

Tired of searching for a great family deal amongst a sea of holiday options that don't cater for the kids?

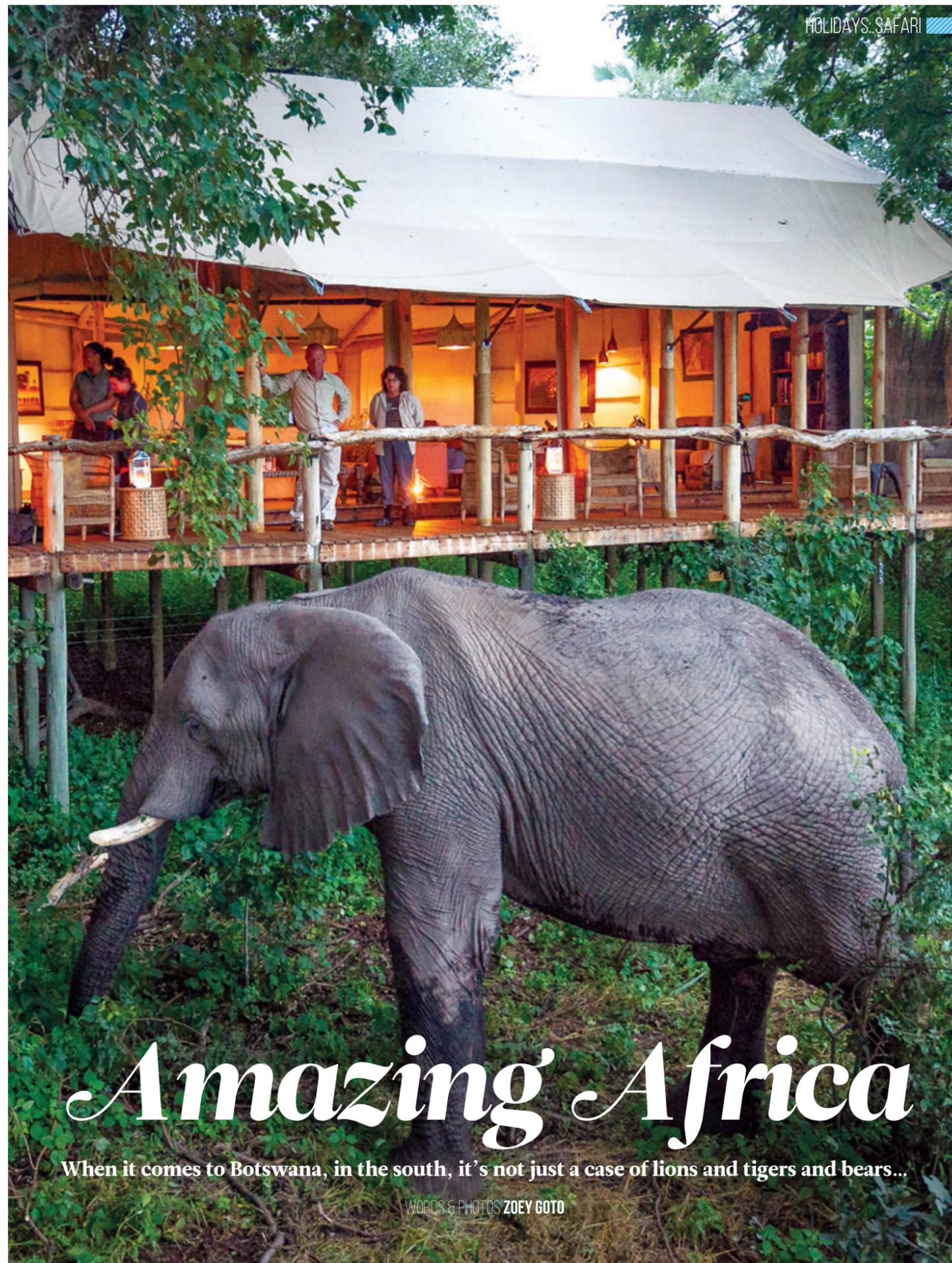
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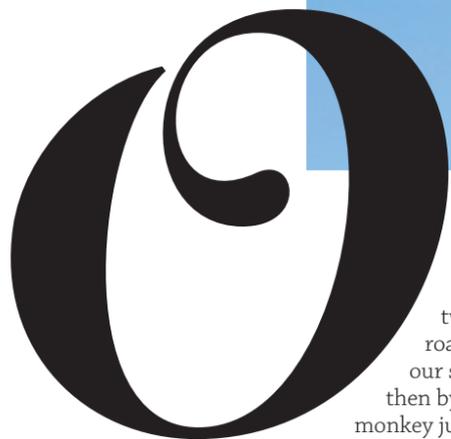
HOLIDAYS: SAFARI



Amazing Africa

When it comes to Botswana, in the south, it's not just a case of lions and tigers and bears...

WORDS & PHOTOS ZOEY GOTO

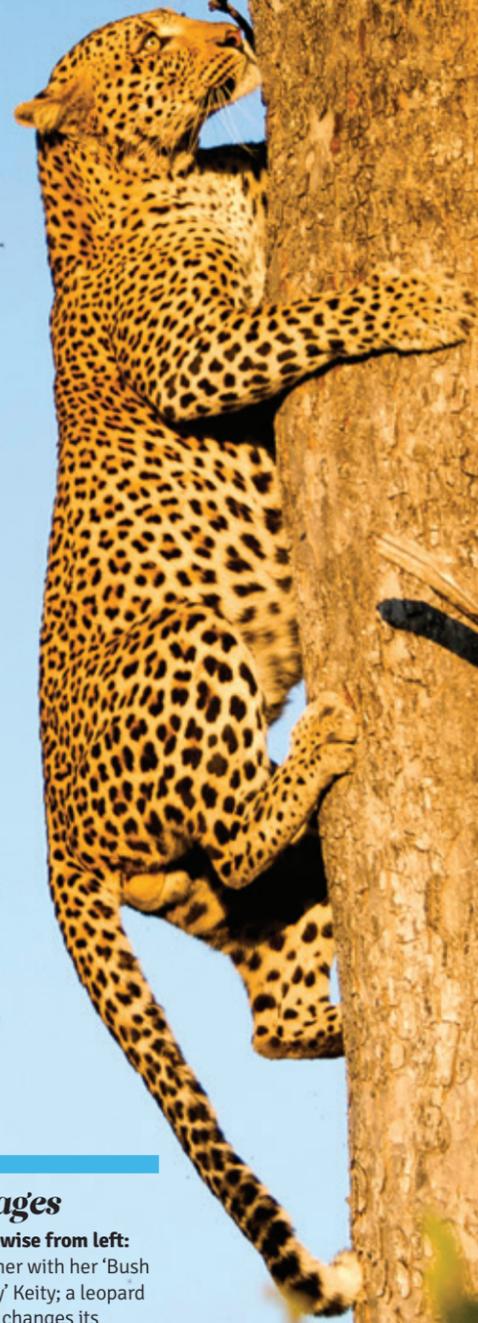


On our debut safari night in Botswana, I was awoken twice – first by a roaring lion outside our safari tent and then by a boisterous monkey jumping around on the balcony. Meanwhile,

my 7-year-old daughter slept soundly beside me, blissfully unaware of Mother Earth's soundtrack playing just feet from our bed. It was the perfect introduction to our first family safari, which brought us impressively close to nature at its most wild.

My animal-loving daughter Summer and I had decided to spend six nights exploring the Okavango Delta region in Botswana, an area blessed with some of the most impressive and diverse wildlife on earth. We picked out three camps run by Wilderness Safaris, swayed by their reputation for offering experiences that are both sustainable and family friendly.

Any concerns that I may have had about taking



my child on such a far-flung adventure quickly evaporated as soon as we touched down at Botswana's Maun Airport. A friendly team from Wilderness Safaris were there to greet us, steering us across the tarmac to the tiny 10-seat plane that took us on an intrepid flight, low over the African bush.

Our first stop was Tubu Tree, a boutique camp with just eight tents built into the treetops. Our elevated room, complete with an elegant four-poster bed, provided spectacular views across the floodplains, which were teeming with buffalos, giraffes and antelopes. As our previous interaction with animals had mainly been at urban zoos, I had somehow imagined there to be more boundaries between us and the animals. It took me a few days to acclimatise to seeing huge elephants and hippos wandering freely near the camps, which we viewed from the raised walkways that connect the guestrooms to the communal areas. This close proximity only resulted in one slightly hairy encounter when a nearby baboon bore his teeth at us – but thankfully a safari guide stepped in to escort us to breakfast safely.

Our typical safari day started at sunrise with a morning game drive, bounding through the African bush in the back of an open-sided Jeep while spotting an abundance of animals. For a safari with kids, it's worth paying a little extra for

private activities so you can go at the kids' pace. Following lunch back at camp, afternoon activities included walking safaris and bush cookery lessons. For a truly unique view of the wildlife, low-flying hot-air balloon rides can be arranged.

Between activities, Summer spent time with her 'Bush Buddy', a dedicated mentor who organised educational activities to enhance her safari experience. This was one of the highlights of Summer's trip, as she learnt to make beaded African jewellery and play the traditional game of Morabaraba with marbles, which she has since taught her classmates back home.

Following our restorative stay at Tubu Tree, where we soaked up the tranquil atmosphere and acclimatised to the enforced digital detox (all of our camps were wifi-free zones), we hopped onto a propeller plane for the 15-minute micro journey to Seba camp.

When we touched down at Seba, we were greeted by Kitso, our charismatic safari guide who managed to expertly tailor our activities to my daughter's interests. Safari checklist in hand, Summer was soon spotting and ticking off the animals. On our second day at Seba, she spotted a magnificent leopard hiding in a tree before Kitso even had a chance!

Between activities, we relaxed in our spacious family lodge, which came complete with a box ▶



images

Clockwise from left: Summer with her 'Bush Buddy' Keity; a leopard never changes its spots; we were made precious lily necklaces at Vumbura Plains; Vumbura Plains at sunset is just spectacular.



NEED TO KNOW



GETTING THERE

Africa Odyssey can arrange your trip (two nights at Wilderness Safaris' Tubu Tree, two nights at Seba and two nights at Vumbura Plains) from AU\$9600 per person including internal flights. International flights cost about AU\$2400 per person.

africaodyssey.com



BEST TIME TO GO

There isn't a bad time to visit Africa on safari, as each season has its own unique charm. The wet season can offer more in terms of waterborne activities and is particularly scenic, while the dry season is better for wildlife-viewing. Easter is a good time for spotting baby animals, which is always a hit with children!



BEST FOR KIDS AGED

This experience is best for nature-loving children aged 7-plus, as the game drives can be long and they will need to exercise some control around the wild animals. However, many camps allow babies and toddlers, and some offer child-minding facilities.

images

Main: A beautiful leopard pops up for a look-see.

Opposite (clockwise from left): Elephants are such majestic creatures; here we are exploring in a mokoro (canoe); our camp at Tubu Tree.



of safari-related children's toys and a private pool overlooking a herd of zebras. As evening fell, we put a small dent in the extensive healthy buffet before being treated to a performance of traditional African singing and dancing around the campfire against a dramatic sunset over the dusty plains. The guests soon joined in with the dancing and Summer was whisked up to dance at the front of the procession, with the women making a chorus of high-pitched ululation – a distinctive noise made with the tongue to celebrate and express strong emotions.

Our final few days were rounded off in style at Vumbura Plains, one of the most exclusive safari camps in southern Africa. The five-star camp offered a la carte dining and luxurious glass-fronted guestrooms. As Vumbura Plains is located in marshland, it also offers a variety of water- and land-based activities, allowing us to spend our afternoons exploring the picturesque waterways by mokoro (canoe) and speedboat, as Summer got up close with the local reed frogs and our guide made us necklaces from the delicate floating lilies.

Heading back home at the end of our epic week, it occurred to me that there must be few places left on Earth that are so utterly remote and wild, which made this such an incredibly enriching experience. I returned with a head full of memories, a camera full of wildlife shots and a daughter who now wants to be a conservationist. **ft**



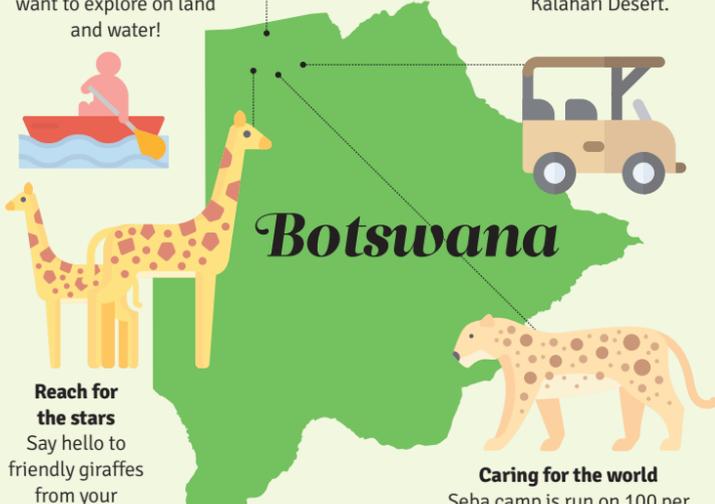
Go to familytravel.com.au for travel inspiration, ideas and tips to turn your travel dreams into reality. Be sure to sign up to the e-newsletter to receive the best family content direct to your inbox.

Double duty
The wildlife at Vumbura Plains is so diverse, you'll want to explore on land and water!



Fostering life
Okavango Delta features a maze of sparkling lagoons in Kalahari Desert.





Botswana

Reach for the stars
Say hello to friendly giraffes from your raised Tubu Tree campsite.



Caring for the world
Seba camp is run on 100 per cent solar, ensuring as light an environmental footprint as possible.

