

# All-out Africa

**Competition at the top end of the safari lodge market is fierce. Joanna Booth tracks down the cream of the crop**

**A** safari is one of the most sought-after holiday experiences – just look how popular it is as a honeymoon option. So trying to select just 10 from the generous sprinkling of genuinely jaw-dropping lodges across Africa was always going to be tricky. The properties below are merely a snapshot of the quality on offer rather than an exhaustive list, but if at least one of them doesn't inspire your high-net-worth, safari-loving clients to book, you need to check them for a pulse.

not, they can't fail to be struck by Chinzombo's beautiful looks. The architect-designed six-villa lodge, which sits by a river in Zambia's South Luangwa National Park, opened in 2013. Slim-profile steel frames maximise views, and local materials keep the feel natural, if incredibly luxurious. Bedrooms are circular, and each villa has its own private plunge pool. It's designed to be low-impact and sustainable, but with no sacrifices for clients, who will find all the frills from Wi-Fi to a spa. It's a Norman Carr Safaris property, with the high quality of guiding and service the name promises.

to nature, but some clients will prefer to retain a little veneer of civilisation in between. This is where Belmond Khwai River Lodge comes in. It overlooks the vast, wildlife-rich floodplains of the Moremi Wildlife Reserve in Botswana. The 14 luxury tents are all air-conditioned – a relative rarity – and have his-and-hers vanity units and hairdryers. The one private suite also has a copper-framed Victorian bathtub and its own private plunge pool. In addition to a spa, there's a small gym, a 20m swimming pool, a business centre and Wi-Fi, so this is great for auests who need to stay connected in the wilderness. Alongside traditional game-viewing activities, clients can take scenic helicopter flights or even have a cheese and wine tasting in the bush.



● **THE ARCHITECTURAL LODGE**

Whether clients are the kind of people who bandy about terms like 'minimalist modernism' or

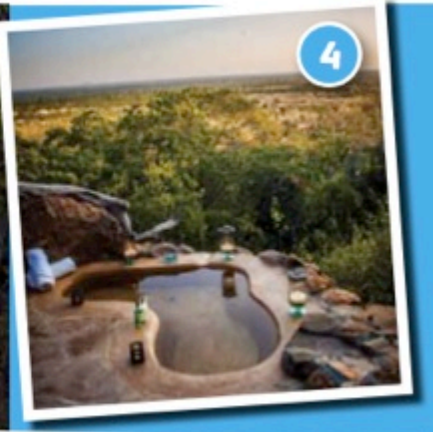


● **THE ALL-MOD-CONS LODGE**

Safari is about getting close

**10**  
of the  
**BEST**  
luxury  
lodges





### ● THE MIGRATION LODGE

Singita Explore is an off-grid mobile camp run on solar power where the focus is on sustainability and the pure safari experience itself, rather than design bells-and-whistles. It's particularly good for clients who want to see the epic spectacle that is the Great Migration, where millions of wildebeest and zebra move across the plains. Set in the private, 350,000-acre Singita

Grumeti Private Game Reserve in Tanzania, the exclusive camp has a maximum of six tents, and its location is decided upon the request of the group – thus placing it directly into the path of the migration, or in a particularly scenic or remote location, depending on the season, weather or movement of game. It's hardly roughing it, however – the beautiful mobile tents are en-suite, there's a private chef and spa treatments can be organised.



### ● THE HISTORIC LODGE

Many a client may have fallen in love with the idea of a safari through *Born Free*, the movie and book relating how conservationists George and Joy Adamson raised Elsa, an orphaned lion cub, and

later released her into the wild. Photos from the filming are displayed at Elsa's Kopje, the lodge that sits in a remote, tranquil spot on the hill above the filming site in Meru National Park, Kenya. It tops Somak's lodge selection for something "romantic, elegant and beautifully styled".

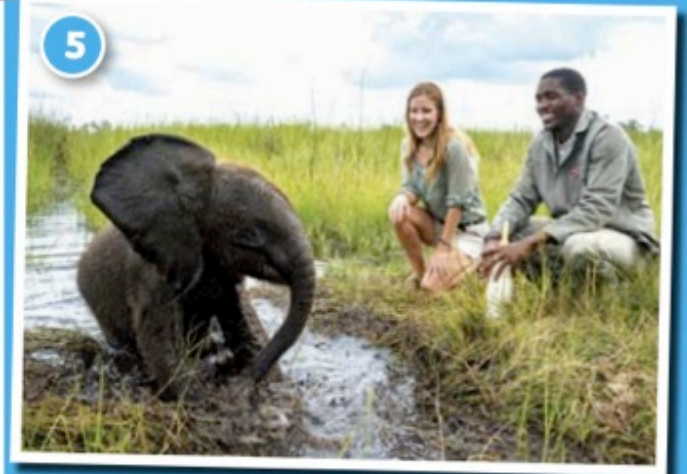
The 10 cottages have open sitting rooms, verandas and rock-hewn bathrooms, all with views that rank among the best in Africa. There's an infinity pool, the camp grows most of its own fresh produce, and game activities are varied, with night drives, fishing and, unusually for East Africa, walking safaris also permitted.



### ● THE ELEPHANT LODGE

At Wilderness Safari's Abu

Camp there are more elephants in the resident herd than there are tents for guests. The camp's six stylish, airy tents, all with en-suite bathrooms and private decks shaded by fig and jackalberry trees, sit within a 450,000-acre private concession in Botswana's Okavango Delta. Guests are offered total elephant immersion with the seven members of the herd – they can walk and physically interact with them, learn about their behaviour and take elephant-back safaris, and even sleep out on a 'star bed' on a



platform overlooking the elephant enclosure. But this is not a circus – the camp, along with NGO Elephants Without Borders, works to reintroduce captive elephants to the wild. The other game activities that make the Okavango so popular are also available – game drives, safaris in mokoro canoes and scenic flights.



### ● THE BEACHSIDE LODGE

Sand and safari make great

bedfellows, so twin a bush stay with the idyllic beaches of African up-and-comer Mozambique. Send high-end clients to the Bazaruto Archipelago, where they'll find brilliant white sands and incredible diving – think manta rays, turtles and Africa's only population of endangered dugong. Established but low-key favourite Benguerra Lodge closed in October for a

complete makeover and will reopen in June as &Beyond

Benguerra Island, with a look described as "warm, intimate and distinctly African". Looking at &Beyond's other properties, we're fairly confident it'll be gorgeous. It'll need to be to compete. This corner of Mozambique is in demand, with properties from Singita and Anantara rumoured to be on their way.



### ● THE GORILLA LODGE

Coming face to face with an endangered mountain gorilla is an utter thrill, but to do this clients will need to trek through the jungle – the experience is more active than your average safari. Which makes a sumptuous base even more welcome, and they don't come much sleeker than Virunga Lodge in Rwanda. ▶



The position is 24 carat, perched on a hill overlooking twin lakes – African Pride describes the views as “genuinely breathtaking” – and the service is as warm as the roaring stove that heats the lounge on chilly evenings. Days are warm, so until nightfall most guests lounge outdoors on the sunny terrace. Of the 10 ‘bandas’, as the stone-built cottages are called, try to book clients into the two newest and most spacious, Ibiyaga and Ibirunga.

for safari aficionados. There are just nine thatched suites and one five-bedroom private villa, and in addition to game drives, horseback and walking safaris are on offer. 2by2 Holidays loves the lodge for its high number of guides and butlers, meaning all activities can be scheduled at times to suit individual guests. Special mention should also go to its superb wine cellar, and star-bed for sophisticated sleep-outs.



#### ● THE MALARIA-FREE LODGE

Picking Tswalu Motse out for

its malaria-free qualities feels rather like damning it with faint praise, but that factor does make this a fabulous top-end option for families. It's in South Africa's Kalahari, one of the destination's least-visited safari areas, on Tswalu, the country's largest private game reserve. The unusual wildlife – wild dog, black-maned Kalahari lions, meerkats, cheetah and black rhino – is a particular selling point



#### ● THE FLOATING LODGE

The Chobe River is the border

between Botswana's Chobe National Park and Namibia's Caprivi Strip, with both banks packed with wildlife. Many visitors stay on land and take boat trips, but keen cruisers, or those that are tickled by the idea of a safari with a difference, can stay on the 45-metre *Zambezi Queen* river cruise boat and explore a longer stretch of the river. All 14 suites have balconies and floor-to-ceiling windows for uninterrupted game

viewing, and the cosmopolitan decor is rather Africa-meets-Manhattan. Passengers can disembark for other activities including game drives, safaris on smaller boats and fishing, but the top deck lounge area and plunge pool mean relaxing and wildlife spotting can go hand in hand.



#### ● THE WINE LODGE

South Africa is on the money for clients who want

a variety of other experiences as well as safari, and if they're looking for vines and views then

point them towards Delaire Graff Lodges & Spa. Sitting at the peak of the Helshoogte Mountain Pass which links Stellenbosch and Franschhoek, the property is perfectly placed for both of the Cape region's leading wine districts. The incredibly luxurious 10-lodge property is in a working wine estate owned by diamond-mogul Laurence Graff, and features art from his personal collection. The food and – unsurprisingly – the wine are something to write home about, plus there's a swanky spa and immaculately manicured botanical and sculpture gardens. **TW**

