



It's about the journey

NEW YEAR 2018

MADAGASCAR: FOLLOW OUR ADVENTURE
UP THE WILD EAST COAST

SOUTHERN TANZANIA FOR FAMILIES:
EXPLORING WITH A PRIVATE SAFARI CAMP

INDIA: GETTING TO LITTLE-KNOWN
SATPURA CAN BE HALF THE ADVENTURE

GABON: ON THE TRAIL OF THE
ELUSIVE MANDRILL



FINDING MYSELF ALONE IN A FORESTED BOWL AT DUSK, SURROUNDED BY HUNDREDS OF FIREFLIES...

In September I was lucky enough to drive Madagascar's notorious RN5 to the wonderful Masoala Peninsula. As I'd hoped, this notorious highway turned out to be a magical slow expedition, governed by the tides, that revealed the character of this little visited region over five days, one small surprise after another:

Finding myself alone in a forested bowl at dusk, surrounded by hundreds of fireflies with the flickering silhouettes of nightjars against a backdrop of the early evening sky. The vanilla scented air of the small fishing villages that line the route, the blow of a humpback whale and its calf lolling in a turquoise lagoon a few hundred yards from shore.

Two decades of safari experience has made us firm believers that lasting memories come not just from the highlights that might be uppermost in our minds when we start to plan a trip, but from the myriad encounters like this that nobody could ever predict.

This thrill of unexpected discovery is partly why we're such advocates of building our safaris into proper journeys. Travel slowly. Stop often. Take time between destinations. And in doing so you leave room for serendipitous encounters as well as a wider understanding of place.

We have two other epic journeys for you this edition. Rod took the Financial Times through some little known backwaters of Southern Tanzania – connecting Ruaha and Selous via the Udzungwa Mountains.

While Andrea shares an Indian odyssey that reveals the wildlife connoisseur's India. Satpura is now one of the most promising tiger reserves in India and in total there are 52 species of mammals and 300 species of birds to be found. But getting there is a rich adventure in itself combining palaces, hill stations, jungle walks and overnight sleeper trains.

Alex

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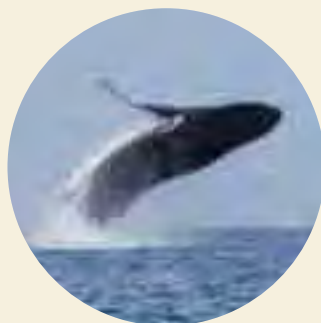
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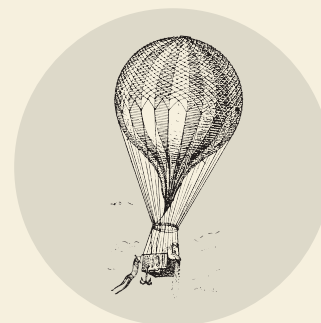
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FINANCIAL TIMES

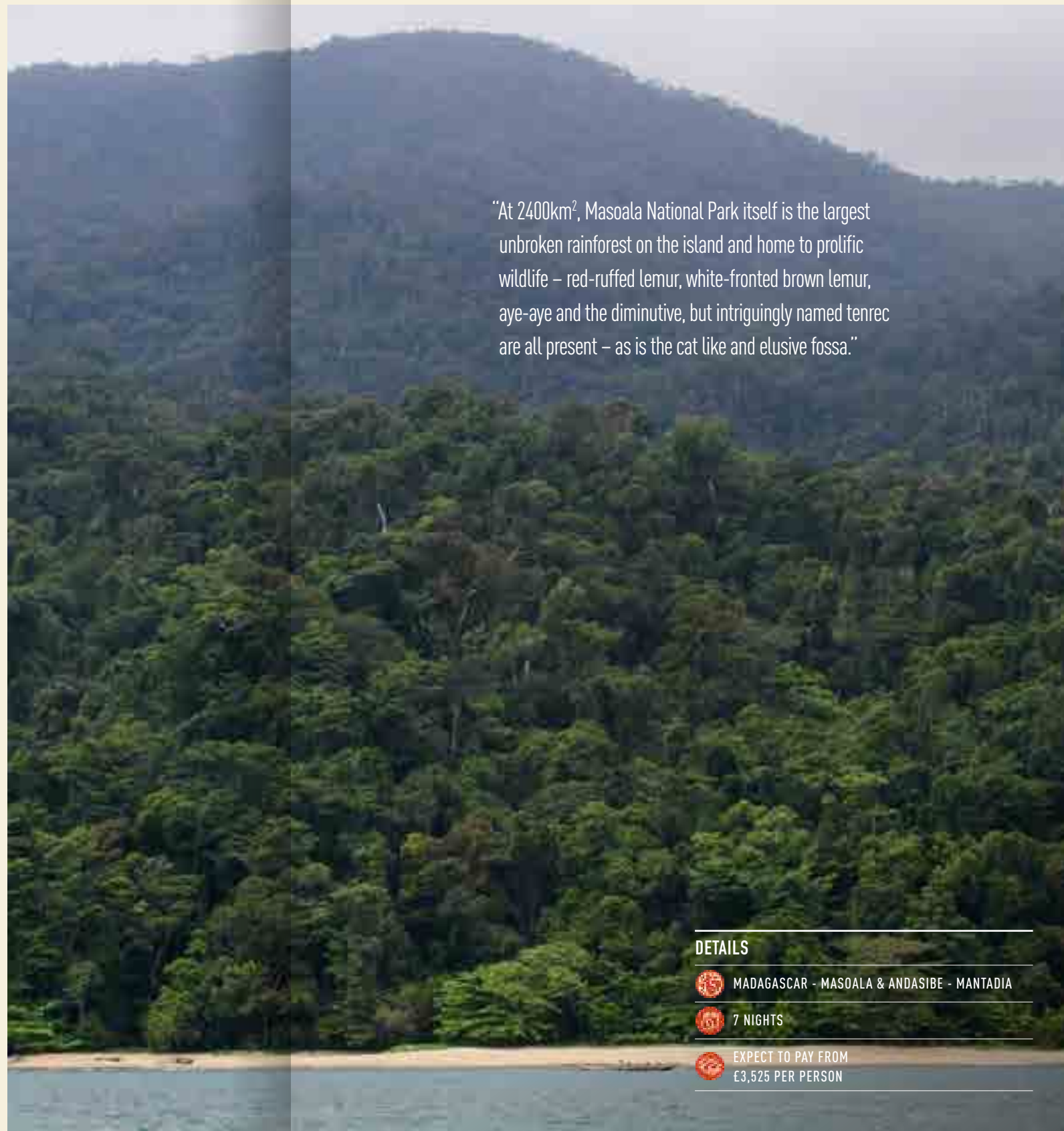
EASTERN MADAGASCAR

ALEX TOOK THE FINANCIAL TIMES ON AN EPIC JOURNEY TO DISCOVER MADAGASCAR'S ROUTE NATIONALE 5 - THE ONLY ROAD UP MADAGASCAR'S WILD EAST COAST AND A SENSATIONAL WAY TO REACH THE UNSPOILT WILDERNESS OF THE MASOALA PENINSULA.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY: ALEX EDWARDS

"The Masoala Peninsula is one of Madagascar's key wildlife regions and home to more than 50% of the island's biodiversity. Unbroken primary forests meet the shores of the Indian ocean and make this place a must for those looking to experience wild, unspoilt Madagascar."





“At 2400km², Masoala National Park itself is the largest unbroken rainforest on the island and home to prolific wildlife – red-ruffed lemur, white-fronted brown lemur, aye-aye and the diminutive, but intriguingly named tenrec are all present – as is the cat like and elusive fossa.”

DETAILS

 MADAGASCAR - MASOALA & ANDASIBE - MANTADIA

 7 NIGHTS

 EXPECT TO PAY FROM
£3,525 PER PERSON

THE RN5 — TRAVELING BACK IN TIME ON MADAGASCAR'S WILD COAST ROAD

A rocky, potholed, single-track road, riven by 13 river crossings, follows the shores of the Indian Ocean to reach Madagascar's greatest unspoilt rainforest at Masoala. It's a brutal 5-day journey and not for the faint-hearted. But along the way it reveals some of the country's greatest charms.

The RN5 (Route National 5) is the only means - by land - of connecting the port town of Tamatave with Maroansetra on Madagascar's east coast. Beyond that it leads to the sensational Masoala peninsula on the Bay of Antongil. It has a well-earned reputation for being the worst highway in the world.

Expect potholes that could swallow a Landrover, rafts made of bamboo that threaten to sink with your vehicle aboard, crumbling bridges straight from an Indiana Jones movie and river crossings ready to flood the vehicle of any driver foolish enough to ignore the tides.

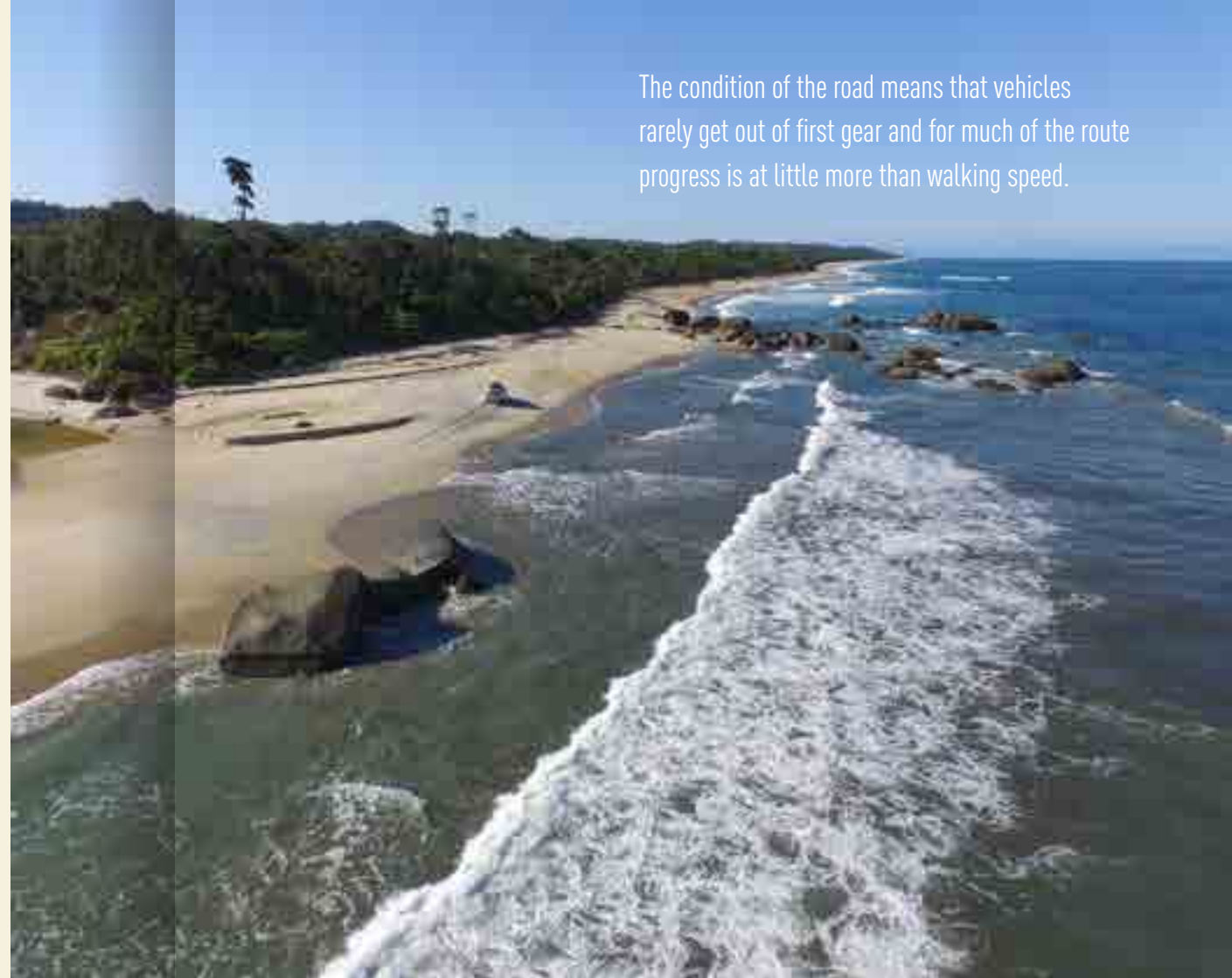
But for those who like the idea of an adventure, and who have the time and patience to take this route, the rewards are huge. After the first ferry crossing at Soanera Ivongo, the road quickly narrows to a single sandy track and for most of the journey travels either within view of - or actually on - the sandy beaches of the Indian Ocean. At most you'll find yourself traveling with a small handful of vehicles, but for large stretches you'll find yourself alone and a world away from modern Madagascar.

Small fishing villages line the route and in spice season the air is scented with vanilla and cloves that are grown throughout the region. Each corner reveals another stupendous view of empty palm-fringed beaches and turquoise waters. What's more, between July and September the ocean is alive with humpback whales that come here to breed. Virtually any time you stop you'll see the spouts of the whales and it's not uncommon to see breaches close to the shore.

The condition of the road means that vehicles rarely get out of first gear and for much of the route progress is at little more than walking speed. In the really bad sections, though this turns the drive into a gentle walk, with your Landcruiser as beast of burden, slowly picking its way over the uneven ground, while you are free to stroll and enjoy the incredible scenery. When the road improves to anything more than a walk, you hop back in. When you reach more bumps, out you get. And so it goes.

Because of the numerous rivers that cut the road along this route, there are frequent stops that lend a natural rhythm to the journey. And any one of these stops has the potential to bring things to a halt while a ferry is mended or the tide goes out. But in all honesty it's here that the charm of the journey emerges. Each stop reveals not only more breath-taking scenery, but also small clusters of tea shops that service the passing trade. Made of bamboo and resembling miniaturised wild west houses on stilts, you are

The condition of the road means that vehicles rarely get out of first gear and for much of the route progress is at little more than walking speed.





welcomed without so much as a raised eyebrow to find freshly-brewed hot coffee, crepes and freshly baked baguettes. Time passes, you shoot the breeze with fellow travellers or soak up the scenery until the tide falls / ferry arrives / bridge is mended...and the journey can continue.

The drivers who ply this route in their specially raised Toyota Landcruisers or Hiluxes (few other cars have the cojones for this job) are a breed apart, commanding real respect for their skills. For the most part, the watchword here is caution. Obstacles are navigated slowly and carefully, engines are rarely raced even among the special Taxis-brousses that ply the coastal road (for the most part Toyota Hiluxes designed with 5 seats, but carrying 22 people each.)

Accommodation along the RN5 is basic in most places – at worst, small cabins with basic sanitation. But every now and then you'll find a surprise, such as the stunning Chez Grandin run by Celine, originally from Reunion, offering stunning views over a palm-lined lagoon and the best pork (cooked in rosemary) I can remember tasting.


So who should take the RN5? If any of the things above put you off, this road simply isn't for you. If, however, you have the time (you'll need to build in contingency time in case of delays) and you are happy to rough it, eat simple local food and take things as they come, you may just find – as we did – that this is a way to make the journey to Masoala a magical experience in its own right.


Natural High offers hardy travellers the chance to travel the RN5 with a private specially equipped landcruiser with guide, driver and road boy.

DROP US A LINE IF YOU'D LIKE TO HEAR MORE: +44 (0) 1747 830950



DETAILS

 MADAGASCAR - RN5 & MASOALA

 11 NIGHTS

 EXPECT TO PAY FROM
£4,700 PER PERSON






ALL AT SEA

DISCOVER ALL THE UNDERWATER
MARVELS THAT MADAGASCAR
AND THE GALAPAGOS HAS
TO OFFER.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY: ALEX EDWARDS



DETAILS	
	MADAGASCAR
	10 DAYS
	EXPECT TO PAY FROM £3,915 PER PERSON

MADAGASCAR'S HUMPBACK WHALES: WHEN, WHERE AND HOW TO SEE THEM

Maybe it's because Madagascar is such a cornucopia of natural wonders that so little has been made of the annual arrival of the Humpback Whales which is only now starting to gain attention.

Whale-watching is a global phenomenon with hotspots found from Alaska to Tahiti. Surprisingly perhaps, for an island so synonymous with endemism, Madagascar is right up there among the best of them.

Arguably the most rewarding of all the whales to watch is the Humpback, with their famously photogenic habit of breaching (propelling two-thirds or more of their body out of the sea and splashing down on their backs) and raising their enormous fluked tails out of the water when diving. The fact that they are approachable and curious as well as active and entertaining only adds to their appeal.

Humpback Whales are found in seas and oceans around the world and their numbers have been gradually recovering since the 1966 global ban on whaling came in to force, current estimates stand around 80,000 individuals. Yet despite these numbers and their massive range (undertaking the longest migrations of any mammal) finding them is not necessarily straightforward - because although they are big (around 36 tonnes and over fifty-foot long) the oceans are vast.

Happily however, Humpbacks migrate to tropical waters to calve and every year from late June to September females gather to give birth to their calves in waters surrounding Madagascar - particularly in the shallow channel between the mainland and Île Saine Mairie running north in to Antogil Bay by the Masoala Peninsular.

For anyone considering visiting Madagascar it is definitely worth considering doing so in the northern summer (June to September) months and including some time on the east coast of the island. Watching the Humpbacks can be done in relative luxury in Masoala - flying in and out of Tana - and for those looking for adventure the incomparable drive up the Route National 5 will give ample opportunity to spot these behemoths cruising up this most spectacular of coastlines.



GALAPAGOS

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS ARE SOME OF THE MOST COMMON MARINE MAMMALS IN THE GALAPAGOS, CAPABLE OF GREAT SPEED AND BREATH-TAKING ACROBATICS, THEY OFTEN APPEAR IN THE CHANNEL BETWEEN ISABELA AND FERNANDINA TO BOW RIDE, ESPECIALLY BETWEEN JUNE AND OCTOBER. THE CONVERGENCE OF CURRENTS AND THE PRISTINE QUALITIES OF THE WATER HAS BROUGHT AN EXTREME VARIETY OF MARINE LIFE.

The islands are home to over 24 different species of dolphin and whale as well as penguins, green sea turtles, whale sharks, hammerheads and rays and those who wish to dive are often rewarded with seeing the world's largest fish, the whale shark, around the archipelago of Darwin and Wolf Islands.

DETAILS



GALAPAGOS BOAT CHARTER:
Cruise on a 12 berth 105ft
brigantine yacht, The Beagle



7 NIGHTS



EXPECT TO PAY FROM
£3,000 PER PERSON





"Ours was a mobile safari. We went in one Landcruiser; our cook, crew, tents and kit in another. We were travelling light but heavy enough that we had proper beds, simple and delicious food, and thousands of miles of wilderness to explore. With Sven quietly doing all the worrying, I realised, the rest of us were gifted a blissfully carefree adventure. Even when things went mildly wrong the experience only became more enjoyable."

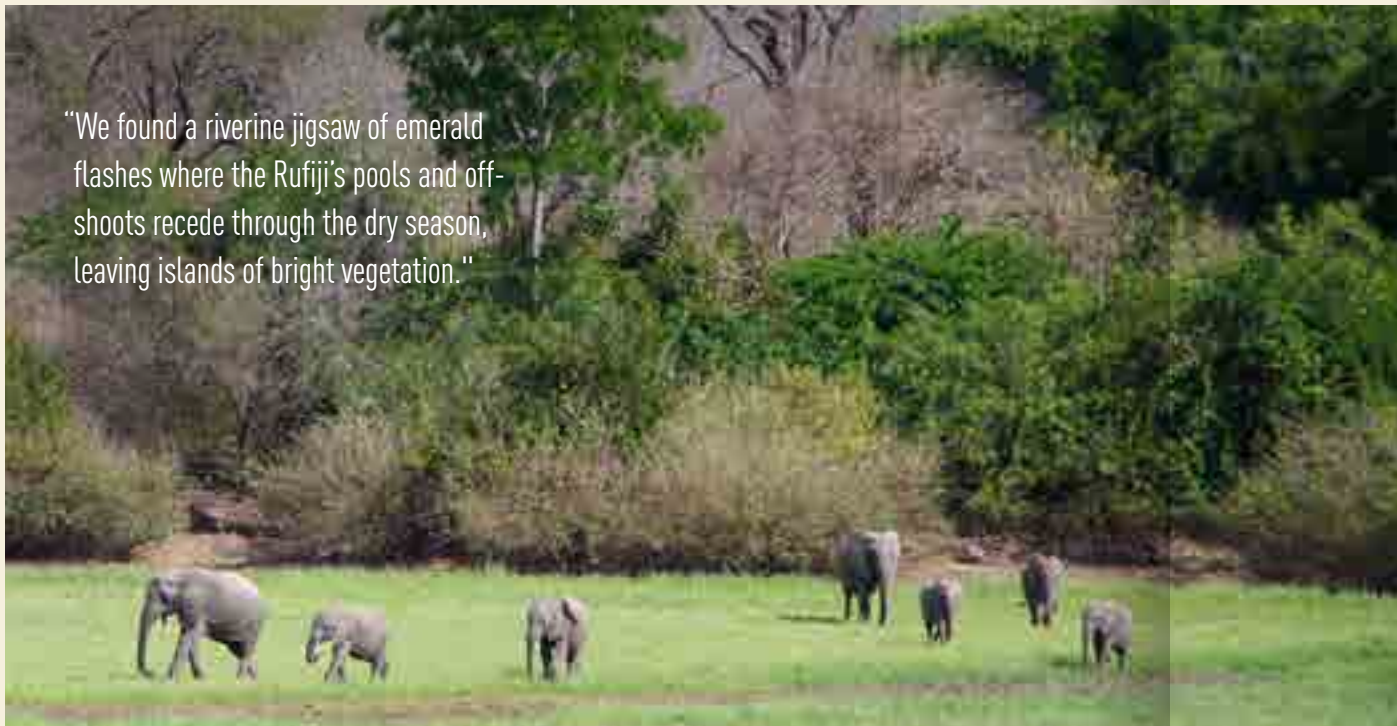
FINANCIAL TIMES

FINANCIAL TIMES

SELOUS, UDZUNGWA AND RUAHA WITH A PRIVATE MOBILE CAMP

FOR FAMILIES, THE LUXURY AND FLEXIBILITY OF A PRIVATE SAFARI CAMP CAN MAKE FOR A TRULY UNFORGETTABLE HOLIDAY. **ROD** TOOK **HORATIO CLARE** AND FAMILY OFF THE BEATEN TRACK IN SOUTHERN TANZANIA SO THEY COULD EXPERIENCE IT FOR THEMSELVES.

"We found a riverine jigsaw of emerald flashes where the Rufiji's pools and off-shoots recede through the dry season, leaving islands of bright vegetation."



"Elephants allow you to pull up alongside them. I studied a young bull's flank, the skin lined as if the thumb prints of the creator had pressed him out of clay."





"The great Ruaha river turns slowly through the park's low hills and plains. There are kopjes of rock, tall golden grasses, infinitely clear skies filled with stars at night, and animals everywhere."



"Two male lions were waking as the sun rose. One of them roared at the morning, great gusting blasts of sound that you could feel through your feet. For a moment he and his brother mock-battled, leaping out of sloth with sudden speed and mighty grace. It was wonderfully terrifying."

"We were travelling light but heavy enough that we had proper beds, simple and delicious food, and thousands of miles of wilderness to explore."



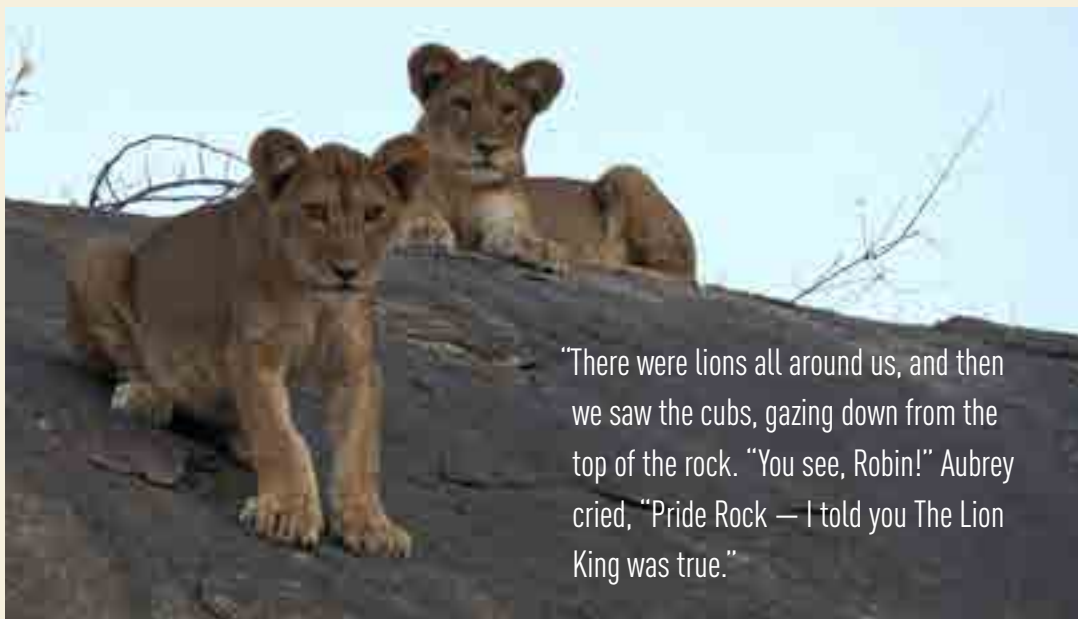
"I had been privileged to visit Africa's great parks before, but the miracle of Ruaha is the sense of travelling in time, to a world as pristine as Eden."



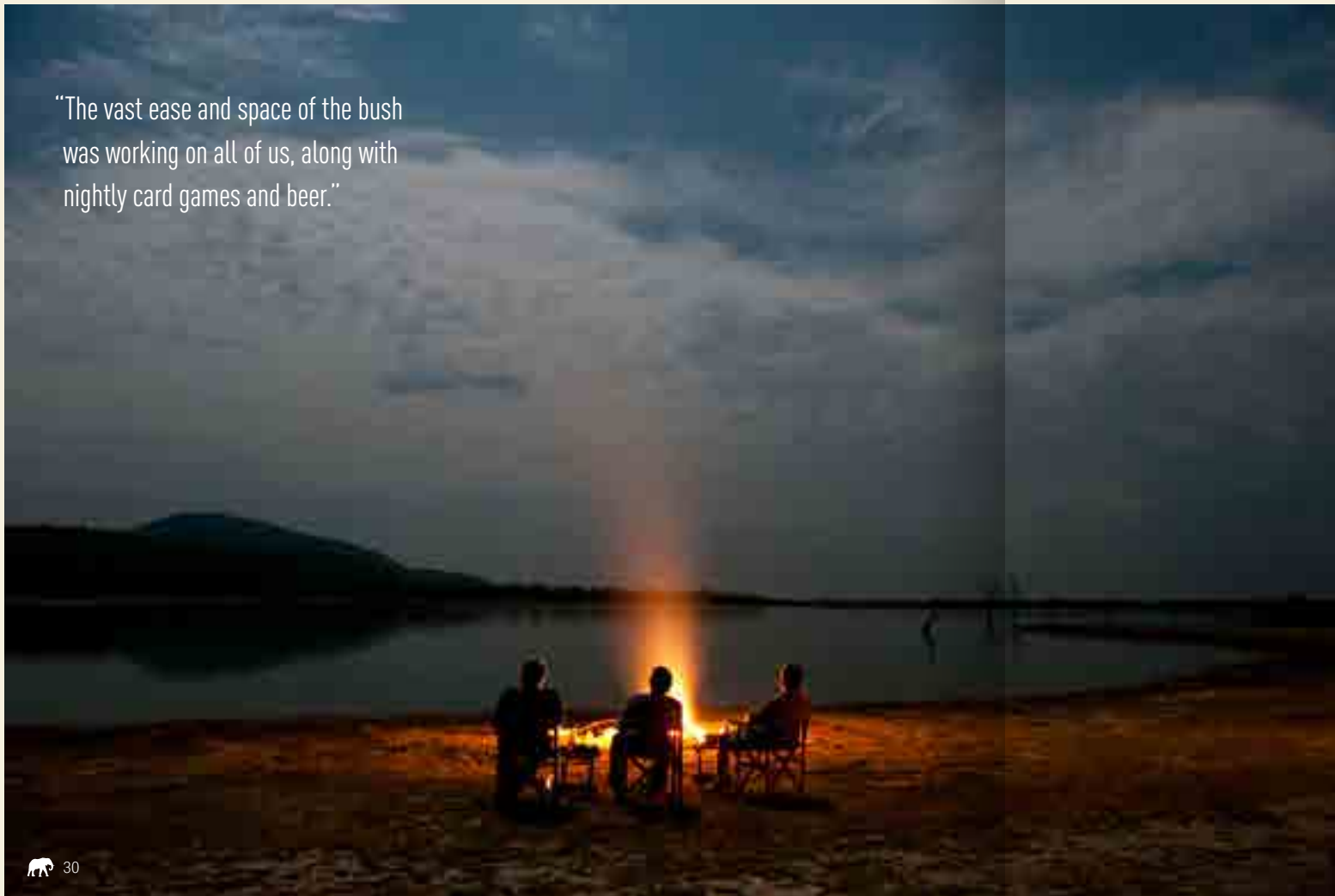
A PROPER JOURNEY

There is a danger on safari that it all becomes about parachuting in from one game-rich area to another and really not spending any time on the ground other than in national parks and hence garnering very little about how the country works and how the wilderness areas fit in with other parts of the country. The beauty of a road trip accross southern Tanzania is that you can spend time in wildly contrasting areas and see how one merges is to another - a real journey through a wild land.

If you'd like to discuss some ideas we'd be happy to put together some ideas and prices for you to look at - say the word and we'll get the ball rolling. Alternatively for a little inspiration, watch our video at [naturalhigh.com](https://www.naturalhigh.com)



"There were lions all around us, and then we saw the cubs, gazing down from the top of the rock. "You see, Robin!" Aubrey cried, "Pride Rock — I told you The Lion King was true."



"The vast ease and space of the bush was working on all of us, along with nightly card games and beer."

SAMPLE TRIP: SOUTHERN TANZANIA

Southern Tanzania has plenty to coincide with the school holidays – June to August is wonderful time to visit as is the October half term and the Christmas New Year period.

After journeying through southern Tanzania you may want to consider a few days of R&R on the beach along the coast or on Zanzibar, Pemba or Mafia Islands.

There's a danger on safari that it all becomes about parachuting in from one game-rich area to another without spending time on the ground other than in national parks. The beauty of a road trip like this is that it connects three superb parks –Selous, Udzungwa and Ruaha – and allows families to learn more about how the country works beyond the national parks and how key wilderness areas fit in with other parts of the country. As in all our safaris there's plenty of scope to mix and match, combining a few nights with a light mobile camp with small lodges and to drive some legs while flying others.

DETAILS



SOUTHERN TANZANIA



8 NIGHTS

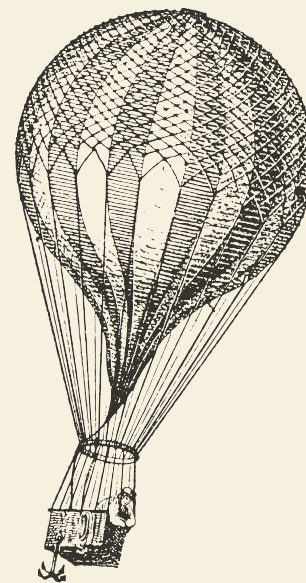


EXPECT TO PAY FROM
£3,200 PER PERSON

THE 6 BEST PLACES TO SEE WILD DOGS



WHEN TO GO

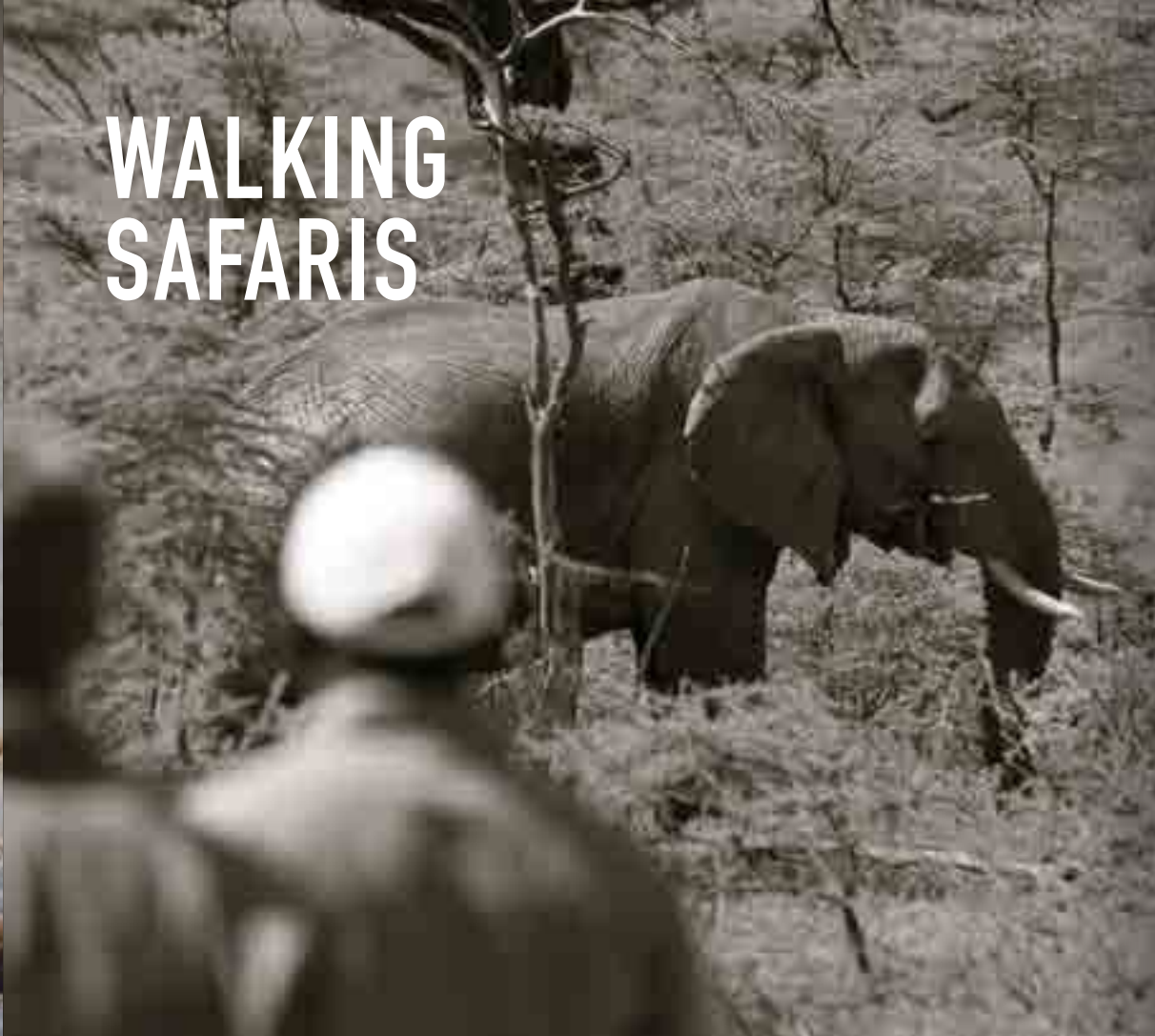


Our at-a-glance guide to where to go and what to see. Including the times of year when low season rates combine with great wildlife and few other travellers to create our low season gems (with low season gem icon). For further details on any of the places or experiences included, please do drop us a line and we'll be happy to help.

EPIC WILDLIFE



WALKING SAFARIS



FAMILY ADVENTURES



GREAT APES



EPIC WILDLIFE

<div><div></div><div>High season</div><div></div><div>Low season gems</div></div>												
COUNTRY	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Botswana	💎	💎	💎	💎	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	💎	💎
Chad	💎	🟢	🟢	🟢								
Kenya	🟢	🟢	💎			🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢		🟢
Namibia	💎	💎	💎	💎	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	💎	💎
South Africa	💎	💎	💎	💎	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	💎	💎
Tanzania	🟢	🟢	💎	💎	💎	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	💎	🟢
Zambia					💎	💎	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	💎	💎
Zimbabwe				💎	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢			
Central India	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	💎	💎				💎	💎	💎
Galapagos	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	💎	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	💎	💎	🟢
Madagascar				🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢

WALKING SAFARIS

WALKING SAFARIS

High season

Low season gems

COUNTRY	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Kenya	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>			<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>		<div></div>
Tanzania	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
Zambia						<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>		
Zimbabwe						<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>		

FAMILY ADVENTURES

FAMILY ADVENTURES

High season

Low season gems

COUNTRY	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Botswana	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
Kenya	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>			<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>		<div></div>
Madagascar				<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
Namibia	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
South Africa	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
Tanzania	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
Zambia			<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>		<div></div>
Bhutan	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
India	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
Nepal	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>				<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
Galapagos	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>

GREAT APES

<div><div></div><div>High season</div><div></div><div>Low season gems</div></div>												
COUNTRY	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Congo Brazeville	🟢	🟢	🟢			🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
DR Congo	🟢	🟢	🟢			🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢			🟢
Gabon				🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢				
Rwanda	🟢	🟢	🟢			🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢			🟢
Uganda	🟢	🟢	🟢			🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢			🟢
Western Tanzania	💎	💎	💎			🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	💎	💎



7 NIGHT WALKING SAFARI

Walk over a number of days through some of the most remote and beautiful parts of the Serengeti. Expect a dedicated crew, large dome tents, a mess tent, three course sit down meals and some of the best wildlife in Tanzania all to yourself.

DETAILS



TANZANIA



7 NIGHTS



EXPECT TO PAY FROM
£2,995 PER PERSON

“
THE BEST
THINGS IN LIFE
AREN'T THINGS



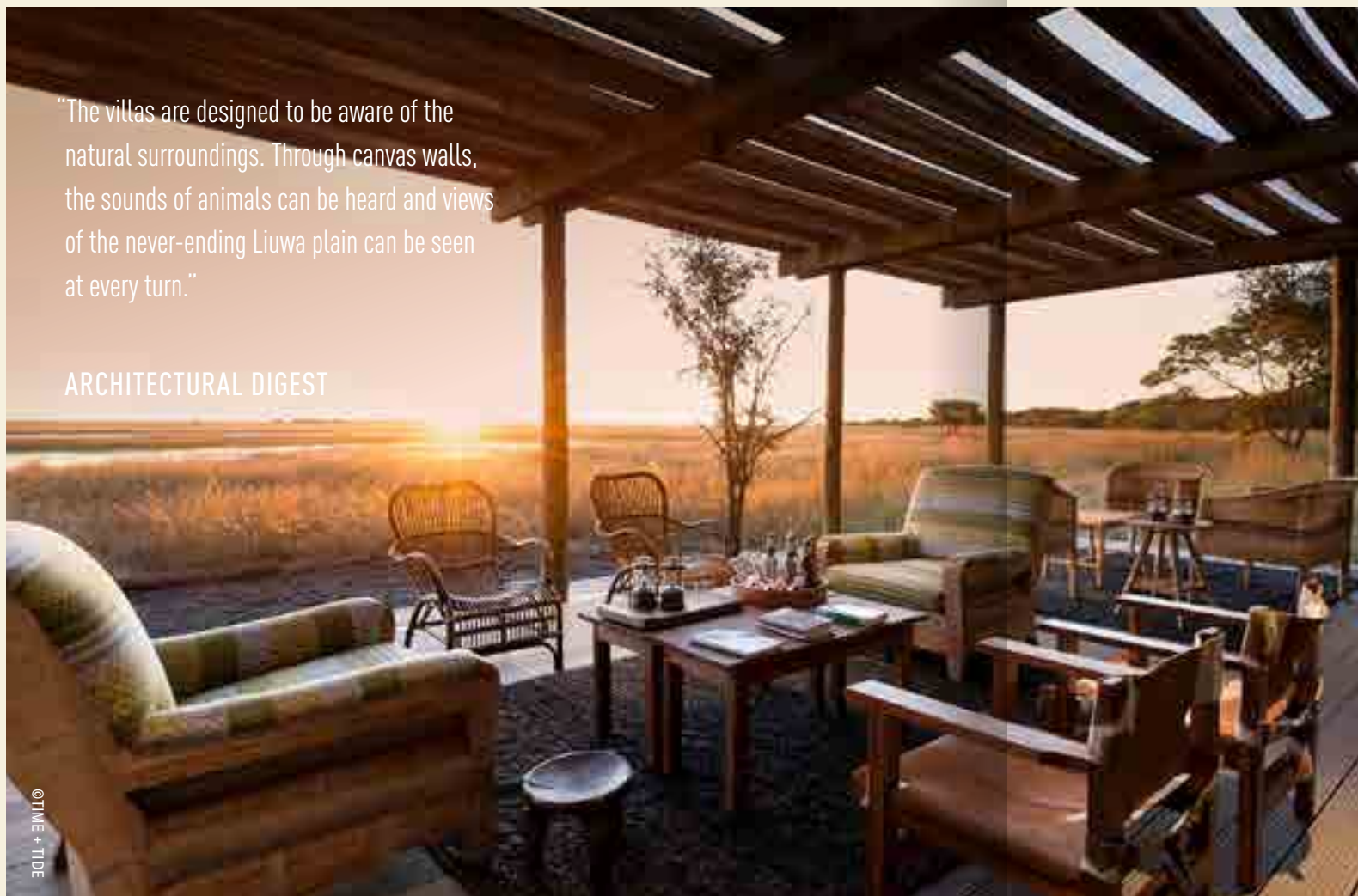
CATHERINE'S TRIP TO ZAMBIA — ELEPHANT CAFÉ, KAFUE NATIONAL PARK & LIUWA PLAINS

Elephants are my favourite animals in Africa and my recent trip to Zambia provided the most wonderful experience of interacting with these gentle giants. A visit to The Elephant Café on the banks of the Zambezi River about 15 kms upstream from Livingstone provides not only a chance to feed the elephants (rescued from Zimbabwe) but also to feed yourself with the most delicious cuisine (lunch, tea or dinner) with locally produced ingredients.

Travelling to the café by jet boat is definitely worthwhile as it is great fun and you also see wild ellies and of course hippos. Arriving at the café by boat, you are greeted by the elephants, given an introduction and then spend about an hour feeding each one. They are then taken to the river for a wash and drink while you embark on your gourmet meal.

"The villas are designed to be aware of the natural surroundings. Through canvas walls, the sounds of animals can be heard and views of the never-ending Liuwa plain can be seen at every turn."

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST



©TIME + TIDE





SAMPLE TRIP: ELEPHANT CAFE, KAFUE NATIONAL PARK & LIUWA PLAINS

'Enjoy three very different experiences in Zambia - The Elephant Café near Livingstone, a charming setting to come face to face with Africa's gentle giants and enjoy superb cuisine. Kafue National Park also provides regular sightings of elephant as they come to drink from the permanent channel in front of Musekese Camp. Superb game drives, both walks and boating are offered as part of the safari activities making this a location not to be missed.

Moving on to the Liuwa Plains, home to Africa's second largest wildebeest migration. Staying at the luxurious and newly opened King Lewanika Camp, you will enjoy fantastic views across the huge plains and always with something different and interesting to see.'

DETAILS

 ZAMBIA

 10 DAYS

 EXPECT TO PAY FROM
£6,320 PER PERSON



©TIME + TIDE



BIG LIFE UPDATE:



A note from the Director:

The end of the dry season is always a tense time for both people and wildlife, everything is in short supply, which manifests itself in many different ways.

/// BIG LIFE FOUNDATION

Hungry wildlife push the boundaries leaving safe areas in search of fodder, and worse, the irrigation fed tomato farms become irresistible. This inevitably leads to conflict. Bushmeat poaching also peaks this period, mainly driven by lack of economic returns in agriculture and therefore trade in bushmeat increases.

Conversely, it's a time of plenty for predators as prey species and livestock are weak, roaming further in search of pasture. In this process we have seen depredation of livestock more than double.

A difficult time of year and as a result our Big Life Foundation rangers, backed by our Tracker Dog Unit, have been busy.

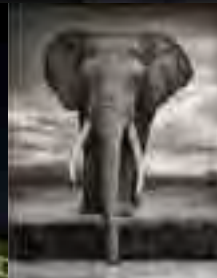
During the third quarter of 2017, Big Life rangers have:

- patrolled 22,793km by foot and 63,669km by vehicle.
- arrested 96 suspects in 45 incidents of illegal activity. Of these, 54 suspects were arrested in 29 poaching-related incidents, including 26 suspected trophy dealers.
- recovered 338 kg of ivory from arrests.

It's a huge achievement and congratulations to Head of Security, Craig Millar, and his team for this success. At the same time, it's a stark reminder that the ivory trade is still alive and well, despite a dip in the black market price of ivory. It also underlines the fact that while ivory has any value, the killing will continue.

Richard Bonham, Director of Operations
Big Life Foundation

Natural High are proud to be sponsoring a team of Big Life's Tracker dogs in 2017.



BIG LIFE
FOUNDATION



WILD INDIA AT ITS BEST: SATPURA

JUSTIFIABLY FAMED FOR ITS STRIPED BIG CAT, A SAFARI IN INDIA CAN BECOME A TIGER-CENTRIC HUNT. ANDREA HULME SUGGESTS HEADING AWAY FROM THE BEST-KNOWN TIGER HOT-SPOTS FOR A TRUE WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE IN SATPURA NATIONAL PARK.



Few experiences can compare to the thrill of tracking tiger in their natural habitat and a good sighting of this powerful beast is sure to make every hair on your body stand on end. It's something that will stay with you forever. But once you've had your fix, there's a diverse range of wildlife to discover in quieter sanctuaries that most visitors never reach.

Although still little known, Satpura is now one of the most promising tiger reserves in India and visitors have the chance to see tiger, leopard, wild dog, sloth bear and gaur all within one reserve. In total there are 52 species of mammals, 300 species of birds and 31 species of reptiles found here. Leopard, wild dog and sloth bear sightings were all good in the last year. Although virtually unheard of previously, tiger are also occasionally spotted; several breeding tiger moved into an area where there was once a village and herbivores have repopulated the grassy clearings providing plenty of prey. Satpura is the only park in Central India with a healthy population of Indian Giant Squirrel and sightings are good throughout the dry season.

The Satpura ranges, or Mahadeo Hills in India's Central Highlands were one of the last places to be 'discovered' by the English Raj authorities in the 1860's, the rugged landscape and dense forests making the region challenging to explore. The park, created in 1981, is tiny compared to those in Africa but its area of 524km² is trebled by the adjoining sanctuaries of Bori and Panchmari, creating a unique highland ecosystem in India. Bori Sanctuary was the first forest in India to be brought under conservation in 1882, which ultimately led to the creation of the Indian Forest Department.

The mountainous terrain is what gives Satpura its beauty; its name means seven mountains in Sanskrit. The flat country of the west gradually ascends into steep slopes to the east of the park with the sandstone peak of Dhoopgarh (1352m) rising from the plains of Marai and Churna (300m), deep ravines, dense Sal and mixed forests, and sheltered coves and bays of Tewa Lake bordering the park. The only way into Satpura is across the Denwa River. The park is open to visitors from mid-October until the end of June, during what is the dry season. It begins with warm days and nights but from December to February the temperature can drop to just 4 or 5°C; a warm coat, hat and gloves are needed first thing in the morning for game drives in open jeeps. May to June are very hot (40-50°C).

Being part of the Central Indian forest ecosystem, Satpura is rich in biodiversity. A combination of different climatic and edaphic factors at varying altitudes has given rise to a rich flora and the park is home to over 1,300 species of plants. Trees most commonly found include teak, sal, East Indian ebony and bel (stone apple), as well as Palas whose flowers streak the forest with vermillion in March. Other plants include bamboos and grasses in addition to orchids, bryophytes, rare and endemic ferns.



PHOTO CREDIT: RENIPANI, PUGDUNDEE SAFARIS



PHOTO CREDIT: RENIPANI, PUGDUNDEE SAFARIS



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The only way into the park is to cross the Denwa River. The atmosphere at Satpura is relaxed and there's peace in which to explore. Vehicles are limited to just a dozen at any one time, and, unusually for India, there's also the option to explore on foot, by boat and canoe, and even on elephant back. Night safaris can be made in the 'buffer zone' immediately surrounding the park.

Satpura is also the only park in India where it's possible to camp – your private mobile camp is pitched in a forest clearing when the river is in full spate or on its dry sandy river bed once it recedes later in the season. Set up as part of a walking safari the walk-in tents are spacious enough, with camp beds made up with crisp fresh linen and a separate bathroom tent all looked after by caring team of staff. The chance to spend a night or two under canvas in the wilderness is to feel you're part of nature instead of just an observer. And the night skies are simply sensational.

On foot in Satpura, armed with only a stick and pepper spray for protection from a potential predator, as you crunch through the leaf litter your expert guide interprets the guttural bark of a sambar deer - an alarm call - and picks out prints and tracks in dust and damp soil, taking the time to reveal the many secrets of the forest. The deeply gouged trunk of a ghost tree turns out to have been by the claws of a sloth bear, its shaggy coat and Disney's Jungle Book character of Baloo the antithesis of this irascible creature notorious for getting drunk on the fermenting fallen flowers of the mahua tree. A jeep covers more ground but setting out on your own two feet couldn't be more different to game viewing from a vehicle and brings the forest to life.

There are just a few places to stay at Satpura and the small comfortable lodges are run by avid conservationists. All have made huge efforts to work with the local authorities to offer a genuine safari experience in India; it should be on the must visit list of every nature and wildlife enthusiast.

TIGER CONSERVATION

At the turn of the 20th century, it was estimated there were around 40,000 tigers in India but the first ever all India tiger census in 1972 shockingly revealed the existence of just 1827. A ban on tiger hunting had only been imposed 1970. The government initiated a plan for tiger conservation and Project Tiger was launched in 1973 with the creation of nine tiger reserves. There are now 47 and it is believed that 70% of the world's tigers are in India but it remains classified as Endangered on the ICUN Red List. The last census in India in 2014 put the Bengal Tiger number at 2,226 but this figure has been doubted by conservationists and methodology questioned by some scientists. The next census is planned in 2018. For the first time India and Nepal, which share forest corridors used by wild animals to traverse the two countries, plan to co-operate and conduct their surveys at the same time. Watch this space for further news.

There are just 2500-3500 wild tigers left in the world.



PHOTO CREDIT: ASHISH TIRKE, PUGDUNDEE SAFARIS



PHOTO CREDIT: KARAN SINGH KOTLA, PUGDUNDEE SAFARIS



PHOTO CREDIT: NIPUN MAHATO, PUGDUNDEE SAFARIS



THE BEST OF WILD INDIA

There's plenty to enjoy on your journey through the hills of central India to Satpura and Jamtara Wilderness Camp in Pench National Park is just one of them. The 10 airy tents are comfortably furnished with Art Deco chairs and desks salvaged at sales from Indian embassies and the Supreme Court but the more adventurous shouldn't miss the opportunity to sleep out under a canopy of shooting stars.

Inspired by the simple 'machaans' where farmers sleep out in the middle of the fields to protect their land and crops at crucial times, for a night you'll never forget, lay your head on a 'star bed', a netted four-poster on a stilted wooden platform that gives uninterrupted views of the Milky Way. Drift asleep to the scents and sounds of the wilderness.

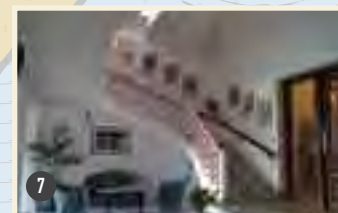




WILD INDIA AT IT'S BEST: THE JOURNEY TO SATPURA


For wildlife connoisseurs Satpura is a richly rewarding, but getting there is half the adventure and something quite special. The journey to reach this wilderness is a chance to experience some of India's rich cultural heritage from palaces, hill stations and jungle walks to overnight train journeys.

- 1 Fly into Delhi to begin your adventure before heading south to the iconic city of Agra
- 2 After viewing the Taj Mahal at Agra board an overnight train to Central India. Don't forget to try a steaming cup of sweet and spicy chai at the station before you climb aboard; your berth number and age are on a list pasted next to the carriage door
- 3 Spend a couple of days in Kanha National Park, famed for its tiger sightings, and rare barasingha (swamp deer) recently saved from near extinction.
- 4 Continue to Pench, the setting for Kipling's Jungle Book; following morning and afternoon game drives spend the nights in a tree house with uninterrupted views of the deciduous forest and grassland, or sleep in a star bed beneath the constellations.
- 5 Transfer through rural India to Pachmarhi and spend a night exploring this colonial hill station, its waterfalls and viewpoints.
- 6 Once in little-known Satpura enjoy exploration of the forests, rivers and lakes by jeep, canoe and elephant back.
- 7 On the final leg of your journey, at Bhopal take a step back in time with a short stay at Jehan Numa, a former palace to thebegums - Muslim queens who ruled over India for more than a century.



DETAILS

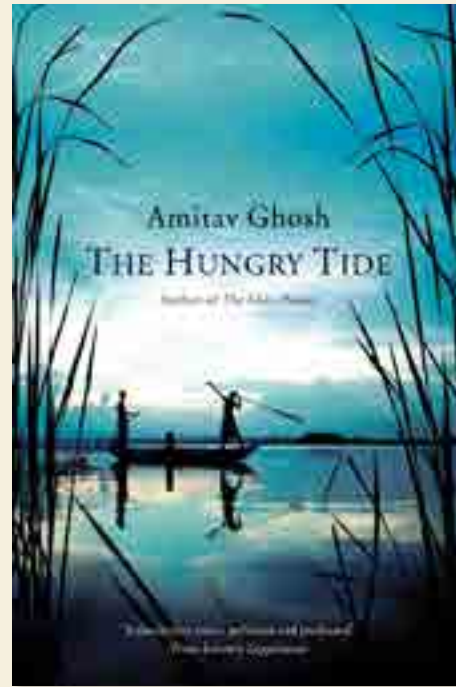
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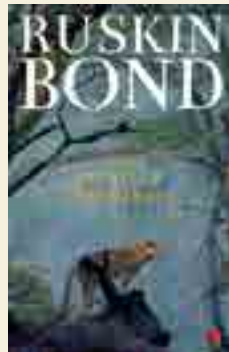
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Jim Corbett



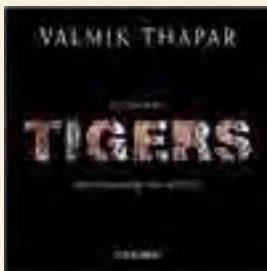
2. THE HUNGRY TIDE
Amitav Ghosh



3. THE TIGER CHILD
Joanna Troughton



4. THE JUNGLE
OMNIBUS
Ruskin Bind



5. MY LIFE WITH TIGERS
Valmik Thapar



6. THE JUNGLE BOOK
Rudyard Kipling

6

BOOKS TO TAKE YOU TO THE INDIAN JUNGLE



GABON 2018

STRADDLING THE EQUATOR, GABON IS AN INCURABLY EXOTIC COUNTRY -LARGER THAN THE UNITED KINGDOM WITH A POPULATION SMALLER THAN STOCKHOLM, IT'S HOME TO VAST EXPANSES OF UNEXPLORED WILDERNESS. 80% OF THE COUNTRY IS FOREST-FILLED WHILE 13 RECENTLY CREATED NATIONAL PARKS ACCOUNT FOR 12% OF THE TOTAL AREA, PROVIDING SHELTER FOR A CORNUCOPIA OF WILDLIFE.

ROD'S OFF TO GABON...

GABON'S TOP 10* WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS (*INCLUDING ONE MYTH):

1. **Mandrill:** The planet's largest and most colourful monkey congregate in mega-troops of several hundred within Lopé National Park between June and October, surprisingly perhaps it still takes perseverance, patience and a dollop of good-luck to locate them, even in these massive groups.
2. **Lowland Gorilla:** It's possible to encounter habituated groups of Lowland Gorilla in both Ivindo and Loango, two of only four National Parks in Africa where this is currently achievable.
3. **Forest Elephant:** Smaller, finer tusked and gentler than their savannah cousins around 40,000 Forest Elephant live in Gabon's forests.
4. **West African Manatee:** Resembling gigantic half-tonne maggots Manatees are wholly aquatic, elusive and largely nocturnal - generally inconspicuous although certainly present.
5. **Migrating Whale:** Between July and October an estimated 800-1,500 Humpback Whales visit Gabon's coastal waters which serves as an important breeding area.
6. **Spectacular Birding:** 777 species make up the country list with easy access to a host of tricky lowland specials.
7. **A plethora of primates:** In addition to **Gorilla** and **Mandrill**, Gabon's marvellous assemblage of primates include Chimpanzees, three species of Mangabey and Colobus, Moustached, Putty-nosed, Crowned, De Brazza's and Sun-tailed Monkeys.
8. **Nesting Turtles:** Gabon's beaches are world-renowned nesting grounds for Leatherback Turtles, the world's largest turtle weighing in at over 600kgs and measuring up to two metres in length.
9. **Photogenic Forest Buffalo:** Distinctive swept back horns preventing any snagging on Forest branches, this close relation to the Cape Buffalo is likely to be regularly encountered.
10. **Surfing hippos (not):** Paradoxically the near-mythical ocean-going hippo of Gabon are largely to blame for a false-dawn in Gabon's tourism.

Gabon offers up an embarrassment of riches to any naturalist with wildlife surprises for even the most seasoned safari enthusiast. The country is an oasis of stability in a region long mired by troubles. Infrastructure is reasonable and the greatest battle is between man and nature. Long-dubbed Africa's Eden it remains little-visited, so the chance to visit a country with so much left to explore was more than we could resist.



PHOTOGRAPHIC SAFARI WITH PAUL JOYNSON-HICKS MBE

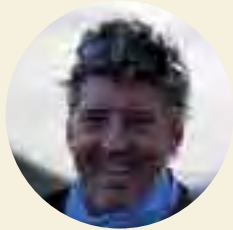
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ALL PHOTOGRAPHS: TAKEN FROM CATHERINE'S PHOTOGRAPHIC SAFARI WITH PAUL LAST YEAR.

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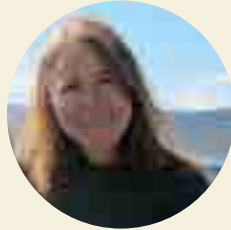
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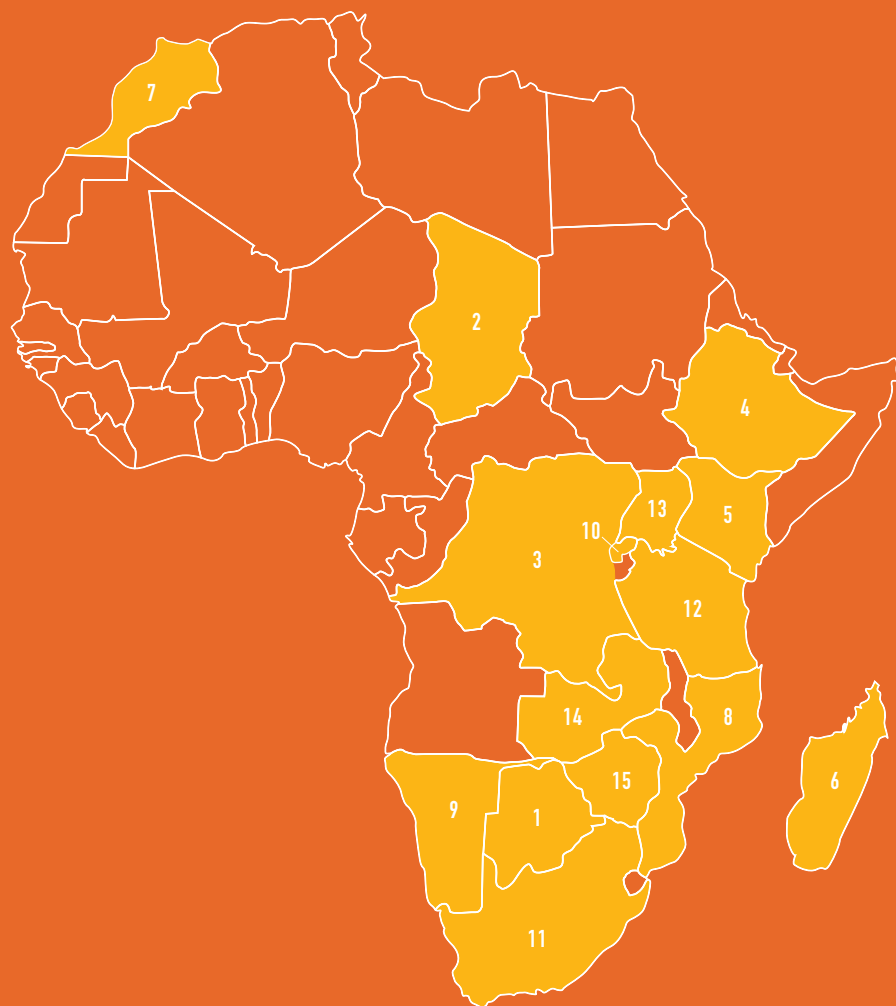
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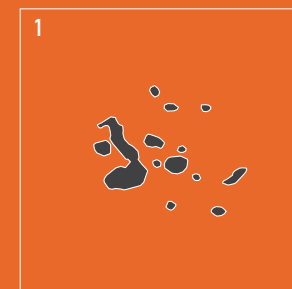
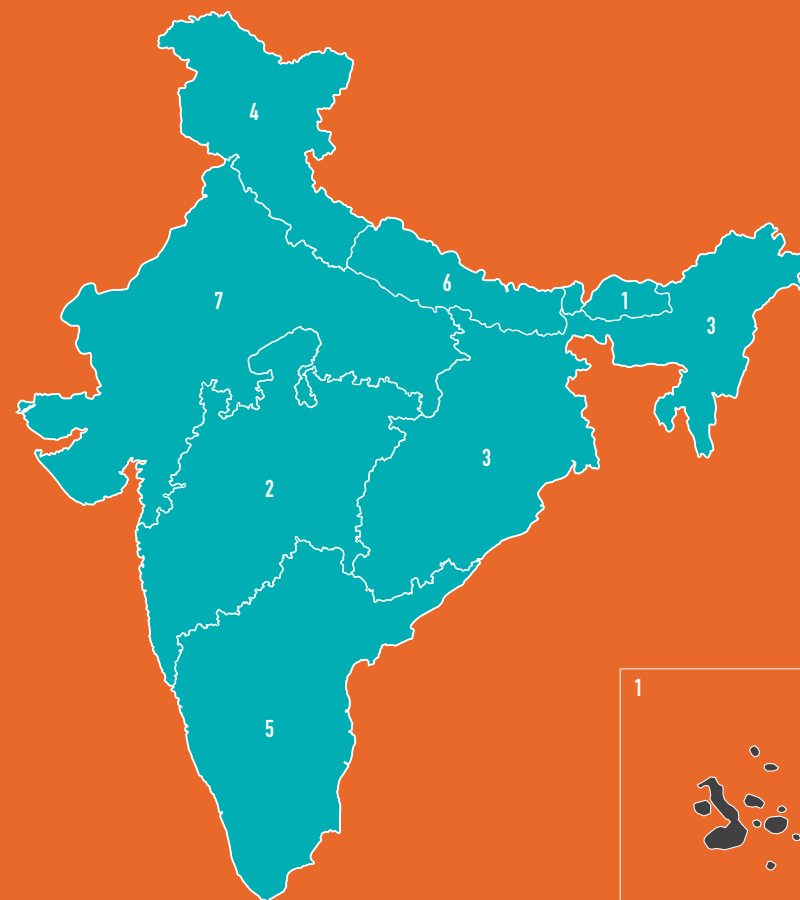


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|--------------|---------------|------------------|--------------|
| 1. BOTSWANA | 5. KENYA | 9. NAMIBIA | 13. UGANDA |
| 2. CHAD | 6. MADAGASCAR | 10. RWANDA | 14. ZAMBIA |
| 3. THE CONGO | 7. MOROCCO | 11. SOUTH AFRICA | 15. ZIMBABWE |
| 4. ETHIOPIA | 8. MOZAMBIQUE | 12. TANZANIA | |

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