

What you need to know before choosing a safari

Do you want to be amazed by a leopard dragging its prey high into a tree? Elephants crossing the road in front of you? Listen at night to the faraway sound of Hippo's or the roar of a lion in the bush? See a meerkat stand watch for an eagle or penguins scampering up the beach? Do you want to experience the Great Migration in the Serengeti and Masai Mara, or the almost as great migration in Northern Zambia? A safari in Africa has got to be part of most African dreams. But what do you need to know about a safari before choosing your African dream holiday, and how does it work once there?

Where to go for the best safari experience

This is probably the most asked question about a safari. You'll have seen the documentaries on tv about the Great Migration, the Mountain Gorillas in the mist, elephants crossing rivers full of hippo's or meerkats coming out of their burrows in the early morning sun. So, is there a perfect place to go on safari where you will see all? Well, no, actually there isn't. Each experience has its own place. Let us explain.

The Mountain Gorillas live only on the slopes of the volcanoes that form the border between Rwanda and Uganda. The Great Migration takes place between Tanzania and Kenya on the famous savannah's that are home to the largest number of wildlife in Africa. Though the overall numbers are larger, the number of species you'll see is limited compared to Southern Africa. Southern Africa has more different species than East Africa – on land, in the air or even the water – don't forget penguins and whales. Then there are the lesser known, unique experiences. The greatest migration on earth is not in the Serengeti but takes place in Zambia and is the migration of millions of bats. The largest animals are whales which give birth in the waters along the coast of South Africa, Mozambique and Madagascar. Elephants cross the rivers in the Okavango Delta and Chobe river in Botswana; the delta is also home to the richest birdlife in Africa. Zambia is perfect for walking safari's and for seeing leopards. Namibia probably has the most specialised animals: the desert elephants, desert giraffes and desert lions live in dry places where you wouldn't expect them and the oryx can do without water at all. If you want to be involved in hands-on conservation, South Africa has some of the best experiences. Finally, Madagascar is a completely different world again – almost all plants and animals are endemic to this unique island and you won't find any of the usual African animals here.

As you can see, there is no 'best' place to go on safari. There are many different places that all offer a different experience. Where to go depends on what you want to see, your budget and time. You need a professional that will happily advise you based on your personal preferences.



How you go on safari matters

Whether you go looking for the Big Five (rhino, elephant, lion, leopard and buffalo), the Small Five (elephant shrew, buffalo weaver, leopard tortoise, lion ant and rhino beetle) or even the Big Six (adding whales), a safari is bound to be unforgettable. But it's not so much **where**, but **how** you go on a safari that determines your experience. You don't want to stand in a traffic jam to see a group of lions – and that does happen!



To make sure your experience is indeed unforgettable, Tales from Africa Travel often takes you to private reserves outside the main parks or private concessions within a National Park. This is crucial information what you need to know before choosing a safari. Why?

- This way you avoid the large accommodations, large number of visitors and large number of vehicles at a lion sighting.
- In the private game reserves, your game drives are in open vehicles, conducted by professional rangers who know where to go and what to look for, with just a couple of vehicles at each sighting. You'll also go on night-drives to encounter nocturnal animals – and the big cats hunt mostly at night too. You can even go on a guided walk for a completely new wildlife experience.
- If you want a more immersive experience, a walking safari, cycling safari or a horse-riding safari is a unique way of encountering wildlife. Always guided by an expert guide who knows what the animals will do and will keep you absolutely safe.
- There is also the option to join a conservation experience, in which you will help track rhino's, count animals, check photo-traps and even can help dart and check your own rhino.
- Sleep in small sized accommodations, in tented camps or in chalets, to give you the real luxury of a true bush experience. Sometimes you even get a shower without a roof – showering under the African night sky is a memory to be treasured!



What a day on safari looks like

What you also need to know before choosing a safari is how it works when you're there: the better you are prepared, the more you'll enjoy your experience. The best safaris follow the rhythm of the bush. In a private lodge or camp, you are woken before sunrise – usually with a cup of tea or coffee and some rusks. At dawn you go out in an open game viewing vehicle or on foot, both under the guidance of an experienced ranger who'll tell you about big and small animals and birds you see. With the rising temperatures most animals go in hiding, so you return mid-morning for a late breakfast. Mid-day is spent at the pool or, if the reserve has its own waterhole, you can spot wildlife coming for a drink. When the temperature starts to go down, the animals become active again. So, after lunch and sometimes even a high tea, at 3 or 4 o'clock you go out on your second game drive looking for wild animals. When going out with the vehicle of the reserve, very often you end the day with sundowners in the bush. The African sunsets are often very spectacular! Sometimes the game drive turns into a night drive with spotlights for spotting the nocturnal animals or big cats on the hunt.

If you go self-driving, follow the same routine! The differences are that you are not allowed to walk without a guide or to get out of your vehicle except at designated, clearly indicated picnic spots with toilets. Also, you have to be back in your camp before sunset. Spotting your own game is very exciting – and difficult!

In either case, you return for a late dinner and strong stories at the bar or around the camp fire. Later, in your bed, sleep will come quickly. Or you'll lie awake with the sound of the bush all around you – hippo's harrumphing, hyena's laughing or lions roaring... Memories of a lifetime...

