



Safari Planning Guide

by Marisa Meisters

Congratulations, you've decided to go on safari! You know that you've always wanted to see African wildlife in its native environment. The continent of Africa is massive, and the number of countries and parks where you can see wildlife is immense. This is one of the most exciting and one of the most frustrating parts of safari planning as you ask yourself, "now what?"

This Safari Planning Guide is designed to do just that, answer your questions and get you started asking the right questions so that you can move forward with confidence and plan the safari that best matches your personality!



The first questions you want to ask yourself are these:

- What country is best for a safari and what do I want to see and experience?
- What time of year do I plan to go on safari?
- How much time should I plan to spend on safari?
- What kind of accommodations are available on safari?
- Are there any safaris for physically disabled travelers?
- What medicines or shots will I need to get before traveling to Africa?
- Do I need a visa to go to Africa?
- How far in advance should I start planning my safari?
- What if I have special dietary needs?

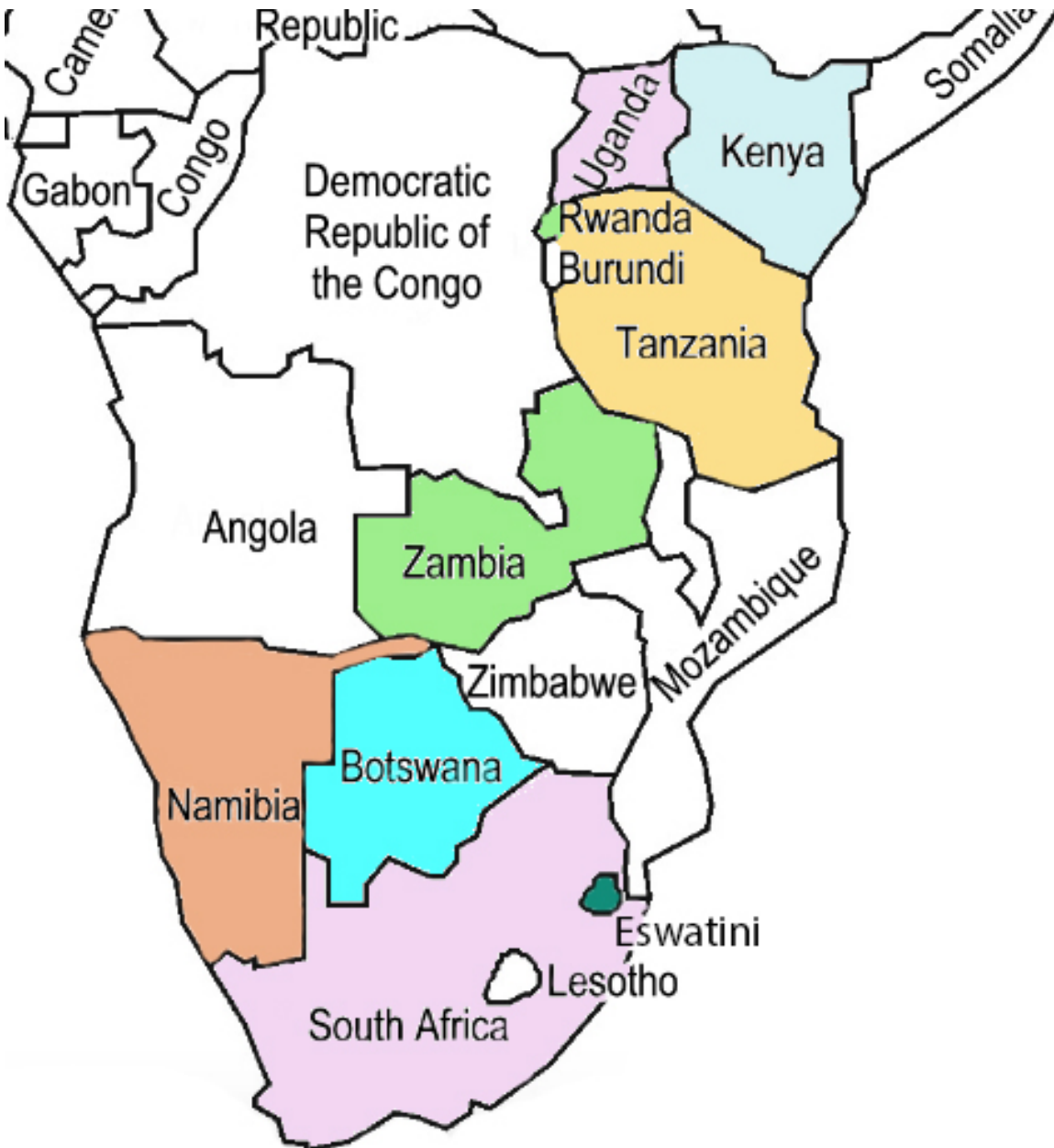
What country is best for a safari and what do I want to see and experience?

Obviously, Africa is a massive continent and the choices of where to go are seemingly unending. There are a lot of things to consider regarding the geography, such as whether you also plan to go mountain climbing (for instance, to the peak of Mt. Kilimanjaro), if you want to hike to see the chimpanzees and mountain gorillas that also live at higher altitudes, or if you prefer to stay at lower altitudes. You can also consider if there are historical places of interest, museums, wildlife organizations, and events that you would like to explore as part of your experience.



General country-specific information

The following map gives you a good idea of some of the most popular safari destination countries, and their proximity to one another.





Uganda and Rwanda: Starting in the northern and inland part of the map, Uganda and Rwanda are very mountainous countries, formed volcanically millions of years ago. In many regions, you can see remnants of the volcanic ridges. This area is perfect for hiking to see the mountain gorillas. It is important to note that both countries are rather high altitude, well above 5,000 feet (1,250 meters) in most places, and frequently higher. As you hike to see the gorillas, you could wind up hiking a few thousand feet additionally as gorillas often forage in the highest points of the mountain tops. Other safari wildlife is much more sparse in this region of Africa than locations further to the south. Uganda is known as the “Pearl of Africa” due to its lush greenery; you can visit Lake Victoria and the source of the Nile River here as part of your safari. It is also where famed Primatologist Dian Fossey studied gorillas and really helped put their plight at the forefront of concern. It is possible to visit some of Fossey’s research sites. You can also visit and learn about **Gorilla Doctors**, one of the foremost gorilla conservation groups borne out of Fossey’s research. The equator runs through Uganda.



Young male gorilla



In 1994, Rwanda experienced unimaginable genocide. All of today's survivors lost people in this devastating time. The country continues to heal and people are forgiving of the past, though they will never forget. There is a museum in tribute to this horrific event in the capital of Kigali. You can also visit the Carr Orphanage, where many genocide orphans were rescued during this horrible time.



Traditional dancing and warrior dress in Rwanda



Mountainous lakeside in Rwanda



Kenya and Tanzania: Both countries have excellent wildlife viewing opportunities. Many people are drawn to the region to experience the **Great Migration**. This is an event that is continually ongoing, in a clockwise pattern, and spans roughly 1850 miles (3,000 km). When most people think of the migration, they picture hundreds and thousands of wildebeests crossing the river swelling with hungry crocodiles. The best months to witness this phenomenon is from June to September. However, it's possible to see wildlife all year long. Some of the region is very mountainous as you get further inland. If you've dreamed of hiking **Mount Kilimanjaro** or **Mount Kenya**, then Tanzania and Kenya are definitely for you! The equator runs through Kenya. Kenya and Tanzania are home to **Maasai** tribes who still live traditionally; tour their villages and learn about their unique way of life. Kenya is home to the **Sheldrick Wildlife Trust**, located just outside of Nairobi. Here, you can visit some of the wild baby orphan elephants that are being hand-reared and prepared to live back in the wild again when they are old enough.



Maasai women and men in the high elevations of Tanzania



Feeding orphaned elephants at Sheldrick Wildlife Trust



Botswana and Zambia: If you're looking for unspoiled beauty and to truly get off the grid, Botswana is fantastic. The concentration of elephants is larger here than most regions. You'll see a great mix of different wildlife throughout. Combining a safari in Botswana with some time in Zambia provides the perfect opportunity to also see world famous **Victoria Falls**. Botswana has some very old **San Bushmen** sites that feature cave art which is thousands of years old. You also have the opportunity to experience the world-renowned **Okavango Delta**!



Ancient rock art of the San Bushmen



Victoria Falls



Namibia: You can see many different animals on safari in Namibia, as well as experience unique desert views unlike anywhere else in Africa! The famous skeleton coast, red desert sands and hospitality of local people and indigenous tribes makes it a fantastic lesser-known safari destination worth exploring.



Nursing kudu



Giraffe mother with baby



Eswatini: Formerly known as Swaziland, Eswatini is one of only three African nations ruled by a king. All of the wildlife in Eswatini is property of the king. In 2018, the king reverted the country back to its historical name of Eswatini. Though landlocked and tiny, Eswatini has a lot of geographic variety and many high altitude locations. There are fantastic horseback riding destinations, waterfalls, and many game parks where you can see wildlife. Eswatini has a lot of rhinoceros compared with many other parts of Africa. The wildlife here is well cared for and the citizens of Eswatini are vibrant, friendly, and welcoming of tourists.



Magnificent Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary



Men dancing in Eswatini



South Africa is also a famous safari destination, with **Kruger National Park** being one of the best known safari destinations in the world. It also has some of the sites where the oldest hominid remains have been found, such as the **Cradle of Mankind** cave system. You can tour the cave site here and see some of the famous hominid remains. South Africa also has a lot more recent history, including the fight for equal rights. You can learn about Nelson Mandela's historic struggle in the **Apartheid Museum** in Johannesburg, visit the home where he used to live with his wife Winnie, and visit his prison cell on **Robbin Island**, a short boat ride from Cape Town. One can also take side trips to see the great white sharks, penguin colony, wineries and vineyards, and so much more. South Africa is a destination unto itself!



Elephant crosses the road in Kruger National Park



Great white shark, Gansbaai, South Africa

**What time of year do I plan to go on safari?**

The time of the year that you plan to travel on safari is very important, because various parts of Africa experience rainy seasons and dry seasons and some regions experience big temperature differences. Does the weather and climate impact where I will go and what I will see? Some parks that are normally open throughout the dry season can experience flooding during the wet season, closing them down partially (such as in Botswana). But, rainy season can also be a good opportunity to see migratory birds. This chart gives an idea of temperatures and rainy seasons throughout the more popular safari locations; remember that these are averages and there can be variations depending on elevation:

Safari Climate Averages	Low Temp Ave.	High Temp Ave.	Rainy season?
Botswana, Eswatini, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia			
January - March	70°F 21°C	90°F 32°C	Yes
April - June	48°F 9°C	78°F 26°C	No
July - September	50°F 10°C	82°F 28°C	No
October - December	65°F 18°C	88°F 31°C	Nov & Dec
Uganda - Bwindi National Park			
December - February	64°F 18°C	75°F 24°C	No
March - May	54°F 12°C	73°F 23°C	Yes
June - August	52°F 11°C	73°F 23°C	No
September - November	55°F 13°C	73°F 23°C	Yes
Rwanda - Volcanoes National Park			
June - August	45°F 7°C	60°F 16°C	No
September - May	45°F 7°C	60°F 16°C	Yes
Kenya & Tanzania - Masai Mara National Park & Serengeti			
June - October	55°F 13°C	80°F 27°C	No
November - May	55°F 13°C	80°F 27°C	Yes



How much time should I plan to spend on safari?

If you can't get enough wildlife, then the longer, the better. Wildlife is wild and unpredictable. The more time you can spend on safari, the more opportunities you have to see more animals and many different species.

If you have a week or less: South Africa is a fantastic option because there are good connections to South Africa from many other parts of the world. You can spend your limited time in one or two parks such as Kruger National Park, have a lot of opportunities to see wildlife, and do so on a limited schedule while perhaps doing some additional non-safari sightseeing in South Africa. Visiting a park like Kruger is less intense than some of the truly wild parks in other regions because Kruger has well maintained roads and is relatively easy to get to via road trip. If visiting Kruger, then a trip to Eswatini would also be very worthwhile as you have some amazing scenery, lovely culture and wildlife parks and it practically borders Eswatini.

If you have 7+ days: A longer safari is highly recommended. There are plenty of options such as Botswana and Zambia if you're looking for great concentrations of wildlife and a chance to visit Victoria Falls. Namibia offers unique, desert scenery unlike anywhere else. Kenya and Tanzania offer excellent wildlife possibilities and a chance to see the Great Migration (which is ongoing throughout the year). Tanzania is also a fantastic option if you wish to see or hike Mt. Kilimanjaro and or visit gorgeous Zanzibar Island. Uganda and Rwanda are terrific longer-visit options if you wish to also see the great apes while in Africa and perhaps have time to travel to more than one safari destination to see a larger variety of wildlife.



Male lion resting in the sun



What kind of accommodations are available on safari?

Just about everything is possible, from camping, to glamping, to ultra luxury accommodations. Some are accessible by road, but others require that you fly on a small airplane to reach them.



**Are there any safaris for physically challenged travelers?**

It takes extra planning to put together a safari for physically challenged travelers, but it can be done, depending on the extent of physical help required by the traveler. Much of Africa is not as friendly for physically challenged travelers as the USA and Europe. South Africa has more facilities to handle options for those with limited mobility.

What medicines or shots will I need to get before traveling to Africa?

Depending on where you will travel, you might only need to take anti-malaria medicine. If you plan to travel to an area where Yellow Fever is endemic, you may also need to get a Yellow Fever shot. You can research the specifics of your travel destinations and definitely ask your doctor for advice. Anti-malaria medicine is prescribed by the doctor and taken weekly or daily (depending on the medicine) during travel and for a short time before and after your safari.

Do I need a visa to go to Africa?

The quickest answer: Maybe. It depends on which countries you will visit, and where you are a citizen. For example, if you are a citizen of India and are traveling to South Africa, you will need a visa, while your friend who is a US citizen will not. Rules about visas can change frequently, so it is important to research this in advance, as well as to discuss with your travel planner.

How far in advance should I start planning my safari?

Six months to a year in advance is generally advisable, since it gives you plenty of time to work with your travel adviser and narrow down what experiences you want. It gives you plenty of time to book airfare, get any required travel visas ahead of time, and arrange doctor's appointments to align any required travel medicines.

What if I have special dietary needs?

You can still travel to Africa on safari even if you have special dietary needs, such as being vegetarian, gluten free, lactose intolerant, etc. However, it is critical to disclose these requirements with your travel planner early in the process.

As you get further into your safari planning process and narrow down your preferences, please contact Marisa Meisters at WorldwideXplorer to plan an amazing custom tour that will make your safari dreams come true! marisa@worldwidexplorer.com or +1-678-622-2988.



Crystal clear ocean water on Zanzibar Island



About the Author

I am Marisa Meisters, owner and founder of WorldwideXplorer. I've lived in the state of Georgia since 2007 and have been traveling for as long as I can remember (prior to Georgia, I've also lived much of my life in the US Midwest). I started my career in IT, but my passion has always been travel and I hold a Master's in International Hotel Management from the University of Surrey in the UK.

A fantastic safari experience in Botswana in 2011 was my inspiration for founding WorldwideXplorer in 2012. I enjoy helping others see all the beauty in the world while exploring off the beaten path destinations. I've been to the African continent numerous times and have traveled to each of the countries on this list. I personally know all of my contacts in each country where my tours operate and I stay in touch with them even during slower seasons. Sometimes I accompany my tours.

I love my family, and also love nature, animals, and meeting new people. Musically, I play piano, flute and oboe, though I haven't done much with music in recent years. I'm vegetarian, which can make travel a little more challenging. However, that experience helps me better understand and help with my clients' special needs and requests.

All of the photographs contained in this document are my own; did I mention I'm also a photography enthusiast? You can find more of my photos at MarisaMeisters.com.



Marisa Meisters, cruise in Ketchikan, Alaska

Thank you for virtually traveling along with me!