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BEST

AFRICA

EXPERIENCES

Words: Sue Watt

Wildlife here is visceral, sometimes brutal



Photo Previous Page: Alamy; This spread: Dreamstime



02

01

The Mababe Depression BOTSWANA

The Mababe Depression is raw Africa, teeming with predators and prey and some of the biggest herds of elephants and buffalo on the continent. Wildlife activity is visceral, sometimes brutal, but always fascinating; this is not a place for the queasy. The pioneering Wilderness Mokete is the only camp in this expansive grassland, lying between the Okavango Delta, Chobe and Linyanti.

Price: Five nights from £5,490pp
Web: yellowzebrasafaris.com

02

Saving chimps at Tacugama

SIERRA LEONE

Freetown's inspiring Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary is perfect for travellers wanting to protect these charismatic, endangered primates. Here, pioneering tourism is benefitting rural communities where chimps are threatened through bushmeat and pet trades. Stay in relaxing ecolodges within the sanctuary or on remote Jaibui Island, home to elusive pygmy hippos. More ecolodges are planned.

Price: From £70pp per night
Web: tacugama.com



03

The tribes of the Omo Valley

ETHIOPIA

Experience the extraordinary Omo Valley tribes in sensitive encounters far from the tourist trail by staying at the remote, exclusive-use Lale's Camp. Travelling by boat or on foot, you'll be the only visitors to nearby villages, which are home to Kara, Hamar and Mursi people. Respectful of their fragile cultures, Lale's Camp genuinely benefits local communities.

Price: Three nights from £8,770 for four guests

Web: wild-expeditions.africa

05



04
The Black Mambas
SOUTH AFRICA
Spend a unique and immersive week with the pioneering Black Mambas, Africa's first all-female anti-poaching unit, in Kruger's Olifants West Reserve. With adventurer and conservationist Holly Budge, founder of World Female Ranger Week, you'll accompany them on patrols and game drives, visit schools participating in their Bush Babies Educational Programme and experience conservation efforts first-hand.
Price: Six nights from £4,995pp
Web: wildlifepositivetravel.com



05
Cosmoledo Atoll Expedition
SEYCHELLES
Explore the faraway paradise of Cosmoledo Atoll in Seychelles' Outer Islands. Dive and snorkel among coral plateaus, try flyfishing, kayak or take stand-up paddleboards around the shimmering blue lagoon, which is surrounded by 18 islands, and discover the local wildlife, from sharks and rays to myriad endemic birds. Your eco-camp on the enigmatic Wizard Island awaits.
Price: Seven nights from £12,260pp
Web: andersonexpeditions.com



06
Jozibanini Camp
ZIMBABWE
Remote "Jozi" is the only camp in southern Hwange, Zimbabwe's largest national park. Off-grid with just five tents, it offers mountain biking, walking safaris, dining under the stars and a waterhole that draws throngs of elephants, with a "look-up" hide for up-close photography. Get up-close too with white rhinos at Imvelo's brilliant Community Rhino Conservation sanctuary, which a stay here supports.
Price: From £390pp per night
Web: imvelosafarilodges.com

Photos: Anderson Expeditions; Ilan Godfrey; Imvelo Safari Lodges



07
North and South Luangwa National Parks
ZAMBIA
Follow in the footsteps of legendary guide Norman Carr who, in the 1960s, pioneered walking safaris in the Luangwa Valley. Stay in beautifully rustic Mwaleshi Camp in the north and Tafika in the south, where top guides lead you to simple bush camps only accessible on foot, past lagoons, ebony forests and the Big Five - elephant, rhino, buffalo, lion and leopard.
Price: Seven nights from £4,695pp
Web: safari-consultants.com



08
The Ilala Ferry
MALAWI
Every week, the Ilala Ferry, a lifeline for local people, makes its seven-day voyage along the 370-mile length of Lake Malawi, offering a fascinating glimpse into life on its shores. Sleep on deck, in simple cabins or in the relatively smart Owner's Cabi, then stop off for the ultimate barefoot luxury at Kaya Mawa lodge on Likoma Island.
Price: Owner's Cabin from £17pp; Kaya Mawa lodge from £305pp per night
Web: Owner's Cabin malawitourism.com; Kaya Mawa lodge greensafaris.com

Photos: Dreamstime; Anneke Jagau



09
Saint Louis Jazz Festival
SENEGAL
With its combination of golden beaches, national parks, the eclectic hub of the capital Dakar, and a rich cultural history, Senegal has plenty to offer intrepid travellers. Come in May for the vibrant St Louise Jazz Festival and its mix of international and African musicians, with blues, soul and rap artists - such as Pharoah Sanders and Youssou N'Dour - performing around the city.
Price: Eight days from £1,835pp
Web: transafrica.biz

MAKE YOUR SAFARI MORE ECO-FRIENDLY



Choose eco-friendly lodges
Use accommodations that prioritise sustainability, such as those using solar power, water conservation practices, and responsible waste management.



Respect wildlife and nature
Stick to designated paths, avoid getting too close to animals and never disturb their natural behaviour. Leave no trace by taking away all waste, including biodegradable items.



Limit plastic use
Bring reusable water bottles, bags and containers to reduce single-use plastic waste. Many safaris are in remote areas where waste disposal is challenging.

A marathon like no other

10

Tusk Lewa Safari Marathon KENYA

Combine your passions for running and wildlife in this challenging marathon along the plains and riverbanks of Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, where myriad wild animals roam. Described as "the world's wildest challenge", it attracts professional runners and novice marathoners alike, all raising funds for the UK-based African conservation charity, Tusk. A breathtaking experience in every sense.
Price: Entry fee £150, minimum fundraising of £1,750pp
Web: lewasafarimarathon.com

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Nyungwe's rainforest RWANDA

Nyungwe National Park is Rwanda's rising star, inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2023 and managed by renowned NGO African Parks. Track chimps and other primates, go birdwatching, and immerse yourself in its fairy-tale rainforest on a fabulous new three-day guided hike, staying in log cabins. All proceeds go to conservation and community projects.

Price: Three-day Cyinzobe trail from £235pp

Web: visitnyungwe.org

Photos: Neil Thomas; Dreamstime; Nimali Africa



12

Nimali Private House TANZANIA

Fancy a safari all to yourselves? The exclusive-use Nimali House lies in a private 10,000-acre reserve overlooking the Maasai Steppe, with a waterhole that attracts abundant wildlife. In splendid isolation, it borders Tarangire National Park, within Tanzania's famed Northern Circuit. Take walking safaris and game drives and visit Nimali's projects, which include honey farming and anti-poaching patrols.

Price: From £8,800 for eight people

Web: expertafrica.com



13

Ouidah Voodoo Festival BENIN

Known as the cradle of voodoo, Benin's festivals and ceremonies play out around the country. The best known is Ouidah Voodoo Festival in January, a unique cultural experience. Believers are absorbed by rites and rituals involving dances, trances, fetishes and sacrifices in devotion to their gods. Prepare for a sensory overload of colours, smells, rhythms, drums and heat.

Price: 14 days from £3,599pp

Web: nativeeyetravel.com



14

Gorongosa National Park MOZAMBIQUE

Decimated during Mozambique's civil war, Gorongosa is now home to over 102,000 large mammals and has been called "the most diverse park in the world". Just by visiting, you're part of its remarkable restoration story. Its back-to-nature Wild Camp offers game drives, walking, boat safaris, swimming in waterfalls, canoeing and community visits to the people benefitting from the park's regeneration.

Price: From £510pp per night

Web: gorongosa.org



15

Exploring the Sahara ALGERIA

Few people travel to Algeria, Africa's largest country. Fewer still visit the vast expanse of the Sahara Desert. In a burning palette of deep red, orange and terracotta you'll find ancient rock art and soaring dunes as you travel with the Tuareg people, taking in their traditions and culture, and wild camping under the stars.

Price: 11 days from £2,895pp

Web: wildfrontierstravel.com

Photos: Dreamstime



16

Climbing Mount Stanley UGANDA

Avoid the crowds on Kilimanjaro and trek the rarely visited Rwenzoris range, known as the Mountains of the Moon for their bewitching otherworldly landscapes. The Kilembo Route passes lakes, muddy bogs (bring wellies!), rainforest, bamboo forest and giant heather zones. You'll need to be comfortable with crampons and ropes to reach Mount Stanley's Margherita Peak, with glaciers right on the equator.

Price: Eight days from £1,100pp

Web: rwenzoritrekking.com



17

Gonarezhou National Park ZIMBABWE

In Zimbabwe's southeastern corner lies a rare, raw wilderness with winding rivers and sandstone cliffs that glow gold as you sip your sundowner. It's home to 11,000 elephants, black rhinos, and predators and prey aplenty, with conservation and communities at its core. Stay in creatively decorated manangas, rustic reed-and-mud rooms built and run by local women, replicating their homes.

Price: From £175 for four people

Web: gonarezhou.org

Photos: Dreamstime

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Island discovery COMOROS

Between Mozambique and Madagascar lies the little-known Comoros archipelago, ideal for open-minded, intrepid travellers. Its three volcanic islands have a quiet charm with echoes of Zanzibar decades ago in the Swahili heritage of the capital Moroni, the spice gardens of Mbeni and golden beaches home to nesting turtles. Spot whales, lemurs and the world's largest fruit bats, and hike volcanoes too.

Price: 11 days from £1,799pp

Web: undiscovered-destinations.com

Take to the sky for a bird's eye view



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Trans-Serengeti Balloon Safari Expedition TANZANIA

Experience the Serengeti, home to the great wildebeest migration, on a new expedition traversing from east to west by hot-air balloon flights in the mornings, then walking or driving across the plains. At night, you'll be wild camping in private mobile camps under starlit skies in wilderness areas, with no other tourists around.

Price: Five days from £7,999pp

Web: farandwild.travel



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The Danakil Depression ETHIOPIA

One of the hottest places on Earth, the Danakil Depression is a photographer's dream: a psychedelic landscape of desert, dried-up salt lakes, hot springs and bubbling lava. After visiting Alledeghi Wildlife Reserve and Harar city – famed for its hand-fed hyenas – you'll drive across the desert to climb active Erta Ale volcano, then camp on the crater rim amid spectacular views.

Price: Nine days from £3,560pp

Web: wildfrontierstravel.com



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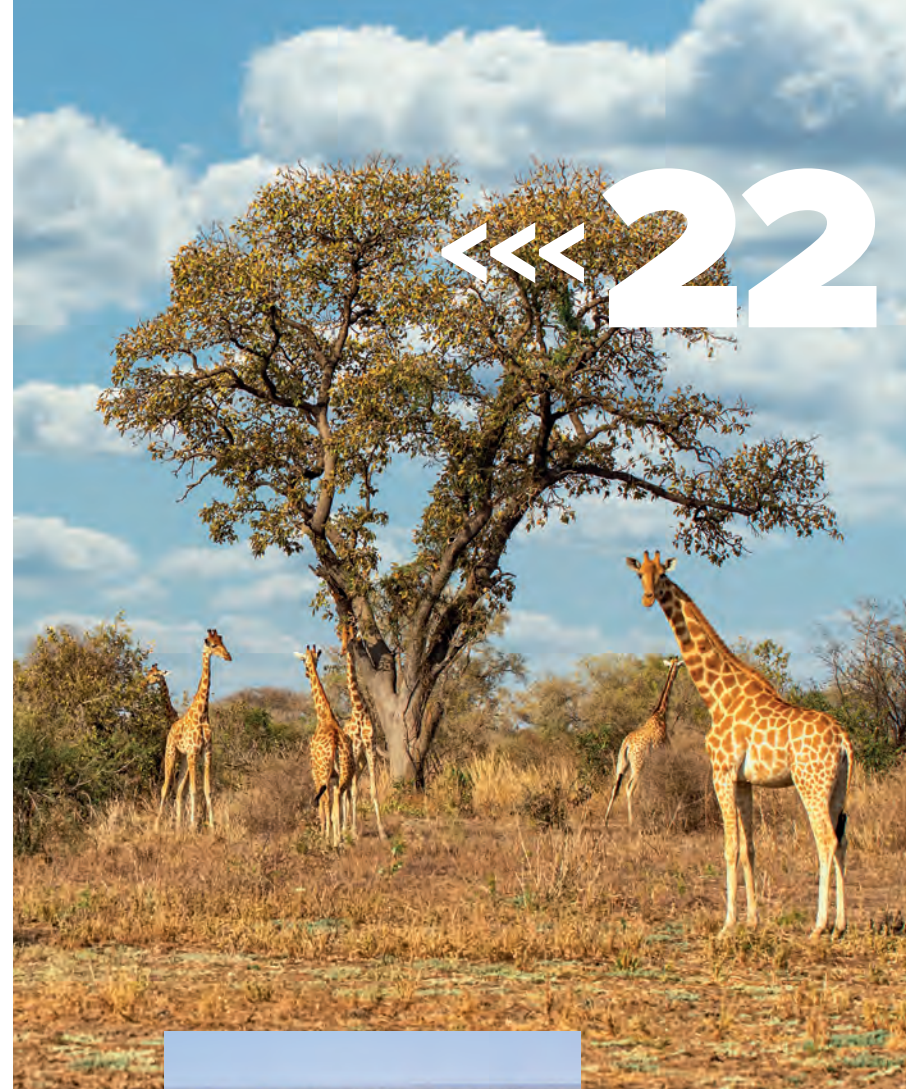
Women empowering women MOROCCO

Discover how local women live in far-flung corners of Morocco on this all-female trip. Spend four days hiking in the M'Goun Valley with a female guide, learn about traditional crafts such as rug-making, dine with Amazigh families, and join in ceremonies of dancing and singing, all the while celebrating Morocco's women and sharing cultural experiences.

Price: Eight days from £879pp

Web: intrepidtravel.com

Photos: Far and Wild Travel; Dreamstime; Intrepid Travel



22

Zakouma National Park CHAD

Safari connoisseurs have Zakouma on their wish list – a wild, rugged habitat with hundreds-strong elephant herds, exceptional birdlife and a true sense of discovery in the company of expert private guide Rob Janisch. Go behind the scenes and see how highly respected NGO African Parks has turned this once-decimated park into an outstanding conservation and community success.

Price: Nine days from £14,500pp

Web: naturalworldsafaris.com

Photos: Dreamstime

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Road trip around the Vanilla Coast MADAGASCAR

Pick up your hire car and discover Madagascar's north-eastern SAVA region (Sambava, Andapa, Vohemar, Antalaha) where the once infamously bad RN5a road has been restored. This road trip around the Vanilla Coast takes in spice plantations, sifaka-spotting, fabulous hiking trails around the Montagne d'Ambre and the beautiful beaches of Madiro Kitamby. Self-drive or hire a local driver/guide.

Price: Car hire from £87

Web: roadtripafrica.com



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Príncipe Island SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE

Once the world's biggest exporter of cacao, São Tomé and Príncipe was known as "The Chocolate Islands". Remote Príncipe is a heady mass of jungle, volcanic peaks and arching beaches. Go birding or whale-watching, or enjoy a "tree-to-table" chocolate tour, staying at Roça Sundry lodge on a cocoa plantation or Sundry Praia in the forest, both committed to sustainability and local communities.

Price: Roça Sundry lodge from £230pp per night; Sundry Praia from £570pp per night

Web: hbdprincipe.com

3 QUICK WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS



Focus on the eyes
Sharp, well-lit eyes bring wildlife photos to life. Use single-point focus to lock onto the animal's eyes.



Use burst mode
Wildlife can be unpredictable. Shooting in burst mode increases your chances of capturing the perfect moment.



Reciprocal shutter speed rule
To minimize camera shake when shooting handheld, use a shutter speed that is at least the reciprocal of your focal length. For example, if you're shooting at 200mm, aim for a shutter speed of 1/200th of a second or faster.



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Odzala-Kokoua National Park CONGO BRAZZAVILLE

Track critically endangered Western Lowland gorillas in Odzala-Kokoua National Park. Supporting conservation and local communities, your luxury lodges include Ngaga, located within one of Africa's most important gorilla research centres. Relish the verdant beauty of the 5,250 square-mile rainforest, spotting forest elephants, buffalo, bongo antelopes, monkeys, butterflies and birds on kayaks, nature walks and night drives.

Price: Seven nights from £11,708pp
Web: yellowzebrasafaris.com



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Fish River Canyon NAMIBIA

Second only to the Grand Canyon in scale, the Fish River Canyon at almost 100 miles is tough, isolated and searingly hot, but the rewards – and views – are immense. Trek independently, carrying all your kit and food, and wild camp at its wildest, or take the more relaxed option with Fish River Lodge guides, staying at remote camps en route.

Price: Wild camping from £55pp per night; Fish River Lodge from £390pp per night
Web: nwrnamibia.com/fish-river-canyon.htm; fishriverlodge-namibia.com



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The Bissagos Islands GUINEA BISSAU

Imagine a tropical archipelago of 88 mostly uninhabited islands in the Atlantic Ocean, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve home to a turtle research sanctuary, saltwater hippos, sandy beaches, mangrove forests, vervet monkeys and myriad birdlife. Guinea Bissau's Bissagos Islands have all this but very few visitors. Meet the people of Orango, Caravela and Carache on this new expedition that supports local schools.

Price: Eight nights from £4,830pp
Web: uk.ponant.com



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Ride the Maasai Mara KENYA

Steer clear of the convoys of game vehicles in one of Africa's most prolific wildlife areas by discovering the Maasai Mara and its neighbouring conservancies on horseback. Canter and gallop on superb thoroughbreds across plains home to elephants, zebra, buffalo and predators, including lions and hyenas, spending your nights in luxury mobile camps under the stars.

Price: Seven nights from £7,780pp
Web: aardvarksafaris.com



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Underwater dreaming on Pemba Island TANZANIA

For idyllic seclusion, stay in the dreamy Underwater Room at Manta Resort, observing Indian Ocean coral reefs and tropical fish from your submerged bedroom and starlit skies from the roof deck above water. Pemba is Zanzibar's calmer, quieter and less-visited little sister, with a character all her own and dive sites and coral reefs that are among the world's most pristine.

Price: From £870pp per night
Web: themantaresort.com



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France with volcanoes

LA RÉUNION

La Réunion, a tiny piece of France in the Indian Ocean, is home to three calderas and the world's most active volcano, Piton de la Fournaise, which is safe for trekking when it's not busy erupting. With vibrant French, African, Indian, Arabian, Chinese and Creole cultures and cuisines, sandy beaches and forest-draped mountains, it's an adventurer's paradise offering paragliding, diving, rafting, kayaking and hiking.

Price: 16 nights self-drive from £2,950pp

Web: rainbowtours.co.uk

Trek among active volcanoes

Photo: Dreamstime

ADVERTISEMENT

Africa's Hottest Hides

There are many ways to enjoy a safari in Africa, be it by traditional guided game drives, self-drive, on foot, by mountain bike or even on horseback. However, one of the most relaxing and underrated ways to really be present in the moment and capture those award winning and/or Instagram worthy shots, is to spend some quality time in some of Africa's best photographic hides and secret safari spots. Safari addict, Claire Roadley shares a few of her personal favourites...



01 Mahlasela Hide

Mahlasela Hide in Tembe Elephant Park in northern KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa is a great place to spot all of the Big 5, but is best known and loved for being a popular bathing and watering spot for some of Africa's biggest tuskers. You can take a peek at some of the action via their webcam.



02 Onkolo Hide

The Onkolo Hide at Onguma Nature Reserve, on the eastern fringe of Namibia's iconic Etosha National Park is a great place to capture a diverse range of wildlife and birds with beautiful light and creative angles at water level. Very comfortable facilities for both experts and amateurs.



03 Matebole Hide

The underground Matebole Elephant Hide at Mashatu in Botswana is a renowned hotspot for photographers, with PhotoMashatu offering guidance. Greg du Toit's *Essence of Elephants* won him Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2013. New Lala Limpopo overnight hide launching in October.



04 Mosestlha Birdbath

It may not be an official hide, but the humble bird bath at Mosestlha Bush Camp and Eco Lodge, in the heart of Madikwe Game Reserve, sees almost as much action as an Attenborough documentary. Between game drives there's no better place to sit than in the lapa or on the deck to see what visits.



05 Mara Bushtops

Mara Bushtops enjoys an enviable view over a busy salt lick which attracts wildlife from miles around. There is no need to "hide" here ... you can view all the action from their award winning spa, the terrace or your private tented suite. The webcam offers a window to the wild for viewers around the globe.



06 Zimanga Hides

There are currently nine photographic hides on Zimanga Private Game Reserve in South Africa's Zululand, including two Bird Bath Hides or Reflection Hides and two overnight hides, Umgodi and Tamboti which have been custom designed by Bence Mate for large mammal photography.



Contact Africa Collection to tailor make your safari on (01403) 256655 / africacollection.com



Virgin Atlantic offers direct, daily flights from London Heathrow to Johannesburg. virginatlantic.com