

The  AFRICA AWAY

Safari Companion



The Essential Guide to Accompany You on Safari

By Dr Henry Southworth

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Introduction

Surprisingly, nobody previously seems to have produced a really authoritative guide to going on safari - how to plan an African safari, how to prepare beforehand, what to expect whilst out on safari, and so on. At AfricaAway we have always issued our guests with a brief guide to many of the important factors that need to be considered here. However we've come to realise that many visitors to this magical continent would welcome having much more background information to take with them on safari, including a guide to the various animal and plant species that may be encountered.



To meet this need, AfricaAway's CEO, Dr Henry Southworth, has prepared this extended safari guide, both as a website, and an associated downloadable PDF, to be made freely available to all, whether or not they are actually travelling on safari with AfricaAway. It is written in a highly individual style, largely based on Henry's own personal experience, containing a variety of 'True Tales', and 'Old Guide's Tips', one or two of which you may wish to take with the traditional 'pinch of salt'.

Principally this safari guide is aimed at the first time visitor, and contains many things that you might otherwise never end up learning about, but which could make the all the difference between a good and a great African safari.

Have a wonderful trip!

Henry Southworth

Dr Henry Southworth

How **NOT** to Chose
an African Safari.

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AfricaAway

AfricaAway is a specialist African safari tour operator, dedicated to offering its guests the very best experience possible, wherever they choose to visit in Africa.

We pride ourselves in offering the widest possible range of camps and lodges, enabling us to be able to tailor your visit to virtually any budget.

Even though we focus principally on Zambia as our destination of choice, we can also offer travel to a wide range of other African countries, including Kenya, Tanzania and Botswana.



Although possessing detailed experience gained over many years of most sub-Saharan holiday destinations, we believe that Zambia, above all, offers the very best safari experience in virtually every aspect - cost, quality of accommodation, quality of game viewing and guiding, range of activities - including walking safaris and night drives - together with, of course, the opportunity to visit one of the seven wonders of the natural world - the awesome Victoria Falls.



Victoria Falls from the air.

We are not alone in rating Zambia above all other African countries - time and time again safari enthusiasts, with experience of Kenya, South Africa or wherever, report back to us that now they have

discovered Zambia they will never go anywhere else again. Truly Zambia can lay claim to being "The Real Africa".

But having said this, we can offer you almost equally intriguing experiences in a wide range of other African destinations - the decision and choice is yours. Whatever you choose you can rely on our friendly and personal - and, above all, highly professional - service in designing what for many people is 'the experience of a lifetime'. Ideally we prefer to focus on offering you destinations and itineraries that we have developed or tried out for ourselves, and therefore *know* will work for you.

How We Operate

Unlike many other Africa tour operators and agents, AfricaAway is an independent, privately-owned company, with no vested interest in working with any particular lodge or camp. Hence we are free to construct your safari itinerary in a totally objective and impartial manner, choosing only those destinations and activities that we believe will best suit your personal aspirations.

However our individual approach goes further than this. Most African tour operators will wax equally enthusiastic about every country, every game

reserve, and every camp or lodge, taking the view that if the client says that he wants to go there then they will oblige. Thus, for example, if a client wants to visit Kenya's Maasai Mara, at the height of the tourist season, then they will happily send him there, even though they know that it can actually be quite a dire and overcrowded experience. Again, visiting Victoria Falls in the dry season will be a huge disappointment, with little water actually falling! But most tour operators will simply accede to your wishes if you say that this is what you want to do.



Game viewing in Kenya's Maasai Mara in high season.

We can't work like this, I'm afraid. For many people an African Safari is an expensive, once-in-a-lifetime event, and we are committed to ensuring that you get the very best on-safari experience possible. If we can see that what you are planning just isn't going to work all that well, then we will tell you so. There may well be a way of rescuing the situation, for example by using our expertise to choose an earlier or later time of year, a slightly different area to visit, or even just a more suitable camp. Once we know exactly what you hope to gain from your safari experience we may instead suggest a totally different country to visit, one that may give you a much richer experience. Thus the key to how we operate is that, by talking directly with you (usually by telephone), we can

assess exactly what kind of itinerary will suit you best, to create the trip of a lifetime.

Again, most of the accommodation that you will be offered elsewhere will be in the medium to high-priced regime. However it is possible to find accommodation costing perhaps only 25% of this, yet offering 85% of the value. Most tour operators prefer not to enter this market (or indeed are unaware of it), since the commission that they earn is so much less. However at AfricaAway we prefer to offer the widest possible range of safari experiences, and if we are able to open this experience up to guests who would otherwise not be able to afford it, then we believe that we have come out ahead after all. Of course there is also a lot of low priced accommodation that is poor, and we have had to distinguish between the two the hard way, but it was worth it! Indeed we have discovered just a few gems that offer *more* than the high-priced luxury lodges, despite their very much lower price.

Incidentally, many of our guests these days choose to finish off their safari with a few days relaxing in an idyllic Indian Ocean Beach destination - a surprisingly cheap add-on. In this instance you can choose between the Kenyan and Tanzanian coasts, or, better still, visit the spice island of Zanzibar, just off the Tanzanian mainland. Needless to say, honeymoons, based on this very formula, are one of our particular specialities!

For more information on AfricaAway itself, visit www.AfricaAway.com.

For your financial protection, we are financially bonded both through our membership of the Travel Trust Association (Membership number R1236) and as a result of our ATOL Bonding (Licence No T7147).



Before You Go

Although this safari guide is written principally as a detailed 'Safari Companion' - an invaluable resource to accompany you on your trip - there is much to be thought about and considered before you even start to plan your trip in detail, in addition to such further matters as medical precautions, what to pack, and so on.



A basic rule is that the more you know before you go, the more you will get out of your visit. In addition to learning what wildlife might be expected, and the different varieties to be found in the particular region that you choose to visit, you will enrich your visit by also learning something about the local cultures – especially if you then go on to experience this, by means of a visit to a local village.

The contents of this section are:

- Planning Your Safari
- Getting Booked
- Medical Concerns
- What To Take
- What To Wear

Planning Your Safari

If you haven't yet chosen your safari, then our free download - *How NOT To Choose An African Safari* - also written by Henry Southworth - could well be the most useful document that you will ever consult.

The word 'safari' originates in Swahili, meaning a journey or expedition. It probably first gained currency in the outside world when it was used by the legendary novelist and traveller, Ernest Hemingway, and thence became mostly associated with the concept of the 'Great White Hunter'. Nowadays the safari experience has become available to all, although the word itself has become devolved in use to merely describing the basic 'game viewing' activity.

AfricaAway, in contrast, firmly believes that the opportunity to visit Africa enables a journey involving the human soul – from the atavistic pleasure of observing wild animals in a true wilderness habitat, through the opportunity to at least fleetingly experience how a vastly different people live out their near-subsistence existence, to a clearer understanding of our own place in creation.

What is the magic of Africa? For many people, one visit is sufficient to hook them on coming back to this complex and wonderful continent, time after time. In part we believe that in some way the visitor recognises that he is revisiting his very roots, Africa being generally acknowledged as the cradle of mankind. Then George Monbiot has attributed it to our desire "to seek an antidote to a surfeit of civilisation". He sees Africa as providing a society that is both much simpler – and more complex – than our own; in turn poorer, and much richer.

Enough of such romantic ideals! Let us first list the destinations that you might choose. The principal tourist destinations in Africa can be divided into three categories:

- **East and Central Africa:** Kenya and Tanzania; Malawi and Uganda.
- **Southern Africa:** Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
- **Indian Ocean:** Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, The Seychelles, Zanzibar. Although not true safari destinations as such, these destinations offer stunning, sparkling turquoise waters and the powdery white sand beaches that can be found nowhere else. They are the perfect ending for your safari, or as a destination in their own right.



Then you need to decide exactly what it is that you yourself want to do during your visit. And there are just so many factors to consider here. Firstly you need to consider exactly why you want to visit Africa – is it its wildlife, culture, history, landscapes, activities, beaches, or a combination of some of these? The variety of experiences to be found on the vast African continent is immense. If this is your first such visit then you certainly need to seek specialist advice. However you will save yourself (and them) an awful lot of time if you can begin by asking yourself the following series of questions:

● How long do I have to spend in Africa?

Obviously budgetary considerations will influence the answer to this question to a large extent. Outside these if you only have the time for a short trip then you should focus on a destination that provides a lot to do within a fairly small area (for example Zambia’s Livingstone, providing you with the opportunity to visit the Victoria Falls, do some game viewing, enjoy river-based activities and so on), or one with good transportation links - long road transfers simply eat up time. A longer time can either enable you to choose to combine a number of different destinations (for

example game reserves of widely different character) or simply to enjoy your trip at a more leisurely pace.



● When can I go?

You may not have a lot of choice as to when you travel (especially if it is on your honeymoon!), but where you go and what you can do will be critically influenced by this - principally due to the prevailing weather conditions.

The climate in Africa is dominated by the transition between extremely hot dry seasons and one or more rainy seasons. It is usually cheaper to travel in the rainy season, and the absence of dust leads to better photography, but the game may be harder to spot due to higher undergrowth and the decreased need for it to congregate around a limited number of water sources. Some areas may be inaccessible at this time, and many camps - especially bush camps - may not be open then. Similarly, activities such as walking may not be possible.

During the dry season the temperatures can become uncomfortably high, although most activities are geared around this (the afternoon siesta being as popular in Africa as it is in the Mediterranean countries). The concentrations of game available to be viewed will also be critically dependent on season - the wildebeest migration perennially circling through Tanzania and Kenya being an excellent example of this. Many bird species, too, are highly migratory.

Africa is a vast continent, and the dry and rainy seasons don’t take place at the same time in all locations. Hence it is usually possible to select a particular type of weather by selecting the correct country to visit, whatever time of year you have to travel. However there will always be fixed attractions that just don’t work at certain times of year. For example, just after the rainy season – April to July – is the best time to see the Victoria Falls at their maximum splendour, although the best game viewing time in this area - September/October - coincides with very poor water flow here.

As a guide:

In East and Central Africa, the long rainy season takes place from early April through early June, with the short rains occurring from late November through December. It is often less expensive to travel during the long rainy season. July and August are generally extremely busy in East Africa, offering comfortable temperatures in addition to being a popular time for travel world-wide, so be sure to book well in advance.

In Southern Africa, the rainy season runs mainly from late November through mid-April in the safari regions; however if you are travelling to South Africa, the southern Cape is experiencing summer at that time and is a wonderful place to visit. The Cape area can be cold and rainy during their winter from June through August. Often high season rates for the safari regions go into effect in July so it is sometimes possible to save a bit of money by travelling prior to that - May and June can be delightful months to travel. Due to the smaller size of safari camps and lodges in southern Africa, it is necessary to book well in advance, particularly for travel from June through September.

In particular, Zambia's elevation on a plateau gives it a moderate climate, despite the fact that it is within tropical latitudes. There are three seasons, cool and dry from April to August, hot and dry from September to October and warm and wet from November to March. Only during the wet season is there noticeable humidity. In the river valleys of the Zambezi and Luangwa it only becomes very hot in the month of October

● What activities interest me the most?

For most people game viewing by vehicle will be the most important activity, but this term in itself is capable of different interpretations. For many it will mean 'big game', especially the big cats, but for others it may mean bird species. Vehicles differ, however, as does occupancy, and there is a world of difference between needing to fight for a window seat in a crowded, enclosed minibus, and relaxing two-across on the back of an open topped 4x4. Night drives are particularly exciting (especially after just having consumed the odd sun downer or two). With the aid of a powerful searchlight, a good 'spotter' and keen eyesight, a whole new world opens up to you.

Adrenaline-filled walking safaris probably provide the ultimate safari experience, but, like night drives, are not available everywhere. Here it is still possible to get up close to big game, in addition to being able

to appreciate the microcosm of experiences that the African bush provides – plants, trees, birds, insects, spoor and so on. Often your base will be a rustic bush camp, rather than luxury lodge, heightening the feeling of visiting such untamed places.

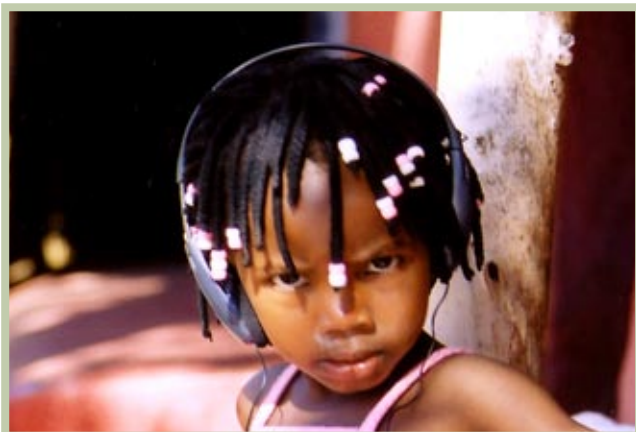


Other possible activities include elephant or camel back, or even horseback safaris, canoe safaris, ballooning and micro lighting. Although not generally termed safari activities, Africa offers a wide range of other opportunities, including mountain climbing (e.g. Kilimanjaro), rail journeys (especially in South Africa), Bungee jumping and white water rafting etc (at Victoria Falls), fishing (the tiger fish are awesome), golf (again, especially in South Africa), coastal activities, such as whale watching, shark cage diving, scuba diving & snorkelling and surfing. We have already mentioned the possibility of adding a few days in an idyllic beach location onto the end of your itinerary.



However at AfricaAway we firmly believe that the safari visitor who restricts himself to the somewhat artificial world of the custom-built 'safari lodge', and to specifically designated game reserves, is missing much of what Africa is all about. In particular he is likely to miss out on actually meeting the *people* of Africa - something that actually remains in the minds of most visitors who do accomplish this, long after the wildlife sightings have been forgotten. If asked, most camps can arrange for you to visit a local village,

and if you can combine this with time spent in the village school we guarantee that you will have an experience that is quite unforgettable.



Above all, though, don't try to do too much in any one visit. Africa moves at its own pace - and it's a gentle one - and your maximum enjoyment will come from adjusting to this pace, rather than dashing on from lodge to lodge, or from country to country.

Who am I travelling with?

Are you travelling alone, with your partner, with children or with friends? The answer to this question will critically affect the destinations, and types of accommodation that are suitable for you. Children, in particular, can be catered for - but not everywhere, although some lodges do actually offer special activities for children. Fitness levels will affect what you can do - walking safaris are not for everybody. Some people are more nervous than others - a walled hut may be preferable to tented accommodation in such cases.

If there are just two of you then you will generally have to share game viewing activities and the like with other people (although it is often possible to hire a private vehicle - at additional cost - if desired). If you are part of a large group then this may restrict the camps and lodges that you can stay in - some of the finest can only accommodate 6-8 guests at any one time.

Is this my first time in Africa, or am I seeking to 'push back the envelope' further?

Our concept of the ideal first time safari is based around the premise that most people will primarily want to secure good sightings of big game. For this reason we recommend 4-5 nights in one or more 'base camps' - lodges offering good facilities and excellent opportunities for game drives, by day and evening. Once this initial hunger for game viewing is satisfied, then it is time to think about other matters,

such as taking to your feet in the bush for the first time (accompanied by a guide and armed park ranger, of course), staying in a more rustic 'bush camp', and so on.

The 'Old Africa Hand' will already have formed his own opinion as to which aspects he wants to repeat - although few people tire of seeing big game - but may well be looking to experience something new on his next visit, such as learning tracking or advanced bush and survival skills. Thus, under the heading of 'Safaris With Attitude', AfricaAway has put together a wide variety of advanced itineraries that will take even the experienced traveller into new realms, and provide new encounters.



What is my budget?

We've put off discussing this particular question to the end, although in some ways it is of course the most important one of all - and an African safari is never going to be a particularly cheap option. Firstly we should warn you that most accommodation, internal flights and so on, is priced in US Dollars, and hence radical fluctuations in exchange rate can drastically affect the cost of travel if you are, for example, based in the Pound Sterling or Euro area of the world.

The factors determining cost (outside considerations such as international and internal flights, which will vary markedly according to the type of itinerary selected), depend mainly on the quality of the accommodation provided, the quality of game viewing in the area selected, whether or not it lies within a National Park or a (more expensive) private game reserve, its remoteness (influencing supply logistics), and of course the season.

Although the style of safari accommodation selected will affect the price that you pay to some extent, it will probably be much less so than it would be, for example, if comparing city centre 1-star to 5-star hotels. In the main, the luxury, air conditioned safari lodge is characteristic of South Africa, and can be

really quite expensive. More generally available are high-quality permanent tented camps or rustic lodges, which remain open for the whole of the year. Then there are bush camps, which are normally regarded as seasonal, being dismantled at the start of the rainy season, and rebuilt again once this is over. Bush camps can range in style from simple tented structures to more elaborate rustic lodge-type accommodation, but in most cases the emphasis is on small groups, living as close to nature as possible (although this doesn't necessarily exclude flushing toilets and hot showers).



Game viewing in Zambia.

As a very rough guide, in high season, expect to pay a minimum of \$500-700 per person per night sharing, in South Africa, around \$600 in Botswana, and around \$500 in Zambia (and since we regard Zambia as the safari destination par excellence, the one giving the best value for money is immediately obvious). These prices generally include all food and drink (drinks are sometimes priced separately), laundry, park fees, ground transfer, guiding and all game viewing activities. But nowhere are they *cheap!* Indeed at the top end you can easily expect to pay well in excess of \$1000 per person per night.

However, in Zambia in particular, AfricaAway has been able to considerably improve on this situation. Although few safari tour operators either know, or care to divulge, this, there is actually a complete range of prices obtainable, from around \$150 pppn upwards, and we recently extensively researched many of these cheaper places with the intention of being able to offer a much wider range of prices for the African safari. In the process we discovered some real gems, offering fabulous value for money (together with many that we wouldn't recommend), and we now believe that we can offer a range of safaris to suit every pocket, thereby opening up the safari market to a vastly larger range of participants.

● Conclusions

Zambia will always be AfricaAway's destination of choice - it combines the highest quality of accommodation with the highest standard of guiding (probably the most crucial factor of all!), the opportunity to undertake walking safaris and night drives - and all of this *can*, with care, be undertaken at really affordable prices.

Perhaps the ultimate piece of advice is not to err too far on the side of economy. An African safari *is*, for many people, the holiday of a lifetime, and, although it *is* also expensive, there is no point in wasting all this money on an experience that you will have cause to regret. A cheap package tour may result in your "driving many miles every day, over rough roads in non-game-viewing country, driving in convoy in a crowded minivan, with the companions from hell, accompanied by inferior quality guides, either staying in massively uncomfortable tented accommodation, or in huge barrack-like lodges".



Game viewing in Tanzania.

The ideal wild-life viewing experience does *not* involve seeing lots of other vehicles herding the bewildered game in all directions - a sight all too commonly encountered in such 'classic', albeit vastly overcrowded, destinations as Kenya's Maasai Mara, where the wildlife is so accustomed to the presence of vehicles that the experience is little more exciting than driving through, for example, the West Midlands Safari Park.

We hope that you will choose AfricaAway to plan your African adventure for you, but whoever you choose to travel with - and there are many other excellent tour operators - we hope that it is an experience that will live for ever in your memory - and that this Safari Guide will have enhanced this experience for you.

True Stories Number One: Perceptions

On hearing that one of our guests was to visit Zambia on safari, a friend of his warned that he would need to be careful. Seeking further illumination, the guest enquired in what way exactly. "Well, because of snakes and things", came the answer. The guest opined that there were somewhat more dangerous things than that to worry about. "Such as?" enquired his friend. The guest thought about buffalo, hippo, elephants, and so on, but finally settled on lions. "What, do they allow them in there?" exclaimed his friend.

Getting Booked

One of the most effective uses for the internet has become the booking of holidays on-line. Many people routinely now book a holiday villa, car hire and a cheap flight, putting together a package for themselves that previously they would have gone to a tour operator for to put together as a whole.

Don't be tempted to do this in Africa. If you know exactly where you want to stay, you could of course book directly with the individual lodges, but this still leaves you with the complex problem of arranging internal flights (which, within Africa is much more of an art than a science!), ground transport connections and so on.

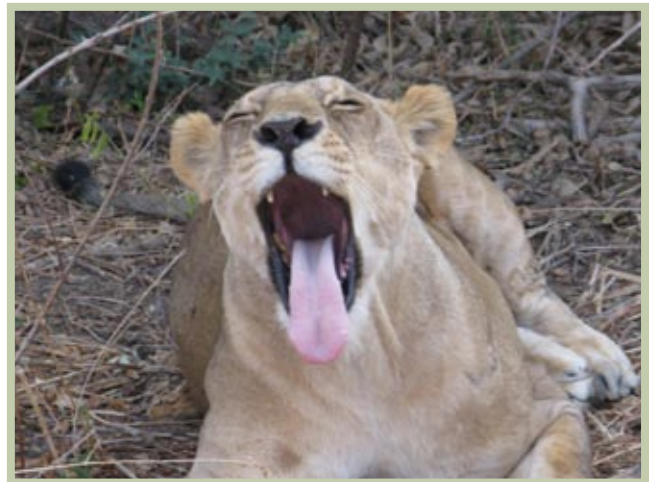
Even if you feel that you do not need any advice about choosing where to go and where to stay, you should still pay exactly the same by booking through a reputable tour operator, with the additional - and absolutely invaluable - bonus of being protected by the tour operator's financial bonding arrangements, something that individual African lodges rarely, if ever, provide. The tour operator should then put together all the connecting parts at no extra cost to ensure a seamless trip. Be warned, though: some tour operators do impose a mark-up on the individual lodge prices (often hiding this within an overall 'package' price), so do insist on being provided with a detailed cost breakdown that you can then cross-check against individual lodge website prices, where available.

Flights

The exception to the above advice may be your international return flight out to Africa itself. This is very easily booked on the internet, and current

security arrangements often require that the credit card used to book belongs to one of the people actually travelling. We generally suggest that guests take care of this aspect for themselves, once their African itinerary is fully confirmed.

One aspect that you may benefit from advice on arises when you require an 'open-jawed' ticket, whereby you fly out and back using the same airline, but - perhaps because you are visiting more than one country - your arrival airport in Africa is not the same as your departure airport. For example, you might fly out from London Heathrow by British Airways direct to Lusaka, for a safari in Zambia, but then end up with a few days' beach holiday on the Kenyan coast, necessitating a return (BA) flight from Nairobi. If booked in one go the cost is similar to that of a simple out and back journey, but if you try to book the two legs separately (or using two different airlines) then the cost would be massively increased.



This part is really boring.

If you are doing something like this then do take your tour operator's advice on connecting flights within Africa - the standard flight websites often aren't geared to dealing with internal flights within Africa itself. For example we recently searched on a very popular flight website for flights between Lusaka and Nairobi, only to be given a Lusaka-London, followed by London-Nairobi, routing - not exactly what we were after! Such connecting flights, though, are very difficult to arrange - even between different countries' capital cities (it's all to do with governments' desire to protect their national airline's routings).

One useful tip for your international flight is to book the best seat, especially if your outbound flight is an overnight one. By choosing a seat on the left-hand side of the aircraft (when facing forwards - i.e. seats A & B) you will most probably be able to view a most beautiful African sunrise on your left hand (easterly) side, an hour or so before landing - an excellent start to your holiday.

Passports and Visas

Before you leave do check when your passport expires. Some countries will allow you to stay there up until the very last day of your passport's validity. Others demand that there is still at least 6 month's remaining on your date of entry. For up-to-date information you can consult the UK Foreign Office website – www.fco.gov.uk – following links through 'travel advice' for the relevant country, to 'entry requirements', although airline staff whose job it is to determine whether your documents are in order, normally rely instead on the International Air Transport Association website – www.iatatravelcentre.com.

Most African countries require incoming visitors to obtain a visa, although the requirements may vary according to your nationality. Your tour operator should, of course, advise you as to the requirement here, but it doesn't do any harm to confirm this for yourself by visiting the relevant African country embassy website. This will also inform you as to what immunisations you must have, for example a yellow fever certificate is required by some countries, but not by others.

True Stories Number Two: Yellow Fever Inoculation

Just for your amusement, and as an introduction to the relaxed attitude that can operate in Africa: I recently visited Zambia (which does not require a yellow fever certificate), followed by Tanzania (which does), and somewhat carelessly had omitted to bring my certificate with me. Surprisingly, I was told that I couldn't depart Zambia for Tanzania unless I had such a certificate (needless to say, on arrival in Tanzania itself nobody was the slightest bit interested in checking on this). Accordingly I was sent to the airport's first aid department to be vaccinated on the spot.

On grumbling that this wasn't really necessary since I was in fact already covered (and not looking forward to what is not one of the pleasantest of vaccinations), the nurse said "That's OK then", and proceeded to issue a certificate stating that I had been vaccinated (several years previously) - "20 dollars please" - which was then quite happily accepted by the airline departure desk! That's Africa for you!

You can obtain your actual entry visa by applying to the relevant country's embassy in your own country

prior to travel, but most people choose instead to simply pay for a visa on arrival, which is a much simpler process, although you may have to queue for a while to achieve this. The cost should be exactly the same. Again, you should confirm all this with your tour operator first.

Visas may be single entry type, or multiple entry, which you will need if you are, for example, visiting another country in the middle of your trip. A classic example of this - which you might not think of - is if you are visiting Livingstone, in Zambia, but nip across the border into Zimbabwe for a few hours, to view the Victoria Falls from the Zimbabwean side.



Really, really boring.

Making Payment

Although the tour operator who you book through should have some form of financial bonding in place, a further level of protection is provided by paying by means of a credit card. You don't have to pay the full amount in this way (there may be a surcharge for payment by credit card), but, for example in the UK, under Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act 1974, you will be protected for the full amount involved (up to a limit of £30,000), even if you only pay the deposit required in this way (so long as the total amount exceeds £100). If anything goes wrong you can apply to your credit card supplier for redress.

A recent ruling has confirmed that such protection applies even for payments made to an overseas supplier. What is rarely realised is that you may even get a similar level of protection if you use a Visa debit card instead, although this is not covered in law as above. However most bank staff are unaware of this provision (known as the 'chargeback' scheme), and indeed it has only just been established, after stiff resistance, that Section 75 credit card claims themselves do apply to overseas suppliers, and therefore it might be best not to rely on this.

Insurance

Many people get 'travel cover insurance' free along with their credit card or bank account. However this may only give you very restricted 'travel accident cover', which may not, for example cover routine illness, or an accident that occurs whilst not actually travelling on public transport that was paid for using the card concerned. You should read your card's terms and conditions very carefully, and remember that, as in most things, 'you get what you pay for'.

The benefit of having peace of mind whilst travelling in somewhere like Africa is well worth the cost of obtaining a proper comprehensive travel cover policy. Your tour operator may (and should) insist on being provided with evidence that you are fully covered by insurance.

Extras

Usually all of your accommodation costs will have been prepaid as part of your booking, but you need to be aware that in some cases certain items – such as park fees, laundry costs and bar bills – are *not* covered. Ideally your tour operator will have made this clear to you, in which case it's a good idea to make a note of these particular locations. In some cases you won't have been warned. The cost isn't a big deal, in terms of the overall cost of your trip, but it can still cause a lot of grief when people end up being charged for items that they hadn't anticipated.

At AfricaAway, in addition to only ever charging each supplier's public rate (which can usually be confirmed by checking the relevant lodge website), we itemise every single item of cost and hence it is immediately obvious what is included in any particular instance. However some operators go to the other extreme, quoting a single overall package price, which (in addition to sometimes hiding some sneaky mark-ups), can obscure whether there are still some 'extras' to cover.



Medical Concerns

In this age of instant litigation if anything goes wrong, the last thing that we are going to do is to give you detailed advice on medical precautions, immunisations, vaccinations and so on.

What you must do is to visit your own doctor in plenty of time before you travel (some vaccinations need to be applied in several doses over an extended period of time), and ask him what medical precautions you need to take, for the countries that you are intending to visit.

Your doctor will then look up what is required - usually on a constantly updated website - and arrange the treatment that is required. This said, you might find the following observations to be useful.

Yellow Fever

Yellow fever is spread by mosquito bites. It is uncommon in tourist areas but can cause serious, often fatal, illness so most people visiting risk areas should be immunised. Indeed, as we saw above, some countries make it an entry requirement to have a valid immunisation certificate, and since this requirement may suddenly be introduced if there is an outbreak elsewhere, it is probably a good idea to have this anyway.

Hepatitis A

Transmission of Hepatitis A virus can occur through direct person-to-person contact; through exposure to contaminated water, ice, or shellfish harvested in contaminated water; or from fruits, vegetables, or other foods that are eaten uncooked and that were contaminated during harvesting or subsequent handling.

Hepatitis B

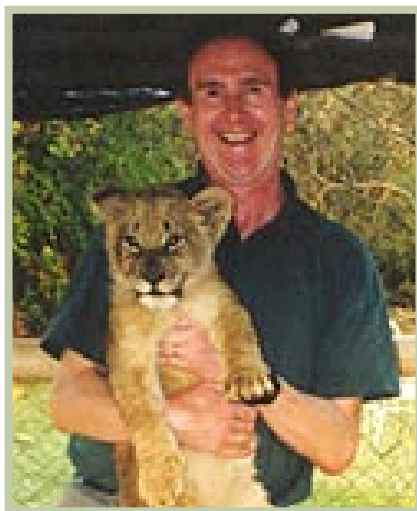
You can become at risk from Hepatitis B if you are exposed to blood or body fluids, for example if you have sexual contact with the local population, but you can also be at risk as a result of emergency medical or dental treatment if infected blood or instruments are used.

Typhoid

Typhoid fever can be caught through contaminated drinking water or food, or by eating food or drinking beverages that have been handled by a person who is infected. Large outbreaks are most often related to faecal contamination of water supplies or foods sold by street vendors.

Rabies

Since rabies is a potentially deadly disease, found throughout most of the world, you are well advised to be vaccinated against this – especially if you are prone to making friends with every stray pussy who crosses your path, as I am. The accompanying picture shows the author with such a pussy cat – which promptly bit me immediately after this photo was taken. You can see from the expression on its face that this was already very much in its mind!



Meningitis

Meningitis is inflammation of the protective membranes covering the brain and spinal cord, and can have either viral or bacteriological origins. Epidemics do periodically occur in sub-Saharan Africa, and hence protection is advised.

Tetanus

Tetanus is found all over the world, so it's a good idea to make sure that your tetanus jabs are kept up to date.

Polio

A one-time booster used to be recommended for any adult travellers who completed the childhood series but never had polio vaccine as an adult, although you are more likely now to be offered a combined tetanus, polio and diphtheria vaccine.

Cholera

Cholera is mainly a product of poor sanitation, but can be guarded against by prior vaccination if your doctor so recommends. However this vaccination is not regarded as all that effective by some medical authorities.

Malaria

Malaria is not strictly a matter of immunisation or vaccination, but rather of prophylaxis, or preventative measures. Sub-Saharan Africa is a high risk area for Malaria, spread by bites from infected mosquitoes. All visitors to this region should adopt the following two-stage process.

Firstly try to reduce the chances of being bitten, by covering up with clothing such as long sleeves and long trousers especially after sunset, using insect repellents on exposed skin and, when necessary, sleeping under a mosquito net. Mosquito nets and room sprays will be provided, where needed, by your hosts. Insect repellents should ideally contain a minimum of 50% DEET, and should be applied to all exposed skin – always on top of sun screen.

Secondly, take the anti-malarial medication prescribed by your doctor, remembering to start the treatment the appropriate number of days before you travel, in addition to continuing it for the correct period of time after you return.

Although, as already stated, we cannot recommend any particular treatment, let me just make the following remarks regarding anti-malaria treatments. I myself always take Malarone: it isn't cheap (costing about £2.50 per day), is prescription-only, and can have side effects with some people (as can all medications), but it works for me.



The principal alternatives are Mefloquine (Lariam), which, again, is prescription-only, and which, quite frankly I wouldn't even go near, since it can have appalling psychological side effects, which can sometimes be fatal; Doxycycline, again prescription-only, and which can cause adverse reactions in the presence of sunlight (of which there is quite a bit in Africa); Chloroquine and Proguanil (or in combination), which are non-prescription, but which may also be less effective, as resistance to these drugs has built up over several years' usage. Which is best for you may depend on which countries you are visiting, and other factors, such as pregnancy etc. It's up to you (or rather your medical practitioner!).

However none of these treatments can be regarded as 100% effective, which is why the avoidance of bites, as discussed above, is crucial. Incidentally, it is claimed that you are more likely to be a target for mosquitoes if you consume bananas!

The initial symptoms of malaria can be quite mild, and easy to confuse with flu. If you are in any doubt, contact your medical professional immediately, and tell them that you have recently returned from a malaria-risk zone.

● Tsetse Fly Bites

A relation to the horse-fly, but ten times more vicious, the tsetse fly is both a nuisance and a benefit to safari travellers. The bite itself can be extremely painful, and can sometimes result in huge swollen red areas on the legs and arms (the reaction found varies greatly between individuals, and even from occasion to occasion). However the tsetse fly also gives rise to sleeping sickness in cattle (although not usually in human beings, at least not the variety found in Zambia) and hence keeps the best game viewing areas free from human encroachment. However in some areas there may be areas of intense tsetse fly activity to be traversed into and out of camp.

These little nasties can inflict highly painful bites even through clothing, socks etc, and I personally have no hang-ups about looking quite silly swathed from head to foot in a plastic raincoat, with close fitting hood, during applicable parts of the journey.



Some camps proudly exhibit 'tsetse fly traps' around their boundaries (shown here). These consist of a jar containing something sickly sweet that is irresistible to tsetse flies, contained within a blue canvas structure (for some reason, the colour blue attracts tsetses). This is designed to trap all such visitors. Being of an enquiring mind I once asked to examine one of these traps more closely. Guess how many tsetse flies were trapped in it? Thousands? Hundreds? The answer is 'not one'!



If you are bitten there are a number of possible treatments. Applying, for example a hot mug of tea, to the bite can give immediate relief: the increased blood flow will wash the poison away from the site more quickly, in addition to breaking down the anti-clotting agent that such bites often contain. Another treatment is to apply a 'zapper' – a piezo-electric device that, when triggered against the skin, produces a short electrical shock to the site, which can also give rapid relief. We were told recently that a mixture of 50% Dettol/50% water is an excellent repellent – although only if you want to smell like a hospital ward! However none of these treatments work all the time, or with all people.

● Bilharzia

We don't want to delve too deeply into the myriad other tropical diseases that you might encounter, but bilharzia (or schistosomiasis) is worth mentioning. Quite nasty, although curable, this disease can be picked up from small infected snails whilst bathing in *fresh water* lakes and streams. Unfortunately this includes the otherwise idyllic Lake Malawi – in theory a strong rival to the Indian Ocean resorts, such as Zanzibar), although it is possible to find resorts here that are claimed to be bilharzia-free.

● DVT (Deep Vein Thrombosis)

DVT is the formation of potentially dangerous blood clots, usually in the veins of the legs, caused by inactivity. This may be accentuated during a long-haul flight, where the combination of low cabin air pressure, stress, fatty food, caffeine and alcohol can result in a significant increase in blood coagulation, making DVT that more likely. It is claimed that one in ten to one in thirty long-haul passengers may be at risk from this condition – which may not make its effects evident until several days, weeks or even months, following your flight.

Advice given for avoiding this condition includes wearing loose-fitting clothes, drinking plenty of fluids,

although avoiding alcohol, tea and coffee, which all have a diuretic effect, and – most of all – performing physical stretching exercises, both whilst seated, and on walking around the cabin. For example, whilst seated, you can try repeating the following exercises (5-10 times each):

- a) hold the arm-rests, whilst slowly lifting your knees simultaneously, holding for a few seconds
- b) hold one knee and bring it up towards your chest, holding it there for 15 seconds, repeating with the other knee
- c) contract your thighs and perform a sitting ‘march on the spot’
- d) lift foot, point toes outward and rotate foot in a circular motion, repeating with the other foot
- e) with heels on the floor, lift toes upwards as far as possible, holding for 30 seconds
- g) with the balls of your feet on the floor, lift up your heels as high as possible, again holding for 30 seconds.



This giraffe won't get DVT!

In the past taking aspirin has been recommended – for its blood-thinning properties – but current medical opinion is that it is of no value in avoiding *veinous* blood clotting, and it can also cause stomach irritation or even gastric bleeding in susceptible people. A natural alternative that is recommended is garlic (in the form of odour-free tablets!). Other recently introduced ‘natural’ products include Zinopin, which contains pine bark and ginger, and ‘Flite Tabs’, which are somewhat similar.

But do research these yourself first, for example on the internet, and, as always, get your doctor’s approval. It is also possible to buy specially designed compression stockings from most pharmacies, which may be particularly recommended for those with varicose veins.

● Jet Lag

Although the flight from Europe to sub-Saharan Africa can be a very long one, the difference in time zones is normally only an hour or two, and therefore jet lag as such is not a problem.

● Medication & First Aid Kits

If you are taking medication of your own, then, given the possibility of luggage going astray, it may be a good idea to carry it in your hand luggage (provided it meets current anti-terrorist regulations!) or split it between hand and hold luggage, if its use is important to you. You might also like to take a small first-aid kit with you as well – obtainable from large pharmacies. Useful contents include plasters, bandages, tweezers, possibly a sterile needle kit. See also the ‘What To Take’ section.

● Pre-existing Medical Conditions

If you have any pre-existing medical conditions, you should certainly seek advice from your GP to discuss the suitability of your proposed trip. You must also tell your Travel Insurer about your condition: if you don’t and you become ill while you are away (even from something quite different), you run the risk of losing your cover. If necessary carry a copy of a letter from your doctor with you, together with details of any prescriptions. Finally, do ensure that you carry sufficient medication to cover any delays.

Further information on medical matters can be obtained by consulting the following websites:

<http://www.mdtravelhealth.com/destinations/africa/>

<http://www.which.co.uk/advice/holiday-health/index.jsp>

www.travelturtle.co.uk

www.malariahotspots.co.uk



What to Take

In the interest of simplicity, we have separated out 'What To Take', from 'What To Wear', but in relation to both categories it is important to remember that there is usually a pretty tight weight limit when flying internally within Africa. Between two different countries, or between major destinations within a single country, this is often 15 kg, but for flights by light aircraft landing onto bush strips it can be as low as 12 kgs.

Now, this really isn't very high, especially when it is realised that strictly this includes both hold and carry-on baggage. Hence the only official advice that we can give you is to *travel light!* Unofficially, all that we can do is to make the following personal observations.

Africa is a pretty laid back place, and it is rare for baggage weights to cause a problem in practice. Usually there is a, pretty reasonable surcharge per Kg (you aren't dealing with a UK low-cost airline here!), but the airlines do actually retain the right to refuse to take luggage that exceeds the weight limit. It should be readily understandable how this could actually be a significant safety hazard on small aircraft. At the same time, the smaller the airport that you leave from (and it doesn't get any smaller than a remote bush strip), the less likely it is that there will be a handsome set of scales facing you.

Old Guide's Tips Number One: Luggage Restrictions

What we do to play it safe is to actually wear, or carry in our pockets, the heaviest items, such as cameras or binoculars, whilst packing other heavy items, such as books or paperwork, into our hand luggage, so that at least the actual hold luggage is likely to meet the weight restriction.

Incidentally, this main bag should be made of a soft pliable material (e.g. a 'grip' bag, or holdall). This will enable it to be packed easily in the various modes of transport that will be utilised.

However, having said all this, we still have to recommend, and repeat, that you should travel as light as possible, bearing in mind that most lodges will do your laundry for you on a 24 hour return basis.

The list of items that you should put on your potential 'To Take' list can be classified as follows:

Hardware

Binoculars: I use a pair of 8x30 Optomax, inherited from my mother. They look old, but then so do I. These figures represent the power of magnification x the diameter (in mm) of the objective lens, i.e. its light gathering capacity. Too high a magnification can lead to image shake, while too large an objective lens, although increasing image brightness, also cuts down on your field of view (in addition to increasing the weight). Anything up to 10x40 would serve you well out on safari. Don't plan to share your binoculars with a fellow traveller though – it just doesn't work.

Camera: don't forget to include charger and spare batteries, spare memory card or film, lens cleaning cloth, manual etc. Although most guides would classify a camera as a necessity, I have to admit that for several years I rarely took photos. It seems to me that, especially with fast-moving wildlife, you have the choice between observing, and hence actually experiencing, what is on offer – or of recording it for posterity. In the latter instance you can become so involved in getting the shot that you never actually experience the viewing. Even now I largely use the camera as a sort of diary to remind me of what I saw, rather than as an end in itself in achieving memorable images (maybe I'm just a rotten photographer!).

Sunglasses: obviously the African sun can be quite intense, although, again, I have to confess to rarely actually using these. For me they get in the way of using the binoculars and camera. Just a tip: I managed to scratch the lens of one pair once, and a dentist friend accompanying me suggested that I polish out the scratch using toothpaste as a mild abrasive. It worked too!

Torch: you will certainly need at least a small torch for getting around in your tent, or in camp, at night; I use a small Maglite. Your camp hosts will possess huge torches capable of spotting all those dangerous predators at a huge distance at night, but these are far too heavy to take along with you. Don't forget to take spare batteries.

Notebook & Pen: I keep a regular diary of everything seen and done, with all game sightings recorded. In particular this helps in correlating with the pictures that you take ("now what kind of bird did the guide say that this was?"). It also helps you to relive what will be one of the experiences of a lifetime. Of course maybe it's just that my memory is failing me as age encroaches, and you may not need to do this.

Optional

Water Bottle: a good item of camping gear this, although on safari you will generally be supplied with bottled water, and hence probably don't really need to take one with you.

Alarm Clock: you might think that this is an essential, given the fact that your day will usually begin at around 5.00 a.m., although most lodges will lay on an alarm call as a standard feature (it's quite bizarre to be staying in tented accommodation, to be awoken by a soft, but insistent "Knock, Knock"). However you may have an early morning flight back at the end, and it would not be wise to rely entirely on a hotel's wake-up service.

Books and Maps: these only add to the weight, but keen birders might want to take a specialist birding book to amplify the information given in this guide. Although you might think that one of the classic Guides to the country that you are visiting might be useful, again these are usually really heavy, and, although useful to read through before you go, are a bit superfluous once you are out there.

Toiletries

Sun Screen (minimum rating '15'), possibly together with some Aftersun. Discard any sun screen that is over a year old.

Shaving Equipment, Deodorant, Toothbrush and Toothpaste, Shower Gel and Shampoo (in small amounts - these are often provided), Sponge and Blister / Foot Care, spare Toilet Roll.

Medical Items

These will include such as Travel sickness pills, Anti Malaria Medication, Insect Repellent, (containing a minimum of 50% DEET (diethyltoluamide) e.g. Mosquito Milk) [Mosquito nets and room sprays will usually be provided, where needed, by your hosts], Bite Relief Cream, Antihistamine Tablets, Eye Drops, particularly if you wear contact lenses (driving through the bush raises fine clouds of dust), Wet Wipes (useful if you've been out for a while, handling all sorts of things, and then come to a bush dinner or just a sundowner with nibbles, and need to clean your hands), Moisturiser, Paracetamol tablets.

It's also a good idea to take some Imodium, in case of diarrhoea. In fact there are two different – and opposing – views on how to treat this condition, but if you are due to take an unavoidable flight or road transfer, then the Imodium route is definitely

to be recommended. It is also possible to purchase anti-diarrhoea packs that contain both an Imodium equivalent and an antibiotic agent to help in curing the problem, but you probably ought to take prior medical advice here. In this context also take some Re-hydration Mixture Sachets. In particular do ensure that you keep well hydrated at all times.

Air travel, especially by light aircraft, can result in air sickness, especially among susceptible people. Hence it might be useful to take travel sickness medication with you as well. See also the 'Medical Concerns' section.

Other Items:

Spare cash for tips, airport taxes, souvenirs etc - generally US Dollars can be universally used, without your needing to obtain local currency. You might also like to take a money belt, and think about splitting up your cash between two or more different locations.

Leatherman (or Swiss Army Knife): I've lost count as to how many times I've found this to be an invaluable tool – with the pliers, scissors, bottle opener, screwdriver, file, saw and, of course, knife, coming to my rescue on many occasions. Essentially the Swiss Army knife is a penknife with a multitude of other instruments that fold out from its handle, including a somewhat poor pair of pliers, while a Leatherman is a good pair of pliers, with these other instruments again folding out from its handles. Do remember, though, not to pack these in your hand luggage during your flight!



Electrical adaptor: most places in Africa will take the standard UK 240 volt square cross-section three pin plugs (for charging batteries etc), or will supply suitable adaptors if not. However many camps may only provide charging facilities in one small central

location, or via just one socket in your hut, and I've found it very useful to take a lightweight multi-plug adaptor so that I can charge several items at once.

Ipod, or similar: it's a long flight out, and the in-flight entertainment may not be to your own personal taste.

Above all – take a sense of humour: things don't always go exactly to plan in Africa - there is a saying: AWA (Africa Wins Again), although this also means that they're pretty good at improvising if a problem does arise.

What to Wear

Most camps and lodges have a daily laundry service, so it is not necessary to bring too much clothing. Basically you need to aim for casual, comfortable, bush coloured safari outfits (i.e. green/brown/khaki, not cream/white/coloured). In fact khaki is the best, and most common, colour of all, not least because it is the same colour as the dust, which gets everywhere. Bright colours should certainly be avoided, especially blue, which attracts tsetse flies. Camouflage clothing is also not a good idea – what to you is a cool fashion statement may be seen by the local authorities as a militaristic threat!



Cool on Safari.

Even though this is Africa, it can actually be quite chilly at night, or early in the morning, especially when driving in an open-topped vehicle, and especially, too, if you are at a relatively high altitude, so do plan for this, by taking some sort of sweater or fleece, and allowing for the need to wear long trousers and long sleeves in the evening (useful also for minimising the danger of mosquito bites).

You've probably got some pre-conceived notion about adopting the classic 'big-game-hunter' safari outfit (Robert Redford in 'Out of Africa' for example). Although it's probably best to try to resist this cliché, the classic safari jacket itself is actually a very useful

item to wear, offering, as it does, a wide variety of pockets, both inside and outside, to carry items such as your sunglasses, sun cream, insect 'zapper', small water bottle, torch, notebook, camera etc – just try to remember where you put them all!

In particular, starting from the top downwards:

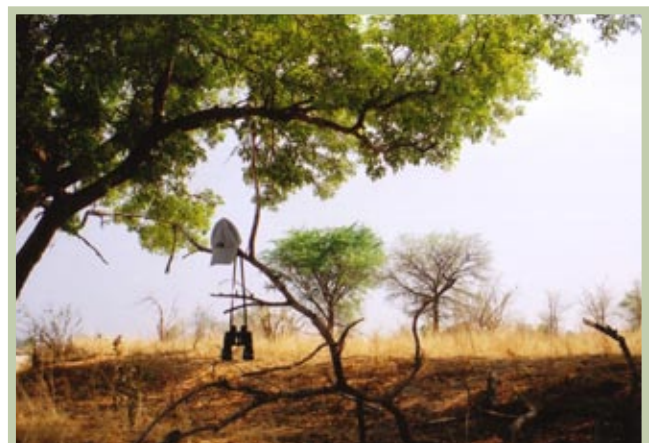
You will certainly need some sort of headgear to protect you from the sun. A (neutral coloured) baseball cap is perfectly adequate, or you might prefer to go for a classic wide-brimmed hat. But do make sure that it has a chin-strap, or it will almost certainly get blown off if you are in an open-topped vehicle going at any decent speed.

Then three sets of day wear - shorts/shirts (short sleeve or t-shirt), plus two sets of casual evening clothes (long trousers to reduce the risk of insect bites). Add four lots of underwear, a good sports bra (ladies!) and socks, nightwear and swimwear (many camps and lodges have swimming pools, which provide a glorious escape from the heat of the afternoon).

If your trip includes any kind of walking safari then you will need to take some hard wearing shoes. Heavy duty walking boots are not needed, however shoes with a thick sole are recommended. Otherwise trainers or other soft shoes are fine. You may also want some comfortable shoes – e.g. sandals or flip-flops – to wear while relaxing around the lodge, or for putting on if you need to get up in the middle of the night.

Finally, you might consider taking a lightweight foldable raincoat if travelling during the rainy months (although the lodge will probably provide ponchos for the actual game drives). As seen above it can also provide invaluable protection against tsetse flies!

When packing your clothes, roll them up where possible – this eliminates creasing, and takes up less room. Take a few plastic bags – for dirty clothes, muddy shoes and so on.



On Safari

There is quite a lot to cover in this 'On Safari' section. Just explaining the amazing selection of different activities that you will encounter is a huge task in its own right, together with other factors such as photographic and safety tips, what to expect from the most important person who you will encounter – your guide – and, finally, some of the more humorous aspects of being out in the African bush.



The contents of this section are:

- On Arrival
- A Typical Day On Safari
- Game Viewing
- Walking Safaris
- On Honeymoon?
- Safety On Safari
- Your Guide
- Responsible Tourism
- Safari Etiquette
- Photography
- Other Matters
- Safari Humour

On Arrival

We have already covered matters such as booking flights, obtaining visas (on arrival) and so on in our 'Getting Booked' section. It might be useful, however to just add a few more words on how to pay for items, such as souvenirs, tips and optional excursions, that aren't included in your pre-booked itinerary. Even where items are priced in the local currency you can usually pay in dollars (or sometimes Pound Sterling or Euros). However, outside big city hotels, the system usually just doesn't support travellers' cheques, credit cards and the like, and therefore you need to take cash. It is best to take brand-new dollar notes since the currency was changed in about 2000, from notes bearing 'small' heads to notes bearing 'large' heads, and only the latter are accepted. Although your need for such payments should be small it is better to take too much rather than too little, and at least dollars are readily convertible back into your own currency.

On arrival in your destination country you will probably have to fill in an immigration declaration form (these may be distributed towards the end of your flight out). If asked to state your address in the country concerned simply put the name of the first lodge that you are staying at.

On arrival at Immigration you will be able to obtain your entry visa, on payment of the appropriate charge (in US dollars). Caution: you should check that the period of the visa does cover that of your stay, or you could be faced with a hefty fine on your eventual departure from the country (in fact it isn't unknown for corrupt Arrivals officials (who double up as Departures officials as well) to deliberately make such a mistake in order to trap you). In some cases, and for a modest charge, a 'meet & greet' service can be arranged for you.

On arrival you will need to collect your baggage and, if flying on further, then take this to the domestic departure area. *Before* checking in here you may need to obtain a domestic departure tax receipt from the 'Passenger Service Charge' window, although these taxes are tending to become incorporated into the overall ticket cost these days. If you do need to pay this tax separately then you will probably need to show your passport and flight booking details. You can then take your baggage through the Domestic Departures scanner and then check these bags in at the departure desk (which often doubles up as the check-in), receiving back a boarding card. You are then usually free to leave the departure hall until near to your flight time (although there is often little to do). This procedure applies at most urban airports, although not of course at bush strips, where everything is much more informal.

Just a word of warning regarding internal flights within Africa. These are often organised by quite small airlines, whose procedures are laid back to say the least. Don't expect the rigorous formalities and check-in procedures that you are used to in the West. The main thing is to ensure right at the beginning that you are actually listed on their departure schedules (although this can be a somewhat grandiose term for what is only a hand-scribbled list), and then to keep a close watch on what is going on so that you don't miss your flight.

However, although it may all look a bit 'hit and miss', Africa is used to this way of getting things done, and everything eventually goes OK.

Often your plane will be anything from a 20-seater down to a 4-seater, which can be quite an experience if you've never flown in a light aircraft before. You might even be sited in the co-pilot's seat (on one such occasion early on in my travels to Africa I was mildly disconcerted to see the pilot alongside me disappear under the cockpit's dashboard (in flight!) wielding a pair of pliers and muttering profusely to himself). If you're wondering whether these planes crash often, the answer is 'No – only once'.



At your ultimate destination you will be met by a vehicle supplied by the lodge that you are staying at, although, again, it is worth double-checking that all is correct – we were once met by the wrong vehicle, and, despite asking several times whether we were destined for so-and-so safari camp, ended up being deposited at one in entirely the opposite direction (whether the people they were supposed to pick up ended up being taken to our camp, we don't know).

More and more camps are presenting guests with a waiver form to sign on arrival. It's up to you of course, but we always refuse to sign these. Apart from the fact that we feel that it is too late to actually require you to do this, without prior notice, too often, in addition to requiring you to acknowledge that there are certain dangers inherent to staying in a safari camp, the waiver also absolves the camp of all responsibility for personal harm – *even if due to their own failure*. We believe that this is unreasonable, and indeed illegal. You cannot be held to something, even if you have signed it, if it constitutes an unfair or unreasonable contract. This being the case, why sign in the first place? If you are courteous, but firm, they will back down. What are they going to do otherwise? Drive you back to the airport?

A Typical Day On Safari

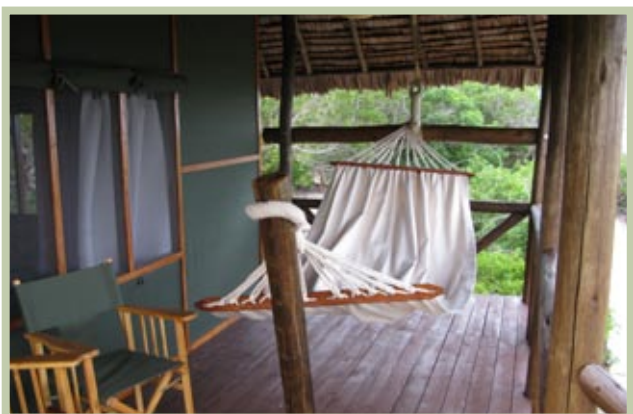
The first-time safari traveller finds it difficult to envisage what the experience involves. In fact there is actually no such thing as a typical day on safari – even if notionally similar, each day brings a different experience, usually surpassing anything that has been experienced already! It also depends on the type of activity chosen, for example game drive or bush walk, the time of year, habitat and so on. This is especially well illustrated by the account of one particular safari undertaken by an AfricaAway-led group in Zambia several years ago (see our 'Safari Diary' page in www.AfricaAway.com)

However if we can attempt to generalise, then the archetypal safari day starts with a wake up call at around 5.00 a.m. (dawn), to the sounds of birdsong



or hippos muttering to themselves. Although this may seem horrendously early, it is essential to head out early on your game drive, before it gets too hot and the animals retreat into the shade. However before you leave there is time for tea and toast around the camp fire. Don't worry about setting your alarm clock – most safari camps and lodges will give you a discreet wake-up call.

The day's activities are normally decided upon over dinner the previous evening. As the sun rises you will head out into the bush with your guide on a game drive or walk. A game drive normally lasts for around 3 to 4 hours. The time depends on what is encountered along the way. Around halfway through, you will usually stop, normally in a scenic location, for a cup of tea under the shade of a tree. Sometimes breakfast will be skipped, in favour of a delicious 'brunch in the bush' halfway through your morning activity. Late morning, as the bush begins to heat up, and wildlife activity begins to slow, you will return to camp for lunch.



After lunch, the afternoon is spent resting, simply because, due to the heat, wildlife activity is very limited. You may enjoy reading, catching up on your notes, taking a nap, or even taking a cooler of drinks to view the wildlife from a nearby hide (available at many lodges and camps).

Incidentally, you should not expect gourmet food whilst out on safari – in fact do take the opportunity some time to visit one of the camp's kitchens: you will be amazed at what can be produced using an oven that is basically just a hole in the ground. Having said this, after a day out in the bush on foot, you will probably declare that the meal you receive is amongst the best that you have ever tasted.

At around 3.30 p.m. the evening's activities start. Afternoon tea is served, usually with a light snack to keep you going until the evening meal. The game drive starts before sunset providing you with another opportunity to see more game in the daylight. As the sun begins to set, you will stop for most people's favourite safari activity, 'The Sun Downer'. This is when the game drives pause while you get out and have a drink while watching the always spectacular African sunset. Favourite drinks include a stiff gin and tonic or a locally produced beer.



Old Guide's Tips Number Two: The Bush Gin & Tonic

On one such trip, at sundowner time, we discovered – horror upon horrors – that, although the gin had been packed in the chill box, together with individual bottles of tonic, the glasses had not. So what's the solution? We simply used a bit of lateral thinking. You see we're all hung up on the idea that you pour out the gin into a glass, and then add the tonic, ice and lemon. What we did was to invent the 'bush gin & tonic', created by drinking a little bit of the tonic, and then topping up the (fortunately small) bottle with gin, and then adding the ice. A brief shake, and a squeeze of lemon, and the perfect accompaniment to another stunning sunset.

Once the sun has gone down and the stars have made their appearance, the game drive turns into a night drive. The scout who looks out for the animals, has an assistant who shines a powerful light from left to right looking for the reflection of the animal's eyes in the torch's light. The night drive brings the opportunity to see both purely nocturnal species and also those animals which are harder to spot in the daytime, in particular the elusive leopard.

True Stories Number Three: A Night Drive

One group of our guests were on a night game drive in a remote region of the Park, when their (open topped) vehicle suddenly lost all power. It eventually turned out that a battery lead had simply come loose, but they weren't actually able to lift the bonnet and explore the problem, since, at that moment, a large pride of lions chose to settle down in front, behind and alongside the vehicle, close enough to touch. Without power for the radio, a long and uncomfortable night loomed ahead, until an adroit guest, with an expensive camera, managed to jury-rig the camera's battery into the radio, by the aid of torch light, and help could be summoned.

After the night's game drive, the evening meal, enjoyed under the night sky, is normally a hive of activity, as guests excitedly compare the day's game sightings. Normally the evening meal is international in type, rather than authentic African. The local food is invariably based around what we would call 'polenta', i.e. a maize-based concoction, variously called Nshima or Ugali. This is extremely bland, and very much an acquired taste (which I haven't yet acquired), although the idea is to complement it with various spices. What I do enjoy – to most people's amazement – are 'mopane worms'. These are actually caterpillars, rather than worms, served fried, and with a distinctive flavour of fried cardboard.



True Stories Number Four: The 'Carpet Slipper' Safari

Once, at the dinner table, and after a few drinks, we heard the sound of irate elephant trumpeting in the dark in front of us, followed by a lion roaring (one of the most chilling night sounds in the bush). Our guide reckoned that the lion was probably located on the far side of a dry river bed about quarter of a mile in front of the camp, and suggested that we take a look.

So we all piled into the vehicle and roared off into the bush – minus cameras, binoculars etc. Two elephant were indeed encountered halfway to the river bank, and proved to be as irate as they had sounded earlier, but we just ignored their angry trumpeting and carried on.

Close to the river bank the lion could be seen crouching on the far side, and we encouraged the guide to drive forward as close as possible, despite his misgivings that we could become stuck in the loose sand along the river bank. We then promptly became stuck in the loose sand, and despite all efforts ended up completely embedded up to the axles.



There was then nothing for it but to walk back to our camp (which now looked about 5 km distant). We had just one small torch between us, and of course had left without the Park Scout (and his rifle). Fortunately the elephant had moved on by then, and we made it back without further incident.

I then confessed that my impromptu walk in the bush had been accomplished wearing only a pair of carpet slippers – not the ideal footwear if a quick dash through the bush had been required! From then on the trip became known as 'the carpet slipper safari', to the writer's acute embarrassment.

It is then time for bed at what would seem a ridiculously early hour, were it not for the fact that you will be up at 5.00 a.m. again the following morning to start another magical day in Africa. Warning: your sleep may be disturbed by the sound of lions roaring in the far distance (sometimes even in camp!).

True Stories Number Five: Elephant in Camp

One of my most interesting night-time experiences came in Chongwe River Camp, in Zambia's Lower Zambezi National Park. Our large walk-in safari tent had been erected just below a winterthorn tree, whose fruit is beloved of elephants. In the middle of the night a large bull decided to ram this tree hard in order to dislodge these. Hence I was abruptly woken to what sounded just like a barrel of gravel being thrown on top of the tented roof.

I soon realised what the cause was, since I could hear the elephant munching away, rumbling and belching, just outside the tent wall. I decided to unzip one of the 'window panels' to take a look at our visitor, shining my torch out through the mesh panel that was the only thing separating me from the elephant about two feet away. However I couldn't see anything at all, however much I swung the torch beam around. I then realised that I ought to be able to see something – grass, other trees, the night sky and so on. All that I could see was a grey wall, which, on angling the torch upwards at a considerable angle, I realised was the elephant itself.

Although reluctant to shine the torch directly into its face, I did manage to take a mental note of how far up the tree it reached (discovered the following day to be over 11 feet). My tent companion had also half woken up, needing to take a leak, and, remembering that when he had been in the bathroom on a similar quest during the previous afternoon, an elephant trunk had appeared over the (outside, open) bathroom wall, headed for the front flap of the tent with the intention of going outside instead. Not a good idea!

Note that some of the above activities - taking to your feet in the bush, indulging in a sundowner, and taking a night drive – are not available in all destinations, Kenya and Tanzania in particular. However Zambia – the original home of the walking safari – caters for all of these, making it very much our destination country of choice.

Game Viewing

Game viewing from a vehicle is the 'classic' safari experience, available at all safari destinations. However even here there are wide variations. In Zambia, for example, this will always take place in an open topped (sometimes there is a canvas sun canopy) 4x4 Toyota or Landrover vehicle. However in countries such as Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa it is more likely to take place in a windowed hard top 'minibus', sometimes with a raised sun roof. But believe us, there is nothing to compare with game viewing from an open vehicle, seeing a lioness walk alongside you, close enough to touch, with nothing but the open air between you.



Now, almost by definition, the game can be difficult to spot while out driving or walking (even very large objects such as elephant or giraffe), simply because they are naturally camouflaged. Often the sharpest-eyed member of the group (after the guide, of course, who can almost see around corners) will spot something that others can't – not because their eyesight isn't good enough, but simply because they haven't 'locked on' to the animal against its background. Once you do, you will wonder why you couldn't spot it before.

There are two ways in which the person who has spotted the animal can communicate its whereabouts to others. One is to declare with ever increasing exasperation 'there, there, under that tree'. The other is to use a description such as 'at three o'clock about 100 metres away to the left of a small green bush, just to the right of the two tall trees'. One of these methods is considerably more helpful than the other. Unfortunately the guides aren't always skilled in the latter sort of description.

You also need to be careful not to take your eyes off the game. You can be looking at an elephant quite close by (and they aren't exactly tiny), only to find that it has vanished after briefly looking away.

Old Guide's Tips Number Three: Photography

Most people will want to photograph what they see, but do be aware that every second spent taking your photograph is actually a second during which you are not really actually observing the animal itself.

The bush isn't like a zoo: too often you can find yourself trying to get the perfect photograph of an elusive animal such as a leopard, and then realise that you never actually saw what it was doing. Ideally one member of your party will be an enthusiastic and expert (and digital) photographer, leaving you to just drink in the spectacle.

In a following section we will discuss matters such as 'safari etiquette' (not as off putting as it sounds), but we should just mention here the necessity to keep your voices low during actual game viewing (your driver will normally come to halt and switch off the engine) – and in particular keep your mobile phone switched off! – in order not to scare the game away.

Old Guide's Tips Number Four: Let Africa Come To You

It is easy to become obsessed with taking every game drive opportunity available, so as not to miss anything, although quite often it is the vehicle travelling only half a minute behind you that gets the lion sighting – it's just pot luck as you racket around the landscape at speed. However sometimes the very best game viewing is obtained by simply sitting still in one place – in a hide or just in camp – letting Africa come to you at its own pace.

I very well recall being ill one day, and spending the entire day just sitting outside my hut, with a pair of binoculars, watching the African pageant unfold on the other side of the river, opposite to where I sat. Herd after herd of different antelope made their steady way down to the river to drink – led by one or two outriders, followed by the main herd, and then a few anxious stragglers, until, just before the evening, a leopard came down to drink – the entire day being a truly magical experience.

Walking Safaris

The walking safari is just about the ultimate African experience (or survivable one, at least), although, again, is only available in a restricted number of destinations. Often a walking safari will be undertaken from more remote, and rustic, bush camp, or even using mobile fly-tent camping, travelling from location to location. In principle you don't get quite as close to big game as you would in a vehicle (although in practice it can turn out to be just the opposite!), but you also get the opportunity to study things – such as insects, trees, droppings and spoor – that you normally never observe from a vehicle. You can't walk at night, of course, but secure in your rustic camp you will be very much aware that you are in the heart of the African bush and very close to its inhabitants.



The whole idea of the walking safari was first developed in Zambia in the 1950s, by the legendary Norman Carr, seen here with friends.

While out walking in the bush there are certain rules and procedures that should be obeyed. You will always be accompanied by an armed Park scout, who leads. Next in line is the guide, followed by the guests, the rear (usually) being brought up by the tea bearer (who also carries spare water). It is important to walk in line, close up, so that any predator only sees a very long animal that he doesn't recognise. Frequently the guide will halt the walk to point out something of interest, and you can then all gather around. For this reason, it is good – indeed essential – etiquette to alternate the order of walking periodically so that everybody gets the opportunity to be close to the guide, and can bring his attention to anything that they would like explained.

In the event of any potentially dangerous encounter it is the armed scout's responsibility to deal with the situation (in fact his major role is to make sure that the animal itself doesn't come to harm, rather than to blast away at it!). The guide's responsibility is to look after you (aided by the tea bearer behind you), so, as before, you need to obey him unquestioningly.

Old Guide's Tips Number Five: Body Language

One of the 'tricks of the trade' is to keep an eye on the body language of the armed scout who leads the group. If he is sauntering along with his rifle slung carelessly over one shoulder, then all is well. If he swings his gun into the ready position, then there is potential danger (if he chambers a round then you're really in for a 'moment'). There's quite a lot more to learn by studying the scout. It's obviously very important to approach animals from down wind, and you will often see the scout either kicking up a bit of dust, or letting some trickle through his fingers, in order to check on the current wind direction. He will also keep all of his senses open for unusual animal behaviour, such as antelope in an 'alert' posture, indicating the possible presence of a predator, informative sounds, unusual smells that could indicate the existence of, for example, buffalo, or of a kill nearby, and keep his eye on the sky, looking for vultures, for example, that could again indicate the presence of a kill. A word of warning here – once, on spotting a small number of vultures circling in this way, we approached to the locus of their interest, to discover over a hundred of these unlovely creatures feeding on a carcass. Then as one they rose into the air, flew in our direction, and crapped directly over us. Believe me, if you're going to get crapped all over, then vultures come very low on the desirability list!



True Stories Number Six: Lion Encounters

On one walking safari a party of American ladies had solemnly taken in the instructions as to what to do if a lion 'moment' occurred – don't run, walk slowly away, without turning your back. Soon after, on an early evening walk on the bank of a dry river bed, we came upon an elephant in a bad mood, and dropped down into the river bed itself to detour around it.

Then, on coming around a bend, we came across a magnificent male lion sunning himself on the opposite bank. The writer was transfixed by this magnificent sight, just a few metres away.

However the American ladies decided that enough was enough, and proved that they had carefully assimilated the advice given to them. The writer was then torn between continuing to watch the lion, or watch these ladies attempting to scramble up a 45 degree banking – backwards!

In fact it wasn't really a triumph of planning, since everybody was out of place. Strictly the scout should have led up the banking (back towards where the elephant spotted earlier might have been), but the ladies got ahead of him.

The guide should then have brought up the rear, which in practice he almost did, before realising that he needed to climb back down to forcibly collect the writer who was still admiring the lion (which at this point woke up, and quietly slipped away into the bush).

A much more dangerous moment, fully illustrating the need to put absolute trust in your guide was brought out to us recently, in Zambia's North Luangwa National Park, when we suddenly came upon a large pride of lions feeding on a freshly killed buffalo, down a slope just ahead of us (which is why we hadn't previously seen them).

The pride just went berserk, half of them boiling up the slope at us, with some of the females leading the cubs off to one side for safety, so they were obviously taking it all quite seriously. The scout simply confronted them, holding his rifle at the ready, keeping them down below, while the rest of us backed off shouting at the tops of our voices, until the scout rejoined us, smiling broadly: all in a day's work to him, but a moment of supreme fear – and joy – for me.

**Old Guide's Tips Number Six:
Dealing with Lions**

It is essential in situations such as the above not to run, since this triggers the predatory instinct in the lion. However an alternative strategy is to shout 'Run!!' very loudly, in the hope that at least one member of the party will lose his nerve and take off at speed, whereupon the rest of the group will be safe.

On Honeymoon?

More and more people are choosing to take their honeymoon on safari in Africa. Perhaps the ideal combination is to spend a week relaxing on an idyllic Indian Ocean beach, especially on the Spice Island of Zanzibar, followed by a week out in the bush.



Many camps have special honeymoon suites available, although early booking is advised to be able to be certain about getting one of these, and they will often lay on one or two special treats for you as well. Out of high season they may also be able to arrange for you to take game drives or walks by yourselves (accompanied by the guide etc of course), rather than having to share with other guests. Partly it's down to how good is the relationship that your tour operator has with the lodge in question.

It is even possible to arrange for the actual wedding to take place out in the bush – perhaps the ultimate such experience, if somewhat expensive for your guests!

Safety On Safari

Just a few more notes on how to survive out in the bush! As we have already stated, the most important

rule is to do what the guide tells you, immediately and without question. Out of the three activities that you will undertake: staying in camp, game viewing by vehicle and walking in the bush, paradoxically it is probably during the first of these that you are most at risk (although the actual risk is small). While you are in a vehicle the game doesn't normally see you as people (or as prey), but rather just as part of a noisy smelly lump that they're already familiar with. You could be within touching distance of a lion, but would be perfectly safe if within the confines of the vehicle (but not leaning out or standing up). Out walking you will always be in the company of both a guide and an armed Park scout and you can be assured that they know what to do.



However in camp you will often be on your own – for example walking from your hut or to the bar or dining area (although at night you will usually be escorted), and there is always the possibility of encountering an animal that has strayed into camp (the same could apply while out, if you have (after asking permission) gone behind a nearby bush for the obvious reasons). The most likely encounter could be with an elephant – they often stroll into camp, oblivious of whoever else might be there. Hippos can enter too, especially at night, and lions have been known to wander through as well – after all, they think they own the bush! All camps keep a careful look out for this happening, but you never know. But do resist the temptation to go out for your normal early morning or evening jog. It's not unknown by a long way, crazy though it clearly is.



True Stories Number Seven: A Leopard Moment

In one remote bush camp my hut was the furthest from the camp fireplace, and on my way back at night, alone, I heard a rustle in the bush to the side of my path. This was definitely a 'moment' and I clearly recall just freezing, and the realization that I was going to have to deal with this one by myself. A noise like this could be anything from an elephant to an elephant shrew, although the accompanying puku warning whistle suggested something more sinister. Then a quick flash of the torch revealed it actually to be a leopard, stealthily making its way off into the bush. I certainly locked my door that night (or would have done, were such things possible in bush camps – instead I placed a chair at the open entrance to the open-to-the-air bathroom – which wouldn't even have stopped a kitten). In the event I actually slept very soundly.

The main point to realise is that animals have a 'zone of comfort' and you are at risk if you inadvertently invade this zone – they could choose either to fight or to flee. Thus you simply need to look around you on emerging from your hut or wandering around camp. Hippos are actually the most dangerous animal in Africa, despite being vegetarians. Basically, they only feel secure in water (but forage on land, at night), and if you get between them and safety they will go right through you. Therefore – get out of their way – they're not predators, and won't follow. If you do come across an elephant in camp just go back into your hut (or the nearest hut) and wait until it is safe to emerge. In the unlikely event of meeting a lion, running is not a good idea, since it will trigger the predation impulse (you can't run faster than most animals anyway). Thus here the rule is 'don't run' and 'don't turn your back'. You just have to present as large an object as possible (thus several people would group together), and stare it down, whilst slowly backing off, still facing the lion. Sometimes they will mock charge (stopping well short), to encourage you to get further away. Great fun!

Do not gain the impression from the above that your life will be in constant danger. None of these encounters are at all likely to happen, and the above information is given merely as a precaution, and as a matter of interest. Checking around you in the bush is no different to looking before you cross the road in the UK – a sensible precaution. Obviously animals with cubs in tow, or wounded animals, pose an extra threat though. One final point, though – do shake your shoes before putting them on in the morning!

For those who are interested, AfricaAway offers a bush craft/tracking/survival skills course that is built around a conventional game viewing and walking type of safari itinerary.

Whilst we are on the subject of safety, you need to be aware of how to behave if out alone in a city, for example on the evening before your return flight home. African cities are probably no more dangerous than big cities anywhere in the world – i.e. they can be quite dangerous if you don't know what you're doing. Thus be streetwise – walk briskly, not alone, keeping to well-lit streets. Avoid going out at night anyway, and stay alert at all times, keeping your bag safe, avoiding speaking to strangers. You already know all this – as we say, it's no different to being out in any strange city anywhere in the world. Outside the cities and towns, though, it's usually a quite different story. The rural African is friendliness itself – at least he is in our favourite country of Zambia, which is probably one of the world's, never mind Africa's, safest countries.

True Stories Number Eight: A Buffalo Charge

At one camp the owner told us of being caught out in the open once, unarmed, and being charged by a buffalo that clearly meant him ultimate harm. The only thing that he could think of to do was to charge the buffalo! Fortunately its nerve broke before his did, and he survived (of course we've not discussed this tactic with any of the people who tried it unsuccessfully). I once tried a similar tactic with a large male baboon that was eyeing me aggressively just outside my hut. Reasoning that I was 'Man', and hence superior, I faced up to it – only to discover that it was distinctly unimpressed by my posturing. I guess I can still claim superior intellectual ability – I had the sense to leg it quickly back into my hut!

Your Guide

The success of your African safari probably depends much more on the quality of your guide than on most of the other factors – accommodation, food, environment and so on – all put together. Ideally your guide will have been appraised of the level of your knowledge before you set off. There is nothing more boring than being given Level One comments ('that is a zebra'), when you're at a stage of knowledge where you're ready for much more detailed information (e.g. as to why zebra always look so rounded and well-fed

– it’s not actually due to their being well-fed after all). Ideally, too, the camp will have tried to group guests of a similar level of experience, and tried, for example, to avoid mixing keen big game viewers with fanatical birders.

Sometimes your driver will also function as your guide: alternatively the guide occupies the seat next to the driver. In either situation the guide will display an unbelievable ability to spot wildlife that you, perched on high with binoculars, cannot. But don’t judge your guide on your day’s ‘animal count’ – unlike with a zoo, you’re the one in a cage – your car – and the wildlife doesn’t appear to order.



The classic book on guiding ('The Guide's Guide to Guiding', by Garth Thompson) starts with the tacit assumption that your guide will be the South African or Zimbabwean-raised Robert Redford look-alike beloved of all the safari movies that you have seen. They warn against an attitude that is too macho, too obsessed with 'the big five', too escapist, too probush (and anti people) or too interested in the female guests in the party, and so on.

One cogent observation here is that, while there are old guides and there are bold guides, there are very few old, bold guides.

However the overwhelming tendency these days (except perhaps in South Africa) is to replace people like this, almost certainly constantly on the move, progressing up their career structure, with guides who are almost always drawn from the immediately local native population, hence possessing an enormous amount of local knowledge, which is vital to your getting the maximum out of your visit. This was brought home to us most clearly on one occasion in Zambia (where the overall standard of guiding is probably the best in all Africa) when, on foot and carefully approaching a large herd of buffalo, our guide cautioned us not to get any closer because he didn't recognise one (!) of the buffalo, and hence was unsure how it might behave!

Here, though, we do feel that we have to raise a most important point in this context, although it's one that has caused us a lot of grief when mentioned in the past, including (occasional) accusations of racism. It is a generalisation only, but one that we, and many other people, believe to be fair. It is in our (western) culture to be inquisitive, asking lots of 'Why?' and 'What If?' type of questions.

However you're rarely going to get such questions answered adequately by your *native-born* guide. His knowledge will be truly encyclopaedic, but it's largely learned by rote, and unless your question pushes exactly the right button it's unlikely to be answered to your satisfaction. Thus, for example, asking how to tell the age of a kudu from the number of twists in its horns will get a most detailed reply, but asking *why* its horns spiral in the first place, probably won't.

Please believe that we are not for one moment suggesting that native African guides lack in intelligence or intellect: I think that it's largely a cultural difference. We waste a lot of our time asking questions as a form of intellectual exercise (and then forget the answers anyway) because we enjoy doing this. However, to the African, unless there is an immediate purpose to the question – basically relating to life, food, survival and so on – then he can't see the point of it, and simply can't formulate an appropriate response.

A guide from a western type of culture, on the other hand, will think 'Ah, that's an interesting question – let's think whether I can put together a response from the various diverse bits of knowledge that I possess'. The native African just won't get it, and either won't reply, or, more likely, come out with the spiel associated with what he sees as the closest of the various buttons that he has available to be pressed.

To a large extent it's also a function of the problem that you get when you ask a question of *any* nationality – English, Spanish, German, or whatever – in a language *other than* their native language. It's easy to reel out your own script in a language other than your own, but less easy to actually understand a question posed to you that may be phrased in a manner that leaves you even slightly uncertain as to its meaning.

So what we are saying is, just don't be disappointed or annoyed if you can't get your (non-factual) questions answered by your guide. Just accept it, and go with the flow. But we thought that it was necessary to warn you, in an attempt to head off the sort of comments that we have sometimes received in the past from returning safari guests.

**True Stories Number Nine:
'More Lion'**

Safaris aren't always totally serious affairs. One guide told of a group of tourists whose sole desire was to see lions – nothing else was of interest or would do. Eventually, although only after several days' search (as happens on such occasions) a fine pride of lions was discovered in full view of the road. However it was all over in a minute – after numerous photographs had been taken - and the guests cried "move on!". "What would you like to see next?"; the guide enquired. "More lion!", came the reply.

Responsible Tourism

So far as responsible tourism – or eco-tourism – is concerned, most of the factors concerned have already been taken into account by ourselves for those guests who book their African safari through AfricaAway.

Hence we at AfricaAway are careful only to select those destinations, and in particular individual hotels, camps and lodges, that support environmentally-friendly practices, and ensure that the local community – rather than just some foreign-located lodge owner – benefits significantly from their presence. In particular it is important that local staff – camp staff as well as guides and drivers – are employed, as is common throughout, for example, Zambia.

There are a number of initiatives that you yourself might think of taking:

- Learn something about the local culture and traditions in the area of Africa that you are intending to visit. This could greatly enrich your appreciation of what you see. Being in Africa isn't just about game viewing – indeed a visit to a local village, and in particular its school, will almost certainly provide you with memories that may last longer than any game sightings. Most camps and lodges support a local village school, and will be delighted to give you details of their project and to accept any donations that you may wish to make - as everywhere, a basic education is one of the most precious things that a child can be given. Some people may be reluctant to make a cash donation, since they lack confidence that it will reach its intended

recipients. However if you can find space in your luggage for such basics as pens, pencils, erasers and pencil sharpeners, educational posters or books of any kind (although the latter are heavy) then these will be gladly accepted. Just leave them with your camp manager. On our last visit we took out a few (uninflated) footballs – plus inflators – and the children's utter joy on receiving these was magical to behold.



- Respect the wildlife code: respect its privacy: it is their habitat, after all; don't try to feed any animals; keep as quiet as possible in their presence; don't remove souvenirs of wildlife origin (e.g. antlers from a discovered carcass), which, in any case, is often an illegal act.



- Offset the environmental impact of your trip by coming to an arrangement with one of the several carbon-offsetting organisations that exist. We do have to point out, however, that, whatever certain sections of society might claim, the case for man-made global warming, due to carbon emissions, is far from proven, and hence you should not feel under any obligation to do this.
- The predominant language spoken in most tourist areas in Africa is English. However you might still consider learning a few words of the local language, where appropriate. In some

countries, Zambia perhaps in particular, there are so many local languages, never mind dialects, that this isn't realistic. However in both Kenya and Tanzania, Swahili is a common tongue used throughout, and being able to understand and use the following few words and phrases could greatly enrich your experience:

- Jambo** – Hello
- Karibu** – Welcome
- Kwaheri** – Goodbye
- Asante (sana)** – Thank you (very much)
- Hakuna Matata** – No problem!
- Ndigo** – Yes
- Hapana** – No
- Sawa** -- OK

Safari Etiquette

Don't be put off by the title of this section. Some of our guests fear that – being an expensive undertaking at the best of times – they will be surrounded by posh rich people who they won't get on with. The truth is far removed from this – we've rarely encountered anybody on safari who we didn't get on with – united as we all are by a common, and down to earth, love of nature and wildlife.

No, by etiquette, we are referring to a number of factors, such as smoking, use of mobile phones and so on, that seemed to us to be suitable for grouping together in this way. Most of this is, of course, common-sense and courtesy. Thus you should refrain from smoking in camp in the presence of other people (even though it may well be in the open air), and especially whilst out on a game drive, confined within a vehicle with other guests.

Unfortunately mobile phone coverage is spreading rapidly across Africa, even in the heart of otherwise remote game parks. Please don't even have your mobile phone with you, and definitely not switched on. Game viewing often depends on sneaking up on an animal downwind, very quietly, and even the tone of a received text message, never mind a ring, would ruin this, and we ourselves impose the rule that offenders will be expelled from the group and left to find their way home alone on foot through lion-infested country Even to hear a mobile phone in camp would be equally intrusive and offensive in this type of environment: we ourselves restrict their use to communicating back home at no more than daily intervals and even then only by means of text messaging.

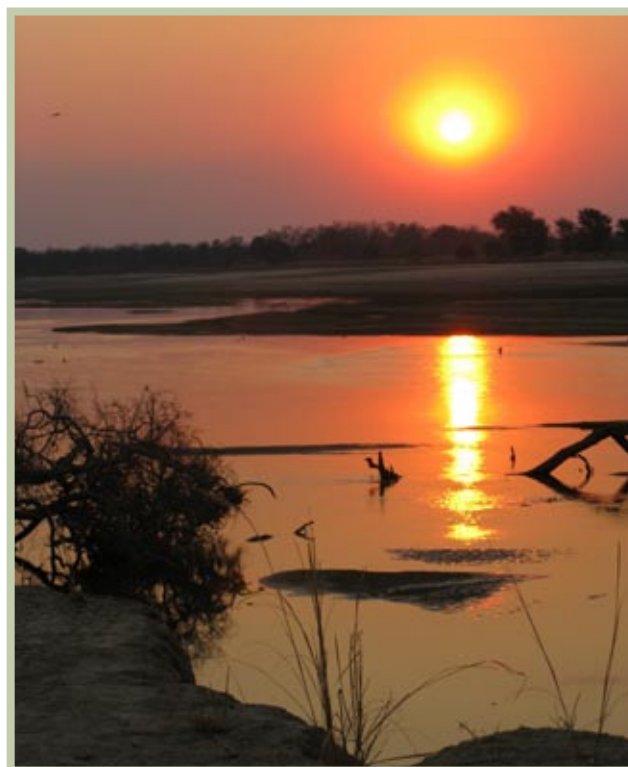
It is equally important not to leave litter (including cigarette butts) – indeed in Zambia, although rarely

elsewhere, it is common for your guide or driver to stop to pick up even minor litter such as discarded tissues, in order to protect the pristine quality of the bush.

There, that wasn't too bad, was it?

Photography

Most people will want to take photographs of what they see on safari, although we have indicated previously how this can cause you to miss out on observing the actual experience. You don't need a super-duper camera, though, to get perfectly reasonable pictures. I myself use a Canon Powershot G9 digital point and shoot camera, costing around £300, and which is small enough to simply slip into the pocket of my shorts. The resultant quality of picture doesn't approach that of the professional photographer, with his tripod, interchangeable zoom lenses and so on, but it's perfectly adequate. An SLR camera, on the other hand, does allow you to change lenses from wide angle to telephoto. Whatever type of camera you choose to take on safari, it is essential to have a good working knowledge of it. If you have invested in some new kit to take with you to Africa then try to spend an afternoon or two before you travel experimenting with your camera and familiarising yourself with its controls and settings. You really won't have time once you get out there.



Travel is tough on photo equipment, so do invest in a good camera bag. You should also get a secure neck or shoulder strap that you keep attached to

your camera at all times – even if it is in its case or your pocket, just in case you need to free your hands (or if you drop it!). Keeping a camera clean in a dusty environment is impossible, so bring a good blower and brush, and clean it every night. Batteries are impossible to find in the bush so travel with spares. If you use rechargeable batteries, bring an extra two sets as some camps do not have charging facilities. Bearing in mind the flight weight restrictions, lugging along a decent tripod could pose problems: consider a monopod instead. Many camps will also be able to lend you a beanbag. Polarizing filters can be one of the most useful accessories you can own. They can increase colour contrast saturation, remove reflection and darken blue skies. The down-side is they absorb light by about 1 1/3 stops. Check which type your camera uses before you buy a polarizing filter: manual focus cameras use a Linear polarizer; most auto focus cameras use a Circular polarizer.

Digital or Film? The answer to this question is usually down to the user's history with cameras and their enjoyment, or lack thereof, of working with computers. Most photographers have switched to digital photography but some still prefer the traditional methods. Digital photography does offer many benefits over traditional film, but particularly relevant in the safari environment is the ability to take as many shots as possible in order to get that one perfect image, much as the professional photographer, willing to shoot off hundreds of rolls of film, achieved in the past.



For digital users, the plethora of image-manipulation software available makes creating the perfect photo that little bit easier, particularly with regard to framing, composition and colour-balance. The one thing this software cannot rectify is incorrect focussing and/or image blur, so do make sure you are familiar with the focus settings of your camera (even 'point and click' cameras will have varying focussing techniques). Image blur can be reduced through the use of a camera with 'image stabilisation' software or the use of a 'vibration reduction'-equipped lens with an SLR camera. In addition, try not to take photos while on

the move, or even from within a stationary, but idling, vehicle (don't be afraid to ask your guide to fully stop the vehicle if you see something of interest, even if you are sharing the vehicle with other travellers).



But do make sure you have enough film/memory. This is the golden rule – and in general if you think you have enough go back to the shop and order twice as much and you should be OK. Even with a digital camera where you can go back, review and delete unwanted pictures you will probably find yourself using more memory than you expect, and less time for reviewing your photos than you expect (it's amazing how an afternoon previously scheduled for sorting photos can slip by as genuine siesta-time in the heat of the African sun after a 5.00 a.m. wake-up call that morning!) Digital users should make sure they know what size and quality photos they are taking, as some cameras have so many pixels that each photo can take up several Mbs of memory. An average snapper could take anywhere between 100 and 500 photos per day, so budget your available memory accordingly. Possibly download onto your laptop (if, like me, you can't travel without it), but back up onto a memory stick as well.

Fortunately the best time to take interesting photos tends to coincide with the typical game-drive times, i.e. early morning and late evening, but do keep the sun behind you to avoid shadows. Low-level sun tends to create more depth and more richness in wildlife and landscape photography, so get as many shots as you can during these times of day. A final warning though: do ask permission before photographing local people – and do not try to photograph military installations or personnel.

For an extraordinarily in-depth discussion of safari photography – much more than we have the space for here – you may wish to consult http://www.hillmanwonders.com/photo_tips/index.htm.

Incidentally, the vast majority of the images that illustrate this website/PDF were taken by AfricaAway personnel, using a variety of cameras, from my own small 'point and shoot' up to a good medium range SLR.

True Stories Number Ten: A Buffalo Moment

On one occasion we asked our Zambian guide what had been his scariest moment, and he told of one that had taken place on safari elsewhere. In Zambia's South Luangwa National Park, the scout might typically carry a .458 Winchester capable of stopping anything. Customarily it will carry 3 or 4 shells in its internal magazine. The first will be soft nosed, for the dual purpose of a warning shot for game such as elephant or buffalo, or as a dropping shot for soft-skinned animals such as lion. The remainder are then hard nosed shells capable of dropping an elephant.

On the occasion referred to, the scout was armed only with an AK47, ideal for carving up human beings, but of little use against big game. The on-foot group (comprising scout, guide and one guest) was very much being faced with a buffalo 'moment', as the latter was charging straight at them. The guide admitted to being slightly nervous to start with, but at moments like these it is the scout who is in charge. Then as the enraged buffalo got nearer and nearer, the guide became even more nervous.

Finally the scout said – to the guest – “please tell me when you have your photograph, sir, so that I can shoot”. The guest dropped his camera and curled into a ball, as the scout then fired off a salvo of shots into the ground directly in front of the buffalo, kicking up lots of dirt into its face, whereupon it wheeled away. Phew!

Other Matters

Souvenirs: Many camps will have their own souvenir shops where you can buy carvings, textiles etc. It is also possible to buy these at major international airports. Prices are not cheap (they can approach what you might expect to pay in a swanky London or New York store), but it would be nice to believe that the profits benefit the local economy in some way (rather than just the shop's owner). Ideally though you should avoid products made from endangered animals and plants, hard woods or ancient artefacts (which may be stolen, or fake anyway).

In places like Zambia's Livingstone and the Victoria Falls area there are numerous stall-based, or just pedestrian, vendors of such curios. Unfortunately the African method of selling is assertive, bordering

on the aggressive (although not dangerously so), and we find that this puts us off – it is almost impossible to browse in peace. Prices asked can be outrageous, and can be bargained down by huge amounts. In a recent example, a copper bracelet that was being touted at \$25 ultimately changed hands at \$4, only for the purchaser to then be offered four similar bracelets for \$5 by another vendor! You can take the view that they need the money anyway, but there's a fair price for everything.

Tips: There is no obligation to tip, although it will be appreciated. As a rough guide, \$1 to an airport porter would be more than adequate. Your individual guide in camp should probably be given \$10-20 per day at the end of your stay (perhaps more, if yours is a large group); your driver (if separate) perhaps half of this, while the camp staff generally might be given \$5-15 per head (your group's head count, not the camp's staff), distributed by the camp host or manager. As an alternative to cash, donating items of clothing that you don't particularly wish to cart back with you – t-shirts, shirts, shorts, caps – will be appreciated, especially way out in the bush where such items are not easy to come by.

Electricity: Most camps and lodges will have an electricity supply (hence enabling you to charge camera batteries and so on), although it may be generator-supplied, and available only from the morning until bedtime (and therefore you need torches or oil lanterns at night). More remote bush camps may not have electricity on tap at all. Hence it is a good idea to keep everything fully charged whenever you get the opportunity. Electricity sockets are normal UK 3-pin type, supplied at 220V.

Safari Humour

There are some terrible jokes (and one or two good ones) associated with going on safari. Here is a brief selection.

Q: Which side of a cheetah has the most spots?

A: The outside, of course

Q: How do you tell the difference between male and female zebra?

A: In the male the stripes are black, whereas in the female they're white (or is it the other way around – must check next time I go)

Q: Why can't you get painkillers in the jungle?

A: Because the parrots eat 'em all (Paracetamol)

Q: Why do flamingos stand on one leg?

A: Because otherwise they'd fall over.

Then there's the story about the middle-aged couple who emerge from their hut to be faced with a hungry looking lion. "Run", yells the husband. "But we can't run faster than a lion", moans the wife. "I don't have to run faster than the lion", he replies, "I only have to run faster than you!"



It's behind you!

My favourite story is one that was pictured in cartoon form in the New Yorker by the creator of 'The Far Side' comic strip, Gary Larson. It simply shows a couple of hippo, grazing in a swamp miles from anywhere; one says to the other "I keep thinking it's Thursday". Most people that I tell this story to (verbally) look at me expectantly, waiting for the punch line. Sorry, but it just cracks me up. Possibly you need to experience it visually for it to work. We can't reproduce the original cartoon, but the accompanying photograph replicates its original effect.



Then, in 1986, Peter Davies was on holiday in Kenya after graduating from North-western University. On a hike through the bush, he came across a young bull elephant standing with one leg raised in the air. The elephant seemed distressed, so Peter approached it very carefully. He got down on one knee, inspected the elephant's foot, and found a large thorn deeply embedded in it. As carefully and as gently as he could, Peter worked the thorn out with his knife, after which the elephant gingerly put down its foot. The elephant turned to face the man, and with a rather

curious look on its face, stared at him for several tense moments. Peter stood frozen, thinking of nothing else but being trampled. Eventually the elephant trumpeted loudly, turned, and walked away. Peter never forgot that elephant or the events of that day.

Twenty years later, Peter was walking through the Chicago Zoo with his teenaged son. As they approached the elephant enclosure, one of the creatures turned and walked over to near where Peter and his son Cameron were standing. The large bull elephant stared at Peter, lifted its front foot off the ground, and then put it down. The elephant did that several times then trumpeted loudly, all the while staring at the man.

Remembering the encounter in 1986, Peter could not help wondering if this was the same elephant. Peter summoned up his courage, climbed over the railing, and made his way into the enclosure. He walked right up to the elephant and stared at it in wonder. They locked eyes, and a knowing look seemed to cross the elephant's face. It reached down, picked the man up carefully with its trunk, lifted him high in the air and then threw him crashing to the ground and stomped him to death!

Probably wasn't the same elephant then.

**True Stories Number Eleven:
Traditional African Joke**

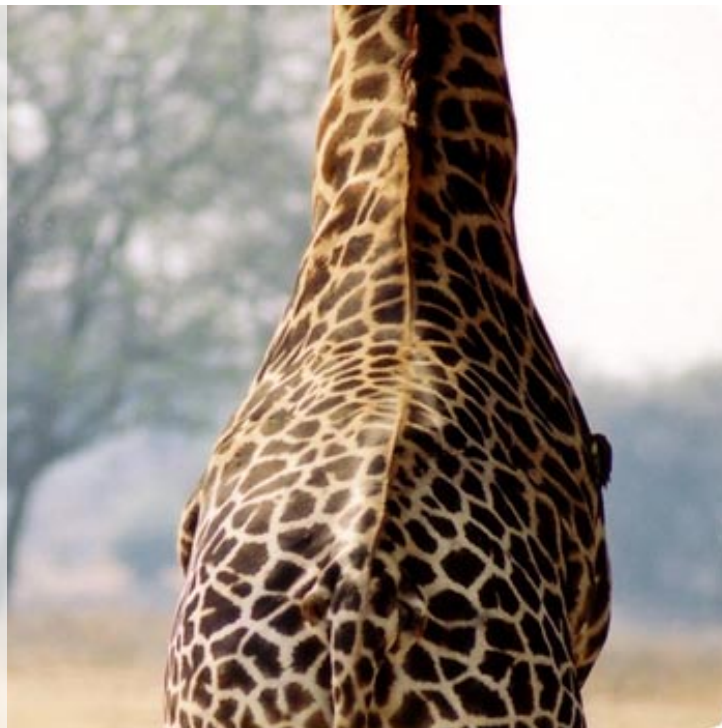
One evening, at a camp in Zambia's Lower Zambezi National Park, it was announced that it was one young lady's birthday. A large cylindrical chocolate cake, beautifully iced, about five inches in diameter, was solemnly brought in, and she was invited to cut it. It turned out to be not that easy, principally because it was actually a large dried-out elephant dropping - although beautifully iced, as we have said. She was then provided with a genuine cake, although somebody else had to be persuaded to cut it for her.

To conclude this section we are reproducing a selection of 'Famous Last Words', recorded by a number of African travellers, in several cases by guides themselves, and all absolutely genuine.

- Don't worry - it's just a mock charge.
- I'm just going behind this tree to take a leak.
- Shit - they're coming.
- It probably won't react if we take a quick flash photo.

Wildlife

Traditionally in a section on 'Wildlife', a sourcebook will catalogue each species' Latin name, typical size, lifespan and gestation period, habitat, feeding preferences, mating behaviour, spoor, droppings and so on.



We don't intend to do this: there are plenty of books listed in our 'Reading List' section that will give you all this information (and more!), and most camps will have a copy of one of these volumes available anyway, which you can consult. Furthermore most guides will actually carry a fully comprehensive bird book along with them. Rather we prefer to list most of the wildlife species that you are likely to encounter, followed by largely anecdotal facts about these – facts that you are unlikely ever to find in one of the books mentioned, and which it would take you years in the bush to accumulate – as it did for us – but which, we believe constitutes the kind of information that can change a merely interesting wildlife experience into a fascinating one, and ones that you can definitely impress your fellow guests with. Thus the purpose of this section is as much entertainment as education. Nevertheless it still runs to almost 100 animal, bird, reptile, insect and tree species!

The obvious place to start is with:

The Big Five

This collective name is generally held to include the lion, leopard, elephant, buffalo and rhinoceros. Although some purist guides will turn their noses up at people's desire to bag these sightings above all else, they are nevertheless among the most interesting and exciting, each in their very different

ways. But do please aim to enjoy all the wildlife that you encounter – from insects, through plants and trees, to small and large reptiles, mammals and birds.

Lion



The 'King of the Beasts' and only gregarious big cat, the lion is probably at the head of most people's 'must see' list. A lion pride will be headed up by a dominant male, five to nine years old (sometimes a coalition consisting of a couple of brothers), who will

have sole rights over all the females until a stronger male comes along to replace him. The new male will then kill any existing young cubs, not wanting to expend resources on someone else's genes, a procedure which also serves to bring the deprived females back into heat, enabling the new boss to start his new dynasty as soon as possible. However the lionesses, being female, often have the measure of him here, sometimes delaying conception for several months ('pseudo-oestrus') to ensure that he is indeed strong enough to hold on to the pride (or they risk their cubs being killed again).

Interesting Facts:

1) You will often be told that lions cannot spot you within a vehicle, seeing only a noisy, smelly lump of metal. Hence it is quite safe to park up very close, just so long as you don't lean out. It is also well known that cats cannot hold your gaze for long. Well, in Tanzania recently we parked up just a metre or two from the lioness pictured below, and she and I gazed deep into each other's souls for about quarter of an hour.



2) When they mate, lions will couple for less than a minute at a time, but at regular 15 minute or so intervals for up to 48 hours, oblivious to all else. It has been explained to us on numerous occasions that this is due to their very low sperm count, which necessitates such multiple mating. On repeating this explanation to one guest she replied 'Isn't that perhaps *why* they have such a low sperm count?' Good thinking!

3) A lion's roar can be heard up to 8 km away, and there is nothing more exciting than trying to sleep at night listening to such a roar getting louder and louder, until (sometimes) it is taking place within the camp limits themselves. Don't go out to take a look, though.

4) Usually the males leave the actual hunting and kill to the females, who will combine together to hunt cooperatively, only for the male to then muscle in to take the first choice for himself. Nothing new there then.

5) Their whisker pattern – number, size and position – is unique to each individual, and hence is used for identification.



6) One last point is the issue of man eaters. Once lion have killed and eaten humans, they quickly develop a taste for us. We are far easier to hunt and catch and are far more tender, without tough skin or hair. Thus lions that have eaten humans generally have to be destroyed.

Leopard



The most elusive, and most beautiful of all the big cats, the leopard leads a primarily solitary existence, unless with cubs. Although it is traditionally anticipated that most sightings take place at night, when it is out hunting, we have actually seen just as

many during the daytime. In fact, due to its broad habitat tolerance it is probably the most widespread of all predators, although at the same time one of the most elusive. However Zambia's South Luangwa valley is home to large numbers of these animals, making it a prime destination for such sightings.

Interesting Facts:

- 1) The leopard will often try to hoist its kill up into a tree, out of reach of other predators, being able to manoeuvre remarkable weights in this way, due to its powerful neck muscles. In fact, kilogram for kilogram, they are about seven times more powerful than humans (with hearing five times better as well).
- 2) The leopard's traditional 'spots' are actually principally made up of dark rosettes.



- 3) The leopard's sound is best described as being like a coarse ripsaw tearing into a piece of softwood. Once, on a walking safari, our tea-bearer, bringing up the rear, somewhat unnervingly had a bad cough that replicated this sound exactly.
- 4) For some reason, leopards hate dogs, and will single them out especially if they visit a native village.

**Old Guide's Tips Number Seven:
Eye Contact**

If you are unlucky enough to come face to face with one of these big cats, without help at hand, then this survival tip could be vital. Lions are basically 'cowardy-cats', and therefore you should simply try to stare them down, until they back off. However this strategy could be fatal with a leopard, since eye contact like this is taken as a challenge, and could provoke an attack.

Elephant



The largest living land mammals (although, interestingly, the only one that cannot jump!), the African elephant can be distinguished from the Indian elephant by the shape of its ears – roughly that of Africa itself, whereas the Indian elephant's ears more resemble that of India (God moves in many mysterious ways).

Largely recovering from the debilitating effects of ivory poaching, elephants are actually starting to become a nuisance in many parts of Africa, since the damage that they do their environment during feeding is considerable. Males will often try to scare off intruders into their personal space by means of mock charges, ears flapping wide, trunks lifted, and ear-splitting trumpeting taking place. In this situation the advice given is to clap your hands loudly and back off. A real charge takes place in silence, with ears pinned back and the trunk lowered. The advice given here is just to pray. In fact the elephant, if encountered unexpectedly close up in camp, and the hippo, if encountered in water in a canoe or small boat, are the only African species that I personally really fear.

Interesting Facts:

- 1) A male elephant's fully erect penis is between one and two metres long, and weighs in at 27kg, the entire genitals achieving a staggering 50kg. The average ejaculate is around 10 litres. [As an aside the elephant does not qualify for the most well endowed

male in proportion to body size. This honour belongs to a species of fly in the class Insecta, who is endowed with a reproductive organ in excess of two and a half times his body length when extended].

2) During each 24 hour period they will ingest 250 kg of food, defecating around 100 kgs of dung, together with emitting (and if you're one of those people who worry about climate change, then this one is for you) 2000 litres of methane gas.

3) An elephant's trunk has approximately 40,000 muscles in it, whereas the entire human body only has 640.



4) You can tell the shoulder height of an elephant by measuring the circumference of its front footprint, and then doubling this figure.

5) When feeling romantic, the male (said to be in state of 'musth') continually drips a secretion from its temporal glands. However what is rarely realized is that females can also do the same.

6) Among the indigenous people, elephants are believed to swallow a pebble every year, so as to keep a count of their age.



Buffalo



Nomadic grazers, travelling in large herds, buffalo are notoriously bad-tempered – possibly because they are regarded by lions as the tastiest meal on the menu. Old males, detached from the herd, living a solitary existence (and known as 'kakuli') are probably the most dangerous, since their failing eyesight and hearing makes them feel especially vulnerable.

You will often come across large open areas, liberally strewn with buffalo droppings, where they have recently bivouacked overnight. While not closely related, buffalo look remarkably similar to domestic cattle but are generally black in colour. Nor is the African, or Cape, buffalo closely related to either the North American bison or the Asian water buffalo.

Interesting Facts:

1) The male buffalo stands around 6 feet tall at the shoulder and his enormous backward-curving, crescent-shaped horns stretch close to 5 feet long.

2) It can run at up to 40 mph.

3) Buffalo live in herds for protection against predators, often ganging up to attack and chase off marauding lions. In this way even blind or lame individuals can survive within the protection of the herd.

4) Apart from this, they're actually not all that interesting. A bit bovine, really.



Rhinoceros

Possibly the member of the 'Big Five' least likely to be encountered – it has been poached to near oblivion in many game reserves, and indeed countries – it actually comes in two varieties. The smaller of the two, the Black Rhino, is a browser, recognisable by its pointed, prehensile upper lip.

The White Rhino, on the other hand, isn't actually white at all – its name is a corruption of the word 'wide' ('wijd' in Afrikaans), referring to the shape of its upper lip, more suitable for grazing (browsers feed from trees and bushes; grazers from grass).



White Rhino.

Interesting Facts:

1) The ponderous-looking rhino can actually run at up to 40 mph and turn 180 degrees in a distance equal to its body length. No point in trying to outrun one, but their eyesight isn't that brilliant, so the advice given if charged is to zig-zag!

2) The white rhino is calm and quiet, but the black rhino is many times more aggressive, and will charge with little or no provocation.

3) In the case of the white rhino, the calf always walks in front of the mother. With the black rhino it's the other way around.

Then there is the 'walking safari' equivalent of the 'Big Five':

The Little Five (Or Rather Six!)

These are the small-species patronymic equivalents of the 'Big Five', namely the ant-lion, leopard tortoise, elephant shrew, buffalo weaver bird and rhinoceros beetle.

Ant-Lion



So described because of its ferocious attitude to those ants that stray within its reach, this insect is actually the larval form of the lacewing insect, in which form it can remain for up to three years. It constructs a conical pit in the sand, as shown in the accompanying photograph, and then hides in its bottom, just below the surface. If an ant even so much as strays onto the inner surface of this pit, the ant-lion throws up a spray of sand that tumbles the ant down into its grasp.



Ant-lion pits.

Old Guide's Tips Number Eight: The Bush Magnifying Glass

If you come across such an ant-lion pit, dig down with your fingers, or a spoon, to extract its owner into the palm of your hand. It is very small, much less than the size of your little finger nail, but there is a useful, although little-known, trick that provides you with a 'bush magnifying glass'. Simply reverse your binoculars, holding the eyepiece close to the ant-lion, looking down the end that normally faces outwards. Using this stratagem you can observe the truly fearsome jaws that this diminutive creature possesses.

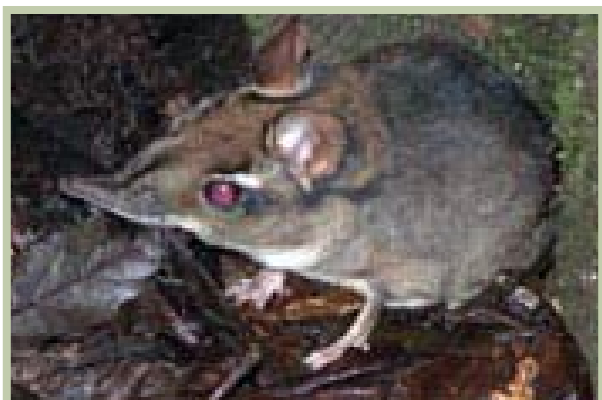
Leopard Tortoise



Just a tortoise really, that you may come across on a walking safari. It gets its name from the black and yellow colouring of its carapace, somewhat resembling that of the leopard itself, and making it equally hard to spot.

Elephant Shrew

So named because of its very long, trunk-like nose, this diminutive creature, is often to be seen scuttling off to one side of your vehicle at night, following well-marked pathways that enable it to travel more silently. It has been shown to be quite closely related to the group of African mammals that includes elephants themselves (and indeed it has the same number of bones in total, and the same toe configuration, as the elephant – four toes on the front feet, and five on the back).



However, since it isn't actually a shrew at all, some people are attempting to get its name changed to the 'Sengi'. However it isn't actually an elephant either, and we think that it would be a great shame to break up the fun concept of 'The Little Five'.

Buffalo Weaver Bird



This comes in two varieties – the black, and the white-headed, buffalo weaver. You may not see the bird itself, but its nests are everywhere, made out of an untidy-looking heap of thorny twigs. Weaver birds avoid predators in very specific ways when it comes to the construction of their nests: firstly, they have two entrances allowing the birds to escape through the back door when a predator arrives on the scene; secondly, by building several nests in the same location, the chance of the predator finding the correct nest is reduced; finally the dilapidated appearances of the nests often persuades predators that they are no longer in use and therefore aren't worth a second glance.

Rhinoceros Beetle



Just a large black beetle really, part of the scarab family, getting its name from the horns that adorn the male's head and its shiny, black armour. The Rhinoceros Beetle is also reckoned to be one of the strongest animals on the planet because it is able to lift 850 times its own body weight. If a human tried to do the same thing, he would be able to lift 65 tons – the equivalent of 75 average sized family cars!

Although there is no 'Big Five' equivalent (at least, not in Africa) we, uniquely, like to expand this list to include a sixth member in this category – the remarkable Tiger Fish. You don't need to be an experienced fly fisherman to enjoy success in its pursuit, and the accompanying photograph shows the author (a complete novice in this area) proudly displaying a specimen of this most ferocious of game fish caught (on a catch-and-release basis) a couple of years ago on Zambia's Lower Zambezi River.



To complete our collection there is then:

The Green Five

These are the plant world's equivalents of the 'Big Five'.

Leonotus

(Lion's Tail or Lion's Ear)



The accompanying photograph shows how this species got its name. Often you will see a collection of dried stalks in camp, for decorative purposes, as well as out in the bush. There are a number of varieties of this overall species, the dried leaves of some of which are sometimes smoked in Africa as a form of cannabis, or 'wild dagga'.

Leopard Orchid



So named due to its characteristic markings, this beautiful and fragrant plant is somewhat difficult to spot, occupying as it often does, the top branches of trees, especially the mopane tree.

Elephant Grass

A type of long grass. Needing little fertiliser to produce very high yields when deliberately cultivated, a recent suggestion is that it could be used to mitigate the effects of global warming by utilising it as a biofuel. Hmmm.

Buffalo Thorn

This plant has curved hooked thorns that give it its alternative name of the 'Waitabit', for reasons that will become obvious if you are ever snagged by one of these!

Rhino Thistle

Just a thistle really, but with no obvious connection to the rhinoceros that we are aware of.

'Collections', such as the big, little and green five aside, we now need to consider a selection of other mammals, birds, reptiles and insects, together with trees and other plants. Space prohibits quite as extensive a description as the above, however.

Let us start with some of the remaining 'big game', that is the hippopotamus, giraffe and zebra.

Other 'Big Game'

Hippopotamus

(from the Greek for 'River Horse')



Known as the most dangerous animal in Africa (i.e. responsible for the most deaths, although the malarial mosquito, of course, well outstrips it in this respect), hippopotami live in well-defined territorial groups led by one dominant bull, although such bulls are continuously fighting for dominance, the losers being banished from the group. In the dry season, some stretches of river can become vastly overcrowded. Hippos are purely grazers, coming out at night, sometimes hauling themselves up extraordinarily high river banks, on well-defined 'hippo elevators', to range for miles in search of food, consuming up to 40 kg, before returning to the water at dawn.

Interesting Facts:

- 1) Male hippos may be identified both in the water and on land as they assert their dominance by vigorous 'muck spreading', disseminating their dung by means of a rapidly flicking tail.
- 2) Their loud 'wheeze-honk-honk-honk' call, is usually echoed, first within the group, and then by other groups further along the river, in an extremely noisy 'chorus chain', possibly as a way of defining the location and strength of their territory.
- 3) Although strictly herbivores (although there are one or two indications to the contrary), hippos possess a set of fearsome, razor-sharp, canines, which are purely used for fighting, preceded by a 'yawning' display designed to intimidate aggressors.
- 4) They have a 'T' shaped pupil, which allows them to

see above and below water at the same time, and can stay under water for up to five minutes at a time.



5) Although they are actually too heavy to swim, they navigate under water by walking on, and pushing off against, the bottom of the river (rather like 'punting').

6) Although hippos were originally classified with pigs and peccaries, recent DNA analysis indicates that they are more closely related to whales. Gosh – we never realised that hippos were so interesting!

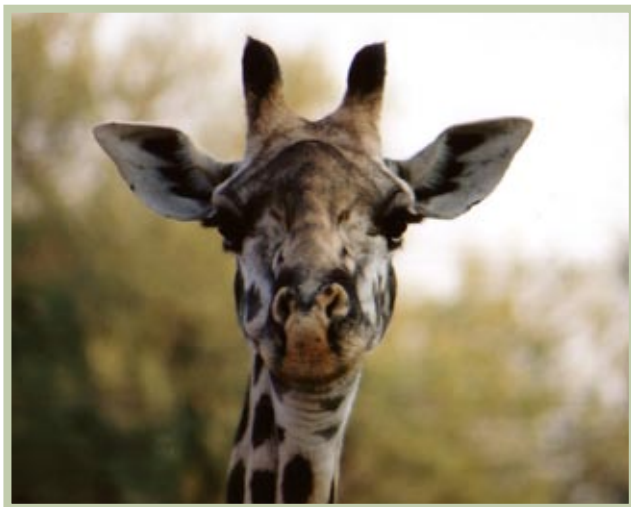
Giraffe



Male Giraffe.

The world's tallest living mammal, the giraffe comes in several different sub-species. In particular the 'Thornicroft's Giraffe' is to be found solely in Zambia's South Luangwa Valley, being slightly smaller than other sub-species, with a characteristic star-shaped marking pattern on its neck. They are essentially browsers, living to around 30 years. Both male and female have horns, but those of the female are pointed and covered in hair, whilst the males are blunt and denuded in hair, rather like a monk's tonsure. This is because males often fight by violently swinging their heads up and under into each other's stomachs (they also indulge in 'leaning' matches, often confused with a friendly gesture). On describing this difference in

the horns as the easy way of distinguishing between the sexes, one (lady) guest remarked that there was a more obvious way to tell. True – hadn't thought of that: you can sometimes try to be too clever.



Female Giraffe.

Interesting Facts:

- 1) Despite their long necks, these only contain seven vertebrae (the same as human beings), which, combined with their long legs, makes drinking quite an art-form. They also give birth standing up. The baby falls from a height of six feet and usually without being hurt.
- 2) Unusually, but in common with the camel, when they walk, both legs on one side of the body move forward at the same time. Check this out!
- 3) They can actually clean inside their ears, using their 18-inch long tongue.

Zebra

Living in small family groups, with the male keeping a careful eye over his family all the time, zebra usually give the impression of being really plump and well-fed even at times of drought. This is actually a false impression, and due to the build-up of methane gas as a product of its digestive system. The true test of health is whether its mane stands up, or droops. The most common member of the family is the Plains (or Burchell's) Zebra, with other sub-species distributed throughout Africa, such as Crawshay's Zebra, found in Zambia's South Luangwa (South Luangwa is almost like 'the valley that time forgot', containing as it does a whole range of sub species of various animals, unique to this location).



Interesting Facts:

- 1) Each zebra's stripe pattern is unique, rather like our own fingerprints. In Zambia the pattern of stripes consists of alternating black and white, although elsewhere in Africa there can be a faint shadow stripe in the centre of the white areas.
- 2) Zebras are often found associated with other grazers, such as wildebeest. Partly this is because this provides more eyes and ears, to keep watch for predators, and partly because zebra can open up grassland by feeding on old, tough grasses, leaving more selective grazers to get at the young and tender shoots that then emerge, and which thus follow close behind them.
- 3) Sometimes, whilst fighting for dominance, a Zebra stallion will lie still on the ground as if he has surrendered but once the other male lets up the stallion will strike and continue the fight.

Antelope and Gazelles

Probably the largest group of mammals to be encountered is that of the antelope or gazelles. Please don't ask us what the difference is between an antelope and a gazelle. Most guides whom we've enquired of actually haven't known, whilst those who did have provided as many different explanations as there are such respondents.

Incidentally, antelopes only see in black and white, which makes it difficult for them to see predators unless the predator is moving. For this reason they often move around with troops of baboons since baboons have better eye sight and colour vision and are able to spot predators before the antelopes can, and sound the alarm.

Antelopes include:

Impala



Probably the most commonly encountered, notable by their reddish-brown upper body, and white underneath. Their most memorable feature is probably the characteristic black Macdonald's 'M' marking on their rumps (remember as 'm' for 'iMpala'). Impala are noted for making prodigious leaps up to 8 feet high - often over bushes and even other impala. This behaviour is known variously as 'pronking' or 'stotting' and, of the several theories behind it, one is that it visually disrupts a predator's chase sequence; another is that it demonstrates how fit the animal is, and hence not worth chasing. In the mating season males will often go for days without eating as they protect their harem from competitors, emitting loud grunting sounds, until sheer exhaustion causes them to yield (or be eaten by predators).

Puku



Much less well distributed throughout Africa, although sharing Zambia's South Luangwa almost equally with the impala, and often confused with the latter. Puku are grazers (while impala are also

browsers) and lack the two-tone colouring and 'M' marking on the rump.

Bushbuck



Similarly sized to impala, but have a rich chestnut coloured coat adorned with a characteristic series of white stripes and spots. Bushbuck are much more shy, solitary and elusive. Unusually, the female bushbuck will eat the dung of her young to avoid the scent attracting predators.

Waterbuck



The Common Waterbuck is a somewhat larger antelope, grey in colour, and distinguished by its circle of white on its rump, rather suggesting that it has sat down on a newly-painted toilet seat. This probably serves as a following mechanism, each animal following the signal of that in front. In contrast, the Defassa Waterbuck has a solid such white area on the rump. The waterbuck has a gland at the base of its tail which secretes a thick oily black smelly liquid which acts as its own insect repellent

- especially for combating tsetse flies - who will die on contact with the liquid. This is also the reason why lions are reputed to not particularly like to eat waterbuck: they don't taste good! However recent research has cast doubt on this.

Kudu



One of the largest antelope is the (Greater) Kudu, with its distinctive stripes which develop their full number of ten over the animal's first year of life. It was described by the 19th-century hunter, Frederick Selous, as 'perhaps the handsomest antelope in the world' (didn't stop him shooting it, though). Its horns possess a very characteristic twist, from which the animal's age can be deduced (each turn takes two years to develop). Since the horns are hollow, they can be used as musical instruments, and also to store honey. In some parts of Africa they are also thought to house evil spirits.

Eland



Largest of all is the elusive Eland, with its characteristic neck hump and dewlap. When walking, tendon or joints in the eland's foreleg produce a sharp clicking sound, the cause of which has not been widely investigated. The sound carries some distance and is a good indication of an approaching herd. Some scientists, though, believe it may be a form of communication - if a male is walking through his territory, the clicking which can be heard for up to a mile away, may alert another eland about this territory.

Surprisingly, and despite their large size, they are quite capable of jumping over a 6 foot fence. They are extremely shy, however, and it's rare to get within quarter of a mile of them.

Less commonly encountered antelope are Roan, Sable, Lechwe, Reedbuck, Grysbok, Duiker, Dik-Dik, Tsessebe and Lichtenstein's Hartebeest (with its characteristic white rump, strongly resembling the jodhpurs that illustrate the front cover of Jilly Cooper's book - Riders).

Amongst Gazelles, both the Thompson's and Grant's varieties are commonly found in Eastern Africa - Kenya and Tanzania.

Wilbebeest



The Wildebeest perhaps also deserves a paragraph of its own, being the centrepiece of the celebrated wildebeest migration that endlessly circles around Northern Tanzania and Southern Kenya, following the rains in search of new grass. We recently enjoyed a cartoon which depicted a young wildebeest on its first such migration, plaintively enquiring of its parents 'Are we there yet?' Again South Luangwa is noted for its own sub-species, the Cookson's Wildebeest (but then you already 'gnu' that, didn't you?).

Other Mammals and Reptiles

Other mammals include primates such as the vervet monkey and baboon, carnivores such as the cheetah, serval, hyena, jackal and wild dog, the warthog, largely nocturnal creatures such as genets, civets, and porcupine, and water-dwelling creatures (reptiles), such as crocodile and the monitor lizard.

Vervet Monkey



Its alarm call varies greatly depending on the different type of threat to the community. Thus they will use distinct calls to warn of invading leopards, snakes and eagles. Their constant grooming of each other is also a way of building bonds and alliances between individuals, and reinforcing hierarchies.

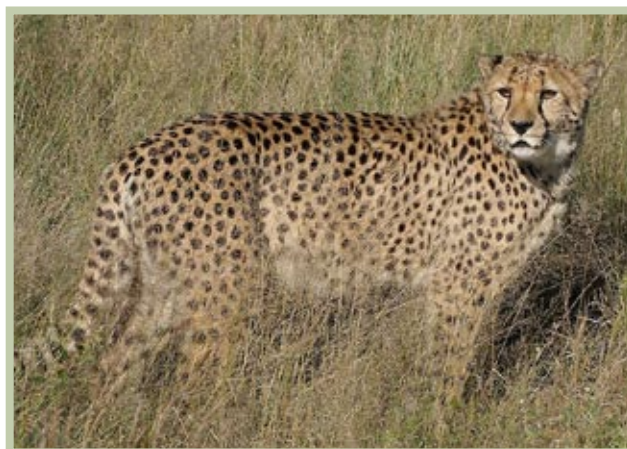
(Yellow) Baboon



The higher the angle that Yellow Baboons hold their tails the more important they are in the troop. Hence it is relatively easy to pick out the dominant males. At night they will congregate in the branches of trees for safety, the boss baboons making their way there

last of all, confident that they will be able to turf off their lesser brethren who made the mistake of trying to bag the best spots early for themselves.

Cheetah



The cheetah is the fastest land mammal, reaching speeds of up to 60 mph, its claws, atypically, being largely non-retractile, giving the cheetah maximum grip when on a chase. Their extra-long tail acts as a rudder during high speed chases, enabling them to match the jinks and turns of their prey. Their cry is quite different from that of the lion or leopard, being more of a bird-like chirp or whistle.

Serval



These are medium sized cats with extremely long legs, and huge ears that they use for pinpointing the location of their prey – small rodents and birds – before leaping high in the air to come down on such with both front feet together. Usually seen (although with difficulty) in tall grasslands. When once given the opportunity to stroke (a tame) one, I found to my surprise that they purr just like a domestic cat.

Hyena



Within a Spotted Hyena clan, all females are dominant over all males, being larger and more aggressive than the males. Then there is also a definite linear hierarchy within this female society - females remain in the clan throughout their lives and daughters inherit their mother's rank.

Males, on the other hand, disperse at about 18 months of age and join a new clan. They are both scavengers and predators. Their droppings are white, like chalk (and are sometimes known as 'missionary chalk'), because of the high calcium content of the bones that they consume – nothing is wasted.

True Stories Number Twelve: The Hyena and the Leopard Kill

Once, on a night drive, we were watching a leopard feasting on a recent impala kill in the dried-up river bed just below us. Suddenly a hyena rocketed in, and the leopard leapt to safety on top of the bank right by the side of our vehicle (leopards, unlike lions, are solitary hunters and cannot risk injury in defending their prey from scavengers such as the hyena – which was almost the same size as the leopard).

So fast did it happen that there was no sensation of the hyena running in, or of the leopard leaping away – just the instantaneous appearance of the hyena and the abrupt change of location on the part of the leopard. However the leopard was clearly unwilling to give up just like that, and so the hyena then snatched a complete foetus from the impala carcass and ran off with it, allowing the leopard to return.

Jackal

Black-backed or side-striped. Quite elusive to spot. Jackals mate for life and often forage together, or return to share food if foraging singly.

Wild Dog



One of Africa's most endangered species, with only some 4000 individuals said to remain in the whole of the continent. Their favourite prey is antelope, which they will run down for hours. Not particularly shy, there are several accounts of impala being ripped to pieces in camp itself – an event of somewhat mixed satisfaction to those in camp at the time. They will swallow whole pieces of meat, which, on their return to their den, will be regurgitated for the pups who have stayed behind. Each animal's marking are unique.

True Stories Number Thirteen: The Joys of Morning

Early one morning, on a walking safari, an impala was seen racing along parallel to us. It ran for a good two hundred yards at top speed, leaping into the air (pronking) at intervals, obviously very full of the joys of morning. It finally came to a halt, totally winded, only to have to turn and race back the way it came as best it could, pursued by a pack of six wild dogs into which it had almost run!. The impala appeared to have got clear, although with wild dog reported as having an 85% success rate on a hunt (unlike feline predators, they can just keep on running for hours), and a top speed of almost 25 mph, the eventual outcome was far from certain.

Warthog



Its facial warts are actually composed of hard skin and dense underlying tissues, it being thought that their purpose is to protect the jaw and eyes when fighting. The males have two pairs of such warts; the females only one pair. Unusually, it kneels down when grubbing about on the ground.

The female warthogs only have four teats, so litter sizes usually are confined to just four young. Each piglet then has its "own" teat and suckles exclusively from it. A family of young warthog rushing around is a bizarre sight, their tails held rigidly vertical, looking for all the world like radio-controlled robots.

Genet



Often mistaken for members of the cat family, genets are actually closely related to mongooses, although are often to be seen high in trees, and can even be mistaken for baby leopards, due to their spotted colouration.

Civet



Again often wrongly referred to as the civet cat, this ground-living close relative to the genet seems to thrive on unpleasant tasting or even toxic creatures such as millipedes or toads, or even poisonous snakes. Their diet also includes a variety of fruits and so on, and their droppings, often collected together in a civet 'midden' are a very characteristic mixture of these diverse elements of their diet. The perineal gland of the African civet also produces an oily secretion called "civet" that has been used in the perfume industry for many years.

Porcupine



These protect themselves, not by shooting their quills at adversaries, as is sometimes thought, but by charging backwards to ram them, leaving their 40cm long quills embedded in their enemy. It doesn't always save them – we once came across some lion droppings with a porcupine quill embedded therein – ouch! Incidentally, do you know how porcupines have sex? The answer is 'very carefully'.

(Nile) Crocodile



This is the only species of terrestrial predator that considers man to be part of its normal diet. Thus a crocodile will actively hunt you in order to eat you. Their speciality is to hide under water, close to the river bank, sometimes waiting days before they pounce, slowing their heart down to as little as one beat per minute, thereby conserving oxygen and allowing them to stay submerged for much longer. Hence I always tend to keep a fair distance from the edge of rivers while out walking. In fact I once saw one launch itself for more than its own length in height out of the water, to take out a large bird perched on a steep river bank. When they mate they dig a hole about 40 cms deep in which they lay about 50 eggs. The sex of those eggs is determined by the heat they were incubated in: thus any egg incubated between 31.7°C - 34.5°C will be a male and outside these limits a female.

Monitor Lizard



The sworn enemy of nesting birds such as the carmine bee-eater, monitor lizards lay their eggs in termite mounds: the termites then seal the hole

dug by the mother, resulting in a living incubator of constant temperature and humidity.

Other reptiles that you might come across are the *chameleon* (very difficult to spot, though!) and a variety of *snakes*, although these are generally very shy and normally try to avoid contact with people. It is very, very rare for visitors to be bitten by poisonous snakes.

Mongoose



Then there are mongeese (OK, mongooses), of which there are several varieties, slender, dwarf, white-tailed, banded, all of which can readily be spotted on night drives, as well as during the day.

Honey Badger



The Honey Badger, or Ratel, almost deserves a section all to itself. Sometimes known as the 'panzer' of the bush, it is the toughest and roughest creature around, believed to have even attacked lions. Known to tear the tyres off vehicles (and, it is rumoured, the

groins out of men who it catches out in the open air) it can hold its own against virtually any other species. It's only the same size as a domestic badger, and also tends to habit the area around camp kitchens scavenging for scraps.

Watching a group of otherwise fearless young men approaching for a viewing, cupping their hands desperately around their most precious parts is one of Africa's finest sights.

Rock Hyrax

The rock hyrax, or dassie, isn't all that prepossessing, being a small dog-sized rodent, but can you guess which other animal it is most related to? Go on – try! Give up? It's the elephant!



Insects

Forgive us if we don't spend too much time on the insects, although the most interesting is probably the ubiquitous termite, whose presence is revealed by its well-known 'mounds', reaching up to 6 metres high, and which may contain up to a million inhabitants. A series of tunnels and shafts threading throughout the mound create a most effective cooling system.

In fact the longest living insects are Queen Termites. Some have been known to lay eggs for up to 50 years and may live even longer and, bearing in mind she can lay 30,000 eggs a day and the number of workers and soldiers in her colony can exceed 6 million, this is one helluvan empire.

We've already waxed eloquently on the tsetse fly and mosquito elsewhere.

Birds

The other major category of viewing – in fact the most numerous – is that of birds. Again we have to ask forgiveness for not giving this category the importance that some people – devout 'twitchers' in particular – would feel that it deserves. The author is notorious for his plebeian attitude of only knowing two species of UK birds ('one is the sparrow, while the other one isn't'), but, during many years spent travelling throughout Africa he has actually developed the ability to identify some couple of dozen of the hundreds of species – many migratory – that can be seen here. To some extent this is facilitated by the great variety in size, colour and plumage of the species found.

True Stories Number Fourteen: LBJs

On one game drive we were explaining to a guest about Africa's 'LBJs' ('Little Brown Jobs') – birds which, to our untutored eyes, look absolutely identical and unremarkable, their description providing you with an excellent impression of their appearance. Overhearing this, the guide pulled a two inch thick book out of his rucksack, entitled 'LBJs of Southern Africa'. However I'm not sure that somebody who can identify and distinguish each of these actually shouldn't be encouraged to get out more!

In alphabetical order, for once, some very distinct species of bird that you might expect to see are:

Bats

Bats (OK, they're not birds, but they fly). Often to be seen in the rafters of large structures within camp, such as your room. However, contrary to popular opinion, they will not get entangled in your hair, or suck your blood!

Cape Turtle Dove

Cape Turtle Dove (you may not actually see this to recognise it, but you will hear its characteristic call, which (during the day at least) sounds remarkably like 'work harder, work harder' (at night it changes subtly to 'drink lager').

Carmine bee-eater



Carmine bee-eater – probably one of the most striking of all. A migratory species it arrives in Africa from September onwards, making its nest in holes drilled to a depth of 2.5 m or more into sandy river banks.

Grey Crowned Crane



The Grey Crowned Crane, shown here, has a notable breeding display involving dancing, bowing, and jumping.

Egret



Egret – both the Cattle Egret and the Great White Egret, shown here, are varieties of heron.

Egyptian Goose



Egyptian Goose – related to the shelduck, and largely found in the Nile Valley.

Fish Eagle



The national bird of Zambia, although usually spotted at the top of a tree, rather than on the river bank, as here. It can live up to 45 years.

Flamingo



Flamingo – classically seen, as here, in Kenya's Lake Nakuru.

Goliath Heron



A distinctively coloured and large variety of the species.

Grey Heron



Grey Heron – much more common, if less distinctive.

Ground Hornbill



Colourful ground-living birds, whose young look distinctly like prehistoric reptile-birds.

Guinea Fowl



Usually to be observed scuttering along on the ground alongside your game-viewing vehicle as you drive around.

Hardida Ibis



Possessing the characteristic curved ibis beak, this bird can drive you crazy with its raucous 'Hardida' cry.

Hammerkop



Its name means 'hammer head' in Afrikaans, for reasons that are immediately obvious.

Honey Guide

A honey-loving bird that is unable to break open a bees' nest on its own. Hence it is reputed to fly ahead of a human being, making its characteristic call, leading him to such a nest. The deal is that, having been shown where it is located, he breaks it open and helps himself, but leaves some for the honey guide as well. If he is too greedy to share, then local legend has it that next time he will be led into a pride of lions!

Lilac Breasted Roller



One of the more delicately beautiful of Africa's birds, the final part of its name originating in the peculiar 'roll' that it executes in flight.

Marabou Stork



A scavenger, like the vulture, with which it competes.

Ostrich



Not observed everywhere, but the largest of all Africa's birds, by far.

Oxpeckers



Several slightly different species exist, servicing buffalo, hippo, giraffe and antelope. You will undoubtedly be told that they benefit the animal by divesting them of ticks and other insects, but recent research suggests that they instead spend most of their time picking at wounds and reopening scabs.

Quelea

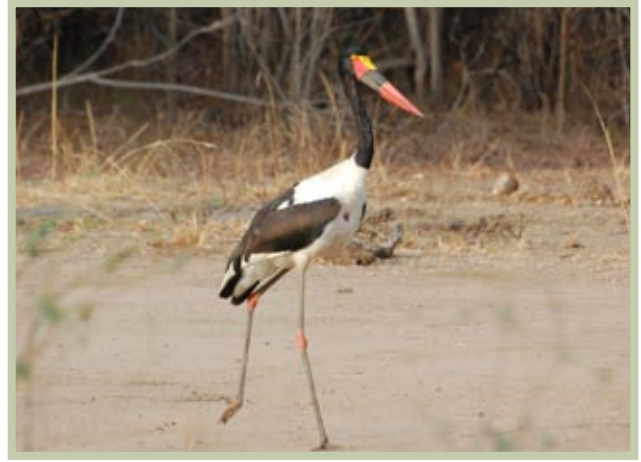
Seen in huge flocks that erupt as one and wheel dramatically through the air.

Sacred Ibis



Depicted on ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphics more than 5000 years ago, the Sacred Ibis again displays the instantly recognisable ibis beak-shape, combined with a distinctive black and white body.

Saddle-billed Stork



Very recognisable. The sexes can be distinguished by the fact that the female's eye has a red centre, while the male's is all black (remembered by the story that he commented unfavourably once when she applied red make-up around her eyes, and she gave him a black eye!)

Vulture



Represented by half a dozen different species, often to be seen congregating together on a carcass. They have incredible eyesight, spotting a carcass from many miles away, flying at a height of over 30,000 feet, and being able to dive at up to 50 mph.

The absence of plumage around their head and upper neck enables them more easily to plunge deep into messy carcasses.

Yellow-billed Stork



These hunt by touch, wading slowly in shallow water, stirring up the muddy bottom, snapping up anything that touches their sensitive beak.

Finally, we can't recall what the bird seen here was called (if you know, let us know), and it's a poor photograph (yes, I took it myself) but have you ever seen one sitting down like this before?



Plants and Trees

Last of all we come to plant and tree species, although these are really far too numerous even to begin to list. If you're ever out on foot with a local native guide, though, you will be amazed by the huge variety of plants described as being 'native Viagra', although they're not to be found (any more) close to villages. Somewhat sceptical, I once asked a guide if they really worked, and he just nodded very solemnly. I took his word for it. In fact a huge range of native medicines can be found growing in the bush – not surprisingly

perhaps, since their active ingredients are simply the same as those found in proprietary medicines.

Among trees, the **mopane tree** is very commonly encountered, its wood being famed for its slow-burning properties, and hence extensively used for camp fires.



Sausage Tree.

Perhaps one of the strangest looking trees is the **sausage tree**, with its pendulous marrow-shaped fruit. These weigh a ton, but, for some reason, the sausage tree is often chosen to park under at tea-time. If one of these fruit fell on your head you probably wouldn't wake up with a headache (you wouldn't wake up at all). Cut open, these fruit can be used to counteract insect bites, and are used for a number of other skin complaints, and may even be useful in combating some skin cancers. Combine the sausage tree with breadfruit and the 'scrambled egg' plant, and you've got a full English breakfast.



Baobab Tree.

Second only in its bizarre appearance to the sausage tree is the **baobab**, or 'upside down tree'. This tree can grow to an age of many hundreds of years, and it is said that you can estimate its age by measuring

its circumference: one formula states that one metre equates to one hundred years, although other versions differ. It attains a mythical significance among many native Africans, and in Zambia it is even used as a birthing place (when its interior has become hollow with the passage of time). Some tribes believe that drinking a brew made from the seeds of the Baobab tree will protect them from crocodiles – I wouldn't bank on it myself, though.



Just as unusual in appearance is this 'Crocodile Bark Tree'. Can you spot the tree frog halfway up it?



David Livingstone statue at Victoria Falls.

Collective Nouns

Groups of animals each have their own distinctive collective term, rather than simply the ubiquitous 'herd'. Sometimes alternative, and more descriptive, terms have been put forward, and, although you are unlikely in practice to find these in actual usage, some – for example 'a dazzle of zebra' or 'a crash of rhino' – are wonderfully evocative.

- Antelope:** a herd (yes, I know – boring)
- Baboon:** a troop, tribe, flange
- Bats:** a colony
- Buffalo:** a herd, troop, obstinacy
- Cheetah:** a coalition
- Crocodile:** a nest, congregation, float, bask
- Elephant:** a herd
- Giraffe:** a herd, corps, group, tower, dither
- Hippo:** a pod, bloat, school, huddle
- Hyena:** a clan, cackle
- Jackal:** a skulk
- Leopard:** these don't usually group together, but the term 'a leap' is sometimes used
- Lion:** a pride, sault, sowse
- Mongoose:** a business, although in the case of the banded mongoose we prefer 'a band'.
- Mosquito:** a scourge
- Porcupine:** a prickle
- Rhino:** a herd, crash, stubbornness
- Stork:** a mustering
- Vervet Monkey:** a troop, tribe, shrewdness
- Warthog:** a clan
- Wild Dog:** a pack
- Wildebeest:** a herd, implausibility
- Zebra:** a herd, dazzle, cohort, crossing (?)

We realise that these aren't African species, but couldn't resist sharing with you:

- Peacock:** an ostentation
- Tiger:** an ambush

True Stories Number Fifteen: Trees and Kangaroos

On his travels through Zambia, the renowned Victorian explorer, David Livingstone, first came across the Red Mahogany tree (*Khayanyasica*), at that time unknown to him. It is reputed that, on asking his guide the name of this tree the latter replied with a word in his local language, and it was by this name that Livingstone duly recorded it in his journal. What he didn't realise is that this reply simply meant "I've no idea"!

There is an urban myth that, in a similar fashion, the early explorers of Australia were astounded to see a most bizarre animal, which kept its young in a pouch in front of its belly, hopping around, and enquired as to its name. The story goes that their aboriginal source didn't understand him, and replied as such in his own language – "kangaroo". Sadly this story has now been disproved, but imagine if Livingstone had come across numerous previously undiscovered fauna and flora and had enquired of the same uninformed guide as to their local name. This would have given The Royal Society, back in London, something to think about. It's almost Pythonesque.

Reading List

These are just a small selection from my large personal collection of books on Africa. Some will be readily available, for example through Amazon, although a few, mainly those published in South Africa, might require a bit more tracking down. Quite possibly a number are now out of print, but most things can be tracked down on the internet these days, with a bit of effort.

Be warned though, although these books provide either ideal reading before you go, or a fascinating follow up to your journey, they are mostly far too heavy to cart out with you.

This is of course why we wrote this guide in the first place!

Country Guides

On a country by country basis, you can't do better than to consult one of the Lonely Planet Series, or the Brady Guides. Then more generally there are:

Adventuring in Southern Africa

Allen Bechky
Sierra Club Books (1997)

A comprehensive discussion of each country in this area, together with detailed tips on watching wildlife and so on.

Wild Places of Southern Africa

Tim O'Hagan
Southern (1999)

More of the same, but focusing more on destinations themselves.

Wildlife Guides

These books will tell you virtually *everything* that you could ever wish to know about the wildlife that you will come across on safari.

The Safari Companion

Richard D Estes
Russell Friedman (1999)

Subtitled 'A guide to Watching African Mammals', this book contains almost everything that you might want to know.

The Behaviour Guide to African Mammals

Richard D Estes
University of California Press (1992)

Very similar, but with even more information regarding actual behaviour.

The Kingdon Pocket Guide to African Mammals

Jonathon Kingdon
A&C Black (2004)

Again similar to the two above, although with not quite as much detail, but with beautiful colour drawings, rather than just black and white.

Tracking

If, especially after experiencing a walking safari, you feel like getting much closer to the whole business of spoor identification and so on, then these are the books for you.

Tracks and Tracking in Southern Africa

Louis Liebenberg

Struik (2000)

A pocket-sized guide, with both colour photographs and diagrams, focusing on tracking, but also giving a condensed version of the information given in the above Safari Companions.

Old Guide's Tips Number Nine: Elephant Droppings

On a walking safari you will occasionally come across a still-steaming heap of elephant droppings in your path. Somebody is bound to wonder just how long ago they were deposited. The Old Guide's trick is to stick a finger deep into one such heap, pull it out and lick it appreciatively, murmuring something like "Ah yes, about 40 minutes ago". The look of horror (mixed with a certain amount of respect) on your companions' faces is wonderful to behold. Needless to say, the finger that you lick isn't actually the finger that you stuck in, although they won't notice this. The downside to this prank is that you're still left with a finger covered in elephant poo, but it's worth it for the extent to which you gross out your audience.

Signs of the Wild

Clive Walker

Struik (1996)

Very much concentrates on tracks and droppings.

A Field Guide to the Tracks and Signs of Southern & East African Wildlife

Chris & Tilde Stuart

Struik (2000)

Probably the most comprehensive of these guides.

Wild Ways

Peter Apps

Struik (2000)

Purely devoted to Ethology – the science of animal behaviour – and absolutely comprehensive.

Old Guide's Tips Number Ten: Tracking

As an indication of the depth of understanding that you can aspire to in the area of tracking and so on, consider the photograph below. I came across these droppings whilst out on a walking safari with a number of guests, and was able to amaze them by not only identifying the species of the animal responsible, but also its sex, its probable location at that moment, and also its name.



Species? The answer is an impala – fairly easy to identify, although a number of antelope leave very similar droppings, such as puku, waterbuck and bushbuck. In particular it is quite difficult to distinguish an isolated impala dropping from that of a puku; however they can be distinguished by consideration of the habitat in which they are found, and by comparison with other droppings nearby.

Sex? The answer is male. You can see that the animal urinated at the same time as defecating. However, although in the case of a female, the droppings would be centred on the circle of urine, in the case of a male, for obvious anatomical reasons, the circle of urine is displaced from the centre of the pile of droppings.

Location? To the right of the pile of droppings, as shown here. This male impala was obviously facing to the right at the time, and since the droppings are very recent (the urine hasn't dried out fully yet) it is very likely that it moved ahead in that same direction, and is still over there.

Name? Reginald – but I'm not going to give away all my tracking skills secrets by telling you how I knew this!

● Personal Accounts

The books in this section range from purely personal accounts of time spent in the bush, to books that are intended as more historical in nature.

Secrets of the Savanna

Mark & Delia Owens
Houghton Mifflin (2006)

A graphic account of this young couple's time in Zambia's North Luangwa National Park, and their attempts to halt the elephant poaching there.

Don't Run – Whatever You Do

Peter Allison
Nicholas Brealey (2007)
Chronicles the true-life adventures of a young safari guide in Botswana. Great stuff!

The Trouble With Africa

Vic Guhrs
Penguin (2004)
An account of this photographer's life with his family in a remote bush camp in Zambia's South Luangwa Valley.

Elephant Memories

Cynthia Moss
University of Chicago Press (2000)
A detailed account of the author's 13-year study of elephants in Kenya.

On Safari

Armand Denis
Collins (1966), but probably long out of print.
For many people, especially of my generation, the first exposure to safari life came through the series of black & white TV programmes produced by Armand & Michaela Denis. This, his autobiography, gives a unique record of a world that has now largely vanished.

Africa – Another Side of the Coin

Andrew Sardanis
I.B. Tauris (2003)
A detailed historical account by a man who was intimately associated with the final years of North Rhodesia, and the resultant emergence of the Zambian nation.

Wildlife Wars – My Battle to Save Kenya's Elephants

Richard Leakey
Macmillan (2001)
The Leakey family have been at the centre of Kenya's wildlife policy-making situation for many years, with mixed fortunes.

Out of Africa

Karen Blixen
Guild Publishing (1985)
There can be few people who are not aware of the film that arose from this book, starring Robert Redford and Meryl Streep. The book itself is equally memorable.

The Lost World of the Kalahari

Laurens van der Post
Odhams (1858)
Laurens van der Post has written several books set in Africa – this is probably his finest, and best known.

Dark Star Safari

Paul Theroux
Penguin (2003)
Paul Theroux should need no introduction as a travel writer, and this is an exciting account of an overland journey made from Cairo to Cape Town, down the entire length of the African continent.

Death in The Long grass

Peter Hathaway Capstick
St Martin's Press (1977)
A thoroughly nauseating account of big-game hunting in Africa.

The End Of The Game

Peter H Beard
Collins (1977)
An utterly chilling account of how the vast elephant herds that once roamed free across Africa became almost wiped out as a result of man's poaching activities.

The Last Elephant

Jeremy Gavron
Flamingo (1994)
Gavron tracks down the last elephant left in Burundi as part of his quest to discover the truth about this animal's survival prospects.

Old Guide's Tips Number Eleven: Multiple Publishing

If you are anxious, as I am, to track down as many books on Africa as possible, then you need to be aware that books published in the UK (as with Jeremy Gavron's book, above) may also have been published in the US, under a totally different name, leading the unwary (like me) to end up with two identical copies of the same book – in this case the US-published 'King Leopold's Dream' – Pantheon Books (1993), which is identical to 'The Last Elephant'.

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