



THE GROWN-UP GUIDE TO AFRICA

Everything you need to plan the trip of a lifetime

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INTRODUCTION

I've been trying to describe what Africa does to people for a long time, and I've never quite managed it. Not properly. It gets under your skin in a way that resists explanation - something shifts, usually quietly, and you find yourself changed in ways you didn't anticipate and can't entirely account for. I've felt it myself more times than I can count, across thirty years and more countries than I've kept track of. And I've watched it happen to others too.

Last year I was in Ol Kinyei conservancy in Kenya with my wife when our guide found a large lion pride - completely by chance, as these things always are. We had the sighting entirely to ourselves. The lions moved around us, the youngsters played, the adults regarded us with complete indifference, and we sat in the open vehicle for as long as we wanted, close enough to hear them breathe. My wife, who has seen a great deal of the world, was moved almost to tears. Not by fear - we were perfectly safe, and the guides knew it - but by something harder to name. The privilege of it, perhaps. The improbability. The fact that these were wild animals in their own landscape doing exactly what they would have done had we never arrived, and that we were trusted - by the guide, by some unspoken agreement with the bush - to witness it.

That is what nobody tells you before you go. Not the animals themselves, though the animals are extraordinary. It's the feeling of being genuinely present in a place that doesn't need you and being allowed in anyway. And the fact that none of it is guaranteed - that you might drive for an hour and find nothing, and the next morning stumble into something you'll carry with you for the rest of your life - is what makes every sighting matter in a way that a zoo, or a game farm, or fifty vehicles around a lion on a main road, simply cannot replicate.

This is what I've been trying to help people experience for years. And this guide is my best attempt at explaining how.

Who this guide is for

You're probably not planning your first holiday. You've travelled, you know what you like, and you're past the stage of ticking off landmarks. What you're looking for now is something that feels genuinely different - an experience that engages you properly, challenges your assumptions, and stays with you long after you're home.

Africa does all of that. But only if you approach it the right way. There's a version of African safari that's expensive, overcrowded, and essentially the same experience you could have on a package tour anywhere. And there's a version that will change something fundamental about how you see the world. This guide is about the second version.

What Africa can offer you

One of the things I've learned from three decades of travelling in Africa is that it's not one thing. It's wildlife and wilderness, yes - but it's also beaches and mountains, ancient history and extraordinary food, cities that hum with energy and remote places where the silence is so complete it takes a day or two to adjust. It's gorillas in the mist and whale sharks in warm water. It's a walking safari in the South Luangwa at six in the morning, when the light is

doing something impossible to the acacia trees and your guide is reading the ground like a book.

Whatever you want from a trip - adventure, relaxation, wildlife, culture, photography, sheer escape - Africa can deliver it. The question is knowing where to go, when to go, and how to put it together. That's what this guide is for.

How to use this guide

I've structured it to follow the natural arc of how most people plan a trip. It starts with the big questions - why Africa, how I work, what it costs, when to go - and moves through the practical detail toward the experiential. The Destinations section near the back gives a personal overview of every country I currently arrange trips to.

Read it in order if you're starting from scratch. Dip in if you have a specific question. And when you're ready to talk - or even if you just want to think out loud about what's possible - you know where to find me.

An important note

Everything in here is based on personal experience. I've visited every destination I write about, stayed in or inspected the properties I recommend, and worked with every operator I mention. Where I have an opinion - and I usually do - I've given it directly. I'd rather be honest and occasionally wrong than vague and reliably useless.

The guide is updated periodically. Prices, visa requirements, and camp availability change - always check with me for the current picture before making any decisions based on specific figures here.

Now, let's talk about Africa.

WHY AFRICA?

People who haven't been, tend to think of Africa as a single place. It isn't - it's 54 countries spanning every conceivable landscape, climate, culture, and ecosystem on earth. Desert and rainforest, ancient city and remote wilderness, Indian Ocean beach and high-altitude savanna. The question isn't whether Africa has something for you. It's which part of it to start with.

But there's a more honest answer to why Africa, and it has nothing to do with checklists.

The wildlife is the reason people book. The people are the reason they go back.

Yes, the animals are extraordinary - and if you've read this far, you already know that. But ask almost anyone who has spent real time in Africa what stays with them, and the answer is rarely a lion sighting. It's the guide who knew every bird by its call and stayed up half the night to tell you why it mattered. It's the camp staff who lined up to wave goodbye when you

left, genuinely sorry to see you go. It's the farmer who flagged you down on a remote road in Zambia and ended up feeding you lunch. Africans understand something about human connection that the rest of the world has largely forgotten, and spending time with them is a reminder of what actually matters.

It will change how you travel - and probably how you think.

There's an expression that circulates in Zimbabwe: "we'll make a plan." It means that when something goes wrong - and something always goes wrong - the response is not blame, not complaint, not a strongly worded email to a customer service team. It's ingenuity, patience, and a refusal to be defeated. I first heard it on a flooded road in Botswana, watching a truck driver turn a metre of standing water into a profitable ferry service. It stuck with me. Africa has a habit of doing that.

The continent will also teach your patience - not as a virtue to be practised but as a natural consequence of being somewhere that operates on its own timetable. After a few days you stop checking your watch. After a week you can't remember why you were ever in such a hurry.

It's also just spectacular.

The night sky with zero light pollution. Sunsets over the Okavango that look too vivid to be real. The silence of the Namib desert before dawn. The scale of the Serengeti, where the horizon is genuinely as far as you can see. The Sahara, which I once crossed in a truck I bought with a friend - but that's a story for another time, and for around a campfire rather than a planning guide.

There is also delicious food and wonderful wine. And increasingly, excellent craft beer. I mention this in the spirit of full disclosure.

Africa gets under your skin. It happens to everyone, at different speeds and in different ways, but it happens. The good news is that the remedy is straightforward - go back.

HOW I WORK

It starts with a conversation

Getting in touch is the easy part. You can email me, use the contact form on the website, or simply pick up the phone. What happens next is a conversation - not a form-filling exercise or a quote request that disappears into a system. I'll ask you some questions about what you're looking for, share some initial thoughts, and between us we'll work out whether I'm the right person for the trip you have in mind.

Then I go to work

Once we're moving in the same direction, I go to work with my partners on the ground. In the safari world these are called DMCs - Destination Management Companies - and they are the local architects of your trip. They know their country in the kind of detail that can only come from living and working in it, and they handle the logistical complexity of getting you

from one place to another smoothly: internal flights, transfers between lodges, timing that accounts for how things actually work in the bush rather than how they look on paper. I work directly with a small number of DMCs I've known for years and trust completely. When I call, they know who I am and they know my clients expect something particular. That matters.

Why I pay my own way

It also matters that I know the places I'm recommending from personal experience. I travel to Africa multiple times a year - partly to attend trade shows where I meet suppliers and stay current, but always for at least a couple of weeks beyond that, travelling as a client would and paying my own way. If I'm putting a lodge in your itinerary it's because I've been there, or because someone I trust completely has, not because it's top of a supplier's availability list. That's not how I'm willing to work.

From idea to itinerary

I'll come back to you with two or three broad ideas for the shape of the trip before investing time in a detailed itinerary - it saves us both the frustration of working up something elaborate that turns out to be heading in the wrong direction. Once you tell me which direction resonates, I build the full proposal: a day-by-day itinerary with accommodation, activities, and logistics, along with a clear breakdown of what's included and what the trip costs. Nothing is confirmed or paid for at this stage - it's a proposal, and we can adjust anything until it's exactly right.

"Andy really took the time to understand what we were looking for, and his recommendations made a genuine difference. He suggested destinations and experiences we would never have thought of ourselves - and those turned out to be some of the highlights of the trip."

- Tomas (Kenya)

Deposits, balance, and everything in between

When you're happy, a 30% deposit secures everything. Your payment goes into a trust account held by Protected Trust Services - more on that in the financial protection section of this guide - and I confirm all bookings with my partners in Africa. The balance falls due eight weeks before departure. Between booking and travel, I'll send you practical preparation guidance, answer whatever questions come up, and make sure you arrive knowing what to expect. I'm available throughout the trip itself if anything needs attention, and I'll be in touch when you get home to hear how it went.

The whole process is designed to feel like planning a trip with someone who knows what they're doing, not navigating a travel company's procedures. That's the intention, anyway.

WHY WORK WITH ME

Thirty-odd years and counting

I've been travelling in Africa since 1992. I've lived there, worked there, and met my wife there - although she's Norwegian, which is why a safari company ended up being run from Scandinavia.

I've returned as often as possible ever since, often many times a year - my record is seven trips in twelve months. I don't employ a team, I don't have a portfolio of packages, and I don't work from a brochure. Every trip I arrange is built from scratch around the specific people taking it, drawing on relationships with partners on the ground that have been built over years of face-to-face contact, shared meals, and mutual trust. When something goes wrong - and occasionally something will, because this is Africa - there is one person responsible for sorting it out. That person is me.

“Andy guided us through every stage - planning, booking, packing, and all the practical details before, during and after the trip - with real dedication, deep knowledge of Africa, and genuine enthusiasm for getting it right. We could never have put together such a varied and rewarding journey on our own.”

- Ellen (Botswana, Zimbabwe & Mozambique)

I only recommend what I'd book myself

The trips I arrange sit at the premium end of the market, and that's not something I apologise for. The lodges and camps I recommend are chosen on the basis of quality, character, and genuine conservation commitment - not availability or margin. I travel to Africa at my own expense specifically to experience what I'm recommending, and I won't put something in an itinerary I haven't vetted personally or through partners I trust completely. I also won't recommend a property that greenwashes - that claims conservation credentials without the substance to back them up. There's more of that in the safari industry than most operators will admit.

Your money is secure

Every payment you make sits in a trust account administered by Protected Trust Services, independently held and fully regulated. I cannot access those funds until after your trip is complete. Your money is safe whether or not I am. More detail on this in the financial protection section of this guide.

Is this right for you? (An honest answer)

A bespoke itinerary is a genuine collaboration - it takes time, communication, and a degree of flexibility on your part as well as mine. Africa doesn't always run on schedule, and the best guides make decisions in the moment rather than sticking rigidly to a plan. If you're looking for predictability above everything else, a fixed-departure group tour might suit you better,

and I'm happy to point you toward the best options. But if you want a trip that's been thought about properly, arranged by someone who knows and loves what they're talking about, and who is accountable to you personally from the first conversation to the last game drive - that's what I do.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY & CONSERVATION

Why your holiday matters more than you might think

There's a question worth addressing directly: given the flights involved, is an African safari actually a responsible thing to do? I think it is - and not just because I have an obvious interest in saying so.

Without tourism, Africa's wildlife will not survive. That's not an exaggeration. The economic model that makes conservation viable depends on people coming to see the animals. When a farmer whose crops are raided by elephants sees that those same elephants generate income for his community through tourism - funding clinics, schools, clean water, employment - he has a reason to protect them rather than fight them. Remove the tourism and you remove the incentive. Poaching fills the vacuum.

The same logic operates at landscape scale. The Maasai Mara conservancies in Kenya are a good example. The private concessions that border the national park allow communities to continue living on their ancestral land while generating income from tourism rather than agriculture or development. Crucially, that land sits directly on migration routes that animals have used for centuries. If those concessions were lost - if the economic case for conservation disappeared - the land would almost certainly be developed, those routes blocked, and a migration that has existed longer than any human settlement in the area would be compromised. Tourism isn't just a nice-to-have here. It's the mechanism that keeps the ecosystem intact.

The lodges and camps I work with are all involved in exactly this kind of relationship with the communities around them. In many cases the land on which a lodge operates is leased from local communities who receive direct income from its presence. Former poachers are now employed as guides and game scouts - people with the best possible knowledge of the bush, now using it to protect rather than exploit. These aren't marketing stories. They're how the system actually works when it's working properly.

"The trip of a lifetime. Andy's advice beforehand meant we arrived well prepared, he stayed in touch throughout, and everything ran without a hitch. He works with operators who take sustainable tourism seriously - which mattered a great deal to us."

- Rune (Botswana, Zimbabwe & Mozambique)

What to look for - and what to avoid

The word 'sustainable' has been stretched so thin by overuse that it's become almost meaningless. 'Eco-friendly' is worse - it's been colonised by properties that slap a solar panel on the roof and call it conservation. I won't recommend a lodge that greenwashes, and I won't dress up my own operation with claims I can't substantiate.

What I look for in a partner is straightforward: are local people employed at all levels, not just in service roles? Does the lodge support specific community or conservation projects with verifiable results? Is wildlife genuinely protected on the land, or is it just a backdrop? Those questions separate the real operators from the ones who've discovered that 'eco' is good for business.

How you can make it count

The single most impactful thing you can do is choose where you stay carefully - which, if you're working with me, is already taken care of. Beyond that, a few habits make a real difference on the ground.

Tip appropriately and in cash - staff tip pools at lodges go directly to local employees. Buy from local craftspeople rather than airport shops. If your guide mentions a community project, ask about it and consider a direct contribution. On game drives and walking safaris, engage with what your guide is showing you - the bush is a classroom, and the guides are exceptional teachers.

And don't feel guilty about being there. Your presence, your spend, and your genuine interest in what you're seeing is one of the most constructive things a visitor to Africa can do. The alternative - an Africa without tourism revenue, where wildlife has no economic value to the people living alongside it - is far worse for everyone, including the animals.

IS MY MONEY SAFE?

Yes. All payments you make are held in a trust account administered by Protected Trust Services (PTS), independently of my business. I cannot access those funds until after you have completed your trip. This means your money is fully protected whether or not my business - or any of my suppliers - were to encounter difficulties.

The scheme is compliant with EU and UK Package Travel Regulations and also satisfies Norwegian regulations as an alternative to Reisesegarantifondet. In fact, it can be argued it provides stronger protection than the RGF scheme, since funds are ring-fenced from the moment of payment rather than insured after the fact.

The Grown-Up Travel Company is PTS member number 5360. You can read more about the consumer protection scheme at protectedtrustservices.com.

“Andy’s recommendations and guidance on where was best for our budget and the experience we wanted was spot on, meaning we saw all the big 5 with some fantastic guides and away from the large crowds. We also felt safe booking with Andy - paying through PTS meant there were no worries regarding fraud.”

- Guy & Rachel (Kenya)

A TYPICAL DAY ON SAFARI

No two days on safari are the same, and that unpredictability is a large part of the appeal. But there is a rhythm to the safari day that is consistent across most lodges and camps and knowing what to expect helps you get the most from it. So here is a typical day - or at least, as typical as anything in the African bush ever gets.

Your wake-up call comes before dawn. It is earlier than you would choose at home, and for the first morning or two you may question the wisdom of it. By the third day you will be awake before it, lying in the dark listening to whatever is moving outside and wondering what the morning will bring. That anticipation - the not knowing - is something truly special.

There is a certain structure to the safari day, so let me share it so you know what to expect when staying at a lodge, tented camp or mobile safari site.

Just before dawn (around 05:30): Knock, knock

The staff will wake you in good time for the morning game drive. Usually, you’ll have hot tea or coffee and some biscuits delivered to your room. You can arrange your wake-up time - perhaps a little earlier if you want to shower before leaving camp.

It will be cool, perhaps cold, before the sun has had a chance to warm the land. Dress in layers and have your clothes ready the night before so you can get dressed without delay.

06:00–09:30: Morning game drive

Enjoy the fabulous sunrise and a dawn chorus unlike anything you have heard before. Animals don’t like the midday heat either, so the cool of early morning is a great time to spot wildlife.

If you’re lucky enough to have booked a hot-air ballooning ride - for example in Tanzania, Kenya or Namibia - you’ll also have an early start, as the best conditions are at dawn.

There will usually be a break for coffee, tea and biscuits during your drive, or perhaps a full breakfast prepared for you in the bush at the end of your morning adventure.

09:30–10:30: Back to the lodge - brunch time

Towards the end of your game drive, it will be too hot for most of the animals, and certainly the humans, so it’s time to head back for a welcome and very hearty brunch. Expect a full English or a continental - or both. You will have worked up a healthy appetite so enjoy yourself.

10:30–13:00: The middle of the day is yours

The late morning is your own - perhaps a dip in the pool, a spa treatment, or best of all getting your head down for a snooze to recharge for later. Depending on the lodge, there may also be a gym, a library, guided bush walks, or simply the kind of profound quiet that is very hard to find anywhere else on earth.

13:00–14:00: Lunch (optional)

You may well still be full after that brunch, but there'll likely be something on offer and the company is good. You'll make new friends among both staff and guests during your stay.

14:00–15:30: Leisure and preparation

At around 15:00 get your gear together for the afternoon game drive. You'll be out until after sunset, so bring warm clothes - it gets cold fast once the sun drops behind the horizon.

Before you head out, let your guide know your sundowner order. They'll bring what's needed. And it really should be a G&T. Just saying.

15:30: High tea

Some colonial traditions have stuck in Africa, and before your afternoon game drive comes high tea - chocolate cake, scones, canapés, small savoury sandwiches. It's a good idea to eat something as it will be a while before dinner.

16:00–19:00: Afternoon game drive

By now the worst of the heat is over and it's time for animals and humans alike to get moving again. You'll see wildlife emerge from the bush to drink at waterholes or hunt for their dinner.

Your guide will find a scenic - and safe - place to park up for sundowners, with your chosen drinks and an astonishing view. African sunsets will genuinely blow your mind.

In a private concession or conservancy, you can continue your game drive after dark, using a spotlight to look for nocturnal animals while returning to camp. In a national park you must leave by dusk when the gates close.

The nighttime can be mosquito time, so long trousers and sleeves are best, along with insect repellent. Like tsetse flies, mosquitoes are attracted to black and blue so it's better not to bring such clothes at all - khaki, green, grey and brown are ideal.

19:00: Pre-dinner drinks

After a shower and a change, join the other guests and guides for drinks - often around the campfire - and perhaps some light snacks before dinner.

19:30: Dinner

Dinner is generally three or more courses, sometimes with wine. Around the campfire, at a long communal table, or in an open-air boma under the stars. Local musicians may provide entertainment, and you should absolutely get involved if invited. It may be some time before you get the chance to dance to African rhythms under a sky full of stars you didn't know existed.

21:00: Bed

Late nights are rare given how early you'll be up the next day. But nobody is judging the last person around the fire.

Either way, falling asleep to the sounds of the African bush is an experience you will not forget. You will sleep like a log, dreaming of what tomorrow might bring.

One practical note: always keep your tent zip closed. The baboons know exactly what they're doing.

WHERE TO STAY

Before I describe the different types of accommodation you'll find on my itineraries, I need to address a word that gets thrown around a lot in the safari world: luxury.

Most people hear luxury and picture chandeliers, gold bathroom fittings and a pillow menu. On safari, real luxury is something entirely different. It's the exclusivity of the experience - smaller camps with fewer guests, game drives where you rarely see another vehicle, guides who know the bush intimately, and the privilege of falling asleep to sounds that have nothing to do with the modern world. The further removed you are from the wilderness, the less luxurious the accommodation - regardless of how many stars it claims.

I'll give you a concrete example of how not to do it. I once spent a night at the Four Seasons in the Serengeti on a familiarisation trip - which at least meant I didn't pay for it. It is, quite literally, an American hotel dropped into the middle of the Serengeti. The waterhole is filmed by cameras so guests can watch elephants drink on their in-room television from the comfort of an air-conditioned room sealed behind concrete walls and glass. It was the most surreal experience I have ever had in Africa. That is what I'd call excessive, not luxurious.

Everything in my itineraries is luxurious by the definition that actually matters. But there are meaningful differences between accommodation types and understanding them helps you choose the right trip.

Safari Lodges

Permanent structures - stone, wood, thatch - built to blend with their surroundings. They offer the highest level of facilities: en-suite bathrooms (often with an outdoor shower, which is not to be missed), reliable electricity, sometimes a pool. They are the most comfortable option and tend to suit guests who want the full bush experience without sacrificing any home comforts.

“Nothing but canvas between us and the elephants, baboons, leopards and hyenas wandering through camp. The personal service was exceptional, and Andy's support throughout - from someone who genuinely knows Africa - made all the difference!”

- Sveinung & Marit (South Africa)

Tented Camps

Semi-permanent structures with canvas walls and thatched or canvas roofs, often set on raised platforms. You hear everything - the lions at three in the morning, the elephants moving past before dawn, the extraordinary volume of the bird chorus at first light. Well-appointed tented camps offer every comfort you need: proper beds, en-suite bathrooms, hot water. What they don't offer is the illusion that you're anywhere other than the bush. That's the point.

Mobile Camps

Mobile camps move with the wildlife and the seasons - set up for a few weeks in one location, then packed and moved to follow migrations or access different areas. More basic in facilities (often bucket showers, limited power) but unmatched for remoteness and exclusivity. If you want to be genuinely away from everything, a mobile camp delivers it.

Sleep-Out Decks and Star Beds

An optional extra that some camps offer: a raised platform or open-air bed away from the main camp, where you spend the night under the African sky with a mosquito net between you and the stars. Popular with honeymooners and anyone who wants to push the experience a little further. Not compulsory, but if your guide offers it and the conditions are right, say yes.

Fly Camps and Wilderness Camps

The most stripped-back option - small, basic, accessible only by foot or light aircraft, designed for one or two nights as part of a walking safari. Think proper adventure rather than comfort. These suit travellers who want to go deeper into genuinely remote areas.

My itineraries draw on all of these types depending on the destination, the time of year, and what you're looking for. When we talk through your trip, I'll make sure the accommodation suits not just your budget but your appetite for immersion - because getting that balance right is one of the most important parts of planning a safari that actually delivers what you came for.

WILDLIFE

Your guide will be an expert wildlife spotter, familiar with the birds, animals and plants of their particular area. The best guides love the interaction with guests as much as the guiding itself - from pouring an excellent G&T to navigating the bush with an uncanny sense of direction, to telling stories around the fire that you'll repeat for years. You arrive as strangers and leave as friends.

What you spot will depend on the country, the camp, the season, the weather, and a hundred other factors. That unpredictability is part of the appeal. Nothing is guaranteed, but in the areas where I arrange itineraries, the odds are very much in your favour.

I'll give you an example of what I mean. We were on a morning game drive in the Okavango when our guide brought the vehicle to a halt and whispered to us to be quiet. Something was moving behind the thick bush but none of us could tell what. Then she stepped out - a leopard, moving slowly and deliberately across the trail toward the mopane forest on the other side. We watched in silence, barely breathing. She was fit, unhurried, completely indifferent to our presence.

And then, before anyone had managed to exhale properly, a second leopard followed. Even our guide - who had spent years in that bush and thought he had seen everything - could not hide his reaction. She passed so close to the vehicle that her tail brushed the bumper as she moved in front of us and disappeared into the trees after the first. Nobody spoke for a long moment.

"We witnessed a lion hunt from beginning to end - such a rare experience that we completely forgot about our cameras! We fell in love with Kenya - the people, the wildlife and the smiles. Everything was exactly what we had hoped for, and so much more."

- Gro & Anita (Kenya)

The Big 5 - and why I'm not a fan of the term

The Big 5 are the lion, leopard, elephant, rhino and cape buffalo. You'll hear the term constantly and many visitors become quietly obsessed with ticking them all off. I understand the instinct, but knowing where it comes from might change your relationship with it.

The Big 5 wasn't coined by conservationists or safari operators. It was coined by big-game hunters - these were the five animals considered most dangerous to stalk on foot. The term became a safari marketing slogan decades later. Once you know that, you might find yourself less attached to it.

Africa has so much more to offer than five species. What follows are some alternatives worth knowing about.

The Little 5

Proposed by conservationists who wanted visitors to appreciate the smaller and less noticed animals of the savanna. The Little 5 are: the leopard tortoise, elephant shrew, buffalo weaver,

rhino beetle and the antlion. Each shares its name with a member of the Big 5 - spot all five and you've achieved something that takes more patience and a better eye than finding a lion.

The Shy 5

Harder still. The Shy 5 are more elusive and lesser-known: the aardwolf, meerkat, aardvark, porcupine, and the bat-eared fox. With the exception of the meerkat, all of these only come out at night, which makes spotting them difficult but highly rewarding. You will remember these sightings.

The Impossible 5

And for the final challenge: the Cape mountain leopard, aardvark (again), pangolin, riverine rabbit and white lion (in the wild). The clue is in the name. Top of this list for me is the aardvark - you'll see their burrows everywhere, invariably taken over by other animals, but almost never the aardvark itself. If you do see one, contact me immediately. You may not realise quite how lucky you've been.

"There was never a dull moment, and we came home with experiences we had only ever dreamed of. We didn't manage to see all of the Big Five - which means we have a very good reason to go back. And when we do, there's no question that Andy will be organising it.."

- Terje & Tonje (Kenya)

A note on night drives

Many camps and private concessions offer night drives, using a spotlight to look for nocturnal animals on the way back to camp. It's worth knowing that responsible guides use a red-filtered light rather than a white spotlight - mammals other than primates have limited colour vision and red light doesn't affect their night vision the way a white beam does. If you're on a night drive and the guide is using blinding white light, that's worth noting. The best operators have moved on from this.

WHERE TO GO

The obvious choice isn't always the right one

One of the first decisions when planning a safari - and one that makes an enormous difference to the experience - is whether to base yourself in a national park or in a private area. Most people assume national parks are the obvious choice. They're not always. Let me explain why.

National parks are publicly owned, government-managed, open to anyone who pays the entrance fee. That openness is both their strength and their weakness. The Serengeti, the Maasai Mara, Kruger - these are extraordinary places. They're also, in peak season, busy.

Very busy. Staying on designated roads is mandatory, night drives and off-road driving are not permitted, and when a guide finds a pride of lions there can be fifty vehicles jostling for position around them. That's not what I'd call a safari.

In private conservancies and concessions across Africa - bordering the Maasai Mara, on the edges of Kruger, in the Okavango Delta and beyond - you can stay in properties with exclusive access to vast private areas where the same animals roam freely. Your guide can drive off-road to follow wild dogs into the bush, stay at a sighting as long as the rules allow, and take you out after dark to spotlight for leopard.

A private conservancy may have several camps operating within it, but they are spread across enormous areas and most have strict internal protocols - typically no more than three vehicles at any sighting, with a time limit before moving on. You may well find yourself alone at a sighting entirely. You will never find yourself in a traffic jam. It's a completely different experience.

Conservancies, concessions and reserves: what's the difference?

The areas I work with most are conservancies and private concessions. Conservancies are typically community-owned or managed, bordering national parks and serving as unfenced wildlife corridors - animals move freely in and out. Private concessions are areas of national park land leased to operators, offering the same exclusive access within the park itself - the Okavango Delta concessions in Botswana are among the finest examples. Both models, done properly, put money directly into local communities and conservation projects. In my view this isn't optional - you simply cannot run an ethical safari operation without it, and any operator that tries isn't one I'd work with.

Private game reserves are a different matter. Entirely privately owned and usually fenced, they vary enormously in quality. The best are excellent; the worst are little more than wildlife parks where the same habituated animals are encountered on rotation. Fencing isn't always a negative - some private reserves exist specifically to protect species that can't safely roam in national parks, rhino being the obvious example, and in those cases the controlled environment is the point. But for general safari purposes, the fencing question is the key one: a large reserve where animals move naturally is a fundamentally different proposition to a small enclosed one. I include private reserves in itineraries selectively, and only where I'm confident the scale and standards justify it.

"This was our fifth safari and the one that has made the deepest impression. No convoy of vehicles crowding around every sighting - the Maasai guides find the animals through experience and approach them with real respect."

- Eirin (Kenya)

It's actually even more complicated than that - but in a good way

Many conservancies bordering the Maasai Mara offer optional day access into the national park itself - at a fee - and for areas that day-trippers from Nairobi can't reach, this can be

genuinely worthwhile. I sometimes include it as an option, and it adds to rather than contradicts the conservancy experience.

The Serengeti is worth addressing specifically. The park is enormous - over 14,000 square kilometres - and vehicle congestion is mainly concentrated in specific areas, particularly around the main camps and airstrips near Seronera, and at the river crossings during the migration when the spectacle attracts the spectators. Neither of those things defines the Serengeti as a whole. The key is knowing where to stay and - critically - when.

A well-chosen camp in a quieter corner of the park, visited at the right point in the season, delivers a wilderness experience that bears no resemblance to the overcrowded sightings that give the park its complicated reputation. This is exactly the kind of knowledge I bring to an itinerary - the difference between a Serengeti trip that frustrates and one that genuinely delivers is rarely the destination itself. It's the detail.

A million wildebeest and three hundred Land Cruisers

The migration is where the nuance matters most. The river crossings attract the worst of the overcrowding - long lines of vehicles queuing for hours for a front-row view of wildebeest attempting to cross the Mara River. That experience is not for everyone, and it's worth being honest with yourself about whether it's what you actually want. The spectacle of the migration - the sheer volume of animals moving across the plains - can be witnessed in far less frenetic circumstances, in different areas or at different points in the season, with a fraction of the company.

And some national parks are simply in a different category altogether. Ruaha in Tanzania is one of Africa's largest and most lightly visited, and a camp there feels as remote and exclusive as anything in a private concession. The question worth asking is never really "national park or private area?" - it's "how exclusive is your access, and how good is your guide?" That's what I'm focused on when I put together an itinerary, whatever the designation of the land.

A specific word about South Africa

One specific caution about South Africa: you will still find operations there that market themselves as game reserves but are in reality hunting farms or commercial wildlife breeding operations - sometimes very small, fenced areas with animals that have little resemblance to their wild counterparts. Anywhere else this would be called a zoo. I only work with properties I know and trust personally, but if you're ever researching independently, ask direct questions about fencing, animal sourcing, and whether hunting takes place on the property.

The short version: national parks are magnificent and feature in many of my itineraries. But the most memorable safaris I've arranged - and personally experienced - have almost always been based in private conservancies or concessions. Less traffic, more freedom, better guiding, and a deeper sense of actually being in Africa rather than visiting it.

COSTS & BUDGET

Flights aren't included - let's get that out of the way first

Everything I arrange covers your time in Africa: accommodation, activities, park and conservancy fees, internal flights and transfers, and guiding. International flights are not included - you book those separately, and I'm happy to help you find the right routing and timing when the moment comes.

What does a safari actually cost?

This is almost always the first question, and the honest answer is: it depends enormously on where you go, how you travel, and for how long. A beach hotel in Mozambique and a night in a Botswana concession are not comparable. Rather than quoting per-night rates that would mislead more than inform, here are realistic total figures for a fourteen-day trip per person, which is roughly what I'd recommend as a minimum to do Africa justice.

For a fixed-date small group camping safari - travelling with others on a set route and departure - you're looking at from around USD 2,750. For a fixed-date accommodated group tour, from around USD 4,250. These trips are run by specialist operators such as Sunway Safaris (sunwaysafaris.com), who offer excellent value and a great experience for those who prefer the social dynamic and structure of a group departure.

For a bespoke personalised itinerary - designed around you, your dates, your interests - costs start from around USD 5,000 per person, with the average across my clients sitting at around USD 7,000 per person for a two-week trip. That figure can be higher depending on destination, accommodation style, and whether you're travelling as a couple or solo.

What's included in those figures?

On a bespoke itinerary, the core costs are covered once you land: accommodation, game drives and standard safari activities, park and conservancy fees, internal flights between destinations, and all ground transfers. Typically, all meals and beverages - both alcoholic and non-alcoholic - are included on safari, but city hotels and beach properties may operate on a bed and breakfast or room-only basis.

Some specialist activities carry additional costs regardless of the operator: gorilla trekking permits, hot air ballooning, and certain walking safari programmes are the most common examples. I'll always be clear about what's included and what isn't before you commit to anything.

Why does it cost that much?

Because the experience you're paying for is extraordinary. Your lodge rate covers three to five meals a day, two activities, expert guiding, national park and conservation fees, and - in remote areas - the considerable cost of getting supplies to places that have no road access. The lodges I work with also employ and train local staff, support community projects, and fund conservation work. When the arithmetic is done, it's genuinely good value for what you receive.

One honest word on budget

If you find yourself calculating whether you can afford a cold Tusker at the airport bar after paying for the trip, it's worth waiting another year. Africa will still be there, and a safari undertaken with financial anxiety hovering over it is not the experience it should be. Save up, do it properly, and it will be one of the best things you've ever spent money on.

HOW LONG TO STAY

The short answer: longer than you think

Two weeks or more is ideal. But even ten days or a week will give you the adventure of a lifetime if the itinerary is well-designed - and a focused week in one area will always beat a rushed fortnight trying to cover too much ground.

The temptation, especially on a first trip, is to cram in as many different places as possible. I understand it - you're finally going and you want to see everything. Resist it. Africa rewards time more than distance. Two nights somewhere is barely enough to unpack, let alone settle into the rhythm of the bush. By the third morning, something shifts - you stop looking for the next thing and start actually seeing what's in front of you.

The three-night rule

I'd suggest a minimum of three nights at any single lodge or camp, and ideally four or five if the destination warrants it. Here's why: travel days in and out eat into your time, the first game drive is always slightly breathless, and the second night is when you finally sleep properly. The third day is when the magic tends to happen - you know the guides, they know what you're interested in, and you go looking for it together.

The same thinking applies to combining destinations. A Kenya safari paired with a few nights on the coast is a wonderful combination, but only if you give each part enough time to breathe. Three nights on the coast after a week on safari is a holiday. One night is just an airport hotel with a better view.

If you can't do two weeks this time

A well-designed seven or ten-day trip focused on one country - or even one area - is a perfectly complete experience. I'd rather help you have an outstanding week in Botswana than a forgettable fortnight spread too thin across four countries. Tell me your constraints and we'll make the most of them.

And as I tell every client who worries they haven't seen enough: you will come back. Everyone wants to. And almost everyone does.

WHEN TO GO

Understanding the seasons

Africa doesn't have one climate. It has dozens, varying by country, altitude, and proximity to the coast. But there are some broad patterns worth understanding before you start planning.

The dry season - roughly June to October across most of southern and East Africa - is when most people choose to travel. Vegetation is thinner, animals congregate around water sources, and game viewing is generally at its most productive. It's also the most expensive time to go, and the most popular. If you want the Maasai Mara in peak season, book early.

The shoulder seasons - April to May and October to November - are often underrated. Prices drop, crowds thin out, and the bush can be beautiful. Game viewing remains excellent in many destinations, and you'll share it with far fewer people.

The green season is the one that surprises people most. In many destinations it means a heavy shower in the morning and clear skies for the rest of the day - landscapes so vivid they don't look real, migrant birds arriving in extraordinary numbers, and newborn animals everywhere. The rewards can be remarkable; I visited Botswana in February - well into green season - and had some of the best game viewing of my life at half the peak-season price.

A word on guarantees

This grid is a guide, not a promise. Weather in Africa is unpredictable - the rains can come early, leave late, or surprise you entirely. More importantly, wildlife sightings are never guaranteed regardless of the season. What good timing gives you is better odds and the right conditions. What your guide gives you is the knowledge and patience to make the most of them. The two together are what make a safari work.

Best months by destination

This is a general guide only, subject to change, and based on typical patterns - not guarantees. Contact me for specific advice on your chosen destination and dates.

Month	Recommended destinations
January	Kenya, Lesotho, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda
February	Kenya, Lesotho, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda
March	Lesotho, South Africa
April	Angola, Botswana, eSwatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe
May	Angola, Botswana, eSwatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe
June	Angola, Botswana, eSwatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe
July	Angola, Botswana, eSwatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Month	Recommended destinations
August	Angola, Botswana, eSwatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe
September	Angola, Botswana, eSwatini, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe
October	Angola, Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe
November	Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa
December	Lesotho, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda

SAFETY

One of the questions I'm asked surprisingly often is whether Africa is safe to visit. The short answer is yes. Southern and East Africa receive millions of visitors every year and the overwhelming majority return home with nothing but extraordinary memories and a burning desire to go back.

Travel advisories

Government travel advisories can be useful but they're often blunt instruments. A single incident in one corner of a country can trigger a warning that covers the entire nation, leaving readers with the impression that everywhere is dangerous when the reality is far more nuanced. Most advisories acknowledge specific regions to avoid, but that detail gets lost.

The same common sense that applies anywhere in the world applies in Africa. You wouldn't wander alone at night through an unfamiliar neighbourhood in any major city - the same applies in Nairobi or Johannesburg. Work with an operator who follows developments in destination countries closely, and you'll always have current, accurate information rather than a blanket government warning written to minimise liability.

Terrorism

Sadly, the risk of terrorism exists wherever you travel in the world, and Africa is no exception. But consider this: most attacks target high-profile locations in crowded urban areas. There's a reasonable argument that spending your time in remote wilderness is one of the safer holiday choices you can make. You'll pass through airports and perhaps spend a day or two in a city, but the precautions you'd take there are no different from those you'd apply anywhere in Europe or North America.

Crime

Crime is a risk everywhere, and Africa is no different. Common sense is the best preventative measure. Stay away from areas known for higher crime rates, particularly after dark. Don't walk around with expensive cameras, watches or jewellery on display. Leave anything valuable you don't need at the lodge or in the room safe. On safari itself, the only real criminals are the baboons.

Animals

The animals are the reason you're there, but it's worth knowing that the vast majority are not interested in you. Most are considerably more scared of you than you are of them. On game drives and on walks, you'll be in the care of an expert guide who knows exactly how to behave around every species you encounter, and what to do in the rare event that a situation requires careful handling. You are statistically far more likely to be bitten by your neighbour's poodle than troubled by a leopard on safari.

HOW TO TRAVEL

Africa offers more ways to experience it than most people realise. The question of how you want to travel is worth thinking about early, because it shapes everything - the destinations that work, the budget required, and ultimately what kind of trip you come home with.

Lodge-based with resident guides

The backbone of most of my itineraries. You travel between lodges and camps - by road, by light aircraft, or a combination - and at each property the guides who live and work there take you out. A resident guide knows their patch in a way no visiting guide can replicate: the individual animals, the seasonal rhythms, the spots that don't appear on any map. It's one of the reasons I favour this model over arrangements that use a single guide travelling with you across multiple regions.

Private guided

A private vehicle and guide for the duration of your trip - the most flexible and personalised option short of self-drive. Your guide gets to know exactly what you're interested in and can adjust each day accordingly. It's also the most expensive option and works best on longer itineraries where that relationship has time to develop properly.

Hosted adventures

A few times a year I lead small group trips personally - usually six to eight people, always to destinations I know well and want to share. These aren't fixed-departure tours run by an operator; they're trips I design and lead myself, travelling with the group throughout. If you've been wanting to go to Africa but would feel more comfortable going with someone who knows exactly what they're doing, or simply like the idea of travelling with a small group of like-minded people, these trips are worth looking at. Details of upcoming departures are on the website.

Scheduled small group tours

Fixed-date departures with other travellers, following a set itinerary. Genuinely small groups - not fifty people on a coach - and often excellent value. Less flexible than a bespoke itinerary, but a great introduction to Africa and a genuinely enjoyable social experience. Sunway Safaris run some of the best in southern Africa and are worth considering if the dates work and you like the idea of sharing the adventure with like-minded people.

Self-drive

For the right traveller, a self-drive itinerary is one of the most rewarding ways to experience Africa. You set the pace, you stop when something catches your eye, and you develop a relationship with the landscape that no guided vehicle quite replicates. South Africa and Namibia are both exceptionally well-suited to self-drive - with scenery that rewards slow travel. Botswana and Zimbabwe are good too, though they require more experience and preparation.

The right choice depends on your budget, your confidence, your travel party, and honestly - your personality. Get in touch and we'll work it out together.

“Travelling with five children of different ages meant the logistics were never going to be straightforward, but Andy had great suggestions for making it work. Everything went without a single problem. An experience we will never forget!”

- Helle Warncke-Wang (Kenya)

GETTING THERE

International flights aren't something I sell or arrange - you book those directly. I'm happy to help you think through routing and timing, but the booking itself is yours. Book your flights as soon as your safari is confirmed; popular routes to Nairobi, Johannesburg and other African hubs fill up, and early booking almost always means better fares.

Internal flights are a different matter - these I can and do arrange as part of your itinerary. Getting between a Nairobi hotel and a Maasai Mara camp, or from Victoria Falls to Hwange, involves small aircraft on scheduled or chartered services that need to be booked properly and timed carefully. I'll handle all of that.

GETTING AROUND

Transport within Africa varies enormously depending on where you are and what you're doing - 4WD game vehicles, minibuses on tarmac roads, light aircraft, mokoro canoes, river boats, and more. Your itinerary will specify what's involved at each stage, and I'll walk you through anything that needs explanation.

Light aircraft

Small planes are a regular feature of safari itineraries, particularly in Botswana, Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia, where lodges are often far from the nearest road. These are not the terrifying death traps some people imagine - they are workmanlike, safe, and frankly one of the most thrilling ways to arrive somewhere. Luggage restrictions are strict (typically 15kg in soft bags) and weight distribution genuinely matters. More on this in the packing section.

Self-drive

If you're considering driving yourself, South Africa and Namibia are the natural starting points - both have well-maintained road networks, reliable infrastructure, and landscapes that reward slow travel. Botswana, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Tanzania are fantastic for more experienced travellers. In some parks you can drive yourself on designated roads; in others, or in the deeper bush, you can book a guide to join you in your own vehicle, so you don't miss anything.

If you've never driven a 4WD before, I can arrange a training session. It's not as daunting as it sounds, and once you've done it, you'll want to do it again.

Getting between countries

Multi-country itineraries typically combine internal flights, road transfers, and occasionally border crossings by vehicle. I plan all of this as part of the itinerary - the logistics are more complex than they look on a map and getting the timing right matters.

PHOTOGRAPHY

I always say that you have to try damn hard to take bad photos in Africa - but here are a few tips to help you take the best you can.

Bring a decent zoom lens

A long lens gives you a better chance of capturing animals that are far away or that you can't safely approach. Do consider the weight and size though - the biggest lenses are genuinely unwieldy in a moving vehicle. A versatile mid-range zoom is often more useful than a monster telephoto that spends most of the trip in the bag.

Remember the rule of thirds

Divide each shot into three columns and three rows. The intersection of the lines - the point of interest - is where you should aim to put your subject. With animals, get the eyes on one of those intersections. Nobody entirely understands why this rule works, but it does. A subject dead in the middle of the frame just isn't as visually compelling.

Get to eye level

Try to position yourself at the animal's eye level. This requires luck and patience, but if the animal turns to look directly at the camera from that angle, you'll get a shot worth framing.

Shutter speed is everything

Animals move faster than you'd expect, and a slow shutter speed will turn a fleeing impala into a blur of brown. A setting of 1/1000 of a second or higher is the general rule for moving subjects. If you're not confident with manual settings, modern automatic modes handle this well - don't be afraid to let the camera do the work.

Take burst shots

When something happens - lion cubs playing, an antelope fight, a cheetah at full sprint - hold the button down and take a sequence. You may find that the third or fourth frame has National Geographic cover potential while the first and second are just grass.

Put the phone down occasionally

The temptation to film everything is real, and there's nothing wrong with it. But some moments - a leopard at five metres, a herd of elephant crossing the track at dusk - deserve to be experienced without a screen in front of your face. The memory will outlast the footage.

READING

A good book before you go or in your bag will make the experience richer. Here are my recommendations, starting with the most useful.

Country guides

Bradt Guides are the best travel books on Africa, full stop. Written by people who actually know and love the countries they cover, they go into a level of detail that Lonely Planet and Rough Guide rarely match. If there's a Bradt guide for your destination, buy it. If there isn't, Rough Guide is the better of the two mainstream alternatives.

Wildlife identification

East African Wildlife by Bradt and Southern African Wildlife by Bradt are both excellent starting points for knowing what you're looking at on a game drive. For birds specifically, Birds of East Africa by Terry Stevenson is the standard reference, and What's That Bird by Kenneth Newman does the same job for southern Africa in a more accessible format.

Fiction and narrative

A novel or memoir set in the country you're visiting is one of the best ways to arrive somewhere with a genuine sense of its history and character. A separate blog post on the website covers eight of the best novels about Africa - worth a read before you start packing.

PASSPORTS & VISAS

Visa regulations across Africa change frequently enough that anything I write here could be out of date by the time you read it. I'll give you the current picture for your specific destination during the planning process - this section covers the general principles.

Your passport

Make sure it's valid for at least six months beyond your return date and has at least two blank pages per country on your itinerary. Banks of stamps from previous travels look impressive but can cause genuine problems if there's no space left for new ones. Check now rather than the week before departure.

Visas

Many African countries now offer e-visa schemes allowing you to apply online and pay by card before you travel. Where this is available, use it - it's simpler, faster, and removes the need to carry cash specifically for the purpose. Apply at least two weeks before departure to allow for processing.

Where a visa must be obtained on arrival, you'll almost always need cash, and US dollars are the preferred currency. I'll let you know exactly what's required for your destination well in advance.

VACCINATIONS & HEALTH

Ask your doctor first

Everything in this section is general guidance based on experience. It is not medical advice, and your first step before any trip to Africa should be to contact a travel health clinic or your own doctor. Vaccination requirements and recommendations change, individual health situations vary, and a professional who knows your medical history is the right person to advise you - not a planning guide.

Travel insurance

Do not travel to Africa without comprehensive travel insurance that includes medical evacuation cover. Evacuation from a remote location to a hospital with the facilities to treat you properly is expensive; without insurance it can be financially catastrophic. Check your policy carefully before you travel.

Vaccinations

Your travel clinic will give you current, destination-specific advice.

Malaria

Malaria is the most significant health risk across most of the destinations I work with, and luckily preventive medication is effective. In my experience Malarone works well for most

people - it has relatively few side effects and is taken one to two days before entering a malaria zone, once daily while there, and for seven days after leaving. Your doctor will advise on the right option for you.

Beyond medication, practical prevention matters: use insect repellent, wear long sleeves and trousers in the evenings, and sleep under a mosquito net where one is provided. Malaria-carrying mosquitoes only bite at night.

One more thing

The best remedy for the itch of a mosquito or tsetse fly bite is, bizarrely, haemorrhoid cream. Pack a tube. You'll thank me.

MONEY

Most safari itineraries are largely cashless once you're in the bush - your lodge costs are covered, meals are included, and there's often little to spend money on between game drives. But you'll still need cash for tips, souvenirs, the occasional activity that isn't included, and any time you're in a town or city.

What to bring

US dollars are the most widely accepted foreign currency across East and southern Africa, and for good reason - they're stable, universally recognised, and accepted at most borders, markets and smaller establishments. Bring 2007 series notes or newer; older notes are frequently refused. Small denominations (\$1, \$5, \$10, \$20) are far more useful than \$50 or \$100 bills.

ATMs are available in larger towns and cities but unreliable in remote areas. Don't count on them. Draw what you need before heading into the bush.

Before you leave home

Tell your bank and credit card providers you're travelling. Cards blocked for suspicious activity in Nairobi or Windhoek are an irritation nobody needs. A quick call or online notification sorts this in minutes.

Tipping

Tipping for good service is standard practice across Africa. As a guide: USD \$10–15 per person per day for your safari guide, and the same for lodge staff (usually via a communal tip box). In restaurants, 10% if no service charge has been added. All tips are of course discretionary but given the calibre of guides and staff on well-run itineraries, you'll almost certainly want to show your appreciation.

HAGGLING

Haggling is both normal and expected at souvenir markets and roadside stalls across Africa. It is not expected in supermarkets, hotels, restaurants or established shops - context is everything.

It can be genuinely fun, but keep perspective. The difference between your opening offer and the vendor's asking price is often a few dollars. The vendor knows the real value of what they're selling and needs to make a living. Drive a hard bargain by all means, but there's no glory in paying the absolute minimum when the amount at stake means far more to them than it does to you.

If you think you're close to an agreement and want to test whether an offer is going to work, the most effective technique is to slowly turn and walk away. You'll find out very quickly.

CUSTOMS, RESPECT & ETIQUETTE

On safari

Your guide is the authority. Follow their instructions without question - they know the animals, they know when to stop and when to move, and they know how close is close enough. Resist any urge to push for a better photo or a nearer encounter. The guide's judgement protects both you and the wildlife.

Stay in the vehicle unless your guide says otherwise. The animals recognise the car as non-threatening; a human standing outside changes that equation entirely. Your photographs will be just as good from inside the vehicle, and you'll be alive to enjoy them. Your actions affect everyone in the group - **don't be that person.**

Don't feed or bait wildlife. This is an absolute rule and not a difficult one to understand: feeding wild animals trains them to associate humans with food, which ends badly for the animals. Every operator I work with takes this seriously. So should you.

Speak quietly on game drives. The bush carries sound further than you'd expect, and sudden noise disturbs both the wildlife and other guests.

General customs

Greetings matter enormously across Africa. Take time to greet people properly - a handshake, eye contact, a moment of genuine acknowledgement. Rushing past without acknowledging someone is considered rude in most of the cultures you'll encounter. Your guide will show you the local variations.

Ask before photographing people. It's a basic courtesy that's sometimes overlooked in the excitement of the moment. If someone declines, accept it graciously. Some people ask for a small payment in return - this is perfectly reasonable.

Don't photograph airports, military installations, police stations or border crossings. This rule feels anachronistic in the age of Google Maps, but it's still enforced, and the consequences of ignoring it can be disproportionate to the offence.

Don't give sweets to children, and don't throw things to children from a vehicle. It looks generous; it isn't. Your guide will know of legitimate ways to support local communities if you want to contribute something meaningful.

The elderly are treated with genuine respect across most of Africa - as a source of wisdom rather than a burden. Follow that lead.

OFFICIALS & BUREAUCRACY

Be courteous and patient with officials - the ones you're most likely to encounter are border officials, but you may also come across traffic police along the way. Show respect and you'll generally have no issues. Politeness costs nothing and moves things along considerably faster than impatience.

In the unlikely event that an official asks what you've brought them from your country, the correct response is a relaxed smile and something along the lines of "sorry, nothing this time." Don't make a big deal of it. If you genuinely want to help, a bottle of cold water is often more appreciated than anything else - it's practical, it's kind, and it doesn't set a precedent.

One observation from thirty-odd years of border crossings: the officials who seem most intimidating are usually the ones who respond best to a genuine greeting and a bit of patience. Most are doing a dull and undervalued job. Treat them accordingly.

T.I.A.

You'll probably hear this a few times on your trip. It stands for This Is Africa, and it's the catch-all expression for when things don't go quite as planned - the light aircraft gets stuck in mud on the airstrip after an unexpected downpour and everyone, including the passengers, has to get out and push.

I had my own TIA moment on my very first evening at a camp in Zambia. I had literally just checked in and was being walked to my tent when we came to an abrupt halt. A large bull elephant - a regular visitor to the camp, apparently - had positioned himself directly on the path and was eating from a tree with the unhurried confidence of someone who knew exactly whose camp this was. We made a long and somewhat undignified detour through the bush to reach my tent from the other direction. He didn't even cast us a glance.

There's an old saying among guides: Westerners have the watches, Africans have the time. It's worth holding onto.

A hearty "TIA!" - ideally accompanied by something cold and a view worth looking at - is the correct response to most minor inconveniences on safari. Things that would drive you mad at home have a way of becoming the best stories of the trip. The flat tyre in the middle of

nowhere that somehow ended in a conversation you'll never forget. The wrong turn that led somewhere extraordinary.

Go with it.

WHAT TO PACK

The golden rule: soft bags, light loads

If your itinerary includes internal flights - and most do - you'll be subject to strict luggage limits. The standard allowance on a bush aircraft is 15kg per person in total, including hand luggage, and your bag must be soft-sided. Hard suitcases simply don't fit in the hold of a light aircraft and will not travel with you - this is not a guideline that can be negotiated. As a rough guide, a typical bush aircraft hold accommodates bags of around 62cm x 30cm x 25cm, but the weight limit is the critical factor, not the exact dimensions.

Even if your itinerary involves no internal flights at all, I'd still strongly recommend a soft bag over a hard case. Game drive vehicles have limited storage space, and a soft bag can be squeezed into a corner where a rigid suitcase cannot. It's a habit worth developing regardless of where you're going.

The good news: most lodges offer daily laundry, often at no extra cost. You need far less than you think. Before you travel, lay out everything you intend to pack and then remove half of it. This is not a joke.

Colours and clothing choices

Neutral colours throughout - khaki, green, grey, beige, brown. Insects, particularly tsetse flies and mosquitoes, are attracted to dark blue and black, so leave those at home. Military camouflage is illegal in several African countries; don't pack it.

The temperature varies dramatically on safari. Mornings can be genuinely cold on an open vehicle before the sun is up; by 10am it's a different story. Use the layer principle - pack clothes that work in combination rather than one outfit per temperature.

Safari clothes are perfectly acceptable at dinner even at the most comfortable lodges. Nobody changes into something smarter; everyone has been on game drives all day and smells accordingly.

Essentials you might not think of

A head torch is more useful than you'd expect - camps are often dark at night and you don't want to be finding your way around with a phone screen. A small portable charger is worth its weight. Binoculars make an enormous difference to wildlife viewing - minimum 8x magnification and borrow the guide's only as a last resort.

Sunscreen (SPF 30+), insect repellent (DEET-based, 30% minimum), lip balm, and a reusable water bottle are non-negotiable. A small day bag keeps everything to hand on game drives.

SAMPLE PACKING LIST

Print this out and tick items off as you pack. If you're travelling with someone, coordinate - you don't both need to bring everything.

Clothing

- 2 x long-sleeve shirts, neutral colours, lightweight
- 2 x short-sleeve shirts or t-shirts, neutral colours
- Fleece jacket or warm mid-layer
- Lightweight waterproof jacket (particularly if travelling in the green season or going gorilla tracking)
- Trousers - at least one pair long, neutral colours
- Underwear and socks (lodges don't launder these - bring enough or wash your own)
- Wide-brimmed hat
- Sunglasses, polarised if possible
- Comfortable, sturdy closed shoes (broken in before you travel)
- Sandals or flip-flops for around the lodge or beach

Health & protection

- Insect repellent (DEET 30%+)
- Sunscreen (SPF 30+)
- Lip balm
- Anti-malaria medication (as prescribed)
- Personal medications in original packaging, in hand luggage
- Basic first aid: plasters, painkillers, antiseptic cream
- Hand sanitiser
- Haemorrhoid cream (see Vaccinations & Health section - trust me)

Gear

- Binoculars (8x or 10x minimum)
- Camera and memory cards (bring more than you think you need - 2,000 shots in Uganda is not an exaggeration)
- Spare camera batteries or charger
- Head torch
- Portable charger / power bank

- Universal plug adaptor (South Africa uses unique round three-pin plugs; the rest of Africa generally uses UK-style square three-pin)
- Plug board if charging multiple devices
- Sealable bags in various sizes (dust protection and separating wet from dry)
- Small day bag or rucksack
- Reusable water bottle

Documents (physical and on your phone)

- Passport
- Vaccination certificate if required
- Travel insurance documents including emergency number
- Flight tickets
- Any visa documentation

Optional but useful

- Field guide for your destination
- E-reader or paperback
- Small notebook and pen (keeping a diary is one of the best souvenirs you can bring home)

One final note on liquid laundry detergent: bring a small tube rather than a bag of white powder. For reasons that will occur to you at airport security.

DESTINATIONS

Africa has 54 countries. The ones that follow are the destinations I currently arrange trips to - places I know well enough to put my name to and where I have partners and contacts I trust. It's a list that continues to grow.

Angola

Angola is one to watch. After decades of civil conflict that kept it largely off the tourism map, the country has been quietly opening up - and what's emerging is genuinely extraordinary. The landscapes alone span an almost improbable range: a 1,600-kilometre Atlantic coastline, the sculpted dunes of the Namibe Desert, the thundering cascade of Kalandula Falls, and wilderness that has recovered precisely because so few people have been there to disturb it. This is Africa before the infrastructure caught up - which is, for the right kind of traveller, most of the appeal.

What sets Angola apart from other emerging destinations is its human dimension. The country is home to more than ninety ethnic groups, and in the south-west the semi-nomadic Himba and Mucubal peoples maintain a way of life largely unchanged for centuries. These

are genuine cultural encounters rather than curated performances - and they are becoming increasingly rare on a continent where tourism has smoothed many of the edges that make a place feel truly different. Angola still has those edges, and then some.

My initial focus here is Luengue-Luiana National Park in the remote south-east - part of the vast KAZA Transfrontier Conservation Area that spans five countries and represents one of the most ambitious wildlife conservation projects on earth. I visited in March 2025 on one of the first familiarisation trips ever opened to foreign tour operators in this area, and what I found was extraordinary: 45,000 square kilometres of miombo woodland, open savanna, and seasonally flooded plains, with recovering herds of elephant, sable antelope and buffalo, and predators - lion, leopard, wild dog - reasserting themselves after decades of absence.

The Portuguese have long called this corner of Angola the *Terras do Fim do Mundo* - the Lands at the End of the World. It was meant as a warning. Today it reads like an invitation. I have a camp in development here, and when it opens, this will be one of the most compelling safari experiences on the continent for those willing to get there first.

Tourism information: [Visit Angola](#)

Botswana

Botswana is, for many people, the pinnacle of the African safari experience - and having spent a considerable amount of time there, I understand why. The country made a deliberate decision decades ago to pursue low-volume, high-value tourism, which means fewer vehicles, larger concessions, and a quality of wildlife encounter that is genuinely hard to match elsewhere.

Most people think of Botswana as the Okavango Delta and Chobe, and they're right to - both are world-class. The Delta is one of the great natural wonders of the planet, a UNESCO World Heritage Site fed by seasonal floodwaters from Angola that transform the Kalahari into an inland sea each year, peaking between June and August. The wildlife concentrations are extraordinary, and the experience of drifting through its channels by mokoro - the traditional dugout canoe - is one of those things that stays with you. Chobe, meanwhile, hosts the largest elephant population on earth, and a boat safari along the Chobe River in the dry season is about as close as you'll get to a David Attenborough moment without the camera crew.

But Botswana is considerably more than these two headliners. The Kwando, Selinda and Linyanti concessions to the north are among the finest private wildlife areas on the continent - remote, uncrowded, exceptional for predators. The vast Central Kalahari Game Reserve, larger than the Netherlands, offers a completely different experience: black-maned lions, cheetah, and a silence so complete it takes a day or two to adjust. The Makgadikgadi Salt Pans are unlike anywhere else in Africa - a stark, otherworldly landscape where meerkats peer out from their burrows and flamingos arrive in their thousands when the rains come. And the Tuli Block in the east, often overlooked, hides impressive archaeological sites alongside excellent elephant and predator sightings in hilly terrain quite unlike the rest of the country.

The green season - roughly November to March - is worth considering seriously. Prices drop, the landscape becomes extraordinarily vivid, and the wildlife, while more dispersed, includes

newborns and migrant birdlife that peak season visitors never see. I visited in February and had some of the best game viewing of my life at a fraction of peak-season prices. Botswana pairs naturally with Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe for multi-country itineraries, and Kasane in the north-east - at the meeting point of four countries - is one of the most convenient staging posts in southern Africa. If the question is where to go for a safari that will be genuinely difficult to top, this is usually my answer.

Tourism information: [Botswana Tourism](#)

eSwatini

The small, landlocked kingdom formerly known as Swaziland is most often visited as part of a South Africa itinerary, and it's well worth including. Don't let the size fool you - eSwatini packs an impressive range into a compact space, from the sweeping grasslands of the western highveld to the wild ridges of the Lubombo mountains in the east, with wildlife, adventure, and genuine cultural depth in between. Hlane Royal National Park offers Big 5 sightings including white rhino and elephant in a relaxed, uncrowded setting that makes a welcome contrast to the larger South African reserves, and the country's network of rivers and rock formations gives it a distinctive landscape character quite different from its neighbours.

What makes eSwatini genuinely special, though, is its cultural identity. This is one of Africa's last absolute monarchies, and the Swazi people take real pride in their traditions - not as a performance for visitors but as a living expression of who they are. The Umhlanga Reed Dance, held annually in August or September, is one of the most spectacular traditional ceremonies in southern Africa, drawing tens of thousands of participants. Arriving in eSwatini and finding that warmth and cultural confidence intact, without the commercial edge that can blunt similar experiences elsewhere on the continent, is one of the quiet pleasures of including it on an itinerary.

Don't rush through. Even a couple of nights gives you a genuinely different perspective on the region, and most visitors wish they'd stayed longer.

Tourism information: [The Kingdom of eSwatini](#)

Ethiopia

Ethiopia stands apart from almost every other destination in this guide - and indeed from almost every other destination in Africa. This is a country that was never colonised, and that independence runs through everything: the architecture, the food, the calendar, the coffee culture, the way people carry themselves. Nine UNESCO World Heritage Sites, more than any other country on the continent, hint at the depth of what's here, but no list quite prepares you for the experience of standing in front of the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela - carved directly into living rock in the twelfth century - or walking through the medieval castles of Gondar, or sitting in a traditional coffee ceremony that has remained essentially unchanged for a thousand years.

The landscapes are equally compelling, and equally extreme. The Simien Mountains in the north are among the most dramatic on earth - jagged peaks, vertiginous escarpments dropping 1,500 metres, and endemic wildlife including the gelada baboon and the Ethiopian wolf found nowhere else on the planet. At the other end of the spectrum, the Danakil Depression in the north-east is one of the most hostile environments on earth and one of the most astonishing - volcanic landscapes, acid springs in shades that shouldn't exist in nature, lava lakes, and temperatures that regularly exceed 50°C. It is not for the faint-hearted, and that is rather the point. The Lower Omo Valley in the south adds a third dimension entirely: sixteen distinct ethnic groups maintaining traditions of extraordinary cultural richness in one of Africa's most important archaeological regions.

Ethiopia is not the easiest destination to travel in, and recent years have brought challenges that require careful navigation. I keep a close eye on the situation and only arrange travel here when I'm confident conditions are right. For those willing to engage with its complexity, though, the rewards are unlike anything else on this list - a country that feels genuinely, irreducibly itself.

Tourism information: [Visit Ethiopia](#)

Kenya

Kenya is where most people fall in love with Africa, and it's easy to see why. The country has everything: iconic savannah wildlife, a dramatic and varied landscape running from the Indian Ocean coast to the snow-capped peaks of Mount Kenya, ancient cultures that have resisted homogenisation, and a warmth in its people that is difficult to overstate. It is also, more often than not, the destination I find myself recommending to first-time safari travellers - not because it's the easiest option, but because it delivers the complete experience more reliably than almost anywhere else on the continent.

The Maasai Mara is the obvious centrepiece, and deservedly so - but the version worth experiencing is not the crowded national reserve with its convoys of minibuses around every lion sighting. It's the private conservancies that border it, where vehicle numbers are strictly controlled, night drives and off-road driving are permitted, and you might share a game drive with guests from one other camp at most.

The difference between the conservancy experience and the national reserve is not marginal. It is the difference between a safari and a spectacle. Beyond the Mara, Kenya has extraordinary range. Amboseli offers the finest elephant viewing on earth against the backdrop of Kilimanjaro - when the mountain decides to show itself. Samburu in the north is home to species found nowhere else in Kenya: the reticulated giraffe, Grevy's zebra, the gerenuk with its improbable neck. Laikipia Plateau, under-visited and exceptional, hosts some of the best rhino conservation work on the continent on vast private ranches. Tsavo - split into East and West and together one of the largest national park complexes in the world - offers a rawer, less-trafficked alternative to the Mara, famous for its dust-red elephants and the sense that you genuinely have the bush to yourself.

The coast both north and south of Mombasa provides the perfect counterpoint to a safari: white sand, warm Indian Ocean water, and a Swahili culture shaped by centuries of Arab, Persian and African influence. Che Shale on the north coast is a particular favourite - remote, genuine, and as far from the package-holiday beach experience as it's possible to get while still sleeping in a proper bed. Kenya is also logistically straightforward, with good internal flight connections making multi-destination itineraries efficient to build. It is, in short, the destination that delivers.

Tourism information: [Magical Kenya](#)

Lesotho

Entirely surrounded by South Africa, the mountain kingdom of Lesotho is one of Africa's most unusual and undervisited destinations. It has the highest low point of any country on earth - even its valleys sit above 1,400 metres - and more than two-thirds of it is covered in mountains, which gives it a landscape character unlike anything else in southern Africa. The Basotho people have adapted entirely to this vertical world: their traditional ponies, short and extraordinarily sure-footed, navigate gradients that would stop most horses in their tracks, and the sight of a horseman picking his way across a high ridgeline in a traditional woven blanket is one of those images that stays with you. Multi-day pony treks through the highlands, passing through remote villages where you stay with local families, are among the most genuine cultural experiences available anywhere on the continent.

The access point most people use is the Sani Pass - a switchback 4WD track climbing from KwaZulu-Natal through the Drakensberg escarpment to 2,874 metres, where it crosses into Lesotho at what is reputedly the highest pub in Africa. It's worth stopping for a drink simply to take in the view. Beyond the pass, the highlands open up into a world of dramatic gorges, ancient San rock art, dinosaur tracks embedded in riverbeds, and the thundering single-drop of Maletsunyane Falls - at 192 metres, one of the longest in Africa and abseiling off its lip is an option for those who like their sightseeing with an adrenaline component. For those who prefer their adventure on snow, Afriski is one of only two ski resorts in southern Africa, operating on the high plateau between June and August when conditions allow.

Lesotho works best as an add-on to a South Africa itinerary - it's close, it's logistically straightforward from KwaZulu-Natal or the Eastern Cape, and it's genuinely different. Different landscape, different culture, different pace. Most visitors wish they'd stayed longer.

Tourism information: [Visit Lesotho](#)

Madagascar

Madagascar is like nowhere else on earth - which is not a cliché in this case, it's biology. The island split from the African mainland around 160 million years ago and evolved in almost complete isolation, producing species found nowhere else on the planet. Around 90% of its wildlife is endemic. The lemurs alone - over 100 species, from the tiny mouse lemur to the indri, whose haunting call carries for kilometres through the rainforest - are reason enough to go. Add to that an extraordinary diversity of landscapes across a single island: misty highland rainforests, the otherworldly razor-sharp limestone pinnacles of Tsingy de

Bemaraha, the iconic Avenue of the Baobabs near Morondava where 800-year-old trees glow gold at sunset, the arid spiny forests of the south, and a coastline that encompasses some of the finest diving in the Indian Ocean. Madagascar doesn't feel like a country. It feels like a continent that somehow got left behind.

The accessible entry point is Andasibe-Mantadia National Park, just a few hours from the capital Antananarivo - a lush rainforest introduction to the island's biodiversity, with indri troops and expert local guides making wildlife encounters almost guaranteed. From there the options branch out considerably. Ranomafana in the mountainous southeast harbours the rare golden bamboo lemur and eleven other species. Isalo in the arid southwest offers canyon hiking, natural rock pools, and ring-tailed lemurs against a landscape that looks like it was designed by committee from Mars. Masoala in the remote northeast - accessible only by boat or light aircraft - is Madagascar's largest protected area and one of its wildest, where the rainforest walks end at the sea. For beaches, Nosy Be off the northwest coast offers world-class diving, whale watching between July and September, and the kind of island pace that makes it a natural companion to a wildlife-focused itinerary. Île Sainte-Marie on the east coast adds a layer of improbable history - once a pirate haven, now a quiet paradise for humpback whale watching and kayaking through mangroves.

Madagascar rewards the curious and patient traveller. Infrastructure can be challenging and distances are large, but that is partly the point - the effort required to get somewhere remote here is precisely what has kept it intact. The island pairs naturally with Mozambique for those who want to end on a beach, or with South Africa for a more expansive southern African itinerary. Best visited between April and November when the rains have eased; cyclone risk makes January and February best avoided.

Tourism information: [Madagascar - Treasure Island](#)

Malawi

Malawi punches well above its weight for a small, landlocked country with limited resources. The warm heart of Africa is an expression used so often it has become a cliché, but it earned the description - the welcome here is genuine in a way that is hard to define and easy to feel. Lake Malawi dominates everything: a body of fresh water so vast it has its own weather system, its own horizon, and more species of fish than any other lake on earth. The world's first freshwater national park sits within it, protecting rocky islands, sandy beaches, and an extraordinary diversity of endemic cichlids that make it a world-class snorkelling and diving destination. Swimming in the lake, kayaking across a bay, or simply sitting beside it at dawn watching the fishing boats come in is one of those experiences that people struggle to explain to those who haven't done it.

The wildlife offering has improved significantly in recent years, largely thanks to African Parks, whose management of Liwonde and Majete has transformed both reserves. Liwonde, with its stunning riverine setting along the Shire River, now offers Big Five game viewing - lion, leopard, elephant, rhino and buffalo - in a lush, photogenic environment that has little competition in southern Africa for sheer beauty. Majete similarly has been rebuilt from the ground up after years of poaching left it almost empty, and the results are remarkable. Beyond the lake and the wildlife parks, Malawi has more range than most visitors expect.

Mount Mulanje in the south rises to nearly 3,000 metres and offers multi-day hiking through misty forests and across open plateaus. The Zomba Plateau provides similar rewards closer to Blantyre. The north of the country - wilder, less visited, with Nyika National Park's extraordinary rolling grasslands and the laid-back lakeside towns of Nkhata Bay - rewards those willing to take the time.

Malawi's compact size is one of its great practical virtues: safari, lake, highlands, and culture are all achievable within a single trip without excessive travel time. It pairs naturally with Zambia to the west or Mozambique to the east for those building a multi-country itinerary - the Mozambique coast is a relatively short transfer from the southern lakeshore and makes a near-perfect beach extension.

Tourism information: [Malawi](#)

Mozambique

Mozambique has one of the finest coastlines in Africa - over 2,500 kilometres of Indian Ocean shoreline, with archipelagos in the north and south that rank among the best diving and snorkelling destinations on the continent. The Quirimbas Archipelago in the far north and the Bazaruto Archipelago further south are both spectacular: warm, clear water, abundant marine life including dugongs and humpback whales, dhow sailing between islands, and a handful of genuinely excellent lodges that have been careful not to overwhelm what they're sitting on. Mozambique works beautifully as a beach extension to a landlocked safari - Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi all connect naturally - and the Portuguese colonial history gives the coastal towns a different character from the rest of southern Africa. Maputo, the capital, has a reputation as one of Africa's most underrated cities - lively, cosmopolitan, with excellent seafood and a café culture that feels more Lisbon than Johannesburg. The island of Ilha de Moçambique in the north is something else entirely: a tiny UNESCO-listed island of coral stone and faded colonial grandeur, with Swahili alleyways, 17th-century forts, and a pace of life that has barely changed in centuries.

What is less well known is that Mozambique is also becoming a serious safari destination, and the reason is Gorongosa National Park. Situated in the heart of the country at the southern end of the Great Rift Valley, Gorongosa is one of Africa's most compelling conservation stories. Decimated by the civil war that ended in 1992, the park has been systematically rebuilt over the past two decades through an extraordinary partnership between the Mozambican government and the Carr Foundation - and the results are extraordinary. Lion, elephant, hippo, buffalo, wild dog and a remarkable diversity of bird life have all returned in significant numbers, and the park's miombo woodland and floodplain habitats support an ecosystem that is still reasserting itself, which makes every visit feel like a genuine contribution to something in progress. For those who want their safari to mean something beyond the game viewing itself, Gorongosa delivers that rare combination.

For the more adventurous, the remote Niassa Reserve in the north - one of Africa's largest protected areas - offers a wilderness experience so far off the beaten track that genuine solitude is virtually guaranteed. Best visited between April and October when the rains have eased; the cyclone season between January and March makes coastal travel unpredictable.

Tourism information: [Visit Mozambique](#)

Namibia

Namibia is one of the most visually dramatic countries on earth, and also one of the most practical to visit - a rare combination. The Namib Desert, the oldest desert in the world, produces landscapes that look like they have been designed for maximum effect: the red dunes of Sossusvlei, some of the highest in the world, glow rust and amber at dawn; the bleached clay pan of Deadvlei is littered with the skeletal remains of trees that died centuries ago and have never decomposed in the arid air; the Skeleton Coast stretches for 500 kilometres of Atlantic shoreline where shipwrecks rust in the fog and vast seal colonies fill the air with noise. It is a country of extraordinary silences and extraordinary scales, and the sense of space - Namibia is one of the least densely populated countries on earth - is itself one of the main attractions.

Etosha National Park in the north is one of Africa's great wildlife destinations, built around a vast salt pan that draws animals from enormous distances to its waterholes - including both black and white rhino, which can be observed from the safety of a floodlit waterhole at night, cold drink in hand, waiting for whatever emerges from the dark. Four of the Big Five are present. Beyond Etosha, Damaraland to the northwest offers a completely different experience: vast, semi-arid wilderness where desert-adapted elephant and black rhino have evolved to survive on almost nothing, and where ancient San rock engravings at Twyfelfontein have been recording human presence for thousands of years. The Caprivi Strip in the far northeast - now officially the Zambezi Region - is different again: lush, water-rich, connecting to Botswana's Chobe and the broader KAZA ecosystem, and excellent for wildlife in a landscape that bears no resemblance to the Namibia of popular imagination.

Namibia is also one of the best self-drive destinations in Africa. The roads are well-maintained, the distances are vast, the traffic is almost non-existent, and the sense of freedom that comes from loading up a 4WD in Windhoek and heading into the desert with no particular deadline is one of the great travel experiences available anywhere in the world. I have arranged many self-drive Namibia itineraries, and it consistently produces some of the most memorable trips I have been involved in. It pairs naturally with Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe for multi-country itineraries, and the Angola border in the north is - for the adventurous - a gateway into some of the most remote wilderness on the continent.

Tourism information: [Visit Namibia](#)

Rwanda

Rwanda has achieved something remarkable. In three decades, it has rebuilt itself from the devastation of the 1994 genocide into one of Africa's most stable, well-governed and increasingly prosperous countries. Kigali is genuinely one of the cleanest and most functional capital cities on the continent - a useful starting point for understanding a country that has approached its own reinvention with extraordinary discipline and ambition.

Tourism has been central to that story, and Rwanda has made a deliberate choice to position itself at the premium end of the market: low visitor numbers, high conservation standards, and an experience that feels exclusive by design rather than by accident.

Most people come for the gorillas, and the gorillas are worth coming for. An hour spent in the presence of a habituated mountain gorilla family in Volcanoes National Park - watching a silverback move through the forest, juveniles playing in the undergrowth, the whole group

going about its morning as if you weren't there - is one of the great wildlife experiences on earth, and difficult to describe without sounding hyperbolic. Rwanda is home to roughly half the world's remaining mountain gorillas, and the permit system that controls visitor numbers is precisely what has allowed the population to recover. But Rwanda is considerably more than Volcanoes National Park. Nyungwe in the southwest is one of the oldest rainforests in Africa, harbouring chimpanzees, thirteen species of primate, and a canopy walkway that puts you above the forest at a genuinely vertiginous height. Akagera National Park along the Tanzanian border offers classic savannah safari - Big Five, including lion and black rhino reintroduced in partnership with African Parks - in a landscape that looks nothing like the rainforest Rwanda of the tourist brochures. Lake Kivu on the western border with the DRC is one of Africa's most beautiful lakes: clear, safe for swimming, with beaches that would not be out of place on the coast.

I am currently developing Rwanda itineraries and have partners in place, though specific product is still being finalised. If Rwanda is on your radar - whether for gorillas, chimpanzees, Akagera, or the full combination - get in touch and we can talk through what's possible. It pairs naturally with Uganda for a combined primate itinerary, or with Kenya for those who want gorillas and classic savannah safari in the same trip.

Tourism information: [Visit Rwanda](#)

South Africa

South Africa is many countries in one, and that breadth is both its greatest strength and the thing that makes it hardest to describe briefly. The Western Cape alone - Cape Town, the Winelands, the Garden Route - could absorb weeks of travel and would rank as a world-class destination even without the rest of the country attached. Cape Town sits on a peninsula between two oceans beneath a flat-topped mountain that appears on the horizon like a promise, and it consistently ranks among the most beautiful cities on earth for good reason. The Winelands an hour's drive away - Stellenbosch, Franschhoek, Paarl - produce wines that compete seriously on the world stage and sit in a landscape of historic Cape Dutch architecture and mountain backdrops that is almost absurdly picturesque. The Garden Route along the southern coast connects all of this to a 300-kilometre stretch of beaches, lagoons, forests and charming towns that rewards slow travel by road.

The safari offering is anchored by Kruger National Park in the northeast, one of the largest and most celebrated game reserves in Africa, with the private reserves on its western boundary - Sabi Sands, Timbavati, Manyeleti, and others - offering some of the finest Big Five experiences on the continent in a setting where off-road driving, night drives, and walking safaris are permitted. The leopard sightings in Sabi Sands in particular are legendary - the cats here are so accustomed to vehicles that encounters are often extraordinary in their closeness and duration. KwaZulu-Natal in the east adds the Drakensberg mountains - a UNESCO World Heritage Site of towering escarpments, San rock art, and excellent hiking - alongside some excellent and underrated private reserves that offer Big Five safari with a fraction of Kruger's visitor numbers. The Eastern Cape, often overlooked, is malaria-free and excellent for families, with reserves near Port Elizabeth that provide a genuine wilderness experience without the health precautions required further north.

South Africa is also, I'd argue, the most complex country on this list - the contrasts between extraordinary wealth and deep poverty, between spectacular natural beauty and the unresolved legacy of apartheid, between the country it aspires to be and the one it still is in too many places, are impossible to ignore if you're paying attention. Paying attention is worth it. South Africa will challenge you as much as it dazzles you, and it's a better trip for that.

Tourism information: [South Africa](#)

Tanzania

Tanzania has the Serengeti - and the Serengeti is genuinely one of the greatest wildlife spectacles on the planet, migration or no migration. The annual movement of over a million wildebeest and hundreds of thousands of zebra across the plains and through the Mara River is one of those natural events that defies adequate description, and the broader ecosystem supports a density and diversity of wildlife that has few rivals anywhere in Africa. But Tanzania's best safari experiences are often found elsewhere, and the country rewards those willing to look beyond its most famous address. The Ngorongoro Crater - the world's largest intact volcanic caldera, sheltering a self-contained ecosystem of extraordinary richness - offers game viewing so concentrated it can feel almost unreal. Further south, Ruaha and the Selous - now formally the Nyerere National Park, one of the largest protected areas in Africa - are remote, lightly visited, and exceptional for big cats and elephant in a wilderness that feels completely undiluted by tourism. The Mahale Mountains on the shores of Lake Tanganyika offer something rarer still: chimpanzee trekking in genuine deep forest, arriving by boat across one of the world's deepest lakes, with no road access and almost no other visitors.

A word on the Serengeti specifically: the river crossings during the migration attract the worst of the overcrowding, with long lines of vehicles queuing for hours for a front-row view of wildebeest attempting the Mara River. That experience is not for everyone, and it is worth being honest with yourself about whether it is what you actually want. The spectacle of the migration - the sheer volume of animals moving across the plains - can be witnessed in far less frenetic circumstances, in different areas or at different points in the season, with a fraction of the company. A mobile camp that moves with the herds, or a lodge in the remote western or southern Serengeti, delivers the genuine experience. The question worth asking is never really "Serengeti or not?" - it's "which part, when, and from where?"

Completing the picture is Zanzibar: a spice island just off the coast with a UNESCO-listed Stone Town shaped by centuries of Arab, Persian and East African influence, excellent beaches, and a culture that feels genuinely distinct from the mainland. The beach-and-bush combination via Tanzania is one of the classic African trips, and for good reason. Mount Kilimanjaro, for those with the legs and the altitude tolerance, stands at 5,895 metres and offers several trekking routes of varying difficulty - the summit is one of the more achievable high-altitude objectives in the world, and the views from the top are exactly what you would hope for.

Tourism information: [Tanzania](#)

Uganda

Uganda is one of Africa's most rewarding and undervisited destinations, and Winston Churchill's description of it as the Pearl of Africa - written in 1908 - remains as accurate as anything written about the country since. The statistics alone are staggering: home to half the world's remaining mountain gorillas, more bird species than any other country in Africa, Africa's largest lake, the source of the world's longest river, and the Rwenzori Mountains - the legendary Mountains of the Moon - which at over 5,100 metres are Africa's third highest range and permanently snow-capped on the equator. But statistics don't capture what it actually feels like to be there, which is something closer to discovery than tourism.

The gorillas are in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest in the southwest - a mist-covered ancient rainforest of extraordinary atmosphere where the trekking experience has a rawness and depth that complements rather than duplicates the Rwanda experience. Different forest, different families, different feel. Alongside the gorillas, Bwindi is home to chimpanzees and twelve other primate species, and a single morning in the forest can produce wildlife encounters that most people never experience anywhere else. Queen Elizabeth National Park, straddling the equator in the west, is famous for the tree-climbing lions of the Ishasha sector - a genuinely unusual behaviour found in very few places in Africa - and for boat trips along the Kazinga Channel, where hippo, elephant and buffalo gather in extraordinary concentrations along the banks. Kidepo Valley in the remote northeast, accessible only by light aircraft and bordering Sudan and Kenya, is as close to true wilderness as Uganda offers - semi-arid, barely visited, with a wildlife assemblage that includes cheetah and caracal alongside the more familiar cast. For those willing to make the effort, the reward is the sense of having somewhere almost entirely to themselves.

The Rwenzori Mountains deserve a mention on their own terms - not just as a backdrop but as a destination. Multi-day treks through afro-alpine moorland, giant lobelias, and glacial lakes to summits that most people don't know exist are available for those with the fitness and inclination. Uganda pairs naturally with Rwanda for a combined primate itinerary, and the two countries together cover more of the great ape experience than anywhere else on earth. For birdwatchers specifically, Uganda is in a category of its own - over 1,000 species including the shoebill stork, one of the most sought-after birds on the continent, found in the papyrus swamps around Lake Victoria and the Murchison Falls wetlands.

Tourism information: [Uganda](#)

Zambia

Zambia is where walking safaris were born - the late Norman Carr pioneered the concept in the South Luangwa Valley in the 1950s, and the tradition here is stronger than anywhere else in Africa. There is something about being on foot in the bush, reading the ground with a guide who has spent a lifetime learning it, that no vehicle-based safari quite replicates. The sounds arrive differently. The scale is different. The attention required is different. And when something large appears - and in the Luangwa, something large always appears - the experience is of a completely different order. The South Luangwa is one of my favourite places on the continent: remote, relatively uncrowded, and with a density of wildlife along the Luangwa River that is genuinely staggering. Leopard sightings here are among the best in Africa. I work with partners whose camps in the valley represent some of the finest bush

operations I have encountered anywhere - small, owner-managed, deeply connected to the landscape and the communities around them. For those wanting to go deeper still, North Luangwa - wilder, less accessible, and the only park in Zambia with the full Big Five - offers an experience so remote that the lack of infrastructure is itself the point.

Beyond the Luangwa, Zambia has remarkable range. The Lower Zambezi National Park offers canoe safaris along one of Africa's great rivers - drifting past elephant on the banks, hippo surfacing alongside, the escarpment rising behind - in a wilderness that has barely changed in a century. Tiger fishing on the Zambezi, for those who want their wildlife encounter on the end of a line, is some of the most exhilarating freshwater fishing in the world. The vast Kafue National Park in the west, at over 22,000 square kilometres one of the largest in Africa, remains genuinely wild and largely undiscovered by the safari mainstream - seasonal floodplains teeming with antelope, predators following close behind, and the kind of unhurried exclusivity that the more famous parks can no longer reliably deliver. And then there is Kasanka - small, unremarkable-looking on a map, and the site of arguably the greatest wildlife spectacle most people have never heard of. Between October and December, up to ten million straw-coloured fruit bats descend on a small patch of forest, creating what is said to be the largest mammal migration on the planet. The sky turns dark with them at dusk. It is one of those things that has to be seen to be understood.

Victoria Falls needs little introduction - one of the seven natural wonders of the world, shared with Zimbabwe, and spectacular from both sides. The Zambian perspective from Livingstone gives access to the full width of the falls and, for those with the nerve, to Devil's Pool - a natural infinity pool right at the lip of the drop, accessible by swimming when water levels allow. Liuwa Plain in the northwest hosts the second-largest wildebeest migration in Africa, almost entirely unknown outside specialist circles, in a landscape so vast and flat it feels like standing at the edge of the world. Zambia is also, in my experience, one of the warmest countries in Africa in terms of its people - genuinely, unhurriedly welcoming in a way that stays with you long after you have left.

Tourism information: [Zambia](#)

Zimbabwe

If I had to choose a favourite country in Africa - and it's a question I'm asked more often than you might expect - Zimbabwe would be a serious contender for the top spot. It was also where I had my first ever safari, back in 2014, and the country has had a hold on me ever since. What I found on that first visit, and on every return since, was a country of extraordinary wildlife, landscapes of genuine drama, and guides of a quality I have rarely encountered anywhere else on the continent. Those guides developed their craft during the quiet years of political turbulence that kept most visitors away, with no mass tourism to dilute the experience, and the depth of knowledge and passion they bring to every game drive or walking safari is something that sets Zimbabwe apart in a way that is genuinely hard to quantify. The country has been through more than its share of difficulty, and the warmth and resilience of its people - who have every reason to be otherwise - is humbling.

Hwange National Park is one of Africa's great elephant destinations. Up to forty thousand elephants are believed to roam the park, and the concentrations around the waterholes in the

dry season - when hundreds, sometimes over a thousand, gather at a single waterhole - have to be seen to be believed. It is one of those wildlife spectacles that photographs cannot adequately represent. Mana Pools on the Zambezi is, for me, one of the most beautiful places I have ever been. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, it offers walking and canoe safaris in a floodplain landscape of extraordinary richness - elephants standing on their hind legs to reach the albid pods, wild dog coursing through the fever trees, hippo surfacing alongside the canoe as the escarpment glows in the late afternoon light. Gonarezhou in the remote southeast - its name means "place of the elephants" - is the country's least visited major park and one of its most spectacular, with dramatic red sandstone cliffs above the Runde River and a wilderness atmosphere that feels entirely uncompromised. Lake Kariba, the world's largest man-made lake by volume, offers a completely different experience: houseboat safaris, tiger fishing, and sunset views over petrified forests emerging from the water that belong in a painting rather than a travel guide.

Beyond the wildlife, Zimbabwe has more range than most visitors realise. The ancient ruins of Great Zimbabwe - the remains of a medieval city that was the capital of a powerful kingdom and gave the country its name - are one of Africa's most significant archaeological sites and genuinely moving to walk through. The Eastern Highlands along the Mozambique border offer cool, lush mountain scenery, birdwatching of the highest order, and hiking that feels nothing like the savannah Zimbabwe of popular imagination. Matobo National Park near Bulawayo combines extraordinary granite kopje landscapes with San rock art, white rhino tracking on foot, and the grave of Cecil Rhodes - a complicated figure buried in a landscape of unambiguous magnificence. And Victoria Falls, shared with Zambia, is exactly what the reputation suggests: one of the seven natural wonders of the world, and best seen from the Zimbabwean side where four of the five cascades are visible, and the spray soaks you from a hundred metres away. I build itineraries that do genuine justice to this extraordinary, underestimated country.

Tourism information: [Experience Zimbabwe](#)

AND FINALLY...

The most important thing to bring on your African adventure is the right attitude.

Leave the schedule in the hotel room. Put the phone in your bag - not for the whole trip, but for the moments that deserve your full attention. A leopard at five metres is not improved by a screen in front of your face.

Absorb everything. Ask questions. Talk to your guide not just on the vehicle but around the fire at dinner - the stories that come out in those conversations are often the best part of the whole trip. Talk to the waiter, the driver, the person who brings your morning coffee. You'll be surprised what you learn.

If the lodge offers communal dining rather than separate tables, choose it. The people sitting around that table will have been through the same extraordinary day you have, and the shared experience of Africa has a way of producing friendships that outlast the trip.

Don't forget to look up after dark. Stop the vehicle, switch off the engine, turn off the lights, and look at the sky. Africa will show you stars you didn't know existed.

When all is said and done, it is the guide who will make or break your safari. Everything I do is aimed at making sure you have the right one - someone who knows the bush, loves it, and wants to share it with you.

Go. It will change something in you. It changes something in everyone.

“We feel really in our element out in the bush - time stands still and we are completely present in the moment. These encounters and experiences made such a deep impression that they are with us almost every day, and we will carry them for the rest of our lives.”

- Hilde Wang (three trips - Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia and Kenya - and counting...)
