

## 5 African Adventures That Take You Beyond the Savannah.

You've seen the big five. Now what? These African adventures will take you where few have ever been.  
Chris Schalkx



*Courtesy of Journeys by Design*

The word “safari” means “journey” in the Swahili language, but somewhere along the way, it became synonymous with bouncing around in a Land Cruiser while staring down lions and elephants through a pair of binoculars or a tele-lens. Not that there’s anything wrong with that, but Africa is much bigger, wilder, and weirder than the Big Five. Below, five African adventures—from the deep jungles of Congo to the museums of Benin—that take you far beyond the savanna.



*Photo : Courtesy of Doli Lodge Canoe River*

### Track Gorillas in the Congo Basin

The mountain gorillas of Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park, Africa's gorilla-tracking epicenter, see almost 100 tourists per day trampling around their turf. It's a busy gig compared to that of their slightly smaller cousins, the western lowland gorillas of the Congo Basin, who can expect to meet fewer than 250 visitors in a year. Tour operator [Cookson Adventures](#) organises fully bespoke expeditions to this little-visited corner of the continent, where, under the guidance of world-leading primatologists, you'll come face to face with these elusive creatures in northeastern Congo's Odzala National Park. With Kamba, a string of eco-chic rainforest lodges, as your base, you'll also come up close with forest elephants, rare bongo antelopes, and more than 1000 native bird species. If that isn't wild enough, hop on a boat up the Sangha River to the UNESCO-listed Dzanga-Sangha Reserve in the Central African Republic, where Cookson has privileged access to newly habituated gorilla groups, the forest elephants of the Dzanga Bai, and campouts with the jungle-dwelling Ba'Aka people.



Photo : Courtesy of Miavana

### Heli-hop Around Madagascar

You're not going to find lions in Madagascar. Nor will you spot zebras, elephants, or any of the other mammals that are omnipresent in much of Africa. As one of the largest islands in the world, this jumble of rainforests, highland plateaus, and otherworldly rock formations has spawned a unique ecosystem of freakish critters—many of which can't be found anywhere else on earth. The best way to get around this largely undeveloped nation is by air, which makes it easy to hop between its lodges and national parks and brings you up close with more than a 100 different types of lemurs, DayGlo-colored amphibians, and insects as big as your fist.

Madagascar specialist [Natural World Safaris](#)'s 10-day private aircraft tour includes stops at the wildlife-rich Andasibe National Park in Madagascar's east, rustic camping on the banks of the Mandrare River, and sundowners under the alienesque baobab trees of the Ifotaka Community Reserve. Your adventure will end in one of the sprawling villas at Miavana, arguably one of the finest beach retreats in all of Africa, where a fleet of boats and helicopters can whisk you to picnics in hard-to-reach tsingy stone forests or on underwater safaris to spot humpback whales, sea turtles, and pristine kaleidoscopic reefs.



Photo : Courtesy of The Ultimate Travel Company

### **Sail Around the Lamu Archipelago**

With its private pool villas and boutiques dealing in breezy caftans, Lamu, Kenya's coastal social hub, can often feel like a Swahili-tinged version of Notting Hill. But *NaiSabah*, a gorgeously refitted Omani dhow that launched at the end of 2023, makes it easy to sail away from the fray. The 75-foot ship's three wood-paneled and aircon-cooled staterooms sleep families of up to eight, while the top deck, furnished with local woodwork and pillow-covered daybeds, offers plenty of space for early-morning yoga sessions, lazy afternoons, and dinners with fish plucked straight from the sea. Routes (bookable via [the Ultimate Travel Company](#)) depend on the season and can range from single-night journeys through the mangrove forests around Lamu Island to week-long expeditions that could bring you all the way to Zanzibar or the pristine beaches near the Somali border. Either way, days fill up with snorkeling trips, village visits, and G&T sundowners on remote beaches that have remained blissfully footprint-free.

### **Go on a Culture Trip in Benin**

From the face-painted Wodaabe nomads in Chad to Kenya's Samburu warriors, Africa's indigenous cultures are hardly achromatic affairs. Still, Benin, a sliver of a country wedged between Nigeria and Togo on West Africa's coast, might just be one of the most colorful places on the continent. It owes much of its vibrancy to the Voudun culture that emerged here during the height of the slave trade in the 16th century. On trips around Benin (or the wider West Africa region), ethnographic travel specialist [Last Places](#) helps you dive deep into Voudun's kaleidoscopic costumes, mesmerizing rituals, and dark past. Other stops could include the Crayola-hued Portuguese mansions of Porto-Novo, the Royal Palaces of Abomey, or the castle-like abode villages of the Ditamari people. Don't jet off just yet, though: A slew of new museums, such as the International Museum of Memory and Slavery in Ouidah and Cotonou's Museum of Contemporary Art, are set to open in the coming year—and will surely be worth the wait.





*Photo : Courtesy of Journeys by Design*

### **Explore Namibia's Skeleton Coast From Above**

What Namibia's Skeleton Coast lacks in freshwater—and therefore, big concentrations of wildlife—it makes up for with scenery that seems almost extraterrestrial. The best way to soak in the sheer size of these endless dunes and rock formations is by air, and the clued-in experts behind [Journeys by Design](#) can help you do just that. On its tailor-made flying safaris, you'll traverse some of Africa's harshest habitats in a small plane, by foot, and by 4×4 to learn first-hand why the Bushmen call this slice of arid desert the Land God Made In Anger. Lodgings en route are basic, but comfortable (think: canvas and wood, bucket showers, and friendly staff from the local communities). Opt for a trip by private helicopter if you want to hop between the Skeleton Coast's upscale camps, such as Wilderness's Hoanib Skeleton Coast Camp or the design-forward Skeleton Coast Shipwreck Lodge.