

Post



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Off on safari for reals - August 1, 2025

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SUMMARY

Flew from Jo'burg to Maun, Botswana and met up with Tricia and Don and were whisked onto a small prop plane for the flight to Chitabe Camp. Our plane was met by a camp representative who took us to meet our evening game drive already in progress. We saw a leopard, elephants, impalas, a hyena, giraffes, lions and more. We stopped for cocktails (aka sundowners) and a gorgeous sunset then were driven to camp in time for a quick unpacking, cocktails and dinner. Our "cabin" is nearly as big as our house back home and beautifully appointed. Only 8 of them in the camp, spread out over 2 kilometers along an elevated walkway. -

Karen

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DETAIL

Today we're up early (6 am) to adjust our body clocks and because we're meeting someone to get us to our flight. The airport is a stone's throw from our hotel, so getting over there should be a piece of cake, but apparently the safari companies would prefer to have someone hold our hands to ensure we get there, on time, with our luggage and passports, etc. etc. In my wallet is a little piece of paper that says who gets what tip here, so I know we're probably paying the lion's share of the cost of this transfer person, but what evs. We're paying either way.

We prep and get down to breakfast. Yep, it's still good. We do our final packing and leave our room. On the ground floor we meet Gordon, our transfer guy. He takes our luggage and we check out. Our room's paid for, but we owe for two nights of dinners and drinks. US\$150 for all that, we're getting spoiled.

On the short walk to the airport Gordon says we're going on safari at just the right time, lots of new young animals and everyone's hungry. It'll be cool (cold?) in the morning. His overstuffed down jacket makes him look a bit like The Michelin Man. He was a tracker/guide for many years and has stories of the trouble previous guests have gotten themselves into, forgetting passports and all.

Luggage checked and at the entrance to the security checkpoint we say our goodbyes and do the tip handshake. At passport control they ask where we're headed but not why. They know. A bit further along we see the signs for the airline lounges, all ten of them. In a land of 'haves' and 'have nots' they're big business. My credit card that occasionally gets us into maybe one lounge here or there, will get us access to four of them. The place is really nice with lots of seating, a huge bar, tons of yummy food, spotless bathrooms. A person could get used to this!

A couple of hours later we head to our gate. It's quite a walk and we get the feeling we're in a shopping mall that just happens to also house an airport. In the waiting area many of the trim, rugged middle aged (and up) white men look like they'd have no problem taking down a leaping gazelle or charging lion.

Full flight. Embraer (Brazilian-made) plane. Room for about 110 passengers. 30 minutes late departing (air traffic congestion). Maybe 30 more. Finally took off at 1:44 pm. Very hazy. Ended up being 90 minutes late. Slow, long line for immigration.

Through immigration we grab our bags and go to customs. There's a "Nothing to declare" line which we head for. Not so fast, the officials indicate, we'd like a word. Anything to declare? Fruit, meat, cash, gifts? No, no, yes, no. How much? Four hundred, maybe? Go ahead.

We see our name on a small board and meet our handler for the next five minutes. We get all our airplane tickets to get to (and between) safari camps for the next week. Hooked back up with Tricia and Don we are shuttled to a small Cessna that probably holds a dozen people, though we're only eight. We confirm that 'yes we do see our bags here' and clamber aboard. The four of us are flying just twenty minutes or so, to Chitabe, and the other four are continuing on somewhere else, not that we care.

Our pilot, not old enough to grow facial hair, gives us the required safety briefing. He indicates that there will likely be turbulence the entire way, and that there is a barf bag at every seat. He tells us that if we use it, we get to take it with us.

On the flight over, I spot two large herds of elephants. Pretty exciting. Upon landing we were transferred to an open Land Rover with our luggage. Our driver indicates he's just the transfer to the Camp. Because we are late our afternoon drive is already underway. Would we like to go to camp or go find our drive already in progress? Duh, safari drive, please.

Before we find our Safari drive, our driver spots a leopard up in a tree, scoping out to nearby zebras as possible lunch. Very exciting. We spy, a mother and baby elephant before finally finding our Safari Drive vehicle with driver Ant ("Aunt") and other guests, Mike and Lisa. Greetings all around and then we're off to find some wild animals.

It's not supposed to be this easy, spotting big wild game on a Safari drive, but we get lucky. One of our finds is a family (pride) of 14 lions. There's a dominant male with his lush mane, and one or more nursing females with good size cubs playing and nursing. And there's an adolescent or two. We get within six or fewer feet of them. They couldn't care less that we're there.

After seeing quite a few more amazing animals to check off our list, we stopped for sunset and a cocktail. Red wine for some and gin and tonic for others. There's also some snacks, fried cheese, biltong (jerky) and dried mango. Ant verifies that the tree beside which we were parked doesn't have any dangerous animals behind it, and that space is opened up as a makeshift restroom for anybody in need.

On the drive back to Camp we encounter a large herd of Impala and three elephants. One huge male, one good size female, and one small child elephant.

Finally at camp we're greeted by the matriarch "Momma Jo" and each given a washcloth wet with cool water with a little bit of citrus. Very civilized. In a little ante room off the dining room, Mamma Jo explains the dangers of being here and has each of us sign a release.

After drinks we head to dinner. We're given the option of dining alone or communally and opt for the more social choice. In addition to Mike and Lisa there are two couples, owners of a number of McDonald's franchises in the LA area.

Dinner is great, a combination of fan favorites and local grain, fruit or starch. After dark we're not allowed to walk around (even on the elevated walkways) and so Mamma Jo escorts us to our cabin/tent. Along the way we stop to admire the bright stars.

We prep for bed remembering that we'll be awakened at 5:30 am and escorted at 6 to breakfast in preparation for our early morning departure on our morning safari drive. Where we're staying the roof is tent material and the big sliding doors to the patio balcony are just screens. It'll get cool overnight and it's already fairly cool. They've put bush babies (hot water bottles) in our beds to warm them up. Nighty-night.

Photos



Not yet out of Johannesburg, we're heading out from the airport lounge, still trying to avoid getting covid or whatevs.



On the flight from Maun to our first safari camp I saw a couple of herds of elephants from the plane. Pretty exciting.



Landing in Chitabe our choices are 'find the guide' or 'go to our rooms'. We head to find our safari guide's vehicle. On the way our transfer driver spots a leopard in a tree eyeing a couple of zebras he might want to have to lunch.



And we see lots of Impalas, though none of these have that pesky Chevrolet logo.



And elephants.



And giraffes.



Our guide takes us to where the lions might be and... they're there. Lots of them. All being overseen by this furry bundle of fun.



There were a couple of lady lions there, too, pooped. This one exposing her underside to cool off.



Driving around we also see hyenas. I think this is one of those, or is it a wild dog, I can never tell.



So many impalas. Stop already.



Speaking of stopping, right around sunset everyday we stop the safari vehicle, pile out, a little bar with muchies is set up, and we decompress. Très civilized. This is us, our guide Ant (Anthony), Tricia and Don, and another couple (Mike and Lisa from South Carolina).



The sun, of course, cooperated. We gather there's nothing but blue sky this time of year.



Finally at Chitabe camp we get our safety briefing and sign the legal disclaimer that says we understand there are wild animals and are OK if we get eaten.



After which we get to have a delicious dinner. We can sit alone (no way) or go communal. We are sociable and the group is mucho fun.



Dinner was delish.



After dark, you're not allowed to walk around un-escorted. This is us going to our room.



This is our room. That big black thing is a screen to the out of doors. There are no doors, there are no windows, just screens that are always open! Lots of screens everywhere, and where it's not screens it's canvas. We'll manage.

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