

Insider's Guide to Family Safaris



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Insider's Guide to Family Safaris



As a mother of three, I'm all for introducing children to the wonder of African wildlife: the bush is a natural arena for learning about the cycles of the earth, predator hierarchy and the fascinating ways animals adapt to their environment. So, a family safari in Africa could well be your best family trip ever! But it does require some thinking as to what will work best for YOUR family.

Imagine... you are five years old and 1½ hours into a game drive. It was really fun at first and you loved seeing the elephant and the baby zebra. But now the ranger just keeps talking and talking... and you haven't a clue what he's saying. You're hungry, and you're getting cold and you really, really need to go to the loo. But Mum says you can't because we're looking for a pride of lions which were sighted near here ... wherever here is. You're bored and you want to go home NOW!

No one wants unhappy children, especially when you've spent a lot of money to travel to Africa. So we hope that this guide, and our Family Safari Quiz, will provide answers to some of your questions.

Each family is different. Some families want to stay together and enjoy game drives all together. If they have very young children, this may mean some compromise on the choice of game lodge. Or budgeting to have your own private game vehicle. Other families love the idea of the children having their own activities, where they may meet other kids and learn about the bush in a child-friendly way. And also giving parents some time to relax.

***Note:** This Insider's Guide uses some of the info in our family safari articles on our website. So, if you've read some of those, there may be some repetition. However, we felt that there was a need for a handy guide which can be read in one go, perhaps printed & more easily shared.*



A photograph of a savanna landscape. In the foreground, a sandy bank meets a body of water with two ducks. In the middle ground, a safari vehicle with a tan canopy is parked. Behind it, a herd of elephants is visible. The background is filled with green trees and bushes under a clear blue sky.

1 - Different Types of Safari Lodges



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Broadly speaking, safari lodges for families fall into four categories:

- Classic Safari Lodges & Camps
- Family-Friendly Lodges
- Family-Friendly Lodges for Younger Kids
- Exclusive Use Safari Houses & Villas





Classic Safari Lodges & Camps

You may decide to opt for a traditional game lodge because it's in a great area for game-viewing. Classic safari lodges typically welcome kids to stay from 6 years upwards (or 8 years for some destinations). But they make no special concessions to kids other than a few board games.

In some cases, accommodation is based on two-man tents or chalets, so it's important that either your children are comfortable sleeping by themselves, or you're happy to split to share one adult with one child.

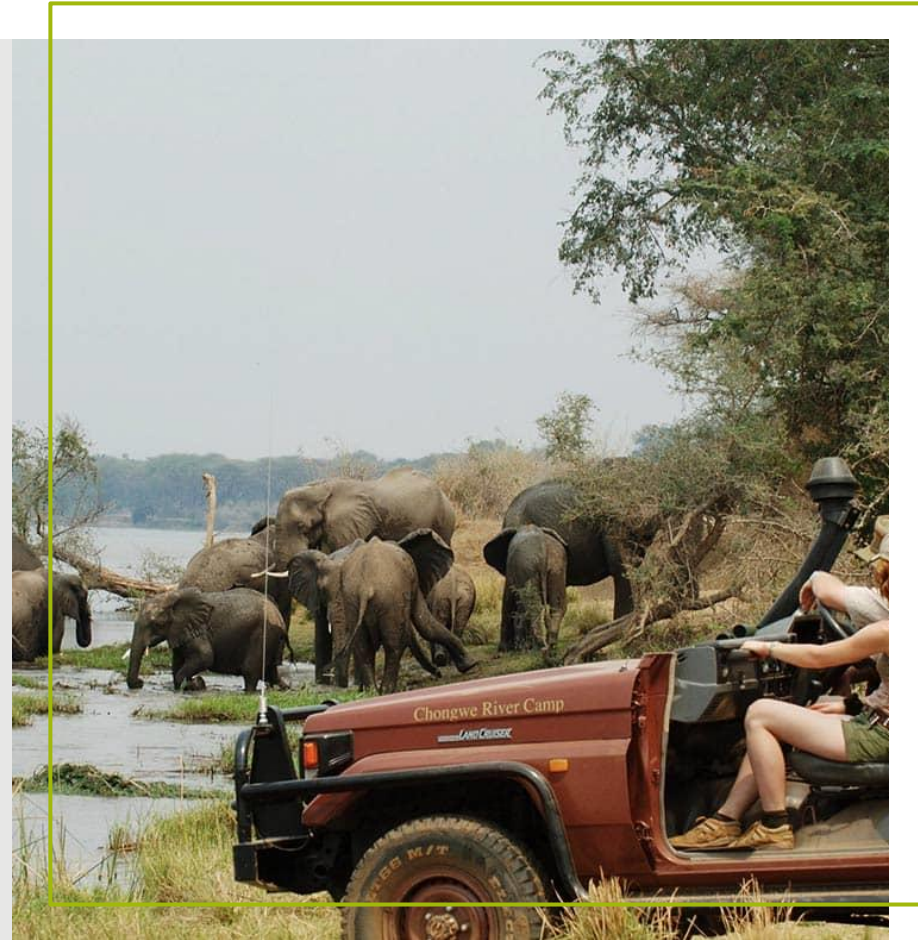
These lodges are perfect if you like to hang out together as a family. Or if your kids are used to amusing themselves.

Family-Friendly Lodges

Family friendly lodges are similar to classic lodges, but they're keen to attract families. So they've geared themselves more towards kids. They still often restrict game drives to children over 6 years old. (Very young children do not really *'get'* the idea of sitting down quietly in a vehicle for several hours.)

But - in addition to the game drives - the lodge will offer additional wildlife-related activities for kids back at the lodge. This may be a games room or ranger-led safari activities after breakfast. E.g. exploring the natural environment – identifying spore (tracks), foraging for feathers and porcupine quills, making plaster casts of animal tracks. They usually (though not always) have family accommodation.

Most of our family-friendly lodges are like this. As only a few people bring their very young children to Africa.





Family-Friendly Lodges for Younger Kids

Some family-friendly lodges DO cater for younger children with shorter 'Kids drives' on offer (possibly at a different time of day from the main drive) as well as supervised wildlife-related activities. Depending on the wildlife area, some of them may allow younger children on the main game drive. However note this is usually only offered where the likelihood of seeing the large predators is very low. They will offer early kids suppers, children's menus, even some baby-sitting or story telling so parents can have dinner in peace.

Most of these lodges tend to be in non-malarial areas but not always. Accommodation is usually in family rooms with children occupying an annex to the room or part of the room. Or in two-bedroom suites.

Note: *These lodges tend to want kids to eat earlier than parents, then head off to bed. If you want to be with your children, not all of these lodges will be right for you. Some have a set children's programme whereas others have a more relaxed approach. Please discuss with us.*



Seven Tips for Kids on Safari



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Tips for Kids on Safari

- 1 Know your Family
- 2 Safaris are structured
- 3 Longer Stays (at least until they are old enough to pack)
- 4 If on a Long Safari – go for variety
- 5 Be realistic about attention spans of young kids
- 6 Private Game Vehicle
- 7 Plenty of Cameras & Binoculars

Download our Helpful Family Safari Quiz to help you decide on which area suits your family.



1. Know Your Family

Your family on safari will be no different from your family on any other holiday. What sort of family holidays do you enjoy? Adventurous or laid back? Lots of activity or time alone in a pristine environment? Do you want to be always together, or prefer some time apart?

If your kids show no major love of animals, don't book a solid 10-day safari. Rather combine a shorter 2 to 4-night safari to introduce them to the African wildlife along with other options such as Cape Town, the Drakensberg mountains, Garden Route or Victoria Falls.

How good are they at travelling long distances? Would your kids like to meet other children, or do you want to stay as a family? Are there any activities that you enjoy such as walking, canoeing, horse-riding? This is vital info that helps us to design the ideal family safari for you.





2. Safaris are Structured

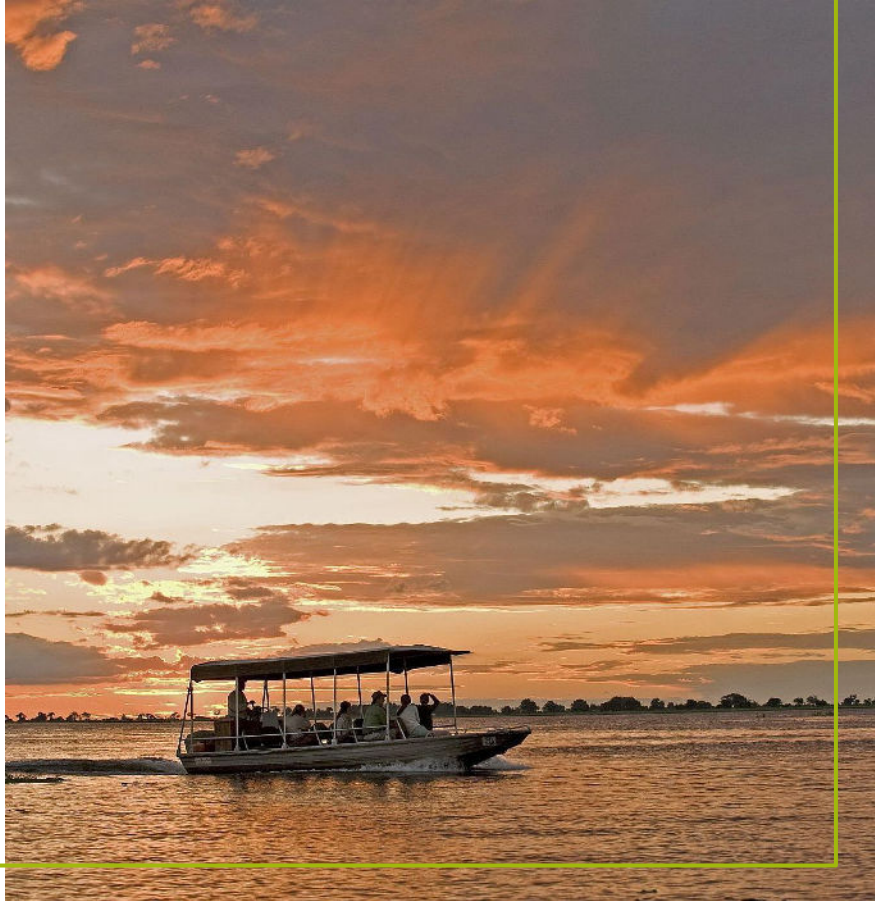
A safari - for a few days - is a structured way of life.

Some kids will easily adapt into the routine of morning & late afternoon game drives mixed with time at leisure. However more boisterous and active kids may find this more difficult, especially in the winter months when swimming in the pool may not be an attractive option. Make sure that you are prepared for this & choose an appropriate safari lodge or come armed with games/books etc.

3. Longer Stays (at least until they are old enough to pack)

I speak from experience as someone who did a lot of research trips with my kids, when they were young, often staying only one or two nights at each safari camp! Three or four nights is a good time period at each lodge, otherwise you'll spend too much of your precious holiday time packing and unpacking.





4. If on a Long Safari go for Variety

If you do decide to take a full-on safari where you stay at several safari camps, try some with different activities for the kids. A diet of only game drives - no matter how much wildlife you are seeing - starts to get a little repetitive for adults. Let alone kids. Spice it up by choosing safari lodges with other activities on offer.

My kids have loved going on a horse-riding safari, tried tiger-fishing, and even a camel ride in Kenya. Many lodges in Zambia or Botswana offer boat cruises as an alternative to a game drive and most kids (plus adults) like the variety.

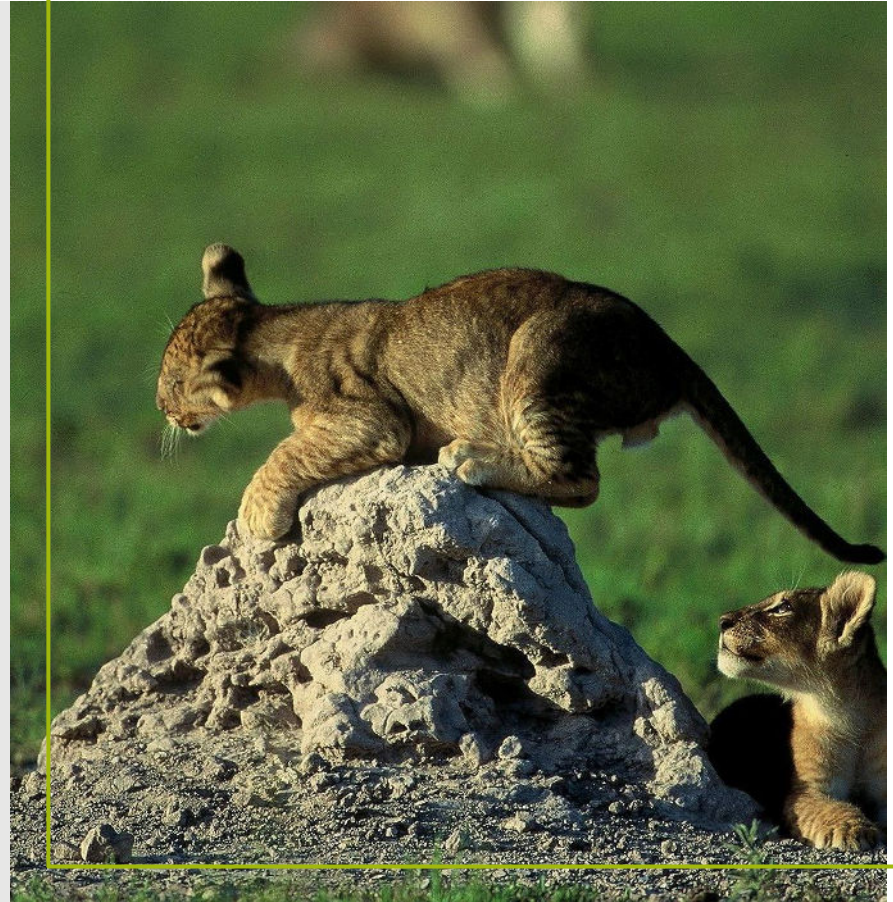
Or alternate your safari stays with sight-seeing. This breaks up the safari routine & allows the family to enjoy some more relaxed lie-ins.



5. Be realistic about attention spans of young kids

Parents often want their 3- or 4-year-old children to go on a game drive to experience the wildlife. I have great sympathy with that - and some 4-year-olds are just fine. However, others cope well only on a good day! The reality is that - with years of experience - the game lodges have found that only children from 6 to 7 years up can consistently enjoy a game drive lasting 3 to 4 hours. And some kids only really get into it from 8 or 9 years old. (My middle son included.)

If you have young children, choose a lodge that's geared for younger kids. OR take a private vehicle. Then you can head back whenever kids are getting tired or fidgety or hungry.





6. Private Game Vehicles

If you are unsure about whether your children will cope with a long game drive, consider booking a private vehicle and guide. The advantage is you can make the game drive as long as suits you. Your ranger will know what you've seen and focus on showing you new things. He (or she) gets to know the kids and builds a relationship with them.

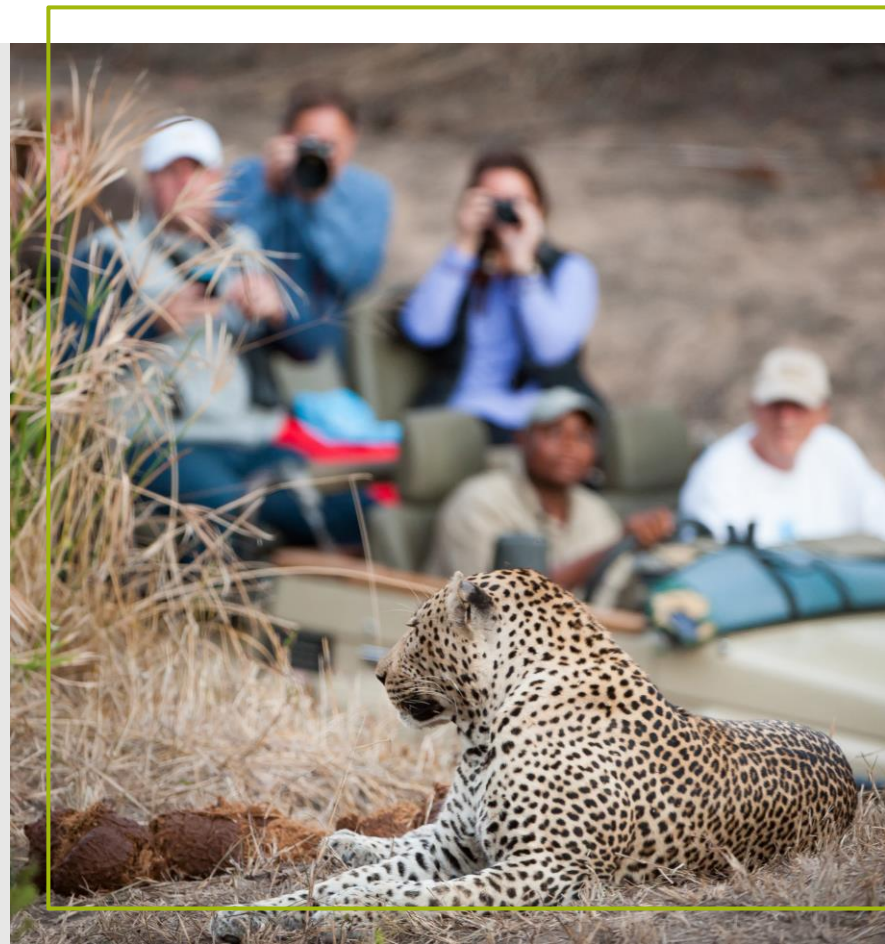
Recommended!

7. Plenty of Cameras & Binoculars

Photos are an integral part of a safari. Bringing at least two cameras with you, and some extra camera phone. My kids loved taking photos. As they get into their teens, you could find you have a budding amateur photographer on your hands!

Likewise - for kids to get the most out of their safari - and to maximize family harmony, I recommend bringing as many binoculars as you can. (From my experience, more 'low grade' bickering takes place over binoculars than anything else on a family safari!)

Ideally you should aim to have binoculars for each family member, or 1 between 2, even if it means borrowing them.

















Main Family Safari Destinations



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Main Family Safari Destinations

-  South Africa
 -  Kruger & Private Game Lodges
 -  KwaZulu Natal
 -  Garden Route & Eastern Cape
 -  Madikwe
 -  Waterberg
-  Kenya
-  Namibia
-  Malawi
-  Botswana
-  Zambia
-  Tanzania



So now you have got some tips under your belt, let's look briefly at some of the main family safari destinations in Africa. This isn't exhaustive, (with more detail on our website), but it gives an overview.

Note: *If you've taken our Family Safari Quiz, this section is duplication, so feel free to skim read it.*

South Africa

South Africa is attractive as a family safari destination because it's so easy to combine a safari with other family activities. It's also the only family safari destination which offers malaria-free safaris. Read our article on [Malaria Free Game Reserves in South Africa](#).

Here's a synopsis on the main safari destinations within South Africa:

 Kruger & Private Game Lodges

 Garden Route & Eastern Cape

 Waterberg

 KwaZulu Natal

 Madikwe



Though the image of vast open African plains scattered with baobab and fever trees fits the north of South Africa, the rest of the country offers a unique diversity of captivating landscapes.

Take a look at South Africa on our website [HERE!](#)



Kruger & Private Game Lodges

- Probably the best game-viewing in South Africa.
- A malarial area, but seasonal, so there is a much lower risk in dry, winter months. Can be very accessible. Or have sense of remoteness depending on the safari lodge chosen.
- Huge variety of lodges with varying comfort levels, 21st century creature comforts, family programmes etc. So it really helps to have an experienced safari consultant to advise you on which lodge will suit your family.



The Greater Kruger is the safari destination for many of our guests. The park itself is vast and encompasses many diverse biospheres. This ensures a diversity of wildlife as well as an unsurpassed concentration of wildlife.

Take a look at the Kruger on our website [HERE!](#)



KwaZulu Natal

- One of my favourite areas of South Africa
- Very low malaria (*ie WHO doesn't recommend ant-malaria tablets*)
- Easy to combine with other interests such as beaches, hiking, cultural interaction
- Sense of African bush, but still fairly accessible
- Some lodges offer variety of activities: boating, fishing, as well as game drives
- Good game viewing. But varies by lodge



The private game reserves and lodges of KwaZulu Natal are not as well known as those in the Kruger Park. But definitely worth considering, especially if you want to follow your safari with a beach holiday.

Take a look at KZN on our website [HERE!](#)



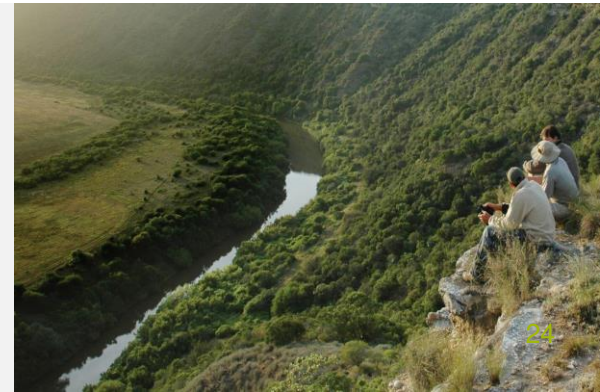
Garden Route & Eastern Cape

- The most accessible area for safaris linked to Cape Town
- Easy to mix safari and other activities – beach, soft adventure, sight seeing, family-friendly activities
- Rarely has a sense of remoteness - with a couple of notable exceptions
- Malaria-free
- Many lodges have children's programmes and creature comforts
- Moderate to good game viewing, depending on the lodge
- Doesn't feel very 'African' – you don't really feel you are in deep in the bush



Take a look at the **Garden Route** on our website [HERE](#).

Take a look at the **Eastern Cape** on our website [HERE](#).



Madikwe

- More remote area in terms of distance but quite a variety of lodges
- Malaria-free
- Many lodges have children's programmes and plenty of creature comforts
- Good game viewing (perhaps 2nd only to Greater Kruger), but remote/difficult to get to



Madikwe is not the most accessible of game reserves. As it is a 4+ hour drive from Johannesburg. But you can fly in and out (1hr). Or why not combine a Madikwe safari with the Pilanesberg or Marakele National Park in the same broad area?

Take a look at Madikwe on our website [HERE!](#)



Waterberg

- Specialist area, great for horse-riding safaris
- Plenty of private safari houses offering exclusive use for one family party.
- Malaria-free and an easy driving distance from Johannesburg.
- Moderately good game-viewing – but not as good as Kruger/Madikwe



The Waterberg is known for its luxurious and romantic game lodges as well as several family friendly safari options. The Waterberg safari options include Welgevonden Private Game Reserve and Marakele.

Take a look at Waterberg on our website [HERE!](#)





Family Safari Destinations – Kenya,
Namibia, Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania



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Kenya

- Probably the easiest destination for Family Safaris. after South Africa.
- Great game-viewing in the Masai Mara as well as Laikipia, Amboseli and Samburu.
- Northern Hemisphere Summer holidays coincide with the wildebeest migration in Kenya.
- Fairly easy to get around with good network of flights.
- Varied activities at many lodges: game drives, horse-riding, camel rides, Masai or Samburu village visits.
- There are no malaria-free game reserves in Kenya.
- Plenty of opportunity to head to more remote areas, if inclination and budget allow.



Kenya is arguably the classic safari destination in Africa. There is nowhere to compare with a Kenya luxury safari for its diversity of landscapes, eco systems and wildlife. It is a timeless combination of tropical beaches and renowned wildlife.

Take a look at Kenya on our website [HERE!](#)



Tanzania

- Tanzania is one of Africa's premier wildlife safari destinations, with natural features such as the Great Rift Valley, Ngorongoro Crater and the Serengeti, which your children may recognise from geography lessons.
- Most families can have their own dedicated 4x4 vehicle and safari guide, rather than shared game drives (norm in Southern Africa.)
- It's perfect for fairly 'self-sufficient' families with kids who don't need much extra entertaining.
- It's relatively easy to travel around. But longish road transfers and full day game drives are called for.
- A few days at the beach on Zanzibar is an easy addition.
- Spending time with the local Masai is enlightening for children of all ages.
- There are no malaria free game reserves in Tanzania.



A Tanzania safari offers abundant wildlife in world famous locations such as the Ngorongoro Crater and the Serengeti.

Take a look at Tanzania on our website [HERE!](#)



Namibia

- Namibia is a unique family destination – it will suit some families perfectly, and others not at all!
- On the plus side: lots of variety as a destination, great sense of remoteness, low to non-malarial with a small medium-risk area in the north.
- But its size means long driving times (or expensive charter flights), so it depends on your children's travelling abilities!
- Great range of lodges to suit your budget and your preferred comfort levels. Some lodges are on Namibian farms so that your kids can get a sense of farming life in Namibia.
- It can be very hot, often over 40°C (104°F), so choose a time that suits your heat temperament.



Namibia offers an exhilarating and varied safari experience. From the vast Etosha salt pan, to the shimmering dunes of Sossusvlei and the Namib Desert, to the waterways of the Caprivi.

Take a look at Namibia on our website [HERE!](#)



Botswana

- Botswana is a great option for family safaris ... as long as the budget allows!
- One of the best game-viewing destinations
- Although the safari camps feel very remote, far from villages, you generally fly between them.
- Although a malarial area, most of Botswana is fairly low risk as there are so few people in the safari areas.
- Some camps offer children's programmes but, as a whole, Botswana is ideal for families who don't need organised activities.



Botswana is one of Africa's last pristine lands and offers its visitors beautiful scenery and prolific big game in equal measure. From the watery paradise of the Okavango Delta, to the majestic baobab trees of the Kalahari, it is a gem.

Take a look at Botswana on our website [HERE!](#)



Zambia

- Zambia shares many of the benefits of Botswana. However, it is a higher-risk malaria area.
- Perfect for families with older children who are happy with longer flights and transfer times.
- Offers several Safari Houses which can be taken on an exclusive use basis.
- As in Botswana, some camps offer children's activities. But it's ideal for families who like to 'do their own thing'.
- There are no malaria free game reserves in Zambia.



A Zambia safari offers the essence of Africa with some of the finest wildlife experiences in Africa. It also delivers one of its greatest rivers: the Zambezi. Zambian game reserves are truly wild and remote.

Take a look at Zambia on our website [HERE!](#)



Malawi

- Malawi has lots to offer families looking for a remote, yet varied, destination.
- As with Botswana, you often have a sense that you are far from modern life, and yet the flights and road connections are pretty easy.
- Lake Malawi, Nyika Plateau, the tea plantations and the Game Reserves offer a safari holiday with plenty of variety, especially for older kids.
- Very easy to combine Zambia and Malawi.



If you enjoy combining a safari with some relaxation beach and if you like to meet the local people in an uncontrived way, then a Malawi holiday could be perfect for you.

Take a look at Malawi on our website [HERE!](#)



A sunset over a savanna landscape. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm orange glow across the sky. Two hot air balloons are silhouetted against the sky. The foreground shows the silhouettes of trees and a savanna landscape.

Family Safaris & Younger Children



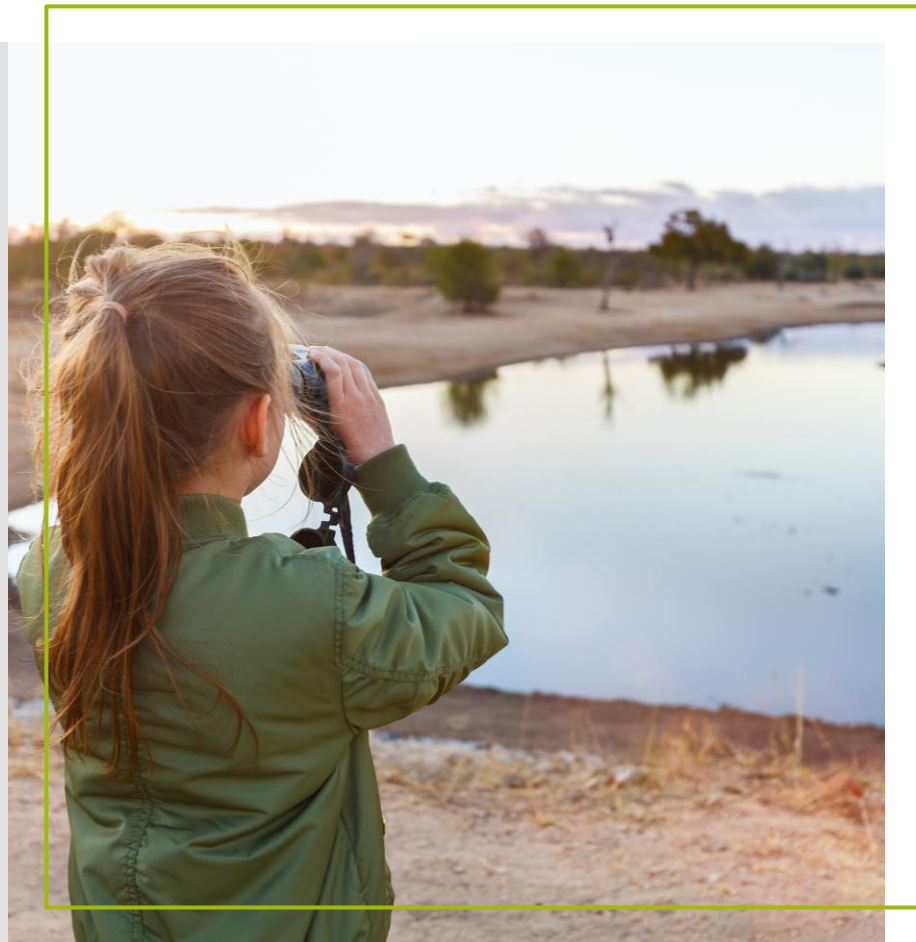
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The Tricky Age

Which safari lodge to choose requires slightly more thought when your children are between 3 & 5 years old. Most game lodges don't allow children under six years on a game drive as:

- *Their attention span tends to be shorter than the typical three hour+ game drive*
- *They may not be able to sit still or be quiet at critical moments, endangering the vehicle*
- *They may not be able to follow the ranger's instructions easily*
- *They may not be able to keep quiet*

I say it's the 'tricky age' because the child THINKS that they'll enjoy a game drive. And even more pertinently their parents thinks so as well. And yet most lodges don't allow it.



Alternatives?

A number of lodges, mainly in the non-malarial areas of South Africa, have embraced this 'tricky age' and welcome younger children. The exact child-friendly approach varies from lodge to lodge.

- Some offer a special kids drive for younger kids. This usually takes place after breakfast and is shorter and more focused on teaching the kids about the Bush than in getting very close to predators. The children will need to have a babysitter when the adults take their drive. So you could find that you don't spend as much time together as a family as you'd like.
- If you have a mix of younger and older kids, you could opt for a lodge which offers a lower age limit. However these are relatively few in number so your choice is not as great.

Affordable Alternatives?

Or you can head to a more 'accessible' game reserve. What do I mean by that? These are lodges that generally don't have so many large predators. And the game drives tend to be shorter, about 2 hours. The age limit on the drives can be as low as three years. And there are more children around. Here, if your four- or five-year-old is a little boisterous, you aren't left cringing with embarrassment. These are usually more affordable and often closer to the main sight-seeing areas. So less time is spent travelling. Kids usually love these lodges, and the lack of predators mean that walks, mountain biking and other activities may be on the menu if you have older children as well.

They may not offer the Big Five, but they are well priced. So that you can afford to test out whether your family enjoys the safari experience without breaking the bank. This is ideal for younger children. But parents need to appreciate that they will not necessarily get a prime wilderness experience! Perhaps combining one of these lodges with a night or two at one of the 'Big Five' private game reserves will mean that parents and children are all satisfied.

Babies on Safari

This is relatively straightforward. All game lodges that accept young children are well-equipped to look after babies and toddlers. A baby-sitter is booked (preferably ahead of time) and she comes to your chalet or room approximately 30 minutes prior to the game drive. This allows you to settle your baby or toddler with her before setting off. However please note that you should aim to bring all food and milk requirements with you to the lodge, (a wide selection is available from supermarkets in South Africa), as game lodges will not generally hold stocks.



Baby-Sitting

The baby-sitter is usually a lady from the lodge staff. She may have had some first aid training. And she will probably be a designated sitter and used to looking after different children. BUT she won't be a trained nanny. And she will not necessarily be an 'active' baby-sitter, e.g. reading stories, playing games and generally amusing your children. Again, this isn't such an issue for a baby or a toddler but is important to remember if you have a four-year-old. (Mine ended up reading a story to the sitter instead!)



Family Safaris & Older Children



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Family Safaris are usually easiest when your kids are seven years and upwards. By this age, the safari planning becomes easier. Generally, if a lodge takes children under 12 then they're allowed to go on the 'adult' game drives once they are six years. (It can be 7-9 years for some lodges, but that's the general rule).

All lodges try to put families together on a game drive. This could give you more flexibility in game drive lengths. But there's no guarantee of this. Nor can you guarantee that the other family has the same expectations as yours. (They might have been coming to the bush for years!)

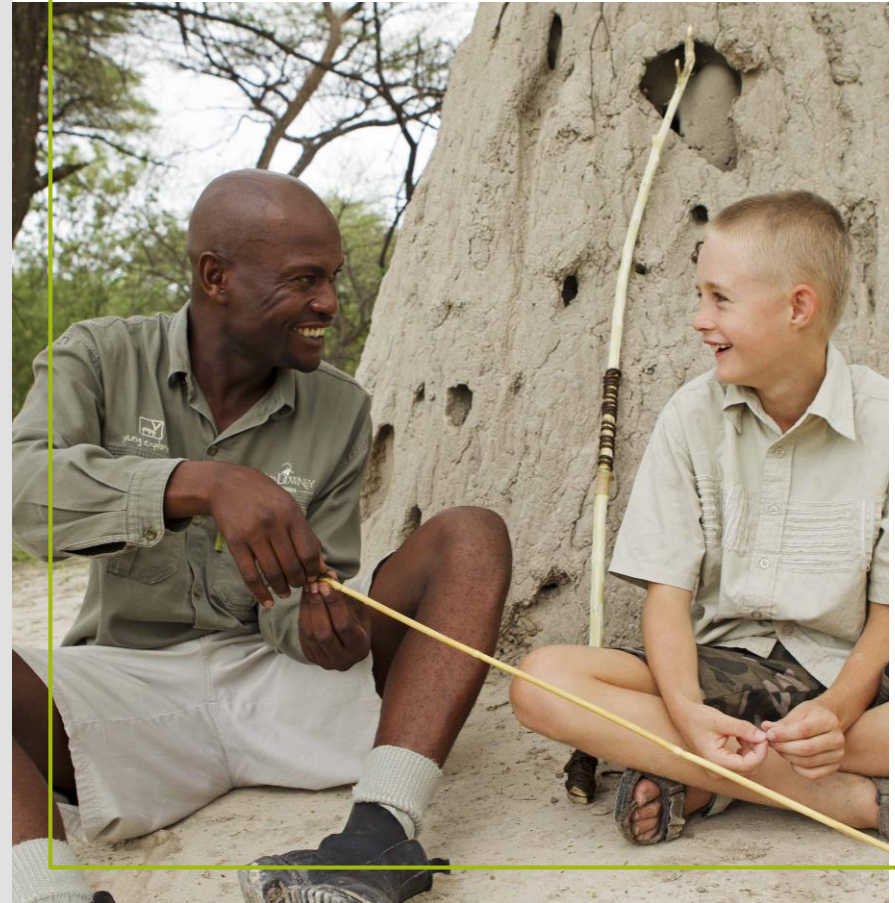
So, if you choose a safari lodge on the basis of its game-viewing potential, rather than its kids programme, your children need to be comfortable spending 3+ hours on a game drive.

However, in our experience most children can do this as it's such an exciting experience for them.

Forewarn your Tech-Savvy Kids

We live in a tech age, especially our kids. Kids loved their computers/phones with the best of them. Yet most safari camps deliberately try to keep this at bay. And, let's be honest, this is a large part of the attraction for us as parents.

So do tell your kids that there will not be a television in the room. (Though the lodge may have a TV or DVD player tucked away somewhere). And may not have great internet reception (depending on its location).



Variety

Try to include lots of variety both in terms of the activities available at different safari camps. And ideally in destinations. Are there specific activities that they enjoy such as canoeing or horse-riding? Teenagers often struggle with the early morning game drives and so mixing safari stays with more relaxed beach or country stays helps to keep everyone happy and 'on message'.

[Get in Touch with Us](#) if you want to discuss what option is right for your family but you are not at the planning stages yet

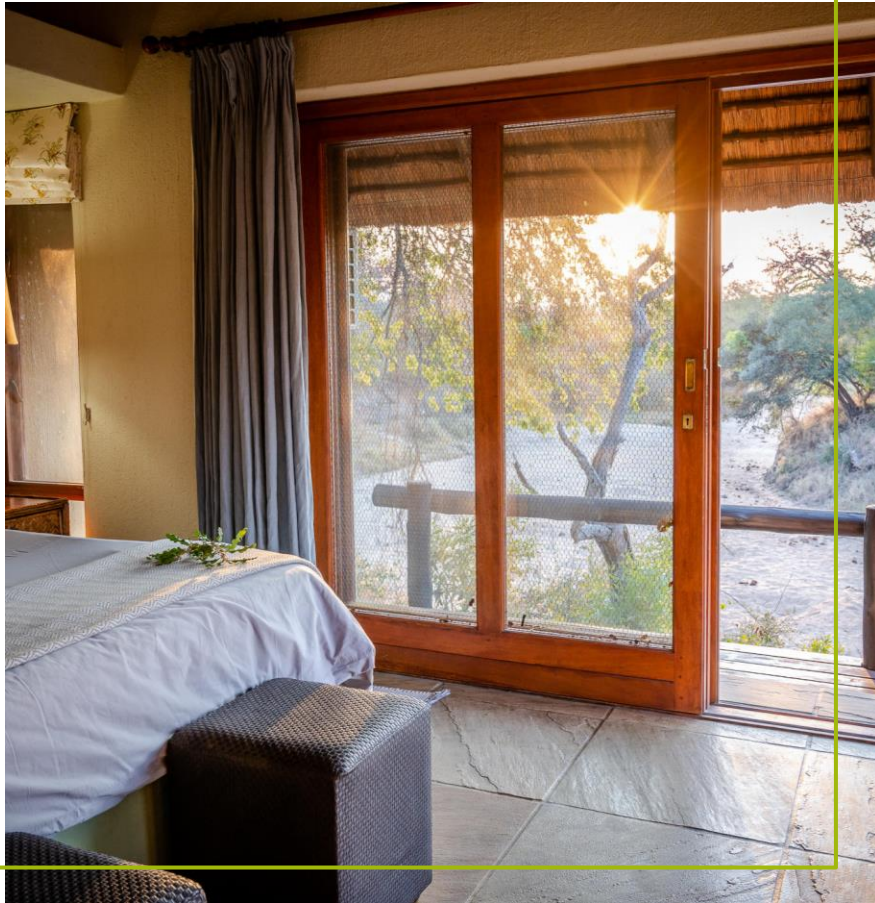




Private Safari Houses



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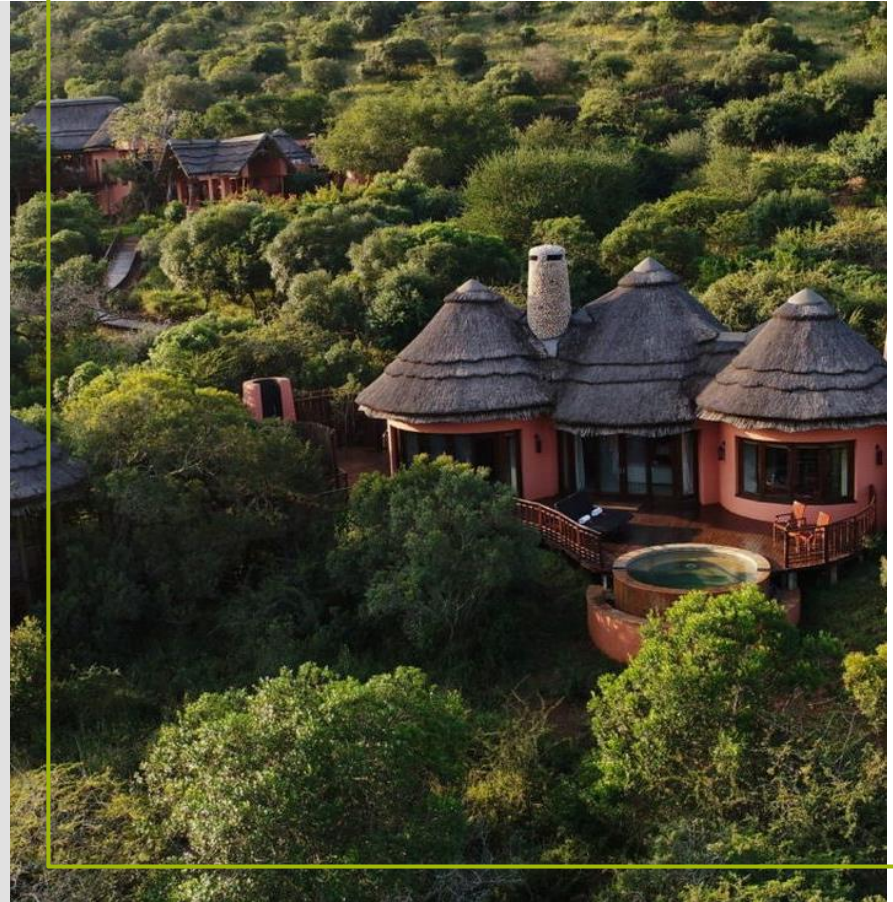
We've seen the growth in multi-generational family safaris with grandparents, children & grandchildren all coming together in large family parties. A Safari House or Villa can be taken on an exclusive use basis, so it's only your family staying there. You can choose your own game-viewing rhythm, heading out early one morning and taking it more relaxed another day.

These game lodges have their own ranger and private vehicle for your game drives and a private housekeeper /chef. So a much more relaxed and flexible family holiday. No constant worrying about noise levels, no self-consciousness about an impromptu game of tag on the lawn!

Of course, this is the perfect solution for family safaris. But be aware that this can come with a sometimes-considerable price tag.

Bush Villas

Some safari lodges have private two-bedroom Bush Villas attached to them, which have their own ranger & vehicle. This allows for many of the benefits of a private home, but you are still attached to a safari lodge if you want to mix with other people. As they are smaller, they are perfect for individual families. Though some can be extended by one or two suites to make a larger exclusive use option.





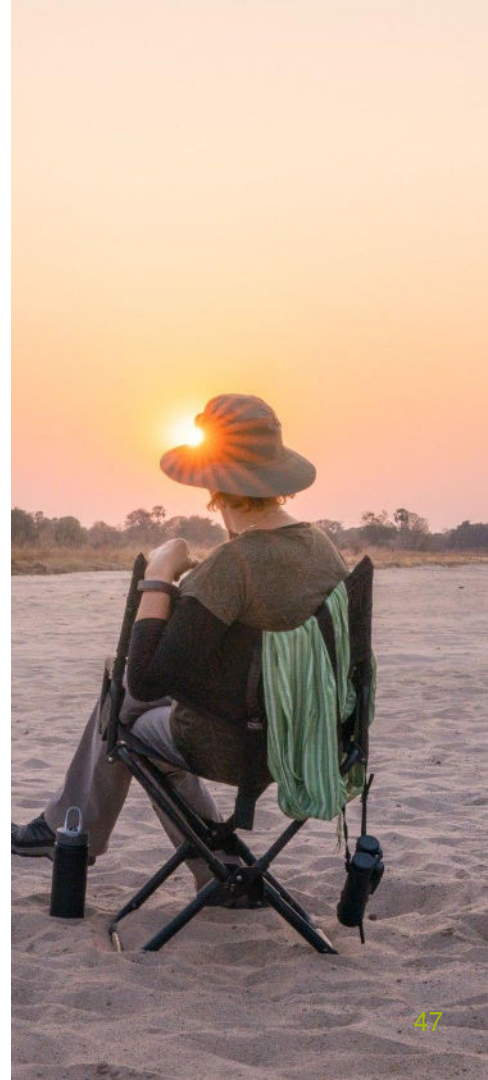
Next Steps

Go on a Family Safari NOW!

We hope that this guide has been useful. Below I summarize top tips and we hope to hear from you when you start planning your safari trip.

- 1 Plan well in advance
- 2 Narrow down on your Safari Destination
- 3 Include something for everyone
- 4 Decide on your malaria risk
- 5 Go for Variety & not just Safari
- 6 Safaris are not cheap – what are you comfortable spending?

Get in touch with us
HERE



About The Author

Kate Bergh is South Africa Managing Director of Cedarberg Africa, a specialist safari company that she co-founded with her sister Ginny over 28 years ago. We help people who are unsure where to turn to for friendly well-informed safari planning.

Kate has lived in South Africa since 1993. She's travelled extensively to the countries marketed by Cedarberg. She especially likes some of the more remote areas such as Coastal Maputaland, the Makgadikgadi pans and the Lower Zambezi. Her home is in the Cedarberg mountains in the Cape (hence the name of the company) where she enjoys hiking and cycling. She has three children, who were used shamelessly, when younger, as guinea pigs to test out the family appeal of various South African hotels and safari lodges.



Thank you!

Spectacular by Nature, Personal by Design

This Guide to Family Safaris was created by Cedarberg Africa, specialist safari operator

We'll design an individual safari just for you so that you get the family safari you've always dreamed of. But without wasting hours of precious time navigating the endless possibilities. If you're looking for an authentic and magical safari experience, Cedarberg Africa can help you.

Have questions? Schedule a time to chat or email us at:

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