

My African Safari Adventure

by ***Mary Jane Crawford***

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11/1 – Flight from JFK to Johannesburg, South Africa

11/2 –We were greeted by a VIP service when we landed in Johannesburg. What a pleasure to be greeted as soon as we get of the plane, our carry-on luggage whisked away, and the proceeded to gather our checked baggage and escort us through a “no wait” private customs line. We did not have this service on the return. What a nightmare! We ran around from place-to-place not knowing where to go (and we had three people that had previously visited Africa.) *Make your clients feel like VIPs – add this service!*

The **Fairlawn Boutique Resort and Spa** exceeded my expectations in every way. The staff treated us as royalty and went above and beyond to make our stay fantastic. I would want all of clients to include a stay here on their



My Suite at Fairlawn Boutique Resort & Spa

African trip. Anna and John are delightful and the perfect hosts, their hospitality made us feel like guests in their home rather than guests in a hotel. Actually, before turning it into a boutique hotel and spa it was their lovely home and stables.

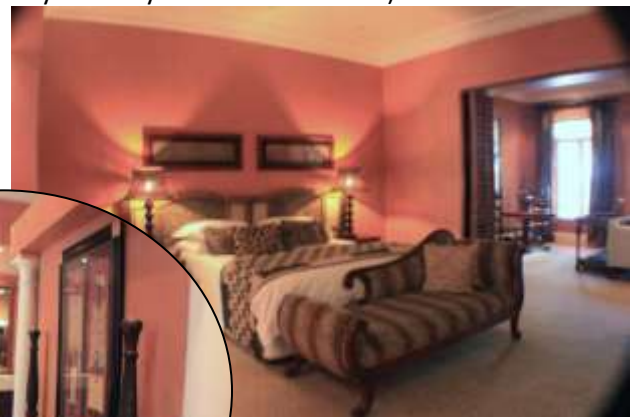
We were offered a tour of this unique property; each suite was elegantly decorated in a different style. Anna must have shopped the world to find such a variety of stunning mirrors and decorations. Of course, we loved the higher-end suites with fireplaces and bathrooms larger than most people’s living rooms.

After a delicious lunch, some of us enjoyed the spa services to revive us from our long journey. Others refreshed and relaxed in the pool, and others took a nap.

That evening, we took the free shuttle service provided by our hotel into town for dinner. We dined at a unique African multi-level modern restaurant, Moyo. First stop was the wine cellar to sample African wines, before making our wine choice for dinner. As it was a beautiful evening, we decided to dine outside under the stars. The prices were extremely reasonable and the food was out of this world - the Africans really know how to cook! I enjoyed their signature dish, a superb-flamed beef fillet filled with mushroom, spinach and mozzarella, along with some delicious sides. Others raved about the lamb dishes. Wish I had been adventurous enough to try the Ostrich fillet (now I will always wonder what it tasted like – guess I will try it on my next visit to Africa.)



Villa at Fairlawn Boutique



11/3 - Touring Johannesburg and Soweto

Next morning, after an enjoyable breakfast, we were off on a private tour to Soweto. What a pretty town – many of the streets are lined with beautiful lavender jackleberry trees.



Jackleberry Trees along Streets

We were all puzzled by the giant golf tees along the side of the road – why were they there? No golf courses were in site! Turns out they are actually statues, not of golf tees, but of vuvuzela horns. The World Cup Soccer Championship was held in Africa in 2010 and they tried to ban the horns, but eventually agreed to allow them. Apparently they make a very loud and obnoxious sound. My kids should definitely thank me for not buying one for each of my grandchildren!



Vuvuzela Horns

Visiting the Apartheid Museum definitely gives a better understanding of what South Africans experienced in earlier times. Our journey through the museum began with cards classifying us as white or non-white – I entered through the non-white gate. The museum has an illustrative exhibition celebrating the life and times of Nelson Mandela. Throughout the museum you emotionally witness the many struggles faced by South Africans; but leave with a joyful feeling that life has immensely improved since their freedom.

Our tour took us to the Old Fort which held only white prisoners. That is, except for Nelson Mandela, who had a bed in the hospital section after his arrest in 1962. Today, Constitution Court is also located at this site, and the 15th Anniversary of the Flame of Democracy burns signifying the commitment to democracy, human rights and constitutionalism. Then off to the 50th floor of the Carlton Centre building (tallest building in Africa) for a 360-degree panoramic view of the city.



Famous photo by Sam Nzima

The Hector Pieterse Memorial Museum tells a very sad story. The students were peacefully protesting against being forced to use Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools on June 16, 1976. As the children began to sing “God Bless Africa”, police began firing and Hector Pieterse, a 12-year old schoolboy, was one of the first to be shot. A photo taken by Sam Nzima became famous around the world. The photo was of Pieterse’s sister running along with Mbuyiswaa, carrying the critically-injured boy to doctor in an effort to save him. After the photo was published, Mbuyiswaa was harassed by the security services, and forced to flee South Africa. His mother received a letter from him in 1978, but has not heard from him since. If you wish to learn more about this sad event, you can read more by visiting this website: <http://www.southafrica.info/about/history/hector-pieterse.htm#.UqPzB1ko7ak>

That evening we returned to our hotel and enjoyed a delightful dinner hosted by Anna and John. They offer a great menu selection and everyone raved about their meal. Be sure to save room for some scrumptuous desserts!



Dessert at Fairlawn's Boutique

11/4 – Flew to Livingston, Zambia

We arrived in Livingston, Zambia and were whisked away for a surprise helicopter ride over the UNESCO World Heritage site of Victoria Falls (one of the 7 natural wonders of the world). Even though this time a year the falls are not at their fullest, the view was still breathtaking. However, as I was in the middle seat I was unable to get great photos.



Victoria Falls with a Rainbow



Our Group with Helicopter

We climbed aboard a vehicle and started off towards our first camp. No sooner had we started driving when we spotted our first wildlife – giraffes! One here, one there, and a couple more – we stopped to observe them and take photos. I think they are kind of lanky, but then there is also something very graceful about them.



Our First Sighting of Giraffes



Who is Watching Who?

Our adventure was just beginning, we were on our way to our first camp in a little motor boat going down the Zambezi River, and there ahead of us were hippos! Yes, hungry, hungry hippos!



Our First Spotting of Hippos in Zambezi River



Is He Just Yawning? Or, Is He Hungry?

Upon arrival at Toka Leya, we received a warm welcome from the staff with cool towels and ice-cold beverages (maybe I should have said we had a cool welcome!) After a brief orientation, we were escorted to our en-suite safari style tents to find our luggage had already been delivered. Believe me safari-style tents are nothing like tents! They are raised from the ground with a wooden floor and climate controlled (air conditioned). The rooms are spacious with comfortable beds; each has a private bath – yes, they have hot running water and flushing toilets. Each unit has a large wooden deck outside with chairs to enjoy the view.



My En-Suite Safari-Style Tent at Toka Leya

After settling in, we were to meet in the lounge/dining area for our first safari game drive. On my way, I spotted my first warthog. Ugly little thing, but fun to watch and they don't bother you at all. As I think back about my trip in Africa, I don't recall seeing any that weren't eating.

Off we went in our safari vehicle through Mosi-Oa-Tunya National Park. It was such a thrill, every time we turned a bend in the road, there were more animals. That afternoon we saw impalas, elephants, giraffes, zebra, wildebeest, kudus, more warthogs, and monkeys. During my African trip I took almost 2,000 photos, the majority of animals – but don't worry, I won't torture with all of them!



My First Sighting of a Warthog - Ugly Little Things!

We were actually on our way to take a walking tour to see the white rhinoceroses, which our guide promised to show us. Of course, when taking a walking safari you need a guide with a high-power

rifle, but we were escorted by four (4) park rangers with extremely powerful rifles. No the rifles were not to protect us from the rhinos, but to protect the endangered rhinos from poachers. Since January, 700 rhinos have been killed in Africa. Why? In major Asian cities, the rhino horns sell for \$65,000 a kg (2.2 lbs) – that is more valuable than gold or platinum! They horns are sawed off and ground to powder and used as an aphrodisiac (not by the Africans.) Once the horns are sawed off, the rhinos are left and bleed to death.



Our Escorts to See the White Rhinos

some great photos, and saw 6 of the 8 white rhinos. As you can see by my photo, the white rhinos are not actually white, so why do they call them white? One theory is their mouths are wider than the black rhinos. Somewhere in translation the word “wide” was pronounced “white” and the rhino was named the “white rhino.”

We were able to get fairly close to the rhinos for



Showing How Close I Was to the White Rhino

I loved how every evening after our safari drive, our guide would take us to a perfect location to view the magnificent sunset and take breathtaking photos. Wherever this would be, we were also served snacks and beverages (wine, beer, soda, etc.) – he soon knew what everyone liked and made sure it was available.

After a relaxing dinner at our camp, we are escorted back to the safety of our cabins. None of the camps we stayed at would allow you to walk around alone after dark in case wildlife was roaming about. As there was plenty of evidence an elephant frequently passed through our camp. No not footprints – elephant poop (very easy to spot!) I would say that evening “The Lion Doesn’t Sleep Tonight,” as some said they heard his roar – but not me, I was sound asleep!



Beautiful Sunset along the Zambezi River in Botswana

11/5 – Flight to Botswana

After breakfast, we took a short flight on a small 12-passenger plane to Botswana. As the plane flies low, the views are spectacular – you can even see wildlife from the plane. We are met at the airstrip, by our four-wheel drive open-safari vehicle. On our way to the next camp, we do a game drive through Linyanti Wildlife Reserve. Wow Botswana is amazing – I love it already! We barely drive a minute or two and there are animals here, there, and everywhere. I never expected to see such a huge amount of wildlife and so close up. I just love watching them and shooting photos with my camera!

We came across a herd of impalas out on a grassy patch in the water. We sat and watched them jump over one grassy patch to another. Some would be ready to jump and then chicken out (just like a kid on a diving board), and



Impala Jumping from One Grassy Patch to Another

go around to the back, and the next one would jump. I was thrilled that I managed to catch a few great photos of them jumping.

Next along side of the road, we came across a herd of elephants, with a few little ones. We patiently watched and took photos until they decided to move on.

Around the bend and down the road we found some baboons along the river. They are always fun to watch as they playfully chase each other. But to me the little baby baboon curled up in momma baboon's arms was just so precious.



Baby Baboon Curled Up with Momma



Small Herd of Elephants

We are still on the same game drive and it is such a thrill to continuously come across different wildlife. Let me take this time and share a page of just a few of the other animals we saw today.



A Leopard on the Run



This Elephant Family Posed for Their Holiday Cards



Notice How the Warthog Kneels Down to Eat



So What do I Know - This Warthog is Not Eating, but Cooling Off in the Mud



More Hungry, Hungry Hippos!



Just a Few of the Many Beautiful Birds in Africa



On an African Safari every encounter with a lion is exciting, especially your first! And I will never forget my first! Our guide spotted the lion asleep under a bush (*see, I told you the lion didn't sleep last night!*) Andy, our guide (who I must tell you is the best guide in Africa) stopped and backed up the vehicle to give us a better look. To add to the excitement our vehicle died – oh no, would we be next? Yes we were only a few yards from the sleeping lion. Andy called for backup but they were several minutes away (meanwhile climbed on hood to try and get it started). I had a great view of the lion from where I was sitting and I kept my eye on him. Then I was sure I saw him move (or was I imagining it?) Ne he was definitely moving. Was he waking up? Yes he woke up, and leisurely stood up and started walking out of the bushes towards us!



Lion Sleeping Under the Bush

We all held our breath as he sauntered closer to our open-air vehicle. He looked

over at us (for what seemed like an eternity – but I am sure it was just a few seconds.) Then he nonchalantly walked behind our vehicle, gave us one more look and strolled away. Of course, all during this ordeal I continued to snap photos – if I was going to be the lion's appetizer I wanted to at least be able to share the experience with

you! If I didn't live to write about it, at least a picture is worth a 1,000 words. To show just how close we were to Mr. Lion, I made sure I included the edge of the vehicle in the pictures.



Lion Glances at Us and Keeps Walking

Our guide told us the animals are used to seeing the vehicles and view us as one unit – not a vehicle full of appetizers. The worst thing to do is get out and run (first of all you are not going to outrun him), and then he would consider you prey and go after you. Keep still and quiet! (Note: the clicking of my camera didn't seem to bother him – guess he is use to it!)

Shortly afterwards, backup arrived and fixed our vehicle; and we went on to view the beautiful sunset.



Lion Nonchalantly Walked Behind Our Vehicle, Gave Us One More Look, and Strolled Away

While watching the gorgeous sunset, we sipped wine (or a beverage of our choice) and snacked on crocodile-shaped bread with an assortment of cheeses, olives and fruit. Wait how did Andy know we were going to see a crocodile today?



Our Crocodile Bread



The Crocodile We Saw Today

That evening we stayed at the Linyanti Discoverer Camp (an Adventurer Camp). It was more rustic than any of the others, and my least favorite, but I could deal with it for one night. They described it as early explorer style with wooden-framed canvas-sided tents. It does have a private bath with running water and flushing toilets, but no electricity – just a 12-volt battery-operated lamp. I would categorize this camp as a step above camping.

The Camp had electricity in the main lounge/dining area and you could have your camera batteries charged there. The other camps we stayed at did have electricity (usually from solar power or generators). You can charge your cameras and phones, but the electric was not powerful enough to use a hairdryer or curling iron.



A Kudu Strolling Through the Wilderness

11/6 – Safari Drive to Kings Pool Camp



Who's Been Playing with this Giraffe Skeleton?

Next morning after breakfast we headed out for our early safari drive, it was raining lightly and a bit chilly. First thing we saw was a herd of elephants. We have already seen herds and herds of elephants; as there are a lot of elephants in Botswana. Not too far away we saw a kudu strolling through the wilderness.

It is not unusual to see the remains of animals; like this skeleton of a giraffe. However, I think the guides were having a little fun with the bones, they had been rearranged putting the pieces together again. A little later we discovered the remains of a baby elephant.

Our guide received a call there was a pack of lions nearby, and off we were on our way. What really amazes me is how the guides can even find their way through this vast wilderness. Dirt roads go every which way – there are no street signs, no markings at all. And when another guide calls, they know exactly where to go. Our guide tells us they know by the trees. I couldn't identify the trees on my block at home, let alone all the trees throughout thousands and thousands of acres.

Andy found the lions in no time and we had a perfect viewing and another great photo op. You can see how close we are by the bar of our vehicle.



Viewing Lions in Linyanti Wildlife Reserve



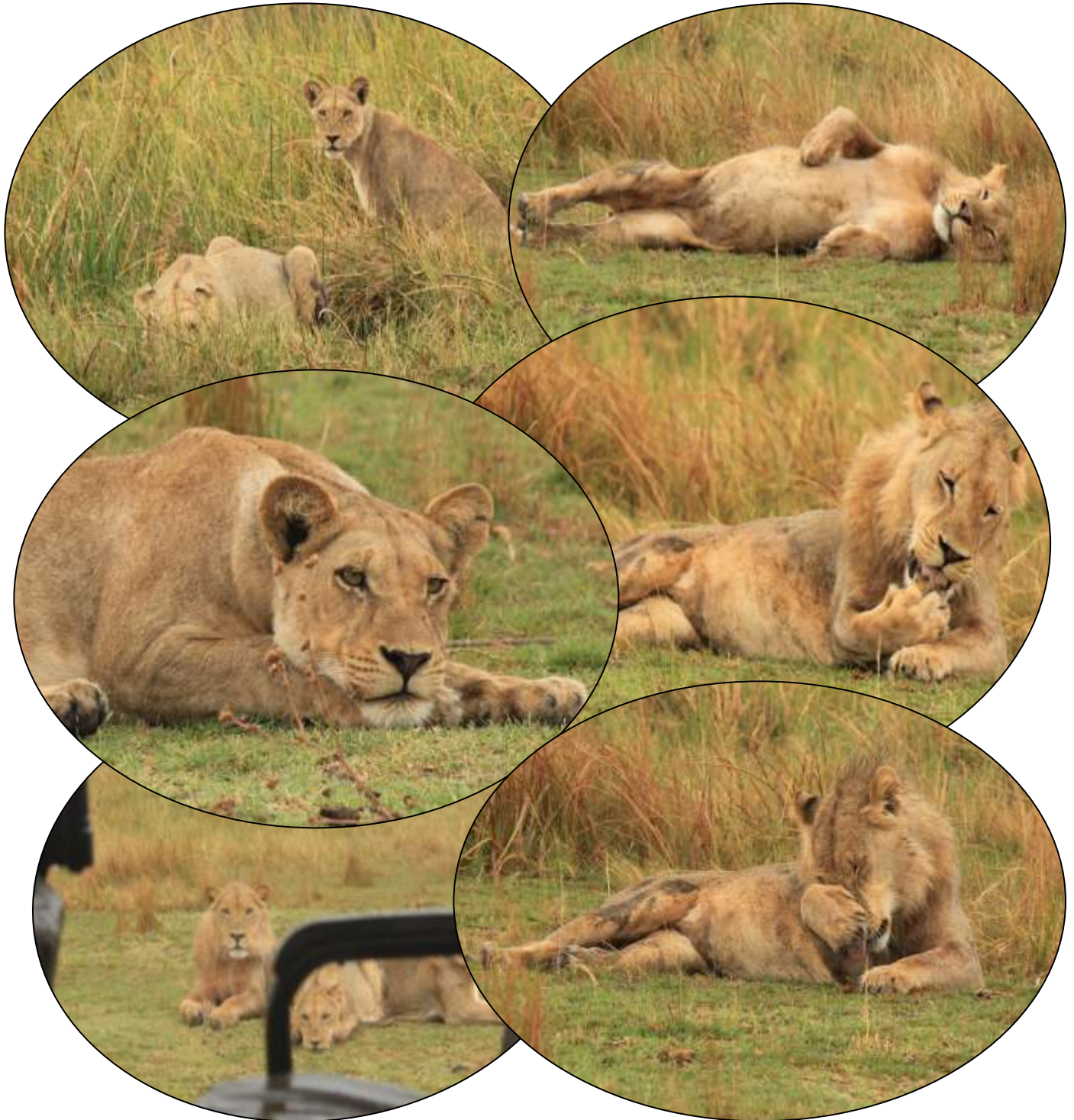
What a Beautiful Lion!



**For Some Reason They Call This Bird
"The Undertaker"**

After going on and seeing some other animals, Andy received a call about another pride of lions. Did we want to go see them? Of course we did!!!

We observed the lions for quite awhile, they would look over at us and then lay their heads back down and go back to sleep. I just have to share a couple of my favorite lion photos.



When we were ready to leave, you will never guess what happened. Yep, our vehicle wouldn't start. This time Andy was prepared to fix it, but he could not get out of the vehicle in front of the lion. One of the other vehicles pulled between us and the lions to block his view. Andy had our vehicle running in seconds and off we went

We arrived at our next camp, Kings Pool Camp – this is a Premiere camp and a “10” in my eyes! Of course, as in all the camps, the staff was exceptional. The nine luxurious cabins are extremely large with a bedroom/lounge area. The bathroom has two sinks and a double indoor shower along with a private outside shower. Our deck had a plunge pool and leads to a thatched sala (gazebo) along the lagoon. (Note: one person in our group thought they had the “Honeymoon Suite” it was so nice! All the rooms are alike!) Also, I wanted to mention that the safari camps will do laundry for you at no charge. They took our dirty clothes when we arrived and returned them before dinner.



Our Tent at King's Pool



View from our Tent of an Elephant Drinking from the Lagoon

From our room, we could see an elephant drinking across the lagoon. Later down by the sala, warthogs were grazing along the edge of the lagoon.



Warthogs by Lagoon Outside Our Tent

Each day we looked forward to going back out on our 4 pm game drive, as each adventure was unpredictable. We came upon a kudi, but he didn't stay around too long. Then a lizard slithered along (not my favorite animal.)

We watched a family of elephants drinking from the water; and then they decided to return (behind our vehicle).



A Lizard - Glad We are not Walking!



Elephant Family Quenching Their Thirst



Elephants Returning Behind Our Vehicle

Then Papa Elephant spotted us, and started coming towards us . . .

Closer and Closer! If looks could kill, he didn't look too happy!

Until he was so close he could reach out and grab us with his trunk . . .



Oh no! What would he do next? We all **Froze** (*well all except my trigger finger on the camera!*) He was MUCH bigger than Us – Was He Going to Push Over Our Vehicle? He SNORTED at us . . .

And YES – he came a little Bit Closer . . . No Let's Make that a **LOT** Closer! Did we dare reach out and pet him? I don't think so!



← Railing of our Safari Vehicle

We all held our breath (*and I took one more photo*). Then Andy started up our safari vehicle; the noise scared Papa Elephant and he ran off! WOW – what a way to get your adrenaline flowing!

This has been quite a day, but it wasn't over yet! We discovered baboons playing along the river – they are always amusing to watch.



Then we saw a “Hungry, Hungry Hippo” out of the water. Can’t believe those little deer are so close to him and not afraid! One looks up at us, but pays no attention to the hippo with his mouth wide open!

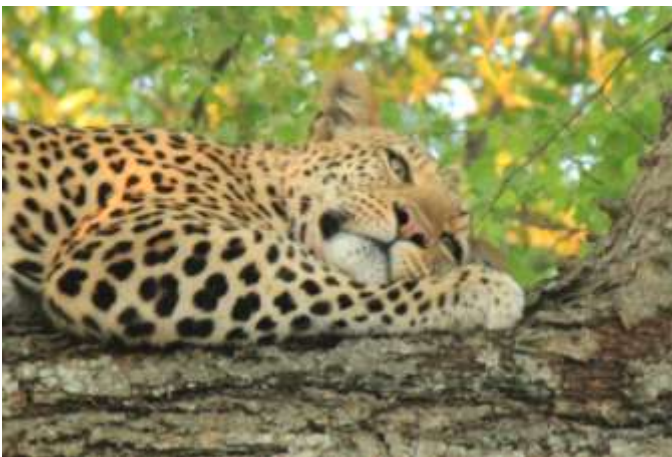


Andy gets a call, do we want to see the leopard? Off we go, and of course Andy knows right where to find Mr. Leopard. He is up in a tree with his prey – a little impala that he killed and drug up the tree. When we arrived he was enjoying his supper. He looked over at us, as if to say, “don’t even think I am sharing!”

All that food must have made him tired, he climbed to a higher branch



And got nice and comfy (what a pretty kitty cat)!



And he fell fast asleep!



We let Mr. Leopard sleep as we disappeared into the sunset –



What a magnificent view!



A beautiful end to a beautiful day in Botswana, Africa

11/7 – Traveling to Seba Camp

After breakfast we are off on our morning safari. I love that we never have to deal with luggage – just leave everything in our tents and it magically appears at the airstrip and is delivered to our next camp. So here are a few photos of some of the wildlife we saw that morning. First we see several giraffes -



These colorful birds are everywhere -



And again we stumble on more lions



And then back to check on Mr. Leopard. His prey is still there and looks like he just finished breakfast. We watched him climb higher in the tree and lay down for another nap.



And more lions . . .



Speaking of leopards, along the dirt road we saw a leopard turtle

We arrive at Seba Camp and checkout our tents (more like cabins). We have en-suite bathroom and a private deck with a magnificent view of the lagoon. Besides five like ours, they have a family villa with two en-suite bedrooms with a built-in tree house, kids' swimming pool and a sandpit. Bristol University in the UK does elephant research in the area, we saw them working with the elephants but were not allowed to photograph them.

At 4 pm we are off on our afternoon game drive – I won't bore you with hundreds of photos, just a few.



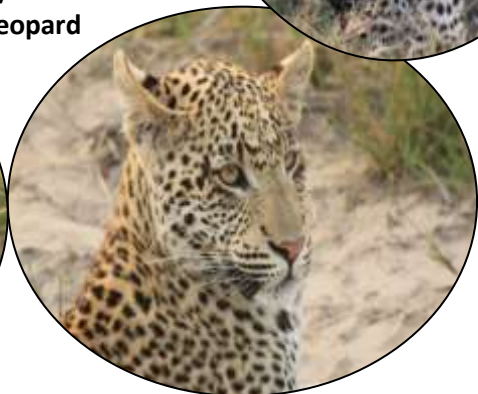
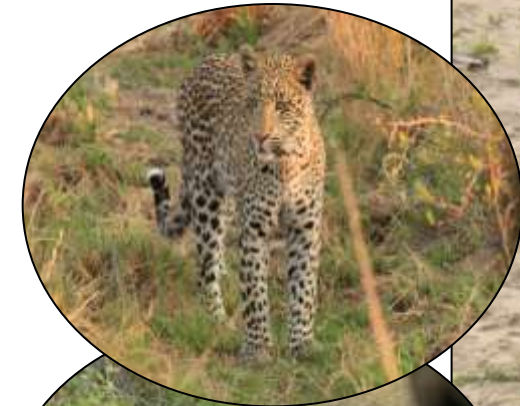
A herd of over 100 Cape Buffalo, males stay on outside protecting female and babies. We did NOT witness this, but I found one on YouTube.

It's true! No two zebras' stripes are identical

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LU8DDYz68kM>

Baby Leopard walks behind our vehicle and lies down.

Today we finally see the Baby Leopard. He is about 8 months old.



The Many faces of Baby Leopard

Do you believe, tonight we go to our “sunset viewing area,” and there in the vast wilderness is a guy with a basin, and carafes of warm water, soap and towels to wash our hands.

And not far away a bar with snacks is set up (with plenty more in the coolers.)



They sure know how to view a sunset!

11/8 – To Chitabe Camp

On our way to the airstrip, we drive through the wilderness and finally see two wild dogs curled up together sleeping. They glanced up at us, and went back to sleep.



The Yellow-Billed Stork (not sure if these deliver babies or not – will have to research that one!)



Sausage Trees are seen all over Africa. Of course they are not really sausages and people don't eat them.



But we did see an elephant pick the sausages off the tree, he appeared to be eating part of the sausage and spitting out part of them.



Did you ever wonder where "Halloween Trees" grow? I finally solved that mystery – in Africa!



And this bridge leads us to Camp Chitabe.

We arrive at Chitabe Camp located in the southeast of the Okavango Delta. Our en-suite Meru-style tent is very nice and includes double vanity sink, along with indoor and outdoor showers.



We went out for our 4pm safari adventure, as you never know what you will see, it is always exciting. Today it is a giraffe, a kudu, cape buffalo and a beautiful African bird.



And what is this? A pile of sh __? Yes, elephant poop – a couple of the girls decided to get a photo taken next to their shoe to show just how BIG elephant poop can be! .

And then we found more lions – Sorry, I can't help posting these photos – I just love watching ever move the lions make! (I have no idea, how I did the photo in the center, but can't you just hear his roar?)

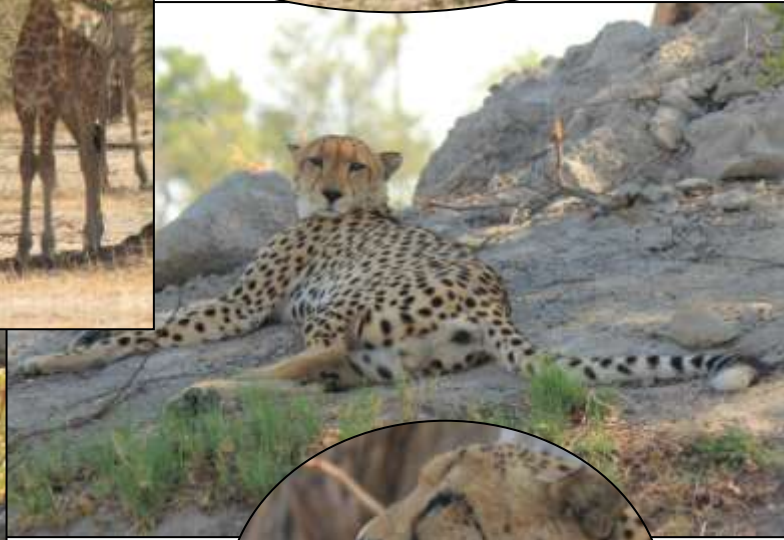
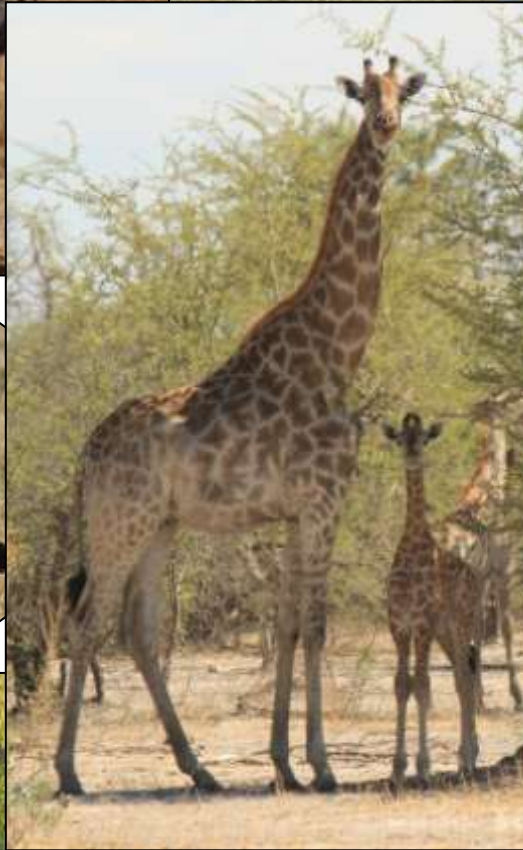


We end another day with a beautiful sunset before going back to the camp for a delicious dinner!



11/9 – Transfer to Xigera Camp

Can't believe today is our last day already, the time has gone so fast and I loved every minute of it! On the way to the airstrip, we see quite a few animals, along with stopping by to take a last look at Mr. Cheetah.



We depart in our 12-passenger plane and ...



fly over Snake River – wonder why they named it Snake River?



To Xigera Camp on "Paradise Island" in the Moremi Wildlife Reserve



At 4 pm we take a little motor boat to our mokoros, our polers are waiting for us.



When we return to view the sunset, would you believe the Xigera Staff are standing in the water with a bar and snacks set up for us.



I am certainly going to miss these gorgeous sunsets!

On the way back, we see a hippo get out of the water and head to our camp.





Back at JFK Airport – we may look a little tired, it was a long journey home but well worth the trip!

Our tour in Africa was an amazing adventure, thanks to African Travel Company. I thought this was a once-in-a-lifetime trip, but I will definitely return. Hope to see you there!