



THE BIG

AFRICAN SAFARIS ARE IN EVERY ADVENTURER'S BUCKET LIST, YET AFTER BEING ON SEVERAL SAFARIS, **CECILY MABASA** FEELS LIKE SHE HASN'T GOTTEN ENOUGH OF THE EXPERIENCE. IN FACT, SHE KEEPS COMING BACK FOR MORE—INSTEAD OF CROSSING IT OFF HER BUCKET LIST, IT HAS BECOME AN ADDICTION. SHE SHARES HER FIVE FAVORITE DESTINATIONS FOR THAT REAL AFRICAN ADVENTURE

PHOTOGRAPHED BY CECILY MABASA

THE BEST SAFARIS IN AFRICA

A shy baby cub we spotted as it woke from its nap



This lizard in Tanzania is famously called Spider man



SERENGETI NATIONAL PARK TANZANIA

Like all other firsts in my life, my Serengeti safari holds a special place in my heart. Yet even without the emotional strings, very few experiences can top visiting this magical wildlife wonderland—it is my *Lion King* childhood fantasy come to life. It was like I was in the middle of Pride Rock. Noted for the unbeatable wildlife sightings amidst endless grasslands, the open plains of Serengeti boast a smorgasbord of species of game. The Serengeti is also famous for its large lion population, but the hyena, cheetah, and leopard, as well as the jackal and vulture,

are also present in this Tanzanian park.

The annual Great Migration across East Africa's Serengeti-Mara ecosystem is one of the most wonderful phenomena in the natural world. Millions of animals—majority comprise wildebeests, but also zebras, impalas, and gazelles—take part in this great big movement. Remember how Mufasa died in *Lion King*, when he got trampled by a stampede of wildebeests? That's what the Serengeti is known for, the migration of animals throughout the Serengeti

in search of fresh grass and quality water. At some point, the migration encounters the mighty Mara River, and despite being terrified of the water, the wildebeests will have to cross it. Thousands will gather nervously at the edge of the river, and it takes a while—sometimes a day, sometimes four—before the wildebeests actually do it. But it only takes one wildebeest for the stampede over the river to start. It is a spectacle that attracts zoologists and wildlife enthusiasts across the globe, and it is also the very reason I will have to make a trip back to Serengeti.

BEST TIME TO GO

The Great Migration crosses the Mara River between August and October.

WHERE TO STAY

The two luxury camps of *S&Beyond Serengeti Under Canvas* are located within driving distance of the massed herds of the Great Migration. The camps follow the migration route, bringing guests as close as possible to the action.

WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS

The Big Five on our very first day on safari—black rhinos, elephants, a pride of lion, leopards, and Cape buffalos. We also saw other amazing wildlife—a jenny of giraffe, zebras, hundreds of the famous wildebeests, a pool of hippos, spotted hyenas, bush hyraxes, graceful gazelles, klipspringers, Mwanza Flat-headed Agamas, black and white colobus monkeys, baboons, Nile crocodiles, vultures, jackals, impalas, reedbucks, warthogs, and waterbucks.



A typical safari vehicle driving through the plains of the Serengeti



During the day, hippos are usually found cooling off in watering holes

NGORONGORO CRATER CONSERVATION AREA TANZANIA

The Ngorongoro Crater is the world's biggest inactive caldera, formed after a nearby volcano exploded approximately a million years ago. Unmatched for its natural diversity of landscapes, the Ngorongoro Crater is one of the most breathtaking wildlife areas in the world. The extensive highland area rests along the eastern side of the Great Rift Valley, a large trench containing hills and volcanoes that stretches from Tanzania all the way to Ethiopia.

In Ngorongoro, you will find one of the largest game populations in Africa. There is a greater chance of encountering the Big Five in the course of a

single game drive, and you will also get to observe endangered animals, like the black rhino and black-maned Abyssinian lions. A staggering population of animals fill the relatively small 100-square-mile bowl, with about 6000 wildebeests, more than 50 lions, and a (sadly) dying population of rhinos. What stood out the most for me was the strong interaction between the animals. Herds of buffalos mingle with the wildebeests, while elephants and hippos swim together. You will learn a lot about the animals and their habitats, as well as discover so much more about how the natural world works.

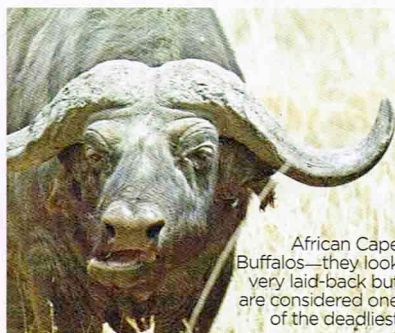
Don't forget to look up during game drives! The African birds are quite a sight as well



A pair of zebras grazing and looking for sustenance



The graceful cranes in Tanzania are mostly spotted near water holes



African Cape Buffalos—they look very laid-back but are considered one of the deadliest



BEST TIME TO GO

Visiting from June to December will give you the best chance to find the Big Five.

WHERE TO STAY Ngorongoro

Crater Lodge is a place of dramatic contrasts, where Versailles meets Maasai. The natural luxury of the breathtakingly beautiful setting blends perfectly with the dramatic interior of your suite. Its unique location on the rim of the spectacular Ngorongoro Crater (with breathtaking 360 degree views) will blow you away

WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS

Zebra, wildebeests, the biggest pride of lion in all my safari adventures, hyenas, giraffes, hippos, ostriches, kori bustards, gazelles, Cape buffalos, golden jackals, African elephants, long-crested eagles, hyraxes, bushbucks, elands, impalas, klipspringers, and warthogs

A wildebeest migration is a scene not to be missed





BEST TIME TO GO

June to October, during the dry periods.

WHERE TO STAY

Lake Manyara Tree Lodge is the only lodge inside the Lake Manyara National Park. It offers an exclusive wildlife experience with only 10 luxurious yet intimate tree top suites located in a remote corner of the reserve.

WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS

Vervet monkeys, elephants, hippos, zebras, cape buffalos, klipspringers, other kinds of monkeys, giraffes, very few wildebeests (mostly the retired ones who got left behind after the herd migrated), flamingos, ostrich, impalas, and termite mounds.

LAKE MANYARA NATIONAL PARK

TANZANIA

It is one of Tanzania's smaller wildlife reserves, but Lake Manyara National Park hosts a wide diversity of animal species. While their wildlife population is not as large compared to other safari destinations, the scenic backdrop of the park makes up for it. The lake is also one of the must-see sights in the park since animals (mostly waterfowl) flock to its rim on a daily basis. The park is home to hundreds of bird species, as well as the olive baboon, the vervet monkeys, tree-climbing lions, and the vast elephant herds that the park was specifically established to protect.

Lake Manyara is one of the few parks in Africa that allow game drives at night, which is a truly extraordinary experience. Accompanied by our Maasai tracker (who was equipped with keen senses and a red lamp), we witnessed two leopards mating. Just when I thought this was the rarest sight I've ever experienced in any of my safaris, the predator couple started to hunt. This was a first, even for our guide!

A rare sighting of the African eagle in flight



BEST TIME TO GO

June to August

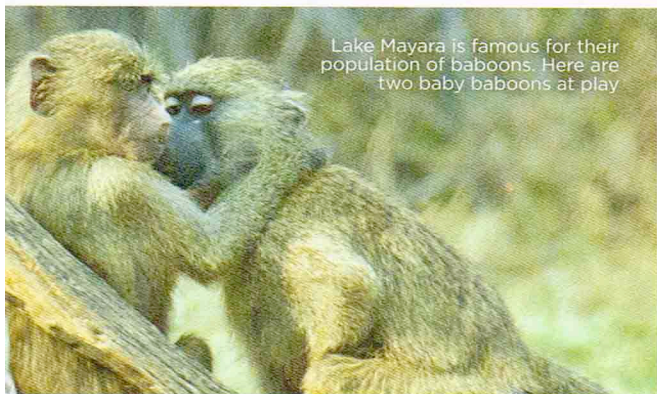
WHERE TO STAY

Wilderness Safari's **Mombo Camp** is the best one can find in the Moremi Game reserve. The best big game viewing experience starts right outside your own veranda, with wonderful concentrations of game milling around in front of the camp. As I walked around camp, animals were constantly wandering past me or right under our suite!

WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS

Huge numbers of buffalos, elephants, lions, hippos, jackals, giraffes, zebras, every kind of antelope you can think of, leopards, wild dogs, as well as many rare and unusual mammal and bird species

Lake Manyara is famous for their population of baboons. Here are two baby baboons at play



A mama elephant forging through the trees in Lake Manyara to clear the way for her offspring behind her



OKAVANGO DELTA

BOTSWANA

When I was planning my first African safari, I got in touch with my friends from the National Geographic, as well as other photographers, to ask for tips. The most common advice? Do not miss out on the Okavango Delta. This is one of the most well-known spots for animal sightings, and where the National Geographic and BBC teams shoot their footage. The delta's expanse of islands and lagoons are rich with wildlife—some stay on a permanent basis, while others leave and return after a season.

Our first visit brought us up close with one of Mother Earth's finest masterpieces,

the protected Moremi Game Reserve. We went on guided game drives, sailed down the river on *mokoros* (a type of canoe) and chased after wild dogs as they hunted. Even though the Okavango Delta is one of the most popular safari destinations in Africa, the place has not lost its raw, organic appeal. The untouched quality of the delta, combined with the staggering number of species—a few hundreds of birds, more than 60 reptiles, a hundred mammals and over 70 species of fish—makes this destination in Botswana a favorite.

The Southern Hornbill is the largest species of hornbill



As wild dogs started their hunt, this herd of elephant went into a circular formation to protect their young



BEST TIME TO GO

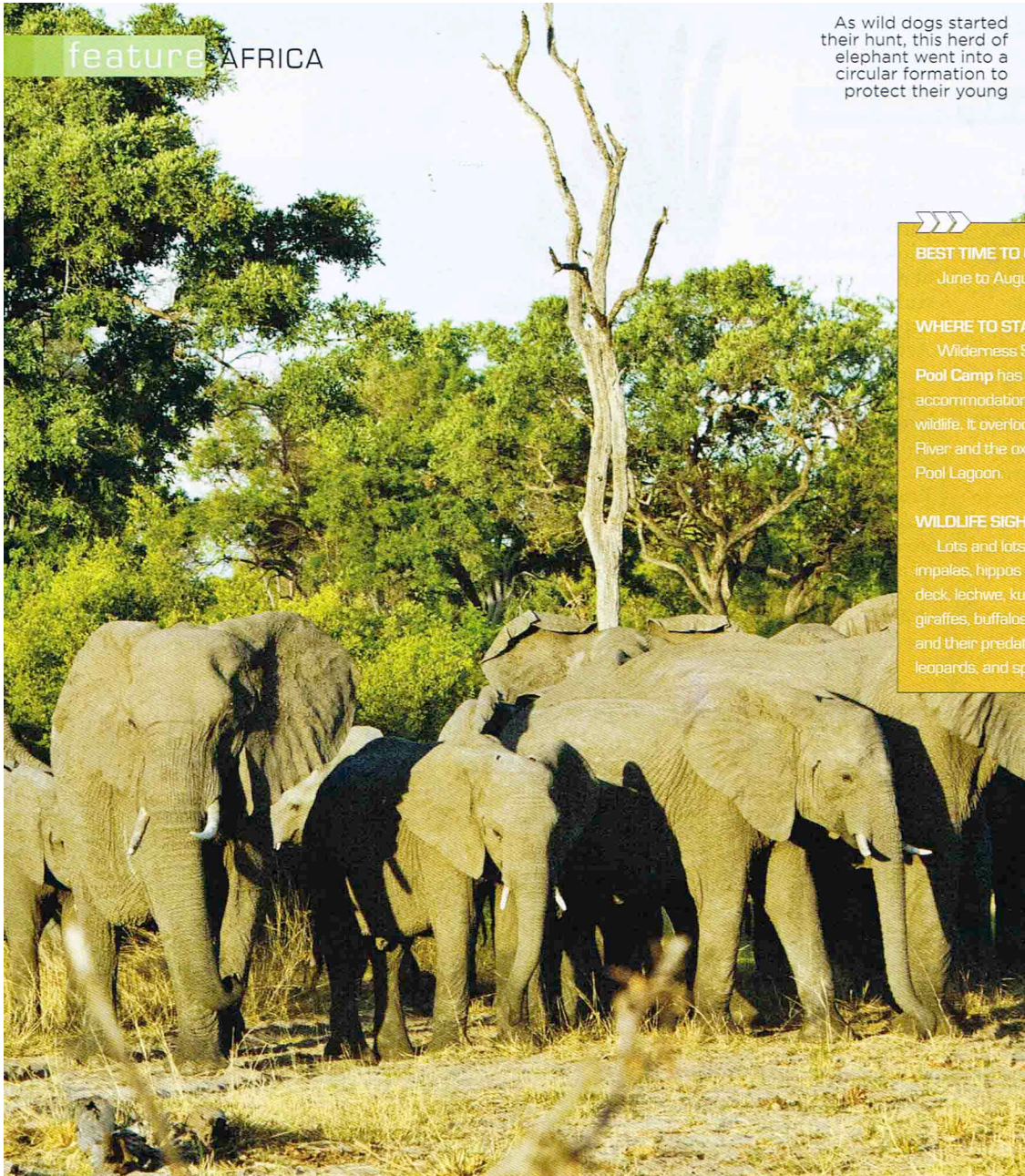
June to August

WHERE TO STAY

Wilderness Safari's **Kings Pool Camp** has luxurious accommodations and spectacular wildlife. It overlooks the Linyanti River and the oxbow-shaped Kings Pool Lagoon.

WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS

Lots and lots of elephants, impalas, hippos outside the suite's deck, lechwe, kudus, zebras, giraffes, buffalos and bushbucks, and their predators: lions, leopards, and spotted hyenas.

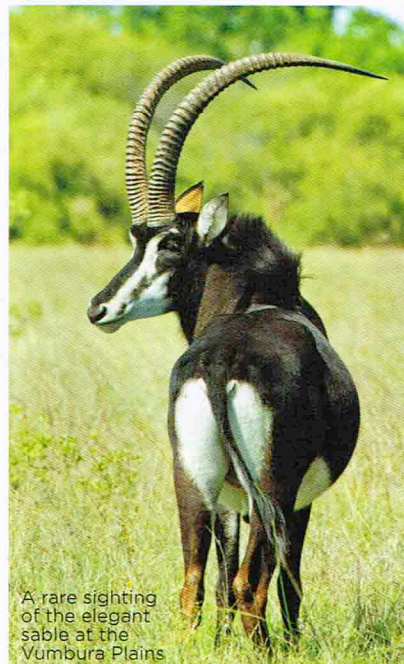


CHOBE NATIONAL PARK BOTSWANA

The most memorable experience in any Botswanian safari is the elephant sightings, and while most people think of the Okavango Delta for a safari in Botswana, I personally consider Chobe National Park as another wildlife hotspot. The park is home to tens of thousands of elephants, who live in and around the park, crowding by the Chobe River during the dry season. The elephants are just the beginning, though. This is the best destination to see predators and their prey in action.

For our stay, we focused on observing animals

through game drives and from the raised decks of Kings Pool Camp, where we could view (and almost touch!) massive elephant feet and trunks while safely tucked inside the comforts of our lodge resort area. One cool afternoon, we took a river cruise to see game and predators interact in an unspoiled setting. As the sun was setting, our guide treated us to the ultimate African safari sundowner: canapes, cocktails, and champagne. As an avid amateur photographer, the diversity of Chobe's wildlife provided me with some of the best safari photos I have taken. 🌟



A rare sighting of the elegant sable at the Vumbura Plains

Beautiful but deadly—the lion is a majestic creature



WHY THIS SHOULD BE IN YOUR BUCKET LIST

Africa is renowned for its dramatic landscapes and unique cultures, but a safari is one of the most exotic and exciting adventures you can ever have. From fierce lions to graceful impalas, you can observe wildlife in their natural habitat.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

How to Get There

The writer traveled with the luxury adventure group Sea to Summit Explorations (For more information, phone [+63 2] 815 8233, [+63 917] 868 7971, visit <seatosummitadv.net>, or email <ces@seatosummitadv.net>), the &Beyond safari outfitters, and Wilderness Safari.

Fly to Arusha (also known as Kilimanjaro) for Tanzania. For Botswana, use Johannesburg or the picturesque Cape Town as your gateway. Compact four- to 12-seater bush planes are used to fly from one Safari camp to the next.

Best Time to Go

It's usually best to go during the dry season, from June to October.

How Long Should You Stay?

Most people like to squeeze in as many parks or game reserves as they can in one trip, but generally two to four days in one place should suffice.