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Insight


# Operators pick must-see African destinations for 2015


By **Dorine Reinstein** / December 25, 2014


  


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U.S. travelers are becoming increasingly adventurous when it comes to travel into Africa. They are gradually starting to veer away from the tried-and-trusted African safari destinations and have started exploring the lesser-known countries on the continent.

Although Africa has been heavily affected during the past year by misinformation surrounding the spread of Ebola on the continent, tour operators have reported that they are slowly starting to see renewed interest for Africa. Karen Cleary of Boundless Journeys says: "While the Ebola outbreak in western Africa caused temporary hesitation in travel planning to Africa this fall, Boundless Journeys' clients are showing renewed interest in Africa. We continue to see a growth in interest in travel to Africa across the board."



These are the top four destinations tour operators contacted by Travel Weekly have recognized as emerging hot spots for 2015 for U.S. travelers to Africa:

### ***Tanzania***

Tanzania has steadily been building up an inventory of luxurious and intimate tented camps, which has put the country in the spotlight. Cleary explains the country has responded to a demand from high-end safari clients. She says: “There are now also more camp options in the northern Serengeti, offering a less busy alternative to the Maasai Mara when the migration is in the north.”

Marcia Gordon, Extraordinary Journeys, agrees and says: “Tanzania experienced growth in tourism numbers in 2014 that we expect to continue in 2015. The wide range of accommodation choices and price and steadily improving infrastructure make this an extremely attractive option for what could be the most prolific accumulation of game in all of Africa. It is perceived as a safe destination, which makes it an attractive choice for many, particularly those from the U.S.”

### ***Zimbabwe and Zambia***

The joint visa for Zimbabwe and Zambia is expected to put both countries firmly on the map with Americans.

Cleary explains Zimbabwe and Zambia have been seeing more attention from U.S. clients and are viewed as a more budget-friendly alternative to Botswana. She says: “Higher-end camps in these countries cost somewhere in the neighborhood of \$1,000 per person, per night, whereas comparable camps in Botswana can be 30% to 40% more expensive. Including these countries on a core Botswana itinerary is a great way to stretch your budget and blend in some diversity to the safari experience.”

According to Cleary, the diversity of landscapes and wildlife offered by Zimbabwe's Hwange, Matusadona and Mana Pools national parks and Zambia's Kafue National Park also offer excellent value, great beauty and unique wildlife sightings.

Gordon also has seen a growing interest in both Zambia and Zimbabwe. She explains that new high-end camps in Zambia, such as Chinzombo and Anabezi, have proven to be a popular option. The country has also seen major investments into the refurbishments of existing properties, which has made the destination more attractive to travelers from the U.S., who like to combine their wildlife with a bit of pampering at the end of the day.

Zimbabwe is also set to benefit from its U.S.-based currency in 2015. Gordon says: "Now that Zimbabwe's currency is based on the U.S. dollar and the government is functioning again, American travelers are returning. We are thrilled because we believe that Zimbabwe offers incredible game viewing, a fabulous classic safari experience, great guiding and great value for money. It also still gets comparatively fewer visitors, so interested travelers get a wonderfully uncrowded experience, especially if they travel in 2015 and get in on the ground floor of this trend."

Jim Holden, President of Africa Travel Inc., agrees: "Zimbabwe is seeing a resurgence, as it is also viewed as more stable than in the past, with its political situation more settled."

### ***Mozambique***

Joss Kent, CEO of AndBeyond, points out that while South Africa remains a popular choice, Mozambique is quickly gaining popularity with U.S. travelers. He says: "Once popular, the country had not been a tourist destination for the past few decades following civil war. Now it is emerging as one of Africa's prime destinations. Travelers are increasingly interested in getting the most out of a vacation."

According to Kent, Mozambique's rich African-Portuguese culture provides a different side of Southern Africa than the bustling cities of Cape Town and Johannesburg as well as the famed game-viewing opportunities. He says: "With its white-sand beaches and heralded culinary offerings, Mozambique is the perfect end to a safari and a relaxing and cultural beach vacation in its own right."

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