



THE ULTIMATE SAFARI PLANNING GUIDE:

HOW TO CHOOSE A SAFARI EXPERIENCE YOU'LL LOVE



PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY

CARRIE ASBY
NATURE HEART SAFARI
WWW.NATUREHEARTSAFARI.COM

YOU WANT TO MAKE YOUR SAFARI DREAMS A REALITY. BUT NOW WHAT?



An African safari is the vacation to remember. It's the ultimate bucket list excursion, bursting with a lifetime's worth of memories. It's an opportunity to connect with exotic wildlife and landscapes and experience a whole other part of the world.

One place to start is by asking yourself some questions:

Do you dream of roughing it in a tent in the African bush? Or luxury lodges with top-rated chefs?

Do you like to travel with a group, or are you a lone ranger?

Do you love the jungle, ocean, desert, forest ... or some of each?

Which animals do you most want to see? Do you want to see them in as intimate a setting as possible? Or is a more crowded public park a-okay in exchange for saving some budget?

Whatever your preference, there's a safari experience to match. However, there is a big range in the quality, safety, and earth-friendliness of safari offerings. Homework is crucial - and will massively pay off!

Time to put on the thinking cap and crank up the excitement! Let's get to planning!

1. WHAT ANIMALS DO YOU WANT TO SEE?



The sheer number of animals and ecosystems in Africa is way beyond the scope of this e-book. But here's what we recommend: pick your top three animals and start there.

In which countries or regions in Africa do they live? What seasons are they most likely to be active and visible?

Also, think about the environments you love. Do you prefer:

- Forest
- Grasslands
- Beach
- Cultural visits (e.g., villages, cities)
- Or a bit of all of the above

Varying the terrain will allow you to see a wider variety of wildlife and a larger slice of the country or countries you visit. So, consider a trip that involves multiple locations.



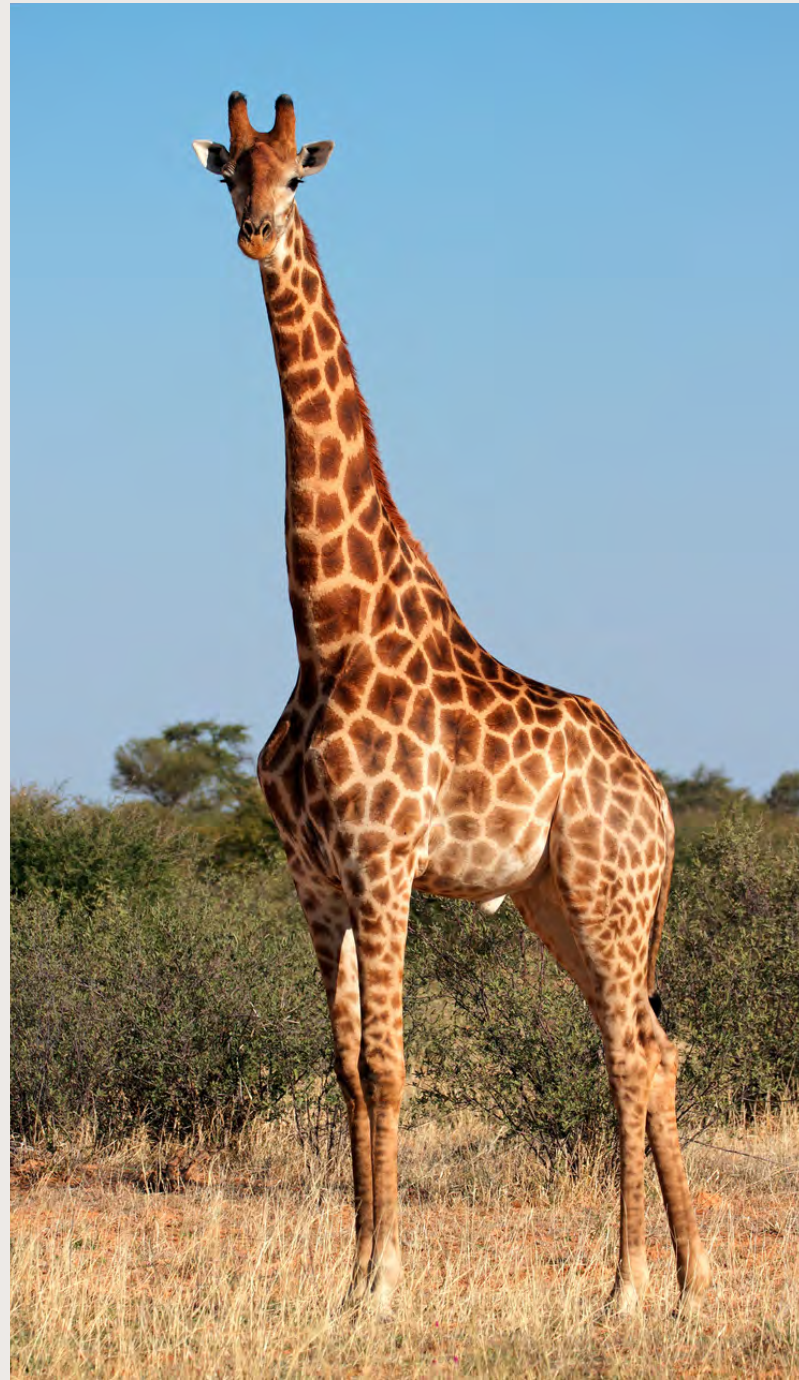
2. WHAT KIND OF ANIMAL VIEWING EXPERIENCE WOULD YOU LIKE?

Seeing magnificent animals in their natural habitat is the primary objective of any safari adventure. So, start by thinking about the kind of animal viewing experience you want to have.

For many safari-goers, it's about seeing "the Big 5" animals: lion, leopard, elephant, buffalo, and rhino. Of course, let's not forget zebras, giraffes, and hippos – not to mention hundreds of bird species and some unique smaller animals, like pangolins, which are shy and a real treat to spot.

You essentially have two options to see them: a private reserve or a public park. While you may see similar animals in both a public park and private reserve, the safari drive and animal viewing experiences will be very different.

The next two pages offer quick pros and cons of each to consider.



PUBLIC PARKS

Large public parks like Kruger in South Africa make wildlife accessible and affordable for many people to experience.

PROS

Public parks are where you're more likely to see large herds of animals.

Admission is less expensive than at private reserves.

Flexibility: You can join a tour, hire a guide, or even drive yourself.

There's a wide variety of accommodations in terms of quality, experience, and cost, including some potentially budget-friendly options.

CONS

Viewing hours can be limited.

Vehicles must stay on the roads (no off-road adventures).

Crowds: There can be long lines of vehicles (jeeps, tour buses, private autos) waiting for their turn to view animals at prime spots (e.g., watering holes). Some of whom are less respectful of the animals than you might be.

It takes a little homework to find a highly knowledgeable guide.

You are less likely to see the smaller (or shier) creatures.

The experience may differ from the romantic notion of a secluded safari that many people have in their minds.



NATURE RESERVES

Private reserves are smaller than the large public parks, but the trade-off is they provide a more intimate and premium experience.

PROS

A limited number of visitors. You might go on a several-hours-long safari ride and see few, if any, other people.

Smaller groups mean you get more time with the animals, and more attention from your tour guides.

Dedicated tour guides and rangers are experts in their area and familiar with the animals' habits and whereabouts.

You can explore off-road.

You can explore "after hours."

Generally, private reserves allow guests to ride later in the evening and earlier in the morning than public parks. This can be a real plus, as many animals are most active at dawn and dusk.

You're more likely to get close to the animals.

You're more likely to see shy animals.

Luxury accommodations (such as Nature Heart Safari's own favorite, Phinda Vlei Lodge, which frequents "Best of African Lodges" lists by *Travel + Leisure Magazine*, among others).

Your tour group may have a small lodge entirely to itself. And you are likely to see wildlife right out the window of your room.

You have a dedicated staff take care of you – and that includes top-notch security that's there to protect both you and the animals.

It's an experience more like the romantic notion of a safari many people have in their minds (remote, uncrowded, quiet).



CONS

Because of the smaller land area at the private reserves, you're less likely to see large herds and migrations like you might in the public parks.

It can be more expensive than touring public parks.

Some lodges are small and book out far in advance, so be sure to plan your trip early.

3. SHOULD YOU CONSIDER A “SPECIALTY” TRIP?

There are a lot of safari companies, tour groups, lodges, and packages out there. So, open your imagination and you can dial-in your African adventure to even closer match your interests. Love horses? Find a safari that does its rides on horseback. Love water creatures like hippos and crocodiles? Plan a river safari.

Want a healing safari with yoga, meditation, forest bathing, and true communion with nature? Or would you like to go a step further and have a hands-on wildlife conservation experience that will change your life and heart forever?

Well – #shamlessplug alert – you can experience the latter two on our [Nature Heart Safari!](#) We integrate expertly guided wellness practices into every aspect of the tour. Then, the safari culminates in the de-horning of a wild rhino, which increases her chances of surviving poachers. We may be tooting our own horn just a bit here, but if you are an aware earth warrior, peace seeker, and avid nature worshiper, our safari is probably for you ;)

Regardless, your safari will be such a special time for you. If it can be made even better with a specialty tour? Cheers to that.

HOW MANY WILDLIFE SAFARI DRIVES DO YOU WANT?

When considering packages, check out how many wildlife drives they include. If seeing animals is a primary objective, allow ample time for viewing experiences, and note how many drives you can expect (and whether they’re in the morning, evening, or both). For example, our 10-day [Nature Heart Safari](#) features 12 safari rides or walks! Cool.



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4. GO ON A GROUP TOUR/PACKAGE OR GO IT ALONE?

Tour groups and packages usually offer more experiences for a better price than you'd get when signing up for activities on your own. Tours will reserve them for you, along with accommodations, transportation, and knowledgeable guides. They'll even plan your meals (considering any dietary restrictions, of course).

That said, when you're with a group... you're with the group and on a group itinerary.

Consider whether you tend to be more social during travel or more reserved. Do you want just to let your trip unfold, or would you prefer a set schedule where someone else calls the shots? For instance, in our [Nature Heart Safari](#), we go so far as to meet you *before you go through customs at the airport* - then make everything from there on out effortless for the remainder of your stay.

Another core consideration is safety. Reputable private reserve lodges and guides consider their customers' safety as the top priority. That means from both animal and human elements.

If safari riding on your own, you might be really on your own, especially in the remote area of a wildlife preserve or rural community. But certain countries and regions are safer and easier to get around than others for tourists. In fact, given that tourism is big business in many African countries, their governments take tourist safety incredibly seriously.

This is where research ahead of time is critical. Google is your friend: look for "Safest countries to travel in Africa" or "Is it safe to travel in ____ country?" If there's any question, find the U.S.-based embassy for the country you want to travel to and review their website for alerts. Another resource is the [Department of State Travel Advisories](#) page online.



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5. WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW TO TRAVEL TO AFRICA?



Start by looking into the travel visa requirements of the countries you plan to visit. For example, you can visit South Africa for up to 90 days as a tourist without a visa. Reach out to your country's embassy and see if there are any alerts you need to be aware of. Then, save that number on your phone if you wind up dealing with the unexpected during your trip.

It's also vital to investigate medical travel requirements for the country/region you visit. As one example, several countries in Africa require proof of vaccination against yellow fever for entry. Other countries have no such requirements. To get the latest news on health-related concerns, visit the [Africa CDC website](#).

Though certain countries across Africa offer a high crime rate, employing the simple good sense you would while traveling anywhere will generally keep you out of hot water. Keep your valuables on you and your eyes open. As a backup, though, you'll need comprehensive travel insurance. Make sure you have a plan that covers both you and your belongings. Also, make sure it covers the entire length of your trip.

If you start with a reputable safari outfitter, you can generally rest assured they won't bring you into the thick of a dangerous area. Private reserves will most always have an ample security staff, as well. Traveling on your own and even within public parks could lead to more potential exposure to theft and other crimes.

6. ARE SAFARIS GOOD FOR ANIMALS AND THE PLANET?

YOUR TOURISM DOLLARS HELP LOCAL COMMUNITIES. BUT WHAT ABOUT THE IMPACT SAFARIS HAVE ON THE ANIMALS?

A primary concern is that safari-goers may habituate animals to humans and encourage them to lose their instincts. So, when it comes to safari drives, the less crowding of the animals, the better. This is perhaps another reason to choose a private reserve over the more crowded public parks.

To minimize stress for the animals:

- Keep a respectful distance from the animals.
- Keep your voice down.
- Avoid flash photography.
- Avoid tour operators who chase or otherwise harass animals.
- Go with an operator who limits the number of vehicles or groups that can access animals at one time.

The ideal would be to leave these creatures alone in their wild existence. But human encroachment is a reality of our modern times.

If done respectfully, the effect of safaris on wildlife is minimal. And dollars spent at nature parks and private reserves can also directly benefit animal conservation efforts.

7. SAVE A RHINO ON YOUR NEXT SAFARI

HELP DE-HORN A RHINO (AND SAVE HER FROM POACHERS)

Poachers are a real threat to endangered rhinos, which are killed for their valuable horns. You can make a hands-on difference on your next safari by taking part in a de-horning.

There is a new breed of ecotourism traveler who wants their vacations to make a difference beyond helping local economies. While you can feel good that your admission to both parks and private reserves contributes to animal welfare, conservation is another area where private reserves tend to outshine the national parks.

Private reserves like andBeyond/Phinda in South Africa offer guests hands-on wildlife conservation activities, such as a rhino de-horning (which you'll experience by choosing [Nature Heart Safari](#)).

- Guests can ride along with park rangers when they perform a de-horning.
- The proceeds of these hands-on conservation packages go directly back into funding the de-horning effort.
- Participating in a de-horning is an emotionally powerful experience that elevates a safari above the level of "photo opp."
- It's an excellent way "to give back" while simultaneously having the experience of a lifetime.
- Learn more in our "[What is Rhino De-horning](#)" article.



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GUESTS CAN PARTICIPATE
IN A RHINO DE-HORNING.

8. HOW TO PACK FOR A SAFARI WITH SUSTAINABLE STYLE

WHEN CONSIDERING YOUR SAFARI WARDROBE, MAKE SURE FUNCTION ACCOMPANIES FASHION.

There's nothing worse than being stuck on an hours-long safari ride without the proper attire. To start with, think layers. Morning and evening can be chilly, while daytime can occasionally be blistering. You might start bundled, then shed down to a t-shirt and shorts later. So, have a small backpack to carry and store your outer layers.

Inside that bag, you'll also have your sunhat, shades, a scarf and light gloves, lip balm, sunscreen, and yes – a bottle of hardcore insect repellent. This is Africa we're talking about here. The bugs don't mess around, and natural repellent may not be effective enough to do the job. Also, pack a set of long shirts / long pants that are light enough to wear when it's warm out. This will give you a protective layer against the bugs and the sun's rays.

As for clothing, think of earth tones (bright colors can be disruptive). Also, steer clear of camouflage. It's literally prohibited in some countries!

Keep it Minimal

Keep in mind that most lodges and tours will have laundry service. So, observe packing rule #1: Do not over-pack!

Once you land your first major airline flight, you'll probably take a small-plane hopper (or two) to your ultimate destination. These small charter flights have strict weight limits for luggage – and if you exceed them, you'll sadly be stuck deciding which of your items to toss into the airport trash can! Also, be sure to choose a soft-sided bag! It'll be easier to squeeze into the luggage compartment, and some carriers ban hard-sided cases altogether.

Keep it Sustainable

Lastly, when you think about ways to travel sustainably, your wardrobe might not be the first thing that comes to mind. But even small choices can make a difference.

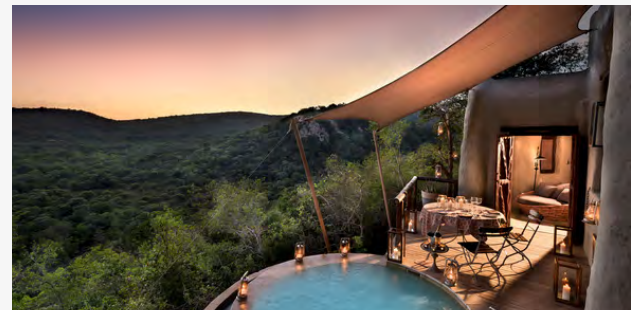
You know that rad wind jacket with the broken zipper? Don't rush to buy a new one – take the old one to a tailor for repair. Have a bestie who's your size? Maybe they have some rain pants, a wool sweater, etc., that they'll let you borrow. You can also find amazing deals on used gear in great shape at your local outdoor store. Just be creative, save yourself some cash, and reuse/recycle.

Want more packing tips? Learn [“How to Pack for a Safari with Sustainable Style”](#) on our website.



ABOUT NATURE HEART SAFARI

10 DAYS AND 9 NIGHTS OF SAFARI RIDES AND WELLNESS
PHINDA PRIVATE GAME RESERVE IN SOUTH AFRICA
JUNE 17 - 26, 2024



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See the "Big 5" (lion, elephant, rhino, leopard, and African buffalo) within the 66,000-acre protected Phinda Private Game Reserve, also home to more than 436 bird species.

Stay in luxury at two Phinda resorts within the Reserve.

Save a rhino in a special hands-on conservation experience.

Experience guided wellness and mindfulness practices including yoga, meditation, breath work, nature-bathing walks, and the study of key yoga philosophies.

Enjoy meditation on the beach, a stroll through the world's only Sand Forest, a visit to a local Zulu village, and much, much more.

SEE THE ITINERARY:

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CARRIE ASBY

Carrie Asby is a wellness coach, yoga instructor, environmental/ wildlife activist, and conservation volunteer, working directly with elephants, cheetahs, pangolins, and, of course, rhinos. This has culminated in her deep relationship with andBeyond/Phinda in South Africa. She can't wait to put that knowledge to work to bring you the most unique, healing, and adventurous safari journey imaginable.



GOOD FOR THE ANIMALS.

GOOD FOR THE BODY.

GOOD FOR THE HEART.

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