

Travel Diary DOOK

“Ignore the obsession with seeing the Big Five animals,” says one of our favourite photographers, who has shot hundreds of lodges and camps over the years. “Rather go for the big five experiences – and if you’re lucky, you’ll get both.”

PHOTOS AND WORDS DOOK



CHOOSE THE PLACE AND TIME Whether it’s a dramatic Namibian desert, the Lala palm-studded Okavango Delta, a theatrical view of the Karoo, or the sweeping plains of the Serengeti and Maasai Mara, the dramatic uniqueness of each area is worth seeing at least once in a lifetime. You must pick the right season, though – for example, not summer for the desert; off-season for the Serengeti; and June to September for the Okavango Delta, as the floods there depend on the variable rains that fall in the Angolan highlands. And the Karoo? Go any time – try Samara Private Game Reserve.

GET GUIDANCE In some areas, you may feel like part of the food chain – or find yourself facing down a nosy elephant, rambling with a rhino, or doing a dance with a dung beetle on your knees, trying to get a photo of its ball-rolling skills. A well-trained guide will provide insight into the ecosystem and point out the small things you wouldn’t usually notice. **WALK... OR FLOAT** It’s far more rewarding to immerse yourself in the quiet experience of an area than to chug around in a noisy car. For me, the ultimate is canoeing down the Zambezi or gliding along Okavango or Linyanti channels in a mokoro.

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LOOK UP It’s incredibly rare to be able to go to bed while gazing up at the mystical, magical fairy dust that fills the limitless night sky with glittering wonder. From see-through tents (Linyanti expeditions) to sleeping decks (Tswalu and Samara reserves) and treehouses (Lion Sands and Ngala), there’s plenty to choose from when it comes to accommodation if you want to feel small and insignificant. **OPEN YOUR MOUTH!** From wholesome meals made over the coals of a campfire to gourmet concoctions that resemble

art on a plate, you’re likely to find yourself waddling away from a safari completely satisfied – and promising not to eat for a month. One of the best food experiences is offered by Jan Hendrik van der Westhuizen – our very own Michelin-starred chef is the creative palate behind the menu at Tswalu, and has opened a restaurant there, Klein Jan. You’ll also find gastronomic delights at Cheetah Plains, MORE Hotels’ Ivory Lodge and &Beyond’s Tengile River Lodge in Sabi Sands, as well as Singita in South Africa and Tanzania.

1. Views of the Maasai Mara from Angama Mara lodge in Kenya. 2. A bedroom under a blanket of stars at Chalkley Treehouse, Lion Sands. 3. On the Zambezi at Mana Pools National Park in Zimbabwe (African Bush Camps). 4. Feet up on a mokoro: explore the Okavango Delta or Linyanti in Botswana with &Beyond, African Bush Camps and Great Plains Conservation. 5. Meeting a calm, curious local at Mana Pools National Park. 6. Sandibe Okavango Safari Lodge offers guests a chance to join the chefs in the kitchen. 7. Gemsbok saunter past Sossusvlei Desert Lodge in Namibia. (See Natural Selection for camps on the Skeleton Coast.)