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FREE MAGAZINE

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BEST OF AFRICA

FROM FLY-CAMPING TO HOT AIR BALLOONING,
TRY A SAFARI WITH A DIFFERENCE

SAN FRANCISCO

The bohemian beatnik
still beating its own path

COSTA RICA

Squirrel monkeys, scarlet
macaws & goldpanning

SALZBURGERLAND

Free guide to Austria's
adventure playground

CITIES

BUDAPEST • LIMA • TURIN



ALSO: DOMINICA // FIFE // JAPAN // LITHUANIA // NORTHUMBERLAND

Making tracks

SAFARI WITH A DIFFERENCE

Africa's wildest sights aren't seen through the windows of a jeep. Set off on foot, in the saddle, by paddleboard, boat or even in a hot air balloon to encounter the most authentic and exciting new safari experiences the continent has to offer

WORDS EMMA GREGG

IMAGE: SUPERSTOCK

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FLY-CAMPING IN BIG FIVE COUNTRY

Serengeti, Tanzania



"Get down!" hisses senior tracker Pius, ducking behind a large tuft of grass. The wildlife path we've been following winds downhill through a tumble of granite koppies and, with my view partially obscured, I can't yet see what he has seen. Trusting him implicitly, I simply do as he says. Ranger Ezekiel shakes a handkerchief stuffed with ash to test the breeze. We're crouching so close we can feel each other's breath.

There's a rapid exchange of whispers. One word stands out: *simba*. My Swahili is rudimentary, but every Disney fan knows that one. Lion.

Njile, our other tracker, has scrambled up a small hill gripping his quiver and bow. Silently, he raises a hand, his face bright and alert: four fingers. I dare myself to peer over the fronds, and there, in the middle distance, is one of the four: a magnificent lioness, padding across another *koppie* in the dewy morning light. Like a tabby on a living room carpet, she chooses the sunniest-looking spot and sinks elegantly on to her side.

She throws a casual glance in our direction. There's no doubt she's seen us, despite our hasty attempts to hide. But at this distance, we're not a mutual threat. For the next five minutes or so we enjoy something rare and extraordinarily precious: a ground-level view of a wild lioness in her prime, on her terms, her permission implicit in her nonchalant gaze and the lazy twitch of her tail.

It's migration season in the northern Serengeti. In Lamai, where my journey began, the close-cropped grasslands sloping down to the Mara River are resounding with gentle, conversational grunts. Like sullen teenagers, wildebeest seem monosyllabic at first, but if you listen carefully, you can detect small, meaningful variations in their calls. Few of the Serengeti's visitors get the chance to dwell on such subtleties, however. Many have travelled for miles with a single goal in mind. In the rush to witness one of East Africa's signature wildlife dramas, their drivers put their foot to the floor and hurtle along the dusty tracks, hell-bent on reaching a river crossing point just before the first wildebeest of the day surges over the brink.

It's quite a spectacle. Braking on the bank to watch a herd of antelopes thicken and twist in the fast-flowing water, dodging fat crocodiles and grappling for purchase, is both nail-biting and exhilarating. But after a day in the *melée*, I was ready to move on. My plan was to devote a few days to a different kind of experience, led by a walking safari team who believe that it's when you switch off the engine, climb down from the vehicle and step out of your comfort zone that the adventure really begins.

IMAGES: EMMA GREGG



PREVIOUS PAGE: Lions crossing a river
CLOCKWISE: Fly-camping safari in the
Serengeti National Park with Alex Walker's
Serian; Hadza tracker Njile; zebras beside
the Mara River

The first of our three camps is a cluster of bell tents in a beautiful, remote meadow, fringed by fig trees and acacias. Officially, we're fly-camping (a temporary camp away from base), but this isn't the rudimentary set-up of boy scouts or hardcore pioneers. 'Fly-glamping' would be closer to the mark. We have a chill-out space strewn with *kilims* (rugs) and cushions and, in the shade of a *balanites* tree that elephants clearly use as a rubbing post, a well-stocked portable bar.

The man behind this magic is Alex Walker, a 50-something East African with bushlore in his blood. His company, Serian, has several conventional safari camps, stuffed with the elegant touches that well-heeled adventurers tend to expect. But I quickly get the sense that it's here, in the stripped-down surroundings of a camp that only sprang up here today — and will be gone without a trace tomorrow — that he's most at home.

"Sunlight filtering through leaves. Dappled shade, a gentle breeze and a campfire," he says. "The Japanese have a word for that: *komorebi*. It's all you really need."

They say that a walking safari is all about the little things. Instead of barging into the bush in a noisy, cumbersome vehicle, you venture in, as if on tiptoe, hoping its wonders won't flee. It's an opportunity to forget the Big Five and discover, instead, the intricacies of nature: the ecological genius of a termite colony, the trill of a honeyguide, the turnip-like scent of acacia sap, the filigree of a scarlet dragonfly's wings. All of this is

true. But what they don't always tell you is that if you're lucky enough to see one of the big things, you'll be filled with such fascination and respect that you'll never want to be a backseat wildlife-watcher ever again.

Njile, a Hadza Bushman from the southern Serengeti, is the joker in our pack. Brought up in the bush, his senses are so sharp that he's always the first to spot anything. "I learn from him every day," says Alex.

Each of our morning and late-afternoon bush walks reveals something new, from the terrifyingly large bull elephant which emerges from the undergrowth to eye us with patient calm, to the warthogs that peer curiously from a distance, uncertain of what we are.

"See how close you can get," says Alex. I step into Njile's shadow and follow his lead. Like kids playing a game of grandmother's footsteps, we inch forward, then freeze, inch forward, then freeze.

"We got within arrow-shot range!" says Njile, triumphant, when at last our target scurries away. My warthog-whisperer training is off to a flying start.

Our last camp is close to the Mara River. As I sip my morning coffee, the high-pitched braying of zebras drifts up from the banks. "They sound agitated," says Alex. "Perhaps the wildebeest are about to cross."

The old me would want to jump into a vehicle and find out. But the new me wants nothing more than to stay right here, with the grass beneath my feet, feeling utterly, blissfully, alive.

HOW TO DO IT

Alex Walker's Serian offers a 10-day Soul Drifter safari in the northern Serengeti including five nights walking and fly-camping from £935 per person per night, all-inclusive, excluding international flights. serian.com

Is it safe to walk in a BIG FIVE reserve?

"On any walking safari, safety is absolutely paramount. The key is to anticipate potential dangers long before they arise. We're always alert to our surroundings, the wind direction and the physical and mental condition of our guests. When I'm leading a walk, I always carry a rifle and am accompanied by an armed ranger — it's a legal requirement. But a weapon is basically just a precaution. It's not a substitute for training, discipline, knowledge, experience and common sense.

Some see walking in the bush as a big adventure — and it is — but it can also be a soulful, peaceful experience. The luxury of space and silence, far from other human beings, and the pleasure of gathering around a campfire to dissect the details of the day add a whole new dimension to the joy of being on safari.

You can see a lot in one excursion; the more time you devote to walking, the more you get out of it. Five days of

morning and afternoon walks is ideal. It's normal to feel a bit clumsy and out of place at first, but as time goes on, you relax, your senses sharpen, you let go of the stresses of your everyday life and achieve a level of serenity that a vehicle-based safari just simply can't match."

ALEX WALKER

Guide and founder of Alex Walker's Serian, a collection of award-winning bush camps in Tanzania and Kenya



LEFT: A kingfisher in the Serengeti National Park
OPPOSITE: A safari-goer with tracker Njile and guide Alex Walker

IMAGES: EMMA GREGG





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ANIMALS TO SEE on a vehicle- free safari

① AFRICAN PENGUIN

SOUTH AFRICA
Chill out on the boardwalks at Boulders Beach in False Bay near Cape Town and watch South Africa's beach-loving penguins at close range.

② BROOKESIA MICRA CHAMELEON

MADAGASCAR
Africa's tiniest reptile can only be found by exploring the roadless forests of Nosy Hara archipelago. You'll need keen eyes: they're perfectly camouflaged and barely half an inch long.

③ CHIMPANZEE

TANZANIA & UGANDA
There's never a dull moment when you're tracking chimps on foot. Speedy, agile and vocal, they'll keep you on your toes as they forage, hunt, squabble and groom.

④ ELEPHANT

BOTSWANA & ZIMBABWE
For serene views of a herd of elephants at the water's edge, watch from a hide or approach gently in a boat, enjoying their beautiful reflections as they drink.

⑤ GIRAFFE

BOTSWANA & KENYA
Galloping on horseback across a sweeping savannah alongside wild giraffes, admiring their graceful gait, has to be the ultimate equestrian thrill.

⑥ HIPPOPOTAMUS

SOUTH AFRICA & ZAMBIA
Waterside safari camps and lodges often have resident hippos which wallow nearby by day and come ashore to graze by night. You can watch them without leaving the deck.

⑦ LION

TANZANIA & ZAMBIA
The thrill of spotting lions on foot is unlike seeing them from a vehicle. Keep your distance and you'll be fine. But just try telling that to your thumping heart.

⑧ MOUNTAIN GORILLA

UGANDA & RWANDA
Gorillas occasionally wander into fields and gardens, but to be sure of finding some, join a guided hike, and climb deep into the forest.

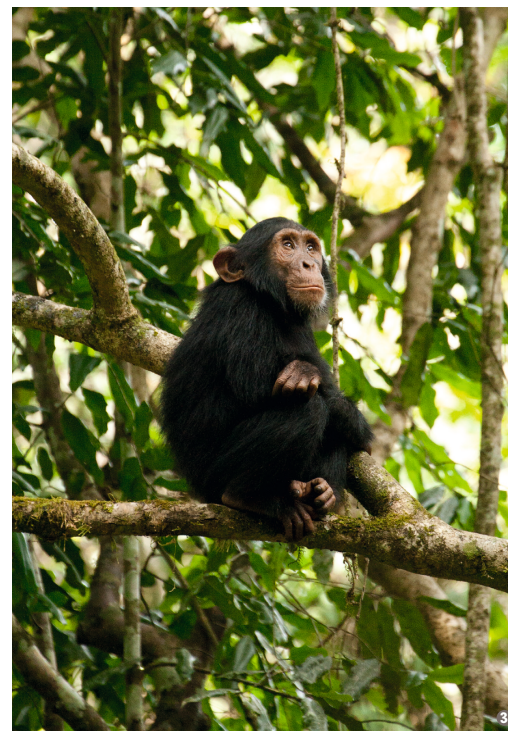
⑨ RHINO

KENYA, NAMIBIA & UGANDA
Tracking wild black rhinos on foot is one of Africa's most exciting conservation-friendly adventures. For a gentler alternative, take a short stroll in a rhino sanctuary.

⑩ SHOEBILL

UGANDA & ZAMBIA
With a peculiar, prehistoric appearance, shoebill birds stand so still when fishing that you'll wonder whether they're real or stuffed. To spot one, venture into their wetland habitat by canoe.

IMAGES: EMMA GREGG



OPPOSITE: Reticulated giraffe at Samburu National Reserve, Kenya
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Tracking habituated chimpanzees in Budongo Forest, Uganda; hiking in Madagascar's Masoala National Park; watching white rhinos on foot at Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary in Uganda