

## Skybeds: Elevated Views and Quiet Luxury



Skybeds are a development of the minimalistic sleepout, adding comfort, space and a little more privacy. These raised platforms, often set several metres above the ground, offer proper beds, premium bedding and thoughtful touches which create a sense of gentle luxury without taking away from the thrill of sleeping outdoors.

### **What a skybed involves**

Most skybeds sit on high wooden structures overlooking plains, waterholes or riverbeds. Many include a small seating area, soft lighting and sometimes a partially sheltered section for changing and additional privacy. While still very open-air, they tend to feel more luxurious. Guides escort guests at dusk and meet them again after sunrise.

### **What makes skybeds special**

As you might have assumed from the name, the beauty of a skybed is in its height. The height gives guests an incredible vantage point from which they can watch [wildlife](#) move below as they settle in for the evening. At the same time, the extra comfort helps people relax fully into the experience. You get all the drama of the bush, but with the ease of a purpose-built space.

### **Who skybeds are best for**

Skybeds suit couples, honeymooners and travellers who like a very adventurous twist without giving up too many comforts. They are also suitable for those interested in stargazing, as the elevated platform offers clear and sweeping views of the night sky.

## Starbeds: Immersive, Scenic and Designed for Stargazers



Starbeds are quite possibly the most atmospheric of these three unique safari experiences. Many starbeds are set in the most remote, scenic spots selected for views as much as wildlife. They typically include beautifully made double or king-sized beds set on open decks. These beds can often roll under a canopy if needed, but on clear nights they sit fully exposed, offering an uninterrupted view of the mesmerising East African sky.

### **What a starbed involves**

Guests sleep on a raised deck, possibly overlooking a dramatic valley, open plain or another feature of East Africa's famous landscape. Starbeds focus on the romanticism associated with sleeping outside, complete with elegant bedding, cozy lanterns and even private dining setups for those who want a quiet dinner before settling in for the night.

### **What makes starbeds special**

Starbeds capture the unique feeling of being suspended between earth and sky. The experience is designed for slow, thoughtful appreciation rather than quick thrills. It is perfect for travellers who want to feel immersed in the wild beauty of the East African wilderness while still enjoying a touch of indulgence.

### **Who starbeds are best for**

Starbeds suit travellers who want something peaceful and scenic. Couples celebrating a milestone love them but so do solo travellers seeking stillness and clarity in one of the world's most beautiful areas. They are also ideal for [photographers](#) or anyone who wants long, uninterrupted stargazing opportunities.

## Choosing the Right Open-Air Safari Experience

Every traveller is different, and each type of open-air safari experience offers something totally unique. The best choice for each guest depends on their desired comfort levels, sense of adventure and the wider safari itinerary they have planned.

If you're considering an open-air safari, we would recommend:

- A sleepout if you want something raw, authentic and close to nature.
- A skybed if you like a blend of adventure and gentle luxury.
- A starbed if you want the vastest views, romantic feeling and the quiet beauty of sleeping under the sky in comfort.

For travel providers, ARP Africa can help incorporate these options into safari itineraries to add further depth and variety to your offerings. For travellers designing their own journey, adding one of these nights turns an already memorable safari into something personal, moving and truly unforgettable.

## Why Open-Air Safari Stays Are Growing in Popularity



As more and more travellers seek truly unique safari experiences, open-air sleep options continue to stand out for their ability to make people feel connected to East Africa in a more intimate way than traditional safaris. These nights tend to live longer in the memory than

almost any other moment on safari, therefore they are a fantastic, ultra-premium travel experience for providers to offer. They also encourage guests to slow down, listen closely and appreciate the natural world with a sense of presence that is often lost in everyday life.

For travel providers looking to create bespoke African safaris, these experiences offer a way to differentiate itineraries and meet the growing appetite for authenticity and adventure. For travellers, they open a window to the true character of East Africa - wild, welcoming and unforgettable.

Ready to diversify your safari offering? [Get in touch](#) with our team today to start creating unique African safari holidays for your clients.