



# Go wild

**Michael Stoneman** takes a walk on the wild side to discover what the world's coolest safari destinations have to offer

One of Africa's biggest draws for holidaymakers is undoubtedly its enormous wealth of wildlife. Few experiences can match the thrill of searching for the 'Big Five' of lion, leopard, elephant, rhino and buffalo on the sweeping plains of the continent's southern and eastern countries. But for those with budgets as vast as those sprawling savannahs, going on safari needn't involve

roughing it in a tent or sacrificing any of the luxuries to which they are accustomed. Discerning wildlife-spotters can now explore the African wilderness from the comfort of luxury safari camps and lodges in stunning locations, with facilities that are second to none.

## DUBA PLAINS, BOTSWANA

Dominated by the vast Kalahari desert, the relatively un-spoilt and

sparsely populated Botswana is widely regarded as having some of the best wilderness areas in Africa, with almost 40% of the country's total land area devoted to national parks, reserves and wildlife management areas – most of which are unfenced, allowing animals to roam wild and free.

Situated deep within the Kalahari Basin, the Okavango Delta is often referred to as the 'jewel' of the Kalahari, offering visitors some excellent game and bird viewing opportunities, often from a traditional mokoro – a dug-out canoe that can access the labyrinth of waterways, and lagoons on the floodplains.

In the remote reaches of the Okavango Delta lies Duba Plains – an intimate safari camp

surrounded by these expansive, seasonally flooded plains. The camp is situated on a tree-filled island in a private 310km<sup>2</sup> (120 sq mi) concession known as the Kwedi Reserve – an area famed for lion prides and buffalo herds. Boasting six spacious tents with en-suite bathrooms, outside showers and verandas overlooking the floodplain, Duba Plains has all the necessary creature comforts, as well as a swimming pool and thatch-roofed lounge, dining room and bar areas on raised platforms, all providing beautiful views. [www.greatplainsconservation.com](http://www.greatplainsconservation.com), [www.botswanaturism.co.bw](http://www.botswanaturism.co.bw)

## MAASAI MARA, KENYA

As home to the largest overland animal migration in the world,

the iconic Maasai Mara National Reserve makes Kenya one of the most exciting destinations for a luxury safari holiday. Each year, between mid-August and late October, two million wildebeest, zebra and gazelle migrate across the Mara between the borders of Kenya and Tanzania, providing visitors with a front-row seat to one of Mother Nature's most exciting displays.

For a truly unique view of this remarkable spectacle, a dawn balloon safari is an unmissable experience, giving you the chance to float discreetly over the great herds below.

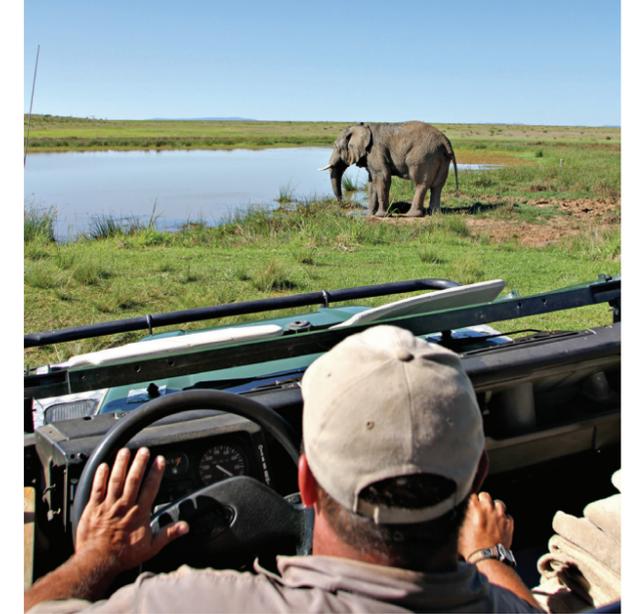
Back on terra firma, the Fairmont Mara Safari Club provides a luxurious base for more wildlife spotting, with each of the

50 tents offering four-poster beds and a veranda overlooking a hippo and crocodile-filled river.

Elsewhere, the Olare Mara Kempinski Masai Mara – tucked away in a grove on the banks of the Ntiakitiak River – provides an elegant tented camp that effortlessly blends in with the landscape, while also providing the modern comforts you would expect from a luxury hotel. The honeymoon suite even has its very own plunge pool with stunning views of the resident hippos and the Olare Orok Conservancy, which spans over 140km<sup>2</sup> (54sq mi) and is inhabited by a number of lion prides, cheetahs and a family of leopards. [www.masaimaranationalpark.org](http://www.masaimaranationalpark.org), [www.magicalkenya.com](http://www.magicalkenya.com)

## KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA

It's not surprising that the Kruger National Park attracts more than 1.4 million tourists each year, considering the huge diversity of its wildlife. Keeping all those visitors entertained are more than 100,000 impala, 10,000



blue wildebeest, 5,000 warthog, 25,000 zebra, 180 cheetah, over 1,000 leopard and 1,500 lions – plus many more of every species imaginable. What's more surprising, however, is that even with that many visitors you'll be amazed at how often you feel as if you have the whole place to yourself. That's simply due to its incredible size, with the park covering a massive 19,000km<sup>2</sup> (7,300 sq mi) and stretching an impressive 352km (218 miles) from north to south.

Those staying at the Royal Malewane will feel even more secluded, with the safari lodge

only hosting a maximum of 20 guests at the same time. Situated on a private reserve within the Greater Kruger National Park, the lodge provides the ultimate in luxury and style, with each of the eight suites offering seclusion and stunning views.

In the far eastern reaches of the Kruger National Park, meanwhile, the Singita Sweni Lodge houses just 12 guests in six rooms ▶

**Left and below: The Olare Mara Kempinski Masai Mara blends understated luxury with authentic African design in a stunning setting**





**Pictured:** Few experiences can match the thrill of spotting wildlife such as lion, cheetah and ostrich on an African safari, while luxury tents like those on offer at the Olare Mara Kempinski Masai Mara in Kenya ensure that guests can still enjoy all their usual creature comforts

built on stilts along the banks of the majestic Sweni River. Situated in an exclusive 130km<sup>2</sup> (50 sq mi) concession in the Lebombo Mountains, the lodge boasts access to the highest concentration of wildlife in the entire park, including a regal pride of mountain lions and unique euphorbia trees.

[www.sanparks.org/parks/kruger](http://www.sanparks.org/parks/kruger),  
[www.southafrica.net](http://www.southafrica.net)

#### **RUAHA NATIONAL PARK, TANZANIA**

As well as being home to Africa's tallest mountain, Mount Kilimanjaro, Tanzania also the second largest number of bird species in the world and the largest mammal population, providing ample opportunity for an unforgettable safari experience. While the Ngorongoro Crater and Serengeti National Park may grab most of the headlines, the remote and wild Ruaha National Park is actually the largest national park in Tanzania (and all of East Africa), covering an area of more than 20,200km<sup>2</sup> (7,800 sq mi). Although the park is famous for its huge herds of elephant, it is also home to more than 530 species of bird and a thriving population of

the rare African wild dog. Those seeking luxury accommodation here will not be disappointed by the Jongomero camp, which offers a truly private game experience. Each thatched-roof tent is set on a raised platform with a private verandah, while the main dining area has a great view of the hippo pool below.

With its vast array of bird species, a huge population of buffalo, elephant and lion, plus a unique combination of both lesser and greater kudu, roan antelope and the illusive African wild dog, Ruaha offers one of the most definitive cross-sections of wildlife you can find on the continent.

[www.tanzaniaparks.com/ruaha.html](http://www.tanzaniaparks.com/ruaha.html),  
[www.tanzaniatouristboard.com](http://www.tanzaniatouristboard.com) ■

