

WHERE TO GO ON SAFARI

As you may know, there are dozens of safari destinations and hundreds of combinations of camps and activities. Fortunately there are just a few golden rules for a happy and successful safari trip:

- * Smaller is always better than bigger when it comes to group size and camp size.
- * Spend more time in fewer locations.
- * If you have a good guide you can have a great safari almost anywhere, anytime.
- * You almost always get what you pay for; in the case of a good safari it is prime location, good guiding, privacy (private concessions, private guide/vehicle), all-inclusive pricing and an all-round quality experience with no unpleasant surprises.

Here are a few destinations we visited recently and which we think hold great appeal for a variety of reasons.

1) Rift Valley Classic Safari, Kenya

For a first safari Kenya is a good choice. Lots of animals that are generally easy to find and see, especially in an area such as the Maasai Mara. It has more diversity than anywhere else (landscapes, culture, game-viewing); quite a bit of driving but that is part of the safari experience in Kenya - some drives can be omitted in favor of flying. We would recommend using a private vehicle and Origins Safaris guide, some of the best in East Africa! This can make it a bit costly for just 2 persons but a fantastic experience. For a party of 4 persons traveling together it is definitely worth considering as it offers very good value when 4 persons share the cost of the vehicle and guide. Have a look at the two Kenya trip reports on our website. There is now also a 'Spartan' option on this trip (nothing too rustic, just somewhat more basic camps) which puts the trip into the moderately priced category for 2 persons.

2) Southern Tanzania & Zanzibar

For a very remote and very private Africa experience, I would recommend a combination of 4 nights in the Ruaha National Park in south-central Tanzania (Kigelia or Mwangusi Camps) plus one or two camps in the Selous Game Reserve (Sand Rivers - sublime) and perhaps Beho-Beho or Siwandu Safari Camp. Perhaps three nights each or 3 and 2. And then add a few days in Zanzibar at the end, combination of Stone Town and one of the beach resorts if that appeals to you. Otherwise 3 nights in Stone Town would be enough; you would be able to do a beach outing in addition to half day walking tour of Stone Town (must do), outing to Jozani Forest Reserve (if interested in seeing Red Colobus monkeys) and also Spice Tour (a bit touristy but highly entertaining and educational). Take a look at the trip report from February 2009. We are returning to Southern Tanzania in May/June 2014. Stay tuned.

3) Zambia and Zimbabwe

Great safari location, a lot like Botswana used to be 20+ years ago. At least most of it; some of the areas in the S. Luangwa National Park already getting a bit busy. My

recommendation would be to spend 4 to 5 nights in the Kafue regions (2 camps, either Shumba or Busanga Plains combined with Musanza) and then to go on to S. Luangwa where I highly recommend 4 nights at Kaingo or Mwamba Bush Camp (Shenton Safaris). Fantastic for especially people interested in photography. Best game-viewing in Zambia. Good night drives - and hides for eye-popping views of hippo, amongst others. There is a detailed trip report on our site from August 2009. Best time to go is from July through the end of September.

Another very good option is to combine a few days at Little Makalolo Camp or Davison's Camp (Hwange Game Reserve) with Victoria Falls and then on go on to the Kafue region of Zambia for a few days. This south-north itinerary is less costly than to fly from east to west in Zambia, due to much shorter distances being involved. Game-viewing in Hwange at both Little Makalolo and Davison's have been outstanding lately; this area of mature woodland and open pans combine very well with the much better watered Busanga Plains of the Kafue area. This makes for a very diverse mix of mammals and birds and other animals.

It is also possible to travel from Ruckomechi Camp in Mana Pools (great game and even better views over the Zambezi with escarpment in background) by boat via Chirundu and then by road to Lusaka. From there, it is a relatively short flight to the South Luangwa National Park.

4) Botswana

I have not changed my mind about Botswana being the very best safari destination of any. It has just gotten quite pricey – especially from about mid-June through the end of October (high season). Even so, you don't have to spend weeks here to have a fantastic time on safari. Seven nights total (mix of Okavango Delta & Linyanti and/or Moremi) is usually more than adequate – for more time on safari rather add a few days in Zambia, Zimbabwe or South Africa. And consider going in the Green Season. It is every bit as good – even better than the dry season for photographers. Likewise the shoulder season - April through May is a good bet as it is already quite dry, the annual flood is just pushing into the Delta (spectacular from the air) and prices are a good 17% to 22% less than high season which starts on June 1. November is also a shoulder month: it is quite hot yet often just as good as the high season months for game-viewing.

Botswana can also be done on a small-group scheduled safari, with up to 8 persons being guided throughout. A trip such as the 'Adventure' category Migration Routes Safari (serviced tented camp) or the more luxurious 'Great Wilderness Journey' which uses mostly permanent tented camps as accommodation, would both be good choices. Both of these trips end or start in Victoria Falls; if staying at Toka Leya I would recommend adding one additional night. These are fun and educational trips - never a dull moment!

5) Green Season trip 2014-2015

If you are looking for the best overall value I would recommend a green season trip to Botswana specifically to combine Tubu Tree Camp or Xigera in the Okavango Delta with a Kalahari camp such as Kalahari Plains Camp, Tau Pan Camp or Nxai Pan for zebras, springbok, oryx and giraffe and ending with Savuti, a good bet for some more

predators, chance of cheetah and wild dogs. Best rates of the year, any time from Nov 2014 to the end of March 2015 (except December holidays). Many other Botswana properties available including Kwetsani, Little Tubu, Seba and Banoka Bush Kamp as well as Kwara (Okavango Delta) and Kwando Lebala and Kwando Lagoon camps in the Kwando-Linyanti area.

We are now also offering several premier (deluxe) camps at a huge discount. These include Vumbura Plains in the northern Okavango Delta, Kings Pool in the Linyanti concession west of Chobe, Abu elephant camp and several Namibia properties including Little Kulala and Serra Cafema.

We can add several additional camps to this special Green Season offer, amongst others in the Victoria Falls area (Toka Leya) and in Hwange (Little Makalolo and Davison's Camp).

In Namibia the offer includes several properties in Sossusvlei, Damaraland and Etosha for all of the country's highlights including its desert and dune experience, desert-adapted wildlife including elephant and rhino and the stark beauty of regions such as the Kaokoveld. In addition, there are several camps in Malawi - please e-mail or call for more details.

6) Botswana (Tuli Block) and South Africa

For the dry season from about April through October I highly recommend a visit to Mashatu in the Tuli Block of Botswana - this is what the safari experience is all about. Superb game-viewing (plenty of predators and elephants), remote and atmospheric. This is one of the best areas in Southern Africa for a walking safari led by master tracker Stuart Quinn. This inexpensive 3 or 4 night walking safari is likely to be a life-changing experience for most people! Mashatu also has two choices of permanent camps namely the luxury Mashatu Main Camp and the moderately priced yet very comfortable Mashatu Tented Camp.

In South Africa the best game-viewing by far is to be experienced in the Sabi Sand Reserve, adjacent to the southern area of Kruger Park. At camps such as MalaMala and Kirkmans and many others, all of the 'Big Five' mammals are seen just about every day. We also like Kings Camp and Tanda Tula, both superb camps in the Timbavati Region which is adjacent to the central portion Kruger National Park. Big Five game-viewing and much else besides including great hospitality, nice rooms, possible sleep-outs, and chance to see the exceedingly rare white lions of the Timbavati. A moderately priced option there is Simbavati. MalaMala and Mashatu can be combined in a 6-night trip - the Definitive Africa safari - which includes a charter flight between the two areas.

Of course, a South Africa is hardly complete without spending a few days in Cape Town. Natural beauty, history, culture, the Cape winelands, Great White Shark diving, museums, some of the best restaurants in Africa - Cape Town and the Southwestern Cape has it all.

7) Namibia

Namibia is primarily a 'desert and dune' environment but there is some good game-viewing to be experienced in the Etosha area, as well as in parts of Damaraland

and the Kaokoveld. The signature sight is the massive red sand dunes at Sossusvlei. One of the most remarkable areas is the remote Skeleton Coast, where our associates Wilderness Safaris will be opening a new Skeleton coast Camp in

August

2014. Stretching from the south of Namibia up into Angola, the Skeleton Coast and its hinterland is a landscape of haunting beauty, a vast area of rolling sand dunes, expanses of uninhabited desert plains, fossil beds, unique geological formations, desert-adapted animals and strange vegetation. Truly a unique and fantastic journey. We also offer two small-group guided safaris namely the luxury 'Great Namibia Journey' and the moderately priced 'Diverse Namibia' Safari, with regular monthly departures from Windhoek.

8) Rwanda and Uganda

I just recently traveled widely in Uganda and Rwanda to take a look at what the countries have to offer - and quickly realized that they are both wonderful destinations especially for people who already been to Africa once or twice and have seen most of the big game species.

A gorilla trek is one of the ultimate African safari experiences: there is just something unbelievable about seeing these massively powerful mammals close up in their true environment. The same with chimpanzees. So, the best reasons to visit Uganda and Rwanda are definitely the apes and monkeys with chimps and gorillas at the top of the list; other things which rate highly in my Uganda/Rwanda book are amazing scenic beauty and other wildlife (mammals, reptiles, birds etc). The people and cultural experiences also make this a very special place - some of my most memorable moments were all about connecting with people while running or on activities. For anyone with more than a passing interest in birds and birding, both Uganda and Rwanda are loaded with spectacular and in many cases endemic or near-endemic species.

9) Republic of Congo - Odzala-Kokoua National Park

The Congo is just an experience - I was totally charmed by the fun, tree-climbing Western Lowland Gorillas compared with their much more pedestrian East African cousins. The forests of the Congo Basin is a totally new world for even the most seasoned African travelers and Wilderness Safaris' 7-day Odzala-Kokoua trip is an ideal introduction to the area. The trips starts and ends in Brazzaville which is not that difficult to get to from either Johannesburg, Paris, Kigali or Nairobi. The forests and gorilla treks out of Ngaga Camp and the walking, boating and nature drives out of Lango make for a very diverse and very exciting trip with lots of firsts and many lasting memories.

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