

Best Tours in Africa 2014

From *Traveler Magazine's* 2014 Tours of a Lifetime

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By Margaret Loftus

Benin, Togo, Ghana: Voodoo Central

Soak up West Africa's cultural heritage: Join a voodoo ritual in Ouidah, boat around the village of Ganvié built on stilts in Lake Nokoué, and check out Lomé's fetish market. *GeoEx: "Mystical West Africa," 13 days; \$5,550; <http://www.geoex.com/>*



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Botswana: Africa for Kids

This adventure kicks off in the Makgadikgadi Pans, where travelers spend two nights under the stars on Kubu Island. It winds up in the Okavango Delta, where kids are schooled in bush survival and tracking skills. *Audley Travel: "Ultimate Botswana Adventure," 10 days; \$8,585; <http://www.audleytravel.com/>*

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National Geographic Expeditions

Kenya: Community Conservation

Longtime naturalist Wayne Sentman offers a behind-the-scenes look at conservation on this safari, from community health initiatives in Laikipia to a nonprofit that makes art from marine debris in the town of Watamu. *Oceanic Society: "Hyenas to Humpbacks," 15 days; \$6,280 (plus park fees); www.oceanicsociety.org*

Republic of the Congo: Channeling Goodall

The Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park is home to 16 families of lowland gorillas and 10 solitary silverbacks. Travel via riverboat, 4x4 vehicle, and foot to track them in this untouched corner of a vast tropical rain forest that spans three countries. Your escorts are Baka Pygmies, whose ancestors lived here. *Extraordinary Journeys: "Untouched Africa: Gorillas of the Congo Basin," 10 days; from \$7,468; http://www.extraordinaryjourneys.net/english/*

Namibia: Desert Dreams

With veteran guides, visit San and Himba settlements and track endangered black rhinos and desert-adapted elephants in this remote wonderland of otherworldly landscapes. Tack on a three-day extension (extra fee) to visit Sossusvlei's swath of epic sand dunes. *Africa Adventure Consultants: "Namibia: Secrets Revealed," 10 days; from \$4,995; www.adventuresinafrica.com*

South Africa: Madiba's Way

The outfitter digs into South Africa's history to spin a unique itinerary around the life of Nelson Mandela. Trace Madiba's journey from boyhood in the village of Qunu to his alma mater at Fort Hare. *Red Savannah: "Mandela Landscapes," 7 days; \$4,335; www.redsavannah.com*

Uganda, Tanzania: Safari Plus

Tag along for a morning with Tanzania's Hadza people—one of the last of Africa's hunter-gatherer societies—on this custom journey that weaves cultural encounters with the region's iconic experiences, such as gorilla trekking in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and game drives in the Serengeti. *Global Basecamps: "Beyond the Big Five: Uganda, Tanzania, & the Spice Island," 17 days; \$7,198; www.globalbasecamps.com*

Madagascar, Tanzania, Comoros, Réunion, Mauritius: Indian Ocean Odyssey

Madagascar and its wonders—dozens of species of lemurs, virgin coral reefs, prolific birdlife—are best reached by sea. Join a team that includes marine biologists and ornithologists on the 100-passenger *Island Sky* from Zanzibar's picturesque Stone Town, around the island's northern tip, to Chamarel's "seven-colored earths," a geological formation in Mauritius. *Zegrahm Expeditions: "Voyage to Madagascar," 19 days; \$13,980; www.zegrahm.com*

Morocco: Sahara Overland

Ever dreamed of chucking it all and setting off on the sort of months-long, rugged, truck adventure made popular by this U.K.-based company? Here's your chance to sample overland travel without quitting your job, while soaking up the sensory overload that is Morocco, from the souks of Marrakech to a camel

expedition in the Sahara. *Dragoman: "South Morocco Discovery," 10 days; from \$1,100; www.dragoman.com*

Ethiopia: The Other Jerusalem

Dating back to the early fourth century, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is one of the world's oldest Christian denominations. The centerpiece of this exploration of northern Ethiopia is the town of Lalibela, whose 11 churches—still in use—were hewn from three rocks some 800 years ago. *Rothschild Safaris: "Heart of African Civilization," 16 days; \$4,411; http://www.rothschildsafaris.com/*

Tanzania: Beyond the Safari

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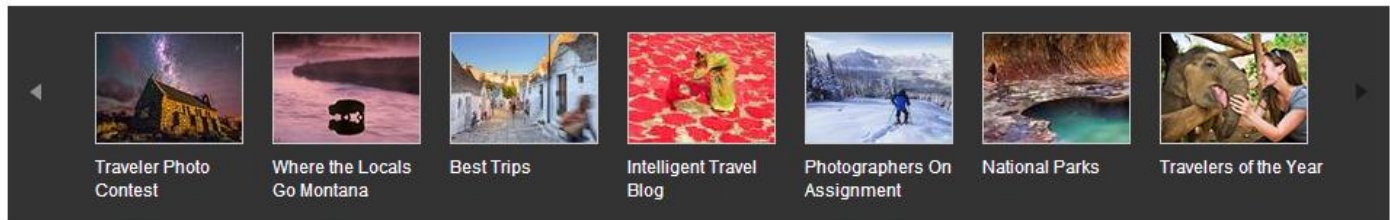
Trek alongside Maasai tribesmen in the Serengeti Plain, descend into Ngorongoro Crater, and forage with Hadza bushmen, one of the last surviving hunter-gatherer tribes. *National Geographic Adventures: "Walking Safari With the Maasai," 11 days; from \$5,095; www.nationalgeographicadventures.com*

Contributing editor **Margaret Loftus** has reported and written "Tours of a Lifetime" for the past eight years.

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