

Safari Vacations

Safari **Traveling Wild Africa**

The word *safari* is Swahili for travel, trip or journey. In the travel industry, safari refers to a type of travel that typically involves these elements:

- At least one country in Africa
- Extensive sightseeing, with an emphasis on wildlife sightings
- An expert guide (although some self-guided safaris can be arranged, it is not recommended)

For animal and nature lovers, few types of travel are as rewarding as a safari. Many who have been will tell you that the countries of Africa connect with the human psyche like few other places... Africa is not a destination - it is a point of origin.

An African safari is a trip like no other. On safari you come face to face with creation in all its glory, with nature at its most untouched. Few people come away from a safari the same as they first arrived. A safari is an opportunity to travel off of the beaten path, creating memories that last a lifetime. Like any specialized trip, the key to a successful safari is education, preparation and planning.

You will enjoy a safari if you:

- Are passionate about nature
- Enjoy wildlife
- Can handle modest discomfort
- Enjoy traveling to uncommon, undeveloped, or unique locations
- Enjoy an active vacation

You'll have several options when choosing a guide, as well as the degree of comfort on your safari. A guided safari is best for most travelers, particularly if this is your first safari. You can arrange an independent, self-drive, safari through a tour operator, however, who can provide a vehicle, maps, itineraries, provisions, tents and park passes.

There are two very important notes regarding independent safaris:

1. Not every country or park allows self-drive safaris



A local inhabitant sizes you up



A happy camper in Tanzania

2. Many locations require guides for safety and to assist with navigating the infrastructure. Self-drive is inherently more risky! The roads are often in poor shape, animals view anything that moves as dinner, gas stations can be difficult or impossible to find along the way, and the local population speaks no English.

These considerations are merely to educate, not to discourage. Travel is a matter of well-informed choice, and if you have some experience, you can surely find a comfortable program with the right tour operator.

Guided safaris involve the presence of a trained, experienced guide who accompanies travelers (as a group or privately) throughout the itinerary. Guides are typically very knowledgeable about local animals, plants, and weather conditions. A good guide will know the best locations for animal viewing, which saves a lot of time and makes the trip much more efficient. Many guides are trained botanists or zoologists and have a sharp eye for animals and plants that the untrained eye might miss. Finally, guides usually speak both English and the native language, a skill that will come in handy time and time again! (Be sure to check with your travel consultant to learn specifics about the guides a safari company uses). Guides are also charged with obtaining park and camping permits, in addition to setting up and breaking down any camps.



A giraffe on Tanzania's Mount Meru

Travelers also have their choice of **accommodations** while on safari. Some camp grounds and accommodations are in the game parks, while others are outside of the boundary of the officially designated parks.

Tented safaris are camping excursions with tents and mobile locations, usually in well-defined tent areas where the parks allow it. Tour operators sometimes offer varied luxury in tents, from bare canvas tenting to deluxe, permanent tent structures. Camping is part of the traditional "mobile" safari, where travelers cross the countryside in a four wheel drive vehicle supplied by a safari operator.

Lodge safaris offer several accommodations throughout the itinerary that can range from rustic to the ultimate in luxury. If you are looking for luxury, it is possible to arrange **Fly In** safaris where the tour operator uses small aircraft to airlift travelers to vehicles in game parks for a day or more of animal viewing.



Treetops Lodge- truly deluxe tent camping

Not all types of safaris are offered at all parks or by all companies, so it is important to ask about options and plan for what will make you most comfortable and excited about the trip.

In addition to the general safaris already mentioned, you can also choose from a great variety of specialized safaris. For example, Selous Game Reserve in Tanzania and Liwonde National Park in Malawi offer canoe safaris to view hippos and crocodiles. Rwanda, Uganda or Gabon offer opportunities for gorilla safaris.

As you can see, part of the fun of planning your trip can be choosing your safari. Safaris can also be as luxurious or rugged as you'd like - which is why the assistance of a good travel consultant is highly recommended for a safari, especially. Trained travel consultants typically have inside knowledge and a variety of resources to find you the best value and safari company, based on what you want from your trip.

Most travelers go on a safari for the opportunity to see the amazing wildlife of the African landscape. The most commonly sighted animals include the "Big 5": lion, elephant, cape buffalo, leopard and rhino. However, a multitude of other species is a part of the safari experience - including zebra, giraffe, cheetah, baboon, wildebeest, and gazelle. In some areas, gorillas, chimpanzees, crocodiles, hippos and other more exotic animals make their homes.



A small lion pride

Spotting wildlife is a matter of luck, patience and a good guide. Especially in the dry season, animals tend to gather around waterholes, which make excellent viewing spots. On rare occasions, you might spot a lion or cheetah stalking a gazelle or other plant eater - a spectacular sight.

Most animal viewing is done from the safety of a four wheel drive vehicle that animals largely ignore. Seldom in the parks are visitors allowed to get out of their vehicles, except in specially designated areas.

The first step to planning a safari is to make sure you are prepared for the physical demands of the trip. Because most game viewing is done from a vehicle, travelers are not limited by physical impairment or infirmity. However, some camping locations or the demands of trekking in mountain ranges may prohibit some from the rigors of the experience, as can the need to spend several hours at a time in a vehicle.

In addition to considering the physical demands of a safari, travelers should be aware of the necessity to protect against indigenous disease such as malaria. As early as possible in the planning stage, consult a physician to determine what shots and other precautions you need, prior to travel.



You've been spotted by a herd of water buffalo

Travelers are well advised to book as far in advance as possible. This allows plenty of time to get the best possible fares and rates on guides, as well as to make appropriate preparations for shots and medications. Some safaris actually sell out, so booking in advance makes for good sense.

All African countries require passports and most, but not all, require visas from most foreign visitors. While travelers can often obtain a visa upon arrival, we recommend purchasing the visa as preparation for the trip.

When you start to think about packing - it's best to pack as lightly as possible. A good, comfortable pair of boots, a hat, sunglasses, sunscreen, insect repellent, and loose, layered clothing are a must. Long sleeve shirts and light jackets for cool evenings also protect against mosquitoes, while neutral colors blend in and are less likely to attract insects. "Convertible" shirts and pants are popular because of their versatility. Your tour operator will provide a complete list of recommended clothing and gear, and you can ask your local outdoor shop for even more advice.

Is a safari safe? Any travel entails some degree of risk, but know that thousands and thousands of lucky individuals safari each year in Africa without incident. Here are a few tips to ensure that you safely enjoy your safari:



Proper attire is important on safari

- Prepare for the trip with a visit to a doctor to make sure you are physically prepared and have the



Your guide is your best friend

- recommended shots and anti-malarials
- Listen to your guide! Do not, under any circumstances, over-rule your guide or avoid their sage advice
- Avoid swimming in bodies of water (Hot? Want a cool dip in the water? See that log? That"s no log)
- Watch animals from a distance; you want to look neither threatening nor tasty, and if you happen to encounter an animal unexpectedly, leave it plenty of room for escape and begin walking away quietly and slowly, near to your guide
- Stay inside your tent at night
- Stay hydrated by drinking clean water throughout the day, even if you are not thirsty
- Respect the local inhabitants: you are their guest and your guide is your best friend
- As with any active vacation, travel insurance covering trip cancellation, trip interruption and medical emergencies is a good idea, and one you should discuss in detail with your insurance providers

Africa is a diverse continent with diverse countries, all varied in the wildlife and infrastructure available to tourists. The most frequently visited safari destinations and their highlights follow:

- Botswana - the Okavango Delta in Botswana is an amazing series of lagoons, lakes and streams with a wide variety of wildlife. Mostly accessible only by airplane. Less crowded, higher-end safari.
- Kenya - Popular safari destination for decades and easily accessible. Masai Mara park is one of the top safari destinations for the annual migration of the wildebeest, a classic safari adventure.
- Namibia - Namibia"s Etosha National Park hosts the world"s tallest elephants and the rare black rhino. More than ninety other varieties of mammal live here.
- Rwanda - Virunga National Park covers an area of about 48 square miles and includes six volcanoes and a mountainous region, home to a population of mountain gorillas.
- Uganda - Uganda is known for its scenery, culture and wildlife. The endangered mountain gorilla is its chief safari draw.
- South Africa - Popular safari destination for the Big 5. Kruger National Park is one of the top safari destinations.
- Tanzania - Dozens of animal species in a variety of settings from the Serengeti National Park to Mount Kilimanjaro and Mount Meru.



A hippo watches warily

There is no real consensus as to when the best time to go on safari might be. Many prefer the dry season, roughly from May through August, also the African winter. The weather is generally more comfortable, and therefore this is peak travel season. During the dry season, animals congregate around water holes and are highly visible, and the vegetation is low and dry, providing unobstructed views. However, the animal migrations are in progress during this season, and some animals may not be present as they travel to find water elsewhere.

The rainy season brings water and the early birthing cycle of many of the animals. The young make for good viewing, and

it is not unusual to see the large predator cats feeding.

Typically, tour operators classify safaris as budget, deluxe and luxury depending on the amenities of the accommodations, the meals included in the package and the planned activities. Your travel agent will use a reputable tour operator, which is an important service, as many safari companies provide varying levels of quality and dependability. Safaris can last from a week to several months, ranging from \$100 per person, per day for a budget trip, to \$800 or more for a luxury safari (not including air).

You can find a safari experience for every budget and for every type of traveler, from a single traveler to a family or a newlywed couple. Get your gear and get traveling - Africa awaits.