



Wild at heart

Jane Dunford goes in search of Africa's most exclusive safaris to suit a variety of clients' needs

Safari School, filmed on South Africa's award-winning Shamwari reserve, has brought the magic of the bush to our front rooms over recent weeks, as a bunch of celebrities turn park ranger for BBC2. For non-celebs too, the lure of spending time in the heart of nature (albeit in five-star lodges) has boomed, particularly over the past couple of years, according to Safari Consultants' director Rob Slater.

But while demand increases, costs have soared too. "There have been some big price hikes, the top end are still willing to pay, but I do wonder how long it can be sustained," commented Slater.

While Zimbabwe remains off the radar for the British (American travellers continue to visit despite the political situation), most other African countries are seeing an increase in UK visitors.

With the competitive Rand and some of

the most exclusive lodges, South Africa looks strong for 2007, say operators, and its malaria-free safari options continue to appeal to families. Elsewhere, Namibia enjoyed a bumper year in 2006, developments in northern Mozambique are putting it on the map as an eco-tourism haven, southern Tanzania's wilderness areas are opening up for adventurous safaris and more people are choosing Zambia for its truly wild national parks and prolific game.

Carrier Africa product manager Sharon Sandz says: "We're expecting a strong year for Zambia. Wilderness Safaris has three new camps and the revamped Royal Zambezi Lodge opens at Easter giving the luxury end a further boost."

The first flights between bush camps of Zambia and Mozambique's Quirimbas Archipelago mean new beach/safari combinations are possible. Expert Africa has a 16-night trip (www.expertafrica.com).

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Above: Chongwe River House, Zambia

FOR FAMILIES

PICK OF THE BUNCH

Destination: **Zambia**

Safari details: There are several great family-oriented properties. Robin Pope's Luangwa Safari House and Chongwe River House can be hired on a private basis. Children can learn how to spot game, identify birds and go on guided walks. Books and games are also available and at Chongwe River House children can go canoeing, although they must be seven to stay here. Chefs, safari vehicles and guides are on hand. Both houses have pools.

Best room: The ground floor bedrooms at Chongwe River House are entered through tunnels, so it feels like you're walking into a cave.

Its USP: A good combination of luxury and wilderness in a safe environment for children.

Animals to see: Leopard, lion, elephant, giraffe and hippo, to name a few, and 400 species of birds.

Any other luxury activities: A helicopter flight over the Victoria Falls is unforgettable.

Price: Prices start from £1,000 per night for either house, with all meals and activities.

Contact: www.robinpopesafaris.net



Above: Luangwa Safari House, Zambia

Its USP: Jembisa takes one booking at a time so the safari is completely tailored to meet the family's needs.

Animals to see: White rhino, giraffe, hippo and zebra, among others.

Any other luxury activities: Scenic helicopter flights can be arranged.

Price: One week for the whole house costs from £8,500, all-inclusive.

Contact: www.baileyrobinson.com

Destination: **South Africa**

Safari details: Pafuri Camp in South Africa's Kruger National Park is great for children. Guides teach survival skills and there are themed excursions, team-building games and picnics. Children can learn how to make a fire and for young wildlife enthusiasts there's a three-day, mini-guide course.

Best room: One of the six family rooms, sleeping up to four people, is perfect.

Its USP: The programme for children is among the best around.

Any other luxury activities: Sleeping out in a hide.

Animals to see: Array of birdlife and mammals.

Price: One night costs £138 per person, per night.

Contact: www.wilderness-safaris.com

BEST OF THE REST

Destination: **South Africa**

Safari details: A popular choice for families because it offers malaria-free areas. In the Waterberg Plateau, Jembisa is a private home set in the family's own reserve, with pool and tennis court. There are day and night drives and guided walks, with spoor and tracking expeditions, 'frogging' and bush survival lessons. Sleep outs and bush dining is possible. Babysitting is free.

Best room: There are six bedrooms and five bathrooms, all comfortably furnished.

INSIDER'S GUIDE

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Probably, the finest safari in the world is the combination of the 60,000-acre private ranch of **Oi Laro** in the Kenya Great Rift Valley, with the private mobile camps of **Royal African safaris**, operated by Peter Silvester. It's by **Lake Natron**, a rare nesting site for the lesser flamingo, and there's fantastic wildlife, excellent walking and community Maasai projects to visit. The luxurious lodge overlooks the Nguruman escarpment and sleeps 14. There are two helicopters and a Cessna

caravan on stand-by, so guests can do day trips into the Maasai Mara, go fishing in Mount Kenya or maybe go to Meru or Lake Nakuru.

If they want to go somewhere further afield private mobile camps can be set up, or they could stay in any other lodges they choose (provided they have space). It appeals to people who want privacy. The Dutch Royal Family, George Soros and Dan Aykroyd are some recent guests – and Bill Gates came for lunch. It costs

US\$250,000 (£128,992) a week all-inclusive.

A new walking safari option is available in northern Kenya with the Maasai and Samburu, led by **Lemarti Loiyoban** and his wife **Anna Trzebinski**. The base is **Koija** in the central highlands and trips are tailored to clients. A helicopter can drop you off and then you walk north towards the **Karissa Hills**, staying at mobile camps, with camels carrying the kit. Mark Shand, Camilla Parker-Bowles' brother, was one of the first to



try it. A week costs £2,699.

There's a new private villa on **Lamu**, the **Dhow House** at Lamu, which is great for families too. **Journeys by Design** have been given the keys to the house – a stay links superbly with a few nights sailing around the Kiwayu archipelago in a private dhow.

(www.journeysbydesign.co.uk)