



Aardvark

SAFARIS

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# Drumbeat

Autumn 2016 Newsletter

# Welcome to Aardvark Safaris' Autumn 2016 Newsletter

We've had a busy year – a new website launched and a new brochure about to roll off the press. The phones and email have been red-hot and we've enjoyed putting together many wonderful safari holidays. The sales team has welcomed Roxy Cox, who, having started her African travels at the tender age of six, has a wealth of experience; and the Scottish office has been joined by Tina Koster who'll be assisting on the admin side of things.

Thank you to everyone who has suggested us to friends and family; word of mouth recommendation is hugely important to us and we're constantly striving to ensure incredible holidays with all the little extra touches that make an Aardvark Safaris' trip special.

It's been fun to meet so many of you, either over the summer show season or with Saba Douglas-Hamilton whose UK speaking tour we supported in the spring. We've several autumn events planned, keep an eye on the blog pages of our website for more details. Among our own recent travels, I have done a whistle-stop tour of Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe, Alice hosted a very successful South African riding safari, and Francis sampled the delights of the Seychelles. Lucinda sets off for South Africa and Mozambique shortly and Jo will be exploring western Tanzania later this month.

Inside this issue we look at the incredible range of safari types on offer, and highlight some of the fabulous 'sleep out' options springing up. Brian Jackman, journalist and occasional contributor to Drumbeat, sums up his visit to one of our favourite Kenyan camps and Alice reveals how she's planned her own family safari.

As ever, we look forward to talking to you about all things safari however early you may be in the planning stage.

  
Richard Smith



## Highlights:



Been there and done that? Try this P5-6



On safari in the land of the sleeping warrior P7-8



How to plan a family safari P9-10



Having visited Africa over 30 times, Richard is a prime example of someone bitten by the Africa bug. He's seen most of the camps we sell but, well-travelled as he is, each trip reveals new gems and unexpected surprises. Here are the highlights from this visit.

**Zambezi Expeditions** is an excellent semi-permanent tented camp set up on the floodplains of the Zambezi River in Mana Pools National Park. It's simpler than many permanent camps, but with all the facilities you'd need, and is in a superb wildlife area.

When you set out for a walk from **Camp Hwange** it's generally with a particular purpose in mind. In our case it was to stalk a lion. We got to within about 15 metres of him before he heard us, jumped up and ran – in the other direction fortunately!

## Richard goes fact finding

We try and cover a lot of ground on our exploratory trips and Richard's latest trip is no exception – a whistle-stop, eight day, 16-camp tour through Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

## RICHARD SMITH

I saw the construction work at **Matetsi** which is being rebuilt many years after it was last open. It's in a fabulous position on the edge of the Zambezi, upstream from Victoria Falls. It'll be run by an old mate of mine, Peter Dunning, who is a fantastic camp manager, so I have no doubt it will be brilliant.

**Tuli Lodge** is a beautiful addition to the Tuli Reserve in the far eastern corner of Botswana. With views over the river, from a hide and up high on some rocks, I can see many people simply parking themselves on one of the viewing spots on the edge of the property and just watching the wildlife. A lovely relaxed way to game view.

**Marataba** in South Africa's Limpopo region, was last but definitely not least. The area is really very beautiful and the service here is among the best I've ever experienced on safari. It's somewhere I'm very excited about, particularly the lovely Trails Camp, close by, which specialises in walking safaris.

LUCINDA ROME

# Ask the Expert

Continuing our series of interviews with the sales team, Lucinda Rome from Aardvark's Hampshire office gives an insight into her role planning safari holidays.



**Q1: What's key to planning the perfect safari?**

**A:** Understanding the wishes of whoever I'm planning the trip for. My suggestions for a family holiday would be quite different to those for a honeymoon safari. I enjoy taking time to really find out what my clients are hoping to get out of their safari.

**Q2: What's your most memorable safari moment?**

**A:** Having a sundowner in Liuwa Plains in Zambia and watching around 1,000 pelicans fly in formation towards the lagoon in front of us. They settled there while African skimmers flitted around the stream behind us. The whole thing was tinged pink by the setting sun – quite magical.

**Q3: What do you love most about your job?**

**A:** Without doubt, it is hearing wonderful feedback and knowing I've helped someone else fall in love with Africa.

**Q4: What's the strangest safari request you've had?**

**A:** When I first worked in Zambia I was asked over the radio to bring a 'lake' into camp. When I questioned this I was told it was to get the 'reaves' into the 'liver'. Much confusion followed until the giggling office staff told me that sometimes r's and l's get mixed up. Actually what was needed was a rake for the leaves to put them in the river - which made much more sense!

**Q5: What would be your dream day?**

**A:** I would start gorilla tracking in Rwanda, then lunch at Luangwa House watching the elephants. Off to the Okavango Delta next before sundowners on the spectacular Makgadikgadi Pans.

**Q6: Favourite safari activity?**

**A:** It has to be riding. There's nothing like exploring the African wilderness on a horse. You get so much closer to the wildlife and can get into areas simply inaccessible to a vehicle.

**Q7: Where are you going to visit next?**

**A:** South Africa and Mozambique in October. I'll be revisiting a few old favourites in South Africa and I am particularly looking forward to riding at Tswalu as well as my first trip to Azura Benguerra in Mozambique.

**Q8: How did you end up in the safari business?**

**A:** I climbed Kili in February 2007 and fell under Africa's spell. By June the same year I'd got a job managing a camp for Norman Carr Safaris in Zambia. I was supposed to be there for five months but stayed nearly four years. I joined Aardvark Safaris in 2010 and haven't looked back.

**Q9: What's your favourite animal?**

**A:** Impossible. As long as it's not a snake I'm happy.

**Q10: What's your sundowner choice?**

**A:** G&T.

**Q11: Favourite country?**

**A:** Zambia. It's where I spent so much time and the South Luangwa Valley is like a second home to me.

**Q12: Best ever sighting?**

**A:** An extraordinary encounter with a leopard and wild dog in Botswana: the leopard was mid-way up a tree with its kill when a pack of wild dog shot into view causing it to drop the quarry. The ensuing fight over the spoils was high octane stuff. The wild dogs were the eventual winners, with a furious leopard slinking off through the bush.

**Q13: Most precious piece of safari kit?**

**A:** My camera - and a kikoy to wrap it in to keep the dust off.

**Q14: What do you like most about being on safari?**

**A:** Space, peace and being in the wilderness.

**Flown in a small plane, try a balloon** Light aircraft are the taxis of the African bush and most of our safaris involve a flight transfer at some point. A convenient way to get from A to B, they also give a great view of the landscape unfolding below. A more leisurely aerial way to view the African wilderness is to take a hot air balloon. Drifting silently over the plains as the sun rises is as idyllic as it sounds and with options in Tanzania, Botswana, Zambia and Namibia there's plenty of choice.



# Been there and done that? Try this

There are many incredible safari experiences on offer in Africa and it's sometimes tricky to choose just what you want to do. If you've liked something on a previous trip it's a little easier to suggest what you'd enjoy next time. Here are some ideas to tempt you:

**Climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, why not try Mount Kenya next?** Kili is the famous one, but Mount Kenya is Africa's second highest peak and offers a fantastic technical climb to the summit. Tarns and alpine meadows; exotic, equatorial, high-altitude vegetation; sunbirds, hyrax and soaring eagles make the walk around the peaks one of the most beautiful expeditions in the East African mountains.

**Scuba'd in the Indian Ocean, try fresh water diving in Lake Malawi** OK, so it's not an ocean, but at over 550km long and 75km wide Lake Malawi is pretty big. Experts reckon there are up to 1,000 species of rainbow-coloured cichlid fish in the lake and in places it's akin to swimming in a tropical fish tank they're so prolific. A handful of really lovely properties scattered along the shoreline, and an easy hop from Zambia's safari areas, makes it a perfect safari add-on.

**Did a safari honeymoon, how about going back with the family?** Remember that carefree safari honeymoon? Always wanted to go back but now you have children to consider too? All is not lost! I know we may be a bit biased, but a safari really is one of the best family holidays you can do. The wildlife will amaze and enthrall, there's tremendous variety, and family houses and tents make accommodation easy. Add time on the beach and you've got the perfect family holiday.

**Slept in a tent, you must try fly camping** If you've enjoyed a tented safari then can we persuade you to take a step further and try a night fly camping? Sleeping on a bed roll under a simple mosquito net with the African night on full beam above is one of those 'must try' extraordinary African experiences. Lots of camps offer a night in the open and while the degree of luxury varies from opulent to simple they'll all give you a night to remember.



**Enjoyed Mauritius, then you'll love island hopping in the Seychelles** Mauritius' sophisticated resorts are a great choice for comfort and relaxation at the end of a safari and if you've enjoyed a stay here then we'd highly recommend a visit to the Seychelles. Island hop for a week or so and you'll see the best of this unspoilt paradise of pristine palm-fringed beaches and unspoiled tropical reefs. Accommodation options range from romantic small hotels to private islands – something for everyone whether families, honeymooners or friends travelling together.

**Stayed in a luxury lodge, try a mobile safari** In our opinion 'a mobile' is one of the best ways to experience safari. You can do a walking mobile, riding mobile, canoeing mobile and even a flying mobile. The standard is to use your portable camp, safari vehicle and private guide to explore whatever wilderness area you have chosen. If you've done the lodge based safari, do try one of these – it's a whole new experience, and wonderful way to see the bush.

**Ridden in Kenya, then try Botswana** So you've galloped across the plains of Kenya's Masai Mara and could be forgiven for thinking there's nothing to match that exhilarating experience. You'd be wrong though as Botswana offers extraordinary riding safaris too. Whether it's splashing through a tributary of the mighty Okavango Delta, riding with elephant and wild dog in Mashatu or crossing the shimmering Makgadikgadi Pans you won't be disappointed by the wonderful scenery, horses, wildlife and guides.

**Done a Zambezi canoe safari, then an Ibo Island dhow safari will appeal** One of the most intriguing mobile safaris we've come across is a dhow safari in the Quirimbas Archipelago. This watery adventure explores a beautiful, barely visited coastline, camping on uninhabited islands and snorkelling and kayaking along the route. A world away from canoeing on the Zambezi, the ethos is much the same and it's great for adventurous types and water lovers.

**Seen the gorillas, then what about chimps in Mahale?** Trips to track the mountain gorillas are one of the most rewarding of all we organise. If these magnificent animals have captivated you, then you'll very likely enjoy some time with chimpanzees too. In remote western Tanzania, and tucked into a magical setting at the foot of the wild Mahale mountains, Greystoke Mahale is a remarkable lodge. Stay a few days and you'll get a unique glimpse of chimp life in the adjacent forest, along with the chance to swim in mountain pools, kayak in the lake or just relax on the warm sand with a drink in hand.



## On safari in the land of the sleeping warrior

**THE Masai Mara has always been my favourite big game stronghold. This is where I saw my first wild lions 40 years ago, following the Marsh Pride with Jonathan Scott long before they became known to millions through the BBC's Big Cat Diary TV series.**



Today the Marsh Lions are in disarray, poisoned, displaced and dispersed by Maasai herdsmen who illegally drive thousands of cattle into the National Reserve every night, forcing those who would wish to experience the Mara as I knew it in former times to look elsewhere.

Fortunately there are still places – the Mara Conservancies, the Mara Triangle and parts of the National Reserve itself – where the big cats and their visitors can still find peace and tranquillity; and that is what brought me to Sala's Camp.

Far from the Marsh Pride's current troubles, Sala's enjoys the most remote location in the Reserve. Set on the banks of the Sand River, it looks directly into the Serengeti National Park and is usually the first place to see the migration arrive, and the last to see the herds depart.

Better still; the resident lion pride is the biggest in the Reserve. Currently numbering 31, it is led by two magnificent males known as Alex and Scar. Their territory extends across both sides of the border and is also renowned for good black rhino sightings.

The camp itself offers the luxurious comfort and great guiding as you would expect from a property run by Mikey and Tanya Carr-Hartley, a 4th generation Kenyan family whose safari portfolio also includes Solio Ranch in Laikipia, Sasaab Lodge in Samburu and Giraffe Manor in Nairobi.

We're so privileged to be hidden away in this very private corner of the Mara, says Mikey. Most guides seldom come this far and would soon be lost if they did.

This was certainly not the case with Moses Kaleku, Sala's affable senior guide, who joined me for a picnic breakfast under a solitary desert date tree, where the wind carried the sound of the advancing wildebeest like the distant roar of motorway traffic.

The herds had appeared early this year. Even before my own arrival there were reports of 300 wildebeest having crossed the Sand River at the beginning of June. Now there were thousands and every day their numbers were growing.

We drove west, away from the Kuka Hills whose outline, say the Maasai, resembles a sleeping warrior. In places we passed milestones in the grass, indicating the border between Kenya and Tanzania that the migrating herds cross with impunity. Giraffes stood out like markers on the plains, measuring the illimitable distance.

Clouds of butterflies fluttered up in our wake. Coqui francolins whirred away from beneath our wheels. In places the grass was almost tall enough to hide a lion, and wherever I looked, on the high rolling ridges like the waves of the sea, and on the green slopes and wide hollows below, lay the ever-growing multitude of zebras and wildebeest, and not another vehicle in sight. This was the Mara I thought I would never see again – and anyone who is remotely interested in safari will love it as much as I did.





REPORT BY ALICE

## How to plan a family safari

So where does an expert with 17 years' safari planning under her belt take her own family on a two week blow out safari? Alice describes the process she's been through putting together her upcoming South African holiday.

My husband works hard, takes few holidays and likes things to work and operate as described. My six year old girls, on the other hand, like anything that feels off the grid, naughty, and an adventure. I am more in my children's camp but I'm going with the theory if my children and husband are kept happy, then I will have a stress free holiday. In my experience, a perfect family holiday takes on board everyone's wish lists and by dedicating a little bit of the trip to each person you should have the ideal outcome.

Any African safari requires proper planning. It's advisable to plan as far in advance of travel as you can to ensure your first choice of camp, activity etc. is available. Safari is an expensive holiday and it's always a shame to have to compromise on what you really wanted to do.

For a variety of reasons, we've chosen South Africa for our holiday. Many of the camps and lodges here are very welcoming to families and there are a couple of safari choices that are simply brilliant with children. The accommodation is so comfortable that it will be a treat for me and Jim, and most of the lodges have interconnecting rooms or tents that are large enough to fit all five of us in without feeling cramped. Being able to stay malaria free makes things easier too.

The range of activities on offer was also a key factor. I am hoping we will ride ponies, take walking safaris, see wild rhino, swim in outdoor pools, eat good food, drink good wine, enjoy good weather, see whales, seals and dolphins, and cook with talented chefs. By the end of the holiday I'd like the girls to have a basic understanding of Africa's wildlife and the problems it faces, and to have learnt a little about someone else's culture.

We are travelling over the October half term fortnight, so the ideal time to make a trip along



the southern coast from Cape Town to Port Elizabeth as well as perfect to explore the Waterberg area for a few days.

We'll start at Aardvark Safaris' favourite Ant's Nest where we can ride, walk and game drive. Then we head to The One&Only in Cape Town before setting off down the Cape coast where we'll stop at Babylonstoren in the Winelands, Grootbos in Hermanus for a spot of whale watching, and finally to Kwandwe for more safari activity.

So we have begun to count the days – there is a chart in the kitchen – until we get on the plane with TVs and a 'restaurant'. I am fuelling the excitement with a safari kit (books and a magnifying glasses from Amazon) and the odd ad lib safari quiz. I'm confident I'll be able to fulfil the girls' wish to see safari animals, ride ponies and have lots of sunshine (we live in the Scottish borders), yet also give me and Jim a fun and relaxing holiday. Keep an eye out for feedback in our January issue.



Kwandwe Ecce Lodge

For more ideas on planning a family safari see [bit.ly/8TipsFamilySafariPlanning](http://bit.ly/8TipsFamilySafariPlanning)

**If you are thinking of taking your own family on safari here are some of our top offers:**

Stay at Chitwa Chitwa a gorgeous lodge in South Africa's world-famous Sabi Sands reserve and one child under 12 stays for free. Expect spell-binding wildlife sightings and great opportunities to spot the Big 5 in the company of experienced, family friendly guides.

Game drives, walking safaris, riding (both horses and camels) make a safari at Lewa House a wonderfully varied experience. One child under 15 stays free and those up to the age of 21 benefit from the 'child rate' at this super Kenyan lodge.

Tanzania is full of iconic safari landscapes, from the Serengeti plains to the Ngorongoro Crater and remote southern parks of Selous and Ruaha. Pick from one of Nomad Tanzania's exquisite collection of camps and anyone under 21 travels at 60% of the adult cost.

Head to Zambia and you'll find adventure a-plenty, it's perfect for active teens. Under 18s staying with their parents in family rooms at luxurious Chinzombo or the bush camps (rustic but still super comfortable) Mchenja and Kakuli stay at half price.

Francis sums up his recent visit to this glorious spot in the Seychelles

### In a nutshell, well, everything.

It's private, and you can only get there by helicopter.

It's ridiculously beautiful with mountains, dense indigenous forests, swaying palms, white powdery sand beaches. Then there's the turquoise and deep blue sea surrounding it that's rich in healthy coral reef and marine wildlife.

The atmosphere is totally laid back – no dress code, no timetable. No shoes? No problem.

The villas are huge and simply gorgeous, the epitome of barefoot luxury. A pool, your own 'kitchen' with a supply of your favourite goodies (topped up all day long)... and the beach just beyond the garden.

Eat whenever you want, wherever you want and whatever you want – the pizzas are the best I've ever had.

The most beautiful pool I've seen anywhere.

A great wine list.

Diving, half day fishing trips, eating, drinking, it's all included in the price (other than reserve wines).

Four different beaches, one of which can be yours alone for a day.

Wonderful, charismatic and talented people to host you.

Conservation in action – you contribute by being there.

# What's so great about North Island?



### Fast facts

**Where:** 20 minute helicopter transfer from Seychelles International Airport

**What:** 11 villas, 4 private beaches, working conservation project

**Kids:** Children of all ages are accepted and guests under 17 are accommodated free of charge when sharing the second villa bedroom, 17 to 19 year olds pay a reduced child rate

**Special offer:** Visit before 22nd December 2016 and enjoy a 'stay seven pay six' offer

**More info:** Read Francis' North Island blog at [bit.ly/NorthIsland10Photos](http://bit.ly/NorthIsland10Photos)





# Old favourites and what's new

## Where to safari in 2017

Since many of the safari camps we love are small, most will have only eight tents, they get booked up well in advance so it's never too early to start planning a safari holiday. Here's a look at some of the sales team's old favourites, as well as some exciting new properties, to choose from for 2017.



### Old favourites:

**Roxy: Apoka Safari Lodge, Uganda** Masses of wildlife, but few visitors; a real gem in Kidepo Valley National Park and one of Uganda's best kept secrets.

**Lucinda: Vumbura Plains, Botswana** Fabulously luxurious with a location to match. Land and water based game viewing year round and pretty much every species living in the Okavango can be found here. Never a dull moment.

**Jo: Safaris Unlimited, Masai Mara, Kenya** Fabulous horses, fantastic guiding, insane wildlife and beautiful landscapes. I'd never seen the Mara so quiet.

**Francis: Goliath Camp, Mana Pools, Zimbabwe** A lovely setting beside the Zambezi with wildlife often seen in front of camp. It's a simple, comfortable place where the emphasis is on fun and personal wildlife experiences.

**Richard: Azura Quilalea, Mozambique** A remote, off the beaten track beach location. Delicious food and impeccable service.

**Alice: Luwi Camp, South Luangwa, Zambia** A seasonal semi-permanent camp deep in the park. Very wild, excellent wildlife, great hippo hide, great walking.



### What's new:

**Ethiopia:** With Roxy's arrival to the sales team, we're delighted to add Ethiopia to our list of destinations. Of her recent exploratory visit she says, 'Ethiopia is very different to any other country I've been to in Africa. The land is well-cultivated and lush and some of the architecture is phenomenal. It's not for everyone – but for the seasoned Africa traveller, with a love and passion for culture, scenery, history and wildlife, it's fabulous.' Do give us a call if you would like further information or holiday ideas.

**Miavana Private Island, Madagascar:** 14 ultra-luxurious beach front villas will open on Nosy Ankao, part of an island archipelago to the north east of the Malagasy mainland, in December. Not simply an exquisite beach lodge on an untouched island, activities will focus on whale and turtle watching, snorkelling, scuba diving, kite surfing, and world class fishing. Lemur and rainforest trekking will also be available on the mainland. Luxury on this scale is a first for Madagascar.

**Tanda Tula Field Camp, Kruger National Park, South Africa:** This exclusive use, and very glamorous, mobile camp is pitched and set up based on the requirements of each booking. It's predominantly a walking safari outfit allowing guests to explore on foot led by highly experienced guides and trackers. Over three days (or longer) you can expect to track lion, elephant and rhino as well as a multitude of other wildlife species. Lucinda's off to visit in October so let us know if you'd like more information on this lovely camp.

### Island paradise in Mozambique:

Just off the northern Mozambique mainland, Mogundula is a private island idyll boasting two secluded beaches, a lake and pristine, little explored coral reefs. Three beautiful villas, opening this autumn, will offer a chic castaway escape from the every-day world. Bookable on an exclusive basis only, and accommodating up to 12, it is a wonderful location for families or groups of friends travelling together.

**Ngorongoro Crater:** There are two new openings here that we're excited about: Entamanu Ngorongoro, perched high on the Ngorongoro Crater rim, is an incredible highland retreat with spectacular views over one of Africa's most iconic wildlife destinations. Activities include Big 5 game drives in the crater, scenic walks in the highlands and Masai cultural experiences.

A little further away, about 40 minutes from the crater, is Highlands. Set amid glorious mountain scenery, deep in the wilderness, far from other camps, it's a wonderful place to escape the real world, to walk with the Masai, and hike the nearby mountains. You can visit the crater too, but we're not sure you'll want to leave the stunning environs.



# Africa's coolest places to sleep

The words 'sleep out' on the itinerary of my first Aardvark Safaris' educational trip had me slightly worried.

Whether I would sleep, be comfortable, be eaten, all passed through my mind. They just laughed at me in the office and waved me on my way. Did I sleep? Not really, I was far too intrigued by the cacophony of grunting and snorting from the wildlife nearby. Was I comfortable? With a thick bedroll and cosy duvet, yes absolutely. Did I get eaten? Obviously not! 15 years later, I jump at the chance to sleep out. Here are some of the best:

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Loisaba star beds

**Abu** – Abu Camp star bed overlooks the elephant boma. Fall asleep to the contented rumbling of the elephants below – the ultimate lullaby.

*Where: Okavango Delta, Botswana*

**Tswalu Tarkuni Sleepout** – Starlit luxury in 100,000 hectares of private wilderness. Early morning sun hitting the red dunes is a magical sight.

*Where: Tswalu Kalahari, South Africa*

**Jao** – A luxurious setting in one of Botswana's animal hotspots. A great place to watch the wildlife comings and goings.

*Where: Okavango Delta, Botswana*

**Little Kulala** – Decamp from your room to the rooftop bed and sleep under one of the darkest night skies anywhere.

*Where: Namib Naukluft, Namibia*

**OI Donyo Lodge** – Go to sleep under brilliant starlight and wake to Kilimanjaro tinged pink at sunrise.

*Where: Chyulu Hills, Kenya*

**Loisaba star beds** – One of the originals, and still the most quirky. Huge beds on Land Rover wheels can be moved in and out of shelter depending on the weather.

*Where: Loisaba, northern Kenya*

**Norman Carr Safaris** – Norman Carr's 'Return to the Wild' is an awesome riverbed sleepout in South Luangwa. Not for the faint hearted but thrilling for those who dare.

*Where: South Luangwa National Park, Zambia*