

Condé Nast  
**Traveller**

# SAFARI SEASON

ACTIVE HOLIDAYS

## SAFARI SEASON

By Laura Griffith-Jones – 4<sup>th</sup> April 2010

CONDÉ NAST TRAVELLER



*Pictured: Shu'Mata Camp at the foot of Kilimanjaro*

# SAFARI SEASON: TANZANIA

**As the Great Migration gets underway once again, Africa's safari experiences get ever more thrilling. Laura Griffith-Jones tracks down the best bush holidays of the season and finds exciting new ways to see the Big Five, rare wildlife walks through unexplored territory, and super-stylish lodges with unparalleled views.**

**TANZANIA Shu'Mata Camp** Deep in the land of the Maasais, on the edge of the Amboseli National Park, lies Shu'Mata Camp (pictured). Opened in August 2012, on a hill at the foot of the awe-inspiring Mount Kilimanjaro, it has to be in one of the most magnificent locations on earth. In every direction, undulating plains stretch away towards the horizon; from the camp, elephants, eland, oryx, giraffes and gazelle appear as tiny dots on a vast landscape, while out on game-drives, night drives or walking safaris, you can get up close. Shu'Mata has five spacious tents, decorated in classic-Hemingway style, with plain canvas roofs, huge gauze windows for game-viewing from your bed, and private terraces. The rust-coloured walls are brought to life by Maasai works of art and the bedspreads are handmade locally with natural fabrics. After dark, you can sit by an open fire, cocktail in hand, in the shadow of that majestic snow-capped mountain, either reflecting on the day's sightings or simply listening to the chorus of crickets or the cackling of hyenas. *Shu'Mata Camp, South Amboseli, Tanzania. From £365 per person per night, all-inclusive, through African Explorations (01367 850566; [www.africanexplorations.com](http://www.africanexplorations.com))*

**Singita Serengeti House** This intimate wilderness retreat, which launched in July, is all about privacy and indulgence: you have your own safari house, guide, chef, 25-metre swimming pool, tennis court and exclusive access to 340,000 acres of wilderness. Located in the Singita Grumeti Reserves on the western corridor of the Serengeti National Park, Serengeti House is a goldmine for game. You may even be lucky enough to witness the famed Great Migration, one of nature's most thrilling spectacles, when millions of mammals, such as wildebeest, antelope and zebra, stampede across acres of parched lands in search of water and grazing. And even if you're not there for the migration, safari options are still endless: you can enjoy game-drives in a 4WD, walking safaris, star-gazing sessions and horseback adventures. There is a watering hole in sight of the house, so you can watch predators and plains game

rehydrate right in your back garden. Serengeti House sleeps eight people in two spacious suites in the main house and two garden rooms. The Cecile & Boyd-designed interiors are unpretentious and quintessentially African: the rooms are decorated in a cooling palette of ebony and ivory and have textured paint and wallpapers, raw-wood furniture, fireplaces made of rough local stone, and there is black Zimbabwe granite in the bathrooms. This is a real home from home, with a Tanzanian twist. *Singita Serengeti House, Singita Grumeti Reserves. Rates from £1,250 per person per night, full board, including all game-viewing activities and drinks, through African Explorations (01367 850566; [www.africanexplorations.com](http://www.africanexplorations.com))*

**Four Seasons Safari Lodge Serengeti** Bilila Lodge in the central north region of the Serengeti National Park is being given a Four Seasons makeover. It will reopen later this year under the new name of Four Seasons Safari Lodge Serengeti, having been transformed into an even-more-opulent bush hideaway than it was before. The 60 rooms, 12 suites and five villas with plunge-pools will be contemporary, spacious and air-conditioned, and most will have private balconies with views over the savannahs of the Serengeti. Elevated wooden walkways will connect the two-storey main building to the guest rooms, villas and an all-indulgent spa and fitness centre. On day and night drives you will be able, undoubtedly, to witness astounding nature and wildlife, too: herds of wildebeest, zebra and antelope one day, lions, leopards and cheetahs the next. And the adventure continues back at the lodge: the infinity pool overlooks a watering hole habitually visited by a herd of 30-odd elephants, who enjoy nothing better than sloshing in the shallows. Magical. *Four Seasons Safari Lodge Serengeti, Serengeti National Park African Explorations (01367 850566 [www.africanexplorations.com](http://www.africanexplorations.com)). Doubles from £750, full board. Park fees US\$50 per day*



*Pictured: mountain-bike safaris from Tafika Camp in the South Luangwa National Park*

## SAFARI SEASON: ZAMBIA

In Zambia's South Luangwa National Park, one camp is transformed into an eco-lodge, a stylish riverside camp is being built, and a new activity provides a unique way to see the bush.

**TENA TENA** Tena Tena, the flagship camp of safari experts Robin Pope Safaris, is being relocated and redesigned, and is reopening as an eco-lodge in August 2012. It is moving a mile upstream to an idyllic spot under a row of mahogany trees on the bank of the Luangwa River. A feeling of tranquillity and emptiness prevails here - empty, that is, except for the animals. The area bursts with wildlife, from leopards and lions to bush babies and baboons. The proximity to the river means there are plenty of basking crocs to spot, a resident pod of hippos, and kingfishers diving into the water. The new Tena Tena, designed by architect Neil Rocher, will have a natural feel, entirely powered by solar energy. The bar, for example, will curve around a mahogany tree and termite mounds, a canopy as its roof; accommodation will be in canvas tents, spread out among under the trees with views over the river.

*African Explorations (01367 850566 [www.africanexplorations.com](http://www.africanexplorations.com)). Doubles from US\$1,060, full board, including all game-viewing activities, drinks and transfers to and from Mfuwe.*

## **CHINZOMBO CAMP**

Early next year, a stylish new camp will open on another stretch of the Luangwa River. Six villas are planned, with airy bedrooms, huge bathrooms kitted out with spa products and their own plunge pools.

With direct, private access by boat to the national park, the camp will be an excellent place from which to explore this wildlife-rich area. Being a project, you will be guaranteed peerless guiding from absolute experts - the company behind it, Norman Carr Safaris has been operating wildlife adventures in the Luangwa Valley for more than 60 years. In fact, the guide and soon-to-be camp manager at Chinzombo, Shaddy Nkhoma, actually worked with Norman Carr himself on one of his first ever guiding jobs.

*Chinzombo Camp, South Luangwa National Park African Explorations (01367 850566 [www.africanexplorations.com](http://www.africanexplorations.com)). Doubles from US\$1,150, full board, including park fees and all activities.*

## **TAFIKA CAMP**

For the more adventurous, there is a gruelling but exhilarating bush experience to be had. Tafika Camp, also on the banks of the Luangwa River, offers mountain-bike safaris through the exquisite scenery of the South Luangwa National Park.

In teams of up to four, plus an experienced guide and an armed scout (just in case), you'll bump across vast expanses of wide-open plains broken up by ancient baobab trees and herds of lumbering elephants, puku, impala and zebra, through woodland where elusive leopards lie camouflaged among the treetops, and along the banks of the Luangwa River past slit-eyed crocs looking on with evil intent. You can also stop off at Mkasanga Village, and meet the village elders.



Then it's back to cosy and atmospheric Tafika Camp. Its six rustic-chic, reed-and-thatch chalets are built in the shade of huge leadwood trees; they have simple furniture, storm lanterns and outdoor showers, so you can watch the vervet monkeys swing in the treetops while you wash.

*African Explorations (01367 850566 [www.africanexplorations.com](http://www.africanexplorations.com)) offers a nine-day trip to Zambia, staying at Tafika Camp (with one night in Lusaka), from £3,393 per person, full board, including return flights from London, transfers and park fees.*



*Pictured: the view from inside a chalet at Mkulumadzi Lodge in Majete Wildlife Reserve*

## SAFARI SEASON: MALAWI

The south-east African country of Malawi gets the Big Five again; and now you can walk with rhinos there, too.

**MKULUMADZI LODGE** Lions were once common in Malawi, but by the 1960s scouts in the Majete Wildlife Reserve, a vast region of granite hills, river valleys and dense forest, recorded only one lion every 100 patrol days. By the 1980s, there were none at all. However, between 2003 and 2010, non-profit organisation African Parks introduced 2,500 animals of 12 different species in order to create an environment where lions could thrive again. Four leopards were released last year, and on 25 August, four lions will join them, restoring the reserve to its natural ecosystem. And there's another very good reason to go to the Majete: last year, Mkulumadzi Lodge opened in 7,000 hectares of private wilderness. The eight super-roomy chalets have sloping roofs planted with shrubs and grasses to camouflage and keep them cool. The interiors are decorated in a pale palette, with creamy-white curtains and bed linen creating a light and fresh atmosphere. Set in the confluence of two rivers, the chalets have private wooden viewing-decks with tables and chairs overlooking sparkling water - great for birdwatching or croc-spotting. The front wall of each opens fully (although you can close it at night if you'd prefer), so you can hear the midnight chorus of the tree frogs or, from August, that distinctive grunting of the lions, from the safety of your kingsize bed. *Mkulumadzi Lodge, Majete Wildlife Reserve, Lower Shire Valley African Explorations (01367 850566 [www.africanexplorations.com](http://www.africanexplorations.com)). Doubles from US\$618, full board, including game-viewing activities, bar and transfers to and from Nchalo airstrip to airports; excluding park fees.*

**MVUU LODGE** Visitors in the Liwonde National Park can now come face to face with the highly endangered black rhino, thanks to a new 'tracking experience' run by Mvuu Lodg. These fascinating, prehistoric beasts became extinct in Malawi in the 1980s, and were reintroduced in 1993; but even today, there are just 14 of them at Liwonde and 11 in the Majete Wildlife Reserve. The focus of the experience is on exploration, learning and research. The evening before, you will learn about the history of the rhino in Malawi. The next day, in a group of just two guests, two armed scouts and a guide, you will set out on a quest for signs of the presence of rhinos and, with any luck, you'll stumble upon giant footprints, and eventually experience the thrill of catching sight of an elusive black rhino. All guests are encouraged to get fully involved with the research by noting down any observations and helping to log data. To top off a fascinating morning or afternoon in the wilds, guests can take a refreshing dip in Mvuu Lodge's natural rock swimming pool - just what the doctor ordered. *Mvuu Lodge, Liwonde National Park, Malawi. African Explorations*

(01367 850566 [www.africanexplorations.com](http://www.africanexplorations.com)) offers three nights at the lodge from £1,975 per person, full board, including Kenya Airways return flights from Heathrow, airport taxes, transfers, activities and park fees. Rhino tracking costs an additional US\$40 per person.



*Pictured: a photography session on the Chobe River with Pangolin Photo Safaris*

## SAFARI SEASON: BOTSWANA

In this beautiful country, three boutique lodges have been revamped and a photography course has launched so you can learn how to capture epic wildlife moments on camera.

**PANGOLIN PHOTO SAFARIS** The best way to learn travel and wildlife photography is to get out there in the midst of it all, in the presence of wild animals in their natural surroundings. A photography course in Chobe National Park, one of Africa's most picturesque parks, teaches photographers of all levels how to take phenomenal travel shots. The guides and tutors are extremely experienced wildlife photographers. Snappers take photographs from customised vehicles: the boat, for example, is three metres wide, allowing maximum space for kit and movement; cameras are mounted onto seats which rotate 360 degrees; and in order to disturb the wildlife as little as possible, it is fitted with a quiet motor. On dry land,



the Unimog 4WD - which has seats with built-in camera mounts - allows access to far-flung places across uneven terrain. *African Explorations (01367 850566 [www.africanexplorations.com](http://www.africanexplorations.com)) offers three nights at Mowana Safari Lodge, Chobe National Park, from £665 per person, all inclusive, with six photography sessions with Pangolin Photo Safaris.*

**NXAMASERI ISLAND LODGE** Set on an island in the swamps of the Okavango Delta, this isolated lodge is surrounded by an exceptional diversity of birdlife and other creatures great and small. Nxamaseri Island Lodge is, in fact, one of the oldest camps in the area, but earlier this year it underwent a mammoth renovation and has been virtually rebuilt. The six new en-suite chalets are connected to the main lodge by teak walkways lined with glowing lanterns at night, and all have private decks with a table and chairs overlooking the waterlily-coated waters. The interiors are classically African in style, with artwork by indigenous people on the vibrantly painted walls and wooden furniture handcrafted by local artisans, such as lampshades made of woven reeds. Days here pass all too quickly - gliding on *mekoros* (traditional dug-out canoes) along the smooth surface of the waterways, over myriad fish, past hippos hidden among the papyrus and multicoloured birds too numerous to count. There are thrilling fly-fishing adventures to be had, where you might find yourself battling with a dagger-toothed tigerfish; and for the hardcore twitchers there are specific birdwatching ventures, where you can watch egrets, African fish eagles, herons and dazzling kingfishers at leisure. Those interested in tribal culture can journey to the Tsodilo Hills, which jut dramatically out of the flat desert landscape and form Botswana's highest point. Sacred to the people of the San tribe, the hills are adorned with more than 2,000 ancient paintings. *African Explorations (01367 850566 [www.africanexplorations.com](http://www.africanexplorations.com)) from £250 per person, all-inclusive. Excludes flights and transfers.*

**SAVUTE ELEPHANT CAMP & KHWAI RIVER LODGE** Sophistication has reached new levels at Savute Elephant Camp and Khwai River Lodge, both owned by Orient-Express. The thatched-and-tented rooms at both camps have recently been kitted out with private viewing decks and vast sliding doors, giving guests an unobstructed view from the bed of the animals that roam the area. It's worth staying a few days at each camp, as the wildlife is different in both. Savute Elephant Camp, near the newly flowing Savute Channel in Chobe National Park, is home to lions, leopards and - as its name suggests - herds of elephants. Khwai River Lodge,

situated beside floodplains in the Moremi Wildlife Reserve, attracts big cats and more than 300 bird species, including the endangered wattled crane, ground hornbill and various eagles *African Explorations* (01367 850566 [www.africanexplorations.com](http://www.africanexplorations.com)) offers three nights at Savute Elephant Camp and three nights at Khwai River from £4,985 per person, full board, including British Airways return flights, transfers and all game-viewing activities.



*Pictured: tiang antelope migrating in the Sudan*

## **SAFARI SEASON: SUDAN**

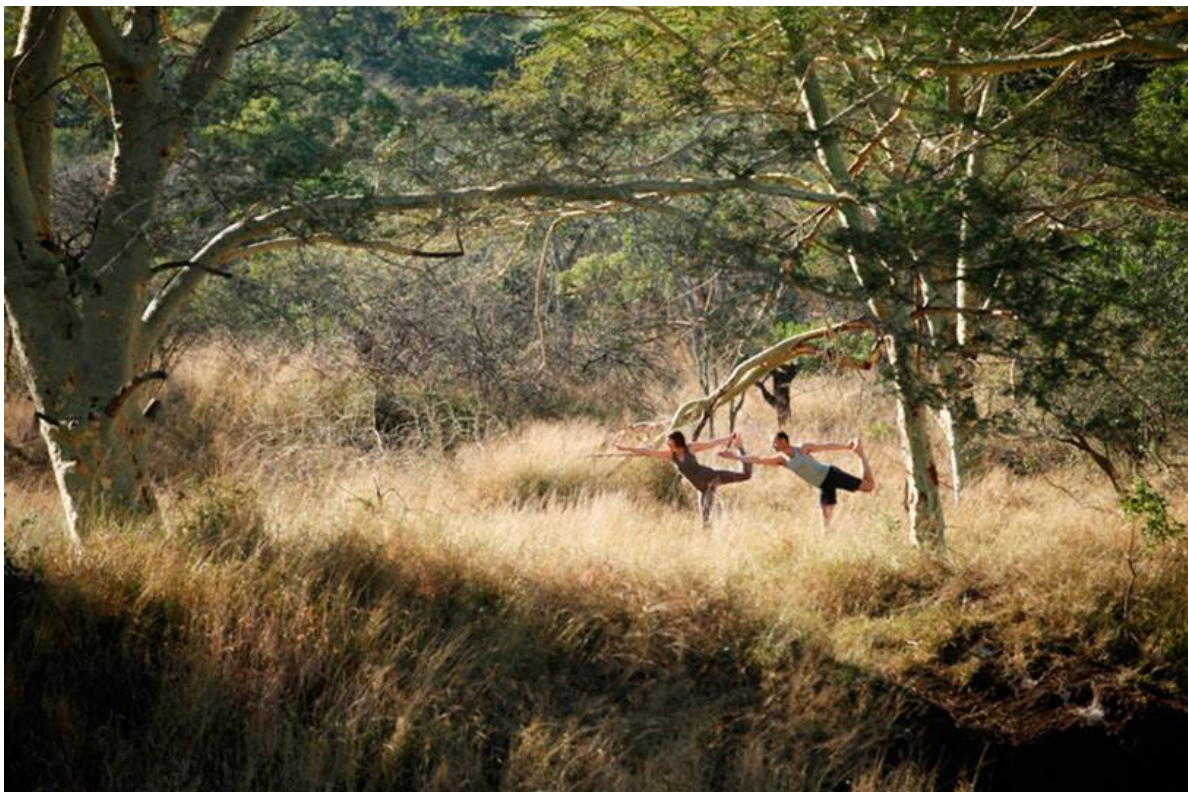
The mammal migration in the Sudan is the greatest of them all, surpassing even those of the world-famous Serengeti and Maasai Mara.

### **BAHL EL JEBEL SAFARIS, SUDAN**

Mention the Great Migration, and most think immediately of the Serengeti, or Kenya's Maasai Mara. Unknown to most of the world, southern Sudan plays host to a migration on an even larger scale than both of these.

Each year, in the dry season (November to March), herds of more than two million white-eared kob, tiang antelope (pictured), mongalla gazelle, elephant, buffalo, zebra and other ungulates trample miles of dusty lands in search of water and grass, often in tightly clustered groups up to 10 kilometres long. And whereas in Tanzania or Kenya, you may be viewing this awe-inspiring sight with hordes of other visitors, here you will have it all to yourself.

Tourism inevitably dwindled during the 30 or so years of civil war and strife in Sudan, but at long last the country is relatively peaceful again. Bahr el Jebel Safaris can arrange trips to Boma National Park, on which visitors can walk these vast lands untrodden for three decades, guided by a former tribal hunter, and witness the most exciting wildlife spectacle on earth, devoid of fellow tourists. *African Explorations (01367 850566 [www.africanexplorations.com](http://www.africanexplorations.com)) offers a 12-day holiday at Boma National Park in southern Sudan, with Bahr el Jebel Safaris, from £3,600, all inclusive, except international flights.*



***Pictured: a yoga safari at The Homestead***

# SAFARI SEASON: SOUTH AFRICA

**New wellness safaris combine thrilling wildlife encounters with fitness sessions.**

## YOGA AT THE HOMESTEAD

A glorious setting for a healthy escape is the Phinda Private Game Reserve in the north of Kwazulu-Natal, in South Africa. The area is known as the 'Seven World Wonders' due to its seven distinct habitats, ranging from savannah to woodland, and the abundant lions, cheetahs and dazzling birds that live there.

But these safaris have a difference: this time, game-drives are interspersed with yoga, meditation and Pranayama lessons, which take place in the countryside around The Homestead. Food is similarly health-conscious, with fresh smoothies, fruit juices and raw vegetables served for breakfast, and the nutritional bush dinners served under the African stars.

The Homestead, a private villa that sleeps six, is a tranquil place to stay: the sleek, stylish rooms are built with timber, stone and thatch in Zulu style and decorated with tribal crafts. From your bed, you can look out through glass sliding doors over the unspoilt bushveld. And when you're not out on game-drives or embracing nature in a yoga session, you can lounge on cushions beside the villa's infinity pool.

*African Explorations (01367 850566 [www.africanexplorations.com](http://www.africanexplorations.com)) offers a four-day yoga safari staying at The Homestead from ZAR22,980 per person (about £1,755), full board, including yoga activities and transfers to and from Phinda and Richards Bay.*





*Pictured: a mountain gorilla in the Republic of Congo*

## **SAFARI SEASON: REPUBLIC OF CONGO**

The Congo has been out of bounds for years, but now there are several very good reasons to pack your bags and head for the Republic of Congo: exceptional wildlife, no other tourists, and two sensational new safari camps.

### **CONGO GORILLA TOURS**

Josef Conrad described the Congo as a 'heart of darkness', and stories of war and revolution in recent years haven't helped to alter this impression. But what is often forgotten is that the Congo Basin, 180 million hectares of rivers, savannahs, swamps and flooded forests, is only second in size to the Amazon, and comprises one quarter of the world's tropical rainforests.

Where the Central African countries of the Republic of Congo (or Congo-Brazzaville), the Central African Republic and Cameroon meet, they form a triangle of pristine forests,

including the Nouabale-Ndoki, Dzanga-Ndoki and Lobeke national parks. Although these areas are home to endangered mountain gorillas, forest elephants, chimpanzees and bonobos, 10,000 species of tropical plant, 400 varieties of mammal and a thousand different birds, they've hardly been visited for decades. The time has come to go there again...

*African Explorations (01367 850566 [www.africanexplorations.com](http://www.africanexplorations.com)) offers a 12-night trip to the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville) and Central African Republic from £8,375 per person, all inclusive*

## **LANGO CAMP & NGAGA CAMP**

The minute country of Republic of Congo has not been all that high on the safari hotlist but the opening of two new rustic-chic camps from Wilderness Safaris in August 2012, in Odzala-Kokoua National Park, has finally put it on the map.

From the deck at Lango Camp, overlooking Lango Bai, you might spot forest buffalo, forest elephant, bongo or the sitatunga antelope. Or perhaps some of the 450-plus bird species, such as an African grey parrot.

Ngaga Camp, in the heart of the Ndzehi Forest, is close to where the three main groups of endangered mountain gorillas in the vicinity like to munch their way through life in the bushes. Grey-cheeked mangabeys, guereza colobus and putty-nosed monkeys are regular sightings, and occasionally you might see a moustached monkey in the treetops, with its comical snow-white moustache.

These camps will give you an insight into a completely new ecosystem: the African rainforest. If you've been on safari before and think you've seen it all, you can be assured that you have not. This is a whole new world.

*African Explorations (01367 850566 [www.africanexplorations.com](http://www.africanexplorations.com)) offers three nights at Lango Camp and three nights at Ngaga Camp from £3,975 per person, full board, including transfers within the Republic of Congo.*



## SAFARI SEASON: NAMIBIA

**The second most sparsely populated country on earth has a new lodge in a private reserve larger than Singapore; plus a new riverside hideaway is under construction in the north-west.**

### THE SANDFONTEIN NATURE AND GAME RESERVE

Set in the south of Namibia, in an immense expanse of pristine desert larger than Singapore, Sandfontein gives you a true wilderness experience. Only very recently available to the public (having previously been used by the owners alone), the property now sleeps up to 10 guests, housed in four chalets and a suite.

Rooms have floor-to-ceiling windows and large east-facing terraces, so you get sensational views of the sun rising behind the mountains and turning the empty land a kaleidoscope of colours. There is also a comfortable sitting room for collapsing in, with a thatched roof,

wooden beams, a cool stone floor and authentic African furniture. An unexpected bonus is the food, created as far as possible with local ingredients and fresh vegetables picked from the lodge's own organic vegetable garden.

Days here are spent tracking black rhinos, fishing or canoeing on the Orange River, riding up into the hills on horseback in search of kudu, red hartebeest, jackals and even leopards, or simply cooling off in the 20-metre swimming pool - a patch of bright aquamarine in the midst of a sun-baked land.

Although there are around 4,000 wildlife species to spot, generally people do not come here for the animals; here it is all about the epic setting, the feeling of being in lands untrodden by human feet and the complete seclusion and serenity.

*The Sandfontein Nature and Game Reserve, Namibia via African Explorations (01367 850566 [www.africanexplorations.com](http://www.africanexplorations.com)) Chalets from N\$6,000 (about £460), including all meals, drinks and activities.*

## **HOANIB SKELETON COAST CAMP, HOANIB RIVER**

Next July, an exciting new desert hideaway will open in the remote and wild lands of north-western Namibia. Straddling the Palmwag area and the Skeleton Coast National Park, Hoanib Skeleton Coast Camp will be constructed beside the Hoanib River in the Kaokoveld, a wonderfully dramatic landscape of arid plains, hardy Welwitschia plants (only found in this area), rugged mountains and crisscrossing parched riverbeds. Adventures by plane, on foot or in a Jeep will bring you face to face with desert-adapted elephant, giraffe, lion, cheetah, oryx, springbok, mountain zebra, brown and spotted hyenas, and even the rare black rhino.

Precise plans for Hoanib Skeleton Coast Camp are still to be confirmed but the idea is to build seven rustic but comfortable double rooms (most likely tented), and one family abode, all with en-suite bathrooms and the usual creature comforts. There will be an open-plan sitting room, bar and dining area with astonishing desert vistas. And if you look carefully, you may spot an armour-plated Namibian gerrhosaurus skoogi lizard prowl silently past, as



you sip your glass of refreshing South African wine under the twinkling night sky. *For more information contact African Explorations (01367 850566 [www.africanexplorations.com](http://www.africanexplorations.com))*



*Pictured: the pool at Camp Hwange*

## SAFARI SEASON: ZIMBABWE

With the strife that has dominated Zimbabwe over the past few years, it has largely fallen off the tourist radar. But the country remains as bewitching as ever.

### CAMP HWANGE, ZIMBABWE

This April, Camp Hwange opened in a secluded corner of Hwange National Park that is further west than most other lodges, giving guests almost exclusive access to the area. The national park is one of the most diverse on earth: whether you're exploring on foot or in a 4WD, you will come across herds of impala, kudu, zebra, elephant, perhaps a lone bushbuck, and, if you're lucky, a big cat or two.

Designed to have a natural 'bush' feel, the camp itself is by no means flashy, but it has all the essentials. Its eight spacious, canvas tents with thatched roofs are quite basic but they

have decent beds, colourful mats on the concrete floors, solar-powered lighting and gauze windows that let the breeze in but keep the insects out. There are wooden trunks for storage, en-suite bathrooms with bucket showers, and superb 180-degree views over the forested plains and adjacent waterhole, where elephants and other game gather to drink. Not to be missed are the 'loos with views' - quite a novelty.

Five-star luxury it may not be, but Camp Hwange has a romantic charm, and its remote location in the tourist-free wilderness makes it truly memorable.

*African Explorations (01367 850566 [www.africanexplorations.com](http://www.africanexplorations.com)) offers a seven-night stay at Camp Hwange from £2,922 per person, full board, including all flights, transfers and safari activities.*