



SAFARI TELEGRAPH

SAFARI CONSULTANTS LTD JANUARY 2014



THE MAGIC OF BOTSWANA

Explore some of the most untamed lands of Africa

FAMILY SAFARIS

There's never been a better time to travel with your children

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

From Zambia to Tanzania, a look at the best places to avoid the crowds

Contents

4 FOCUS ON ZIMBABWE

One of Africa's best safari destinations

6 OUR TRAVELS

The Team report back from their travels

8 BOTSWANA

Some of the most untamed lands on the continent

10 WHAT'S NEW IN 2014

Plus a look at 2013's success stories

12 FAMILY SAFARIS

A look at some of the best experiences for families

14 SPECIAL INTEREST

Three spectacular but rarely visited regions



Published by
SAFARI CONSULTANTS LTD
Africa House, 2 Cornard Mills,
Mill Tye, Great Cornard,
Suffolk, CO10 0GW
t: 01787 888590
e: info@safariconsultants.com
www.safari-consultants.com
Design: www.zedpublishing.co.uk

With thanks to the following for photography:
Richard Costin (cover shot),
Dana Allen, Pete Smart,
Geoff Einon, John Wright,
Kathy Richardson/RPS,
Bob Brind-Surch.

SOCIAL MEDIA & MARKETING

One of the greatest challenges we face as a company is keeping up with the technological and social media revolution. Having re-launched our website a few years ago, this year we finally got to grips with Facebook! We are very grateful for all your support so far. We use our Facebook page to report from Africa as we travel, post wildlife photographs (ours and yours) and share the odd piece of interesting safari news. We would love to keep in touch with as many of you as possible, so if you do have an account with Facebook, please visit our page and 'like us'.

We will be running a 'photo of the month' competition and have a few more ideas on how we can keep you in touch with the magic of the African bush.

Next year we plan to expand gently into other forms of social media, notably Twitter (@safariuk) and YouTube. We will also be introducing an Email Newsletter – the plan being a brief quarterly round up.



WEBSITE

Our website (www.safari-consultants.com) remains the hub for information, and through our Latest News & Blogs, Special Offers and Trip Reports pages you can keep up to date with everything Africa. If you have any ideas or suggestions on how we can improve the user experience on our website, please do let us know. It would be really helpful to hear your

thoughts, so please don't be shy!

In addition, if you would be prepared to do a more official 'website review' for us, please let us know. We plan to do this early in 2014 and it will involve approximately half a day's research on our site, but you will be able to do it from home. We will be able to offer something in return for your time and efforts!



Game viewing GETS EVEN BETTER IN 2014!

Welcome to our new annual newsletter, which we hope you enjoy!

In many ways, 2013 has been a very positive year. The economy has shown some green shoots of recovery and here at Safari Consultants we have been busy. Special thanks go to all of you who have kept us so and, in turn, supported many families across Africa. We always feel lucky to deal with so many dedicated safari travellers and, as ever, it has been fun to meet many of you at various events throughout the year. We enjoyed record numbers at our summer luncheon in early August, the support of which by our current guests is always much appreciated.

Safari Consultants has grown this year with Roland, Fran and Oliver joining our dedicated team. Roland joined our flights and admin departments as well as adding some technological expertise around the office. Fran also came into our admin department and is fast becoming our social media 'guru' (more on this opposite), and Ollie is on a whirlwind ride having started in sales! They have all added greatly to our existing team.

Michele, Mary, Rob and Jane have travelled as

widely as ever and you can read about their travels later in this newsletter and, in more depth, on our website. We have been visiting new areas, checking out old haunts and Bill and Rob even made it back to Zimbabwe after 13 years away from what was such a huge part of our business in the '90s.

Our suppliers in Africa have done us and you proud with their outstanding service, and the game-viewing just seems to get better and better! More and more, we are finding that availability can be difficult at peak travel times, with the best small properties becoming heavily booked a long time in advance. In particular, the Kruger region at Christmas, Masai Mara in September, northern Tanzania in August and the Lower Zambezi from July to September immediately spring to mind, but many other destinations are booked a year or so in advance. So if you can, plan early!

We look forward to the New Year and would take this opportunity to wish everyone a very merry festive season and best wishes for a prosperous and happy 2014.

Bill, Rob, Michele, Mary, Josie,
Michaela, Jane, Roland, Fran and Ollie



Focus on **ZIMBABWE**

During 2013, Rob and Bill travelled back to Zimbabwe to gauge how the safari industry had weathered the political storm of the last decade plus. Bill travelled to the Upper Zambezi, Victoria Falls, Hwange National Park and the Matobo Hills whilst Rob visited the Mana Pools and Matusadona national parks.

Generally, our consensus was one of pleasant surprise. Sure, the safari camps have not had the investment over the years to keep up with the Jones' in neighbouring countries (most are a bit frayed in comparison), but they still offer a genuinely great safari experience. The excellent and dedicated professional safari guides and the wonderful lodge and camp staff have always been most welcoming. It was almost as if the only issue was the calendar year, reading 2013 as opposed to 1999.

Historically, Zimbabwe has always been one of the best safari destinations in Africa and certainly the country has been at the forefront of exceptional guiding. It appears that during the first few years of this century, the standard of professional guides coming through the system did drop quite significantly (although they



were still arguably better than most guides in countries like Tanzania) but this was accepted and challenged, and by 2008 the comprehensive exams were refreshed and back to their exceptionally high standards.

Internal air travel is still difficult although there are a number of companies offering light aircraft schedules between Victoria Falls and the main safari areas (Mana Pools, Kariba/Matusadona, and Hwange). The road from Victoria Falls to Bulawayo is as good as it has always been. The Eastern Highlands, in the past largely associated with 'self-drive' tourism, can also be visited although at this time we would only recommend it is done so with a private guide. In the far south-east, three operations are seemingly doing well, including Singita Pamushana, Chilo Gorge Safari Lodge, and professional guide Ant Kaschula's camp and walking safari operation in Gonarezhou National Park (now part of the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area). This has always been considered a remote area, and still is today.

To the south of Bulawayo (Zimbabwe's second city, although in decline) lies the Matobo Hills National Park. The park is probably more famous for its giant granite outcrops and the burial place of Cecil John Rhodes but for aficionados, it contains the highest number of breeding pairs of black eagle in the world, and good populations of both black and white rhinos. The San rock-art is also a great attraction.

Hwange National Park is Zimbabwe's largest park and lies on the south-western border with Botswana. Noted for its huge elephant populations, there are also good numbers of sable, buffalo, giraffe, lion, leopard and wild dog. Rhino, unfortunately, have taken a beating in the last decade and sightings are far more difficult than they used to be. There are a handful of very good safari camps, most of which have wildlife hides overlooking very productive waterholes – a great way to spend a lazy afternoon.

The Victoria Falls of course speaks for itself and is well worth visiting



even if you're going onto Botswana or Zambia. The Zimbabwe side includes the 'promontory' which extends in front of the falls and arguably affords the best view, particularly when there is a lot of water (April to July). The town itself has changed little, and there are a number of good hotels within walking distance of the Falls, including Ilala Lodge and the famous Victoria Falls Hotel. Within the adjacent Zambezi National Park, which now extends all the way to the Botswana border covering the area we used to call 'The Upper Zambezi', a number of new safari camps are indicative of the optimism within the country.

The Matusadona National Park lies on the southern shores of Lake Kariba, the vast dam created in the 1950's to provide hydroelectric power. The park extends well beyond the immediate shoreline, where most game-viewing takes place by vehicle or boat, into the Matusadona Mountains. The 'drowned' leadwood trees littering the shoreline provide impressive silhouettes against the setting sun, as well as roosts for many bird species. Rhino tracking has become significantly more difficult than it used to be, but elephant, buffalo, lion, hippo, impala and waterbuck



Left: Matusadona shoreline

Clockwise from top left: Hwange elephants; Zambezi River; Mana Pools; Lake Kariba sunset; Kanga Pan; Mana Pools; Matobo Hills

“Historically, Zimbabwe has always been one of the best safari destinations in Africa and certainly the country has been at the forefront of exceptional guiding.”

populations are pretty healthy. Boat cruises along the shoreline are the best way to explore the lakeshore and provide a welcome break from bumping around in a safari vehicle.

Mana Pools National Park, a designated World Heritage Site, lies on the northern border with Zambia and below the Kariba Dam in a region referred to as 'the Lower Zambezi'. The floodplains of the mighty Zambezi River are covered in particularly attractive acacia and mahogany woodlands which offers exceptional walking conditions and it is possible to approach a lot of species on foot. There are some excellent 'old-style' safari camps operating and they offer a close and personal wildlife experience. Wild dog, lion, elephant, buffalo, eland, kudu, impala, waterbuck, hippo and crocs abound and the birding is excellent too (strangely, giraffe are absent). Away from the river, a number of permanent springs provide water for a wide range of species and are particularly productive during the latter part of the dry season. Kanga Pan is of particular note.

For more information, visit www.safari-consultants.com or call 01787 888590

Our travels

The Safari Consultants team has been busy over the last year visiting new areas and checking out old haunts, to ensure we're offering customers the very best experiences...



Oliver

"In September I took my first trip to Kenya, exploring Laikipia and the Masai Mara, before travelling to the coast for a few days around Mombasa. This was not only my first trip to Kenya, but my first experience of Africa, and the journey holds many amazing memories. Seeing such large numbers of wild animals was something special, considering that previously I had only encountered these creatures as guests in my living room (usually carefully chaperoned by the ubiquitous David Attenborough!). The wildlife highlight of my travels this year comes from my visit to Kenya, when I felt the roaring of a large male lion at very close range. My favourite camp was Kicheche Laikipia, chosen primarily because of the people there.

Before I knew it, in October I found myself in neighbouring Tanzania, where I travelled to the Ngorongoro Crater, Lake Manyara and the Serengeti. The atmosphere of the early morning journey into the crater, through misty Masai villages, was very memorable, as were the views of the giant caldera. In fact, while proving excellent for game viewing, Tanzania was perhaps most striking for its interesting geography.

Apart from the crater, I was treated to an aerial sighting of Kilimanjaro, and also ran my fingers through a hot-spring in Manyara National Park. My 'top tip' for travellers is to take with you an open mind and a sense of humour. "

Jane

"In January I started the year with a full-on educational safari to Kenya. I visited 23 different camps and lodges, producing many pages of detailed notes, and always alert for particular highlights that would help in conveying somewhere to clients. Understanding the location of camps at first-hand was particularly useful. I did manage a few days rest along the way:

Offbeat provided some excellent birding in an unusually verdant *Meru Camp*; *Sosian* were amazing hosts, and their horses got me close to elephants and provided a thrilling airstrip gallop; I only had time for one activity at *Laikipia Wilderness*, but that was an action-packed morning walk complete with leopard sighting!

After a hot summer at home, the chance to ride with the wildebeest migration with *Safaris Unlimited* excited me. Tony Church pioneered the first horseback safari back in the '70s and today his son Gordie, and his fiancée, Felicia, provide all the normal finishing touches in camp and just a bit more. Against black threatening backdrops and an amount of unseasonal rain, we saddled up every morning and wound our way through four different Mara conservancies seeing plenty of wildebeest and many topi with wonderfully cute calves.

For the experienced rider, this is definitely a trip I would recommend."



Bill

"During the year I travelled to Zimbabwe and the KwaZulu/Natal region of South Africa. It was wonderful to get back to Zimbabwe after such an extended break and I was quite impressed with the state of the safari industry and the general infrastructure (the main roads in particular were in good condition and void of traffic). I did not travel at the best time of the year for game-viewing, but my visit to Hwange in particular was very rewarding with sightings of wild dog, lion, leopard, sable, giraffe, buffalo, amongst the odd thousand or two elephants. It was lovely to get into the various waterhole hides and take time out to view the animals as they came down to drink. Aside from the up-close and personal experience, you do get some amazing photo opportunities too.

In KwaZulu, I spent time up in the iSimangaliso Wetland Park (formerly the Greater St Lucia), another World Heritage site. Although not really a big game destination, the birdlife is superb and a few days spent in the region, after the 'game experience', is well worth it. It's also worth remembering the lovely beaches along this stretch of coastline, particularly if travelling during the winter months when the Cape is not so good."

Mary

“We often talk about the diversity of Africa and my travels this year showcase this brilliantly. First stop in March was South Africa, combining the cultural heritage of the Zulu Kingdom with the Greater Kruger area. Both areas offered first class game viewing, with the added bonus of vast untamed beaches in KwaZulu Natal. July finally saw me make it to Madagascar and it was my highlight of the year. It can be a maddening destination as the infrastructure is so unreliable and plans frequently change at the last minute but, for me, the pros considerably outweigh the cons. The evident French influence and the vibrant chaos of ‘Tana’ (Antananarivo) appeals to my inner Francophile, but once you leave the capital, the landscapes are breathtaking and I felt privileged to see so many endemic species. Being used as a climbing frame by rescued lemurs, shivering at the plaintive call of Madagascar’s largest lemur, the Indri, and walking at night in the pouring rain looking for chameleons were all exhilarating experiences. But nothing can beat (and I’m not sure ever will beat!) sea-kayaking in the Baie d’Angolins and being only twenty metres away from breaching humpback whales! My final trip was a more purist wildlife experience as I headed to Tanzania in early October. Lake Manyara and the Ngorongoro Crater were well worth the visit but the game viewing on the northern plains of the Serengeti was spectacular; proud male lions, cheetah with cubs, breeding herds of elephants and copious amounts of plains game – the Serengeti easily lived up to its reputation of being one of Africa’s top wildlife destinations.”



Michele

“Due to a number of circumstances I only managed one trip to Africa during the first half of this year but I will be researching a number of hotels on Mauritius as our newsletter goes to print. Please see my trip report on our website.

The beginning of my trip to Kenya included taking four travel agents on a five night safari to hopefully enthuse and educate them on two key regions. We spent a couple of nights in the Ol Pejeta Conservancy followed by three in the Masai Mara. I really enjoyed being in Ol Pejeta again. The game-viewing was fantastic and we were rather spoilt with a wild dog sighting on our first afternoon. The morning walk was equally productive and we encountered buffalo, cheetah, hyaena, zebra, giraffe and elephants. Having dropped the agents back at the airport, I spent a night in Nairobi National Park at the relatively new Emakoko Lodge, a wonderful property that I would highly recommend. I then returned to the Masai Mara for a more in-depth educational. Travelling from the south-east of the reserve bordering Tanzania, I worked my way up to the north-west stopping at various camps en route. I fell in love with the Mara at this time of year - the plains were teeming with antelope, mostly tending to their young, and the cats did not disappoint either. A particular highlight for me was a pride of ostrich which included mom, dad and at least 30 teenagers, a prominent sign of attentive parents. What really made these game-viewing experiences even more special was the lack of other tourists and at most sightings, particularly on the conservancies, we were the only vehicle present (as rare as that sighting of that very large number of ostrich).

We are often asked what the best time is to visit Kenya for game-viewing? Of course travelling when the wildebeest herds are resident is superb but I would highly recommend December to March too. The absent migration herds are barely missed from the resident profusion of the plains game (zebras, impala, giraffe, Topi, Thompsons gazelle etc.), there are fewer tourists, and most of the properties offer better value for money too.”

Rob

“For me, 2013 has seen a focus on some core wildlife regions in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In February I travelled to Selous and Ruaha (southern Tanzania), with the specific intent of judging the safari experience during their green season, as well as updating on the safari camps we use. It was an interesting trip and my conclusion, as expected, was that whilst the green season is an option to consider, especially for experienced travellers and birders, the dry season is always going to be much better for game-viewing.

In June, I spent a week in the South Luangwa, Zambia’s premier game park and a destination which is always such a pleasure to visit. The South Luangwa really is first class, stunningly beautiful along the Luangwa River and, even in early June (the beginning of the season), the game-viewing and walking was superb. Highlights were watching wild dogs along the Kapamba River, a dawn micro-light flight from Tafika, watching lions hunting buffalo at night from Kaingo, and spending time on two excellent walking safaris – Luangwa Bush Camping with Robin Pope Safaris, and the Chikoko Trails with Remote Africa. My experiences totally re-affirmed how special the South Luangwa is!

In November I re-visited Zimbabwe for the first time in 13 years and was pleasantly surprised by the quality of the safari operations in Mana Pools and Matusadona. Some camps/people are somewhat ‘caught in time’ but after what they have been through during the last 13 years, who could blame them! I loved being back and I think Zimbabwe’s safari industry is ready and raring to go.”



Journal BOTSWANA

The wilderness and wildlife areas of Botswana are some of the most expansive and untamed lands in Africa. The team share their experiences.

Rob - CENTRAL KALAHARI

“The first time I visited the Central Kalahari, I travelled at the wrong time of year (unusually, the dry season) and stayed outside the park. Consequently, I didn’t fully ‘get it’. More recently I travelled during the rainy season (best time), staying in the heart of the park, and it was magical. There is something about the Kalahari – the endless horizons, starry skies and silent nights – that gets to your soul. And when you have your best ever sighting of a caracal, as I did near Deception Valley, you will always have a soft spot for the place!”

Michele - OKAVANGO DELTA

“It is the variety of activities available which makes the Okavango so special to me. A serene mokoro journey, with only morning bird song to break the silence as you slice through the motionless crystal-clear water. A dramatic game drive as you stumble upon a pack of wild dogs on a kill and watch in anticipation as the hyaenas hone in to steal the prize. A lazy afternoon boat





cruise, with the chance to throw a line into the water, cold beer in hand as the sun dips below the horizon, the silence of the moment only broken with crashing and sloshing as a herd of elephants cross a channel ahead. Exploring this wilderness on foot, soaking up the beauty whilst feeling diminutive as you approach a tower of giraffe."

Mary - MAKGADIKGADI

"From May to November, the austere dry season landscape of the Makgadikgadi Pans enraptures me as it evokes a sense of mysticism, romance and serenity. Endless white vistas merging into blue skies, occasionally broken by a cluster of palm trees, easily explored in game viewing vehicles,

on foot in the company of the local bushmen or by quad bike. A glimpse of a shy brown hyaena is thrilling and the meerkats are enchanting but, for me, it's all about the never-ending landscapes."

Bill - THE LINYANTI/ KWANDO RIVER SYSTEM

"I remember travelling here in the late '80s when Selinda Camp was just three tents in the middle of nowhere and the nearest camp was five hours drive away - at best. Fortunately, the game concentrations have not changed - predators are found in good numbers - but nothing beats the thrill of being in the middle of 50 plus elephants or on foot amongst a 400 strong buffalo herd. Still wild, albeit not as remote."



Main image: Okavango aerial
 Above left to right: Mokoro excursion, Okavango Delta; Makgadikgadi Pans; Elephant game drive in Linyanti

Jane - MASHATU

"After ten years of traditional safaris, my first trail ride was with Limpopo Horse Safaris through Mashatu, endearing me to the area. The thrill of long canters and jumping small thorn bushes was exhilarating. I remember watching giraffe and impala as we cantered along when all of a sudden we were joined by two black and white 'stripy horses', attracted by our hoof beats. They stayed with us for several minutes before peeling off and disappearing into the bush. Wildlife being unaware of your presence or choosing to come to you is my safari 'icing on the cake!'"

For more information, visit www.safari-consultants.com or call 01787 888590



LOOKING OUT FOR WHAT'S *new in 2014*



new Mara Plains and Mahali Mzuri, Kenya

After an extensive period of building, two top-quality lodges opened during the year in Kenya's Masai Mara, bringing much-needed new levels of sophistication to the area. Mara Plains, part of the Great Plains Conservation group (along with Selinda, Zarafu, Duba Plains and Ol Donyo) owned by wildlife film makers Dereck and Beverly Joubert, is located on the 'confluence' of the Olare Motorogi and Mara North conservancies and the National Reserve, and is the only camp capable of offering game-viewing in all three. Accommodating just 14 guests, the lodge retains a safari atmosphere whilst delivering a demanding five star experience. Its sister camp, Mara Toto, which opened

last year, is a little more down to earth and located within the Reserve.

Mahali Mzuri is Sir Richard Branson's new camp, located within the exclusive Olare Motorogi Conservancy. The lodge has a wonderful location and the 12 modern suites with Branson style are sure to attract a new travelling public to the region.

Neither is cheap, but they do deliver much needed top quality to the region.

new Back to nature

In contrast to the 'sophisticated developments' in the Mara, two new 'back to nature' walking safari options have opened up in the Ruaha (Tanzania) and the Timbavati (South Africa), as well as a new safari

Our 2013 success stories!

We'd like to think that our knowledge allows us to place our guests at properties best suited to their requirements and we're really delighted when the clients agree! Some of those properties which have received consistently good reports over the year include:



Savanna Tented Lodge in the Sabi Sands

1 Savanna Tented Lodge in the Sabi Sands – a great property, well run with excellent guides and a lovely homely atmosphere.

2 Footsteps through the Delta in Botswana's Okavango – a great bush experience exploring the fringe of the delta on foot.

3 Kicheche Laikipia in the Ol Pejeta Conservancy in central Kenya – we've known managers Andy and Sonja Webb for nearly 30 years and they're still so enthusiastic about producing a wonderful client experience.

4 Old Mondoro in the Lower Zambezi National Park, Zambia – consistently good, year after year, and although it does come at a price, if you want to stay, do book two years in advance!

5 Selous Impala overlooking the Rufiji River in Tanzania's Selous Game Reserve – a genuinely good value property in a great game-viewing area. It's not lavish, but key qualities like having only 4 guests per vehicle give it a big 'thumbs up'.



Rufiji River, Selous

operation and a canoeing experience in the Kafue (Zambia).

Kichaka Expeditions, owned by guide Andrew (Moli) Molinaro and his partner Noelle Herzog, launched their walking trails programme within Ruaha National Park. Operating out of a comfortable base camp, they will move to more remote areas with lightweight fly-camps and explore the wilderness on foot. Each safari is private so you're able to walk as much or as little as you like. Very well priced, even for just two travelling.

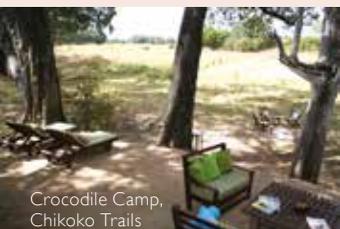
To bring a bit of 'old-style authenticity' to the South African safari industry, Tanda Tula in the Timbavati Game Reserve have just launched their 'Field Camp'. This is a lightweight mobile camp which will be used solely for walking safaris and is booked as a complete unit. Accommodation for up to eight guests so perfect for a small group, but expensive if there are fewer participants.

In the Kafue (Zambia), Jeffrey and McKeith Safaris have launched their Musekese Camp and series of mobile safaris through the region, whilst Mawimbi Adventures have got the

concession to operate walking and canoeing safaris along the Kafue River.

NEW **Call of the Kalahari**
New to the Kgalagadi Trans-Frontier Park are the two small lodge developments on the Botswana side of the Nossob River – Ta Shebube Rooiputs near Twee Rivieren in the south, and Ta Shebube Polentswa in the extreme north of the park. Both are accessible by self drive car from South Africa and offer a proper lodge experience, as opposed to the self drive safari options on the South African side, of this amazing area.

NEW **Safari at Sea**
And perfect for the sea loving, try a dhow safari from Ibo Island in northern Mozambique travelling through the Quirimbas Archipelago. The safaris offer a wonderful chance to explore the uninhabited islands and more remote fishing villages of the region with snorkelling, kayaking and diving also available. The safaris are available either privately (for complete flexibility) or on a scheduled departure basis.



Crocodile Camp, Chikoko Trails

6 Etendeka Mountain Camp in Damaraland, Namibia – we were a little concerned when Dennis Liebenberg went into partnership with a larger company a few years ago but this wilderness experience just seems to get better and better.

7 Chikoko Trails in the South Luangwa National Park, Zambia – one of the few genuine bush experiences available in Africa today with some great guides and complete exclusivity.

8 Lavender Manor in Hermanus, South Africa – it is not about the accommodation but wonderful old-school hospitality from Kobus and Isabel. Simplicity which works brilliantly.



La Residence in Franschhoek, Cape Town



Asha Cottage

9 Asha Cottage in the Diani coast, Kenya – a small, very personalised, guest house run by John and Dominique. Just delightfully simple hospitality.

at the highest level whilst maintaining a personal and relaxed atmosphere.

10 La Residence in Franschhoek, Cape Town – consistently performing

11 Waterberry Lodge on the Upper Zambezi near Victoria Falls, Zambia – beautiful setting, lovely staff, and generally a very good value property performing above its remit.



Family SAFARIS

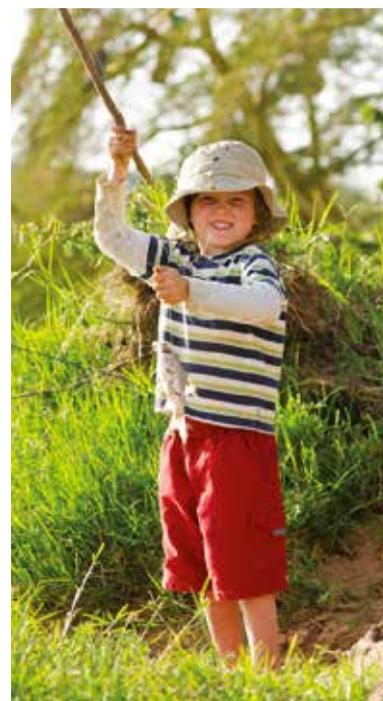
Visiting Africa with your children could be one of the most interesting, fun and educational holidays you ever take as a family

2013 has been a very successful year for family safaris. The industry in Africa is as ready to host families as it has ever been. In this modern era where computer games and social media can easily dominate our children's free time, it can be a real breath of fresh air to be sitting in the African bush, watching your kids soak up the ebb and flow of the natural world. In addition to the fascination of the animals themselves, children get to learn so much about how the environment works as well as being exposed to traditional cultures. Being on safari as a family can also provide wonderful shared memories and create that quality time that can be hard to find in busy, everyday life.

In terms of accommodation, there is a wide range of 'family options' available. In many camps, traditional safari tents have been enlarged and modified to cater for families with younger children, either with one large bedroom (with extra beds) or with adjoining sleeping areas. However, for families who enjoy total exclusivity it is also possible to book camps or lodges exclusively (especially larger family groups) or, in an increasing number of areas, choose private safari houses.

As with all our holidays, individual requirements and preferences are crucial when it comes to our recommendations. However, here are a few ideas which we think really work for families.

MARA BUSH HOUSES, MASAI MARA, KENYA – combine the incredible game-viewing of the Masai Mara and the culture of the Maasai people with a relaxed and exclusive haven to retreat to between activities. Mara and Acacia Houses have shared use of a lovely swimming pool overlooking a waterhole and, in addition to fantastic game drives, you can undertake walking safaris and visit local schools and villages.



Left: Children on bushwalk
Clockwise from top left: Jembisa kids safari, Waterberg region, South Africa; Fisherboy in the Laikipia region, Kenya; rhino feeding.

“In this modern era where computer games and social media can easily dominate our children's free time, it can be a real breath of fresh air to be sitting in the African bush, watching your kids soak up the ebb and flow of the natural world”

SOSIAN, LAIKIPIA REGION, KENYA - a perfect family retreat in the heart of the Laikipia wilderness. The key here is the relaxed atmosphere, friendly hosting and wide range of activities. Game drives (by day and night), walks and horse-riding are complemented with lion tracking, river swimming, tennis, fly-camping, fishing, playing cricket on the lawn, jumping off waterfalls etc. Family fun in the heart of Africa.

MORUKURU OWNER'S HOUSE, MADIKWE GAME RESERVE, SOUTH AFRICA – if you are looking for a combination of fantastic, malaria-free, big game-viewing and beautiful accommodation with first class hosting, then South Africa is likely to provide the most sophisticated options, and the Morukuru family of houses is an example of where you will feel totally spoilt!

KARISIA SAFARIS, LAIKIPIA REGION, KENYA – for the more adventurous family, with slightly older children, Karisia offer the chance to really escape the modern world and immerse yourselves in an African family walking adventure you will never forget. Walks can last any number of days, hosted by owners

Kerry and James and their superb Samburu guides. The experience is not just about the animals you see, but also about the scenery, the culture, the night skies and honing your bush craft skills.

YOUNG EXPLORERS, OKAVANGO DELTA, BOTSWANA – is a wonderful opportunity for families with children 6 years and older! Guided by Paul Molesang who has specialised in family safaris for a number of years, and staying at the delightful, but quite adventurous Footsteps Camp, Young Explorers is a completely exclusive safari program that can be tailored to suit each family. It combines traditional game-viewing in the fantastic Okavango Delta with specialist children's activities with the prime focus being on entertaining and educating the children.

There are so many different considerations for any family embarking on a safari holiday, and what is right for one family may not be suitable for another. Please do not hesitate to contact us for much more specific information on what might suit you and your family.

Visit www.safari-consultants.com or call 01787 888590



OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Some of Africa's most amazing game-viewing regions can get a little busy with tourists at times. It is inevitable, but other regions are barely known, and certainly ignored by the large tour operators. We don't recommend somewhere simply because no-one goes there, but here are three places which are spectacular but rarely visited.

Liuwa Plains in Western Zambia is a vast area of open grassland, home to Africa's second largest wildebeest migration and an increasing amount of wildlife including hyaena, cheetah, wild dogs and lion. Robin Pope Safaris operate a limited number of set departure safaris in November and May/June, the best times to visit, but there is now talk of Norman Carr

Safaris opening a permanent camp there. Bill travelled to Liuwa in the late 1990s and this year experienced safari travellers John and Renate commented on their visit in late May as follows:

"Liuwa Plain - This was simply fantastic and as enjoyable as any camp/location we have visited. It should be on any sophisticated safari-goer's list"

Kaokoland, Namibia – the far north-west of Namibia has long been an adventurous destination. To explore it correctly, you need an experienced guide, four-wheel drive vehicle and a mobile camp, but you can explore pockets by flying into one of the few luxury lodges. While these luxury lodges will work for travellers with limited time, the greatest adventure is to drive the remote and rugged



Above:
Namibian wilderness;
Mahale Chimpanzee

Below:
Hide view

Opposite page:
Walking on Namibia's Skeleton Coast;
Walking safari in Zambia; Watching chimps in the forests of Uganda

Hoanib, Hoarasib and Hartmann valleys in the company of a guide who can introduce you to Himba settlements, seek out the desert wildlife and keep you on the correct sandy tracks! Nights are spent camping in the spectacular wilderness, a long way from anywhere! Jeff and Hennie commented recently after their first trip to Namibia:

"the camping segment proved to be the highlight of the trip. We saw way more wildlife than we expected, and got as close to the land and culture as I think it's possible to get"

Mahale Mountains, western Tanzania

– where tumbling forests fall off mountain sides onto the white sandy beaches of Lake Tanganyika. The jungles are home to a variety of primates, including chimpanzees, and Mahale is arguably the best place (along with Gombe Stream to the north) to view these close cousins of ours. The lake is stunningly clear and you can watch hippos 20 feet beneath your boat. Sometimes you don't even need to leave camp to spend time with the chimps, as David and Pamela discovered in October:

"On the second day two chimps decided to visit the camp just before we were about to go out into the forest. They had come to eat some mangoes which were just becoming ripe."



CAPTURING THE MOMENT

You may be aware that we arrange photographic workshops in Africa for a number of photographers including Pete Smart, John Wright, Richard Costin, and Bob Brind-Surch. Over the years, these small group tours have proved a popular way for enthusiasts to improve photographic techniques. But you don't need to go on a scheduled group workshop to get good wildlife shots and there are a number of camps and operations in Africa which have the facilities to

enhance the chance of taking some excellent wildlife pictures. There are specially kitted out photoboats operating on the Chobe River in Botswana, and many styles of hides in the Luangwa Valley, Hwange, Mashatu and Chobe which offer excellent opportunities to photograph from a variety of angles such as an ant's view of an elephant or a hippo's view of a carmine bee-eater. Some properties will also offer tuition.

ON FOOT IN AFRICA

"Time seemed to stand still. All was quiet except for some hippo's snorting in the distance, and an irritating fly decided this was a good time to try and glean some moisture from my face. But I wasn't sure I was allowed to move!"

It was mid-morning in Zambia's South Luangwa National Park, and we had been tracking the King of the Beasts for a couple of hours now. Along the way we had watched white-fronted bee-eaters come and go from their cliff face homes, disturbed a lonesome spotted hyaena and watched a herd of around 200 buffalo stampede away through the bush. We had stopped for a tea break and been treated to a wonderful sighting of elephants crossing the wide Luangwa River just a few hundred metres away. By any stretch a fantastic morning in the bush already, but our real quarry lay ahead – somewhere, and we were not sure how close.

After what seemed like an age, our guide signalled that we could move forward and we relaxed a little as we entered a more open area. Some guinea fowl starting 'chirring' noisily off to our right, and our guide instantly tensed, and then pointed slowly. Sitting on the side of a termite mound, watching us with nonchalant grace, was a majestic male lion....."

As with Rob's experience, we have always been very aware that for many safari travellers, the ability to get out of a vehicle and explore the African bush on foot is a highly rewarding experience, whether for short, gentle walks, or for more adventurous multi-day trails. Not only do you tend to learn more about the subtleties and detail of the eco-system, but there is also a feeling of exhilaration from being 'at ground level' on Africa's great stage. A further attraction of the more serious walking safaris is that they invariably operate from remote bush camps or mobile fly-camps, in both cases offering an authentic and exclusive wilderness experience.

It is impossible to talk about walking safaris without being immediately drawn to one of our favourite safari destinations, Zambia, arguably the 'home' of walking safaris. Walking is engrained in the safari culture there and the South Luangwa in particular offers marvellous country to view on foot.

Many other incredible options to 'get out on foot' exist however. In Kenya, you can explore the rugged wilderness for days on end, hosted and guided by wonderful Maasai or Samburu guides who can introduce you to all aspects of their 'back garden'. In Namibia, you can trek through harsh but stunning desert landscapes,



"It is impossible to talk about walking safaris without being immediately drawn to one of our favourite safari destinations, Zambia, arguably the 'home' of walking safaris."

learning about the specially adapted animals and sleeping out under the great southern skies. In the jungles of Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda, you can track primates and search for endemic birds in the forest canopy, while in Botswana's Kalahari you can walk with local San bushmen to discover ancient cultures, or get 'up close and personal' with endearing meerkat families.

Whatever your fitness level and interests, there are opportunities to explore Africa on foot and enjoy a different perspective.



Wildlife and CONSERVATION

Rhino and elephant poaching have unfortunately continued seemingly unabated throughout 2013 although we were heartened to hear that the Tanzania Government launched a massive anti-poaching campaign in September using the army. No doubt there have been significant losses to the elephant populations in the Selous, Mikumi and Ruaha but the Brigadier General in charge has ruffled a few political feathers by implicating publically at least four serving politicians. Hopefully his strong armed tactics won't see him demoted to private!

In early December, Botswana is hosting an emergency summit on the illegal ivory trade for all Heads of Government of the countries in which elephants are found. Penalties for ivory trading, law enforcement and public awareness are on the agenda. A recent report has exposed a number of traders who 'openly' trade ivory and rhino horn in Maputo markets. We wonder how much Presidents Zuma (South Africa) and Guebuza (Mozambican) are going to contribute to the discussion.

On the positive side, wild dog sightings through Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, South Africa and Kenya are definitely on the rise and it's now much easier to find these elusive predators.

There are interesting times ahead in South Africa. Rattray Reserves, owners of the world-famous safari lodge MalaMala, lost a land claim by the local N'wandlamharhi Community. They have managed, however, to secure a long-term management contract for its two lodges on the 13000 hectare property in the Sabi Sands Game Reserve. Cybele Forest Lodge, another bastion of South African tourism, was not so lucky and, despite significant negotiations with both Government and the new stakeholders, has been forced to close its doors.

During this season of goodwill, it's worth remembering some of the charities we work with in Africa including: Loldia School Fund, South Luangwa Conservation Society, the Koiyaki Guiding School and the Microloan Foundation (to whom we make our 'Christmas card' donation). There are links from our website.



NOTES
for the diary

AS USUAL, WE WILL BE EXHIBITING AT:

DESTINATIONS
(London, 06-09 Feb)

THE SUFFOLK SHOW
(Ipswich, 28 and 29 May)

THE BIRD FAIR
(Rutland Water near Oakham, 15-17 August).

If you are attending, please do call in for a chat. We'll be delighted to see you.



SAFARI CONSULTANTS LIMITED
Africa House, 2 Cornard Mills, Mill Tye, Great Cornard, Suffolk, CO10 0GW
tel: 01787 888590 email: info@safariconsultantuk.com
web: www.safari-consultants.com

