

Am I safe on safari?

“Don’t you put your guests in danger by having them sit in an open vehicle so close to the lions?”

This question pops up nowadays when I display a picture of guests in an open vehicle close to lions on an African safari.

The short answer is: “Definitely not. You are under the guidance of an expert ranger who will not put you in danger. The lions see the vehicle as an object and have no interest as they feed on prey in the wild.”

But since the widely publicized recent tragic death of a young American woman who was dragged from her vehicle in a lion park near Johannesburg the short answer no longer suffices.

Not surprisingly, as they did with the Ebola scare a few months ago, the media excelled in misinformation by presenting her as someone who went on an African safari in a game park or reserve. Nothing could be further from the truth.

This attack happened at a small fenced-in lion breeding enclosure near Johannesburg, tantamount to a drive-through zoo. It is not the first time attacks

occurred in a lion park. This is why there are clear signs all over these parks warning visitors not to open their windows. Unfortunately, this young woman did not heed those warnings.

Recently a lioness actually opened the door of a vehicle resulting in a video that went viral on YouTube.

On the other hand, you never hear of lions attacking open safari vehicles in bona fide game parks or reserves. Why is that?

Lions raised, kept and fed in confined enclosures lose their natural fear of humans and learn to associate them with food.

In the wild in real game reserves, lions do not depend on us for food. They hunt and we, as long as we do not approach them on foot or stand up in the vehicles, are mere observers.

Many game drives are conducted every day across Africa without incident in open safari vehicles in real game reserves spanning across thousands of square miles, involving numerous close encounters with wild lions and other predators.

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Below are pictures that I took in Tanzania's Serengeti National Park from an open vehicle as a lioness jumped from her lookout post in a tree a few yards from us. She continued to track down her prey with us in pursuit at a reasonable distance not to interfere with the action.

Scenes like this are common in safari country and no one gets hurt or killed except the prey that did not get away. In the case of lions seventy percent of their targets actually escape.

This is what a real safari is about. Allowing nature to play out without any interference from *Homo sapiens*.

Let's not have the media confuse an African safari in a reserve spanning over thousands of square miles in wild country with a drive through a suburban enclosure less than a thousand acres.

Take it from me. When you go on a real African safari the most dangerous part of your journey will be the traffic on the highway from your home to the airport.

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