

# The Practical A-Z Guide TO GOING ON SAFARI



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# The Practical A-Z Guide to Going on Safari

**Everything You Need to Know**

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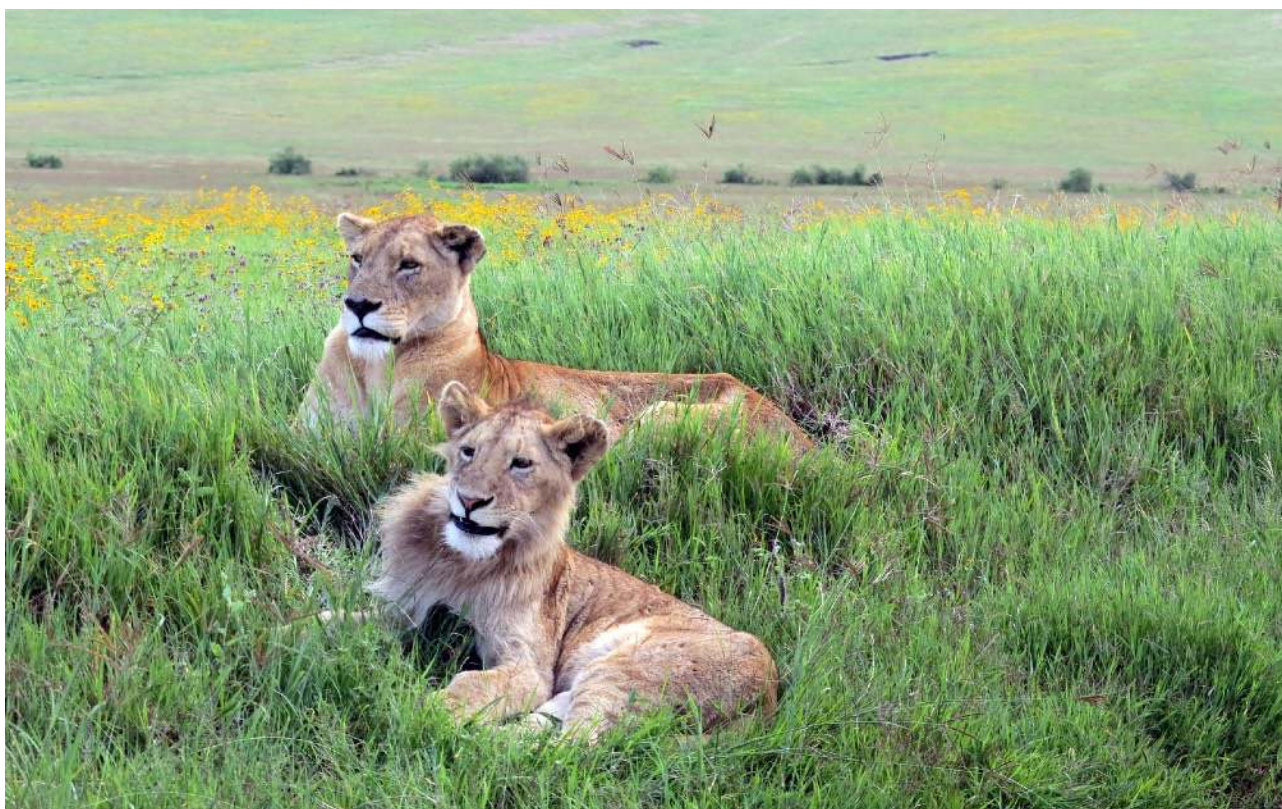
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*“The only man I envy is the man who has not yet been to Africa — for he has so much to look forward to.” (Richard Mullin)*



# What is Safari?

From the wildebeest covered plains of Tanzania to the elephant filled forests of Botswana, safari is the world's great escape into untouched wilderness. It's an immersion in the wild, one that takes you away from urbanscapes and into a realm where people are merely visitors. Africa offers one of the world's final remaining untouched natural landscapes, offering huge areas that have forever been the haven of wild mammals. Going on a safari offers an immersion into this world. It's far more than sightseeing. On an African safari you feel as if you are part of the landscape. You open your senses to nature in all its drama and charm. It's something that I first experienced when I was just a child. And it's something that's never left me. Because once you've been on safari, you'll want to go again and again.

Understanding safari further can be done through exploring the origins of the term. In Swahili, safari means "long journey," a reflection of how the experience isn't just about seeing a few animals. Safari is nothing like a zoo. The animals aren't in cages. These are wild fenceless landscapes where anything can happen. It's unpredictable and it's always intimate. Wild scenes play out just meters from your eyes, like lions taking down zebra or rhinos roaming around waterholes. A safari isn't about arriving with a tick-list or saying that you saw a few wild animals. It's about going on a journey through Africa and discovering nature's unmistakable rhythm.

But with safari there are always so many questions. From the basic concerns about safety - what happens if a hyena comes into the camp? - to practical details like what to pack, what accessories are needed, how to stay healthy, and even how to say hello. This practical **A - Z** guide is designed to answer all these questions, covering everything you need to know for a safari journey. It's based on the years of experience I have of going on safari and over 23 years of living in Africa. With this guide I hope you will be fully prepared for landing in Africa and going off on your own safari adventure.

*“If there were one more thing I could do, it would be to go on safari once again.” (Karen Blixen)*



# Who is Michael Theys?

I am a blogger and Internet entrepreneur from Belgium and the proud founder of Africa Freak. I fell into Africa's magic when I was a little boy! :-)

I've had the chance to live and travel across the African continent for over 23 years. As a result, I am perhaps one of the greatest Africa "Freak" enthusiasts on the World Wide Web. My travel ventures have taken me to various countries. So far, I have lived in Kenya, Burundi, Tanzania, Zambia, South Africa, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

More recently, I embarked on a 58-day/13 500 km expedition traversing 8 African nations. It was an unbelievable journey that took me from Nairobi all the way down to Cape Town.



When I am not overseas, I work on [AfricaFreak.com](http://AfricaFreak.com), a place for Africa enthusiasts. At Africa Freak we come together and share our great stories about the marvellous continent that is Africa.

My long-term goal is to literally revolutionise the way people create, share, and discover content pertaining to Africa on the Internet. The purpose of our platform is to cultivate content that reflects the true beauty and complexity of both Africa and its people.

Life is too short not to follow your dreams. By this point, you have just seen a glimpse of mine.

## Do you feel like being a part of the *dream*?

The journey is long. But it is also remarkably exciting. As a man with great faith, I believe that both faith and perseverance are the key ingredients to success in life. I invite you to enter into the Africa Freak community and explore your own African dreams. As Dr. Martin Luther King puts it: "Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step." These are some words of wisdom to meditate on as you read this book and plan a journey to Africa.

Please do not hesitate to send me a [mail](mailto:mailto:) for any questions that you might have. I'd be glad to help! I am here as a loyal *rafiki* (friend)! You can also connect with me or the Africa Freak community through any of the methods below.

Enjoy the eBook! And *karibuni* (welcome).

*Michaël Theys*

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# The Practical Guide to Going on Safari

## Easy Peasy from A-Z

As the title suggests, this practical guide is an easy **A - Z** run through of everything you're going to need on an African safari. With this you should be fully prepared for anything the landscape or wildlife can throw at you, including the thieving baboons. And who better to introduce it all than a majestic leopard photographed in Namibia's Etosha National Park.



## A = Accessories

### *Small things that make a big difference*

Pack for any trip and it's easy to get preoccupied with the big things, like bags, shoes and sleeping bags. But for a successful African safari, it's usually the little things that really make a difference. Here's a few items that you shouldn't leave home without:

- **Swiss army knife** or other **penknife**. This really comes in handy when you're in the bush, from uncorking a bottle of wine to cutting up rope to tie down your tent. Or perhaps there's a roadside stall selling huge ripe mangoes. Maybe a sundowner bottle of beer needs opening when you're gazing over the waterhole. In rural African landscapes, where there's little around, a penknife is an essential item.



- **Money belt**. There's various popular sayings in Africa that run along the lines of “once the fruit is ripe, you need to eat it.” In another language it means “if there's an opportunity, you have to take it.” These metaphors can be applied to your travels in Africa. It's very unlikely you'll get robbed, as long as you don't present an opportunity. A hidden money belt keeps your cash and travel documents safely stowed away, so nobody is eyeing up the wallet that bulges out of your



back pocket, or a handbag filled with all your valuables. There are many models of money belt, like Travelwey, Landing Gear, Eagle Creek, or my personal favourite, the Pacsafe RFIDsafe 100. It's compact enough to hide under your clothing and has two zippered compartments.

- **Combination lock** or **padlock**. Suitcases usually have their own locks but you may need a combination lock for a duffel bag or backpack. A three-dial combination lock should be fine; it's more of a deterrent than anything else. Increasingly common is Pacsafe wire meshing that can be fitted around backpacks and duffel bags so nobody can get inside. This is very useful when you're taking buses or local transport, especially overnight.

*“Reminds me of my safari in Africa. Somebody forgot the corkscrew and for several days we had to live on nothing but food and water.” (W.C. Fields)*

## B = Binoculars

### *A major priority on a safari packing list*

On an African safari you'll be looking out for the big things and the small things, from herds of 50 elephants to tiny exotic birds that flutter around Acacia trees. In most national parks, your safari vehicle isn't allowed to travel off the trail, which can lead to frustration when the action is taking place far away. Binoculars always come in handy, whether it's scanning the trees for a leopard, getting a close-up of a kill, scanning the savannah for your next move, or admiring the intricate feathers of a tropical bird.



Here are ten things to consider when buying your safari binoculars.

**1. Brand.** There's a huge amount of choice out there. I trust and recommend Zeiss, Canon, Bushnell, Pentax, Swarovski, Steiner, Leiva, Tenta and Fujinon.

**2. Cost.** A reasonable pair of binoculars can be found for US\$100. Anything else isn't really worth it. Expect \$200 – 300 for a good pair that's guaranteed to last. The Pentax Papilio and Nikon

Monarch are good entry binoculars. You can also find cheap second-hand pairs online.

**3. Eye Relief.** Eye relief refers to the optimal distance between your eyes and the binocular's eyepiece. If you wear glasses, look for an eye relief of at least 15mm.

**4. Field of View (FOV).** This is the width of the view at a particular distance. In general, the greater the magnification, the narrower the field of view. For an African safari, choose a pair with a field of view of at least 330ft at 1000 yards.

**5. Magnification Power.** Binoculars are fitted with a series of numbers, like 8 x 42 or 10 x 50. The first number represents the magnification. A figure of 10 means the image is ten times bigger than seen with the naked eye. For tracking fast moving objects like birds or running mammals, don't consider magnification greater than 8x. 10x or greater is better for general animal spotting and when you need to scan the horizon.

**6. Lens Size / Aperture.** The second number represents the diameter of the lens; the larger the number, the bigger the lens and the more light the binoculars can take in. This is important in fading light and for making the scenes more colourful. For optimal results, consider fully multi-coated lenses.

**7. Shock Resistance.** It can be bumpy in a safari truck so you'll want protective rubber or synthetic housing that prevents scratches on your binoculars.

**8. Waterproofing.** Waterproofing isn't just about protection from dropping the binoculars in a hippo-filled lake. It protects them against moisture, humidity, and the swirling dust that inhabits many safari landscapes.

**9. Weight and Size.** There's a trade off here. Compact binoculars are lighter and easily transported, so great for birdwatching. But larger binoculars offer greater magnification, precision and image detail.

**10. My Personal Recommendation.** I've had my Russian Tenta army-type binoculars for over 15 years and they've probably been the best ever safari buy (thanks dad).



## **B = Books**

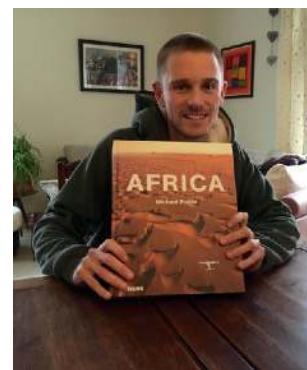
### *Some personal favourites to get you excited*

I'm not suggesting filling your bag with a lot of hardback illustrated books, but there's some amazing literature that will really inspire you to visit Africa. Plus, a couple of field guides are an excellent accompaniment to a safari. With those in your backpack, it's easy to recognise animal behaviour and exactly what you've just seen. The following are some of my personal favourites:

## *Illustrated Books*

**Africa, by Michael Poliza** – A photography masterpiece with sublime illustrations and jaw-dropping images. One glance and you'll fall in love with Africa.

**Serengeti: Natural Order on the African Plain, by Mitsuaki Iwago** – I got this book from my parents when I was only a child. It made me immediately fall in love with Africa's extraordinary wildlife. Mitsuaki is a real artist with his camera.



## *Field Guides*

**Birds of East Africa, by J.G. Williams and Norman Arlott** – An indispensable guide with 1283 species and 650 colour illustrations.

**Larger Illustrated Guide to Birds of Southern Africa, by Norman Arlott, Phil Hockey, Ian Sinclair, and Peter Hayman** – Recently updated, this is the most comprehensive guide on its subject.

**The Safari Companion: A Guide to Watching African Animals, by Richard D. Estes** – This book is like having a personal guide with you on safari, as it's full of information about behaviour displays, vegetation zones, and what to look out for when you spot all the big mammals.

**Signs of the Wild, by Clive Walker** – This is my bible for Southern Africa safari. It contains detailed information on the spoor and signs of all Southern African mammals, plus stunning illustrations, distribution maps, and an environmental glossary.

**Larger Animals of East Africa, by David Hosking and Martin B. Withers** – It was one of the first safari guides I ever bought. It's got great illustrations and is very easy to use. Perfect for a first-time safari.

## *Travel Guides*

**Lonely Planet** – There's both an East Africa and Southern Africa multi-country guide by the LP. If you like the Lonely Planet style then these are good travel companions. I wouldn't recommend their Africa guidebook as it squeezes over 50 countries into 1000 pages, so there's very little detail.

**Bradt** – Bradt's various country guides are more in-depth and authoritative than the LP and it was Bradt that published the first ever guidebooks to various African countries. The major downside is that there's no up-to-date regional guide, so you'll need to buy a separate guidebook for every country.

## *Safari Tales*

**Don't Look Behind You! A Safari Guide's Encounters with Ravenous Lions, Stampeding Elephants, and Lovesick Rhinos, by Peter Allison** – The title says it all and you really feel like you're on an Africa adventure with the narrator.

**Whatever You Do, Don't Run: True Tales of a Botswana Safari Guide, by Peter Allison**

– Read this and you're certain to put African safari at number one on your travel wish-list.

**Out of Africa, by Karen Blixen** – A biography of living in Kenya and developing conservation.

**Born Free: A Lioness of Two Worlds, by Joy Adamson** – The original and still the best book on the complexities of wild versus tame.

### *General African Literature*

**Things Fall Apart, by Chinua Achebe** – A harrowing tale of what happened when white colonization entered West Africa.

**The Whale Caller, by Zakes Mda** – A surreal novel about a South African whale caller who falls in love with a migrating whale.

**The Shadow of the Sun, by Ryszard Kapuscinski** – 40 years of stories from a Polish journalist who lived all across the continent. Beautifully written and focuses more on the positives than many other journalist biographies.

**Half of a Yellow Sun, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** – A stunning story of love, tradition, modernity, and civil war.

*“I never knew of a morning in Africa when I woke up that I was not happy.” (Ernest Hemingway)*

## **B = Baboon Protection**

### *Protection for when animal meets man*



Baboons are amusing. They run around in troops, jump through trees, ball and shout, and generally make an entertaining safari highlight. But they're cheeky and impudent thieves, always ready to jump at an opportunity to run off with your food. So you always need to be vigilant and bring your mental baboon protection. Baboons have a habit of hanging around any place where there's people and food, notably the entrance gates to national

parks and public campsites. Their tactics involve jumping through any open windows, shouting, and running away with your packed lunch box. And they don't just steal bananas and stale bread. Baboons are experts at rummaging through your belongings and stealing the items of culinary luxury you brought for the safari.

So how do you protect yourself from baboons? Firstly, always keep the windows to the safari truck closed when you're parked, even if you're inside (it's pretty scary when a baboon jumps through the

open window and you're still inside the vehicle). Secondly, don't walk and visibly carry any food whenever baboons are around. And finally, but most important, stand your ground if a baboon snarls at you – they just want to scare you away so they can steal your goodies!



## Tales From An African Safari Guide

On one of my first ever jobs I was waiting at the entrance gate to Ngorongoro Conservation Area in Tanzania. There were baboons everywhere and I told everyone explicitly to keep the windows closed and not walk around with food. One of them opened the window to take some close-ups of the baboons as they climbed over the vehicles. I was buying the entrance tickets when suddenly, a piercing scream came from the car park. A young baboon had jumped through the open window and the commotion alerted three much larger members of the troop. There were now four baboons in the vehicle! I had to run out with a stick, open the door and scare them away. All on my third ever safari as a guide! I went to inspect the damage. The baboons had ignored the sandwiches and fruit. Instead they'd stolen my two tubes of Pringles, the only vegetarian packed lunch, and half a kilo of gourmet Dutch cheese – essentially the only items I couldn't replace!

## **B = Big Five**

### *Going beyond the safari favourites*

Okay, so you can't pack them, but knowing the big five is the starting point for your exploration of the wildlife in Africa. The big five is a big buzzword in the safari industry, yet it's got a menacing



history. It's actually a hunting term. These five animals were famous because they were the hardest to hunt, as it was only these five that would attack back when they were getting hunted. Fast-forward 100 years and it's these big five animals that are revered as the premier sights on an African safari. The big five are lion, leopard, elephant, rhino, and buffalo. And I'd like to see anyone who could squeeze any of these into a backpack.

Of course, seeking out these majestic animals is going to be at the heart of your safari experience. But don't get too preoccupied. There's far more to safari than just five animals. Some national parks have over 100 different mammals while others have herds of zebra or wildebeest that number over 100 000. A safari offers a complete immersion in the wild and you'll be surrounded by nature's weird and wonderful, so don't think it wasn't a success because one of the famous big five didn't get a tick on the list.

### Tales From My African Safaris

The first animal I ever encountered in the wild was a black rhino in Nairobi National Park. Everyone had said not to expect too much, so I hadn't even thought about any of the big five. It crossed the road right beneath our eyes - not a bad safari start don't you think? Perhaps you can see why I was hooked from the first moment!

## C = Clothing

### *Get dressed for safari success*

The African savannah can be dusty, windy, scorching hot, surprisingly cold, and when it rains it “really” rains. Two adjacent national parks can have very different climates and conditions. So what do you pack? Before considering the packing list, let's first consider the basics of safari. The climate can be harsh and unpredictable, the landscape is rough and rugged, while the adventure takes you to remote wilderness that's hundreds of miles from any paved road. So to get dressed



for safari success, think first about practicality and comfort. You're not going to be impressing giraffe on a nightclub dance floor or showing off a designer swimsuit to a wading hippo. So never bring your best clothes. Instead, whatever you bring needs to reflect the challenging conditions of a safari. Here's a rundown of a comprehensive safari wardrobe, all of which is recommended in neutral colours (see **N** for why!):

- **A couple of lightweight jerseys and a warm lightweight fleece** – Early mornings and late evenings can be chilly, especially when you're in an open safari vehicle.
- **Short and long-sleeved button shirts** – I normally pack two of each. The long sleeves are important against the sun and insects.

- **T-shirts** – Pack a few so you always have clean options in the evening.
- **Shorts** – Two or three pairs are enough as long as they are durable.
- **Durable long trousers** – These are especially important if you're going to be walking through the bush.
- **Zip-off safari trousers** – Yes, I know they're not fashionable but they save luggage space and are highly practical.
- **Jeans** – Although they are bulky and heavy, I like to bring a pair which I can change into during the evenings.
- **Underwear** – I'm not going to make any suggestions here!
- **A poncho** – They're lighter and more practical than a raincoat and can serve both as a rain cover for you and your belongings. It's also an effective windbreaker.
- **Swimsuit** – If a camp or lodge has a pool then it's usually got an incredible view. Just don't go swimming when local wildlife is taking a drink!
- **Sarong / kikoy / Maasai shuka** – An excellent accessory that can be used as a blanket, sun protection, or to keep you warm against the wind.
- **Thermal long johns, gloves, scarf, beanie** – Required in winter when you're on safari in Southern Africa.
- **A multi-pocket gilet** – This is especially useful for photographers.
- **Shoes** – See **S** for what you'll need.
- **Socks** – Thick comfortable ones to wear underneath your shoes.

Now, you might be thinking – especially if you are female – that all this makes for a drab and conservative wardrobe. So let's accessorise. Two or three lightweight coloured scarves or wraps are a great way to add some glamour to a safari outfit. Combining this with some vibrant local jewellery or bead necklaces works really well. For guys, a colourful evening shirt helps inject some vibrancy into the outfit. When packing your wardrobe consider that you will need different clothes for the actual safari activities and for the evenings. After a long day in the bush you'll want to shower and change into clean fresh clothes for the evenings.

## **D = Debit and Credit Cards**

### *Yes, they do work*

Many people think that Africa is a backwards completely undeveloped continent where the locals are still trading with kola nuts or seashells. The world's media doesn't tend to document the progress that Africa has made. Banks and ATMs can be found across the continent, especially at major airports and in big cities. Not all of these will take foreign cards, but there's at least one bank in every country that will accept plastic. Visa is the most readily accepted. Mastercard also works in a

smaller percentage of banks. It's difficult to find ATMs that will take American Express or Maestro, especially when you're in East Africa.

Whenever I withdraw the equivalent of \$200 I feel like a rich man. I'm not being bigheaded here. The highest denomination note is often worth less than \$5. So the ATM has to dispense a lot of notes and my wallet is almost bulging out of my pocket. It's also hard to completely rely on ATMs, because the traveller's nightmare dictates that the bank machines will only stop working when you've completely run out of money. So remember to also see **U** = US dollars.

## **E = Electricity Plug Converters**

### *Because you'll need to recharge the camera*

The first time I visited South Africa I almost threw my plug adapter away. It was one of those international adapters that supposedly work in every country. Except, they don't work in South Africa. Or Namibia. Or Botswana. Or Swaziland. Or Lesotho. Wow, the list goes on. In Southern Africa they have these strange bulky three-pin sockets that aren't found anywhere else in the world. So the typical international plug adapter is completely redundant. Fortunately, you can buy an adapter at the airport when you arrive. It's good to buy one as soon as you



arrive, because plug adapters aren't the easiest things to find when you're camping in the bush and elephants are calling from the forest. In Southern Africa, many places already have European two-pin adapters that are fitted into the wall. You can never guarantee this. Although you can probably guarantee the camera battery going dead at the only place without a two-pin adapter.

Many safari vehicles are fitted with USB chargers and some also have standard plug sockets. These are great for recharging on the go, especially if you have two camera batteries or need to charge up a GoPro or video camera.

The majority of East Africa uses British-style square three-pin electricity sockets. So an adapter that works in the UK will work fine in Kenya, Tanzania, or Uganda.

## **E = Emergency Toilet Paper**



### *You never know when...*

Some people picture an African safari and imagine going to the toilet in the forest and wiping with their hand. Well, going to the toilet in the trees is going to be dangerous when there's elephant herds roaming around. There *are* toilets, a mix of the seated and



squat varieties. But there isn't always toilet paper, especially at remote toilets in national parks. Now, the important thing about emergency toilet paper is keeping it in an accessible place. When you need to go you don't want to rummage to the bottom of your backpack. Or start cursing because your toilet paper hiding place was too effective. I like to keep a couple of sheets in my back pocket, just in case. Or sometimes I put half a roll in the side pocket of my daypack. And here's the most important rule of emergency toilet paper: replace what you've used. Nobody wants to turn to discarded plane tickets or insurance certificates when they're on the toilet.



## Tales From An African Safari Guide

I always like to tell my guests about the different styles of toilet they can encounter, like composting toilets, squat toilets, the hole in the ground, and the at-one-with-nature.

One morning I was watching out for animals when a guest wanted to find a discreet place to do what he needed to do - being male makes these things much easier. It was the heart of the dry season and the urine created a little puddle on the savannah. Within two minutes there was a Beisa oryx slurping it all up. Everyone was baffled. But I was unsurprised because nothing is wasted in the bush and a tourist's urine is an excellent source of salt.

## **F = Food**

### *Bring a few luxury items for your safari*

Safaris range from the cheap and cheerful to the ultra luxurious. Unfortunately, there's not many of us who can afford the high-end safaris and staying in \$1000-a-night camps. These luxury safaris come with gourmet meals and snacks, so there's no need to pack any extra food for your safari. However, taking a cheaper safari often means sacrificing good food for getting a better price. The menu might be five days of pasta and sauce, or a week of the same basic staples that can be cooked on the fire. There's nothing wrong with this food, but I find that it can get a little monotonous. So it's good to pack a few luxury items for a sweet or savoury snack in the bush. There's a few things you'll struggle to find in local African supermarkets, especially nice chocolate or cheese. You might also want to stock up on some chips or nuts. Bringing a few luxury items means poor quality food isn't a problem – just don't leave it within reach of any monkeys...

*“Africa is mystic; it is wild; it is a sweltering inferno; it is a photographer’s paradise, a hunter’s Valhalla, an escapist’s Utopia. It is what you will, and it withstands all interpretations. It is the last vestige of a dead world or the cradle of a shiny new one.” (Beryl Markham)*

## G = Great Wildebeest Migration

### *Where and when to catch nature's greatest show*

An African safari always delivers immersive highlights of wild drama and staggering impressions of scale. Nowhere is this better illustrated than the [great wildebeest migration](#), the largest gathering of wild mammals anywhere on the planet. It's an annual phenomenon that's appeared on many wildlife documentaries, concerning 2 million animals migrating around the grass plains of the Serengeti ecosystem. There's wildebeest, zebra, and Thompson's gazelle, all of them chaperoned by a hungry collection of predators. The scale is mind-boggling. In one panorama there's hundreds of thousands of animals, all slowly grazing and moving across the landscape. Get closer and you can take in all the little details, like zebra resting on each other's backs, wildebeest mock charging to demonstrate their virility, or cheetah stalking a baby gazelle.



Nature's greatest show roams between two adjacent and fenceless parks: Tanzania's Serengeti and Kenya's Maasai Mara. Witnessing it is about being in the right place at the right time. From late-December to March, the wildebeest calve on the nutrient-rich grass of southeastern Serengeti. With so many young calves around, this is the prime time to spot the big cats hunting. There's cheetah, leopard, lions, hyenas, vultures, and a few diminutive hunters you might not have heard of before. From March to June the herds start migrating north across the Serengeti. They move off in five to seven waves, each big group taking a slightly different route across the flourishing grass. These months are best for seeing the herds on the move, although note that April and May is also the rainy season in the Serengeti.

Sometime in July, the herds start to congregate besides the Mara River. They can wait for days before one wildebeest builds the courage to cross the river and 100 000 follow. It's a precarious



crossing as crocodiles wait in the water and the currents are too strong for the older weaker wildebeest. And when they arrive on the other side? Lion prides and other cats are licking their lips in anticipation. July and early-August is best to see this dramatic river crossing from the Serengeti to the Maasai Mara. Then from August onwards, you'll need to be in Kenya's Maasai Mara to see the big herds. By now, they're all grazing and getting fat on the fresh grass, before the females lead the charge back south to the calving grounds, where the cycle repeats itself for another year.

## H = Hat

### *The sun doesn't take prisoners*

While it might look pretty when it dips behind the horizon and paints the sky all shades of orange, the African sun is intense and pretty dangerous. Rather than malaria, it's the African sun that's most likely to have you feeling ill on an African safari. Safari isn't a place for four hours of sun bathing next to the pool. Spend two hours with your head in the sun and it will be spinning. So a good wide-brimmed hat is one of

the most important things on the packing list. It needs to be wide enough to keep the sun off your face and the back of your neck, especially if you intend to go on a walking safari. While they might not look particularly fashionable, there's a reason that so many people wear identical looking safari hats. But don't worry too much if you can't find one at home. Almost all African airports sell typical wide-brimmed safari hats so you can pick one up when you arrive.



While the typical safari hat isn't particularly fashionable or alluring, there's plenty of alternative options that can add some jazz to your safari outfit. For girls, floppy straw sun-hats are lightweight



*My “Rogue” Safari hat is a must-have on any adventure. Especially when it’s blazing hot, like at the Fish River Canyon (Namibia).*

and provide excellent shade cover. For guys, Panama hats or sturdy real leather cowboy hats are a little more chic than the standard fare sold at the airports.

## **H = Handwash**

### *The anti-bacterial kind*

Just imagine: you're driving through the savannah and the wind is sending dust everywhere, covering everything in a thin veil of brown. There's no waterhole for miles and there's a brown layer of sweat on everyone's face. And now it's lunchtime, and your dusty fingers are about to wrap themselves around a sandwich. A small tube of anti-bacterial handwash is an essential little addition to a safari daypack. A quick squirt from the tube and you're ready to enjoy your lunch, rather than worrying about how many strange germs and dust particles are accompanying the meal.

## **I = Insect Repellent**

### *An absolutely essential item on the packing list*

Insects are tricky. They can turn any safari into an itchy nightmare as they ravish your ankles and feast on the skin around your legs. So insect repellent is perhaps the most important item on your packing list. You'll need to apply it every late-afternoon, in preparation for when the mosquitoes hover around at dusk. You'll also need it on in the early-morning, especially for an early game drive. And it's not just mosquitoes. Protection against things like tsetse flies also makes insect repellent absolutely essential.

So what is a good mosquito repellent? Ideally, look for a product that contains at least 20% DEET, the active ingredient in the repellent. Some brands have insect repellents with 50% or even 80% DEET. However, some people don't like DEET as it's a chemically manufactured substance. There

are various natural alternatives. Citriodol is produced from eucalyptus oil. Citronella is excellent although it's hard to find repellents that use it. Picaridin is very pleasant, relatively odourless, and has a gentle clean feel. DEET is still the most effective in keeping the insects away, but these natural remedies just feel nicer on the skin.

A recent addition to the market are insect repelling wristbands, available with both DEET and natural repellents. Wear them on your ankles and wrists and they can be extremely effective. Just remember to remove them when you're in the shower, otherwise you'll wash away all of the repellent.

Insect repellents come in various sizes and styles, like gels, sprays, creams, or roll-ons. Personally I feel that too much is lost with the sprays, as half the bottle misses your skin when you spray it on. I like to carry a small pocket-sized bottle of repellent cream with me, because there's always one day when you forget to put on your repellent and the insects start biting.



*“If you think you are too small to be effective, you have never been in bed with a mosquito.” (Betty Reece)*

## I = Insurance Certificate

### *Ensure immediate attention in an emergency*

Hospitals in developing countries work a little differently from those at home. The first question they ask when you arrive is not “what happened,” but “who is going to pay?” Medical treatment isn't free and the hospital will want some proof that the costs can be covered. You will probably be able to cover the costs. But what if you don't have cash, they don't accept Visa, and the nearest ATM is 150 km away? In an emergency it's important to get immediate treatment. Carrying a copy of your insurance certificate helps ensure that the doctors will treat you straight away. It helps to have the insurance company's emergency phone number on the document so that they can make immediate contact if anything needs to be clarified.

## J = Jambo

### *Some elementary Swahili for visiting East Africa*



Africa has over 1000 languages and 3000 tribes, so it's not always easy to communicate in a local dialect. Swahili is the main language of East Africa and while it won't be everyone's first language, it's a language that almost everyone can speak in the region. Learning a few simple words is an easy way to endear yourself to the locals. It's a real show of respect if you attempt to use a few words. The great thing about learning Swahili is that you

Speak it pretty much as it is written, so there's no funny phonetics like many other languages.

Thank you	= <b>Asante</b>
Hello, how are you	= <b>Jambo</b>
Reply to Jambo	= <b>Sijambo</b>
Hello, how are you (informal)	= <b>Mambo</b>
Reply to Mambo	= <b>Poa</b>
How are you (general)	= <b>Habari</b>
Reply to Habari	= <b>Nzuri</b>
Welcome	= <b>Karibu / Karibuni</b> (to welcome more than one person)
Have a good journey	= <b>Safari njema</b>
Where's the toilet?	= <b>Choo kiko wapi?</b>
Go away!	= <b>Nenda zako!</b>
No worries	= <b>Hakuna shida</b> (although <b>Hakuna matata</b> is also correct!)
Lion	= <b>Simba</b>
Buffalo	= <b>Nyati</b>
Elephant	= <b>Ndovu / Tembo</b>
Leopard	= <b>Chui</b>
Rhino	= <b>Kifaru</b>
Cheetah	= <b>Duma</b>
Hyena	= <b>Fisi</b>
Crocodile	= <b>Mamba</b>
Hippo	= <b>Kiboko</b>
Snake	= <b>Nyoka</b>
Giraffe	= <b>Twiga</b>
Warthog	= <b>Ngiri</b>
Zebra	= <b>Punda milia</b>
Baboon	= <b>Nyani</b>
Wildebeest	= <b>Nyumbu</b>

## Tales From My African Safaris

I was staying at a lodge by the river in Ruaha National Park and it wasn't fenced off. So wild animals were roaming around. It was almost dark and my mother and sisters walked from the chalet to the restaurant. Maasai warriors usually accompany guests but for some reason they weren't there. On the way they bumped into a lone buffalo bull, and solitary buffalos are known for their aggressive behaviour. I'm not sure if my mother had time to shout "nenda zako" (go away), but luckily one of the staff members arrived and scared the buffalo away with some stones. They certainly got a huge fright!

## **K = Kilimanjaro**

### *Scaling Africa's highest mountain!*

Kilimanjaro is a majestic symbol of Africa, an old volcano that towers some 5895 meters above the plains of Northern Tanzania. Mounting to the snow-dappled summit is one of the continent's great travel challenges and experiences. But it's not easy. Climbing to the peak takes at least five days, although realistically you should count on six or seven days. Summiting Mount Kilimanjaro is only possible on an organised tour and the majority of these leave from the Northern Tanzanian town of Moshi. Porters carry your bags and all your food, so you only need to carry a daypack.



There's now six different routes to the top but 90% of climbers take either the Marangu (Coca-Cola) or Machame (whisky). Marangu takes six days and is the only route that offers accommodation in mountain huts. It's not the most scenic as it ascends and descends on the same trail. You can also do it in five days, but this seriously increases the risk of altitude sickness. Machame takes six or seven days and is far more scenic, with a different loop up and down the mountain always bringing sublime panoramas. It's widely considered a more difficult climb but is extremely scenic, with accommodation at public campsites. For something a little different, consider the Lemosho route, a seven-day camping trail that starts from the West then descends to the South. Expect to pay a minimum of \$250 per day for a climb, with something around \$350 per day being more realistic. On the Africa Freak website you can find articles on [what to pack for a climb](#) and an interview with someone who has [climbed Kilimanjaro](#).

## L = Leave the Fashion at Home

### *Wildlife doesn't care about trends or labels*

I've seen some crazily dressed safari-goers over the years and many people who seem to be competing for wearing the most impractical safari gear in history. There's been haute couture



animal prints hot off the Milan catwalk, Prada stilettos getting stuck between the slats of wooden decks, and \$300 silk scarves getting ripped to shreds by thorn bushes. I've even witnessed a set of Victoria's Secret lingerie draping from the branches of an Acacia tree – it must have been stolen by vervet monkeys! And guess what, elephants and zebras don't have a clue about high fashion or trends. They can't tell if you're wearing Lacoste from H & M. When it comes to safari, there's a good chance that what you wear is going to get ruined. So it's not the place to be sporting

your finest labels and most expensive clothes. Things will get dusty, sweaty, dirty, and covered in flying thorns from the vegetation – so practicality should always come above fashion when it comes to packing your bags.

### Tales From My African Safaris

Night sounds on safari can be extraordinary. Especially when an entire herd of buffalo comes storming through campsite, chased by a pride of lions! That's what happened to me at Keer Keer Camp in the Timbavati. What a symphony it was! We could hear one of the beast's struggle as it went down in a fight for survival. To our astonishment we found the carcass the next day, less than 300 meters behind the camp and surrounded by six lions feasting.

*“You know you are truly alive when you're living among lions.” (Karen Blixen)*

## L = Luggage

### *What to choose for an African safari*

When all your safari gear is ready there's another question that crops up. What to pack it in? If it was any other holiday then the type of luggage wouldn't really matter; all the bag needs to do is survive the plane journey. But on an African safari things can get a little more complicated. Your luggage is going to be coming with you on the journey, so it will be bumping around the bush and getting squashed into the back of Land Cruisers. Ideally, you'll want to bring something that is both





strong and can be easily squashed. I find that **duffel bags** are perfect for this. I also prefer to only take bags with YKK zips as these are very strong and more secure.

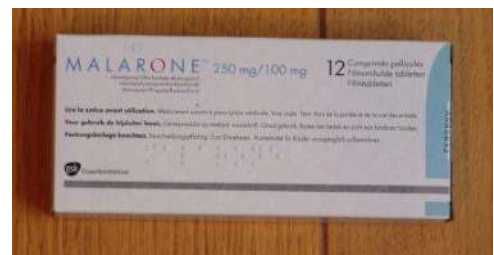
Perhaps you already have something strong, secure, and squashable. If you don't, what's wrong with your existing luggage? Many suitcases are simply too inflexible. They take up too much room for how much they fit in, which is a nightmare when guides are trying to squeeze things into a safari vehicle or stash a bag beneath a seat. Many cheap suitcases

also aren't strong enough. They need to survive getting thrown around and absolutely covered in dust. And those handy little wheels? They're not that useful when the ground is as rugged and rough as the African savannah. That's why I like a sturdy duffel bag that can be squashed down but also expanded to fit in any last minute souvenirs at the end of a safari.

## **M = Malaria Medication**

### *Your health depends on this*

Somewhat bizarrely, malaria has actually helped Africa's safari destinations stay wild and untouched. When the colonial invaders arrived they were fearful of areas where malaria was rife, so they didn't turn places like the Serengeti into an area for farmland. Fast forward and there is still some threat from malaria in Africa. Insect repellent is the most important factor in reducing the risk. If you don't get bitten by a mosquito then you can't contract malaria. So being cautious and applying the repellent is essential. Camps and lodges should already come with mosquito nets so make sure you spend the night underneath it and not on top of it – sometimes that's more problematic if you've had a few too many drinks!



I actually prefer not to take antimalarial medication. I'm not a fan of these medications and try to avoid them as it's difficult to keep taking it for prolonged periods. But I'm definitely not going to advise that you do the same. Contracting malaria has deadly consequences and you should get recommendations from your doctor. Antimalarial tablets are especially recommended for anyone on their first trip to Africa. Not everywhere in Africa carries a malaria risk. Unfortunately, almost all the main safari destinations do. [You can find country specific malaria maps here.](#)

No antimalarial medication is 100% effective and there is no vaccination. There's generally three types of antimalarial medication and they must be taken throughout the trip, plus a week or so before and after the trip. Again, your doctor will advise. Malarone (atovaquone / proguanil) is a daily medication widely regarded as having the least side effects; it's also the most expensive. Doxycycline is a daily medication that is widely taken but some suffer side effects such as sun

sensitivity and migraines. Mefloquine / Lariam is only taken weekly but a higher proportion of people suffer from its side effects.

*“Everything in Africa bites, but the safari bug is worst of all.” (Brian Jackman)*

## N = Neutral Colours

### *The importance of blending in with nature*

Ever wondered why everyone is wearing such drab colours on their safari photos? Or why wildlife presenters are always in khaki safari outfits? It's not about fashion or everyone shopping at the same safari outfitter. Neutral colours are essential as they allow you to effectively blend into nature. That's not that important on a game drive as the animals see a vehicle, not the people in it. But on a walking safari, neutral colours enable you to become part of the landscape and not disturb the



wildlife. That means you can get closer to the ungulates. And it also means you don't annoy any of the dangerous mammals like rhino or buffalo. Bright, flashy colours stand out against natural landscapes, so animals will run off when they see you. Furthermore, neutral colours can absorb dust far better than bright colours; a khaki shirt still looks khaki after driving through the savannah, while a bright red shirt will probably have turned khaki anyway!

So what are the ideal neutral colours for safari travel? There's **khaki**, **olive**, **mushroom**, **stone**, and **acacia**. All these are extremely effective at enabling you to fully blend into the landscape. Now here's another essential packing tip. Avoid dark blue or black clothing at all costs. Yes, they might be relatively neutral, but these colours attract insects like mosquitoes and tsetse flies. The latter can be vicious and bite through your clothes.



## Tales From My African Safaris

When I was a child, tsetse flies would sometimes get trapped in our jeep. And I remember that my two sisters and I were literally on a mission to exterminate them. We'd use some tissues (we called them "chimiques" - French word for "chemicals") to squash them against the car windows. I can still recall the agonising sound of the poor little creatures as we squeezed them in style: a real carnage! Not the most enjoyable thing to picture I must admit, but we were just kids at the time and to be honest it was rather painful when they managed to strike; so we simply couldn't sit around doing nothing!

## **O = Ornithology**

### *Remember to also look up on an African safari*

With the impala skipping and the hyenas roaming it's easy to spend the whole African safari with your eyes to the ground. It's the famous mammals that attract most people to safari and these normally live on the ground. I've often fell into the rhythm of eagerly scanning the grass and only checking out the animals that live at ground level. But what about the trees and the sky? Africa is a birdwatching paradise and some national parks have over 500 different species. They range from the exotically colourful to the boisterous and noisy, or the cute and curious to those with bizarre mating displays. Eagles soar overhead, vultures rest on high branches, while tiny tropical birds flutter above the savannah. And if you don't look up you'll miss it all. While finding the big mammals is usually at the core of the experience, ornithology offers an added treat on any safari journey.



Some of my personal favourites are the African fish eagle, the majestic emblem of Zambia; the intriguing helmeted guinea fowl; the stunning bristly crown of the great crowned crane (pictured); then the rainbow colours of the lilac-breasted roller. There's some inspiring photos and other examples of iconic [African birds on the Africa Freak site](#).

*“There is something about safari life that makes you forget all your sorrows and feel as if you had drunk half a bottle of champagne — bubbling over with heartfelt gratitude for being alive.” (Karen Blixen)*

## P = Patience

### *Good things come to those who wait...*

Everyone goes on safari dreaming of the famous images from the wildlife documentaries, like buffalo herds clashing with lions, trunk-swinging elephant babies, or leopards pouncing on black and white zebra stripes. There is a good chance that you'll see these beautiful safari scenes, but you can't expect to see everything in the first hour of your first ever game drive. At lodges and camps, I've heard many people complaining and saying that they "didn't see anything." When I ask them to clarify, they say something like "well, we only saw two rhino, lots of elephants, and loads of buffalo." Then I ask them to clarify further and they say "oh yes, there were zebra and gazelle and warthogs and hippos and crocodiles..."

When people say they "didn't see anything" it usually means they didn't see one of the big cats. Safari is unpredictable and you can't expect to find every animal on every game drive. It's not an unsuccessful safari just because you didn't see a leopard. So rather than get preoccupied with finding *all* the animals, pack plenty of patience and prepare to be amazed by the unexpected. Safari isn't just about saying "I saw a rhino." By being patient you can fully enjoy the natural show created by these incredible mammals. So rather than zoom off, stop and enjoy your intimate access to the behaviour of Africa's wild animals.

### Tales From My African Safaris



I remember being 12 years old and visiting the Serengeti in Tanzania. I was playing around with my cousins and standing on a small kopje, a rock that looks a little like Simba's in the Lion King. Suddenly I got attacked from behind by an unhappy hyrax. I must have been disturbing his nap or challenging his kingdom because he clearly wasn't happy to see me! It just shows that wildlife can turn up when and where you least expect it.

## P = Packing Light

### *Always keep it under 15kg!*

Safari involves traveling between different destinations and staying in a variety of different lodges and camps. You're constantly on the move, either in the safari vehicle or sometimes flying between national parks. So everything you pack is going to be accompanying you. International airlines have big luggage allowances but the small planes that connect safari destinations have fairly strict 15kg limits – there's simply not enough space on the plane to accommodate bigger bags. Similarly, while safari vehicles can be spacious, you don't want all that space getting filled with multiple suitcases. You want to be relaxed and comfortable. Not cramped and having to step over a backpack to get in

the car. Don't worry, you will be able to get your laundry done in Africa so there's no need for packing 15 of everything.

## P = Passport

### *Three important tips regarding your passport*

Everyone needs a passport to visit Africa. So I'm not presuming that you might forget it. But there's three important things to consider:

- 1) Make sure your passport is valid for at least six months *after* your planned departure from Africa date.
- 2) Most countries require you to have two blank pages in your passport, although the immigration official may only use one.
- 3) Always carry a colour photocopy of your passport and keep a backup file online using a site like [dropbox](#). You can also email yourself a copy of your passport for easy reference.

*“..few can sojourn long within the unspoilt wilderness of a game sanctuary, surrounded on all sides by its confiding animals, without absorbing its atmosphere; the Spirit of the Wild is quick to assert supremacy, and no man of any sensibility can resist her.” (James Stevenson-Hamilton)*

## P = Photography

### *Document the wonders of Africa*



I'll be honest. Photography is not my specialist subject. I'm the guy who usually prefers taking pictures with eyes wide open rather than the camera shutter. And while I've taken a few great snaps of safari, they won't come close to wonderful photographers like [Kerry](#), [Gerry](#), [Morkel](#), [Greg](#), [Andrew](#) and [Uwe](#). In general, I'm a person who is enjoying the safari and taking a few photos of what comes along. But I have taken thousands of photos. So here's five easy tips to help you decide the kind of equipment to bring on your safari.

- 1) **Objective of the safari?** Are you a serious photographer looking for incredible shots? Or just coming to enjoy the experience and capture some memories from the safari? If it's the

former, you'll need to have a good DSLR with at least two lenses. Great wildlife photography is challenging so you'll need quality equipment that's up to the task.

**2) Lenses and zoom.** While safari offers intimate encounters with wildlife, you won't be able to get three meters away from all the animals. Most wildlife keeps a respective distance. So a good zoom lens is essential, whether you have a compact camera or a DSLR. Use wide angles (18-35mm) for picturesque photographs and super zoom lenses (18-200mm usually does the trick; 28-300mm for best results) for animal portraits and close-ups.

**3) Stability.** Zoom into the wildlife and it will be difficult to get a sharp image without some form of tripod. Standard tripods can be bulky and impractical when in a safari vehicle. So consider lighter ones that can be attached to a vehicle roof. A great option is a pillow pod camera support; these are portable and provide a soft cushion for resting your lens.

**4) Extra memory cards.** On some safaris I've taken well over 1000 photos. And I've seen lions and elephants before so I don't need to photograph every single one. On a first-time safari, some people can take tens of thousands of photos. So you'll definitely need a spare memory card.

**NB:** Find out what might happen when you're not fully prepared for the "unexpected" ([watch Kai's incredible video footage!](#))



**5) Portable charging.** Many safari vehicles have electricity outlets so you can charge on the go. It's very handy for ensuring you don't miss any of the action.

## Tales From My African Safaris

At the Serengeti National Park entry gate my father was in urgent need of going to the bathroom. He decided to choose a bush not very far from the car. About five minutes after he had come back I looked around. There was a huge male lion standing in the exact spot where my father had done his business. It was very close and a pressing need that could have been costly.

## Q = Quenching Your Thirst

### *Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate*

Perhaps the greatest health concern on an African safari is dehydration. Africa is hot and you'll need to be drinking at least two litres of water a day, every day. Dehydration is a slow torture and once you're dehydrated there's no going back. I like to take my own durable water bottle with me at all times. But on a walking safari, I would also recommend a bladder hydration pack. If you have to remove the bottle from a backpack, then you reduce the willingness to drink. Yet with a pipe hanging over the shoulder, drinking water is always accessible and it helps you stay hydrated.



## R = Random Safari Activities

### *Mix up the itinerary and see Africa from different angles*

For many people, safari is about driving around and checking out all the weird and wonderful wildlife in its natural habitat. Game drives are the core of most safari itineraries and they're a wonderful opportunity to explore a landscape and all its residents. Elephant herds, hippo pods, lion prides, monkey troops, giraffe towers; game drives allow you to cover large distances and discover a variety of habitats.



But game drives aren't always the only means of exploration. Many safari destinations permit a variety of safari activities, each offering a fresh perspective on the landscape and the wildlife. Where possible, consider an itinerary that incorporates these different activities. While you'll be seeing the same wildlife, there's a very different feeling to these experiences.

Nighttime game drives are always thrilling, encouraging you to follow audio clues and listen to the sounds of the savannah. While your field of vision is diminished, remember that a lot of wildlife won't see you coming. So you can get much closer than normal. For example, it's completely black and you can hear rustling. Yet only when the guide switches on the spotlight do you discover that the two rhino are just five meters from the vehicle. Walking safaris (see **W**) are another intimate and exhilarating experience.

How about a safari from the air in a hot air balloon or small plane? It's a great option for appreciating the scale of Africa's large national parks and wilderness areas. From the air it's easy to take in the raw splendour of the environment and pick out all the different herds that roam freely

across the landscape. To get further inspired about safari from air, how about seeing [what a scenic flight over the Okavango Delta looks like?](#) Or [rising above the African plains on a balloon safari?](#)

Horse riding and bicycle safaris are also possible in some reserves, usually those where there isn't any threat from predatory cats. They're a chance to blend into the landscape and get impossibly close to many animals. Being in the saddle means you become part of the environment, rather than a noisy vehicle that's interrupting it. So the herds don't run away and you might be surrounded by hundreds of zebra or wildebeest.

*“Africa – You can see a sunset and believe you have witnessed the Hand of God. You watch the slope lope of a lioness and forget to breathe. You marvel at the tripod of a giraffe bent to water. In Africa, there are iridescent blues on the wings of birds that you do not see anywhere else in nature. In Africa, in the midday heart, you can see blisters in the atmosphere. When you are in Africa, you feel primordial, rocked in the cradle of the world.” (Jodi Picoult)*

## R = Respect the Environment

*Listen to the guide and never break the rules*



Safari is very safe. Except that is, if you don't respect the environment and ignore the rules. There are sporadic stories of tourists getting dragged through a car window and eaten by lions. Or of elephants flipping a vehicle filled with tourists. Almost exclusively, these dangerous incidents happened because the tourists didn't respect the wildness of the environment. Lions, elephants, and many other African mammals can be extremely dangerous. They will accommodate and accept your presence. But leaving the car window open when approaching a lion pride is like leaving the fridge door open when you've got a pet cat. It's an opportunity to eat and cats don't usually ask permission. Likewise, camera flashes are a great way to wind up nature's

largest land mammal. But an elephant will give two clear warnings before it charges, flapping its ears and stamping its feet to show irritation and annoyance. So when an elephant flips a vehicle, it means that a) the tourists didn't respect the rules about using the flash and b) they didn't respect the behaviour of the elephant.

Respecting the environment is about respecting that you are just a visitor to this wild mystical realm. It's about





respecting that safari isn't about interaction but observation and exploration. That means not stroking lions, inciting elephants, feeding baboons, riding zebras, or challenging hyenas to a laughing contest. It also means respecting the wildlife and staying quiet whenever you encounter any animal. Here are some more practical don'ts when you're on safari:

- Pack out all your rubbish.
- Stick to the designated trails and definitely don't wander off on your own.
- Do not feed any of the wildlife.
- Only drive on allowed roads and stick to the strict speed limits.
- Don't hang out of any vehicle.
- Never take anything out of a national park.



## S = Shop

### *Some recommended places to buy the best safari products*

After a few years of trial and error I've narrowed down the list of good online safari shops to four. These shops stock almost everything you'll need for a safari wardrobe along with the accessories that are essential for your adventure.

- [Africa Adventure Safari Products](#) – Buy books, clothing and travel gear to take on your trip.
- [Kendrick Imports](#) – Kendrick imports unique merchandise from Africa and claims to have personally road-tested everything they stock. It's especially useful if you're looking for Rogue outdoor gear or safari clothing.
- [SafariQuip](#) – The travel equipment and adventure gear shop. Their motto is "if it doesn't work we don't stock it".
- [The Safari Store](#) – The specialist supplier of safari clothing, safari luggage, binoculars, safari books and safari accessories.

Other **outdoor adventure stores** to consider (for last-minute shopping in **South Africa**): Cape Union Mart, Outdoor Warehouse, Duesouth, and Drifters.

## S = Shoes

### *Think about practicality and comfort*

Most people come on African safari with their big thick walking boots, despite the fact that the most walking they'll do is from the lodge to the car. There's a presumption that the African savannah



demand the biggest and most durable footwear around. But did you know that San bushmen hunt animals barefoot? Or that Maasai warriors wear shoes that are made from disused car tyres? Of course, the savannah can be full of thorns, so I'm not recommending wearing slippers on safari. Yet there's no need to bring heavy uncomfortable footwear unless you're actually going to be doing some walking on the safari.

For vehicle-based safaris it's best to think about practicality and comfort. Safari vehicles in East Africa have pop-up roofs, so you'll be standing on your chair to get a great view over the landscape. And you don't want big dirty footprints all over the seat. So shoes that are easy to slip on and off are good. If you're just doing small walks around the camp then sneakers are more than adequate. Walking boots are very restrictive and sweaty in the heat, so your friends won't be too happy when you take them off and smell out the vehicle or tent. Plus, the funky scents can attract wild animals when you leave shoes outside the tent! I like to pack a pair of heavy-duty waterproof "bush slops" or sandals, which are good enough to handle walking in light bush and practical for staying cool on game drives.

It's a different story if a walking safari is part of the itinerary. Then you will need something a little more durable. The landscape is rugged and uneven, so sturdy walking boots that cover your ankles and help protect against strains are a good idea. Don't worry about fashion or looks. Practicality and comfort are always the most important factors when choosing shoes for an African safari – just check out the tale of high heels below.

In the evenings it's always nice to slip into a fresh pair of non-safari shoes – i.e. footwear that isn't covered in thorns or all sweaty from the day. Basic flip-flops are good for walking around the camp and a pair of slip-on tennis shoes are even better as they protect your feet from the evening mosquitos.

## **Tales From An African Safari Guide**

During the great wildebeest migration I took clients to a luxury tented camp in Kenya's Maasai Mara. It was a place for luxury clientèle and many of the female guests came to the restaurant tent in evening dresses and high heels. I felt a bit out of place in my dust-stained shirt, even if a wild lion could be heard shouting in the distance. After sunset it was incredibly dark, with just the crackle of the fire and the piercing wheeze-honk of hippos keeping everyone company. Out of nowhere there was a loud scream. When the rangers shone their torch they found a female guest collapsed on the grass. Walking back to the tent in the dark isn't easy in high heels, especially on a landscape as uneven as the Mara. The lady had tripped and somehow managed to face-plant a pile of buffalo poo.

## **S = Sun Protection**

### ***Turning red just isn't cool***

It's almost impossible to go on a safari and not see a handful of tourists who are horribly sunburnt. The logic is simple and so many people fall for it. Many think that the sun in Africa is the same as the sun at home. Which technically it is, but the effect is very different. The savannah isn't a place for tanning oils or waltzing around thinking that the red burn “will turn brown later.” Not respecting the sun can lead to days of painful misery, and that goes for locals as well as tourists. Namibia's Himba tribe concoct sunscreen out of ochre and butterfat, while the Zulu people smear their faces in an orange-brown natural suncream made from the earth. So why do so many tourists come to Africa without sunscreen?

Factor 30 is the absolute minimum you should consider packing. Anything less can't compete with the sun's UV intensity. The African sun burns quicker than it does in Europe or America. Bring one main bottle of sunscreen and then one pocket-sized bottle that easily fits into your daypack. Everyone has their favourite brands and there's plenty of choice at shops in the West. Unfortunately, there's only limited choice once you arrive in Africa. Bottled sunscreens for the local market often contain whitening, and while nobody wants to go red, few people want to turn whiter than they already are. Good sunscreen is imported so it's rare to find shops or pharmacies with more than just a couple of rudimentary options. Sunscreen is always the number one item on my packing list, because, well, I definitely don't want to turn the same colour as a baboon's behind (trust me, it's not pretty).

## Tales From An African Safari Guide

“I’ve taken many guests to Botswana's Central Kalahari in search of the zebra migration. 50 000 zebra are on the move but locating them in the desert isn’t easy, especially given the scorching desert mirages that always hang on the horizon. I always remind my guests about sunset and wearing sunscreen. Not everyone listens. After a week on safari I take guests back to the city and some can’t believe their eyes. They almost turn into a zebra, with their whole body being white, except for a very dark brown stripe on their arm. When you sit in the same place in the safari vehicle the whole time, one arm is always in the sun! So when I remind people of sunscreen I now make sure to tell them about also applying it to their arms!

## T = Torch

### *Crucial for the nighttime trips to the toilet*

When you're camping in the bush, there's a procedure to follow if you need the toilet at night. First, listen. Spend a minute checking if there's anything rustling or moving around outside. Open the tent. Now shine a torch around the area, making sure there are no wild animals between you and the toilet. Only now is it safe to leave the tent. Going to the toilet in the night isn't the only reason a torch is an essential item on the packing list. Many camps don't have electricity, so a torch is the only way to see where you are going, or even work out where the zip for the tent is.

I prefer a small lightweight torch that's easy to carry. I also pack a head-torch, which is handy in the evenings around the camp. Make sure it has a solid on-off switch that's hard to accidentally push when the torch is in your bag – nobody wants to find that the torch is out of battery when the camp is surrounded by buffalo.

## T = Tipping

### *Rewarding those that create exceptional experiences*

While working in the safari industry is considered a very good job in Africa, guides and [staff get paid relatively low salaries](#). Tipping is an expected part of going on safari and many tour companies will offer guidelines on how much you should tip. The problem is that tipping should always be reflective of the experience, rather than something that's demanded. So I always like to tip dependent on how a guide or driver has made my experience. If they are good I tip well. If they're not good then it seems odd to provide a large financial reward. Realistically, it's good to budget around 10% of the safari cost for tips. You might not end up giving all this out. But it always feels nice to reward great service.

*“Nothing but breathing the air of Africa, and actually walking through it, can communicate the indescribable sensations.” (William Burchell)*

## U = U.S. Dollars in Cash

### *Emergency money...just in case*

The traveller's invisible law says that something will happen to your bank card only when you've run out of cash. And then you're stuck in Africa, with no debit card, no cash, and not much that can be done about it. I always like to keep a small stash of U.S. dollars hidden away in my bag. U.S. dollars are the most usable foreign currency anywhere in Africa; they can be easily changed and even used to directly pay for goods and services. Having \$100 – 200 provides peace of mind and ensures there's a back up for the time when your debit card gets chewed by an ATM.

## V = Vaccinations

### *Getting covered before you arrive*

I'm not a doctor or a health physician, so I'm not going to recommend the vaccinations you will need for your trip. That's something that can only be advised by your own doctor. However, after years of living in Africa I've had many different jabs and inoculations so I'm going to pass on my experience. For most countries in Africa, doctors recommend vaccinations for hepatitis A, hepatitis B, tetanus, typhoid, and diphtheria. For Kenya, Uganda and a variety of other countries you'll also need a yellow fever vaccination and certificate (see **Y**). [This website is excellent at providing more detailed information for each individual country.](#)

## V = Visas for Travel

### *Some countries require advance planning*

Entry and immigration requirements vary across Africa and whether you need a visa in advance will depend on your destination. None of the main safari countries should pose any challenges if you have an E.U. U.S. Canadian or Australian / New Zealand passport. But they might require advance planning. Here's a quick list with information that's correct as of January 2017.

**Botswana** – No visa required for a 30 day stay.

**Ethiopia** – Visa required. Can get it on arrival at international airports. Must get it in advance when arriving by land.

**Kenya** – An e-visa is required which must be obtained in advance from <https://immigration.ecitizen.go.ke>.

**Lesotho** – No visa required.

**Malawi** – Visa upon arrival.

**Mozambique** – Visa required. Realistically, this should be obtained in advance.

**Namibia** – No visa required for stays of up to 30 days.

**Rwanda** – Visa upon arrival.

**South Africa** – No visa required, but check the special requirements if you're travelling with children. <http://www.dha.gov.za/files/Brochures/Immigrationleaflet.pdf>

**Swaziland** – No visa required.

**Tanzania** – Visa upon arrival.

**Uganda** – Visa upon arrival.

**Zambia** – Visa upon arrival.

**Zimbabwe** – Visa upon arrival.

*“One cannot resist the lure of Africa.” (Rudyard Kipling)*

## W = Walking Safaris

### *Intimately experiencing it all from ground level*

Walking safaris offer an exhilarating experience. Step, step, step, slowly you wander through the bush, usually with a local tracking guide who picks up on all the subtle clues. Everyone can recognise a paw print in the sand. But local trackers can feel the print and immediately tell you the size and sex of the hyena and exactly how long ago it passed along the trail. By following these local trackers you can seek out many herds and animals. And everything looks a lot bigger when you're also at ground level. Walking safaris are always intimate.



You're less of a threat on foot, so wildlife doesn't necessarily run away. They also offer a true appreciation of size. Hartebeest and gemsbok are impressive animals weighing almost half a ton. Only from the ground can you acknowledge just how big they are. In some countries it's also possible to take walking safaris that track rhinos or even elephants, rare treats on any trip to Africa.

### Tales From My African Safaris

On a walking safari near Kruger National Park we came across the remains of a buffalo. I had forgotten all about it, but when we returned later in the afternoon a huge male lion was finishing its supper. It still gives me goose bumps thinking we had been there a few hours before and hadn't seen any sign of its presence. And then this huge lion was literally licking the blood from around its lips.

## W = Wifi (or lack of)

### *Leave your devices at home and forget about Facebook*

It often amazes me the number of tourists I hear complaining that a camp or lodge doesn't have wifi. They're on an African safari, 200 km from the nearest town, overlooking a waterhole filled with hippos and buffalo herds, and they are worrying about their Facebook status? Sometimes you just have to let go. First, there's the practicalities of getting wifi in the middle of the wilderness. On a safari you enter vast untamed plains where the rhythm of life is dictated by the rains and the battle between predator and prey. So it's hardly a place for interrupting everything with technology. Secondly, one of the great charms of a safari is the absolute escapism. You'll hear lions roaring at night, antelopes grazing beside the tent, and hippos grunting from the river. And that's much easier on the ears than the ping that accompanies a Whatsapp message.

Trying to use wifi on a safari is always frustrating. Even when it is available, it's torturously slow, especially if you want to upload photos or check a data-heavy Facebook news feed. And while you're trying to connect the iPad you're missing out on the procession of wildlife that's roaming around. It's better to forget about the screen and fully settle into the wilderness. There's a whole world going on before your eyes and it's far more alive than the virtual world!

## X = X-Rated Wildlife Situations

### *Encountering nature's wildest animals*

Africa can be a wild continent where dangerous cats run free and hippos live in the rivers. But it's not completely wild. There are no lions on the airport runway and no rhinos wandering through



*This big guy is a regular “drinker” at the Simba-A Campsite (pictured quenching his thirst from a water tank; Ngorongoro Crater, Tanzania).*

villages. So the X-rated wildlife situations don't start the moment you land. However, in these wild landscapes there are always moments when you hold your breath and hope that one of Africa's great mammals doesn't take an interest. Such incidents provide a reminder that you're just a visitor and this is their realm. And they always provide memories that will linger on for years.

On one safari I experienced an elephant that roamed into the camp and started rummaging

through our bags. He stole a tube of Pringles and went through a bag with my friend's iPhone! You can watch a [video of this surreal experience on the Africa Freak site](#).

### **Tales From An African Safari Guide**

One year I crossed the border between Botswana and Zimbabwe. Although you're not supposed to, I always liked to take photos at the border posts, next to the sign that says "welcome to ..." It's always a great memory. After crossing into Zimbabwe I walked up the road to snap the iconic green sign that declared I was now in Zimbabwe. From my left came a loud trumpet sound. People weren't the only ones crossing this border. The border post was on the migration route of hundreds of elephants. And this big pachyderm wasn't happy that I'd got in the way. I quickly ran back to the safety of the border guards, who were rolling around the floor in laughter after witnessing what happened. From then on, I've always respected the signs that say no photography at the border.

## **Y = Yellow Fever Certificate**

### ***Fundamental if you're visiting Kenya or Uganda***

Yellow fever is a deadly disease that's slowly disappearing from Africa. Fortunately, there's an easy vaccine for yellow fever. However, this vaccination isn't optional. In countries where yellow fever is prevalent, you'll need to present a certificate of yellow fever vaccination at immigration. Without one, they won't let you in. Or you'll have to get the vaccine from a nurse at the border post. The yellow fever certificate is required for anyone visiting Kenya or Uganda. It's also usually asked for when visiting Zambia.

## **Z = Zzzz...**

### ***The most enchanting night's sleep you'll ever have***

When the thrill of the game drive has slowly evaporated away and the nighttime fire is down to its last embers, you're led in bed waiting to sleep. Suddenly a noise. A soft rustling sound. Something is next to the tent. You listen intently in the darkness, waiting for the sound to gently drift away. Now another noise. Some elephant trumpets are echoing from the distance. Now a hippo's wheeze-honk and the strange cry of a monkey. More [sounds](#) are added to nature's nighttime lullaby as you lie transfixed in the tent. Don't pack the sleeping tablets. Don't bring earplugs. Falling asleep on a safari is one of life's most enchanting experiences. The safari hasn't ended just because you're in bed. Nature's chorus will keep you company and provide a reminder of





exactly where you lay your head.

*“To witness that calm rhythm of life revives our worn souls and recaptures a feeling of belonging to the natural world. No one can return from the Serengeti unchanged, for tawny lions will forever prowl our memory and great herds throng our imagination.” (George Schaller)*



*“When you leave Africa, as the plane lifts, you feel that more than leaving a continent you’re leaving a state of mind. Whatever awaits you at the other end of your journey will be of a different order of existence.” (Francesca Marciano)*

*Safari Njema (have a safe journey)!*