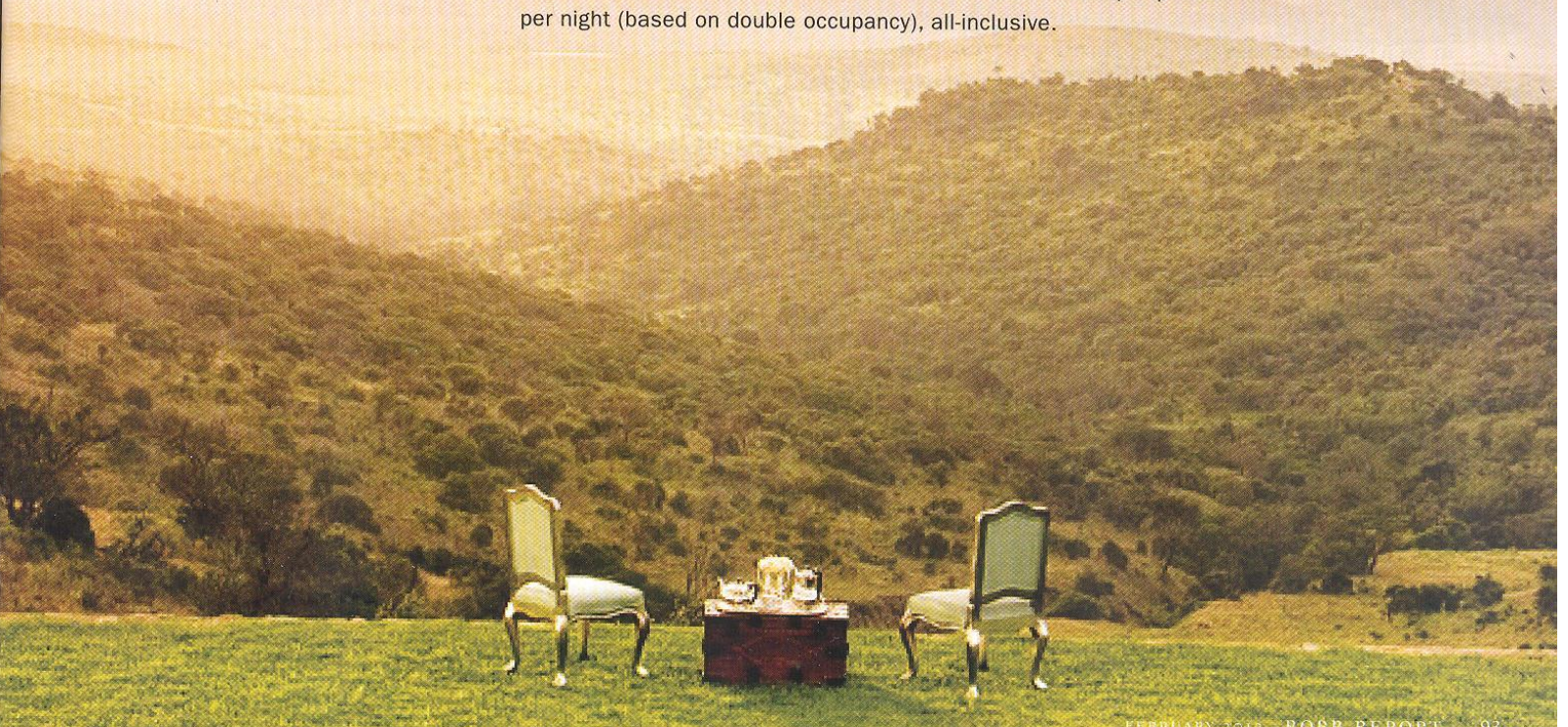


Essential SAFARI Guide

By SCOTT GOETZ

AT ITS CORE, the African safari is a simple undertaking that requires little more than a good guide, a sturdy vehicle, and the built-in entertainment of a wildlife-filled forest or savanna. Too often, however, the process of planning a safari is unnecessarily complicated by the dizzying array of companies claiming to offer the best and most authentic journeys. To help whittle down the many options, *Robb Report* presents the Essential Safari Guide, an exclusive yet comprehensive compendium featuring only the very best lodges, outfitters, and expeditions in Africa. ¶ Each of the following lodges—selected for privacy, location, activities, quality of guides, and, of course, accommodations—delivers an exceptional safari experience in its given setting. The best safaris, however, combine diverse regions and various modes of exploring them, from lodges and villas to permanent camps and mobile tents. How one combines these experiences is a matter of personal taste, but one best facilitated by a trusted outfitter (see the “Safari Spotlight” boxes throughout the guide) that can handle the complex logistics of African travel while steering you clear of the crowds. No matter the destination—the plains of Kenya, the deserts of Namibia, the rain forests of Rwanda, or a combination of all three—*Robb Report’s* African-adventure guide will help ensure a simply splendid safari. ➤

*Unless otherwise noted, all pricing information is listed in U.S. dollars per person per night (based on double occupancy), all-inclusive.



SOUTHERN AFRICA

HOME TO KRUGER National Park and the Sabi Sand Game Reserve, South Africa offers the most accessible wildlife viewing—and several of the most refined lodging options—for first-time safari-goers. The country also caters to travelers with wide ranges of interests, from fine wine and cuisine to golfing, surfing, scuba diving, and other sports. Just to the north, Botswana is best known for its wildlife-rich Okavango Delta, which safari-goers can explore by canoe, and the barren Makgadikgadi Salt Pans. In neighboring Namibia, the oldest desert in the world stretches along the ghostly Skeleton Coast and is home to rarely visited groups of nomads. Zimbabwe and Zambia are ideal for active, under-the-radar safaris in parks such as Zambia's Luangwa and Hwange reserves. The two countries share the vast Victoria Falls, which serves as an ideal starting or ending point to a southern Africa safari.

BOTSWANA

Abu Camp, Okavango Delta ♦

Safari-goers become part of the Abu herd while riding through the delta atop Cathy, the 44-year-old

matriarch of this first-ever elephant-back safari camp. Six expansive tents built in 2011 draw from the elephants' elegance with gray-and-bone color

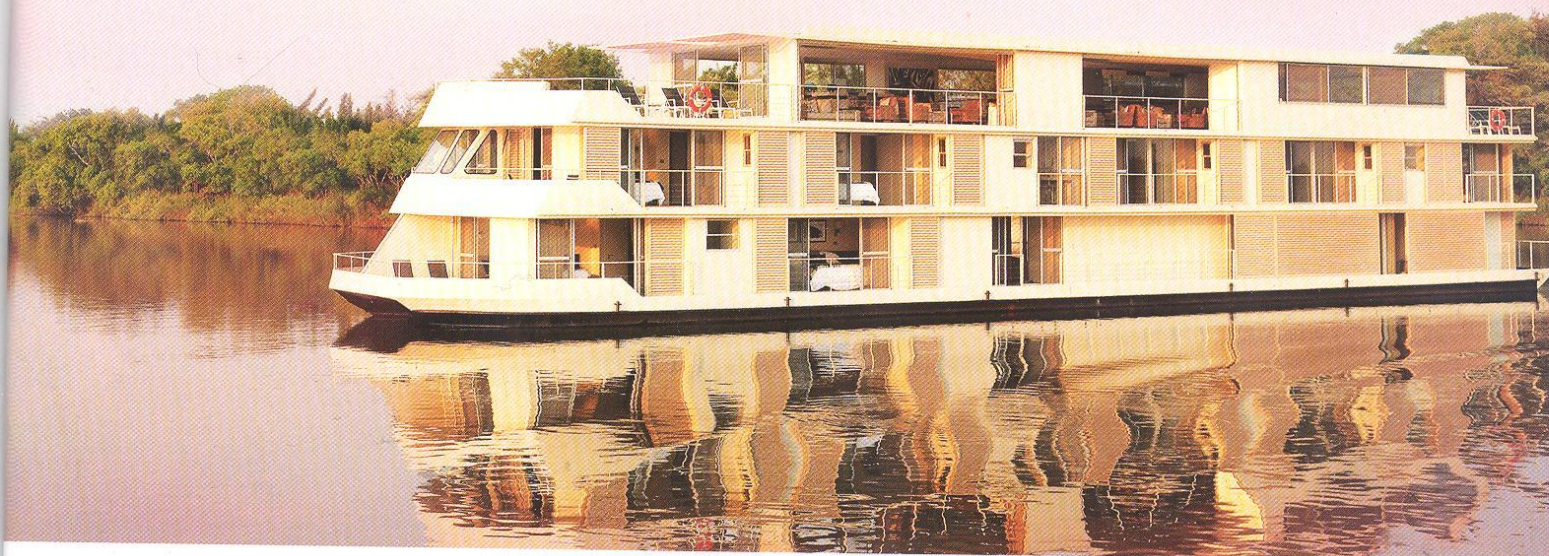
schemes. Guests interact with Abu's seven pachyderms during twice-daily activities and can opt to sleep above the animals' paddock in a new star bed

SAFARI SPOTLIGHT

EXPLORE AFRICA

THE COLORADO-BASED SAFARI aficionado Cherri Briggs—who has homes in Botswana and Zambia—scours the African continent six months a year to find the best places for both luxury and authenticity. She founded Explore Africa in 1992 and has since led such trips as an adventure through Sudan with *National Geographic* journalists and the first descent down Mozambique's Lugenda River.

♦ **Ultimate African Family Adventure** • Explore Africa designed this interactive four-week journey for adventurous families, whose educational opportunities along the way include lessons in the basics of traditional canoeing and tracking animals with master guides in Botswana. In Kenya, families learn how to make spears, bows and arrows, and jewelry; play traditional games; identify traditional bush medicines; and help Samburu people herd cattle. A week in Zambia connects guests with local communities and provides opportunities to plant gardens and improve medical clinics. Individual segments of the trip can be booked à la carte. 888.596.6377, www.exploreafrica.net



that is possibly Africa's greatest safari indulgence. (\$1,950) www.abucamp.com

Uncharted Africa Safari Co. Jack's and San Camps, Makgadikgadi Salt Pans ♦

Founded in honor of the legendary adventurer Jack Bousfield by his son, Ralph, and Catherine Raphaely, Jack's Camp sits alone near vast salt pans and features 10 tents that channel the spirit of a sophisticated 1940s safari. A few miles away on the edge of the salt pans is the seasonal (April through October) and more private San Camp, offering six tents and running showers. Travelers at both camps walk with Bushman trackers and take part in paleontological and biological discussions with a team of guides. (Jack's Camp from \$1,400; San Camp from \$1,100) www.unchartedafrica.com

Jafo Camp, Okavango Delta ♦ To maximize views and

minimize human impact on the surroundings, Jafo's nine wood-and-canvas rooms are connected by a network of raised decks. After game drives or a canoe ride down hippopotamus paths among the delta reeds, guests can book treatments in the camp's open-air spa and view the surrounding floodplains over a meal in the second-story dining room. (\$1,200–\$1,975) www.wilderness-safaris.com

Mombo and Little Mombo Camps, Moremi Game Reserve ♦

The game is rich and the action is fierce on the northern tip of Chief's Island, where Mombo's nine tents and the exclusive-use Little Mombo's three tents are the best places to stay for those hoping to see a predator make a kill. The camps' legendary service standards include regularly extending game drives to watch a pride of lions on the hunt. In such cases, meals can be

delivered to the delayed safari vehicle. (From \$1,700) www.wilderness-safaris.com

Zarafa Camp, Selinda Reserve ♦

On the edge of a lagoon heavily trafficked by elephants and giraffes, Botswana's most exclusive camp delivers an ultimate safari experience. Guests can learn to track lions and leopards through the 320,000-acre private reserve in the manner of Dereck and Beverly Joubert, the National Geographic filmmakers who co-own this Great Plains Conservation property. Back at base camp, guests can join elephants for sundowner cocktails on the deck of one of the four 1,000-square-foot tents, which feature copper fireplaces and bathtubs, World War II-era crank phones, private pools, and outdoor showers. (\$1,275–\$2,025) www.greatplainsconservation.com

NAMIBIA

Serra Cafema, Kunene River ♦

The three-hour flight by single-engine propeller aircraft from Windhoek is worth it for the chance to interact with the nomadic Himba people who reside in this beautifully barren region. Bordering the Namib Desert, this exclusive camp sits at the edge of the Kunene River. After spending the day exploring the desert dunes on quad bikes, guests fall asleep in one of eight riverside canvas-and-thatch villas to the sound of rushing water. (\$825–\$1,200) www.wilderness-safaris.com

Zambezi Queen, Chobe River ♦

Zambezi Queen is southern Africa's first high-end river safari. The floating hotel hosts two- and three-night excursions between Botswana and Namibia on the Chobe River. Guests of the ship's 14 contemporary cabins explore the region that is considered Africa's

The 14-cabin Zambezi Queen's two- and three-night cruises ply some of Africa's most wildlife-rich waters.



GUESTS
TRAVEL
BY PRIVATE
JET TO
BOTSWANA
TO ROLL
THROUGH
THE
OKAVANGO
DELTA
ABOARD
THE ROYAL
RIG.

densest in wildlife, with more than 120,000 elephants, 400 species of birds, and countless hippopotamuses and crocodiles. (From \$925 for two nights) www.zambeziqueen.com

SOUTH AFRICA
Londolozi Private Granite Suites, Sabi Sand Game Reserve ♦

This elegant three-suite camp within the larger, family-run Londolozi reserve is set amid scenic granite outcroppings along the Sand River. Oversize bathtubs—some of them perfectly and privately shaded by 500-year-old ebony trees—sit riverfront outside each of the rooms, which also have individual

swimming pools. Guests have spotted as many as eight leopards in a day on the surrounding Londolozi concession and Sabi Sand Game Reserve. (\$1,450) www.londolozi.com

Royal Malewane, Thornybush Reserve ♦ Adjacent to Kruger National Park, this lodge and private residence is bush luxury at its best. The 6 one- and two-bedroom suites feature expansive decks draped in Persian carpets that pad the way to private pools. Each of the six bedrooms in the Africa House residence includes an outdoor shower and deck overlooking the surrounding private reserve, where Big Five

sightings are frequent. (From \$1,425; Africa House from \$13,900 for as many as 12 people) www.royalmalewane.com

Singita Boulders and Ebony Lodges, Sabi Sand Game Reserve

♦ The flagship lodges of the luxury-safari leader Singita are set within a private 45,000-acre property considered to be one of the best locations for Big Five interaction in South Africa. Recently refurbished, the 20-year-old Ebony offers colonial charm, while the contemporary Boulders was inspired by the massive rocks along the Sand River that were incorporated into its design. The two