

## On Safari

You have arrived at your destination. Regardless of how you got there—whether by road, by boat or by air—you find yourself in a world free of stress. Everyone around you is relaxed and ready to allow nature to take over their existence. Suddenly all those issues that seemed so important in the civilized world that you left behind, are gone. Your only focus is on seeking out Africa's magnificent animals, to take pictures, to read about wildlife, to eat good food and relax. At night you snuggle into bed and fall asleep engulfed by a chorus of animal sounds that are a lot fiercer than the crickets at home. You are on safari.

Your routine will be roughly the same regardless of whether you opted for deluxe treatment or decided to go with a less expensive option in a national park under the guidance of a tour operator or on your own. Game viewing is best in the early morning and late afternoon.

## A Typical Day

To talk about a “typical day” in the African wild is not only misleading. It is tantamount to talking about a typical person with typical behavior. In the final count it is all about the animals. No one can predict what you will see and what they might be doing and how it might affect you. Every day brings its own surprises. Just listen to the stories exchanged over drinks and dinner back at the lodge or base camp and you realize how varied the experiences can be on a single day.



*Refreshment break*



*Lion sighting at Duba Plains, Botswana  
Picture: Les de Villiers*

There is, however, a common schedule determined not by humans but by the animals kingdom. Regardless of whether you opted for a private game lodge where an expert game ranger guides you or a self-drive safari in a national park, the best time to view animals is from sunrise until mid-morning and again from late afternoon until sunset. The animal kingdom goes into a siesta during the midday heat. In private game reserves the afternoon drive continues into the dark in search of nocturnal creatures—something usually not allowed in national parks.

At most lodges and camps the daily program is set accordingly. While there might be some

difference in the type of vehicle and the standard of the facilities provided back at the lodge, depending on what you are willing to pay, the safari experience remains basically the same. It should be noted that in some, but not all, national parks off-road driving is not allowed regardless of whether you use the services of a ranger or self-drive. In some, however, concessions leased to private operators within these parks allow for off-roading.

### **Private camps**

Expect a knock on your door at anywhere between 5.30 or 6.30 in the morning. The wake-up



*Flatboat viewing, Okavango Delta*



*Makoros on the water canals*



*Canoeing at Mana Pools, Zimbabwe*

*Picture: Mike Myers*

## *The Ultimate Safari Guide*

call comes with coffee or tea and *beskuit* or rusks. A half hour later you find yourself in a comfortable open four-wheel-drive vehicle. Regardless of the season you will start off with an extra layer of clothes as early mornings and evenings can be quite brisk on the African plains and in the bushveld.

Plenty of blankets and ponchos are provided for those who need extra protection. Sometimes hot water bottles are placed between the blankets by ever thoughtful hosts. For those who go to the exotic islands on the Zambezi, Kariba, Kwando and other water destinations where viewing is done from open boats the same extra layers are needed in the early morning and evening.

### **Viewing mode**

In South Africa's private reserves the ranger in the driver seat of the open vehicle is accompanied

by a tracker who sits on a high seat in front of the hood. He will move back when there are lions, leopards or other predators close by or when the vehicle encounters needle-sharp thorn bushes in the off-road search for animals. (In most other countries the ranger or field guide goes solo). Rangers stay in radio communication with their colleagues to share information about important and interesting sightings. The rule at private game reserves is not to have more than two vehicles at a sighting at any given time. In some areas animal viewing could be from waterways in small boats or makoros. Camps may also offer their clients walking safaris and fly camping as an option. Gorilla viewing in Rwanda and Uganda and chimpanzee visits in Tanzania obviously require walking as their habitat in dense rain forests along the mountain slopes hardly allows for any mode of transport.

### **Coffee break**

At about 9 in the morning there is a coffee break. Passengers will only be allowed to disembark



*Bush breakfast, Singita, South Africa*



*Relaxing in a plunge pool at Lion Sands, South Africa*



*Midday walk at Elephant Plains, South Africa*

after the ranger and his tracker have thoroughly scouted the surrounding area. Guests have the opportunity to stretch their legs or answer the call of nature—within earshot, but hopefully out of sight—and to indulge in refreshments that include coffee, tea and fruit juices together with an array of snacks, *beskuit* and *biltong* (African jerky).

### Breakfast

At around 11 in the morning the journey ends back at the lodge where a hearty breakfast awaits. Barely two hours later an *a la carte* lunch is in the offing. Some lodges have fitness rooms and provide massages for those who wish to stay in shape. Most have swimming pools and some include private plunge pools to their array of luxuries. Nature walks under the watchful eye of a ranger are offered. Those who opt to stay out of the searing midday sun have ample reading material and soft beds begging if they need to make up for the early morning rise.

### Afternoon drive

Late afternoon the game drive resumes. The animals have had their siesta and are now active again. The air has turned cooler and the extra layers of clothing that were taken off are needed backed up with ponchos and blankets provided by the every thoughtful guides.

### Sundowners

This time the game drive leads to a sundowner replete with dressed-up makeshift tables and fine crystal, wine and delectable snacks. It is time to discuss all the unusual sightings of the day. On a clear day the African sun slowly descends like a fiery ball. Some ascribe it to the dust in the air, others simply take it for granted as African magic, but no one will

ever forget the experience. On the way back to the camp the tracker shines his spotlight in the trees and on the ground in search of nocturnal creatures. It is a furtive sweep as great care is taken not to temporarily blind animals and make them more vulnerable and defenseless against lurking predators.

### Dinner time

Back at the lodge there is time to freshen up before going to dinner, either indoors or in the *boma*—an open air space where tables are arranged around a campfire. Local tribal folk may visit to give a performance and there is the opportunity to exchange stories and compare notes with the other guests. Turning in at night is an eerie experience for those who thought that the sound of crickets is having communion with nature. The laughing of hyenas, the hoarse barking of baboons, the grunting of hippos and ultimately, the roar of a lion, are sounds that will remain with you for as long as you live and make you come back to Africa for more.

### Self-Drive Experience

If you self-drive you will not have the services of someone searching out animals on your behalf and giving you a wealth of information or the luxury of going off-road to get up close enough to make a 300 mm lens seem almost superfluous. If you signed up with operators offering day trips be aware that your driver/guide might not necessarily be a qualified wildlife expert either. You will rely on the animals to come towards or cross the road as you slowly cruise through the park. There are, however, rest areas overlooking waterholes where animals congregate in numbers. However, back at your base camp you will also most likely discover a camaraderie among the guests.

