



How To Take Your Family on an African Safari

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THREE HOURS IN LINE, waiting with two teenagers in the pre-dawn chill for the National Park rangers to open the gate? Never again, I told myself, heading back to the lake and our cabin.

But it got me thinking. Maybe it was time to plan that African [safari](#) we'd been telling the kids about for so long. Aged 11 and 12, they were finally old enough to enjoy it. And an hour on the phone with my favorite travel agent, a person I'd worked with before, proved to be the solution.

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By the time I'd hung up the phone, we'd worked out an itinerary starting with dates and in-country flights, an arrival hotel in Johannesburg, [South Africa](#), and four nights each at three game lodges in South Africa, Botswana and Zambia, countries where [wildlife conservation projects](#) are a part of public policy, and the reason that the animals — elephants, lions, giraffe, antelope, rhinos — continue to thrive.

But for first-timers, hoping to explore Africa's wild country, finding the right safari lodge can be a challenge. Thirty years ago, there weren't more than a dozen private lodges and ranches interested in taking

guests. Now there are plenty of game lodges, most of them located on public and private land inside parks and wildlife preserves. The choices run from tiny rustic bungalows and former hunting lodges to family-style cabins and luxury hideaways. The largest of them, bustling resorts encouraging family travel, provide not just daily game drives and lavish meals, but spas, gyms, guided village tours, teen activities and child care play centers.

Where to start your search for an African safari with family



Photo: [BlueOrange Studio/Shutterstock](#)

Since every lodge has its own website — or is part of a group website — it's easy to see what's available. Start your education with a leisurely tour through two of them, [Uyaphi.com](#) and [Go2Africa.com](#), travel and touring companies that book family, individual, group, and customized safaris. Their websites are a treasure trove of photographs, descriptions of locations, site types, indoor and outdoor areas, porches, gardens, prices per night, per person, and extra activities, from canoe rides to walking safaris, spa visits and swimming pools.

Safari lodges have always welcomed children. But now they're encouraging it, adding additional two-bedroom suites and building larger cabins. Small lodges, those built for six to ten guests, actively court group travel, offering discounts when you book the entire lodge.

When you've found something that works, search for its name and group affiliation or an individual contact, a person who can answer your questions. A partial list of top-rated companies include [Sanctuary Retreats](#); [Ker & Downey](#); [Wilderness Safaris](#); [Bushcamp Company](#) in Zambia; and [SabiSabi Company](#).

Why you should consider using a tour company to book an African safari with family

It is certainly possible to book a flight to an African country and your own game lodge reservations. But most North American travelers would rather spend more for a trip planned by an experienced full-service tour company with supporting staff on the ground. It's a relief to be met upon arrival, helped with luggage, driven to your hotel or lodge, and to have help with visas, customs and local currency — especially if you are traveling with children.

Why some of my favorite family safaris could be yours



Photo: [Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve](#)

If it's a big, lively lodge you enjoy, one with 25 luxury suites and an ideal place to meet other travelers and their children, try [Little Bush Camp](#) in the Sabi Sands Preserve, in South Africa's Kruger National Park. As diverse as any resort, its activities include traditional game drives, cultural community visits, swimming pools, a spa, gym, a child-care play center, gift shop, and a waterhole near the dining room, where you can enjoy lunch and watch the elephants congregate.



My first-ever and all-time favorite game lodge is [Londolozi](#), also in Kruger National Park, a sentimental favorite. Now enlarged and divided into four different lodges, it remains true to its origins as the country's first leopard conservation project.



Photo: [The Bushcamp Company](#)/Facebook

In Zambia, the [Bushcamp Company Group](#), in the South Luangwa River National Park, is special. The main lodge, with an open-air lounge, casual restaurant and 12 separate cabins is a 30-minute drive from Mfuwe town, an easy-to-reach getaway for families traveling with kids, and area residents who come for an overnight. It's also headquarters for the company's eight other distant lodges, intimate, isolated and rustic hideaways. These lodges all have distinct names and are a perfect size for

a family of four or less. Lodge Bilimugwe is cozy and close to elephants and at lodge Chamilandu you can spend a morning in a hide, watching the animals come to drink in the nearby creek.



Photo: [Ker & Downey Botswana](#)/Facebook

My Botswana favorites are all in the Okavango Delta and are traditional lodges with tent cabins for guests which are bolted onto wood decks, per conservation regulations. If you are interested in the Okavango Delta have a look at [Shinde](#) which is close to water and open plains, and Kanana, which arranges mokoro (canoe rides) to birding islands. [Chief's Camp](#) and [Stanley's Camp](#) are also great options for families and are located on wooded islands and near surrounding lagoons.

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How much does an African safari with family cost?



Photo: [LondoLozi Game Reserve](#)/Facebook

Do game lodge prices really reflect luxury, service and all meals? Yes, those that charge over a thousand dollars per person per night guarantee first-rate mattresses, matching linen, leather armchairs, chef-prepared cuisines and notable wines.

But are the guides and trackers, employees who lead you through into the same bush country, more effective than those working at lodges charging \$180 per night? That's where you have to do a little research. Guides, the drivers, are often hired from outside, whereas the trackers, who sit on the fender searching for tracks in the dust, are local residents who've grown up with wildlife. If your goal is to see lions, rhinos, hippos, giraffe, wild dogs, hyenas and elephants in their natural surroundings, then ask in advance about the trackers when booking. Keep in mind a hefty price tag does not guarantee the best animal spotting.

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How to keep your family healthy

The mosquitoes that carry malaria are rarely a threat during Southern Africa's dry months, from July to mid-October. If mosquitoes are present, protect yourself and your family by covering up in light-colored

long-sleeve shirts and long pants and applying insect repellent. A course of prophylactic drugs, started before you go and for a period of time after your return, is recommended.

Travel and medical insurance are also essential, especially when traveling with youngsters on safari.

When to book an African safari



Photo: [BlueOrange Studio/Shutterstock](#)

June through August (winter) are dry, high months, with cool to cold nights and mild, sunny days. September and October are warm and dry; it's not as green, but animals are much easier to see, in the bush or at the waterholes. December, January and February bring rain which leads to muddy roads that can cause delays in travel.

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