

The Big Five

Many first-time safarists go to Africa with the intention to see the Big Five—lion, elephant, rhinoceros, leopard and buffalo. First coined by hunters to denote the five “most dangerous animals,” the term “Big Five” is today mostly used for promotional purposes. Claiming to have The Big Five is considered to be a plus.

However, the animal responsible for the most human deaths per year is missing from the list. While no one would contest the ferocity of any of these animals when cornered or wounded, the hippopotamus is strangely absent, considering that it is responsible for more human deaths every year than any of the Big Five. By the way, the deaths caused by hippos are usually without malice or forethought. Cold comfort to the next of kin of those unfortunate humans who were summarily snapped in half by these tubby tuba-mouthed vegetarians because they were mistakenly perceived as a threat. (In very rare cases hippos have resorted to eating left-over meat when going short on veggies).

Keep in mind that some of Africa’s best safari destinations do not have all of the Big Five and that there are many hundreds of other animal and bird species to see.

Travelers who are obsessed with the idea of seeing the Big Five on their first trip are best advised to spend the extra money and opt for a private game reserve where expert rangers can track the animals into the bush instead of waiting for them to come to the road. In their follow-up journeys these visitors will, like other seasoned safarists, begin to understand that seeing the Big Five is only one dimension of a multi-faceted experience. Beyond the thrill of the Big Five is a whole universe of animals, large and small, that makes for equally fascinating viewing.

Our chart on the next page indicates where you are most likely to find the Big Five. No guarantees, of course. These are not zoos and animals roam freely over vast terrain. Note also that in areas where you might miss one or more of the so-called Big Five there is much else to observe and enjoy.



ODDS OF ENCOUNTERING THE BIG FIVE



BOTSWANA

Okavango Delta	●	●	►	►	○ ○ ¹
Moremi	●	●	●	●	○ ○
Chobe	►	●	►	●	○ ○
Central Kalahari	○	○	○	●	○ ○

KENYA

Amboseli	●	●	○	○	○ ○
Masai Mara	●	●	●	●	○ ►
Meru/Samburu	►	►	○	►	○ ○
Tsavo	●	●	►	●	○ ○

MALAWI

Liwonde	○	●	○	○	○ ○
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NAMIBIA

Etosha	○	●	○	●	○ ►
East Caprivi	►	●	►	►	○ ○
Skeleton Coast	○	○	○	○	○ ○

SOUTH AFRICA

Kruger NP	●	●	○	●	► ○
KNP Private	●	►	●	●	► ○
Hluhluwe	●	●	○	►	● ►
Phinda	●	●	●	►	● ►

TANZANIA

Ngorongoro	●	●	○	●	○ ►
Serengeti	●	●	●	●	► ►
Selous	●	●	●	●	○ ○
Katavi	●	●	○	●	○ ○
Ruaha	●	●	○	►	○ ○

UGANDA

Murchison Falls	►	►	○	○	○ ○
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ZAMBIA

Kafue	►	►	○	►	○ ○
South Luangwa	●	●	●	●	○ ○

ZIMBABWE

Hwange	●	●	►	►	○ ○
Matusadona	●	●	○	►	○ ○
Mana Pools	●	●	►	►	○ ○

Excellent ● Good ► Reasonable ○ Extint or N/A ○