

Excursions and extra events make safaris more magical than ever

SEE MORE
ON
Safari

SAFARIS are no longer just about seeing the Big Five animals in the wild. Alongside lions, leopards, elephants, rhinos and cape buffalos we're now given the chance to go stargazing under the world's clearest skies, forage for medicinal flowers in vital wetlands and enjoy treatments with a view in riverside spas.

Added extras, new excursions and small-group, homestead visits are transforming our time on the plains of Africa, and in Asia and beyond. And safari extensions and two-centre holidays that end with a week on a warm sandy beach are also gaining in popularity.

EXPERT GUIDES

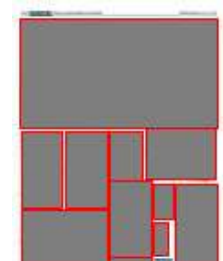
Early morning game drives in sturdy 4x4 vehicles remain the mainstay of most safari experiences. With the best ones,

you're driven by local guides and spotters who know exactly where the animals we love are likely to be – and they will communicate with colleagues by radio to follow up on unexpected sightings.

Holding on to the seat backs of a battered Land Rover as you bump over dusty tracks remains an abiding memory of most wildlife adventures, and variations on the theme are coming thick and fast. Night drives are now common and hugely popular. They're worth taking as animals can be more active in the cooler hours after sunset, so you're more likely to see fights, feeding and hunting.

Recent guests say watching animals through non-intrusive red-light beams is surprisingly atmospheric. As low-light photography is difficult, night safaris force us to live in the moment and look around rather than staring intently at screens in search of the perfect shot.

There's also a unique soundtrack to night tours – it's a 'natural



symphony' of nightjars, owls, crickets, cicadas, coyotes, foxes, frogs and bush babies.

WALKING SAFARIS

Walking safaris are gaining ground too. And while it may sound unnerving to stroll towards potentially hungry predators, you'll be in a small group, led by an armed local spotter. Walkers say being at ground level, rather than in a 4x4, changes the look and feel of the land, too.

Following animal tracks away from roads, with no sound but your footsteps, also heightens the sensations and adds drama. Like the idea? Walking safaris are most popular in parks in Zambia, Tanzania and South Africa and tend to last between one and four hours.

Sunrise hot air balloon rides, sunset hippo- and crocodile-watching boat tours on the Zambezi river and professional photography workshops in the bush are among the other extras that safari specialists at travel agents such as Trailfinders and Newmarket Holidays can arrange.

NEW IDEAS

New places to stay are transforming safaris this year – alongside imaginative ways to reach them.

The seven-night Safari and Beach Adventure with Friendship Travel includes First Class train travel through Kenya's dramatic landscapes before four nights in lodges and tented camps in the bush, and three

nights by the beach at the Papillon Lagoon Reef hotel.

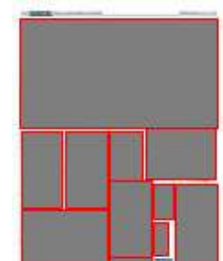
Also in Kenya, copper baths in the bathrooms of luxurious tents, an infinity-edged swimming pool and yoga deck overlooking the hippos of the Mara River are just three top features of the new Paradise Plains camp. Set in the heart of the Maasai Mara national reserve, the camp is in the perfect position for trips to view the wildebeest during the annual Great Migration.

At the very top end of the safari market, new luxuries include on-demand use of a private helicopter at the Jumeirah Thanda Safari camp in South Africa.

Or take a more down-to-earth approach with small-group safari tours with Saga. Plenty of included excursions make its holidays good value, including early morning plant walks with experts in local medicine on a 10-day holiday in Mabula Game Lodge north of Johannesburg. And at the other end of the day you can stay up late on included stargazing evenings accompanied by astronomers and storytellers.



Local guides know exactly where to find the animals we love





THE NEW FACE OF SAFARI: (from top) a sunrise hot air balloon ride over the Maasai Mara; Paradise Plains camp is luxury in the reserve's heart; elephants at Jumeirah Thanda Safari camp in South Africa

