

BEACH HOLIDAYS

If you're looking for a sun-kissed beach holiday beneath a cloudless sky, then head to the east of the continent, to the Indian Ocean coast and islands – and time your visit carefully.

For a purely beach trip, **Seychelles** (pages 244–269) is very hard to beat. What's surprising is that it's not just world-class private islands and luxurious resort hotels; there are also some great small guesthouses and beach retreats too. The Seychelles work both for stand-alone beach trips and as an add-on after a safari, with flights via Johannesburg or Nairobi.

On mainland Africa, the beaches of **South Africa's Cape** are lovely and, from around late-November to the end of March, the weather is usually glorious. During this time, the Cape's southern coast, from Cape Town to Hermanus (pages 72–74) and along the Garden Route (pages 75–77), offers beaches with relatively sophisticated hotels and the option of some high-quality, small, owner-run guesthouses.

Between July and February the weather is generally excellent off the East African coast of Tanzania. Here the **Zanzibar Archipelago** (pages 214–223) has some of Africa's best beaches: gorgeous, long stretches of fine white sand fringed by palm trees. You'll find a wide variety of hotels and lodges: something to suit everyone, from luxurious, all-inclusive resorts, to 'barefoot luxury' private islands and simple, inexpensive beach retreats.

Nearby, **Mafia Archipelago** (pages 224–226) doesn't have the same long stretches of squeaky white sand, but it is generally much quieter. A few tiny, intimate lodges on Mafia offer a more personal feel and marvellous value. Staying here you can spend days on deserted sandbars, surrounded only by shallow coral seas; Mafia is very special indeed.

Between May and October, some of Africa's best beaches are on the blissful islands of southern **Mozambique's Bazaruto Archipelago** (pages 236–237).

Here a couple of remote, palm-fringed islands have empty sandy shores and a few small lodges. These comfortable hideaways are easily reached by daily flights from Johannesburg; see page 243 for ideas of beach trips that can easily be added to your safari.

For even more offbeat island getaways, look to the clutch of very remote lodges on the pristine islands of **Mozambique's Quirimbas Archipelago** (page 242). The Nampula Province on Mozambique's mainland (page 239) also offers stunning untouched beaches. These areas can be difficult to reach, but it is this inaccessibility that places them amongst Africa's most exclusive and offbeat beach retreats.

Or perhaps consider heading to the beaches of **Lake Malawi** (pages 142–145), where a handful of high-quality lodges occupy remote locations along the lake's shore. Visit the beaches here as a relaxing, stand-alone trip, or perhaps combine them with a longer safari in neighbouring Zambia.



The Bazaruto Archipelago has a number of stunning lodges – set on powdery white sand beaches



The islands off Tanzania and Mozambique offer superb diving and snorkelling

DIVING & SNORKELLING

The Indian Ocean off Africa's tropical coast has an incredible variety and quality of marine life. There are manta rays and whale sharks, five species of turtle, over 400 species of fish, endless tropical coral reefs and even the occasional shy dugong.

There are sites for a few day's diving and/or snorkelling within reach of most of **Zanzibar** (pages 214–223), although two areas stand out for the quality of the snorkelling and diving. The reef surrounding Mnemba Island is superb, if often very busy; quick access to the best spots is one of many reasons to stay at Mnemba Island Lodge (page 222). Meanwhile, the reefs of Zanzibar's little-visited southwest can be good and you'll usually have them to yourself. Guided snorkelling trips from Chumbe Island (page 222) showcase a

world-class variety of colourful coral, whilst Fumba Beach and Unguja lodges (page 220) have particularly good access to the excellent reefs of the Menai Bay Conservation Area.

The sheltered Chole Bay within **Mafia Archipelago's** marine park (pages 224–226) makes a superb place to snorkel and to learn to dive. More experienced divers come back here for spectacular wall dives outside the bay, featuring larger pelagic fish including the occasional shark. Further north, **Pemba Island** (page 223) also has some first-class reefs with excellent snorkelling and shallow dives, whilst deeper sites attract experienced divers who are confident with strong currents.

For sheer range of fish, **Seychelles** (pages 244–269) is excellent – although some of

the coral here has been bleached. You'll find more pristine reefs around **Mozambique's** Bazaruto and Quirimbas archipelagos (pages 236–237 and 242) and the Nampula Province (page 239). Here our guests have even discovered new dive sites for themselves!

South African waters aren't so tropical, but this is one of the few places in the world where you can cage-dive with great white sharks. There is also good wreck-diving and fast drift-diving from Knysna (page 76).

For something completely different, the freshwater **Lake Malawi** (pages 142–145) has a rocky underwater environment which is home to over 500 species of brightly coloured (often endemic) cichlids, and otters – who like to play with divers' bubbles!

HONEYMOONS & ROMANTIC BREAKS

Many of our camps and lodges make romantic destinations; singling out any is difficult. All go out of their way to make your stay special, and if it's your honeymoon or a special anniversary, then they'll try even harder. Many will plan surprises during your stay – perhaps a private dinner, a bottle of bubbly on arrival or a bush bouquet for the bride. These aren't usually formulaic add-ons; generally they are simply thoughtful camp managers making exceptional one-off arrangements.

Tell us if it's your honeymoon or a special occasion, and note it on the Special Requests section of our booking form, so that we can tell your hosts in Africa. Our honeymoons cost exactly the same as any equivalent trips; telling us will only make a difference to your experience, not the price.

The 'classic' African honeymoon is a luxurious safari followed by a romantic beach break – for which **Tanzania** is the obvious choice. A few nights at Ras Kutani (page 227) could help you to unwind when you arrive, and whilst most of the camps in the Selous Game Reserve (pages 176–181) cater very well for honeymooners, Beho Beho (page 179) and Impala Camp (page 178) deserve special mention. For the adventurous, a night fly-camping can be ruggedly romantic.

To safari in more famous (and busier) parks, visit northern Tanzania. Include Lake Manyara Tree Lodge (page 196), with its particularly good in-room spa treatments, and for a real treat Ngorongoro Crater Lodge (page 203) is one of Africa's most spectacular lodges. It's very costly, but you

get a stupendous location, theatrical décor, great food and service, and opulent bubble baths! In the Serengeti, seek out the romance of a remote tented camp – look to the billowing canvas at Sabora and Sayari (pages 209–210).

After your safari, **Zanzibar's** palm-fringed beaches (pages 214–223) can make idyllic hideaways. Matemwe Retreat, Kilindi and Sultan's Palace are particularly stylish and romantic; Pemba's Fundu Lagoon (page 223) is popular with a young crowd; whilst those seeking something quieter should head to Mafia Island (pages 224–226) where Pole Pole is a lovely quiet spot. If money is no object, then the ultimate beach getaways are Zanzibar's Mnemba Island Lodge (page 222) or **Mozambique's** Vamizi Island (page 242), Azura (page 237) and Quilálea (page 242).

On a private concession that sees very few visitors, **Explore Gorongosa** in Gorongosa National Park is a new and wonderfully remote safari option (page 238). This romantically rustic tented camp offers an exclusive wildlife safari which is easily combined with one of Mozambique's stunning beaches.

Zambia's small, individual safari lodges can be very romantic. Consider the stunning honeymoon suite at Chiawa Camp (page 123), the deceptively luxurious Sausage Tree Camp (page 123), or the suites at Chongwe River Camp (page 122)! Many more camps here offer special honeymoon rooms including Kapani (page 124) and Tena Tena (page 126).

Zambia's spectacular Victoria Falls is a wondrous sight. Here, Tongabezi, Sindabezi and the Islands of Siankaba are magical riverfront places to stay (page 133). Perhaps ask for a champagne breakfast on Livingstone Island as one of your wedding gifts!

Victoria Falls can also be combined with a safari to **Botswana**. Many of the camps have a lovely honeymoon suite – usually a specific tent which is more secluded than most, with a large double bed and perhaps a moonlit shower or bath. These rooms need booking well in advance, but don't usually cost extra. In addition, Baines' Camp (page 94) has special 'star beds' that roll outside to sleep under the heavens, whilst every room at the luxurious Jao Camp (page 91) and Vumbura Plains (page 93) has its own 'sala' – a cushioned private outdoor lounge with a view. For rooms with a private plunge pool and an additional shaded bed on the roof, consider the suites at Xudum Delta Lodge (page 95).

For a beach holiday after a Zambian safari, **Lake Malawi** is close, with the lovely Pumulani (page 142) built on its shore. Far offshore, but still within easy reach, Kaya Mawa's individual suites (page 143) are truly spectacular. Nearby, the powder-white sands of Nkwichi Lodge (page 144) match those around any coral island.

Every year a few honeymooners, and many celebrating special anniversaries, travel to **Namibia**, where the desert landscapes can be dreamily romantic. Lodges like Little Ongava (page 46) and Little Kulala (page 32) have stunning honeymoon suites and Wolwedans (page 34) has a 'private camp'. We'd also highlight the Bush Suite at Okonjima (page 52), any of the four exclusive suites at Ntwala Island Lodge (page 60), and the splendid isolation of Serra Cafema (page 57) as being particularly special.

For luxury with high levels of comfort and care, head for a private island in **Seychelles** (pages 244–269): North and Frégate are world-class, whilst Denis and Desroches will suit less extravagant, more moderate budgets. For a honeymoon exploring the islands, consider the Four Seasons (page 250) on Mahé Island; the Black Parrot Suites (page 253) or Le Duc (page 255) on Praslin; and perhaps Domaine de l'Orangerie (page 258) on La Digue.



One of the stunning, unusual and romantic rooms at the Crater Lodge



For the perfect honeymoon stay in one of Kilindi's vast pavilions, each with a private infinity pool

RIDING

Many African camps offer horseriding as an additional activity. Usually these are based in areas with little dangerous game so often even beginners can enjoy the scenery and rolling hills, without worrying about the dangers of riding in lion country. For those seeking an alternative, a few camps even offer elephant rides. If you love riding, then build some of these places into your trip.

In **Namibia's** Namib-Naukluft area (pages 30–33), Desert Homestead offers half-day horseriding trips, either in the very early morning for sunrise, or late evening for sunset – though they also do overnight camping trips for those who want to explore further afield. Nearby Büllsport has longer trails into the mountains, lasting up to three days. Elsewhere, River Crossing (page 55), Grootberg Lodge (page 42) and Cañon Lodge (page 36) all offer short excursions.

In **South Africa**, Grootbos (page 74) is a wild and lovely place with very well-kept stables, housing ponies and horses with excellent temperaments, some suitable for

children. Meanwhile, when you're staying in Cape Town, The Long Beach (page 72) makes a lovely base with easy access to nearby stables from where you can ride along the beach.

Zambia has several private reserves whose owners keep large stables. There's top-class riding on the horses at Shiwa Ng'andu (page 135), as well as more gentle riding excursions in the forests of Mutinondo (page 135). Near Lusaka, Chaminuka (page 136) instantly springs to mind.

In **Botswana**, the privately owned, and newly re-built, Motswiri is a specialist riding camp offering activities ranging from half-day rides through to six-day riding safaris (page 102). For a truly African experience in the saddle, consider riding African elephants through the Okavango Delta from Abu Camp (page 92).

In **Tanzania** all three lodges on the Grumeti Reserve (page 210), adjacent to the Serengeti have access to the outstanding stable at Sasakwa Lodge.



Game-spotting on an elephant-back safari



Africa from the saddle - overlooking the Lake of the Royal Crocodiles at Shiwa Ng'andu



South Luangwa National Park is where walking safaris were pioneered, and it still offers some of the best in Africa

WALKING

Experiencing Africa's wilderness areas is integral to many of our trips, and there's no better way than on foot. There are nearly always opportunities for walking, but to maximise these choose which areas to visit carefully.

From gentle wanders to strenuous hikes, **Namibia** offers walking, free of dangerous big game, through some of Africa's most dramatic scenery. Tok Tokkie Trails (page 34) organises an excellent three-day walk across the Namib's dunes and mountains, whilst guest farms near the Naukluft Mountains (page 31) make perfect bases for your own exploration. The walking at Waterberg (page 54) and Erongo Wilderness Lodge (page 52) is good, as it is in many parts of Damaraland (pages 40–43) – particularly at Etendeka and Desert Rhino Camp. Hiking in Fish River Canyon is an exhilarating option, with some good trails offered by Fish River Lodge (page 36). However, our very top recommendation is the expertly guided walks exploring the very special Mundulea Nature Reserve (pages 52–53).

The Cape offers mountainous walking in high, open areas – topographically similar to gentle British ranges. You can hike independently in the Cederberg Mountains (page 79), whilst the coastal Tsitsikamma area (page 77) is particularly verdant and spectacular.

Botswana, Zambia and Tanzania tend to focus on walking with big game – and here the quality of guiding is crucial. The choice in **Botswana** is simple: head for the specialist walking trails at Footsteps Across the Delta (page 94) and Footsteps Across the Linyanti (page 104).

Formal walking safaris began in **Zambia** in the 1960s and you'll still find some of the continent's best on-foot experiences here. You can walk from camps in the Lower Zambezi (pages 122–123), but the Luangwa Valley (pages 124–132) has the most comprehensive choice with virtually every camp offering highly experienced walking guides. Go a step further: some camps in South Luangwa (pages 124–129) and Mwaleshi in North Luangwa (page 132) offer only walking safaris!

Zimbabwe's excellent guide-training system results in many great walking guides; some are attached to lodges whilst others work freelance. Most safari camps here offering walking will have some very good guides, but three operations stand out as being owned and run by guides of note: Musango Safari Camp in Matusadona (page 155), Vundu Camp in Mana Pools (page 159), and the tiny Hwange Mobile Camp (page 153) on the north side of Hwange.

Tanzania's camps are increasingly

combining walking with adventurous fly-camping. The best options are in the Selous (pages 176–181) and Katavi (pages 188–189), whilst walking in nearby Mahale (page 190) involves tracking chimpanzees along hilly forest paths. In Tarangire (pages 198–200), Oliver's Camp stands out as having guides who concentrate on walking, and in the Serengeti consider Sayari Mara (page 209). Undoubtedly, for the more adventurous traveller, there's no better way to get off the beaten track in the Serengeti than to take part in a Walking Mobile Camp (page 211). In the Ngorongoro area, Gibb's Farm (page 202) is the start for a strenuous but stunning eight-hour walk up to the crater's rim.

Mozambique's Explore Gorongosa (page 238) offers some excellent safari walking, led by knowledgeable guides. These mostly take place on its own private concession of 250km² which allows for a great sense of wilderness – you won't see a vehicle trundling past!

For a gentle jaunt, the exquisite sandy beaches of **Seychelles** cry out for leisurely strolls, whilst a wander through the spectacular palm forests of the UNESCO Vallée de Mai (page 256), on Praslin, is a must for island visitors. On Mahé Island, Sans Souci perches in the mountains and makes a great base for more serious hiking.

WILDLIFE SAFARIS

Wildlife is Africa's biggest draw for visitors and key to many of our safaris and trips – so trying to select just a few places here is almost impossible. Ask us about what you'll see in the various countries; one of our team can always talk to you from personal experience – and be much more specific than we have space to write here.

Visitors on their first safari to Africa often head for areas with plenty of classic big game. We'd particularly recommend Etosha in Namibia (pages 44–47); almost any of the reserves in northern Botswana (pages 88–104); the Luangwa and Lower Zambezi in Zambia (pages 122–129); the Selous (pages 176–181) and Ruaha (pages 184–186) in southern Tanzania; and all four main safari areas in northern Tanzania (pages 192–211). Old Africa hands often have much more specific interests, on which we're always happy to advise, usually in considerable detail.

Many well-known species occur across the continent; here we'll highlight some of the best areas for a few select species.

Lions are relatively common in most safari reserves; it's rare for anyone to return from a week's safari without having seen at least one pride! Quite often, in the more remote areas, guests will have a number of lion sightings, and the chance to watch them hunting or feeding. The exclusivity of many of these areas means that your experience will rarely be interrupted by other people or vehicles.

For a unique take on Namibia's special desert lions, consider *Wild about Africa's* Namibia Desert Lion Safari (www.wildaboutafrica.com) where travellers get involved in the Desert Lion Conservation Project and spend time learning from expert guide Dr Flip Stander in the country's remote northwest.

Leopards are very common throughout Africa, but usually remain hidden. They're often nocturnal, so to maximise your chances of seeing them, night drives are essential. For activities after dark, consider South Luangwa and the Lower Zambezi in Zambia (pages 122–129), and the private reserves in northern Botswana (pages 88–104).

Cheetah can be equally elusive, unless you're visiting a refuge like Okonjima (page 52). In the wild, the best cheetah sightings are probably in the Cape's Kgalagadi

Transfrontier Park (page 80), or Tanzania's Ruaha (pages 184–186) and Serengeti areas (pages 204–211). Historically they have also been seen on Zambia's Busanga Plains in Northern Kafue (pages 118–119), although in recent years these sightings have decreased.

For your best chances of seeing **wild dogs**, you need vast open areas with no fences – and preferably open ground across which you can follow these far-ranging predators by 4WD. Top of your list should be the private safari reserves in northern Botswana (pages 88–104), or possibly Tanzania's Selous (pages 176–181) or Zimbabwe's Hwange (pages 152–153) or Mana Pools (pages 158–159). The Busanga Plains in Zambia's Kafue (pages 118–119) are also a possibility and, in recent years, dogs have been increasingly seen in South Luangwa (pages 124–129).

Search for one of the region's rarer large carnivores, **brown hyena**, on Namibia's Skeleton Coast (pages 56–57), or possibly in the Kalahari at Jack's, San Camp or Camp Kalahari (page 106), where researchers have habituated a local clan. Rhino are much less common than they used to be, but have recovered from the brink of extinction in recent decades. The larger, relatively peaceful **white rhino** are plains grazers and best sought in the reserves in South Africa's Cape (page 78); in Namibia's Etosha National Park (pages 44–47); in Zimbabwe's Matusadona National Park (pages 154–155); and perhaps at Edo's Camp (page 108), in Botswana's Kalahari.

The slightly smaller and much more aggressive **black rhino** are also easily seen in the evenings at the Okaukuejo waterhole in Etosha; in Tanzania's Ngorongoro Crater (pages 201–203); and most recently from Sarayi (page 209) and its sister camp Olakira (page 205), located in the far north of the Serengeti. Desert Rhino Camp (page 42), in Namibia's Damaraland, runs superb rhino-tracking safaris on foot. Both black and white rhino are found in the picturesque Matobo Hills National Park (page 160) in Zimbabwe.

Meerkat enthusiasts should seek out these entertaining creatures in the Kalahari. The Kgalagadi (page 80) remains the best place to see them, although Jack's, San Camp and Camp Kalahari (page 106) have a



A family of elephants on the vast Serengeti Plains

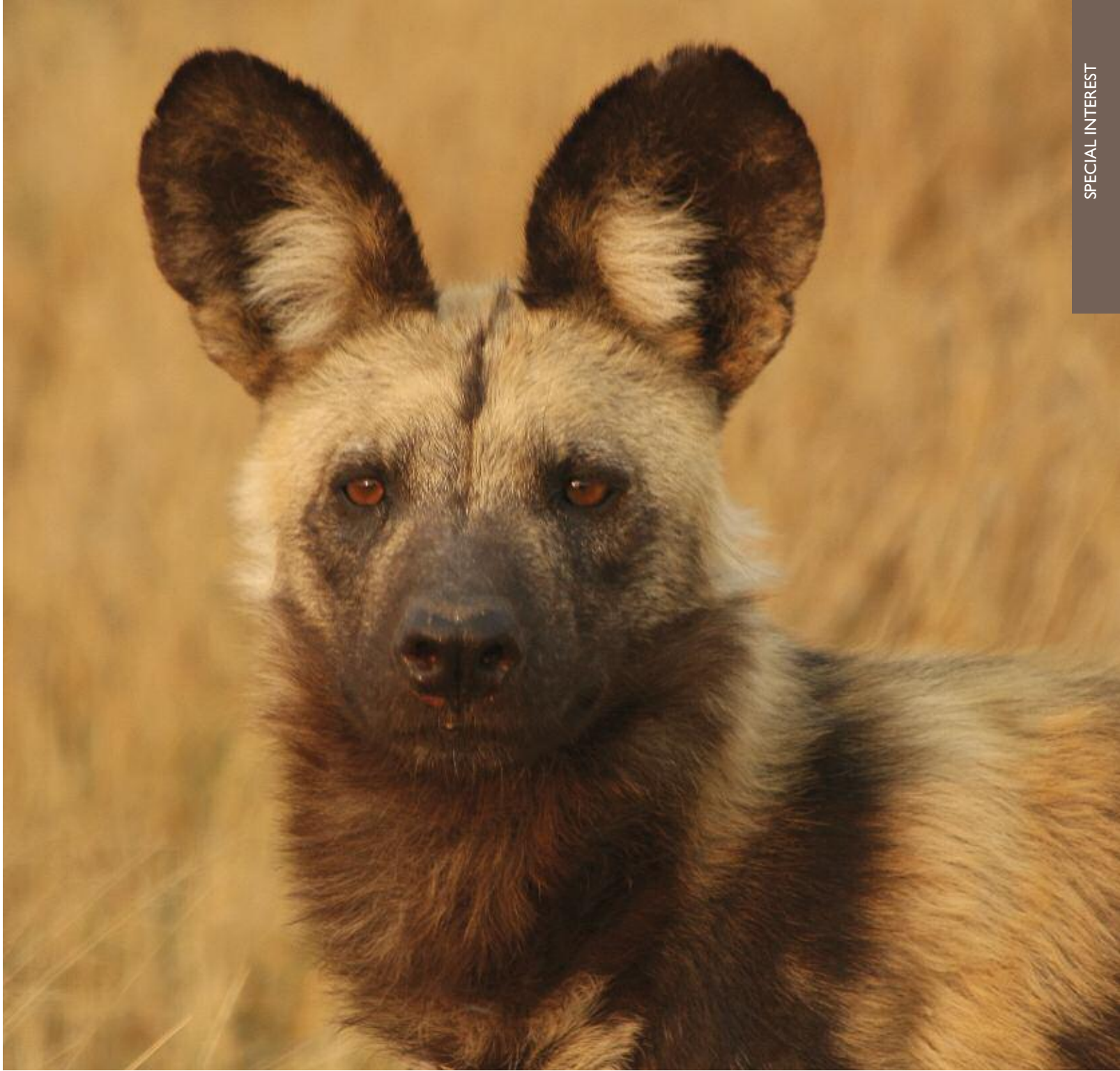
habituated mob, and a relaxed mob sometimes appears for breakfast at Bagatelle Game Ranch (page 35).

Watching a herd of **elephants** has a very special magic and you'll see these in virtually all of our safari destinations, except the Kgalagadi and Central Kalahari reserves. In the Cape, Addo Elephant Park (page 78) is an obvious place to start. The camps of Zambia's Lower Zambezi (pages 122–123) are regular thoroughfares for thirsty elephants, but really, there's nowhere better than northern Botswana – especially beside the waterways towards the end of the dry season. To get a lot closer, consider the elephant experiences at Stanley's and Baines' (page 94), or Abu camps (page 92). To see 'big tuskers' – old bull elephants with spectacular tusks – by far the best place is Tanzania's Ngorongoro Crater (pages 201–203).

In some ways, primates offer the most engaging wildlife viewing in Africa. For **chimpanzees**, Tanzania's remote Mahale Mountains is certainly the destination of choice (page 190), whilst those seeking **gorillas** need to venture to the Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda (pages 168–169).

For a far-from-conventional wildlife experience, the islands of Seychelles (pages 244–269) offer some surprisingly engaging and original wildlife encounters – including the marvellous **giant tortoises**, which can be seen on most islands.

Finally although the **pangolin** is widely distributed in Africa, it is sighted so rarely that most guides have never seen one. We're particularly excited that a research project to study them has recently started on Mundulea Reserve (page 52) in northern Namibia, which promises visitors the chance to observe them.





Namibia's varied light and landscapes, and especially its dune-scapes, are addictive for photographers

PHOTOGRAPHIC TRIPS

Many of our African destinations are very photogenic and so this section is less about where to go, and more about how and when to travel. The *Expert Africa* team are proud to have taken virtually all the photographs in this brochure (see page 277 for the few exceptions!), so we're very aware of when and where you're likely to get the best shots.

Firstly, note that professional photographers will wait for weeks just to get a particular shot. Whilst few of us have this luxury, the lesson is clear: you need time and space to take good photographs. Hence our **self-drive trips** in the Cape and even more especially in Namibia are perhaps the obvious ways to do this. With a self-drive you can set your own schedule; if you want to wait beside a waterhole in Etosha for eight hours – you can!

Activities at safari camps tend to be organised around a handful of guests. You'll get some great photographic opportunities, but setting entirely your own schedule will be difficult. One way around this is to hire a

private guide and vehicle at each camp – it offers the best flexibility, but usually costs around £200–300 per vehicle per day extra, and isn't always possible.

For serious photographers, the ultimate way to travel is with a private vehicle and expert guide who understands your requirements. Although not possible in all areas we cover, this is easily arranged in Namibia where a guide's knowledge of the right location at the optimum time of day is crucial for the best landscape shots. Many of our safaris in northern Tanzania are with a private vehicle and driver. The drive from Lake Manyara up to the Ngorongoro Crater and down onto the great Serengeti Plain is spectacular and can be enjoyed at your own pace – with complete flexibility to stop and photograph the wildlife for almost as long as you wish. Ndutu (page 204) in Serengeti's southern plains is one of the very few areas of northern Tanzania where your guide can drive off the tracks to get closer to wildlife and so is worth a special mention here.

Zarafa Camp (page 102) in Botswana's game-rich Selinda Reserve has gone one step further than many. Owned by famous photographers Dereck and Beverly Joubert, the camp has a 4WD designed specially for photographers, with camera mounts and other aids already installed.

You'll generally get better pictures of game on 4WD safaris than on foot but, better still, spend some time in a **game hide**. In Botswana you'll find hides at Meno A Kwena and Leroo La Tau (page 107), Chitabe (page 96) and Linyanti (page 103). In Zambia, Kaingo and Mwamba camps (page 127) have several ingenious hides, including one high above an elephant crossing and another floating beside a colony of carmine bee-eaters – and are particularly accommodating camps for photographers.

Finally, the light is best in the early morning or late afternoon, so ensure that you are able to make the most of this. Camps that offer night drives have the advantage because you can then take your time returning to camp after sunset.

WELLBEING ESCAPES

We think of 'wellbeing escapes' as trips which will help you relax and unwind; ones that give you the opportunity to get back in touch with nature and your inner self; journeys that are restorative, rejuvenating and deeply 'good for your soul'. Based on this description, most of the more remote places described in these pages qualify as 'wellbeing escapes'.

Head off on a walking safari: you'll concentrate on the natural world around you, gradually getting more in touch with it, and contemplating your place within it. Spend a few nights beside a campfire, listening only to the noises of Africa: it'll put everything back into perspective. Look up at the clear, star-studded night sky in the solitude of the Namib Desert: you'll soon

appreciate where your life fits into the great universe.

What's more – escaping to Africa will bring an income to some of the continent's poorer, more rural communities; so your escape adds to their wellbeing, as well as your own.

Of course, if you like the idea of conventional spa, massage and beauty treatments – then we also offer a handful of those. In the Indian Ocean, these are often Asian influenced, with highly professional Thai and Balinese masseuses in residence. On continental Africa, although more lodges are starting to offer therapies, spas tend to be simpler; we've visited some that claim to have 'spa' facilities only to find a single massage table!

For premium products, inspired interiors and skilled therapists, Maia, Banyan Tree, Four Seasons (all page 250) and North Island (page 267) in **Seychelles** all have simply superb spas. Total relaxation is guaranteed. Across the water in **Mozambique**, Azura (page 237) offers very high-quality treatments.

In **Namibia**, a number of lodges offer massages, but GocheGanas (page 55) near Windhoek, Divava (page 59) in the Caprivi Strip, Huab Lodge (page 42) in Damaraland and Epacha and Mokuti (pages 46–47) near Etosha all stand out as having well-equipped spas.

Botswana's Jao Camp (page 91) has a spa that offers a full menu of therapies ranging from facials to manicures, pedicures and a range of massage options, whilst Chief's Camp (page 90) has a beauty therapist offering a range of body therapies, body rituals and facial skin-care treatments. Its sister camp, Chobe Chilwero (page 100), offers a full spa service of environmentally friendly treatments. Facilities include an indoor spa bath, Vichy showers, hydrotherapy, plunge pool, relaxation area and private treatment rooms – one of which is elevated in the treetops.

Several of **Tanzania's** top lodges feature massages, from Mnemba Island Lodge (page 222) which offers different types (hot stone, deep tissue, aromatherapy and reiki) to Sasakwa Lodge (page 210), Baraza and Breezes Beach Club (page 219), which all have extensive professional spas. Of the new spas which are springing up, one of the most authentic is the Osero Clinic at Gibb's Farm (page 202), which draws its treatments from traditional East African healing therapies.

Located on **Zambia's** side of Victoria Falls, The Royal Livingstone's (page 133) spa features five stunning outdoor gazebos as its treatment rooms. Each of these overlooks a wide stretch of the Zambezi River, and offers a range of therapies including facials, massages and body treatments.

In **The Cape**, many of the hotels offer excellent spa and beauty treatments, including the Vineyard, Constantia Uitsig and the Bay Hotel in Cape Town (all on pages 72–73), and Birkenhead House in Hermanus (on page 74).



The extensive spa at Azura Mozambique is excellent



BIRDWATCHING

Among us are hard-core dedicated birdwatchers who plan their travels with specific birds in mind, but even avid big-game enthusiasts eventually become captivated by Africa's birds. You'll find interesting species across the continent, although some areas stand out for their sheer avian diversity.

Bird Island (page 260–261) in **Seychelles** offers one of the most spectacular opportunities to observe birds that we have encountered. Sea, shore and land birds fish from and breed on the island in tremendous numbers, and with no predators they display little fear of humans, allowing incredibly close contact. It's captivating for anyone from die-hard ornithologists to curious children. Many other islands of the Seychelles offer protected habitats for endemic and endangered species, with the paradise flycatchers in La Digue's Veuve Reserve (page 258) and the magpie robins of Frégate (page 266) being highlights.

Botswana's Okavango Delta (pages 88–96) is not only a top area for game, but also perhaps Africa's ultimate birding destination. Its mosaic of dry and watery environments is home to a huge range of birds, from raptors of dry Kalahari thornscrub, to waders on the floodplains and colourful kingfishers above the deeper channels. Enthusiasts may come in search of the slaty egret, Bradfield's hornbill, lesser jacana and pink-throated longclaw, but everyone else will enjoy the iridescent colours and wide variety of spectacular birdlife.

The Central Kalahari and Makgadikgadi Pans areas (pages 106–108) haven't got the same variety, although if the pans fill with water during the rains (between November and March) then many waders are attracted, and it is sometimes used by breeding flocks of flamingos.

If birds are your prime focus, head for **Zambia's** Bangweulu Wetlands (page 134). This vast wilderness has a tremendous variety of water birds, but it is famed as home to the very rare shoebill stork – which is probably easiest to see from about May to July.

Later in the year, around September, the beautiful and gregarious carmine bee-eaters arrive for their annual breeding season, staying for three or four months. Their busy colonies can be found in vertical

sandbanks throughout southern Africa, but prime places include the Luangwa (pages 124–132), as well as the Kwando River (page 102) between Botswana and the Caprivi Strip.

The Lower Zambezi (pages 122–123) makes a great venue for spectacular water birds like goliath herons, whilst the north of the Kafue National Park (pages 118–121) has an equally impressive avian array including flocks of 'dancing' crowned cranes.

For an outpost destination with fabulous birdlife, Liuwa Plains (page 137) offers opportunities to see large numbers of crowned and wattled cranes, pelicans, storks, herons and many other water birds, along with terrific raptor activity.

Tanzania offers some fine birding opportunities, with the miombo woodlands and dambos around the Rufiji River in Selous (pages 176–181) being of particular note. Equally, Ruaha (pages 184–186) is home to many East African species that aren't found any further south.

Avid twitchers might make a special trip to the Udzungwa Mountains (page 183) where there are many forest birds typical of the Eastern Arc forests, as well as two very restricted endemics: the rufous-winged sunbird and the Udzungwa partridge. The latter was only discovered as recently as 1991.

Tarangire (pages 198–200) and Lake Manyara (page 196–197) have particularly diverse ranges of vegetation – and the latter has almost 400 different bird species. You'll usually find flamingos and pelicans on Lake Manyara with waders of many species in the shallows. For a complete contrast, the evergreen groundwater forests harbour raucous groups of spectacular silvery-cheeked hornbills.

Even Tanzania's Indian Ocean islands have their birding interest, with Pemba (page 223) harbouring four endemic species, including the Pemba green pigeon and the Pemba scops owl.

In **Mozambique**, Gorongosa National Park (page 238) has 412 different bird species and some incredibly rare birds such as the green-headed oriole, which can be found on the forested slopes of Mount Gorongosa.

Unlike Zambia and Tanzania, **Namibia** isn't generally disrupted by its rains, which is fortunate, as this is the best time for birdwatching. The amazing reserve of Sandwich Harbour (visit on a day trip, page 39) shouldn't be missed whilst, further north, in Etosha (pages 44–47), flamingos breed when the pans fill and great flocks of graceful blue cranes descend upon the park. Namibia's best area for birds is certainly the Caprivi Strip (pages 58–59), where you'll find many species usually associated with Botswana's Okavango Delta.



A martial eagle on its prey – a guineafowl

SOLO TRAVELLERS

Some of our trips don't work well for travelling alone, whilst others are perfect. Generally, we find that self-drive trips aren't ideal if you are on your own – simply because it's often better to have company in the car. However, solo travellers to **Namibia, Botswana, Zambia** and **Tanzania** will find our *Wild about Africa* programme (www.wildaboutafrica.com) of small-group escorted trips well suited to them. Many have no single-person supplements and prices start from as low as £1,742 per person for trips to Namibia.

On many of *Expert Africa's* tailor-made itineraries you'll stay at small safari camps and lodges. This is often like visiting friends at their country house: you'll dine together with your hosts and fellow guests, whilst spending your days exploring the area and enjoying safari activities together.

Eventually, you'll move camps – and so won't stay with the same people all the time. Thus you'll have the company of like-minded travellers at each camp, yet the advantage of moving on and meeting different characters during your trip.

Walking in a small group is a particularly sociable activity. In **Zambia's** Luangwa Valley many of the walking bushcamps are great options – and a few have especially low single-person supplements. Among these are Luwi and Nsolo (page 124); Chikoko and Crocodile (page 125); and Mwaleshi (page 132). *Robin Pope Safaris* (page 126) no longer apply single supplements at any of their camps and so are worth considering – but book early!

Given our excellent, long-standing relationships with many camps in

Botswana, we can sometimes reduce or even waive single supplements. However, this is easiest to arrange outside peak season, which runs from July to October. Sandibe (page 96), Nxabega, Xudum and Xaranna (page 95) are just some of the good possibilities; it's best to discuss these options with us well in advance.

In **Tanzania** two excellent options for solo travellers include Lake Manze Camp in Selous (page 176) and Mdonya Old River Camp in Ruaha (page 186). They offer both very low single supplements and group dining, which lends a sociable air. The more luxurious Beho Beho (page 179) is an old favourite for solo travellers – with no single supplement and a continuous 'dinner party' atmosphere it's a great way to get to know other guests.



Sociable and relaxing, meals and activities at many camps are in small groups



Acting out: Bushmen in the Kalahari show a visitor how a snare works – to everyone's amusement

TRADITIONAL CULTURES

If the idea of an African 'cultural experience' makes you cringe, or brings to mind superficial tribal dancing and local people forced into demeaning, stereotypical roles – then rest assured: this is absolutely not what we offer.

Looking through these pages you'll find very few places where we write of traditional cultural experiences. That's because we simply do not send visitors to interact with local people who live in Africa's more fragile, original cultures unless we can be sure that it'll be beneficial to both our travellers and their hosts. Fortunately, there are a few places like this where you can meet individuals living traditional lives – and the meeting leaves you with a mutual understanding and respect.

Namibia heads our list of favourites. If you're interested in getting to know people of a radically different cultural background then by far the best experience that we know of is with the Bushmen of the Kalahari at Nhomu Camp near Tsumkwe (page 50). Getting to know these people takes time so spend at least three or four nights in this area. We've had several guests fall in love with the experience, even returning to spend several weeks with the villagers.

Northwestern Namibia is also an interesting area, with a lot of community development happening around the excellent Grootberg and Doro Nawas lodges (pages 41–42) – while trips to the Skeleton Coast (page 56) and to Serra Cafema (page 57) include sensitively arranged visits to local Himba villages.

Join expert guides Garth Owen-Smith and Dr Margaret Jacobson, conservationist and anthropologist, on a five-day safari with *Wild about Africa's* Namibia Conservation & Culture Safari (www.wildaboutafrica.com). It's a fascinating way to gain insight into community-based natural resource management.

In **Botswana**, visiting Bushmen communities with anything like the depth of experience that's found at Nhomu Camp is surprisingly difficult – although Edo's Camp (page 108) does go some way towards accomplishing this. Mobile trips to the Tsodilo Hills (page 97) offer an interesting historical perspective on their culture, and there are San/Bushman guides at Jack's, San Camp and Camp Kalahari (page 106), and at Deception Valley Lodge (page 108).

Visitors to **Zambia** should seek out Kawaza Village (page 129), beside South Luangwa National Park, for a very genuine glimpse into traditional Kunda life. This is a super

experience; it really is a slice of real African village life! In Lower Zambezi, Tsika Island Camp (page 122) is a good base from which to see a nearby 'cultural village'. Set up as part of a community partnership project with Chongwe River Camp (page 122), this slightly contrived living museum nevertheless offers an insight into local life.

In **Tanzania** there are several opportunities to experience traditional communities. A local village walk and lunch at Mto Mwa Mbu, by Lake Manyara National Park, allows you to sample local cuisine and daily life, whereas several of the small, tented camps in the Loliondo area (page 211) and at Lake Natron (pages 194–195) provide good opportunities to interact with the Maasai.

Zanzibar is full of different cultures, but accessing them on a short visit can be tricky. Chumbe Island (page 222) has a distinctly local flavour. Some of the day trips, especially the engaging Jambiani Village Cultural Tour, offer great cultural insights and a surprisingly rare opportunity to interact with the villagers through a respected local resident. On **Mafia Island**, Chole Mjini Lodge (page 225–226) is built beside a village, and is closely integrated with it – for the benefit of both the villagers and the visitors.



From big game to beaches, Africa is fascinating for every member of the family

FAMILY HOLIDAYS

Africa has a lot to offer families but it's important to visit places that actively welcome children, rather than simply accept them. Africa isn't ideal for babies or very small children, who should avoid areas with malaria. However for interested children who are old enough to understand what they see, Africa can be an amazing and inspiring place.

Private houses and villas can be ideal for families (see the next page for a selection of the best), but many lodges also welcome children.

Self-drive trips in **South Africa's Cape** and **Namibia** enable you to travel at your own pace and stop where you like to explore. South Africa's Cape is free of malaria and the obvious choice for families with small children. Outstanding options here include Grootbos (page 74), with its dedicated activities for younger visitors, including early-morning feeding of ponies and small farm animals, riding, beach-combing and bug-collecting.

In **Namibia**, many smaller guest farms and lodges welcome children. New Bushmen playmates at Nhoma (page 50) can be wonderful, whilst active children will relish the hands-on approach at Mundulea (page 52). Sand-boarding and kayaking near Swakopmund (pages 38–39) are tremendous fun, with Sandfields Guesthouse (page 38) standing out here as being particularly child-friendly, and Sossusvlei is perhaps the world's largest sandpit! Further north, the national park

restcamps within Etosha (page 44) have four-bed bungalows suitable for families, while Mushara Bush Camp on the eastern boundary specifically caters for families and even has a play area with a slide!

Relatively few lodges in big-game areas are really family friendly, but **Zambia's** 'safari houses' (see opposite) are perfect; the self-contained Hippo Pod at Kasaka River Lodge (page 123) is excellent for a family of four, and smaller, family-owned camps, like Tafika (page 125), welcome children. For families looking for a more affordable option, Flatdogs in South Luangwa (page 128) is a mid-range camp with a very comfortable two-storey family-chalet. The swimming pool and relaxed nature here also makes it a pleasant place to bring children.

In **Botswana**, we can arrange a specialist children's guide whilst you stay at many of our camps. In addition, Sandibe (page 96) and Nxabega (page 95) also provides fun quiz books for children; Footsteps (page 94 and 104) operates a 'Young Explorers' safari especially for families; whilst Selinda (page 102), DumaTau (page 103), Chitabe Lediba (page 96), Jao (page 91), Savuti (page 103), Seba Camp (page 92), Jacana Camp (page 91), Linyanti Ebony (page 104) and the Vumbura camps (page 93) all have large family rooms.

For a family with older children, a small exclusive camp with a great guide is perhaps the ultimate safari. In **Zimbabwe**, Hwange Mobile Camp (page 153) is very

good and excellent value – as are some of Wild about Africa's (www.wildaboutafrica.com) private safaris.

In **Tanzania**, our private-guided safaris (see trip ideas on page 228–231) can work very well for families with older children – and the 'per person' cost usually decreases as more people join a trip. In southern Tanzania, Impala Camp (page 178) welcomes older children, as do Ruaha River Lodge and Mwangusi Camp (pages 184–185).

Tanzania's more family-friendly beach locations include Breezes Beach Club (page 219) on Zanzibar and Chumbe Island (page 222), which is geared towards informing as well as entertaining. Meanwhile, in the **Mafia Archipelago** (pages 224–226), both Chole Mjini and Pole Pole are considerate towards the needs of children, and Kinasi has a lovely family room.

Mozambique's Indigo Bay (page 236) caters well to families, including supervised games in a children's club. Further east, the malaria-free **Seychelles** offer super seaside family holidays. The kids club at the Four Seasons (page 250) is very professional and well-equipped; all the beachside villas on North Island (page 267) have their own lounge/office which easily becomes a lavish bedroom for two; whilst on a much simpler level, the self-catering villas at Les Villas d'Or (page 254) offer flexibility and great value.

PRIVATE VILLAS & HOUSES

In recent years, we've seen more families travelling together, and a rise in small groups of like-minded friends sharing a trip. Both work best when they have their own space, and flexibility in their meals and activities – and so a private villa can be an ideal solution. Many are staffed with their own private chef and safari guide.

In **Namibia**, Okonjima (page 52) and Mushara (page 47) both have luxurious villas, whilst Wolwedans has, for some time, had a 'private camp' (page 34) that can be booked by small parties, and Babson House (page 52) offers a private retreat from which to visit the *Cheetah Conservation Fund*. In **South Africa's Cape**, Kwandwe's Uplands Homestead and Melton Manor (page 78) are perfect for groups.

Zambia stands out for its 'safari houses' – with their own guide, activities and chefs. First among these, Robin's House (page 126) was designed for four guests. More

recently, the imaginative Luangwa Safari House (page 126) and Chongwe River House (page 123) are both designed for up to eight people. The old Manor House at Shiwa Ng'andu (page 135) feels like a private stately home and Tangala House, near Livingstone, is the private house of the owner of Tongabezi (page 133)!

In **Malawi**, Ndomo Point Lodge (page 143), on Likoma Island near Kaya Mawa, is a new and spectacular option built with eight people in mind.

In **Tanzania**, Kiba Point (page 178) in the Selous is a private camp linked to Sand Rivers. This will take a group of up to eight people, staying in four neighbouring cottages. Although not technically a villa or house, a Private Mobile Camp (page 211) is the perfect way to get away from all the crowds on your own exclusive campsite.

A short plane hop away, **Zanzibar's** highly original Kikadini Villas (page 219) combine



One of the spacious villas at Benguerra

the seclusion of several funky private houses with the facilities of a small and private boutique hotel.

As an alternative Indian Ocean retreat, **Mozambique's** Benguerra Lodge and Azura Lodge (page 237) both have a two-bedroom villa, whilst several seaside self-catering options exist in **Seychelles**: from the value-conscious Côte d'Or Chalets (page 255) to more luxurious options at Banyan Tree (page 250).



At a private villa, like Zambia's Luangwa Safari House, your group chooses when to go for a game drive, and when to stay beside the pool

