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LUXURY
by The Man Correspondent

This time for Africa

These luxury safaris offer the ultimate experiential escape!



The guest area at Xudum Delta Lodge in Botswana

I've nearly been bowled over by an acrobatic baby gorilla in Rwanda; stuttered with fright in a canoe as a hippo leapt off the riverbank to shower me with Zambezi spray and watched an elephant crash by my safari camp bedroom on the way to a watering hole in Kruger...

Africa, Africa, Africa. It's the ultimate experiential escape; the perfect memory maker, the most wonderful place on Earth.

And when the bass baritone of a lion booms through the night chorus you'll realise it, too. That Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer roar will shake the ice in your gin and tonic and reach deep inside to rattle your primeval DNA, because there is nothing more exciting than suddenly understanding where you stand in the food chain.

But where do you start? Easy, with THE MAN's handy guide to 10 of the most luxurious safari experiences on the continent.

BOTSWANA



Bale Mountain Lodge

Wildlife: Botswana boasts the world's largest inland delta, the Ohavango, perfect for exploring by dugout canoe and packed with giraffe, elephant, lion and cheetah; the Moremi Game Reserve, a 'Big Five' favourite populated with white and rare black rhino and the hippo-friendly waters of Chobe National Park, home to 1.2 lakh elephants.

Highlife: Abercrombie & Kent don't describe their tents as tents, but as canvas castles, they employ a professional photographer to offer technical tips and they know what guests like. "[They] like to return from a game drive to discover the copper tub has been moved onto the deck under a duvet of stars; the champagne's on ice and the bath water frothed to perfection using a fork attached to an electric drill. Bath baristas. Whatever next?"

An 11-night Botswana safari with A&K starts from around US\$11,000 (07 lakh approx) per person (abercrombiekent.co.in)

ETHIOPIA

Wildlife: The Rift Valley's Lake Awasa is packed with vibrant bird and monkey life; the Bale Mountains National Park offers nyala (a spiral-horned antelope), warthog and guereza monkeys and at the Sanetti Plateau, endangered Simien wolves, golden jackals and the Abyssinian hare. The magic of Ethiopia is that its tribes are equally fascinating from the bull jumping men of Hamar to the women of Mursi who adorn their lips with giant decorative plates.

Highlife: Ethiopia is not known for its über luxury accommodation. There are charming rustic escapes such as Bale Mountain Lodge, but this is the luxury of an experience your friends are unlikely to have enjoyed.

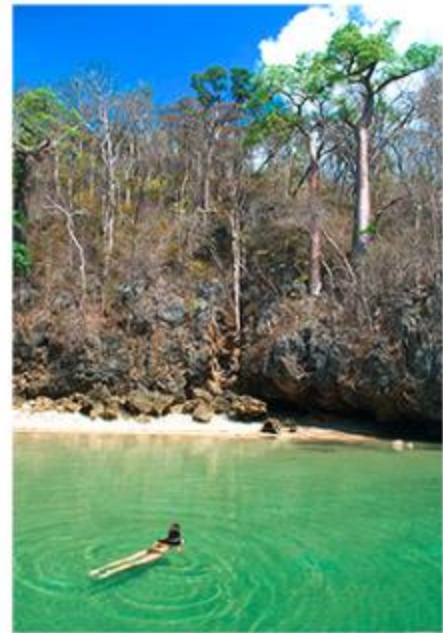
Red Savannah has 13-day tours of the country's wildlife and wild sights from US\$5,692 (Rs 4 lakh approx). (redsavannah.com)

MADAGASCAR

Wildlife: Five per cent of all known animal and plant species live in the desert, rainforest, mountains and along the coastline of this extraordinary island. Of course, lemurs are the children's film favourite, but let's not forget the spooky fossa (a predator local to the area), sharks and humpback whales, weird lizards, rare bird species and colourful frogs as well as photogenic chameleons.

Highlife: A lack of big carnivores on Madagascar means you can explore on foot. And at night. So you need five-star insight. Lucienne Wilmé is a local university lecturer, author, editor, biologist and research associate. She leads guests of Rainbow Tours

Prices for an 18-day 'wildlife extravaganza' with Rainbow Tours start from £5,795 (Rs 4 lakh approx) (rainbowtours.co.uk)



NAMIBIA

Wildlife: From the shipwrecks scattered on Skeleton Coast to the haunting wilderness of the Namib Desert and the walking safaris of the Han bushman and secrets of the Himba tribe, Namibia offers an otherworldly African perspective populated by coastal seals, desert elephant, cheetah, black rhino, chameleons, black scorpions and sand snakes as well as the giraffes, antelopes, jackals and leopards of the Namib Rand Reserve.

Highlife: Brown+Hudson offers private planes and makeshift airstrips to explore your own exclusive safari wilderness, sandboards to surf those ghostly dunes, parachute flights to get a bird's eye view of this romantic land and accommodation that ranges from designer boutique hotels in the capital of Windhoek to wilderness camps overlooking watering holes with ensuite bucket showers and tempting 'bush bars'. If you wish you can also learn "survival techniques in the desert" with the likes of television explorers such as the BBC's Ben Fogle.

Prices are on request contact Brown+Hudson for details (brownandhudson.com)

RWANDA AND UGANDA



Andasibe-Mantadia National Park

Wildlife: Two iconic destinations, one main reason to visit — gorillas. Lions, cheetahs, leopards all amazing to see, but nothing compares to seeing a baby gorilla playing with his mum. Bwindi's Impenetrable Forest in Uganda and Virunga National Park in Rwanda are the best places in the world to enjoy gorilla family fun and both countries also offer extraordinary volcano landscapes, verdant forests and endless varieties of monkey, orchid and bird life.

Highlife: The rustic splendour of Bwindi Lodge is wonderful, the chance of seeing a roaming gorilla on the lawn, sublime; Mount Gahinga Lodge is cottage cosy and Virunga Lodge in Rwanda offers volcano views that are priceless.

From US\$10,880 (Rs 7 lakh approx) Red Savannah offers 13 days of unforgettable gorilla and monkey action in both countries (redsavannah.com)



TANZANIA

Wildlife: Chem Chem, Ngorongoro Crater, Singita, these are African wildlife legends. And they are all in Tanzania. Take Ngorongoro, for instance, there are more than 25,000 large animals here — including the black-maned lion, leopard and black rhino — as well as Maasai taking their cattle down to drink. The Serengeti, well, it hosts the greatest wildlife show on Earth, the summer migration of millions of wildebeest and zebras pursued by predators looking for an easy lunch.



Highlife: Colonial-style cottage luxury, contemporary vintage tents, gourmet menus, under-baobab tree massages, stilted thatched suites, personal butlers, fine whiskies, cigars, libraries, infinity pools, Extraordinary Journeys has got the lot in Tanzania as well as the five-star service that gets you up close and personal with the animals.

Extraordinary Journeys has a 12-day tailor-made luxury Tanzania tour for US\$16,500 (Rs 11 lakh approx) (extraordinaryjourneys.com)

SOUTH AFRICA

Wildlife: In Kruger I've seen lazy leopards waiting, cheetahs crouching, lions lunging on gazelle and watched a harassed hyena herd her babies. Off the coast of Hermanus, I dived with great white sharks and whale-watched. Driving along the continent's famous coastline is an experience of life-changing proportions. No, really.

Highlife: There is nothing like coming back from a game drive to an al fresco bush dinner with trees illuminated by lanterns or a little wine tasting in the cellar of Singita Boulders, a private 45,000 acre game reserve.

Scott Dunn can customise your South African safari to perfection and has nights at Boulders from US\$1,500 (Rs 1 lakh approx) (scottdunn.com)

ZAMBIA

Wildlife: The Luangwa and Zambezi rivers bring life to the wildlife in Zambia and the best way to get into the thick of the action is in a canoe to watch the elephants crossing, the crocs waiting and the hippos playing (watch out for leapers). Game drives can track down the big cats in the bush (a night drive is unforgettable) and walking safaris get you up close and personal with rare bird life. You can finish your Zambia adventure staring in wonder at Victoria Falls.

Highlife: The riverbank lodges in Zambia provide extraordinary views, extraordinary comfort and Chiawa Camp and Old Mondoro are among the best offering river-view splash tubs, high Egyptian cotton counts, game viewing hides and thatched bars for sundowners. Dinner on the nearby river islands is highly recommended.

From just £5,795 (Rs 4 lakh approx) per person Abercrombie & Kent offers a 13-day adventure exploring four wildlife-filled destination highlights of Zambia (abercrombiekent.co.in)

ZIMBABWE

Wildlife: After helicoptering over Victoria Falls and the hippo, crocodile, elephant and giraffe by the Zambezi, you jump into another chopper to game-packed Nagamo Plains for a few days, followed by a private plane to Lake Kariba and the luxury 29-metre houseboat of Matusadona that explores remote reaches of the bush. Then it's into another private plane to Pamushana Lodge for a couple of days of rhino tracking, bird watching and game drives in Zim's famous Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve.

Highlife: All those helicopters, private flights and extraordinary camps, lodges and houseboats are the epitome of personalised luxury and part of an itinerary organised by Journeys by Design. Yoga before your drive? Check. Jacuzzi on houseboat? Absolutely. The most qualified guide in the country? Of course.

The price is just US\$40,801 (Rs 27 lakh approx) per person (journeysbydesign.com)

KENYA

Wildlife: The Out of Africa classic where predators chase millions of migrating wildebeest and zebras; the famous Maasai Mara savannahs provide some of the greatest concentrations of animals on Earth; Lake Nakuru is carpeted with millions of pink flamingos while endless elephants and giraffes saunter across the national park of Tsavo West.

Highlife: Sir Richard Branson's 12-tent safari camp in the Maasai Mara, Mahali Mzuri promises a "front row seat" to the migration. The camp's viewing platforms, giant screen windows, infinity pool, contemporary dining tent, futuristic architecture, spa, vintage champagne and claw-footed bathtubs are as dangerously seductive as the wildlife.

Prices for exclusive use of Mahali Mzuri start from just US\$18,240 (Rs 12 lakh approx) per night (virginlimitededition.com) andy round