



What to expect on an African safari

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The best thing about an [African Safari is the wildlife](#). Getting up close and personal with some of the world's most impressive and unique wildlife is unforgettable. From seeing your first giraffe or elephant in the wild to the spectacular diversity of birds, you will not be disappointed. But what can you actually expect on your safari? Here, we give you an idea of what you might expect and how to prepare for your African safari.

You'll see lots of animals!



It's no secret that you'll see lots of animals on an African safari. Each day is a new adventure and brings new surprises. Your guides will probably be able to guarantee some wildlife, but other wildlife might be harder to find. So go with realistic expectations. Regardless, you are likely to be blown away by the sheer numbers and diversity of animals in such a small area. It really is incredible!

Game drives



Photographing a giraffe © Renee Franken | [African Birding Tours & Safaris](#)

Game drives are the best part about an African safari. This is where you will see the majority of the big African wildlife you have been dreaming about seeing. However, it is good to know what to expect. Game drives can be long. In fact, you might spend the majority of the day in the vehicle driving. However, your guide will take breaks at designated locations along the way, where you can stretch your legs and use the bathrooms.



Lunch stop in Ngorogoro Crater

Most Safaris (especially in Tanzania and Kenya) use Toyota Landcruisers adapted for wildlife viewing with a pop-up roof. These are great as they allow you to stand up and stretch your legs frequently and are also optimal for wildlife viewing and taking photos from the vehicle without having to look or photograph through a window. Game drives can also be bumpy and dusty. So ensure you wear comfortable clothes that you don't mind getting dirty (more on this later).

Bring binoculars and a camera



One of the most important things to bring on your safari is a pair of binoculars. While most of the wildlife is quite close, binoculars will be helpful for that more elusive creature further away from the road. You don't want to miss the good view of that distant leopard in the tree or rhino in the forest. The birds in Africa are also spectacular and even if you are not a birder, it is definitely worthwhile to enjoy their colours and behaviour.



Lilac-breasted Roller Photographed on our Tanzania Birding Tour

You'll also want a camera to capture all the spectacular wildlife you will see. It is also helpful to have one with a telephoto lens, so you can get those close-up photos. If you are using a telephoto it will be helpful to use something to support or stabilize your camera (you can often use the rim of the roof). A small beanbag or even a folded clothing item can work. A tripod has very limited utility as you will be taking most of your photos from the inside of the vehicle where you can't set it up, so keep that in mind.

The food is generally very good

The food can be very good and there is usually lots of it. The variety of dishes is also impressive: you can expect to eat everything from freshly baked breads and pastries to grilled meats and curries. Breakfast usually includes fresh fruit and fruit juices, as well as hot and cold options such as eggs/omelets, yogurt, and pancakes. You will sometimes have lunch at your lodge, but often you will take a boxed lunch in the field. Dinner will usually be at your lodge, which will either be a buffet or a set menu with a few options that change daily. Most lodges are also able to accommodate allergies or food preferences with no problem at all.



Breakfast buffet

Drinks (beer, wine, pop/soda) are usually not included in the cost of your safari, so make sure to bring some money to pay for those. Some lodges will take credit cards, but machines can occasionally go out of service, so it is good to have some cash on hand.



Eating breakfast at tented camp in the Serengeti

You can expect some tummy troubles

Most lodges do a great job with trying to ensure the food is prepared in a safe manner, but tummy troubles do occur. It often happens from eating uncooked fruits or vegetables with skins, so avoiding salads can be one way to stay healthy. If you do end up with intestinal issues, it can be helpful to have some Imodium and/or a round of antibiotics that will clear it up quickly. Talk to your doctor ahead of your safari to find out what they recommend. Bottled water is everywhere: in your vehicle, at restaurants, as well, all accommodations will provide water for brushing your teeth.

Accommodations

There can be a range of accommodations on safaris from tenting to luxury lodges, but overall you will find your accommodations comfortable and safe. In addition, the staff that work at these lodges are very friendly and provide great service.



Bungalow on African safari



Tented Bungalows, Tarangire National Park



Tented camp in Serengeti with indoor plumbing!

Some accommodations are tented camps. Here you will find comfortable canvas tents with proper beds, electricity and indoor plumbing (yes, sink, separate zippered section for the toilet and another zippered section for the shower). The exciting part about these tented camps is that you'll hear animals around your tent at night. There may be some wild noises that you'll want to ask your guides about the next morning. At these camps, they will often have an evening campfire prior to dinner, or

as they called it, "bush TV". This is a wonderful time to enjoy the sunset and meet fellow travellers to discuss the incredible animals you saw that day.



"Bush TV" in the Serengeti © Renee Franken

Lots of accommodations on safaris include lovely bungalows. Occasionally they have swimming pools, although depending on the time of year, it might feel too cold to go swimming. Some accommodations will also have spa services. The real treat is when you get to stay at accommodations nestled into a park, where you can sit on the porch in the evening with a drink and watch the wildlife walk past.



Enjoying a sundowner in Tarangire National Park © Renee Franken

Wifi and devices While Wi-Fi is not guaranteed, most accommodations (even camps) will have it. It can be quite slow though and occasionally sporadic, so don't necessarily count on it all the time. All lodges and camps also have charging stations, so you can charge your phones and devices, ensuring they are ready to go for the next day's adventure. Often vehicles also have charging stations, so hopefully you will never run out of power.

Clothing

You will be close to the equator, so don't forget your sunscreen, hat and sunglasses. Sunglasses are also helpful when driving on open roads to prevent dust from getting in your eyes. In general, wear comfortable clothes that you don't mind getting dirty. You will spend hours sitting in the vehicle, so dress in whatever you find comfortable. While lots of people wear khaki to blend in with the environment, most of the time you will be in the vehicle, so it is not as critical, but khaki does have the advantage of not showing the dust after a dusty drive! It is good to dress in layers, as temperatures can vary tremendously throughout the day, depending where you are. For the most part, comfortable shoes, such as running shoes will be sufficient, unless you know that you will be doing more walking and require a more supportive shoe. It is also nice to have a pair of sandals to slip on at the end of the day, or even to wear in the vehicle on hot days. Bring separate clothes for the evenings. These might be your everyday clothes that you would wear at home. Some people like to dress up for dinner, but there usually isn't a dress code at the lodges. However, you will definitely want to get out of the clothes you were wearing all day on your game drive. There is laundry service at most accommodations, but note that they don't wash undergarments, so plan to bring enough or bring some soap so you can wash them yourself.

Bring money for tips

Don't forget to bring money for tips. While it is not mandatory, it is nice to tip service staff in gratitude. These staff usually work long hours away from home and are often supporting extended families. The little extra can go a long way for them. It can be hard to find ATMs along the way, so you might want to calculate the tips ahead of time for all the different accommodations you will be staying at and tuck it away into separate envelopes. US dollars are widely accepted. Most lodges have tip boxes where you can deposit a tip that will then be dispersed among the staff. This will go towards the cleaners, cooks, gardeners, maintenance staff, guards, waiters etc. You can tip your driver/guide separately at the end of the trip. Most safari companies will give you some indication ahead of time of how much to tip, but here are some rough guidelines you could follow. Airport transfer \$5 USD/couple, general staff at safari lodge/camp \$15-20 USD per couple/day, guide \$20 USD per couple/day If you are travelling on one of [our tours](#), tips are included in what you pay us so check on the arrangements for your travels to confirm. You are, of course, still welcome to tip. Your African safari is sure to be unforgettable and a trip of your lifetime!



Guided African safari