

Q: 'How do we choose a perfect safari?'

It's a trip-of-a-lifetime and there's one out there just for you. Our expert **Sue Watt** has done

all the work for you. Here are her top picks


The Big Five beauty Akagera, Rwanda
THE RESERVE Rwanda is more than mountain gorillas. It's home to Akagera, perhaps Africa's prettiest Big Five park. Once devastated by civil unrest, Akagera's resurgence reflects its resounding conservation success.
THE SETTING Imagine a mini-Serengeti crossed with England's Lake District, where elephants, rhinos, lions, leopards and buffaloes live among golden savannahs, papyrus-fringed wetlands and rolling hills.
THE CAMP  Soothing and soulful. Ruzizi is a mid-range eco-lodge, with comfy tented rooms amid towering fig trees. Friendly staff create a happy vibe.
THE SIGHTINGS Yes, the Big Five all roam these plains, but it's the birds that steal the limelight . Spot endangered crested cranes, prehistoric-looking shoebills and riotously colourful kingfishers.
BEST THING The beautiful Kilala Plains in the north often teems with wildlife , from lumpy buffaloes and elephants to dainty impala, herds of elands and topis, and giraffes striding across the savannah.
WORST THING Wildlife generally isn't as prolific here as in some better-known parks, so you could have long drives seeing little ; it's all down to the luck of the draw on the day.
TRAVEL'S TIP Ask to take the little-known behind-the-scenes tour of HQ or patrol the perimeter fence with community guides. Both provide a rare and fascinating insight into the running of the park and its conservation.
PRICE Aardvark Safaris (aardvarksafaris.co.uk) offers a four-night all-inclusive stay (except for drinks) at Ruzizi Camp , with international flights and transfers, from £1,610pp.


The wild (dog) one Mana Pools, Zimbabwe
Unesco World Heritage Site Mana Pools lies on the southern shores of the mighty Zambezi. It offers a rare freedom in the bush allowing visitors to drive, walk, canoe and camp, even without a guide.
In the shadow of a purple-hued escarpment, the Zambezi's floodplains, studded with mahogany woodlands, give this remote park its charm. Elephants and hippos thrive along the winding river.
Zambezi Expeditions is an upmarket but unpretentious bush camp on the riverbank. Mitch, the resident hippo, sometimes emerges at breakfast.
You'll find four of the Big Five here (only rhinos are absent), but it's best known for its charismatic African wild dogs, aka painted wolves 
Mana's walking safaris are among the best in Africa, as are Zimbabwe's guides. You can truly — and safely — get up close to elephants, lions and those endearing painted wolves.
Getting caught in the rain is no fun here — the black cotton soil sticks to tyres and makes the tracks impassable. Avoid the rains by visiting between May and September.
Ask your guide to look for Fred Astaire and Boswell, two famous elephants who have learnt to rise on to their hind legs to reach for pods high up in albida trees.
Safari Consultants (safari-consultants.com) has a four-night all-inclusive stay at Zambezi Expeditions , with international and domestic flights, from £3,150pp.


The secret classic Serengeti, Tanzania
Endless golden savannahs, wildebeest in their thousands and predators waiting to pounce: Serengeti evokes quintessential Africa. Avoid the crowds by heading to the Soit le Motonyi area and classic big-cat country.
Vast plains dotted with granite <i>kopjes</i> (outcrops), home to gazelles, hundreds of zebras and prides of lions napping under lone acacias. Your nearest neighbours are an hour's drive away.
Namiri Plains's luxury and sophistication belie its remoteness. Sip cocktails by the pool, melt with a massage in the spa or simply watch the wildlife from your secluded suite. 
Open only, until recently, to researchers studying big cats, the plains around Namiri are renowned for superb sightings of lions and cheetahs and for the famous Great Wildebeest Migration.
Namiri's guides have followed their big cats for years, so they can share their entire life stories and characters with you , adding a fascinating dimension to sightings.
The manic wildebeest river crossings to Kenya's Maasai Mara are too far away — stay further north, near the Mara River or Lamai Wedge, if you want to see them in all their glory.
Serengeti isn't just about the migration. Visit the northern area when the wildebeest have gone (January–March or June are best) and you'll see its beauty and beasts, including rhinos, without the crowds.
Expert Africa (expertafrica.com) offers a four-night all-inclusive stay at Namiri Plains , with international and domestic flights, from £3,990pp.

PHOTOGRAPHS: ALAMY, AWL IMAGES, GETTY IMAGES, ROBERT HARDING


The bush romance Okavango, Botswana
Rumour has it that Harry and Meghan fell in love in Botswana. It's hardly surprising: the Okavango Delta oozes romance and Khwai Private Reserve has lily-strewn waterways, star-filled night skies and sweet solitude.
Home to just five camps, Khwai Private Reserve is a lush, watery wonderland. Residents include elephants and lions, which amble along the floodplains, while hundreds of hippos wallow in the lagoons.
Under a high thatched roof, Sable Alley camp is understated luxury , all modern local art and creamy sofas, with a cool pool for hot days. The stylish honeymoon suite lies a discreet distance away.
A former hunting reserve, Khwai historically had skittish wildlife wary of people. That's all changed now, with more relaxed lions, elephants, buffaloes, antelopes and even rare wild dogs all happily hanging around.
Romantics should drift along the mirror-like waterways in a mokoro, a dugout canoe, spotting creatures from reed frogs to hippos , then sip sundowner G&Ts as dusk descends. 
The winter nights here (between May and August) can be bitterly cold. Wrap up warm on early-morning game drives, especially in open vehicles. Brrrrr...
Ask your guide to take you to the submerged hide where elephants come to drink. They're totally oblivious to your presence, yet so close you could almost reach out and touch their wrinkly trunks.
Abercrombie & Kent (abercrombiekent.co.uk) has four nights at Natural Selection Sable Alley all-inclusive, from £3,599pp, with international and domestic flights.


The family-friendly one Laikipia Plateau, Kenya
In north-central Kenya, the Laikipia plateau hosts a patchwork of private reserves teeming with wildlife. OI Pejeta Conservancy is ideal for families and for nurturing mini Attenboroughs.
With snow-capped Mount Kenya dominating the skyline, the high plains of OI Pejeta are home to East Africa's largest black rhino sanctuary and the last two northern white rhinos on Earth.
Beautiful eco-camp Kicheche Laikipia , renowned for high-quality guiding, looks out to a dam that entices plenty of wildlife. Its new family suite opened this year and little ones over six are warmly welcomed.
All the Big Five and myriad other animals roam OI Pejeta's plains, but the stars are the rhinos: meeting Najin and Fatu , the two northern whites, in the endangered species enclosure is unforgettable.
Kicheche's junior ranger course teaches kids all about wildlife , working through fun activities and adventures. At the end, they say the ranger's oath and get a certificate and a hat.
Don't be surprised to see cows among the wildlife — this is a working ranch , home to Boran cattle herds, which slightly takes the edge off life on the wild side.
Turn the hols into a learning opportunity: youngsters can learn to track lions with rangers (from £30) and pick up bush skills from Masai warriors. 
Yellow Zebra Safaris (yellowzebrasafaris.com) has a four-night all-inclusive stay at Kicheche Laikipia with a night in Nairobi , including international and domestic flights, from £3,285pp.

FAQ:

How do I complain and get results?
Key phrase if complaining by letter? 'I feel I have been treated unfairly,' rings alarm bells as it's *unfair* treatment that will concern the ombudsman (ie you haven't had the service you paid for). Key phrase if complaining by email/Twitter? 'I've cc'd/tagged your CEO' — email addresses and Twitter handles for thousands of CEOs can be found on ceoemail.com. Key phrase if complaining in person? 'I'd like to speak to your supervisor. And can I ask your name, please?'

FAQ:

Does all-inclusive include everything?
No. That usually means three buffet meals a day, plus snacks and basic drinks on tap. Most resorts hold back the good stuff (posher restaurants, premium alcohol, watersports, excursions) and charge extra for them. Examine the small print to avoid disappointment.

