AFRICAN SAFARI
AN INSIDER’S GUIDE
INTRODUCTION

Safari. It’s been sitting on your bucket list for ages, but how do you actually plan the perfect safari? Can you do it yourself or should you use a tour operator?

If you know what type of safari you’d like to do, the country (our countries) you’d like to visit, and have plenty of time to do the research, you can organize a great vacation yourself. Tripadvisor eliminates some of the guess work of finding the best camps and lodges, and international and regional flights are easy enough to book online. However, it’s important not to underestimate the more complicated business of getting from place to place once you reach your destination—booking in-country bush flights needs a bit of insider knowledge. Ending up on one side of the Masai Mara when your camp is half a days’ drive away won’t endear you to your traveling companions or make the best use of your time.

START BY ASKING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:
• Has the specialist been to Africa and how well do they really know the countries and activities you’re considering?
• Do they offer the style and quality of safari you want?
• Would you enjoy working with this person/company? A look at the ‘about us’ page should offer some clues.
• How long has the operator been in business and how do they make money?
• Does the company offer its clients financial protection?
• Does it support responsible tourism?
• Can you see previous clients’ testimonials?
• Does it offer 24/7 support while you’re on safari?

If the DIY route doesn’t appeal to you, then using a tour operator is the way to go. The question is how to choose, from the many reputable travel companies out there, the one that’s best for you. Our top tips:

✦ GET RECOMMENDATIONS: Word of mouth referral is one of the most powerful ways to source the best.

✦ BE OPEN-MINDED ABOUT DESTINATIONS: Any country done well will be amazing but some require bigger budgets than others.

✦ SPEAK TO PAST CLIENTS: Anyone who’s done a similar style of safari, whether it’s a family, solo travel, luxury, etc.

Whether you’ve booked your own trip or are planning to use a safari specialist, we hope this guide will answer many of the questions you’re likely to encounter during the process of booking, preparing and actually traveling on safari.

Happy reading!
Proud male lion, Botswana. © GREAT PLAINS CONSERVATION
BEFORE YOU GO TO AFRICA

part 1

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TRAVELING TO AFRICA

Before you begin your adventure, you need to tackle the sometimes complicated and potentially expensive business of getting to Africa.

Bold and beautiful, South African Airways is the country’s national flag carrier. © WIKIMEDIA
Once we’ve designed an itinerary for you, we’ll advise you on exactly which flights you need. You may already have a travel agent you’ve worked with in the past who can book these for you. If not, we will introduce you to a flight consultant experienced with African travel. We will work closely with you, your travel agent or the flight consultant to ensure that your travel is seamless.

Here are a few tips to minimize stress and maximize your travel value:

- **MOST CARRIERS ISSUE FLIGHT SCHEDULES 11 MONTHS AHEAD OF TIME.** We suggest you buy your tickets as early as possible to get the best deal. The earlier you plan, the better your savings.

- **PRICE-SHOP ACROSS AIRLINES AND VENDORS.** KLM may be more affordable than American Airlines for your prospective trip, for example, but is that same KLM flight offered through another vendor at a lower price? Some vendors have special relationships with certain airlines and get better deals than their competitors. Our advice is to scout all the best deals across as many flight providers and ticket vendors as you can.

- **IF YOU DEPART FROM THE U.S. AND STOP IN THE UK OR EUROPE EN ROUTE TO AFRICA, CONSIDER SPLITTING THE JOURNEY INTO TWO DISTINCT LEGS.** That way, you can give yourself a day or two to explore London or some other European destination. This can help to alleviate the stress of long-haul flying, and is a particularly good option when traveling with children. Direct flights from the U.S. to Africa fill up quickly and are rare compared to flights departing the UK and Europe.

- **IF YOU HAVE FLIGHT MILES, USE THEM.** Most airlines belong to alliances that include one or more carriers offering flights to Africa. Redeeming mileage awards can take patience and persistence. Calling the airline’s mileage rewards department often yields better results than trying to book online. We can also refer you to specialists who, for a small fee, will put in the hours to secure tickets for you. It’s a smart option and you can usually hold the flights for 24 hours.

- **SEND US YOUR FLIGHT ITINERARY BEFORE YOU BOOK.** A second set of eyes checking dates, times and connections can’t hurt. Before you make the investment, please ask us to review your flights to ensure that they work perfectly with your itinerary.

Read more about getting to Africa ➔
TRAVEL WITHIN AFRICA

Planes, trains and automobiles. All can get you from point A to point B in Africa, 
but the most efficient mode, considering the vast distances, is flying.

Your safari will likely include several light-aircraft flights within your destination 
country, which is the best way to traverse the long distances while at the same 
time ensuring your comfort. These aerial journeys will save you hours of driving 
and give you an opportunity to enjoy the spectacular landscapes. Soaring 
over great herds of animals, mountains, savannahs, vast dunes and valleys 
will open up below you, offering a thrilling and memorable bird's-eye view of 
Africa that evokes the romance of early air travel and the thrill of discovery.

These flights will generally include other travelers, and may make one or two 
stops before reaching your destination—think of the aircraft as flying taxis. If 
you prefer, we can arrange direct private charter flights for you. There are no 
extensive check-ins, luggage transfers, delays or the other hassles of modern 
travel. Your safari guide will bring you to the bush airstrips that cater for 
these light aircraft and load your luggage; then you will be off to your next 
spectacular destination, where you will be greeted by your friendly guides.

These light aircraft, flown by expert bush pilots, are maintained to the 
highest international standards and have a long track record of safe 
operation. We’ll include these segments in your trip and someone will 
meet you at every airstrip, so your journey will always be hassle-free.
SEASONS & WEATHER

There’s no denying it—Africa is huge.

It’s also cut roughly in half by the Equator, so seasons are opposing in the northern or southern hemispheres. You could fit most of China, India and the UK into the 15 countries where we arrange safari vacations, so it stands to reason that the climate varies enormously. The wet season in Kenya is dry in Botswana, while summer on South Africa’s southern coast is glorious—but may bring cyclones in Madagascar. Green seasons mean taller grasses and lush landscapes—usually with fewer tourists and lower prices—while the dry season offers huge concentrations of wildlife at diminishing water sources, and, often, an equally large number of travelers, if you aren’t working with the right safari company.

During the rainy season, dirt roads are transformed into waterways and pleasant hikes and climbs become downright miserable slogs through tumultuous downpours. Here are some general seasonal guidelines for Southern and Eastern Africa:

SOUTHERN AFRICA
BOTSWANA, MALAWI, MOZAMBIQUE, NAMIBIA, SOUTH AFRICA, ZAMBIA, ZIMBABWE

The dry season in Southern Africa lasts from May through October. As the heat builds into November, legendary thunderstorms bring much-needed rain. Along with the rains come migratory bird species and, in places (like the Kalahari Desert), several hundred thousand zebra and other plains game seeking the tender, new grass. It can rain on and off through April, with the majority of rain falling in January and February—but that doesn’t get in the way of game viewing. Think short downpours rather than torrential rains that have the added advantage of ridding all dust from the air, leaving crystal clear skies in their wake. This long wet season is deceptive, however, as Southern Africa enjoys some of the lowest average precipitation around the globe.

EAST AFRICA
KENYA, RWANDA, TANZANIA, UGANDA, ZANZIBAR

East Africa has two dry seasons: December to February and June to October, with rainy seasons filling the gaps. In between, November and December have short rains—similar to those in Southern Africa, but in April and May, most safari camps close due to very heavy precipitation.

July and August are the most popular months in East Africa. For that reason, it can get rather crowded, unless you are working with a top-notch tour operator who knows how to guarantee that you’ll see far more animals than people on your safari.
PACKING FOR AFRICA

What you pack for your trip to Africa depends in part on your itinerary and luggage restrictions. We recommend a few essentials, though, to ensure that you have a memorable, safe and thoroughly enjoyable safari experience:

Remember, less is often more when packing for safari so seek advice about clothing and equipment. ROBIN POPE SAFARIS
**IDENTIFICATION:** Your passport, your visa (if necessary) and one other form of photo ID.

**PHOTOCOPIES OF YOUR ID DOCUMENTS:** Copies are convenient for carrying on your person when out and about. Plus, it never hurts to leave a copy with a family member or friend back at home.

**A GOOD CAMERA:** Digital cameras are so amazing these days that they can turn any amateur shutterbug into Ansel Adams. Africa is an astoundingly photogenic continent, so bring your favorite camera and accompanying lens(es). If purchasing new equipment for your trip be sure to spend time practicing before you go; you don’t want to fiddle with settings while a lioness and her cubs pose for the perfect shot. Incredible photo opportunities await!

**ADDITIONAL MEMORY CARDS FOR YOUR CAMERA:** You will take more photos than you think, especially if this is your first safari. And you’ll probably take them early on, which means that by the time you spot something incredible at the end of your trip you’ll be out of space. Memory cards also fail from time to time, so having a couple of spares is a good plan.

**EXTRA CAMERA BATTERIES:** Don’t get caught with a faulty battery in the middle of the Serengeti. Bring a backup and a battery charger.

**SUNSCREEN:** The African sun is very strong for most of the year—and depending on where you go, it can get seriously hot. Bring plenty of high factor sunscreen as you’ll need maximum UV protection.

**THE RIGHT FOOTWEAR:** Different safaris call for different shoes. If you are going gorilla tracking, for instance, you’ll need waterproof hiking boots with high ankle support. For most trips, however, a good pair of sneakers will be sufficient, as long as they are comfy. A pair of sandals or flip-flops is a must for walking around the lodge or your room. Whatever you do, don’t break in new shoes on safari!

**PERSONAL SET OF BINOCULARS:** To avoid missing out on any of the sights, bring your own binoculars (You’ll find more details on page 12).

**TOILETRIES:** Most of the safari camps, lodges and hotels we recommend will provide basic toiletries such as shampoo and soap. Bring your own toothbrush, toothpaste and any other items (conditioner, shaving cream, etc.) that you need to feel good. Since you’ll have luggage weight restrictions while on safari, it’s a good idea to bring trial sizes. Or, transfer your giant bottle of face wash into a small, three-ounce container, which you can pick up at any drugstore.

**MEDICATIONS:** Depending on where you are going, it may be wise—in some cases, mandatory—to take malaria pills. Our clients rarely experience illness while on safari as all food is prepared to suit Western tastes and standards but the long journey to Africa and the change in climate can be enough to set the digestive system on edge. With that in mind, you may also want to pack Imodium, to cope with “traveler’s tummy” and ask your doctor to prescribe a broad-spectrum antibiotic. Of course, take your personal prescription medications with you, as you can’t count on being able to fill up while in Africa, and please carry your prescriptions as you may be asked to show it at customs points.

**A HEADLAMP:** Flashlights are bulky. Even if you are just walking ten feet to the loo in the middle of the night, headlamps/head torches are incredibly useful—and they double as fantastic reading lights.

**INSECT REPELLANT:** Mosquitos are more than just a nuisance in many parts of Africa. Protect yourself with DEET or a similar repellant.

**A WATERPROOF BAG:** Rain can occur at a moment’s notice, so you’ll need to protect your water-sensitive valuables if you visit any lakes or rivers. A far greater danger to your digital camera than a spot of rain, however, is the ever-present dust. You can keep your electronics both dust- and rain-free with a waterproof bag: extra-large zip-lock bags or dry bags do the trick nicely.

**CRUSHABLE SAFARI HAT WITH CORD:** This will keep the rain off your head and the sun out of your eyes. It is also very, very fashionable. Honestly! P.S. If you have short hair, you might prefer a hat with a neck flap.
CAMERAS

For excellent photographs of birds and animals, it’s necessary to have a good quality digital SLR camera and a telephoto lens, or a good “point-and-shoot” camera with a large, built-in zoom function.

The minimum recommended lens size is 200 mm, with a 70-300mm offering an ideal range, and for the dedicated photographer, a larger zoom lens of up to 400 mm can be extremely useful. If you are considering taking a larger lens than this, bear in mind that the most interesting shots are usually taken using hand-held equipment, so quality may suffer. You may also want to consider taking a “point-and-shoot” camera if you are taking a walking safari during your trip, as you may find an SLR too bulky and heavy to carry.

Experienced photographers know that digital cameras make it easy to take a large number of high quality images—especially when photographing animals—but this can also use up a large amount of memory. Portable storage devices are now available—and quite useful—for storing your images on long trips abroad. Some brands even have an LCD screen on the back so that you can review your shots. We recommend that you take at least two different memory cards on your trip, in case you experience a problem with one of the cards, or should you require more memory space than you originally thought.

Although the majority of camps and lodges now have at least one main electrical socket for recharging camera batteries, we recommend recharging cameras or batteries at every available opportunity, as well as taking a second battery. If you have a 12V charging pack that can be connected to a vehicle via the cigarette lighter you may be able to charge your battery while on longer game drives. Please bring your own attachment to connect your charger or video to the cigarette lighter.
We find that the ideal magnification for safari binoculars is 8 x 40 or 10 x 40, giving you a good combination of zoom and field of vision.

There are many styles and designs available, from the ultra-compact to heavy duty marine spec models. In practice, we find the mid-range models best: They’re easy to see through, and big enough to be effortlessly held. Avoid the extremes of the model ranges: the smallest are prone to wobble and are not very easy to see through, and the biggest and most robust are often impractical due to their sheer weight.

We do not prefer any particular brand, but in general the more you pay, the better the optical and build quality. Prices range from US$45 to more than US$2,800. We suggest you visit an outdoor sports store where you can try a variety of makes and designs then pick the one that suits you best.
LESS IS MORE: LUGGAGE IN AFRICA

So, what should you use to pack all these goodies?

The easy answer is a soft duffel bag.

About 99% of our clients take small-propeller aircraft at some point on their safari. These efficient and usually scenic flights come with one caveat: there are luggage weight restrictions for safety reasons. It’s also worth mentioning that the holds aren’t exactly cavernous. We’ll advise you on your allowable weight but it’s generally between 33 and 44 pounds.

Hard-sided bags, and those with frames and wheels, simply don’t fit into the small cargo areas of these planes and wheeled duffels are heavy, usually weighing in at about eight to ten pounds of your precious allowance. On the other hand, lightweight duffels tip the scales at a couple of pounds.

HERE ARE SOME OF OUR FAVORITES:

• **Patagonia** has a fantastic duffel called the Black Hole in 120-liter and 90-liter sizes
• **Eddie Bauer** has plenty of options
• **Cabelas** offers low priced, durable duffels

Think you can’t survive on a two-week trip with just 33 pounds of gear? Consider that the majority of safari camps include laundry service, and will gladly wash almost anything and have it back to you, neatly folded and pressed, the following morning. Yes, we said “almost anything.” Ladies’ underwear is the exception for cultural reasons, but don’t fret, because you’ll usually find a little jar of washing powder right next to the sink in your room.

If you are a hardcore photographer, we can make arrangements for an increased weight allowance on your flights to accommodate your lenses, tripods, etc. Just make sure we have plenty of notice, so that your valuable equipment travels with you, rather than having to catch up with you later because the plane was at capacity!

Finally, if you are worried about throwing your back out dragging your luggage from place to place, don’t be. Someone will be there to help, carrying your gear every step of the way.
Before going on safari, we highly recommend that you acquire traveler’s insurance. This will protect you not only in cases of theft, but also in the event that, heaven forbid, someone falls ill.

Travel insurance also provides blanket protection for your once-in-a-lifetime trip to Africa against unforeseen complications or postponements. Good insurance will usually offer comprehensive cancellation coverage.

If you don’t want the expense of insuring your trip for cancellation, it is essential that you have emergency medical evacuation coverage. The cost of “air ambulances,” especially over long distances, can be prohibitive. Some companies are very specific about which activities are excluded from coverage, while others are much more open to the realities of African travel.

We can assist you with a policy that meets your budget and your needs, so that you can travel with complete security.
HEALTH AND VACCINATIONS

Everyone has a horror story about travel illnesses, from Delhi Belly to Montezuma’s Revenge. The truth is that more than a million people go on safari every year and come back happy and healthy with a lifetime’s worth of good memories. We often find that the greatest cause of illness is dehydration, because clients don’t drink enough in the hot African sun.
Every Aardvark Safaris client who goes to Africa gets information about the countries he or she will be visiting. From time zones and tipping to voltage and vaccinations, we make sure you are well-armed with all the information you need.

It is essential that you get some basic vaccinations and take precautions against malaria. However, we do offer wonderful safaris in malaria free areas, if you have concerns about taking the prophylaxis. There are two main defenses against malaria:

**BITE AVOIDANCE:** No malaria prophylaxis medicine is ever 100% effective, so avoiding mosquito bites is the most important first line of defense. Remain as covered up as possible between dusk and dawn; wear long-sleeved shirts and pants in pale colors; and use mosquito nets at night. When sleeping under canvas, there is no need for a separate mosquito net, as the tent is designed to act as a barrier and is treated with repellent.

Use good-quality insect repellents and apply them, as recommended by the manufacturer, to any exposed skin. The most effective repellents contain 25 to 35% DEET; higher concentrations do not afford any more protection and are harder to use. Some people have found lotions containing eucalyptus oil to be as effective as DEET so you may find these a suitable alternative depending on where you are traveling.

In most safari camps, you’ll find that while you’re having dinner, someone will go to your room and put down the mosquito net around your bed, close your tent flaps and spray to rid your room of any stray beasties.

**MALARIA PROPHYLAXIS:** Malarone, the most current medication, is a combination of the two drugs atovaquone and proguanil. It needs to be taken for one day prior to exposure and for only one week after leaving the malarial area. As of October 2011, a generic version of Malarone became available on the U.S. market. You may want to ask your physician or travel clinic about prescribing the generic formulation. Depending on your insurance, this could result in significant savings.

Malarone has now been licensed for children in the U.S., UK and many European countries, and is the first malaria tablet designed for children. Tablets are coated so they don’t taste bitter and they can be crushed. As with the adult dose, medication starts the day before exposure and continues for seven days after leaving the malarial area.

For children, it is particularly important that you consult a qualified health professional, since the dose of Malarone depends on the child’s weight.

**VACCINATIONS:** Talk to your doctor to discuss your vaccination requirements. Plan well ahead of your trip, too, as you may not be able to have all your vaccinations at the same time. You should have completed all your vaccinations at least two weeks prior to departure.

Below are the commonly recommended vaccinations:

- Polio
- Tetanus
- Diphtheria
- Typhoid
- Hepatitis A
- YELLOW FEVER is transmitted by daytime mosquitoes and is active in Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda. For travel to any of these countries, you may be required to show a valid yellow fever vaccination certificate upon arrival. If you are arriving from one of the countries where it is present into a country that is free of yellow fever, you will be required to provide a yellow fever certificate on arrival.

Your operator will be able to give you up-to-date advice concerning current health regulations in the country that you are visiting. Aardvark Safaris’ clients will find this information in their Pre-Departure Information.

**WHAT IF I DON'T WANT VACCINATIONS AND ANTI-MALARIA MEDICATION?** We can arrange fantastic, malaria-free safaris for anyone who doesn't want to take a malaria prophylaxis or incur any risk of malaria. If you are unable to have the yellow fever vaccination for medical reasons, you must carry a valid medical certificate from your doctor explaining why you cannot have the injection. It is recommended that the certificate be accompanied by a detailed letter from the doctor, which specifies entry and departure dates from the country and the full medical reason for the exemption.
RESPONSIBLE TOURISM
AND SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

We became involved in the African tourism industry for one simple reason: we love Africa.

We love everything about it, from the breathtaking views to the majestic animals, the vibrant culture and the wonderful people. We love the continent so much that we’ve dedicated ourselves to its preservation in every small way we can. That’s why we’re huge advocates of sustainable travel. But what does that really mean, and how can you help by being a responsible traveler? When choosing an operator and where to go on safari, consider:

- Select lodges, camps and guides who understand that their way of life depends on a responsible interaction with their environment. Responsible safari properties are involved in some way in their community to help nourish and preserve the flora and fauna of their region. But it’s not just nature that our partners seek to promote and improve: most of them are also heavily involved in education, healthcare and heritage preservation within their communities.

- Work with a safari specialist who educates their clients about what it means to be a responsible traveler, including specific tips for whatever destinations are on your itinerary. At Aardvark, we’ve received awards from the Association of Independent Tour Operators for our commitment to responsible tourism and education. Make sure that whoever you choose has similar accolades and practices.

- A good safari operator should put their money where their mouth is supporting the people and wildlife that make their livelihood possible. Among our favorite causes and ones we share with our clients are Tusk USA and the Tusk Trust which support wildlife and communities all over Africa and the Koiyaki Guiding School in Kenya’s Masai Mara, which sponsors students who go on to be conservationists and park rangers of African natural preserves across the continent. They are the future guardians of the ecosystems that we love so much.

- If of interest, ask if you can visit community projects in Africa, meet conservationists, and see how your park fees help fund anti-poaching patrols. It’s a great way to see your tourism dollars in action and who knows, you might find a cause you’d like to promote when you come home.

- Pick a safari company that also does good locally. We regularly donate safaris and participate in fundraisers benefitting organizations in our community such as the YMCA, ALS Society, the Sanford Burnham Medical Research Institute, the Accordia Global Health Foundation and the San Diego Natural History Museum. Ask your operator how they enrich their community.

Being a responsible traveler is a way of life. At Aardvark Safaris, we’re proud to continue the cycle of education and sponsorship that protects and preserves our great environments. Even better, many of our past clients have also gone on to sponsor, donate and volunteer. We hope you will, too.
Buffalo herd, Busanga Plains. © DANA ALLEN, WILDERNESS SAFARIS
SAFARI TYPES

Most people associate safaris with the classic image presented in films and books: rugged all-terrain vehicles traversing wide-open spaces and offering close-up encounters with animals in relative safety and comfort. These safaris are common and very exciting, but it’s important to know that there are many other ways to experience the sights and sounds of Africa—many of which are well away from the rumble of engines.
MOBILE SAFARIS

The classic safari reminiscent of the golden era of African exploration. **Mobile safaris** take you to some of nature’s most pristine wild places with the benefit of camp staff, safari necessities, and all creature comforts in tow. Ideal for game viewing, these safaris are flexible, versatile and adventurous, often extending beyond the scope of most safari camps. If you want to maximize your sightseeing and animal viewing, there’s simply no better choice. Mobile safaris, due to their popularity and expediency, are also favored by Africa’s top guides and game drivers; therefore, they tend to be led and staffed by some of the most knowledgeable and entertaining wilderness experts in Africa.

**OUR TOP MOBILE SAFARIS:**

- **Small group or private mobiles** in Botswana’s Okavango Delta
- **Exploring the Serengeti and Ngorongoro Highlands** in Tanzania
- **Multi-day flying safaris** in Namibia
WALKING SAFARIS

Want a more up-close-and-personal African safari experience? Although they lack the speed and sheer quantity of sights that mobile safaris are known for, a walking safari is an incredible experience. A bush walk with an expert guide—like the ones who work with Aardvark Safaris—is a great way to slow down, absorb the scenery, soak up the silence and spot some of the smaller details you might miss by vehicle.

Some operators offer half- and full-day walking excursions from whatever base camp you are temporarily calling home, while others (if you are feeling adventurous) can take you out in the bush for days or weeks at a time. Many experienced guides will teach you valuable survival and bush skills while you are out; even though you will never be led too close to Africa’s more dangerous wildlife, you will still be able to spy them from afar. On one walk, Aardvark’s own Francis, Charlie and Tracy found themselves no than 30 feet from a pride of lion deeply absorbed in their zebra feast.

On multi-day walking safaris, a team will drive your belongings ahead to your next camp, or carry them on a pack of camels. Camp will be set up for you and a chef will whip up magical fare in the middle of nowhere—while shower tents, bed linens and a portable bar ensure that you’ll feel like royalty. It’s a great way to come face to face with the wonders of the African wild, and pack in a great workout! Sound like the experience of a lifetime? Then a walking safari is the choice for you!

OUR TOP WALKING SAFARIS:

• Multi-day, camel-assisted treks in Kenya
• Full-day walking safaris in Zambia’s South Luangwa National Park
• Walking with the Kalahari Bushmen in Botswana’s Makgadikgadi Pans
• A multi-day walking safari in Tanzania’s vast Selous Game Reserve
• Walking in Zimbabwe’s Hwange National Park with Africa’s top guides
RIDING SAFARIS:

Riding through the African wilderness is unlike any other safari. As you blend with the game roaming the plains, you become part of the bush and rely on your horse’s instincts as much as your own. This is as close to nature as you will ever get: your horse acts as the best 4 x 4, covering the ground effortlessly and accessing areas way beyond any motorized safari. Quite simply, nothing compares to the exhilaration of riding alongside wildlife, or the thrill of stalking elephant and buffalo. And when your safari is nearly at an end, you can try your hand at a game of polo, at one of Africa’s many horse ranches.

For the true enthusiast, riding safaris can be lodge-based stays or mobile camping safaris, where your walk-in safari tents will provide the comforts of home in the heart of the bush. There are extreme adventure rides—with explorations of the deserts of Namibia and sleeping under the stars—and gentler options amid prolific wildlife, where luxury blooms in the most unlikely settings. For the less experienced, a taste of riding can be included with conventional safaris, when simple day rides will give you a feel for the freedom it brings. Happily, we can also cater to non-riding companions with a variety of game-viewing activities to guarantee that everyone has a brilliant safari.

There are many riding outfits in Africa and we know and have tested them all. We will explain the particular strengths of different areas and operators and find the riding safari that best suits you. We also make all the arrangements to ensure that your journey is hassle-free.

OUR TOP MOBILE SAFARIS:

• Follow the wildebeest migration on mobile tented riding safaris in Kenya’s Masai Mara
• Incredible wildlife on a lodge-to-lodge ride in Botswana’s Limpopo Valley
• Jaw-dropping scenery in Namibia’s Fish River Canyon
• Galloping through Botswana’s Okavango Delta, flanked by giraffe and zebra
• Exclusive riding safaris in Tanzania’s Singita Grumeti Reserves
• Riding through the fynbos, and on the beaches, in South Africa’s Western Cape

Cheek-by-jowl with wildlife on an exhilarating horseback riding safari in Botswana. 🏈 AFRICAN HORSEBACK SAFARIS
See game from a whole new perspective on the Savuti Channel, Botswana. © DANA ALLEN, WILDERNESS SAFARIS
CANOEING SAFARIS

Parts of Africa are inaccessible by road or rail. The continent’s rivers and waterways open up some truly amazing and unforgettable sights, which too many explorers miss. An often overlooked and underrated safari adventure is the canoe safari, which enables you to see a whole new world and countless animal species. Africa’s rivers are its lifeblood and nowhere else will you see so many distinct species gathered in one place.

The great Zambezi River is an excellent river safari destination. Dividing Zambia and Zimbabwe it intersects Mana Pools National Park to one side and the lower Zambezi National Park to the other, and supports a wealth of bird life, hippos and elephants. All canoe trips move downstream to minimize effort, but it’s still an exciting workout. Trips can extend over days or weeks, with longer excursions requiring you to ferry your own camping gear in your two-person canoe. No previous experience is necessary, but for multi-day canoe safaris, a certain level of stamina and fitness is required. Canoe safaris aren’t for everyone, but if you are up to the challenge, it can be an immensely rewarding adventure that creates vivid and enduring memories.

OUR TOP CANOEING SAFARIS:

- A multi-day camping canoe safari in Zimbabwe’s gorgeous Mana Pools National Park
- Half or full day trips canoeing and fishing on the Lower Zambezi in Zambia
- Gently poling through the calm waterways of Botswana’s Okavango Delta
CLIMBING AND TREKKING SAFARIS

The hills and mountains of Africa are as varied as they are majestic. A multi-day trek across these great ranges and divides is a superb complement to any African safari—or as a standalone adventure in its own right. The intimacy of a walking safari joins the thrill of a rugged mountain climb for spectacular views and timeless memories. Some of the world’s most storied ascents reside on this massive continent, including the famous Mt. Kilimanjaro and the Rwenzori Mountains of Uganda and Congo. Ever-changing altitudes deliver diverse ecosystems as you climb, ensuring that you see new and fascinating things every day.

Remote and stunningly beautiful, the continent offers middle- and high-altitude challenges for both the weekend hiker and the experienced climber. However, scaling high altitudes is fraught with potential hazards, so it’s essential that you work with experts who have unparalleled knowledge and gear to ensure not only your enjoyment but, most important, your safety. Climbing safaris are led by the most experienced guides who have fully certified first-aid training, as well as a naturalist’s knowledge of the land. In a word, an Africa climbing safari is "epic."

Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Malawi and South Africa all offer excellent opportunities to climb some of the world’s most fabled peaks, as well as long-distance hikes and treks through great mountain ranges and massifs. You’ll experience outstanding scenery along the way, traveling through varied ecosystems at different altitude zones that allow you to enjoy good wildlife and birding as you ascend.

OUR TOP TREKS IN AFRICA

- Summit the roof of Africa on Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania
- Climb Mount Kenya and stop for some excellent fly-fishing on the way
- Hike in the Drakensberg Mountains in South Africa
- Trek the fabled Mountains of the Moon: Uganda’s snow-capped Rwenzori Mountains
- Mulanje Mountain, Malawi
When you buy gorilla permits and visit other primates your money is channelled directly towards preserving their future. — VICTORIA LANGMEAD

PRIMATE SAFARIS:

The joy of coming face-to-face with a mountain gorilla in Rwanda or Uganda is a truly unforgettable moment for even the most jaded safari-goer. These wonderful beasts, the world’s largest primate, are massively powerful yet amazingly gentle and caring. They share more than 97 percent of our DNA and we often hear from you, our clients, that being able to observe their very human behavior is something that will stay with them for their rest of their lives.

The smaller-sized primates—including chimpanzees, lemurs, monkeys and baboons—have big personalities and offer a rewarding experience. The intelligence they show in their interactions, communication and mobility is proof of our kinship with this amazing family of beautiful animals. Chimpanzee tracking is at its best in Uganda (where you can even join a habituation program) and Western Tanzania, where famed primatologists such as Jane Goodall have spent their lives observing chimp antics.

OUR TOP PRIMATE SAFARIS

• Mountain gorillas in Uganda and Rwanda
• Chimp habituation in Uganda’s Kibale Forest
• Madagascar’s endemic lemurs, including sifaka and indri
• Lowland gorillas in the Congo
• Tracking the fast moving chimps in the Mahale Mountains of Western Tanzania

When you are planning your safari, keep in mind that there are more options available than first meets the eye. It’s easy to combine different safari types—like chimp tracking with a big game safari, a Kilimanjaro climb with a few days on the beach, or a walking safari with more traditional game drives.

No matter your preferences, there’s a tailor-made adventure waiting for you in Africa: you just need to find it. That’s where we can help. Drop us a line or give us a call, we’d love to talk with you and build your dream safari.

That’s Africa, your way. →
FAMILY SAFARIS

Our company helped pioneer family safaris, urging tented camps and lodges to offer adjoining family rooms, ideal for parents traveling with kids, and guides who are brilliant with children.
Aardvark Safaris’ directors and most of our staff have brought their own children to Africa and know the wonder of seeing the magic of discovery through a child’s eyes. We carefully vet every safari camp and lodge we offer to all our clients. For families, we choose camps and lodges that do more than tolerate kids—they actively embrace their enthusiasm, energy and curiosity.

Adventures come thick and fast. Game drives, bush breakfasts, boat trips, camel rides, lunches under the shade of African trees, bug hunts on foot and floodlit expeditions at night: there’s no end to the activities on offer. The locals brim with hidden skills and will teach your children how to coax fire from sticks, make beautiful beaded jewelry, craft bows and shoot arrows.

Where you stay is a huge part of any safari and, for most families, a medley of different lodges and camps provides a varied and rewarding experience. Start in the relative normalcy of a conventional lodge, meeting Africa’s wildlife for the first time and sketching in the outline of a new environment. Then, move on to tented life or a private bush home, offering the independence of your own bit of Africa, exclusively there for you and your family. Finally, close the experience with a tranquil stay on the beach, sunning your family by the Indian Ocean.

- Camel riding safaris
- Canoe and boat safaris
- Camping out in the African bush
- Fishing
- Whitewater rafting
- Horseback riding
- Mountain biking
- Visiting local markets
- Game tracking
- Night drives
- Bird watching
- Star gazing
- Swimming in pools and rivers
- Snorkeling near a sunny beach
Re-live the romance and spirit of the golden age of safari.

Zarafa Dhow Suites, Botswana. © GREAT PLAINS CONSERVATION
Accommodation in Africa is as varied as the continent’s storied landscapes. Where you stay will be influenced by your budget, taste and itinerary.

We try to mix different styles of accommodation on each custom crafted safari, to give you a taste of what’s on offer. From the grandest lodge to the humblest tent, all of the accommodations we choose in Africa share the classic luxuries of a traditional safari. Crisp white linen, attentive hosts, and—even in the most remote parts of Africa—bush chefs to conjure culinary delicacies. From your early-morning croissant to the ice that clinks in your evening tonic, no creature comfort is ever overlooked.

Aardvark Safaris doesn’t own any camps, hotels or lodges. Instead, we have curated a hand-picked selection of properties in every budget range. We’ve slept in the beds, and tested everything from the guides to the food to the water pressure. That way, when we make suggestions, they come with our “tried and true” seal of approval.

Read more about various accommodations →
HOTELS:

We will book the best hotels for your needs in any major city—whether it’s an overnight near the airport in Nairobi or Johannesburg, or a guesthouse or sumptuous suite in Cape Town. You can anticipate a wide range of options in terms of quality and cost.
One of Cape Town’s finest boutique hotels, Ellerman House is the epitome of luxury with its plush bedrooms, fine art collection and sweeping views across the Atlantic Ocean and Robben Island.
SAFARI LODGES:

Lodges have permanent walls, typically made of wood or stone, with thatched or shingled roofs. Some have windows while others have more open (but completely private) rooms with beautiful architecture. Some offer air-conditioning and fireplaces, mini-bars and other modern conveniences. You can expect a lounge, bar, dining area and, often, a swimming pool.

It’s not every day you get to feed resident giraffes through the second floor window of a historic lodge. Giraffe Manor, Kenya. 📸 THE SAFARI COLLECTION
TENTED CAMPS:

African safari tents at permanent and seasonal camps are quite different from the sort of tents you may be used to. They’re spacious and completely furnished in high style, often with stunning pieces of furniture and fine linens. Most tented safari camps have en-suite bathrooms with running hot water and flushing toilets adjoining every tent. Some may offer bucket showers: five gallons of “just right” hot water controlled by a pull chain. Communal areas where you can mingle with other guests usually include a lounge and dining area—though meals are often taken under the stars—and some camps even have swimming pools. Enjoying at least one tented camp—ranging from comfortable to over-the-top luxurious—is a must on safari.

Safari tents are perfectly safe, too: there are always night guards on duty, and though animals will occasionally wander through camp, they won’t try to get into your tent. At the first hint of discomfort, you’ll always have a (seldom used) whistle, siren or walkie-talkie to hand.

MOBILE TENTED CAMPS:

Fancy something a bit more adventurous? Get even closer to nature or follow the wildebeest migration with a stay in a mobile tented camp where water is by bowl, toilets are short- or long-drop, and showers are by heated water in a large canvas bucket with a shower head. What you sacrifice in creature comforts you’ll gain in privacy and a truly inspiring sense of solitude. Romantic and exciting, mobile tent camping may be the perfect choice for you.
BEACH PROPERTIES:

These can vary enormously, from simple bed-and-breakfast affairs to large resorts. Some are better for couples, others for singles and still others for families. As with beach properties anywhere, an idyllic location can often mask flaws, so the Aardvark staff’s expertise is enormously helpful in ensuring that your money is well spent with an ideal combination of location, amenities, quality and service.
PRIVATE SAFARI HOUSES:

These are exclusive-use—and fully serviced and staffed—bush houses. With two to five or more bedrooms, they are ideal for groups of friends or families. Even though they come with a private safari guide, a chef, house manager and a slew of other staff, they are often surprisingly affordable. The ones we recommend are also ideally located to take advantage of the best wildlife viewing.
FOOD AND DRINK ON SAFARI

Catering to Western tastes (and tummies), the food on safari is generally outstanding. Clients expect to lose weight on safari but usually come home well fed, enormously impressed and a few pounds heavier.

Candlelit communal dining African safari style.

© MADIKWE SAFARI LODGE
Breakfast may be cereals, yogurts, fruits and freshly baked bread, or a full cooked breakfast—or both. Coffee, tea, juices and water are always on hand.

Lunch is usually lighter, with lots of delicious salads sourced from the camp’s or lodge’s own garden where possible, cheeses, quiche, cold pasta salad or cold meats. All fruits and vegetables are washed in purified water.

Afternoon tea will always feature something sweet and delicious, and may include savory canapés, perfectly conceived to tide you over until dinner.

Three-course dinners (and, in some lodges, there are as many as seven courses) include an appetizer, entrée with fish or meat, vegetables and dessert.

Your itinerary will specify what’s included at each property, but when on safari, tea, coffee, soda, water, juices, house wine, beer and liquor are usually unlimited. Staying hydrated in the hot African sun is very important, so we encourage you to drink lots of water. When you arrive, your host will give you a brief orientation explaining whether the water from the taps is purified and safe to drink. If not, bottled or purified jug water will be provided for drinking and tooth brushing.

Special dietary requirements can be catered to with ease as long as we have advance notice. Whether you are vegan or have an allergy, food sensitivity, halal or kosher requirement, gluten intolerance or even just a preference, just let us know in advance. Children can pop back into the kitchen to help bake cookies, and kid-friendly food, tailored to little people’s tastes, can be whipped up in a flash.

Safari camps and mobile tented camps usually offer communal dining—the opportunity to sit around a big table with other guests, and hosted by the camp manager or a guide, swapping safari stories or chatting about life at home. Good friends are often made that way, and the company of like-minded travelers is a real joy on safari.

Some safari lodges offer communal dining, while others offer a private table for you and your traveling companions. Beach properties only serve up private dining, though you are certainly free to join other guests you befriend.
YOUR GUIDE

Your safari guide is probably the most important person on your African adventure. At Aardvark Safaris, we know many of the best guides in Africa and keep a close eye on up-and-coming stars to ensure that we only ever work with the best.
The hallmark of a truly great guide is the ability to bring the bush to life, with a host of anecdotes and observations that add new layers of understanding to the natural world and social systems of the area you are visiting. They’ll know the names of birds and plants and the daily habits of the animals living in their patch. They’ll also have mastered the knack of knowing when to be quiet, and allow the beauty of your surroundings to filter through in silence, so that you can be at peace with your thoughts.

In this business, the best guides are internationally known, with established reputations that spread throughout the safari world and beyond. Nine characteristics that make a great safari guide:

- **EAGLE EYES**: The uncanny ability to spot animals and plants in their natural habitat
- **EXPERIENCE**: The combination of growing up in the African bush and guiding all sorts of different people takes time to master
- **PATIENCE**: Everyone knows patience is a virtue, but in the wild being patient will build a better experience for all
- **ENThusiasm**: Excitement is key to having fun with your safari
- **CONVERSATION**: Being at ease talking with your guests, whether a young child or adult
- **PASSION**: The best guides are genuinely thrilled every time they see the same animal or plant. Their passion is boundless.
- **CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING**: Transcending cultures and having the skills to relate to and communicate with people from all backgrounds
- **SAFETY FIRST**: Knowing what’s safe and what’s not. A great guide has the training and situational know how for any emergency
- **ENTERTAINING**: Fun is infectious so being animated helps guide the experience for everyone
Giraffe mother and calf at Little Tubu Camp, Botswana.

© DANA ALLEN, WILDERNESS SAFARIS
Where the Wild Things Are

The Big 5. The expression was originally coined by African hunters and referred to the five most dangerous animals to hunt on foot. Today, it’s more regularly used to describe some of Africa’s most spectacular wildlife and includes lion, elephant, rhino, leopard and buffalo.

Africa isn’t Disneyland: you won’t be able to see everything year-round. The wildlife, plants and safari types all have peak seasons that are determined by weather, social habits (like mating and migrations) and the availability of food and water. Knowing when to visit is crucial to optimizing your itinerary and making the most of your viewing experience.
LEOPARD

Shy and solitary creatures, leopards are well camouflaged for good reason. Their kills are often stolen by hyena and lion, both of which are more powerful and tend to travel in packs. Leopards tend to hide in plain sight on tree limbs and, more inconspicuously, under bushes. Seeing a leopard feels like a huge privilege and watching one hunt is a fascinating lesson in patience and timing. At Aardvark Safaris, we know the best places to see leopard—such as Zambia, where night drives are allowed in the national parks. While wildlife sightings are never guaranteed, it’s a fair bet that, with our help, you’ll be in the right place at the right time.
Africa’s elephants are a major attraction. Watching mothers tenderly wrangling their calves, young bulls play-fighting, and old matriarchs leading their herds are all breathtaking sights. Elephant tend to move in predictable patterns to water sources, making them easy to find. You’ll see them wallowing in the red mud of the Samburu National Park in Kenya, wading through Botswana’s watery wonderland, congregating on both banks of the Zambezi River, and digging for water in Namibia’s deserts. Botswana’s Chobe National Park boasts the highest concentration of elephant in Africa while Maputo Elephant Sanctuary in Mozambique claims to have the continent’s biggest tuskers.

If you are truly passionate about pachyderms, we can arrange for you to visit Elephant Watch in Kenya, where decades of research have been done by Save the Elephants’ founder Iain Douglas Hamilton. Or, spend an afternoon at the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust in Nairobi, where you can sponsor and meet an orphaned elephant and its keepers.
CHEETAH

Often referred to as the sports cars of the animal world, these cats are really more like drag racers: cheetah reach incredible speeds of up to 120 kph (or 75 mph), but only over short distances. Because of their immense acceleration but poor stamina, their survival depends on having room to run. You’ll find cheetah year-round in the open plains and broad savannahs of the Masai Mara, the Serengeti, the dry areas of Botswana’s Okavango Delta and the flat salt pans of Etosha National Park. As with most game, cheetah are easiest to spot in the dry season, when their low, prowling forms aren’t hidden by tall grass.

Cheetah cubs. © RUSSELL FRIEDMAN
THE WILDEBEEST MIGRATION

You may not believe it just by looking at them, but the wildebeest is actually a kind of antelope. It’s best known for its truly epic annual migration, where literally millions of wildebeest travel in search of better food and water resources. The sight of this spectacular pilgrimage is one of the world’s wonders and is a must-see for newbies and veteran Africa travelers alike. The ideal time to visit is between January and March in the southern Serengeti for the calving season, then again between July and October in the northern Serengeti and the Masai Mara for their return journey. Of course, big cats view the migration as a movable feast, making for some action-packed safari moments.

If you are a nature lover, you can’t miss this one. Call and speak to one of our wildebeest migration experts today for more details.
Sadly, rhino numbers have been decimated by poaching. There is no best time of year to see Africa’s surviving black and white rhino, as they neither migrate nor range far afield, but there are a few places left where you can view them. Among the best are Desert Rhino Camp in Namibia, Kenya’s Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, South Africa’s Sabi Sands Concession in the Kruger National Park, Tswalu in the South African Kalahari, The Ngorongoro Crater in Tanzania and Etosha National Park in Namibia.

As a bonus, if you’d like an inside look at the efforts being made to conserve rhino, we can arrange for you to spend the day with an anti-poaching patrol, or a few days tracking and tagging rhino. Just ask us how.
CAPE BUFFALO

Notoriously ill-tempered, Cape buffalo travel in herds trailing dust clouds in their wake. Whether seen from land or air, 1,000-strong herds of these enormous animals are an awesome sight. Uganda’s Kidepo Valley National Park has reported up to 4,000 buffalo gathering at certain times of year. Unfortunately, they’re often followed by vast numbers of tsetse flies, making game-viewing less than comfortable. Almost every safari area that we sell boasts healthy buffalo populations, but highlights come in the form of age-old enemies—buffalo and lion—facing off in the Okavango Delta, or grumpy old males wallowing in the waters of Uganda’s Kazinga Channel, with countless colorful oxpecker birds in tow.
Lions are synonymous with Africa, so it comes as no surprise that many visitors want to see these majestic beasts. The sad truth is that Africa’s lions are under threat and today, Namibia has the only growing lion population on the continent. The best place to see them year-round is in Africa’s most prominent game reserves. An additional plus to seeing them in these parks is that profits from tourism are channeled directly towards conservation programs that protect and preserve these animals for future generations. Your best bets for large numbers of lion are Kenya’s Masai Mara, Tanzania’s Serengeti, the Kruger National Park in South Africa and its surrounding private concessions, Zambia’s South Luangwa and Lower Zambezi national parks, Zimbabwe’s Hwange National Park, Namibia’s Etosha National Park, and Botswana’s Okavango Delta, Selinda and Linyanti Reserves.

Due to their decreasing numbers in many of these areas, the lions are known so well to the guides that they’ll probably be able to share their life stories with you!
Lioness and cubs share a tender moment. Etosha National Park, Namibia. © DANA ALLEN, WILDERNESS SAFARIS
To see the famous “Gorillas in the Mist,” you’ll need to head to the equatorial mountains of Uganda and Rwanda, where the majority of the world’s remaining 800 mountain gorillas roam. Happily, since these countries are equatorial, there are no weather extremes, so gorilla tracking can take place year-round. There are, however, times of year when more rain falls, making for muddier-than-usual walking conditions and more challenging photography. Call or email us for more specific information.

The mountain gorillas are a brilliant conservation success story. Though their numbers are still few, around 800 individuals, they’ve been brought back from the brink of extinction thanks to eco-tourism, which supports their conservation. For a real behind-the-scenes peek at how gorillas are being studied and monitored, we can arrange for you to meet with the veterinarians who care for these wild animals.
Another fascinating species that is making a big comeback. Also called “painted dogs,” they may look like mutts from the pound, but their keen intelligence, superb hunting skills and complex social structure are all captivating. Their numbers have rebounded throughout Botswana’s Okavango Delta, Nxai Pans and Makgadikgadi Pans; in Kenya’s Samburu and Laikipia regions; in Zimbabwe’s Hwange National Park and in Zambia’s South Luangwa National Park.
SAFARI ETIQUETTE AND SAFETY

The first thing to remember while on safari is that you are not in a zoo. Animals roam freely; you are in their territory, not the other way around.
Before you begin your safari, all necessary safety precautions and procedures will be laid out for you. You’ll be getting up-close and personal with these animals—it’s part of what makes a safari so exciting!

Your guides are not only your eyes and ears, but your trusted friends, ensuring safe passage. They have been around big game for years or decades, and are intimately familiar with animal behavior. It’s their job to find the beasts and keep you out of harm’s way, and yours is to listen closely and follow directions.

On game drives you will be asked to remain seated at all times. Keep your arms and legs inside the vehicle; seeing limbs pop out of the car can alarm animals—and your fellow safari-goers. Don’t worry: your guide is an expert at maneuvering the safari vehicle to provide you with not only the best view, but also the best photo opportunity. It’s fine to talk—in fact, your guide will do lots of talking, pointing out birds, animal tracks and wildlife—but being loud can scare off the game you’ve traveled so far to see.

These special, customized 4x4 vehicles might have electronics chargers and even a mini-fridge, but roads are usually unpaved, so going off-road can get bumpy. Hang on (and don’t put your expensive camera gear on the seat next to you without holding it tight), and do tell your guide if you have a bad back or neck, as sitting in the front might be a better option.

Always stay in the vehicle, unless authorized to leave by your guide. He or she will let you out for sundowner drinks, at safe safari hides; will hop out with you to look at animal tracks; or will make comfort stops at your request. Other than that, though, the thin metal walls of your vehicle are your best protection. It doesn’t matter how awesome your close-up photo of that lioness will look on Facebook, don’t jump out of the vehicle!

**IF YOU ARE TRAVELING ON FOOT**

You may be close to elephants, lions, buffalos and other animals, but it’s critical that you stay close to the group and do as your guide instructs. Your guide will keep you downwind of big game as unfamiliar smells might upset wildlife (even your best eau de toilette!), and the key is to watch without disturbing them. Always wear boots and socks and keep your eyes open.

Your guide will have a rifle on a walking safari, but he or she doesn’t want to use it. **Exploring Africa on foot** is a breathtaking experience, and we want it to be memorable for the right reasons.

Never swim in lakes or rivers without your guide’s permission. Crocs are tough to spot and hippos are very dangerous. They’re territorial in the extreme and are likely to “overreact” whenever they feel threatened.

**WHEN IN CAMP**

Don’t bring food into your tent. Baboons, vervets and other monkeys love nothing more than a reason to steal your stuff, and they won’t stop at food. Sunglasses and even cameras are fair game and make great toys!

After dark, you will be escorted to and from dinner. And, if you head out for the day before first light, someone will come to your room or tent to get you. Most camps and lodges are unfenced, and bumping into a grumpy buffalo in the pitch dark is less fun than you might think. Keep your tent zipped up and your door closed, both when you go out and when you are in for the night.

Theft (other than by monkeys) is very rare on safari but it does occasionally happen. There may be a safe or a lockable trunk in your room. If not, you can ask the safari camp manager to secure your valuables, such as money and passport, in their office. Don’t wear the family jewels and follow the same common-sense guidelines about jewelry and cash as you would anywhere else in the world.
An African safari can be a life-changing and eye-opening experience. Both first time safari-goers and repeat clients often ask how they can give back to the wildlife and people they visit. At Aardvark Safaris, close to 100% of the safari camps and lodges we work with are involved with programs to benefit local communities—including schools, conservation education, tree-planting initiatives, HIV/AIDS prevention, burn clinics, women’s micro-finance projects and textile workshops. Many safari camps lease their land from local tribes—people who derive significant financial benefit from the arrangement and, in turn, are encouraged to continue to preserve the wildlife that you travel so far to see.

You are already making a huge contribution just by going to Africa. Conservation fees are included in every safari to help with the cost of protecting both habitat and animals. If you want to do more, however, we have some ideas.
IDEAS TO GIVE BACK ON SAFARI

- **PACK FOR PURPOSE WORKS WITH MANY OF THE SAME SAFARI PROPERTIES THAT WE RECOMMEND.** Through their website, you can easily find out what the needs are in the local community and bring along some vitally important supplies. For example, using only five pounds of your luggage space, you can bring 400 pencils or a stethoscope, a blood pressure cuff and 500 Band-Aids.

- **CLIMB FOR A CAUSE.** Aardvark consultant Victoria Langmead raised several thousand dollars climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro to benefit a trachoma eye care clinic run by the Samburu Trust in Kenya.

- **CONSIDER VOLUNTOURISM.** You can bring your expertise and skills to Africa by working in a school, medical facility or skills program, even for a short time. Even children can do it.

- **TAKE ON A CYCLE CHALLENGE.** Aardvark owner John Spence raced Kenya’s 10 to 4 Mountain Bike Challenge a few years back. Starting 10,000 feet up on the northern slopes of Mount Kenya, he cycled some 40 miles down rough tracks to Il Ngwesi at 4,000 feet. Funds raised supported teachers’ salaries at the Koiyaki Guiding School.

- **DONATE LIVESTOCK.** Heifer International can purchase a cow or goat on your behalf and give it to a needy family who will benefit daily from the milk.

- **MAKE TIME TO VISIT A LOCAL COMMUNITY PROJECT.** Chances are you’ll find a way to get involved from home. Tracy Stevens, one of our safari experts, visited the Bwindi Community Hospital and is sourcing medical equipment to send out to the hospital.

- **IF YOU ARE PART OF A SERVICE ORGANIZATION, RALLY YOUR FELLOW MEMBERS TO AID YOUR CAUSE.** Your passion will be contagious and, together, you can amplify fundraising efforts.

- **SPONSOR AN ENDANGERED SPECIES.** You can also add a few days to your itinerary with a dedicated conservation safari, like Kwandwe’s Rhino Safari, from which 100 percent of the proceeds goes to species conservation.

- **SPONSOR A CHILD.** Education is often free in Africa, but school uniforms and supplies aren’t. With only meager resources, families often have to choose which of their children to send to school. You can make an enormous difference by providing funds.

- **ASK US HOW YOU CAN HELP.** A school in England rounded up a few hundred unwanted bras and we shipped them off to Zambia’s Project Luangwa on their behalf. Read more here. Or, ask us to ensure that we include a cultural element in your trip, so you can visit some community projects or schools to see which ones you might want to support.

We know you have the best intentions, but here are some things NOT to do:

- Don’t bring candy to distribute to school kids or in villages. Many of these children have no access to dental care, or even a toothbrush.
- Don’t give cash. It’s tempting, but you have no way of tracking its use.
- If you are bringing supplies—like a wall map, soccer balls or school supplies—don’t give them to particular kids. Your generous gifts should go to the teacher or headmaster/headmistress who can distribute them appropriately among the children.
- Don’t despair. You may not be able to end poverty on your own, but all great movements are made up of individual actions.
The ultimate in barefoot luxury at Benguerra Island.

&BEYOND
TOP TIPS BEFORE YOU GO

❄ KEEP AN OPEN MIND. You’ll probably have ideas about the animals and places you want to see, and safari activities you’d like to do. However, a specialist operator may surprise you with a suggestion you haven’t considered. Trust the advice—they’ll often conjure up something unusual but perfect.

❄ CONSIDER TRAVELING IN THE LOW SEASON. Africa is a huge continent and has different seasons in different areas. There’s almost always somewhere with great wildlife and good weather. Lower season months can be great times to visit, and might only be classified as lower season because they’re outside the major travel times for people based in the northern hemisphere. Even when the rains do come, they’re not necessarily all day and can produce many great reasons to visit: clean air for photographers, animals giving birth to young, lush landscapes, dramatic skies and much lower prices.

❄ QUESTION THE CHEAPEST OPTION. A safari is often a once-in-a-lifetime experience so avoid cutting corners. Lower prices generally come with more people per vehicle, long drives between camps rather than flights and bigger camps or lodges that are incongruous in their surroundings. It can also mean less flexibility with regard to what you do, fewer things included up front (and then appearing on your bill later as extras), and guides who spend their whole time angling for a tip. A good tour operator will advise you how to make your budget stretch as far as possible. Remember, too, that apart from tips and a little curio shopping, you won’t need to spend money while you are away.

❄ BE SURE TO INCLUDE TIME TO RELAX. Some itineraries are an exhausting whirlwind that try to show you everything in a week. The downside is that you’ll have little time to soak up your experience. In all likelihood you rush enough at home so avoid doing that on safari. Stay a bit longer in each place—three nights is great, four is even better—and you’ll really get under the skin of a place. You may even find the guides do something really special with you that they can’t if you are only there for a couple of nights.

❄ AFRICA IS MORE THAN JUST ITS ANIMALS. There’s the culture, scenery, smells and sounds, all of which make a safari such a different vacation. Yes, you should book a safari to see the wildlife, but if your tour operator suggests a diversion from pure game viewing, give it serious thought. You’ll be pleasantly surprised by the experience that awaits you.

❄ TRY A TENTED CAMP. Unlike the tents you may be used to, these tents have proper beds, fine linen and en-suite bathrooms. For many, the experience of being cocooned in canvas and listening to the sounds of the bush at night is without equal.
TIPS WHEN YOU GO

❖ PACK SENSIBLY. Luggage allowances are generally limited and most top end camps offer a free and fast laundry service. Follow the rule of “one set on, one set off and one in the wash.” Take comfortable clothes, too: a safari is pretty informal, and not a fashion parade. You may need long trousers for evenings and bush walks, plus a light rain jacket or hoodie for early morning game activities. Avoid bright colors and white if you are walking (natural colors help you blend in). Also, avoid the full “Great White Hunter” safari outfit—you’ll just look silly!

❖ PUT THE CAMERA DOWN. Of course you want to capture your safari on film, but remember to stop and look around occasionally to enjoy the scenery. It’s well worth getting good advice about what camera equipment to take to ensure you get the results you want. A point and shoot isn’t always the best option for wildlife photography. It’s possible to hire a bigger camera and lenses if this might be the only time you’ll use them. Also, be sure to check with your guide to find out when it’s appropriate to take photos, particularly on a walking safari.

❖ DRINK WATER AND WEAR A HAT. It’s hot in the middle of the day in Africa. Arm yourself with a hat and sunscreen—and drink plenty of water. The wildlife takes cover in the shade during the hottest hours and so should you.

❖ TELL YOUR GUIDE WHAT YOU’D LIKE TO SEE. If it’s your first safari and you’re keen to see a particular animal, let your guide know. If you’re a safari veteran tell your guide what you’ve done before.

❖ ASK AARDVARK SAFARIS. We’ve many decades of experience between us. As well as being experts in planning vacations in Africa, we’re also friendly and approachable. We make planning a great vacation to Africa easy. We tailor everything to meet your wishes, and it costs no more than putting the trip together yourselves. Give us a call, chat with us on Live Chat, or ping us an email. We think you’ll be as delighted as all of the clients who travel regularly with us and recommend us to their friends.

Malachite kingfisher, Jacana Camp, Botswana.
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If you’ve read this far, you know that planning a safari takes time and expertise. Figuring out which safari is the right type for you—where and when to go, how to stay safe, what to see, how to get around—and making the most of your time and money can be daunting. That’s where we come in, and our clients think we’re pretty good at what we do. Read their testimonials for yourself.

Working with people who have met the guides, stayed in the camps and lodges, and seen the wildlife is a huge help. At Aardvark Safaris, our consultants will craft a trip for you based on your wish list, putting our decades of Africa travel to good use. We’ll only recommend places that we’re passionate about and you’ll never pay a cent more for your safari camps, lodges and hotels than you would if you booked direct. We even have a guarantee to that effect.

We promise to listen closely, to provide hassle-free planning, ensure honest pricing and bring your safari dreams to life.

CONTACT US TO BEGIN YOUR ADVENTURE.