

NS

MAGAZINE

NATURAL SELECTION

SAFARIS OF CHARACTER

New Heights
in Conservation

A Desert Adventure
to Kubu Island

How to *Speak* Elephant

Take a *Star* Safari



THIRD EDITION



Contents

NORTHERN OKAVANGO DELTA - 18

THE ELEPHANT EXPRESS - 26

Dr Jennifer Lalley on helping school children navigate busy 'elephant highways'

KHWAI PRIVATE RESERVE - 30

HIDE AND SEEK - 38

Andrew Thompson finds the best viewing seats in Botswana

ROAMING WITH THE RANGERS - 42

David Goodman spends a day with conservation rangers

SOUTHERN OKAVANGO DELTA - 48

HOW TO SPEAK ELEPHANT - 54

Peter Allison shares a few tricks of the trade

MOREMI GAME RESERVE - 56

THE UPSIDE OF A PRIVATE GUIDE - 66

How a specialist private guide can elevate your African safari

GET TO KNOW SUPER SANDE - 68

Pru Allison gets to chat with safari guide Super

MAKGADIKGADI PANS - 72

A DESERT ADVENTURE TO KUBU ISLAND - 84

Richard Holmes ventures across the salt pans

AFRICA'S OTHER MIGRATION - 88

Helping to restore southern Africa's greatest wildlife migrations

GO WILD ON TWO WHEELS - 96

Jules Hadley saddles up for an epic cycling adventure

NAMIBRAND NATURE RESERVE - 100

TAKE A STAR SAFARI - 106

You will never forget the night skies of the Namib Desert

ETOSHA HEIGHTS PRIVATE RESERVE - 108

NEW HEIGHTS IN CONSERVATION - 114

Anton Crone shines a light on a conservation success story

HOANIB VALLEY - 118

NAMIBIA'S NOMADIC HIMBA - 124

Andrew Thompson investigates OvaHimba culture and their desert survival strategies

SKELETON COAST - 128

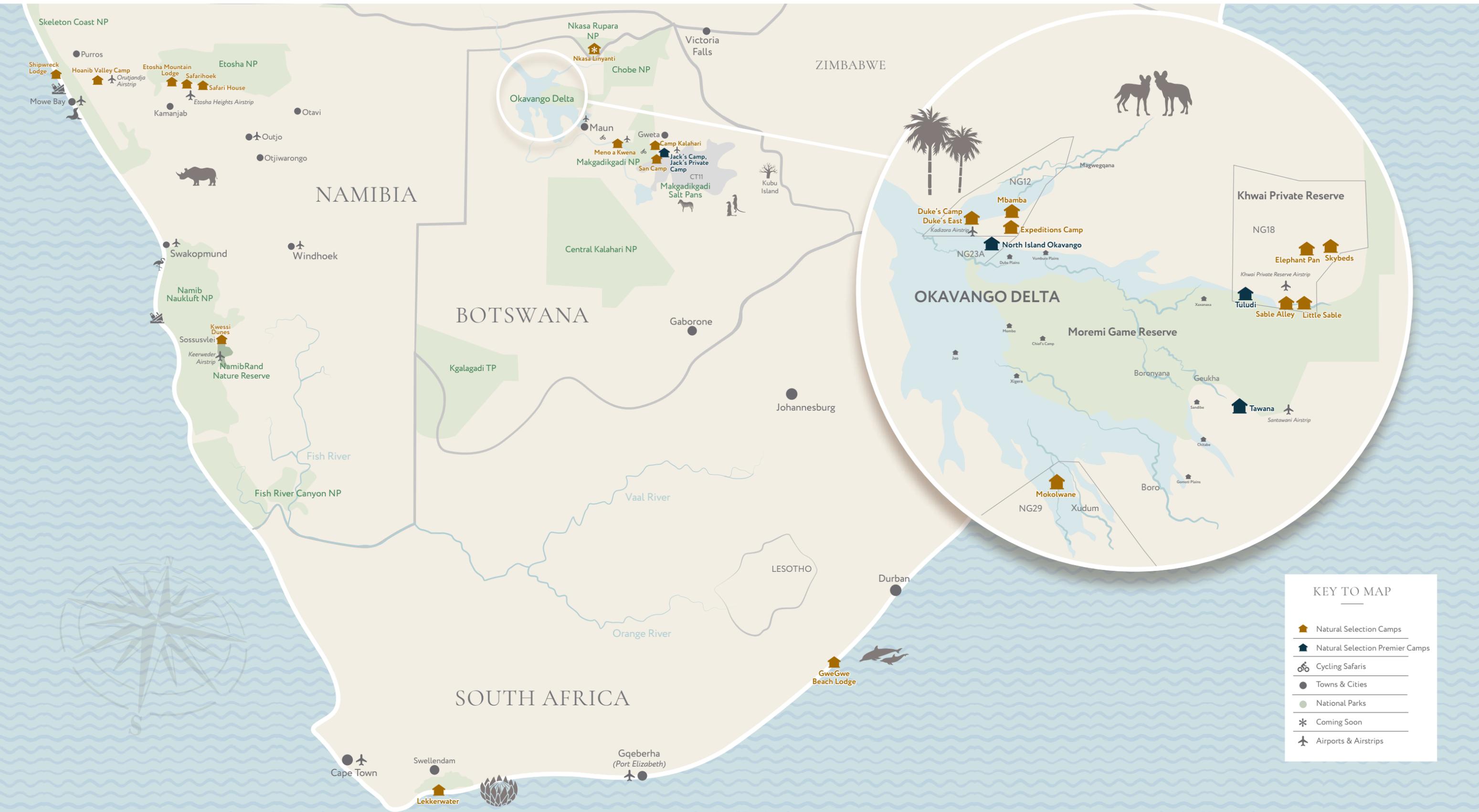
FROM THE DESERT TO THE DEEP BLUE SEA - 134

A spectacular drive from Hoanib Valley Camp to Shipwreck Lodge

DE HOOP NATURE RESERVE - 140

MKAMBATI NATURE RESERVE - 146

Our Safaris of *Character*





INTRODUCTION

Travel that *matters*

Natural Selection is not your typical safari company. We look at the world a little differently when it comes to why we're in business and how we share Africa's wild spaces with our guests.

Natural Selection is, proudly, all about putting conservation first. We believe in protecting African wilderness for the long term, making a generational impact to conservation on the continent, all while supporting and partnering with the communities that have long called these landscapes home. We believe well-managed nature-based tourism is the best way to achieve our ambitious goals of enabling land conservation, wildlife protection and the sustainable development of rural communities.

Natural Selection was launched in 2016 by four passionate conservationists who have spent decades in the bush as wildlife guides, safari managers or conservation researchers, pioneering ways to experience and conserve wildlife areas across southern Africa's least explored landscapes. Their united vision has changed the role that nature-based tourism plays in conservation. Natural Selection isn't simply a place to find exceptional safari lodges; its goal is giving - giving to wildlife, wildlife habitat and rural communities.

In under 10 years, this drive and vision has enabled Natural Selection to grow into a sustainable conservation tourism company with 30+ safari camps and lodges, eight long-term community joint ventures, and 22 ongoing conservation and rural development programmes with joint care of over 1.6 million hectares of wildlife land.

Alongside the dedicated Community, Conservation and Reserve (CCR) Fee levied per guest per night, as a company Natural Selection sets aside 1.5% of the value of each booking at our lodges. That income goes directly to protecting wildlife, preserving habitats, and supporting the communities alongside these special corners of Africa. It's just one of the ways we commit to placing people and conservation before profit.

But we're just as passionate about sharing these magical spaces with our guests in a myriad of memorable ways. Across our camps and lodges you'll spend your days in the company of experienced safari and wilderness guides, each of whom brings enormous passion, knowledge and personality to your time on safari. They love questions, so fire away!

We also ensure that no two safaris are the same, and whether you spend your days exploring the desert on foot, paddling the crystal-clear Delta channels or sleeping out beneath the stars, you are sure to return home with the dust of Africa on your shoes and lifelong memories etched into your soul. From the watery wonderland of the Okavango Delta to the dunes of Namibia and pristine coastline of South Africa, we welcome you on a journey to discovering Natural Selection's utterly unique safaris of character.

www.naturalselection.travel
[@NaturalSelectionTravel](https://www.instagram.com/NaturalSelectionTravel)
Design: Sue S Design & Jessica Sloan
Editor: Richard Holmes

The Heartbeat of Heritage

AFRICAN WISDOM FROM THE NATURAL SELECTION TEAM

At Natural Selection, conservation has never been just about landscapes or wildlife. It's also about people.

Most of the wonderful people who look after you in our lodges carry traditions and wisdom that they rarely share with guests. Their wisdom is passed from generation to generation through storytelling, lullabies, shared meals and shared fires, rooted with tradition. Here are their words, offering a glimpse into the heart of Africa.

Itumeleng Eunice Kgopedi - Botswana

"Music and dance are the heartbeat of our culture - they carry emotion, history and meaning. It is not just entertainment."

Monthusi "Monty" Sebang - Botswana

"Respect is the foundation of our culture. We honour our elders, learn from them, and carry their teachings forward."

Bontekanye Bayei - Botswana

"We openly share our traditions. I would love to teach guests how to collect and cook waterlilies, a traditional practice passed down through generations. And I will show them how to weave a beautiful basket, a skill that carries the stories of our people."

Mpaphi Dikaelo - Botswana

"My mother taught me that to move forward in life, we must first make peace with the past - by leaning into our traditions and the wisdom of our ancestors."

Raditaola Molake - Botswana

"Our traditions are a source of strength. From farming to celebrations, they connect us to our ancestors."

Michael Haindongo - Namibia

"When elephants fight, it's the grass that suffers, meaning battles of the powerful, hurt the humble."

Steve Tsheko - Botswana

"Fire is life. As children, we were taught that fire provides warmth, light, and the energy to sustain us. It is at the centre of every gathering and every story told."

Ralph Dantu - Namibia

"Hear, but live like someone who does not hear. See, but live like someone who does not see. True wisdom does not lie in reacting to everything you see and hear."

Kgotla Kgomonne - Botswana

"If you want to go quickly, go alone. But if you want to go far, go together."

Mariam Gaebope - Botswana

"We grow crops and raise livestock for our future. The land teaches us to cherish and plan for tomorrow."

Monica Lebane - Botswana

"In our culture, we are taught the importance of respect, especially in how we greet each other. A simple handshake and bending while doing it shows a deep level of respect for one another."

Mavis Xweeta - Botswana

"Motho ke motho ka batho" — a person is a person because of others."

Onneile Galerone - Botswana

"We honour our culture with traditional attire and we like to play traditional games."

Johannes Haikali - Namibia

"There is a saying that the rain may beat the leopard's skin, but it will never wash away the spots" — meaning, as hard as you try, you can't change a person's character."

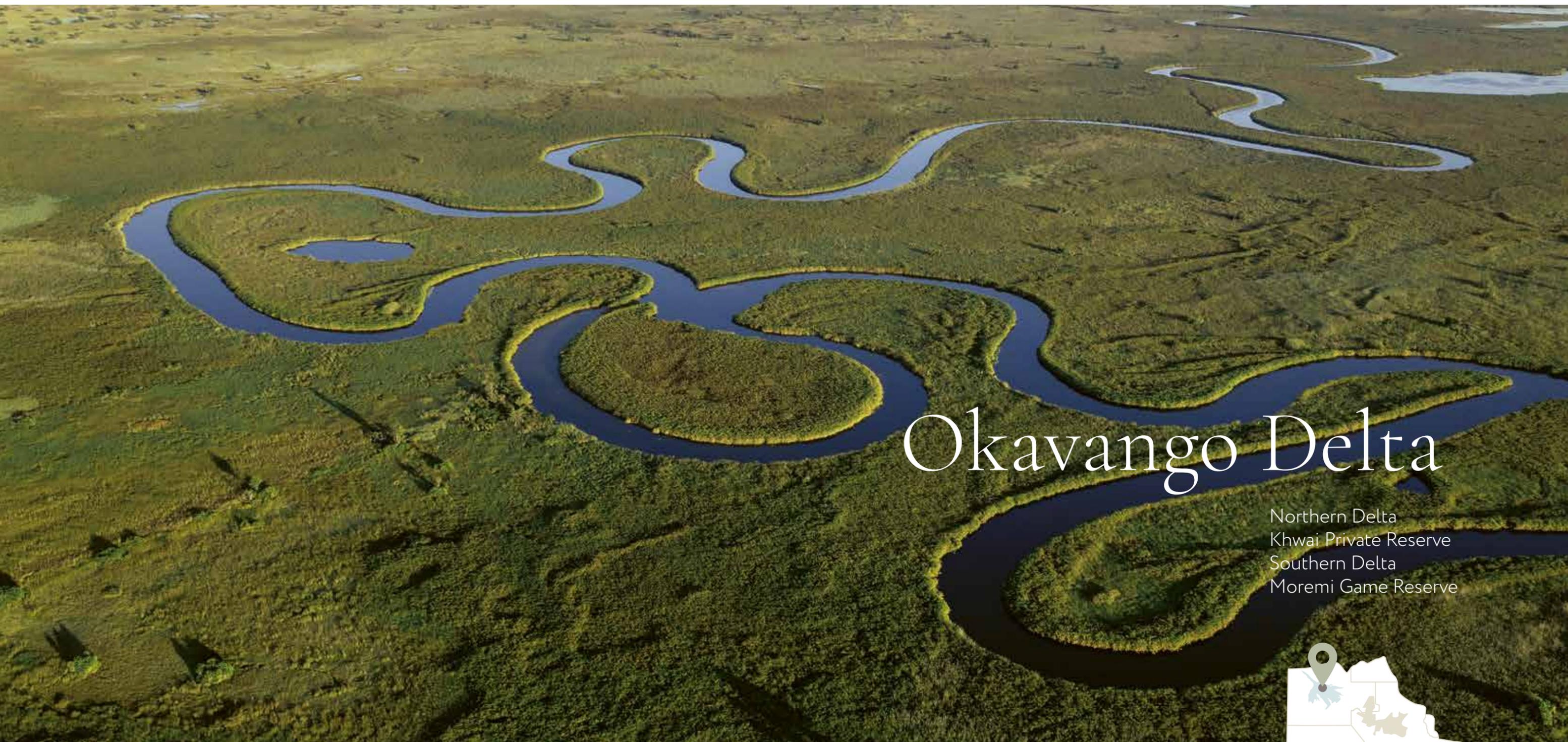


Botswana



BOTSWANA

19.493° S , 23.509° E



Okavango Delta

Northern Delta
Khwai Private Reserve
Southern Delta
Moremi Game Reserve



Okavango Delta

THE REMARKABLE STORY OF THE RIVER THAT LOST ITS WAY. THIS UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S BEST SAFARI DESTINATIONS

From the air, there are perhaps few sights in Africa quite so spectacular as Botswana's Okavango Delta. Formed by an ancient shift in tectonic plates, it is Africa's third-largest alluvial fan and the continent's largest inland delta without an outlet to the sea. Or, to put it in more simple terms, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is simply a river that lost its way.

HIGHLIGHTS

An iconic wetland home to an impressive diversity of wildlife

Unforgettable game viewing on exclusive private concessions

One of the world's birding hotspots

An incredible variety of water-based safari experiences

Unique luxury camps showcasing pristine corners of the Okavango Delta

One of the Seven Natural Wonders of Africa

The source of this remarkable wetland of sinuous channels and deep pools, wild woodlands and grassy plains lies some 1 000 kilometres distant in the highlands of Angola. Here, the Kavango River meanders south and eastwards in search of the Limpopo River and the Indian Ocean. Instead, the floodwaters that arrive through the famed Okavango Panhandle will eventually trickle away beneath the sands of the Kalahari Desert.

And the Okavango is a land in constant flux. From May to August the life-giving floods arrive from the highlands of Angola, spreading the watery tendrils of the Delta from the north-western Panhandle as far south as the bustling tourist hub of Maun. As the floodwaters spread, wildlife – up to 200 000 large mammals – begins to move back into the region, drawn by the promise of abundant food from the fertile flood plains. By July the floodwaters reach their peak, and the Delta doubles in size as grasslands transform into lakes and channels filled with crystalline waters.



This aquatic abundance supports a remarkable diversity of fauna and flora: 530 species of birds, 160 mammal species, 190 species of reptiles and amphibians. More than 1 500 species of plants. Little wonder it is acclaimed as one of Africa's most memorable safari destinations, and a bucket list item for nature-loving travellers.

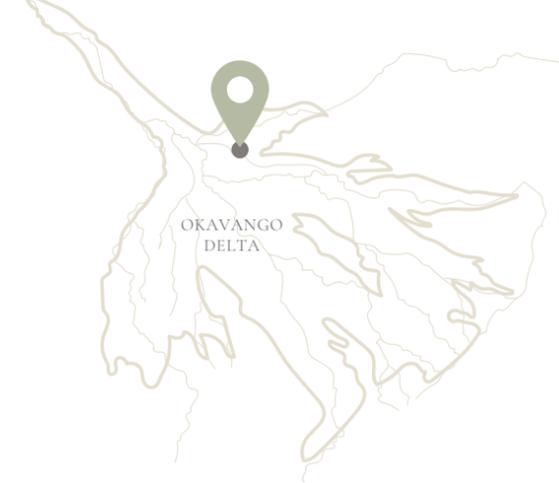
As the floods recede, the landscape starts to dry out, and grasslands return to shades of burnished gold. Until, around November, with ink-black clouds and a clap of thunder, the rains arrive. From December to March these dramatic afternoon thunderstorms wash the dust from the air, soak the landscape and provide welcome relief from the heat of summer days. As the rains peter out in March, the floodwaters begin to arrive from Angola, and the cycle repeats itself.

This restless landscape allows for a wonderful diversity of safari experiences. Game drives led by skilled guides venture deep into the grasslands and woodland of the region in search of wildlife, offering excellent sightings of keystone species, including African wild dog, leopard, lion, elephant and buffalo. A highlight too is the chance to discover red lechwe and sitatunga, the semi-aquatic antelope that call the Delta home.

And don't forget the binoculars! Birders can look forward to memorable sightings of African fish eagle, Pel's fishing owl, African jacana, slaty egret, and wattled cranes among more than 500 recorded species. Walking safaris offer a thrilling opportunity to spot birds and larger game on foot, while in the flood season excursions are offered on traditional mokoro dugout canoes. Motorised boat safaris allow you to explore the larger channels and deep lagoons that play host to pods of hippos.

Happily, Botswana's forward-thinking approach to low-volume eco-tourism means that camps and lodges across the Okavango Delta are spread out on expansive private concessions, ensuring an exclusive safari experience where the emphasis is firmly on touching the earth lightly.

Natural Selection offers luxury camps and lodges across the Delta – from the Panhandle to the eastern reaches of the Moremi Game Reserve – allowing guests to create a memorable circuit exploring the true diversity of this unforgettable corner of Africa.



Okavango Delta

NORTHERN DELTA

WHY YOU WILL LOVE IT

Iconic landscapes deep in the Okavango Delta's famous Panhandle, which receives the floodwaters first

A circuit of award-winning yet intimate luxury camps

Diverse landscape of lagoons, forests and grasslands ensures remarkable wildlife sightings

Land- and water-based activities, including game drives, motorised boat safaris and mokoro excursions

Close your eyes and summon a vision of what you always dreamed the Okavango Delta would look like. Congratulations, you've just found it!

Natural Selection's expansive concessions in the northern Okavango Delta dish up the postcard-perfect scenes that make this one of the world's great wilderness areas. It's a landscape of diverse habitats – tawny grasslands, palm islands and ancient forests – woven together by the waterways and seasonal channels of the Delta. Bordering the world-famous Moremi Game Reserve, the game viewing here is nothing short of remarkable, and with just a handful of camps sharing a vast concession, you can be assured of an intimate experience in a wonderfully uncrowded corner of the Okavango Delta.

With a diversity of landscapes, you're spoilt for choice when it comes to activities. Spend the morning poling silently along in a traditional mokoro, then while away an afternoon tracking leopard through the grassland. The area is famous for its mega-herds of elephant and buffalo, and an abundance of antelope attracts plenty of predators. In fact, old safari hands reckon this area has the highest concentration of lion anywhere in the Okavango Delta! Birding is spectacular here too, whether you're drifting along on a motorised boat safari, or settled in on your waterside private deck.

Natural Selection's camps in the region take full advantage of their enviable locations, whether it's waterfront real estate overlooking lagoons and channels, or suites set amid the tawny savannah of the Okavango Delta.





The northern reaches of the Okavango Delta has one of the highest concentrations of lion, often in hot pursuit of the mega-herds of buffalo that roam this area.

NORTHERN DELTA CAMPS

Wild escapes

NORTH ISLAND OKAVANGO
DUKE'S CAMP · DUKE'S EAST
MBAMBA

On the fringes of the famed Okavango Panhandle, Natural Selection's vast concession in the northern Okavango Delta is host to four memorable camps, each offering a unique sense of safari style amid one of the world's great wilderness areas. Each is a partnership with members of the local community.

NORTH ISLAND OKAVANGO is a joint venture with the Makgobokgobo Youth Trust. It offers seven thoroughly contemporary suites set on the fringes of a permanent lagoon. Under the shade of stately wild ebony trees, the spacious suites include a cosy lounge – with a fireplace for cooler nights – and a terrace complete with a private plunge pool. Raised boardwalks link the suites to the main lodge, where an over-water lounge and dining area offer unforgettable al fresco moments beneath the stars.



North Island Okavango



North Island Okavango



Duke's Camp



Duke's Camp

DUKE'S CAMP is the Okavango Delta counterpoint to the iconic Jack's Camp in the Makgadikgadi Pans. Tapping into the same aesthetic of vintage grandeur and opulent furnishings, the eight elegant under-canvas tents at Duke's rest on raised wooden decks in the shade of ancient leadwood trees.



Duke's East

On an island nearby, and offering just four spacious suites, **DUKE'S EAST** is ideal for travellers seeking privacy and safari panache in the heart of the Delta. The sister camp to Duke's Camp, Duke's East delivers a similar sense of vintage style and is enormously popular as an exclusive-use under-canvas option for families and multi-generational travellers.

MBAMBA is the newest addition to the collection, offering 12 canvas tents – including two family suites – in the shade of stately leadwood trees. Standing on raised wooden decks above the grasslands, the interiors feature the much-loved Bousfield aesthetic and guests will revel in the plush fabrics, mahogany sideboards, Persian rugs and romantic four-poster beds infused with a sense of vintage charm.



Mbamba

CONSERVATION FEATURE by Dr Jennifer Lalley

All aboard the *Elephant Express*

HELPING SCHOOL CHILDREN
NAVIGATE THE BUSY 'ELEPHANT
HIGHWAYS' OF THE OKAVANGO
DELTA PANHANDLE

Botswana is world famous for its elephant sightings, and the thrill of spending time with large herds on the move is what brings many travellers to the mesmerising landscapes of the Okavango Delta.

But for pedestrians, especially children, these towering pachyderms can pose a threat.

As elephant herds have moved out of shrinking or unsafe wilderness areas, they have moved into Botswana, which has historically been a safe haven for wildlife. Here they regularly pass through remote villages and agricultural lands, sometimes threatening the livelihoods and day to day activities of local people.

While innovative programmes are helping reduce elephant crop raids, an equally pressing concern in the Okavango Panhandle is getting children safely to and from school. Many local children face a long walk to school each day, often up to 10 kilometres return, and the chance of encountering wildlife is high.

The solution came in January 2020, when Natural Selection partnered with conservation organisation EcoExist and the Okavango Community Trust to launch the Elephant Express.



This vital scholar transport programme operates a fleet of three buses, dedicated to ensuring children living in and around the eastern panhandle of the Okavango Delta can travel safely to school each day. Besides the immediate safety benefit, the availability of reliable transport has also led to an improvement in both attendance figures and academic performance at local schools.

While the learners are safely in their classrooms, the Elephant Express vehicles are used to transport healthcare workers between central and remote satellite clinics, ensuring easier access to healthcare. This has resulted in accessible care for the elderly and a significant increase in pre-natal care for women.

Throughout the day, the buses move through villages like mobile beacons, stating prominently on the sides "Brought to you by your local elephants". They are constant reminders that this land is shared with elephants and we can co-exist.

Combined with educational bus shelters erected for waiting passengers and targeted conservation education, the result is zero fatal elephant encounters since the programme began. What's more, the benefits of elephants can be felt throughout the community.

Happier pupils, healthier villages and elephants left to get on with the business of being elephants. This is by far one of the most successful community conservation partnerships in Botswana.

Dr Jennifer Lalley, Natural Selection Co-Founder and Chief Impact Officer

Making a *difference* in the Northern Okavango Delta

Together with community property partners and our operational partners at Uncharted Africa and North Island Okavango, these are some of the Community Outreach and Wildlife Conservation projects we support in Botswana.

1.



ELEPHANT EXPRESS

In the Okavango Delta, some areas have experienced rising elephant populations over the past 15 years, largely due to migrations from less hospitable regions. While this is positive news for tourists, it creates challenges for local villagers, making agricultural lands more susceptible to elephant raids and increasing the risk of dangerous encounters.

To address this human-wildlife conflict, we launched the Elephant Express buses to safely transport school children through high-risk areas. In partnership with EcoExist, which identified the 'elephant highways' where human-elephant encounters are most likely, we've been running these buses since 2020 with support from the Okavango Community Trust. Stakeholder meetings indicate improved school attendance and academic performance, and the buses also facilitate medical staff transportation between village clinics, enhancing pre- and post-natal care.

2.



COACHING CONSERVATION

Coaching Conservation is an innovative conservation outreach programme for children, which fosters self-respect, respect for each other and respect for wildlife and the environment.

By copying the survival strategies of different large mammals while engaging in sporting activities, kids actively learn about species conservation, the importance of working as a team and celebrating each individual's skills and power to make a difference.

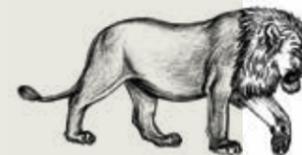
3.



GUDIGWA EARLY LEARNING CENTRE

Natural Selection and lodge partner Uncharted Africa have joined up with the Wild Bird Trust to establish an early learning centre in one of the most remote villages in the eastern panhandle. Many of our lodge staff come from this village where, until now, there has never been a safe and nurturing place for pre-school aged children to play and learn.

4.



HERDING FOR LIONS

Over 50 lions across 13 prides have been spotted in the northern panhandle of the Delta, often living on the fringes where they face persecution due to livestock predation. Here we have supported CLAWS (Communities Living Among Wildlife Sustainably) and a communal herding programme since its inception in order to protect both cattle and lions. Approximately 80% of cattle in Eretsha village are now part of communal herds, providing employment while reducing retaliatory killings of lions and restoring overgrazed land.

CLAWS is vital in safeguarding lions and livestock through collaring and tracking, which minimises encounters and lowers herding costs, benefiting both herders and lion populations.

Travel that *matters*

For more information on the projects we support, or if you would like to assist further in our community or conservation work, please scan the QR code or visit: www.naturalselectionfoundation.org.





Okavango Delta

KHWAI PRIVATE RESERVE

WHY YOU WILL LOVE IT

Exclusive private reserve; only five camps share 200 000-hectares

Famous for game and predator sightings

Land- and water-based activities, including game drives, mokoro, walking safaris and night drives

Remarkable birding, and a photographer's paradise

Be part of conservation in action

Sleep out under the stars

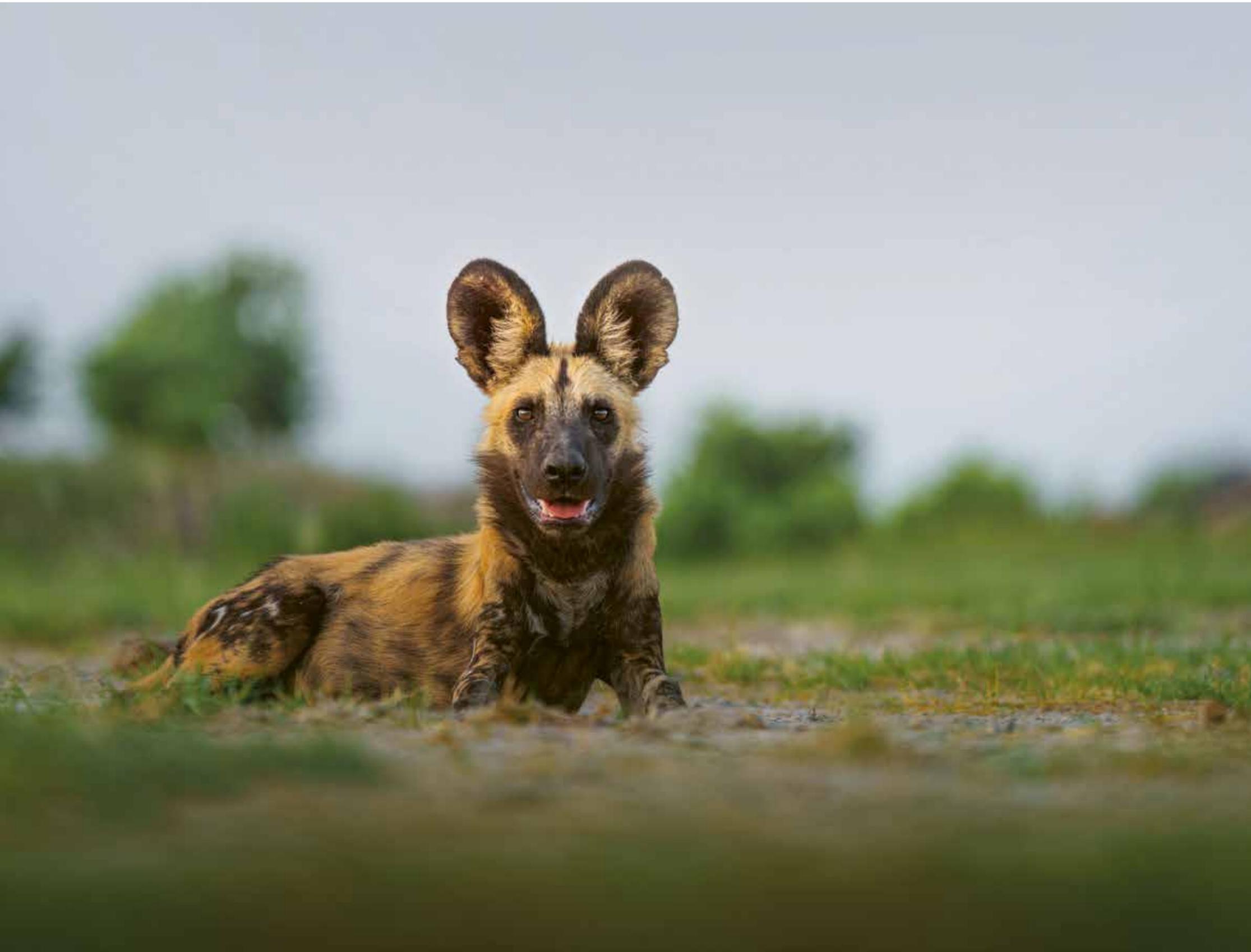
Set in the north-eastern reaches of Botswana's Okavango Delta, Khwai Private Reserve (KPR) protects a diversity of ecosystems that range from crystalline waterways and wide rivers to game-rich grasslands and tracts of mopane forest.

Bordered by the renowned Moremi Game Reserve to the south, and the Chobe National Park to the east, KPR offers some of the best game viewing Botswana has to offer. The perennial Khwai River, which forms the southern boundary of the reserve, attracts herds of elephants and antelope, but KPR is equally famous for sightings of lion, leopard, cheetah and African wild dog. In the drier interior of the reserve, seasonal waterholes are a magnet for thirsty wildlife and the reserve's ecological diversity makes it a haven for birdlife, with more than 450 species recorded.

Twice-daily game drives are led by Natural Selection's skilled safari guides, but also look forward to traditional mokoro excursions, motorised boat safaris and night drives. Thrilling game walks are offered in the cool of the morning, and our two unique underground hides offer up-close elephant encounters. Guests can also discover the incredible work of our conservation teams with the unique KPR Ranger Experience.

Another favourite activity is a trip to the Khwai Village where our community partners live on the edge of Moremi Game Reserve amongst wildlife and where we carry out several community programmes.





Khwai Private Reserve offers a range of camps, which are all part of a community partnership with the Khwai Development Trust. Accommodation ranges from the immersive luxury of Tuludi and Sable Alley to the understated exclusivity of Little Sable. Elephant Pan is a more relaxed under-canvas experience set within a stand of mopane woodland, while the towering Skybeds sleepout offers an unforgettable opportunity to sleep beneath the stars amid the wilderness of Botswana.

Just a handful of camps share a reserve nearly three times the size of Singapore, so you can be assured of memorable sightings without the crowds.

KHWAI PRIVATE RESERVE CAMPS

Wilderness luxury & starry nights

TULUDI · SABLE ALLEY · LITTLE SABLE
ELEPHANT PAN · SKYBEDS

Khwai Private Reserve stretches across 200 000 hectares of Okavango wilderness yet is home to just four remarkable camps.

TULUDI is the flagship, and part of our Botswana Premier Camp Circuit, with seven airily spacious suites gazing out over a grassy floodplain alive with wildlife. Boardwalks link the suites to the main area, where a sun-splashed pool deck and 'treehouse' library offer idyllic ways to while away an afternoon.





Sable Alley



Elephant Pan



Skybeds



Little Sable

SABLE ALLEY offers a similarly contemporary aesthetic that will charm and delight. Here 12 spacious under-canvas tents capitalise on the views across a permanent waterhole, while the camp's communal lounge and romantic firepit are the perfect place to soak up the Okavango Delta views.

A short drive from Sable Alley, **LITTLE SABLE** is a more intimate eight-room choice, with a focus on understated immersion in the wilderness.

ELEPHANT PAN also revels in its location, here amid the sandy mopane forests in the east of the reserve. It's a laid-back destination that offers guests a front-row seat to thrilling sightings of the wildlife that flock to the waterhole on the fringes of the camp. If you've always wanted to get up close to ellies, Elephant Pan is for you.

Adding an extra dose of adventure is access to the unforgettable **SKYBEDS** experience, with three secure double-storey sleeping platforms offering a memorable night out beneath the stars.



FEATURE by Andrew Thompson

Hide and Seek

LOOK FORWARD TO UP-CLOSE WILDLIFE ENCOUNTERS WITH THE UNDERGROUND VIEWING HIDES AND PLATFORM SLEEPOUTS IN KHWAI PRIVATE RESERVE

“There’s no need to worry,” says Matt, a seasoned safari guide, as we settle into our seats and gaze out over the waterhole. “The elephants will be here soon.”

Matt and I are in an unlikely location for a safari sighting: perched on swivel chairs in a repurposed shipping container that’s been sunk into the sands so that we are sitting eye-level with a small waterhole deep inside Botswana’s 200 000-hectare Khwai Private Reserve.

“Enjoy your coffee while you can,” says Matt with confidence. “And maybe get your camera ready.”

Khwai Private Reserve is often billed as the Okavango Delta’s best-kept secret and has no shortage of spectacular wildlife. You’ll find four of the Big Five here, alongside healthy populations of African wild dog and cheetah.

The lush landscapes in the south-west of the reserve, fed by the long reach of the Okavango Delta, are also home to herds of lechwe and sitatunga, the remarkable semi-aquatic antelope common in the Delta. An impressive array of birdlife, from waterbirds to raptors, completes an almost perfect Okavango Delta picture.

But in the drier north-eastern reaches of Khwai, the swampy grasslands make way for thick mopane bushveld. There’s a palpable change in the atmosphere here, and when night falls, it’s not to the call of croaking frogs and the sloshing of splayed hooves, but the eerie cry of black-backed jackals and lonely whoops of spotted hyenas.

It’s a welcome contrast to a watery Okavango Delta adventure. And in this thirsty landscape, waterholes become predictable focal points for wildlife. Elephants are a particular drawcard, and with Khwai Private Reserve wedged between Chobe National Park and Moremi Game Reserve, Khwai’s reliable grazing and year-round water make this a highway for hungry and thirsty herds, particularly in the drier winter months.

Matt shares all of this knowledge in a hushed whisper, as we wait patiently in our underground hide. I busy myself with photographing the Cape turtle doves flapping around the shallows, and a lone zebra that saunters in for a morning drink.



But then, a large slate-grey leg fills the window to my right. A swirling, inquisitive trunk follows. Both are so close I can count the wiry black hairs protruding from the caked and wrinkled skin. Soon, more legs and trunks follow, as a large herd of African elephants drink, splash and bathe in the freshwater that flows just metres away.

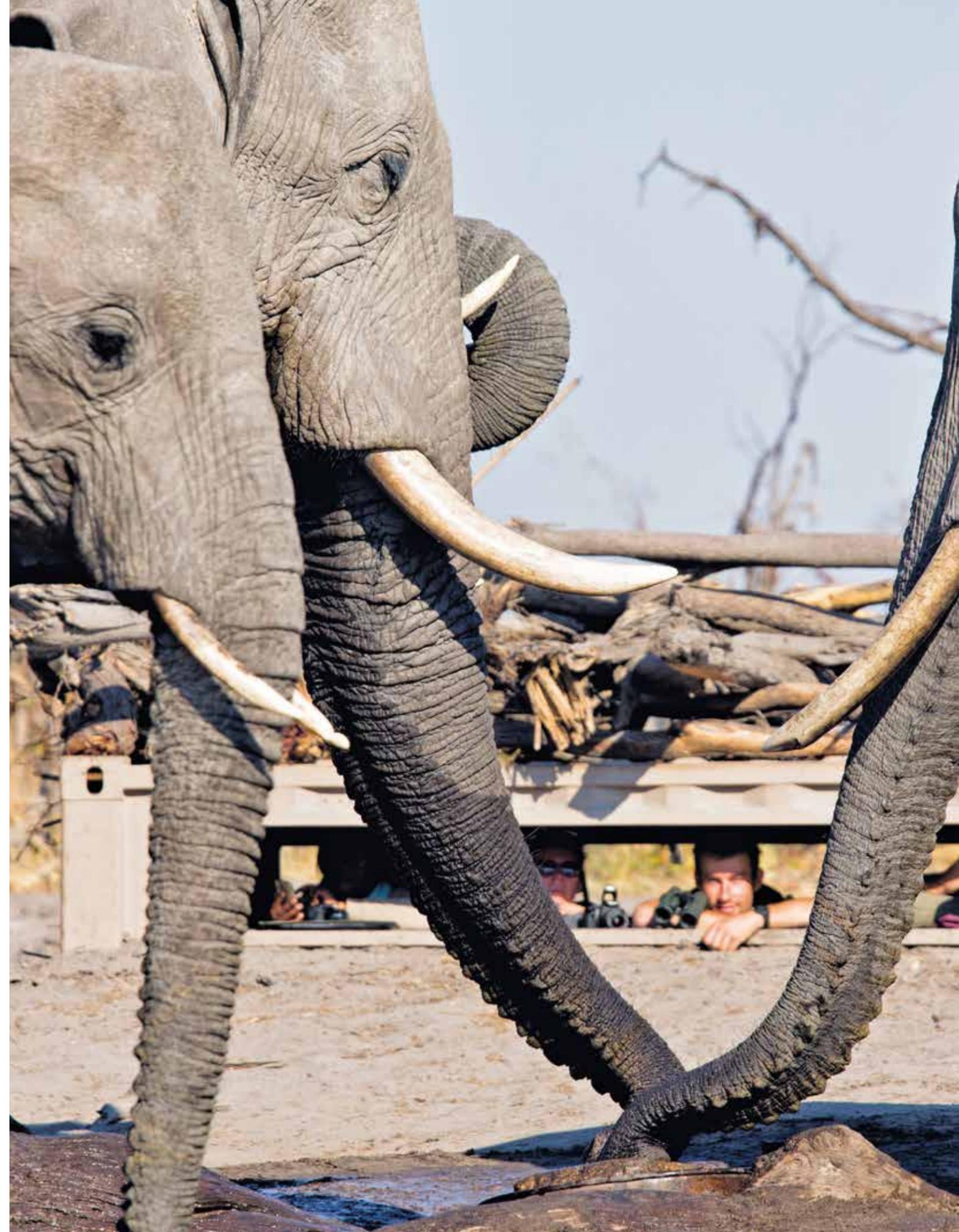
The underground hide is a highlight of Khwai Private Reserve, but another unique experience here is set high above it. The Natural Selection **SKYBEDS** offer an unforgettable night out beneath the stars, with three elevated sleeping platforms – each with en-suite bathroom – and a separate bar and dining area, and a friendly team on hand to take care of the details.

The Skybeds all gaze down on a busy waterhole that feels wonderfully remote, and I fall asleep beneath the snug duvets, counting the shooting stars, before pre-dawn wake-up calls from snorting buffalo and thirsty lion at the waterhole.

Between the underground hide and the Skybeds, it's easy to believe that a Khwai experience can't get much more memorable. But when I returned to Elephant Pan, a charmingly low-key camp in KPR, there was one last surprise waiting for me: another herd of elephants heading straight toward camp.

And so, with a cold bottle of St Louis beer in hand, I settled into a sofa set just metres away from these remarkable animals. This drier corner of Khwai Private Reserve may not be your typical Okavango Delta experience, but – I thought – the iconic waterways and mokoro adventures could wait. Right now, this was surely the best seat in Botswana.

Andrew Thompson is a freelance travel and business writer based in Cape Town, South Africa.



FEATURE by David Goodman

Roaming with the Rangers

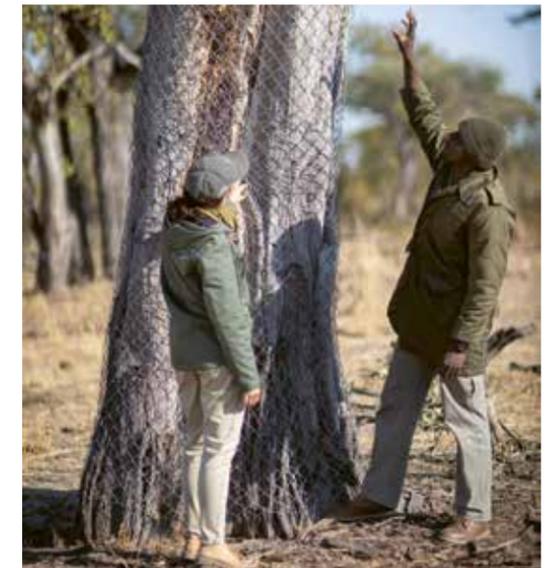
DAVID GOODMAN SPENDS A DAY WITH THE RANGERS AT THE FRONTLINE OF PROTECTING KHWAI PRIVATE RESERVE

Golden morning light bathed the mopane trees as my wife and I climbed onto the Land Cruiser from Sable Alley camp, donning ponchos for protection against the early morning chill. Head Ranger Gofiwa Thebenala was at the wheel, ranger Robert Swartz climbed in the back, while our tracker sat in a jump seat above the front bumper, scanning the bush for signs of life.

We were joining the trio as part of a new Natural Selection Ranger Experience, which allows guests to see, up close, how rangers work as connectors in the wilderness, building trust with animals, connecting with the local community, and advancing conservation goals.

We were given a tracking guide and checklist to report what we saw, an iPad with a GPS map – to plot the location of each animal that we encountered – and a digital camera with a 400mm zoom lens to record the moment.

The unique Ranger Experience is also an opportunity to look behind the scenes and discover how rangers and guides work together to create the magic of a successful safari, heading out before the guides to track animals and report sightings, ensuring a richer experience for guests.



The six rangers of Khwai Private Reserve – a 200 000-hectare reserve home to Natural Selection’s Sable Alley, Little Sable, Tuludi, Skybeds and Elephant Pan – have an unusual intimacy with the animals, and their knowledge of animal behaviour is the key to their work.

“We rangers do quite a lot of jobs: wildlife management, tracking, solving the human and wildlife conflicts in the village, firefighting, educating our community about conservation, providing security in the concession, and watching out for poachers,” explained Gofiwa, a gregarious man with an easy smile. They also help to save the region’s iconic baobab trees, which elephants often damage by stripping the bark.

Rumbling down a sandy track, the tracker suddenly raised his arm to signal a halt. Hopping down from the vehicle, we all crowded around as Gofiwa pointed to a distinctive paw print in the sand: cheetah. Stepping carefully to avoid disturbing the tracks, we followed the spoor for about 100 metres until they veered off into the thick bush.

Back in the Land Cruiser, we drove quickly along to try and get ahead of the cheetah, but on the far side of a large mopane grove the cheetah tracks had vanished. The world's fastest land animal had made a clean getaway. Nature was working as it should. In the Okavango Delta, animals rule. But humans can help.

Gofiwa later described how the rangers had tracked a pregnant leopard, keeping her whereabouts secret until she had given birth. The new mother and her cubs were skittish, "so we spent time with them," he said. "We came early morning, moving around with them all day, until they went to sleep at night. Sometimes, we left a vehicle with them there and opened the radio so that they could hear the noise and get used to that."

"Now," he said, "they are comfortable with us." Later in the day, we pulled up alongside a small stream. The rangers motioned to some tall grass. Staring closely, we could make out the tell-tale spots of a leopard. Suddenly, two young leopards stood up and ambled over to the water, drinking side by side and occasionally looking quizzically at us.

"Those are the cubs. They are brothers," said Gofiwa proudly, like a doting father. Beyond helping safari guides locate wildlife, the rangers play a key role in the conservation mission of Khwai Private Reserve. Although Khwai banned hunting many years ago, a nearby concession permitted hunting until as recently as 2017, making animals in the region skittish around humans. It has fallen to the rangers to re-establish trust and habituate animals to humans.

"I have a special connection with all the wildlife," said Gofiwa. "It's just a passion that drives me."

The rangers' connection with the animals they watch over is evident when we arrive at a waterhole, where a pride of five lions lazed in the grass.

As a Land Cruiser from Sable Alley arrived at the sighting, a thick-maned male lion ambled over to lie down in the shade of the vehicle, sheltering from the midday sun, as the guests on-board watched wide-eyed. As we drove with the rangers, Robert encouraged us to note down all we observed: the birds we saw, any injuries or identifying marks on the lion, and the location of each animal on a digital map.

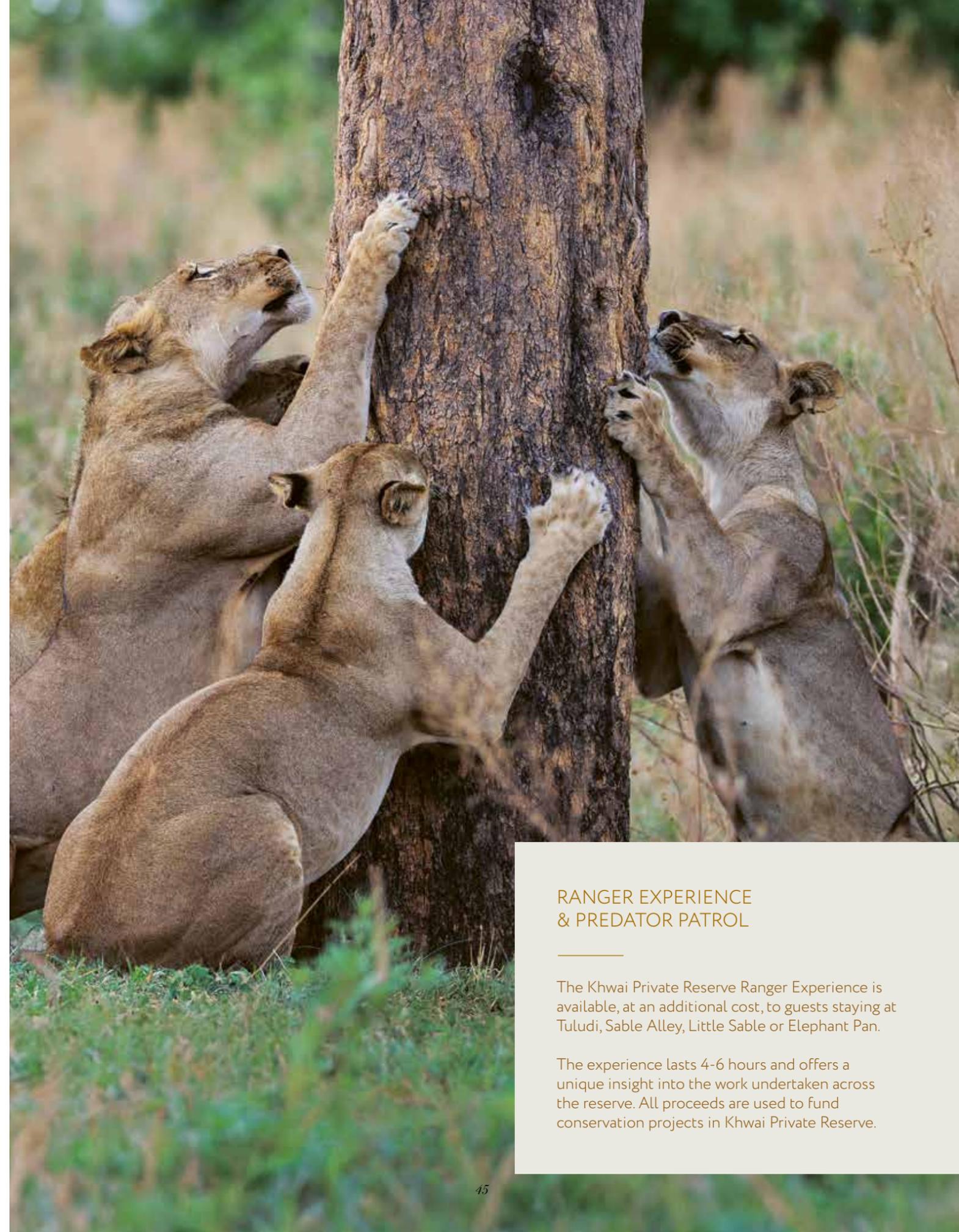
"We want guests to experience the natural feeling of having been in the bush, like tracking and how to identify animals and their ages," said Gofiwa. "That's why we get out of the vehicle and walk and show you tracking. Here, we share everything."

The rangers also share their knowledge with the local community.

Residents in nearby Khwai village spend weeks cutting grass for traditional thatched roofs, and with Natural Selection providing both transport and meals to the workers, the rangers are on hand to ensure their safety.

"It's something we can do that really helps the community," said Robert as Gofiwa nodded in agreement: "We build trust with animals... and with people."

David Goodman is a USA-based journalist, author and photographer. Goodman's award-winning reporting ranges from covering politics to the threat of climate change, the outdoors, and adventure travel. His writing has also appeared in the New York Times, Outside, Boston Globe, Travel & Leisure, Ski, the Los Angeles Times, and other publications.



RANGER EXPERIENCE & PREDATOR PATROL

The Khwai Private Reserve Ranger Experience is available, at an additional cost, to guests staying at Tuludi, Sable Alley, Little Sable or Elephant Pan.

The experience lasts 4-6 hours and offers a unique insight into the work undertaken across the reserve. All proceeds are used to fund conservation projects in Khwai Private Reserve.

Making a *difference* in The Khwai Private Reserve

Together with our property partner, KPR, these are some of the Community Outreach and Wildlife Conservation projects we support in Botswana.

1.



MARIA RAMSDEN LEARNING CENTRE

Founded as the Khwai Village Day Care Centre by Maria Naledi Ramsden and Sandra Rubins to support preschool children from single-mother households, the initiative evolved when their non-profit charity, Naletsana, partnered with Natural Selection in 2018. After Maria's untimely passing, the centre was renamed in her honour.

Today, the centre provides a safe, nurturing learning environment with daily nutritious meals. In 2023, the facilities were expanded, adding a new kitchen, borehole, water tanks and pump, and greenhouse. We seek donors to help fund meals and weekend learning opportunities for adults.

2.



KPR ANTI-POACHING

At Khwai Private Reserve, wildlife is protected through daily monitoring, biannual game counts, collecting of snares on borders, and communicating with local communities on conservation issues. The ranger team are supported with much-needed equipment, from vehicles to binoculars, rain suits, two-way radios and motorbikes to access remote reaches of this large reserve. With or without tourism's support, the ranger team carry on with this vital conservation work throughout the year.

3.



WILD SHOTS OUTREACH

This unique conservation education programme runs workshops through our camps for unemployed young adults from nearby villages. Participants learn about photography, conservation and the appreciation of beauty in nature as seen at the end of a camera lens.

4.



COACHING CONSERVATION

Coaching Conservation is an innovative conservation outreach programme for children, which fosters self-respect, respect for each other and respect for wildlife and the environment.

By copying the survival strategies of different large mammals while engaging in sporting activities, kids actively learn about species conservation, the importance of working as a team and celebrating each individual's skills and power to make a difference.

5.



WILD DOG DISEASE PREVENTION

After the illness and death of a wild dog close to Khwai Village, Natural Selection joined forces with partners Botswana Predator Conservation Trust (BPCT) and Maun Animal Welfare Society (MAWS) to have all domestic dogs in the area vaccinated to prevent transmission of distemper to wild dogs. Such an outbreak could wipe out the wild dog population of the area. The vaccination programme continues, regularly delivering vaccines to Khwai Village and many others bordering the Okavango Delta. Inside Khwai Private Reserve, the ranger team monitor Wild Dog, assisting BPCT with population and distribution data.

6.



KHWAI VILLAGE GRASS HARVESTING

This important habitat management and community outreach project has been running for six consecutive years. Here we work closely with members of the Khwai community to support local harvesters with transportation, safe accommodation, food, and the trucking of harvested grass for the annual three-month harvesting period. Our KPR rangers also work closely with the harvesters to rotate harvested areas, minimise impacts on wildlife and maintain safe practices.

Travel that *matters*

For more information on the projects we support, or if you would like to assist further in our community or conservation work, please scan the QR code or visit: www.naturalselectionfoundation.org.





Okavango Delta

SOUTHERN DELTA

WHY YOU WILL LOVE IT

Exclusive private concession: one camp in 200 000 hectares

Diverse landscape of lagoons, forests and grasslands ensures remarkable wildlife sightings

Africa's third-highest density of leopards: BBC's *Big Cats 24/7* and Netflix's *Living with Leopards* was filmed on location here

Land- and water-based activities, including game drives, mokoro excursions and night drives

Set on the south-western fringes of the Okavango Delta, Natural Selection's Xudum private concession is one of the largest in Botswana, offering exclusive access to 200 000 hectares of pristine wilderness. Vast, remote and virtually untouched, it is a destination that delivers a dramatic diversity of wild ecosystems and extraordinary experiences.

Here you'll find open grasslands and fertile floodplains, wide lagoons and crystal-clear channels, riverine thickets and mopane forests. Xudum is also well known for its large herds of herbivores: mega-herds of buffalo are often spotted, and up to 10 000 elephants are to be found on the concession at various times of the year.

An abundance of antelope ensures plenty of predators prowl the grasslands, as lion, wild dog, hyena and cheetah pursue the wary kudu, red lechwe, bushbuck and tsessebe that call this landscape home.

But look out for the smaller stars too. At Xudum you'll find bat-eared fox, side-striped (and black-backed) jackal, African wildcat, honey badger, and mongoose.

As night falls, enjoy sightings of the shy nocturnal residents: porcupine, aardwolf, aardvark, civet and genet. And with a blend of riverine, forest and savannah habitats, the birdlife is equally impressive, and dedicated birders can look to tick off the likes of Pel's fishing owl and wattled crane.





The Xudum concession boasts the third-highest density of leopard recorded in Africa. It is also here that the Netflix documentary *Living with Leopards* was filmed by renowned wildlife filmmaker Brad Bestelink.

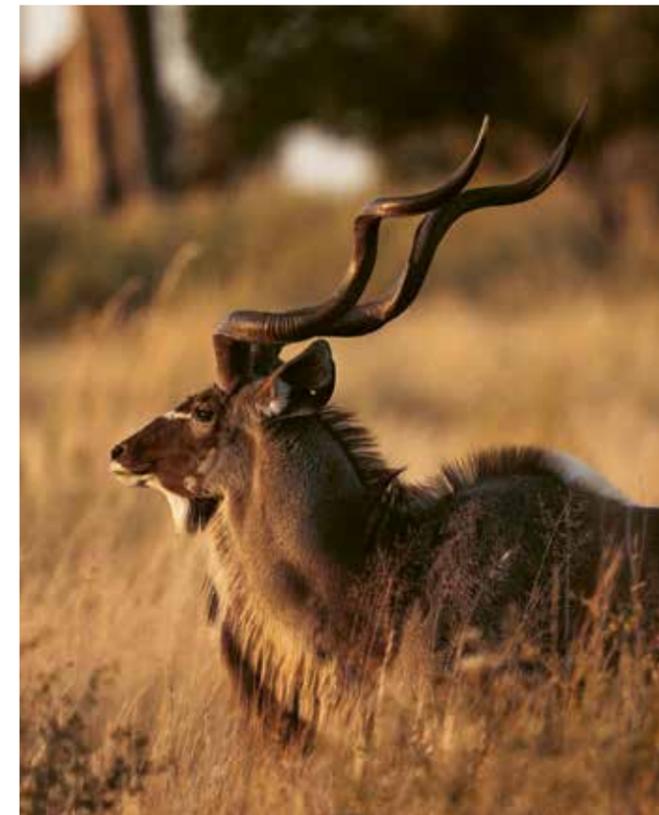
OKAVANGO DELTA
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Mokolwane



The array of landscapes is mirrored in the variety of activities on offer. Morning, afternoon and early-evening game drives offer your best opportunity for sighting predators, while seasonal mokoro excursions offer an immersive experience of the Okavango Delta's sinuous channels. Scenic helicopter flights offer yet another thrilling perspective on this UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Natural Selection operates only a single camp on the Xudum concession, ensuring an exclusive safari experience for guests. **MOKOLWANE** is a little camp that's big on adventure. You'll find just seven under-canvas tents here, set on raised boardwalks to touch the earth lightly. It's an unfenced and understated gem that offers a front-row seat to the landscapes and wildlife of the southern Okavango Delta.

FEATURE by Peter Allison

How to *Speak* Elephant

*SPECIALIST PRIVATE SAFARI GUIDE
PETER ALLISON SHARES A FEW TRICKS
OF THE TRADE FOR INTERPRETING
ELEPHANT BEHAVIOUR*

It's hard to imagine a body shape more different to our own than an elephant's. Yet with a small amount of time you can learn to see that their body language is even more expressive than a dancer's. A magician should never reveal their tricks, but I'm prepared to share how safari guides perform some of theirs.

A common strategy when an elephant is spotted on the move is to anticipate where it is heading.

So, trick one: despite the abilities of a bulldozer, elephants tend to follow well-trodden paths they have made over millennia. You can follow the cleared trail with your eyes and drive to intercept them further along the path. And if the elephant approaches you, it will be far more relaxed than if you rumble up to it in the game vehicle.

It's always a good sign if an elephant starts feeding. It means they're relaxed, and you can be close to them in absolute safety. But then comes trick two: how to tell that a feeding elephant is becoming uncomfortable with our presence, by noticing an oh-so-subtle change in behaviour.

Instead of ripping, stripping and chomping away at food with its full focus on the task, sometimes the elephant turns its attention and the white of the eye becomes very visible. It's pretending not to watch us, but it certainly is.

As it plucks at food, the trunk curls to take a sniff of the vehicle, and the animal may engage in 'mock feeding'. That's when the food goes into its mouth but falls straight back out. This, again, is a little bit of theatre. The elephant doesn't want you to know that its full focus is now on us, and not lunch. Watch an elephant and you'll never stop learning.

Now here's a tail to tell..

There are other ways to interpret what an elephant is telling you. While you won't always have a view of an elephant's rump, the rear end can tell you a lot about what the front end is thinking. More specifically, the tail is incredibly expressive. If it's swishing, it's a happy, relaxed elephant. If it's hanging down and still, the elephant does not appreciate you approaching its rump. If it's held straight out to the side, you may be in real trouble and best to get away from that backside!

One often overstated aspect of pachyderm body language is the meaning of an elephant flapping its ears. This is often interpreted as a threat, and sometimes it can be, but more than 90 percent of the time the ellie is simply cooling itself down. By waving its ears the elephant cools the blood carried in the ropey veins just below the skin.



However, there's flapping and flaring. If the elephant has its ears flared, head up and facing you, that is a (rather needless) attempt to make itself look even bigger, and a sign that you should give it some space.

As humans, we rely on our voice for so much of our communication. So do elephants, it's just that we can't hear most of their communication. That's because our hearing starts at around 35Hz, and an elephant's language begins at 5Hz! We do hear their highest notes though, a menacing grumble.

Don't fear, most of the time it merely means 'let's go'. You won't always see immediate action as it may well be a bored teen whining at the family, and only when the matriarch gives marching orders will the herd move on. When you're out in the bush, take the time to look and listen, and you'll soon learn the subtle language of Africa's pachyderms.



Okavango Delta

MOREMI GAME RESERVE

WHY YOU WILL LOVE IT

A landmark conservation area established by local community leaders

Famous for its high concentration of antelope and predators

A diversity of habitat plays host to an impressive number of species

Twice-daily game drives in the company of expert guides

The ancestral lands of the Batawana tribe of Ngamiland, the Moremi Game Reserve was proclaimed as a game reserve in 1963. Stretching across nearly 5 000 square kilometres (1 900 square miles), the Moremi is a magical corner of northern Botswana which protects nearly half of the Okavango Delta, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

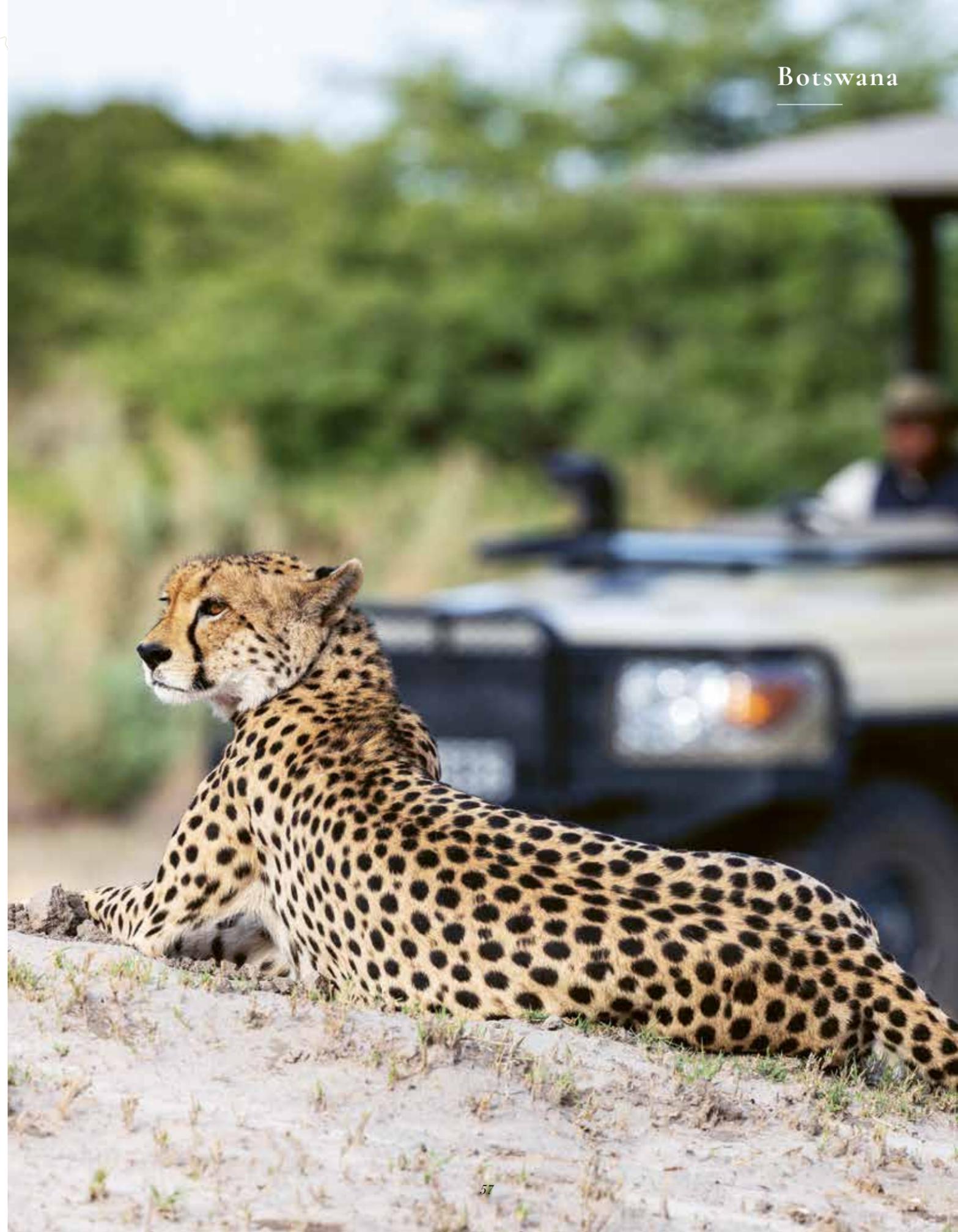
It's an environment that changes character through the seasons, from lush grasslands when the summer rains fall to a landscape of crystal-clear channels when the floodwaters arrive from Angola during the winter.

That diversity means the Moremi offers a remarkable year-round wilderness experience, and is famous for its large numbers of antelope, herbivores and predators.

Lion, leopard and African wild dog are often sighted a short way from camp, and the permanent waters of the Gomoti River ensure a wide variety of game is present in the area year round. Look forward to sighting large herds of antelope, including the semi-aquatic red lechwe and shy sitatunga.

Within the lagoons and pools of the Gomoti, large pods of hippos make themselves at home, while enormous Nile crocodiles are often seen basking on the banks.

More than 400 bird species have been recorded here, and throughout the year the waterways and grasslands ensure the Moremi is a twitcher's delight.





“The south-eastern Moremi Game Reserve, where you’ll find Tawana, is one of the most productive destinations in Botswana for game viewing,” explains Colin Bell, co-founder of Natural Selection. “In all my years in the bush, there are few places I’ve found that offer such incredible concentrations of wildlife.”

MOREMI PREMIER CAMP

Timeless Tawana

Tawana is the latest addition to Natural Selection's collection of Premier camps and lodges, joining Jack's Camp, Tuludi and North Island Okavango to create a remarkable circuit that showcases the incredible biodiversity of northern Botswana.

Created in partnership with Chief Tawana Moremi, the paramount chief of the Batawana tribe, Tawana rests in the shade of towering ebony trees on the banks of the Gomoti River in the world-famous Moremi Game Reserve. Game drives make the most of this game-rich corner of the Moremi, and guests can look forward to extraordinary sightings of antelope, predators, birdlife and large herbivores.





Tawana offers eight spacious guest suites – including three two-bedroom family suites – linked by raised wooden walkways that rest lightly on the landscape and allow wildlife to pass unhindered.

Each suite is created as a tranquil haven; the décor abounds with natural tones and organic textures taking their cue from the wilderness beyond. Step outside onto the wide private deck and you'll find a private lounge, plunge pool and outdoor relaxation spaces gazing across the Gomoti River and game-rich grasslands.

Those views take pride of place at the main lodge too, where the inviting lounge area blends easily into both indoor and outdoor dining spaces and a dedicated firepit. A walk-in wine cellar, wood-fired pizza oven and open-air dining area add to the menu of culinary adventures that are a signature of the Tawana experience. A 16-metre lap pool, well-equipped gym and in-room spa treatments allow for a focus on wellness in the wilderness.

Making a *difference* in areas surrounding the Moremi Game Reserve

We support these Community Outreach and Wildlife Conservation projects in the areas surrounding the Moremi Game Reserve.

I.



LEARNING TREE CENTRE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

In Shorobe Village, we've started The Learning Tree Centre for Early Childhood Education, for children aged 4-6. Established by Tawana camp in May 2024, The Learning Tree provides foundations for literacy and numeracy and vital nutrition for growing minds. In the afternoons, the centre becomes a learning and skills development venue for women as part of our Mmogo Centres for Community Development.

2.



COACHING CONSERVATION

Coaching Conservation is an innovative conservation outreach programme for children, which fosters self-respect, respect for each other and respect for wildlife and the environment. By copying the survival strategies of different large mammals while engaging in sporting activities, kids actively learn about species conservation, the importance of working as a team and celebrating each individual's skills and power to make a difference.

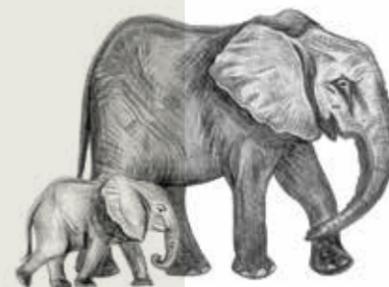
Each child who visits Tawana helps a local child from Shorobe Village to participate in this award-winning environmental education programme.

3.

BIOBOUNDARY PROJECT

In 2023, Natural Selection partnered with Wild Entrust and their BioBoundary Project, to provide long-term funding for their research on inexpensive, natural and safe airborne elephant repellent to help protect crops and reduce human-wildlife conflict.

This initiative studies the use of animals' olfactory senses to manage wildlife movement and reduce conflicts, particularly between elephants or wild dogs and human settlements, so they can coexist. Plant-based repellents offer a promising alternative to traditional methods like chilli peppers, contributing to the protection of crops and infrastructure.



Travel that *matters*

For more information on the projects we support, or if you would like to assist further in our community or conservation work, please scan the QR code or visit: www.naturalselectionfoundation.org.





FEATURE by Jules Hadley

The *upside* of a Private Guide

HOW HIRING A SPECIALIST PRIVATE GUIDE CAN ELEVATE YOUR AFRICAN SAFARI

Guests who travel with Natural Selection tell us time and time again that one of the most-cherished memories of their safari holiday was interacting with their wilderness guide.

They're the ones at each camp who wake you gently for that pre-dawn game drive, pour the coffee to ward off the morning chill (or the G&Ts for a sunset toast) and are always on hand to bring your wilderness adventure to life with their knowledge, skill and humour. At Natural Selection, we are incredibly proud of our guiding team, who are among the very best in the business.

But some travellers need that little something extra. Perhaps it's the more personal touch, a specialist knowledge of the bush, or simply a helping hand to ensure a seamless African holiday.

That's why many of our guests opt for the services of a private guide who will escort them through every step of their safari holiday, from the moment of arrival until that final wave goodbye.

They'll see you smoothly through the airports, recommend the seat with the best view on the light aircraft, keep tabs on your luggage (and the kids), remember how you like your drinks mixed, and ensure your safari is as effortless as it is memorable.

"Private guides add continuity to the journey," explains Peter Allison, an accomplished private guide with decades of experience in Africa, and Sales Director for Natural Selection. "They ensure you don't hear the same stories twice as you hop between lodges, and really bring their own unique experience and broad expertise to add depth and richness to the safari."

And while the guides at each camp typically still take charge of your daily safari outings, you can expect your private guide to ride along to bring context and perspective to what you're viewing, connecting the dots between sightings across different lodges and (often) countries.

They'll help to ensure you accomplish specific sightings and objectives, and delve that little bit deeper into your own specific areas of interest.

"If you are passionate about birding, or geology, or history, or flora, a private guide brings expert knowledge, experience and skills in niche areas, which we perhaps wouldn't expect even the best lodge guides to have," adds Peter, who says great private guides wear many different hats.

"At different stages of the journey they may be the animal-spotter, the naturalist, the interpreter-of-cultures, the host, the entertainer-of-kids, the storyteller, the trouble-shooter and the mixologist. But perhaps most importantly, they simply make sure you are enjoying yourself every step of the way."

For more information on Natural Selection's Private Guides, including rates and availability, contact our reservations office.



Q & A by Pru Allison

GET TO KNOW SUPER SANDE

Big guy. Bigger smile.

Unless he's home on leave, it's almost impossible to miss Super Sande. Aside from the fact that he towers above six feet, he is a significant presence at Jack's Camp; a guide whose warm demeanour and booming laugh have become a signature of this iconic destination in the Makgadikgadi Pans of central Botswana.

Super was born in the village of Senyawo, north of Francistown and close to Botswana's border with Zimbabwe. His long road to a life in conservation and guiding began while working alongside Jack Bousfield at an animal orphanage. When Jack passed away in 1992, Super signed on to help his son, Ralph, build the camp named in Jack's honour.

Super quickly fell in love with the stark beauty of the Makgadikgadi and, with Ralph's mentoring, went on to train as a safari guide. For the past three decades, Super has devoted himself to this landscape, becoming a specialist in the unique ecosystem of the Makgadikgadi Pans. Under Ralph's mentorship he has developed a reputation for his exceptional tracking skills and unmatched knowledge of the landscape.

From the annual zebra migrations to the elusive nocturnal creatures of the Kalahari, Super's passion for these wild spaces has made him a guiding legend in this ancient salt desert. A sought-after private guide, and widely regarded as one of the best safari guides in Botswana, it's no surprise he was honoured as Best Safari Guide in Africa at the 2023 Tatler Travel Awards.

Super, what's the secret to being a great guide? Guiding is not an easy role, so you must start with simply being hard-working. I read a lot to improve my knowledge and to be able to understand my surroundings better. When we're out there on the pans you have to read the tracks and understand the environment, download all the information about what's happening, and then share that with the guests.

Who has mentored you on your journey to being an award-winning guide?

I've worked with Ralph a lot over the years and of course, I learned a lot from him. But I'd say that our guests are some of the best mentors too. Just seeing how they experience this place, and their reaction to what we are sharing with them. It's what makes our time so important.

What makes Jack's Camp so special?

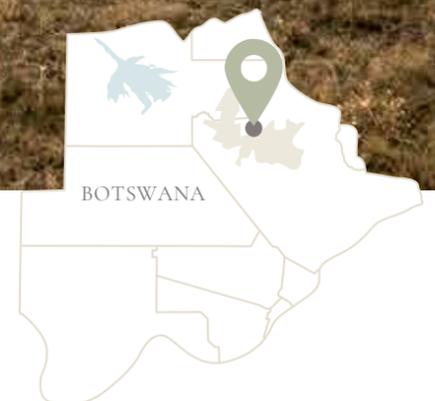
Jack's Camp is in such a unique location. We are on a private concession that covers over 400 000 hectares of the Makgadikgadi, which means we as guides have so much to work with. There are almost no boundaries, and the landscapes here are just amazing.

We have the world's second-largest wildebeest and zebra migration, and in my years here we have worked hard at conservation and seen the amount of wildlife grow and grow. And it's everything: the populations of aardwolf, aardvark, mongoose, tortoises. It's a place teeming with life. We have so much game and wildlife. Not many people know that this is also one of the very special places where you naturally find impala and springbok in the same landscape.

You also lead the quad-bike expeditions, what is special about this adventure?

Biking across the salt pans to Kubu Island and the flamingo breeding sites is amazing. There's an unbelievable sense of space during the day, and at night we roll out the sleeping mats to sleep under the stars. It's an experience you'll never forget. But my favourite thing is probably that you travel through the most deafening silence you'll ever hear.

Makgadikgadi Pans





Makgadikgadi Pans

There are few places on the planet that can evoke a feeling of ancient timelessness - as if you were dropped down onto planet earth 100,000 years ago.

While the watery channels of the Okavango Delta are a focus of many travellers to Botswana, the iconic, vast Makgadikgadi Salt Pans of central Botswana often become their safari highlight. Here you'll trade the lush grasslands and indigenous forests of the Okavango for the shimmering vastness of the pans; and the Delta's abundance of antelope for the thrill of unforgettable encounters with rare desert-adapted wildlife and an honouring of southern Africa's most ancient indigenous people, the San Bushmen. No visit to Botswana is complete without a few days amid the majestic beauty of the Makgadikgadi Pans.

As the Cessna swoops down to the gravel runway on the fringes of the pans, the vast white expanses of the Ntwetwe, Sua and Nxai Pans (which collectively make up the Makgadikgadi) stretch to the horizon. The remnants of an ancient lake, long drained by the movement of tectonic plates in the region, the pans are covered in a distinctive salt crust for most of the year, springing to life with the annual rains.

Amid the pans you'll marvel at islands of grassland too, punctuated by palm and baobab trees, which support herds of hardy wildebeest, springbok and zebra.

*ETHEREAL SILENCE
& ENDLESS HORIZONS*

HIGHLIGHTS

Iconic safari camps offering unmatched desert luxury

Enigmatic salt pans home to astonishing desert wildlife

Game drives, Bushman walks and quad-biking adventures

Immersive experience with habituated meerkats

Home to Africa's second-largest zebra migration

Summer 'Green Season' attracts vast breeding colonies of flamingos

Desert sundowners and spectacular stargazing



And when the summer rains fall here the explosion of grassland gives rise to Africa's second-largest zebra migration, drawing herds from as far afield as the Okavango Delta and the Chobe River.

During these months, predators take full advantage, as black-maned Kalahari lion, cheetah and hyena make the most of the seasonal abundance.

As the pans fill with water, birdlife arrives; grassland species and migrants, alongside vast flocks of greater and lesser flamingos that make their nests on the pans to feed, mate and breed. And yet the diversity of the Makgadikgadi Pans extends beyond the salt pans: westwards towards the Boteti River, where thorny scrubland is home to elephants and kudu merges into riverine habitat that draws zebra, wildebeest and impala during the dry winter months.

And there are almost endless ways to tap into this enigmatic landscape, with a wide range of experiences on offer according to what the seasons permit.

Game drives allow guests to discover the diversity of the desert experience year round, while those with a taste for adventure will love the quad-bike adventures available in the dry winter months.

Quad-bike excursions make use of established trails to safeguard the fragile ecosystem of the pans, while horseback trails allow guests to gallop alongside herds of zebra and wildebeest for an unforgettable experience in the saddle. Early-morning walks take guests to spend time alongside families of habituated – but still wild – meerkats, as specialist guides unravel the remarkable family structure and mannerisms of these characterful desert residents. Walks in the company of local Zu/'hoasi San Bushmen delve into the rich cultural history of the Makgadikgadi Pans, while scenic helicopter flights offer an unforgettable perspective on this iconic desert wilderness.

It's a singular landscape waiting to be discovered, and the four unique Natural Selection camps in the region offer immersive experiences led by highly skilled guides boasting years of experience.

MAKGADIKGADI CAMPS

Desert Dreaming

JACK'S CAMP · SAN CAMP
CAMP KALAHARI · MENO A KWENA

On the eastern boundary of the Makgadikgadi National Park, Natural Selection offers guests exclusive access to a private concession stretching across more than 400 000 hectares of the actual Makgadikgadi Pans. Just three camps, operated by Uncharted Africa, share this vast landscape, ensuring unrivalled exclusivity and a truly immersive desert experience.

JACK'S CAMP is our much-loved original where campaign-style décor and a touch of vintage grandeur combine to offer a truly opulent desert adventure. It's a deeply luxurious camp in every sense, from the expansive suites – each with a private plunge pool – to indulgent dining experiences in the elegant mess tent.

It's with good reason that Jack's Camp is nothing short of an icon in the world of African safaris. Just a short walk away, the exclusive-use Jack's Private Camp offers a desert hideaway for families and small groups in search of additional privacy and personalised service.





SAN CAMP is about unabashed desert romance. It's an intimate camp, with just seven suites of white canvas shimmering on the fringes of Ntwetwe Pan. Here the magic is in the minimalism, from swept sandy paths guiding you to the main dining tent to the sense of personal service and bespoke desert safaris.

CAMP KALAHARI enthralls younger travellers and will enchant you with its casual charm and understated simplicity. Here 12 Meru-style tents rest beneath rustling mokolwane palms on the edge of the salt pans. Perfect for multi-generational groups and families, it's a desert delight that dishes up all of the romance and adventure of the Makgadikgadi, without breaking the bank.



On the western boundary of the Makgadikgadi National Park, **MENO A KWENA** is a relaxed camp set dramatically on the banks of the Boteti River, where under-canvas tents with private verandas offer fantastic views, along with easy access to seasonal sightings of southern Africa's largest mammal migration.



FEATURE

SIGNATURE OPULENCE, UNRIVALLED PRIVACY

Jack's Private Camp

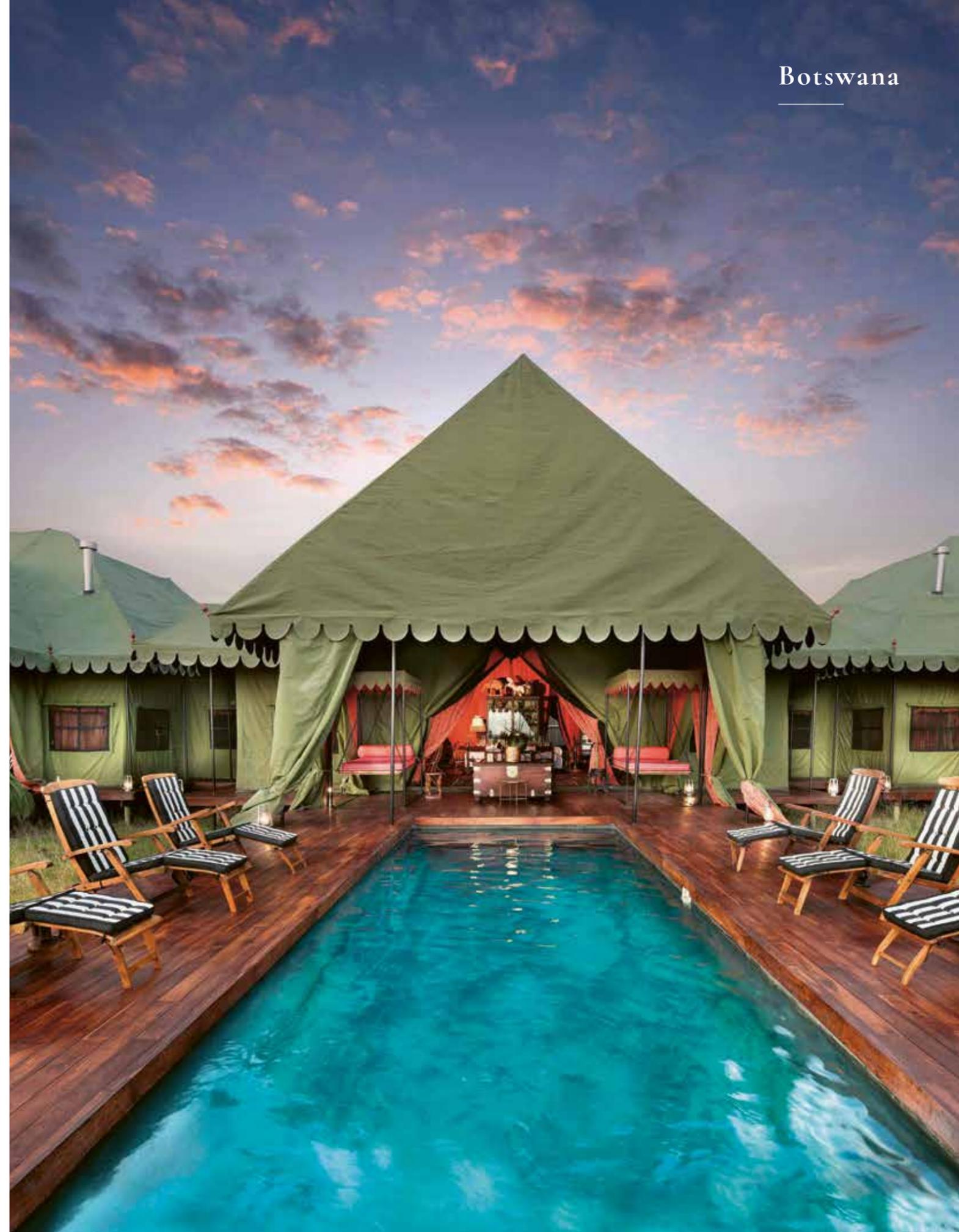
For the past 30 years, Jack's Camp has combined an immersive discovery of Botswana's ethereal Makgadikgadi Pans with a deeply luxurious experience celebrating the grandeur of vintage African journeys.

That experience evolved in 2024 with the opening of Jack's Private Camp, an exclusive-use villa-style escape that combines the vintage charm and riotous opulence of the original nine-suite Jack's Camp with a 21st-century focus on privacy and exclusivity.

Uniquely designed to cater for small groups, families and multi-generational travellers, Jack's Private Camp offers an experience in step with the iconic original, while elevating the experience with bespoke service and complete flexibility.

Located a short walk from the main lodge to ensure privacy, Jack's Private Camp was created as a stand-alone under-canvas villa. With flexibility in mind, a pair of expansive bedrooms flank the spacious central living area, making it ideal for reconnecting with loved ones while ensuring there's enough personal space for a little downtime.

Throughout the camp you'll soak up the memorable aesthetic of the much-loved original, paying tribute to the timeless charm that has long defined Jack's Camp. Think splashes of colour in North African rugs amid an abundance of burnished brass and luxuriant hand-woven African textiles. It's a colourful blend of bold opulence meets considered luxury and contemporary comforts.





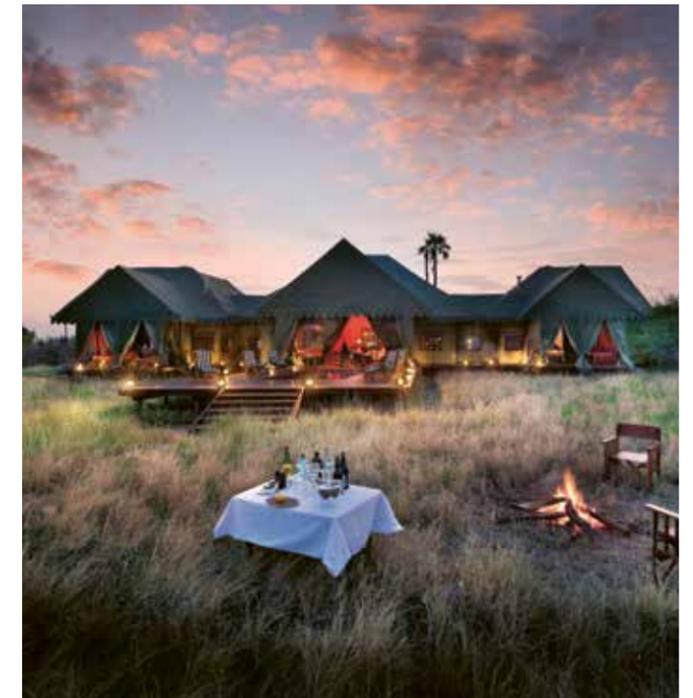
Both bedroom suites offer indulgent amounts of living space, with en-suite facilities extending to a pair of indoor showers, an open-air outdoor shower and the first bathtubs in the history of Jack's Camp!

Private verandas leading off each bedroom allow serene spaces for quiet contemplation amid the restorative stillness of the Kalahari. But we know that today's traveller also needs to be connected when it counts, so internet access is available throughout Jack's Private Camp.

You'll likely have little time for hopping online. Guests at Jack's Private Camp enjoy a dedicated 4x4 vehicle and guide – personally trained by safari icon Ralph Bousfield – allowing guests to tailor-make their safari experience.

And there are myriad ways to fill your days here in the Kalahari, from spending a morning with habituated meerkats to discovering the secrets of the pans on a wilderness walk alongside local Zu/'hoasi San Bushmen.

Daily safari drives reveal the abundance of wildlife in this harsh desert landscape while horse-riding and quad-bike adventures offer yet more ways to explore the pans. However you spend your days, you'll have the comfort of the Makgadikgadi's most exclusive villa to return to; a bolthole old Jack Bousfield would have been proud of.



FEATURE by Richard Holmes

A desert *adventure* to Kubu Island

*THREE DAYS. 400 CLICKS. ONE
UNFORGETTABLE JOURNEY*

For most travellers to the Makgadikgadi Pans of central Botswana, Jack's Camp is – with good reason – a destination. It's a desert oasis brimming with charm and character, home to some of the best guides in the business and perhaps the most eye-catching (and certainly the coldest) pool in Botswana. It's a place to turn up, breathe out, and tune in to the subtle rhythms of the desert.

Except for me, Jack's wasn't the end of the road. Rather, only the beginning. Because while there are many good reasons to settle in for a good long spell at Jack's Camp, there's also one very good reason to leave it all behind.

From June to September – the dry season in Botswana – Jack's Camp is the departure point for a one-of-a-kind three-day quad-bike adventure, with small groups of guests travelling across 400 kilometres of the Makgadikgadi Pans to reach the enigmatic granite outcrop of Kubu Island.

The journey begins with a leisurely start, as our quad-bikes are loaded up and our guide – the legendary Super Sande – gives a thorough briefing on safety and riding protocol. Out on

the pans, we'll follow a single track to minimise our impact on this fragile desert landscape. With goggles on and kikois wrapped around our heads to protect us from both sun and salt, we head off.

The quad-bikes – 350cc Yamaha Grizzly Ultramatics – are stable and easy to ride, and even without much experience I soon get the hang of it. Leaving the grasslands of Jack's behind we venture out onto the moonscape of the pans.

As the speedometer clicks past 60 kilometres per hour, the horizon peels away and the evaporated salts of Ntwetwe Pan sparkle like diamonds in the bright desert sunlight. Where the sun has soaked up the summer rains, the earth lies dried and cracked like elephant hide.

When we stop for lunch – chilled couscous salad served in tiffin tins – I wander by myself out onto the pans. It's a moment to stop and listen to the deep silence of the Makgadikgadi. At my feet I'm surprised to find the desiccated remains of shrimp and insects, and a few steps further a clutch of downy feathers glued to a crust of soil. They are reminders of the summer rains that transform this landscape into a vast lake, making the Makgadikgadi one of Africa's most important breeding sites for lesser and greater flamingos.

We ride a few more hours that afternoon, skirting pans still muddy from the rains and traversing tawny grasslands. There's not a road sign in sight, yet Super knows these pans like the back of his muscled, weathered hand.





Kubu Island is too far from Jack's to reach in a single day, and by the time the sun is dipping we pull into the fly-camp that has been set up for us on the 'Lost Island of Baobabs'. This remarkable site, leased from the local community, is where Jack Bousfield – for whom Jack's Camp is named – first pitched his tent and fell in love with the Makgadikgadi.

As do our merry band of travellers, after a hot bucket shower beneath the baobabs, a sundowner, and a three-course dinner on a camp table laid with white linen and crystal glasses. We may be out in the wilderness, but no luxury has been spared.

It's an early night for us, and while tents are available if you prefer, we all choose to sleep out on the nearby pans. Comfortable bedrolls are laid out, complete with hot water bottles inside and a spray of southern stars above.

We're up with the sun the next morning, for the 200-kilometre round-trip that will take us to Kubu in time for lunch. It's a thrilling morning out on Sua Pan – one of three that make up the Makgadikgadi Pans system – as we take the quads around grassy islands to avoid the sucking mud where the signs of rain remain. It's a hypnotic landscape, but more than once a soft patch sends the back tyres fishtailing and I'm reminded to keep my mind on the tracks ahead.

And then, like a mirage, the pans erupt into granite boulders topped by towering baobabs, as Kubu Island rears above the salt flats.

It's a surreal sight and, after parking up, we set off to explore a site that is both a national monument and a sacred site for local communities. The boulder-strewn slopes offer endless new perspectives on the island and the pans, while in the Sacred Cave locals leave offerings for the ancestors.

Too soon, it's time to leave and we roar off towards the horizon. Salt flats give way to grass, and then black cotton soil whipped to talcum-fine dust. Not for the last time I'm glad I brought my ski goggles to the desert.

We pull into camp just as darkness falls. It's been a long day in the saddle, but the prospect of a warm shower, cold beer and a crackling fire ensure there's a smile on my face. Tomorrow we'll drive that last leg back to Jack's and realise that while it's been good to leave, it's even better returning home to our oasis in the desert.

Cape Town-based travel writer Richard Holmes has always been drawn to wild places, from bear spotting in Alaska to exploring Namibia by plane. The Okavango Delta is by far his favourite corner of southern Africa.

FEATURE by Pru Allison

Africa's 'other' migration

THE REMOVAL OF FENCES HAS REVIVED ONE OF AFRICA'S LONGEST WILDLIFE MIGRATIONS

The smell of rain is a powerful scent. In the city, rain falling on tarmac perfumes the air with petrichor, but on the sandy plains of northern Botswana, the whiff of warm rain on hot earth is a trigger for one of Africa's most remarkable, yet little-known, animal migrations.

Unlike the more famous wildebeest migrations in East Africa, northern Botswana's zebra migration is one of the longest mammal migrations in Africa and remains relatively unsung. It's a migration that is as ancient as the land itself, and yet human intervention almost ruined it. From the mid-1900s the natural rhythms of migration on this land were thwarted by veterinary fences that stretched across the country to protect cattle farms. But the march of time – and, helpfully, elephants – has seen the fences fall and the ancient migratory patterns return.

And it is all thanks to the rain.

As the rains start to fall in central Botswana each November, thousands of Burchell's zebra, accompanied by vast herds of wildebeest, embark on an epic journey to the Makgadikgadi Pans. Some begin their journey in the Okavango Delta, but most come from the floodplains of the Chobe River in the north of the country.

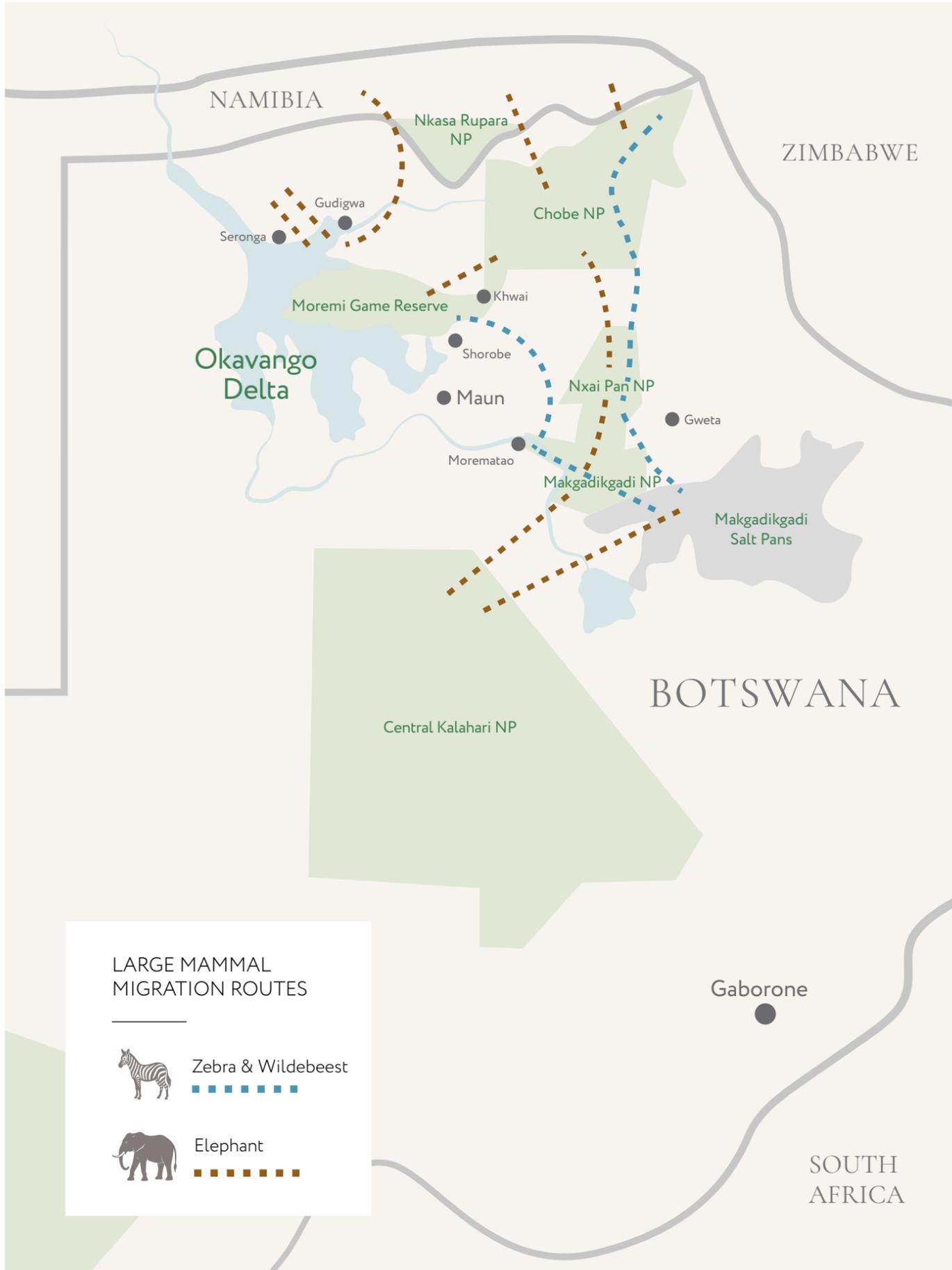
They move in search of grazing, and the salt-laden grasses of the pans are a nutritious bounty too tempting to resist. By January the grasslands and water-filled pans surrounding Jack's Camp, San Camp and Camp Kalahari are alive with the grunts and snorts of up to 100 000 zebra and wildebeest.

Of course, this parade of protein attracts no shortage of predators, making this 'green season' the perfect time to spot the impressive black-maned Kalahari lion that call the region home.

For a few months – January to April – this often desolate landscape comes alive as the herds take advantage of endless plains of green grass, and the Natural Selection camps of the Makgadikgadi Pans offer a front-row seat to the spectacle.

But for the zebras, the abundance won't last. As the rains move on and the grasses wither, the pans dry up once more and the zebras must make the arduous journey back to Chobe and the Okavango Delta in search of water and fresh grazing. The cycle is renewed, to be repeated the following summer.





NATURAL SELECTION IS HELPING RESTORE THESE LARGE MAMMAL MIGRATION ROUTES

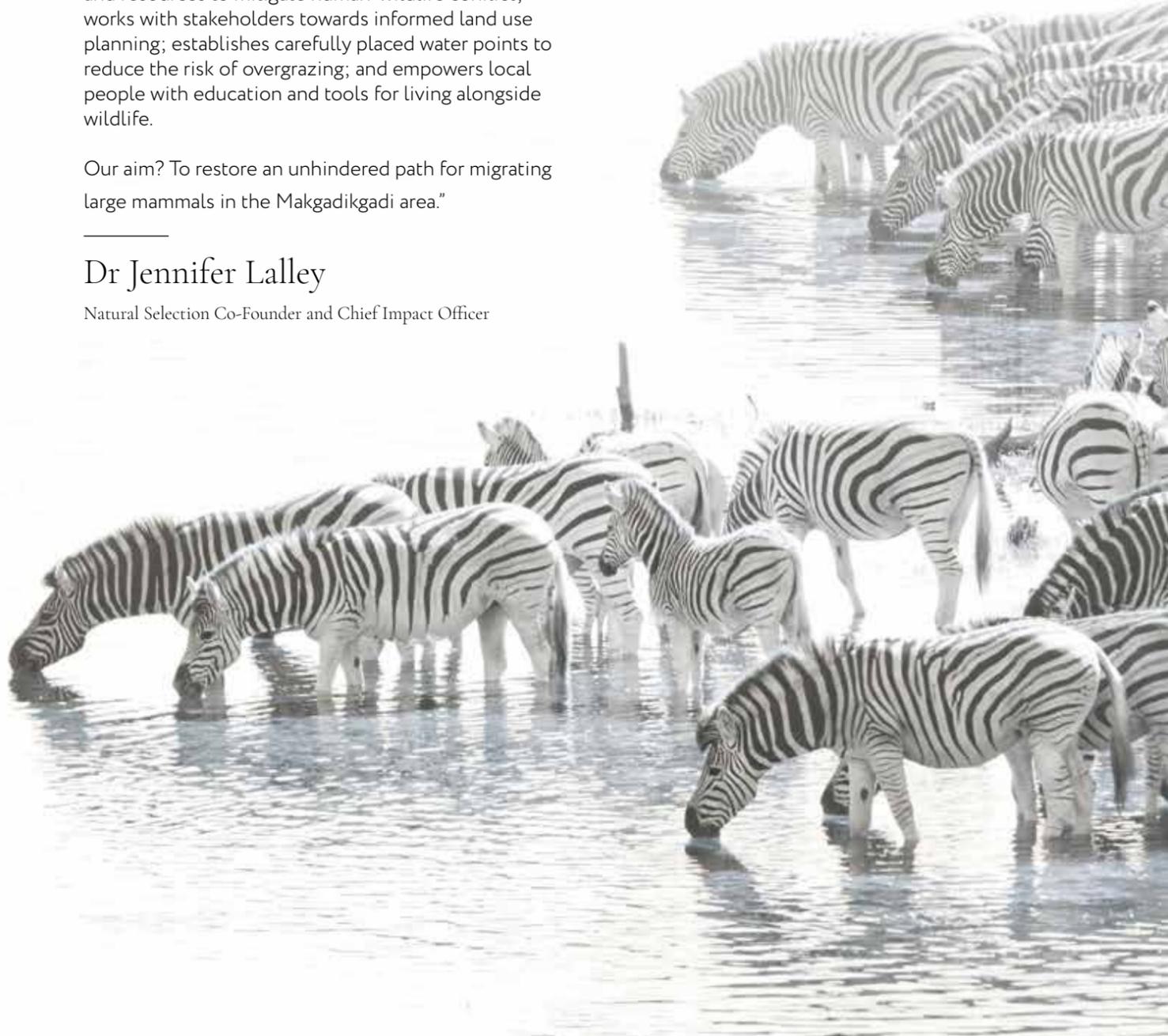
“Natural Selection was established just as this renewed migration was taking a strong hold, so it’s been one of our key conservation foci from our beginning.

We are addressing the migration challenges through a multi-faceted programme that researches land usage and resources to mitigate human-wildlife conflict; works with stakeholders towards informed land use planning; establishes carefully placed water points to reduce the risk of overgrazing; and empowers local people with education and tools for living alongside wildlife.

Our aim? To restore an unhindered path for migrating large mammals in the Makgadikgadi area.”

Dr Jennifer Lalley

Natural Selection Co-Founder and Chief Impact Officer



Making a *difference* in the Makgadikgadi area

Together with our property partners, Uncharted Africa and Meno a Kwena, these are some of the Community Outreach and Wildlife Conservation projects we support in and around the Makgadikgadi.

1.



MAKGADIKGADI LARGE MAMMAL MIGRATION

Before the 1960s, the area of north-eastern Botswana around the Makgadikgadi National Park and the Kalahari Desert held the longest and possibly the largest migration of zebra and wildebeest in Africa. It was, however, abruptly cut short by land use changes requiring extensive fencing. Amazingly, the migration has re-emerged over the last decade, pushing through old fences and small-hold farms. Today, all our Makgadikgadi properties are well known for the annual migration they host, with visitors eager to witness the charge.

What visitors don't see is the work being carried out on wildlife and cattle movements, waterhole usage, human-wildlife conflict zoning and conflict mitigation efforts. Through this multi-faceted conservation programme, we aim to un-restrict migratory movement by working alongside all stakeholders to develop land use plans that benefit all. Currently this programme has research underway on surface water impacts as well as ongoing 'Living with Wildlife' workshops with our implementing partners Elephants for Africa. These workshops assist local farmers and residents with the challenges of safely carrying out day to day activities and protecting agricultural plots from nearby elephant herds.

2.



MMOGO CENTRE FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

'Mmogo' means 'together' in Setswana and through these centres we will be working closely with communities to establish centres for development, initially focusing on two key areas of need in rural areas of northwest Botswana: early childhood development and the upliftment of women. In Moreomaoto near Meno a Kwena camp, we are establishing a Mmogo women's craft centre to provide support to basket and jewellery makers in this village. Look out for their crafts in the Meno a Kwena curios shop!

3.



ENVIRONMENTAL KIDS CLUB

The villages near Meno a Kwena fall within one of the highest human-wildlife conflict zones in Botswana. In order to help both humans and wildlife, we work alongside the local NGO, Elephants for Africa (EFA), to help improve the livelihoods of the Moreomaoto village residents and children who live next to the Makgadikgadi National Park.

Meno a Kwena, in continuation of their long-standing support of the village, together with EFA deliver a monthly Environmental Kids Club with lessons and excursions into the park. It's hard to believe that many of the children living in the village were not even aware that they lived next to a national park.

Understanding this sheds light on the relevance of the wildlife that passes through the village, and you never know, it might just inspire some future conservationists!

4.



AARDVARK PROJECT

As part of a larger scale project looking at the link between climate change and armadillo biogeography, this project uses camera traps and anthill counts to determine the distribution of armadillo in CT11 (Jack's Camp, San Camp and the Camp Kalahari area). The hypothesis is that climate change has been negatively impacting the food resources of ant- and termite-dependent myrmecophagous species, such as armadillos and pangolins, across southern Africa. One of Jack's Camp's guides, KG Baruti, is the lead investigator on this Makgadikgadi segment of the project as part of his MSc.

5.



COACHING CONSERVATION

Coaching Conservation is an innovative conservation outreach programme for children, which fosters self-respect, respect for each other and respect for wildlife and the environment.

By copying the survival strategies of different large mammals while engaging in sporting activities, kids actively learn about species conservation, the importance of working as a team and celebrating each individual's skills and power to make a difference.

6.



INTEGRATED AGRICULTURAL PROJECT

This initiative aims to empower youth, by diversifying the skillset and income revenue stream in the Gweta community through a variety of agricultural enterprises. The first project is an egg-laying facility producing eggs that the community sells to lodges. Over time, this programme aims to farm arid-adapted fresh produce for local entrepreneurs to sell to our lodges and further afield.



7.



WILD SHOTS OUTREACH

This unique conservation education programme runs workshops through our camps for unemployed young adults from nearby villages. Participants learn about photography, conservation and the appreciation of beauty in nature as seen at the end of a camera lens.

8.



GWETA VILLAGE UPLIFTMENT

Areas in and around Gweta are constantly challenged by power outages. A solar pump and system has been installed so that when there are electricity cuts, the village still has access to uninterrupted running water from the boreholes.

The Gweta hospital and clinic also received solarisation to ensure reliable power and continued services to patients. Due to a shortage of toilets we facilitated the building of ablution blocks at the local primary school, as well as constructing and delivering a bus stop for the elderly at the local post office.

9.



THE WISDOM ACADEMY

The Wisdom Academy is a sanctuary for the ancient knowledge of the Ju/'hoansi people. In a world facing environmental change and cultural erosion, this academy is a vital initiative blending their ancient wisdom with modern creativity. Based at Jack's Camp and nearby San Camp and Camp Kalahari, this programme empowers indigenous Bushman communities—especially women – by providing ways for them to harness and benefit from their ethnobotanical knowledge and also their incredible animal tracking abilities. This academy fosters a profound connection between the Ju/'hoansi and nature, reminding us that the survival of ancient cultures is intrinsically linked to the well-being of our planet.

Travel that *matters*

For more information on the projects we support, or if you would like to assist further in our community or conservation work, please scan the QR code or visit: www.naturalselectionfoundation.org.



FEATURE by Jules Hadley

Go *wild* on two wheels

SADDLE UP FOR AN EPIC CYCLING ADVENTURE THROUGH NORTHERN BOTSWANA

For active travellers looking to combine a safari holiday with a little outdoor adventure, Natural Selection has created an extraordinary biking experience through northern Botswana, with experienced safari guides – and keen cyclists – leading small groups on immersive wilderness adventures from Maun to the Makgadikgadi Pans.

Designed for trailblazers, adrenalin-seekers and wildlife enthusiasts alike, the ride takes you along riverbanks and through acacia forests, following ancient elephant routes across savannah grasslands, over seven days. With expert guides in the saddle, you'll delve deep into the rich history, culture, ecology and wildlife of Botswana. When you reach the Makgadikgadi, enjoy the unique experience of cycling across one of the largest salt flats on the planet, the remnants of an ancient inland sea.

The first day is spent easing into the ride by exploring the riverine landscapes around Thamo Telele camp on the outskirts of Maun, the gateway to the Okavango Delta. It's a perfect warm-up for the next day's route to the south, along the banks of the Boteti River to overnight at Meno a Kwena. After a morning's ride through woodland along the river, you'll stash the bikes for a road transfer to the Afro-chic bungalows of Planet Baobab to wash away the dust of the desert in the largest, swimming pool in the Kalahari.

Then your guides lead you deep into the enigmatic Makgadikgadi, along sandy tracks carved by countless hooves: you'll be cycling along an ancient zebra migration trail. At Camp Kalahari give your legs a break with a sunset game drive, because your last day in the saddle offers the chance to take a two-wheeled safari to visit habituated meerkats or walk with local San bushmen. After a peaceful night's sleep under canvas, the final day is a scenic road transfer back to Maun, and perhaps an onward transfer to one of the luxurious Natural Selection camps deeper into the Delta. You've earned some downtime!

Natural Selection cycling safaris are fully escorted by experienced wilderness guides who have a deep love for both the bush and the bike. One rides in front of the group, and one at the back to ensure your safety. A backup vehicle with a support crew follows the group at all times to cater for any refreshment stops, mechanical breakdowns or simply to give tired legs a rest!

While the pace is adjusted to suit the group, a reasonable level of fitness is recommended to ensure you take full advantage of this epic adventure. You'll be cycling 40-70 kilometres per day, but with some sandy trails to contend with you'll want sturdy legs on the pedals. Bicycles are available for hire, and e-bikes can be accommodated, with charging points at each overnight stop.



Namibia





NAMIBRAND & SOSSUSVLEI

WHY YOU WILL LOVE IT

Climb the highest dunes in the world at Sossusvlei

Float above the desert landscape in a hot air balloon at dawn

Soak up the silence of this internationally recognised Wilderness Quiet Park

Discover the desert-adapted wildlife and hardy flora of the region

Admire the stars in Africa's first certified Dark Sky Reserve

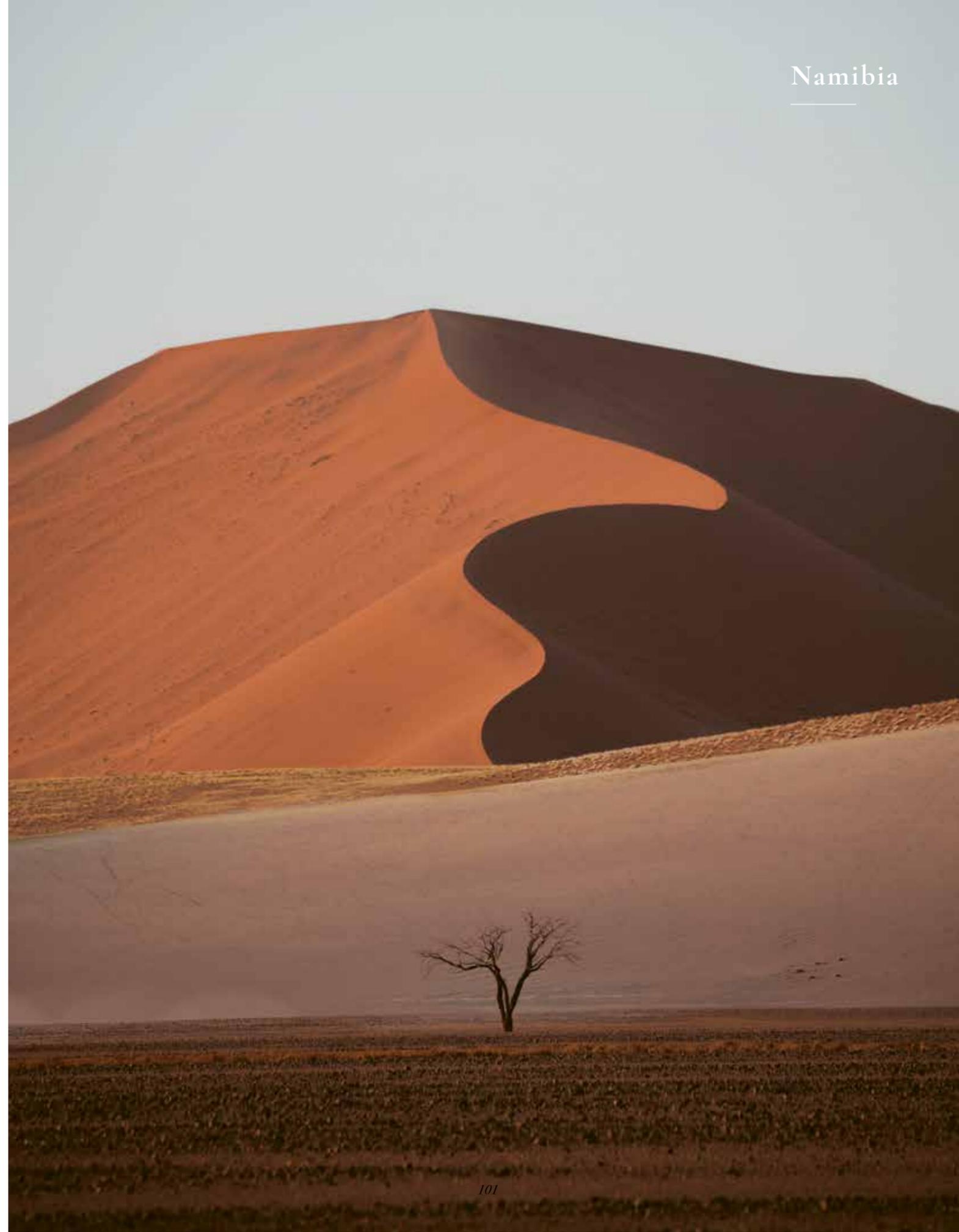
Ponder the origin of the mysterious fairy circles of the Namib

The NamibRand Private Nature Reserve in south-western Namibia, home to Natural Selection's charming Kwessi Dunes safari camp, is a conservation success story: of farmland returned to wilderness, and an ecosystem restored. Three decades of vision and commitment to conservation have made it into one of the largest private reserves in southern Africa, stretching across more than 200 000 hectares.

The NamibRand was established to protect and conserve the unique ecology and wildlife of an area dubbed the 'pro-Namib', the ecological zone along the eastern edge of the Namib Desert, the world's oldest desert. This pro-Namib region is critically important for the wider ecosystem, both providing a buffer zone against farmlands and creating a vital corridor for seasonal wildlife migration.

It is also an achingly beautiful corner of Namibia. Here ochre-red dunes mingle with plains of sand and gravel, framed by a backdrop of the boulder-strewn Nubib Mountains. The famed fairy circles of the Namib are a mysterious feature here too, while the hillsides are dotted with fleshy euphorbias and quiver trees.

Oryx are a constant feature, their powerful shoulders flexing as they wander slowly between water and grazing. Springbok are common, as are kudu, giraffe, klipspringer, steenbok, hartebeest and baboon.





More than 150 bird species have been identified on the reserve, including the dune lark – Namibia’s only true endemic – and the endangered Ludwig’s bustard, a large terrestrial bird species. And while sightings of shy predators are rare, this landscape supports healthy populations of cheetah, hyena and caracal too. At night, listen for the lonely call of the black-backed jackals that patrol the dusty trails.

While the NamibRand is a destination in its own right, it is also a springboard for exploring the neighbouring Namib-Naukluft National Park. Here the towering dunes of Sossusvlei are a highlight for visitors to Namibia, and day-long excursions from Kwessi Dunes allow guests to climb the famous Big Daddy dune for expansive views across the Namib, and to explore the enigmatic Dead Vlei.

At day’s end, return to the charm and comforts of Kwessi Dunes, where just a handful of under-canvas suites offer a delightfully low-key immersion in the otherworldly landscapes of the NamibRand.

NAMIBRAND PRIVATE NATURE RESERVE

Desert *charms* at Kwessi Dunes

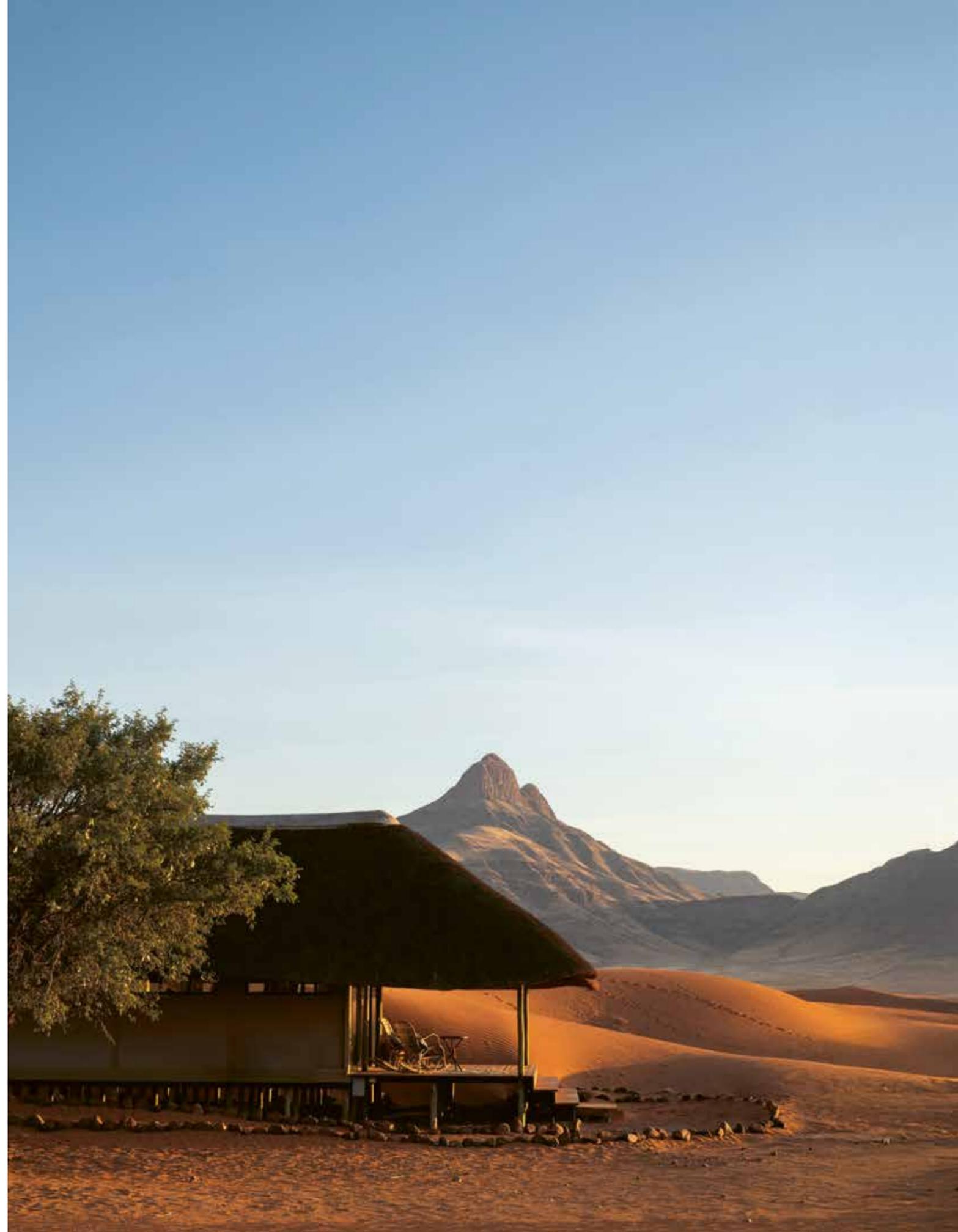
Whether you're relaxing up at the main lodge or taking a quiet moment for reflection on your private deck, at **KWESSI DUNES** the views take centre stage. Facing the Nubib Mountains across wide gravel plains, this charming camp that treads lightly on the fragile Namib ecosystem brings home the true enormity of the NamibRand.

The main lodge is a homely space for connecting with fellow travellers: sink into the deep-buttoned couches in the air-conditioned main lounge and library, pull up a chair at the well-stocked bar, or settle in on the wide terrace.

The Kwessi swimming pool – a true luxury in the desert – is the perfect place to cool off in the afternoon between nature drives. Come evening, take a camp chair at the firepit for stargazing and a little 'bush TV', as the guides call it.

Wooden boardwalks link the lodge to 12 thatched rooms brimming with charm and character. Here vintage maps frame romantic four-poster beds, with striped canvas walls and indoor-outdoor showers adding a more modern aesthetic.

There's contemporary comfort here too, with air-conditioning to keep you cool in summer and ward off the chill of a winter's night. Attached to each canvas-and-thatch room is an outdoor Stargazer room, with a separate double bed laid out beneath the southern skies.



FEATURE by Richard Holmes

Take a *star* safari

You'll never forget the light of the Namib Desert. That's especially true as sunset sweeps across the sands of the NamibRand Nature Reserve, transforming the grassy dunes and empty plains into a palette of burnished hues. But this landscape is equally remarkable in the depth of night, as profound darkness envelops the landscape surrounding Natural Selection's remote Kwessi Dunes lodge.

Since 2012, the NamibRand has been certified as Africa's first and only Gold-designated International Dark Sky Reserve, recognising its pristine and unpolluted night skies. Here guests can look forward to a truly dazzling after-dark star safari, as the Milky Way stretches overhead in breathtaking clarity.

With a lodge guide on hand to lead you on a wander across the southern skies, look forward to admiring the constellations in extraordinary clarity. The dry winter months (May to September) are the best months for stargazing, with crisp clear skies showcasing the sparkling brilliance of the constellations above, many of them rich in local folklore.

Guests at Kwessi Dunes can also fall asleep gazing up at the stars above, with each tented suite offering an attached outdoor Stargazer room; open to the heavens above but securely enclosed for a restful night's sleep.





ETOSHA HEIGHTS PRIVATE RESERVE

WHY YOU WILL LOVE IT

This exclusive reserve offers iconic Etosha landscapes and wildlife without the crowds

Exceptional birding, with an abundance of raptors and vultures

Night drives to seek out nocturnal species, including aardvark

Rare opportunity to see black and white rhino in one reserve

Guided nature walks for thrilling encounters on foot

Two-level photography hide offers unique waterhole experience

Bespoke picnics and sundowners in spectacular savannah locations

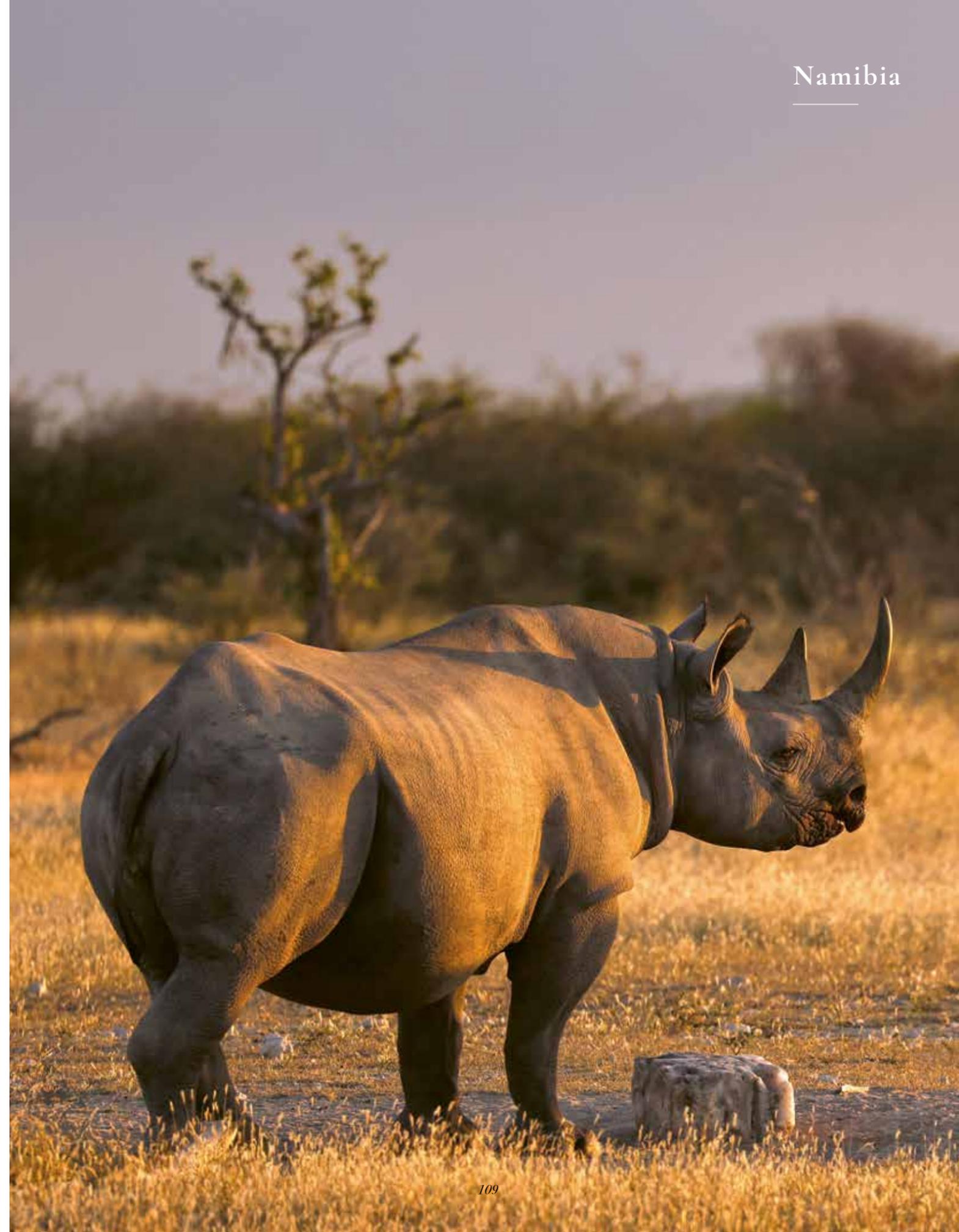
Adjoining the iconic Etosha National Park, Etosha Heights Private Reserve offers an engaging wilderness experience amid the wide-open savannahs of northern Namibia. Stretching across 60 000 hectares, the reserve shares a 65-kilometre boundary with the national park, allowing wildlife to roam freely between the two conservancies.

Yet while the wildlife may be free to wander, Etosha Heights is a private reserve, ensuring Natural Selection guests have exclusive use of this vast landscape to enjoy an immersive safari experience without the crowds.

Etosha Heights Private Reserve is also a landmark conservation project, transforming what was once agricultural and hunting land into a conservation area creating a crucial buffer zone for wildlife between the Etosha National Park and the surrounding farmlands.

Look forward to the mesmerising signature landscapes of northern Namibia, from sprawling savannahs interspersed with pockets of mopane woodland to dense riverine forests. Waterholes are a highlight of any safari drive, especially in the dry winter months (May to September) when animals congregate here in search of water, and the low vegetation makes for the best game viewing.

In contrast, the summer months (October to April) herald the rainy season, as brief thunderstorms transform the land with fresh grass that draws more elusive species into the open. Rising towards the dolomite Etosha Hills, the terrain offers a haven for both savannah and desert-adapted species, each uniquely attuned to the region's variable climate.





Throughout the year, travellers can expect to spot a diversity of wildlife at Etosha Heights. Resident species include elephant, lion, leopard, cheetah, and a variety of antelope.

Notably, Etosha Heights is home to both black and white rhinos, protected by a dedicated anti-poaching team, making the reserve a perfect destination for travellers wanting to witness rhino conservation in action. Guests also have the unique opportunity to enjoy night drives – keep a keen eye out for armadillo and native owls – and guided nature walks, with the thrilling chance to spot wildlife on foot.

Beyond nature walks and twice-daily game drives, Etosha Heights offers a two-tier photography hide, providing exceptional proximity to waterhole activity for both keen photographers and wildlife enthusiasts.

Etosha Heights Private Reserve offers a pair of intimate lodges and an exclusive-use safari house, catering for independent travellers, couples and multi-generational family groups.

ETOSHA HEIGHTS PRIVATE RESERVE LODGES

Exclusive Etosha

SAFARIHOEK · ETOSHA MOUNTAIN LODGE SAFARI HOUSE

Two characterful lodges and an exclusive-use safari house share the 60 000-hectare wilderness of Etosha Heights Private Reserve, ensuring an exclusive safari experience that allows guests to soak up the ethereal silence of northern Namibia.

SAFARIHOEK offers a contemporary safari experience, set overlooking a wildlife-rich waterhole with spectacular savannah views. The newest lodge on the reserve, Safarihoek offers 11 thatched chalets, all with en-suite air-conditioned rooms promising modern comforts and perfect privacy. Plus, we think the swimming pool here may just have the best views in Namibia!



Safarihoek

ETOSHA MOUNTAIN LODGE comes brimming with vintage character, its hilltop locale gazing down across a wooded valley popular with herds of elephants. Channelling the relaxed charm Namibia has long been famous for, the lodge's vaulted ceilings and dark wood finishes lead out onto wraparound balconies delivering endless Etosha views. With 8 double/twin rooms, plus a family unit, Etosha Mountain Lodge is ideal for larger groups.

SAFARI HOUSE is an unpretentious gem, blending personal service and flexibility with down-to-earth comforts. An exclusive-use safari house, this three-bedroom escape promises blissful seclusion and a full complement of staff – including private chef, guide and vehicle – that allows you to set the pace for your own safari experience.



Safari House



Etosha Mountain Lodge

FEATURE by Anton Crone

New Heights in Conservation

FROM HUNTING AND AGRICULTURE TO WILDLIFE TOURISM: A CONSERVATION SUCCESS STORY FOR THE MODERN AGE

In the short space of seven years, a remarkable transformation has taken place on the southern edge of Namibia's Etosha National Park (ENP). Here 14 former cattle and hunting farms have been combined to form the 60 000-hectare Etosha Heights Private Reserve. Hunting rifles have been shelved, and the reserve now welcomes photographic tourists to discover an extraordinary diversity of wildlife.

Operated in partnership with Natural Selection, two comfortable lodges – Safarihoek and Etosha Mountain Lodge – stand on high ground overlooking the plains. And it's these hills that make this environment so utterly unique.

With the 2.2-million hectares of Etosha National Park to the north predominantly flat, these hills dramatically expand the biodiversity of the region, meaning that wildlife you won't find in the national park – such as black rhino and mountain zebra – share the reserve with large herds of plains game, including white rhino, eland, wildebeest, gemsbok and more.

After securing the western, southern and eastern boundaries of Etosha Heights, several fences on the boundary of ENP have been dropped to allow a more connected landscape where wildlife can wander freely and benefit from the expanded environment and extra protection of the reserve.

With the attraction of freshwater points, expanded grazing and browsing, over 150 elephants which previously had no access to the reserve are now seen on the property regularly, while more than 30 lions have established this as their domain to take advantage of the abundant plains game.

Other remarkable creatures to be seen here include black-faced impala, which are endemic to the region, and sable antelope, which are much prized by wildlife photographers. Just as importantly, the area is proving a welcome roost for two vulnerable bird species: white-backed and lappet-faced vultures. Uniquely adapted to eating carrion, these scavengers are crucial in keeping this biome and its wildlife free of infection and disease.

A great deal of effort is being put into sustaining, protecting and expanding the biodiversity of the reserve and the wider region. The reserve now hosts the Savannah Landscape Ecology and Education Centre (SLEEC), a collaboration between the Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF), the Namibia University of Science and Technology, and Etosha Heights. Among other important studies, SLEEC examines the movement ecology of herbivores and carnivores in the reserve.

In partnership with the Cheetah Conservation Fund, it works towards improving genetic diversity of cheetah and other endangered species in the greater Etosha region by introducing and monitoring the species here.

Human-wildlife conflict mitigation is another focus, aided by the collaring and monitoring of both elephants and predators. Backing this all up is vet training, and wildlife counts conducted twice per year.

On a broader scale, engagement and collaboration with local and international conservation programmes and the tourism industry helps to develop a sustainable and integrated long-term programme to support the wider area's conservation needs.

Sadly, another of the key conservation demands in this day and age is protection. A well-equipped and experienced anti-poaching team is based on the Etosha Heights Private Reserve. One of their key roles is patrolling the reserve and its boundary on foot, with the support of aircraft and cutting-edge surveillance technology.

After both black and white rhinos were reintroduced to the area during the transition from hunting to conservation, the anti-poaching team expanded their role to keep the rhinos under 24-hour monitoring and protection, as well as conducting rhino monitoring training.

Part-owner of the reserve, André Nel, who previously ran a hunting and livestock operation on these lands, is committed to conserving and expanding ecology and tourism in the region. He and Natural Selection share the goal of this becoming the leading wildlife destination in Namibia.

Part of that ambitious goal would involve convincing neighbouring landowners to drop their fences, increasing the area available to free-roaming wildlife to as much as 300 000 hectares.



Etosha Heights is becoming a proving ground for the success of modern conservation initiatives. Over the past seven years the reserve has seen an increase in both the variety and density of wildlife, expanding the ecological value of the region and offering unrivalled game watching opportunities for visitors.

Head guide Michael Haindongo says that if it wasn't for photographic tourism, you would find it very hard to see rhino and other endangered species in the region at all. The main source of income for Etosha Heights is tourism, 16 percent of which goes into protecting the reserve's population of black and white rhinos.

Etosha Heights is also part of the internationally renowned Wildlife Conservation Network, which is directly involved with rhino conservation funding and education throughout Africa through its Rhino Recovery Fund.

By partnering with local communities, landowners, scientists, international wildlife organisations, and tourists, Etosha Heights is on the way to becoming one of Africa's leading conservation initiatives.

Zimbabwe-born Anton Crone is a writer and photographer working at the intersection of travel, culture and conservation. Currently he is the editor of African Birdlife magazine.



HOANIB VALLEY, KAOKOLAND

WHY YOU WILL LOVE IT

One of Namibia's most remote, and remarkable, wilderness areas

Unique desert-adapted wildlife, including elephant, lion and giraffe

Track endangered black rhino in the famous Palmwag concession

Cultural experiences with local Himba and Herero tribes

Six intimate under-canvas luxury tents at Hoanib Valley Camp

Namibia is never short on spectacular landscapes, but in the far north-west of the country lies perhaps the most astounding of them all: Kaokoland.

One of the country's most remote and untouched wilderness areas, here Namibia's reputation as 'the land God made in anger' is on full display in a clash of sun-baked mountains and towering dunes, dry riverbeds and thirsty gravel plains. And yet amid this forbidding landscape come ribbons of green, where underground springs give rise to hardy trees and bushes that nourish the region's unique desert-adapted wildlife. Also making their home here are two of Namibia's most fascinating indigenous tribes, the Himba and Herero people.

In the heart of Kaokoland is the remote Hoanib Valley, a region of enigmatic desert landscapes. Here the ephemeral Hoanib River cuts a path through the desert to the sea, meandering past granite outcrops before passing beneath a vast dune sea to reach the Atlantic Ocean. Though the riverbed is largely dry, and flows only after intense thunderstorms, subterranean water gives life throughout the year, sustaining an unexpected abundance of desert wildlife.





The Hoanib Valley offers the unique opportunity to discover the region's desert-adapted wildlife, including elephant and lion. The area is also a hub for research into desert giraffe, which are often spotted on daily game drives that explore this alluring desert wilderness.

Zebra, klipspringer and kudu move freely through the mountains, while you'll find hardy herds of springbok and oryx picking their way across the dust-blown plains. The region is also home to a healthy population of free-roaming black rhino, with dedicated game drives available to track these magnificent residents. Birders are in for a treat, with the likes of Monteiro's hornbill and Rüppell's korhaan to be found in the valleys, gazed down upon by the imperious Verreaux's eagle soaring above on cliffside thermals.

Cultural engagements with local Himba and Herero tribes are always a highlight, offering a fascinating insight into the rich history of these indigenous peoples.

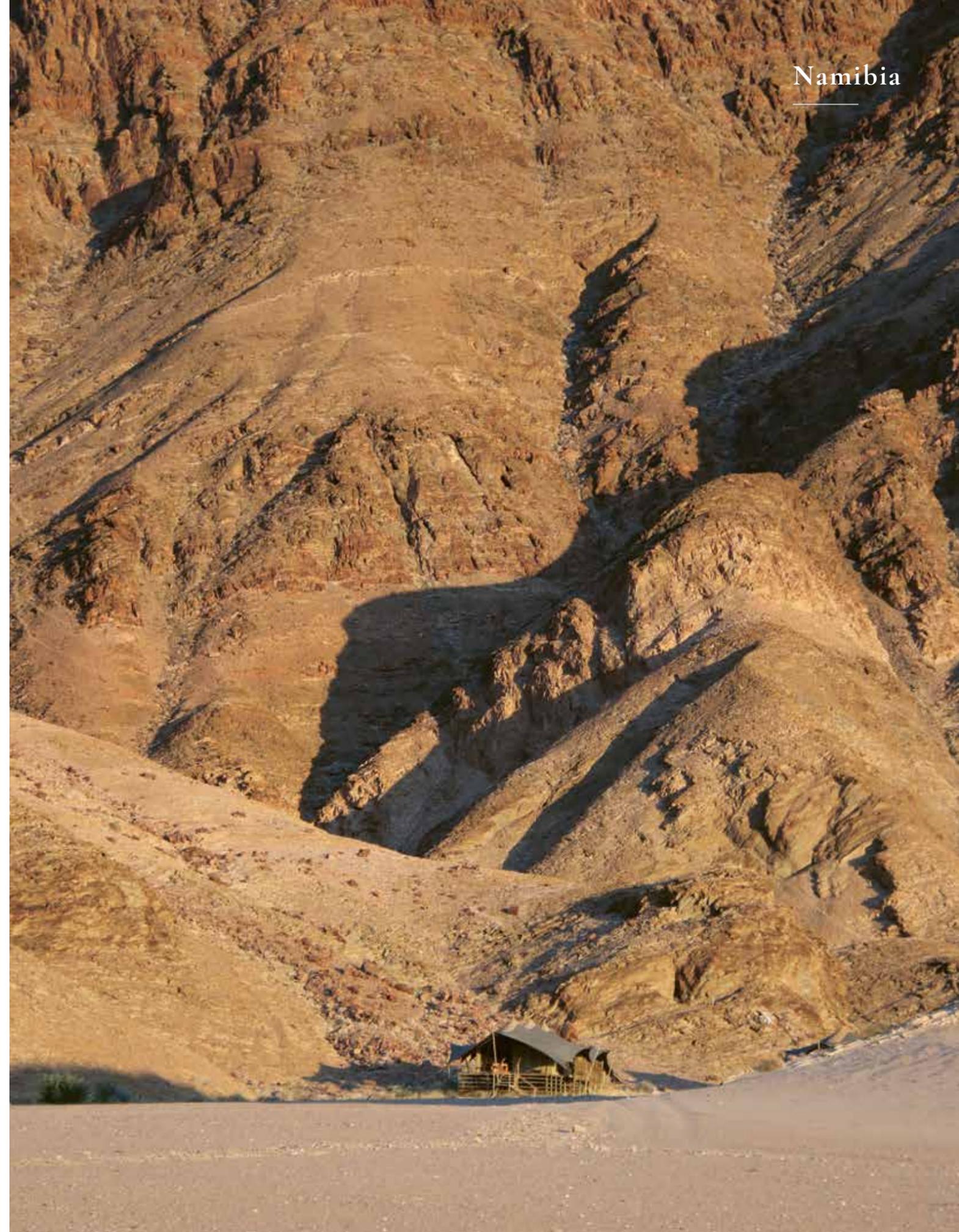
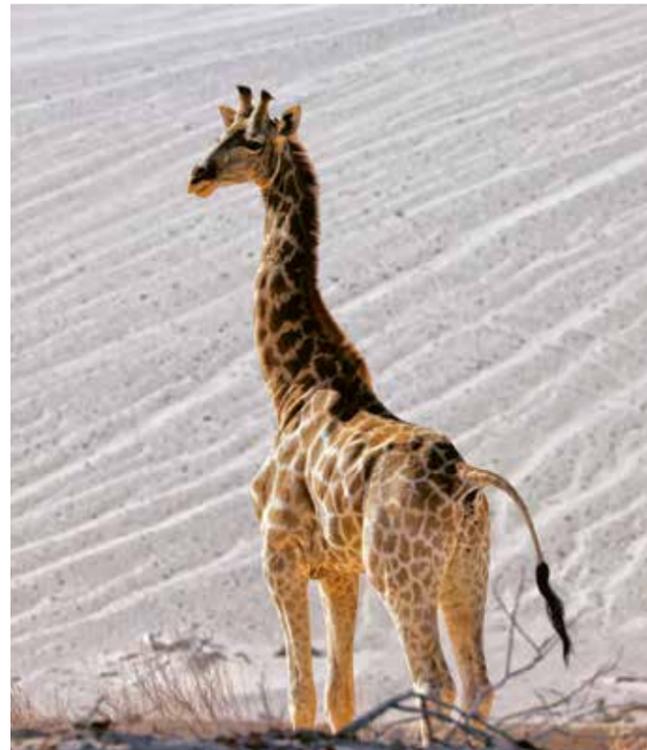
After a day out searching these rust-coloured crags and arid plains for rare sightings of desert-adapted wildlife, return to Hoanib Valley Camp for a refreshing swim and fine cuisine served beneath star-spangled night skies. This intimate camp offers just six contemporary under-canvas tents, each intuitively created to blend seamlessly into this pristine desert environment.

Desert *elegance* in Kaokoland

HOANIB VALLEY CAMP

Resting in perfect contrast to the rugged surroundings, Hoanib Valley Camp offers wilderness elegance and remote sophistication amid the harsh landscapes of Kaokoland. Here just six air-conditioned under-canvas tents – spaced well apart for privacy – offer impeccable levels of comfort in a dramatic desert locale. Spacious communal lounge and dining areas ensure ample opportunity for soaking up the vistas, or take a dip in the sparkling pool to cool off after a day of adventure.

HOANIB VALLEY CAMP is equally ingrained with a sense of place, from the design and colour palette informed by the textures of the desert to the décor shaped by local artisans and master craftsmen. Built to tread lightly on this fragile desert landscape, Hoanib Valley Camp stands on raised platforms and operates exclusively on solar power. The camp was established as a joint venture with the Sesfontein community and in partnership with the Giraffe Conservation Foundation.



FEATURE by Andrew Thompson

Namibia's *nomadic* Himba

Flying high over Namibia's sun-scorched region of Kaokoland, or driving these remote desert roads in north-western Namibia, it's hard to imagine anything – or anyone – surviving in this beautifully harsh environment.

Rainfall here is scarce, a few millimetres a year at best. The dry winters extend an almost permanent drought. And when, or if, it breaks, rain brings only fleeting relief from searing summer temperatures.

Any noticeable movement – the desert-adapted elephant, giraffe, or sinewy lion – has evolved over millennia to survive here. Outside of river valleys, plant life too, is scarce: ankle-high tufts of grass, stunted acacia and mopane trees, and occasional cushion-like succulents are often the only flora you'll find.

And yet, there are signs of human life too. Wooden posts from livestock kraals, many seemingly long abandoned, are a hint of the semi-nomadic people that live here, their movements dictated by a life of migration following the rain and available grazing it brings. Less common are small settlements, consisting of intricate mud-clad huts that are minimalistic and mobile by necessity.

Both are testament to the resilience of Namibia's OvaHimba people, who, since their first forebears migrated here from East Africa in the 16th century, have found ways to thrive in what most outsiders consider the most inhospitable of lands.

Yet despite their isolation, the OvaHimba may be familiar to many travellers – even those who have never set foot in Africa – with their striking appearance making them a popular inclusion in tourism brochures and magazine features on the region. Many travellers may leap to conclusions based on looks alone, leading to something of a one-dimensional global fascination.

But travellers staying at Natural Selection's Hoanib Valley Camp have a rare opportunity to do more than simply observe. Instead, guests are able to spend a morning, with the guidance of Otjihimba interpreters, gaining insights into the history, culture, daily traditions, and ongoing complexities of living in this location at this time in history.

On a visit to an OvaHimba settlement, women – who head up many homesteads by fetching firewood, milking livestock, and cooking – often welcome visitors into their homes, where they may choose to share details of their traditions.

How the *erembe* headdress, for example, is worn by girls who've reached puberty, and that boys are circumcised before the same age. Others might demonstrate their daily smoke bath ritual, which is used instead of scarce water to maintain hygiene. Visitors, curious about the distinctive red hue of OvaHimba women's skin, will learn how this is achieved through the application of *otjize*, a paste made of animal fat and red ochre.



This is also an opportunity to challenge the Western gaze that dictates what appears in mainstream media. Differing views on nudity is one of them. For instance, visitors might discover that OvaHimba women, comfortably bare-breasted but adorned with lengthy ankle bracelets, are often puzzled by female tourists' decision to cover their chests while leaving their legs exposed.

Today, it's estimated that fewer than 50 000 OvaHimba remain in the greater Kunene region, and climate change is cruelly pushing even these most resilient and adaptive of nomadic people to seek the security and modernity of more established villages. With this comes the risk of eroding centuries' worth of culture and traditions that, as you slide back into the seat of your safari vehicle, you'll surely agree are worth preserving for centuries to come.

DID YOU KNOW THAT GIRAFFE ARE UNDER THREAT IN AFRICA ?

GIRAFFE ARE LISTED AS VULNERABLE ON THE IUCN RED LIST OF THREATENED SPECIES, WHICH MEANS THEY ARE VULNERABLE TO EXTINCTION.

There are only about 119 000 giraffe remaining in all of Africa. This means that there is ONE giraffe for every FOUR African savannah elephant. Giraffe numbers have dropped by almost 30% in the last thirty five years.

However, the situation is actually much worse: recent research by Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF) and their partners have shown that there are four distinct species of giraffe and numbers of each species are much lower.

WHY ARE GIRAFFE UNDER THREAT?

Giraffe and other wildlife are under increasing strain from wildlife habitat degradation brought on by Africa's development and growing human population. Throughout Africa giraffe face the greatest threat from habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation. Together with many other wildlife species, giraffe face a difficult battle due to diseases, poaching, and climate change, which can make certain environments more difficult to survive in.

WHO IS GCF?

GCF is the only organisation in the world that concentrates solely on the conservation and management of giraffe in the wild throughout Africa. GCF is dedicated to a sustainable future for all giraffe populations in the wild.

WHAT IS GCF'S IMPACT?

GCF currently supports giraffe conservation efforts in 20 African countries and their work has an impact on over 44 million hectares of giraffe habitat. As a small yet impactful organisation, working with partners is at the core of GCF's values and operational model. GCF has helped to develop 10 National Giraffe Conservation Strategies and Action Plans, including a regional plan for the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area.



WHAT IS THE COMMUNITY IMPACT?

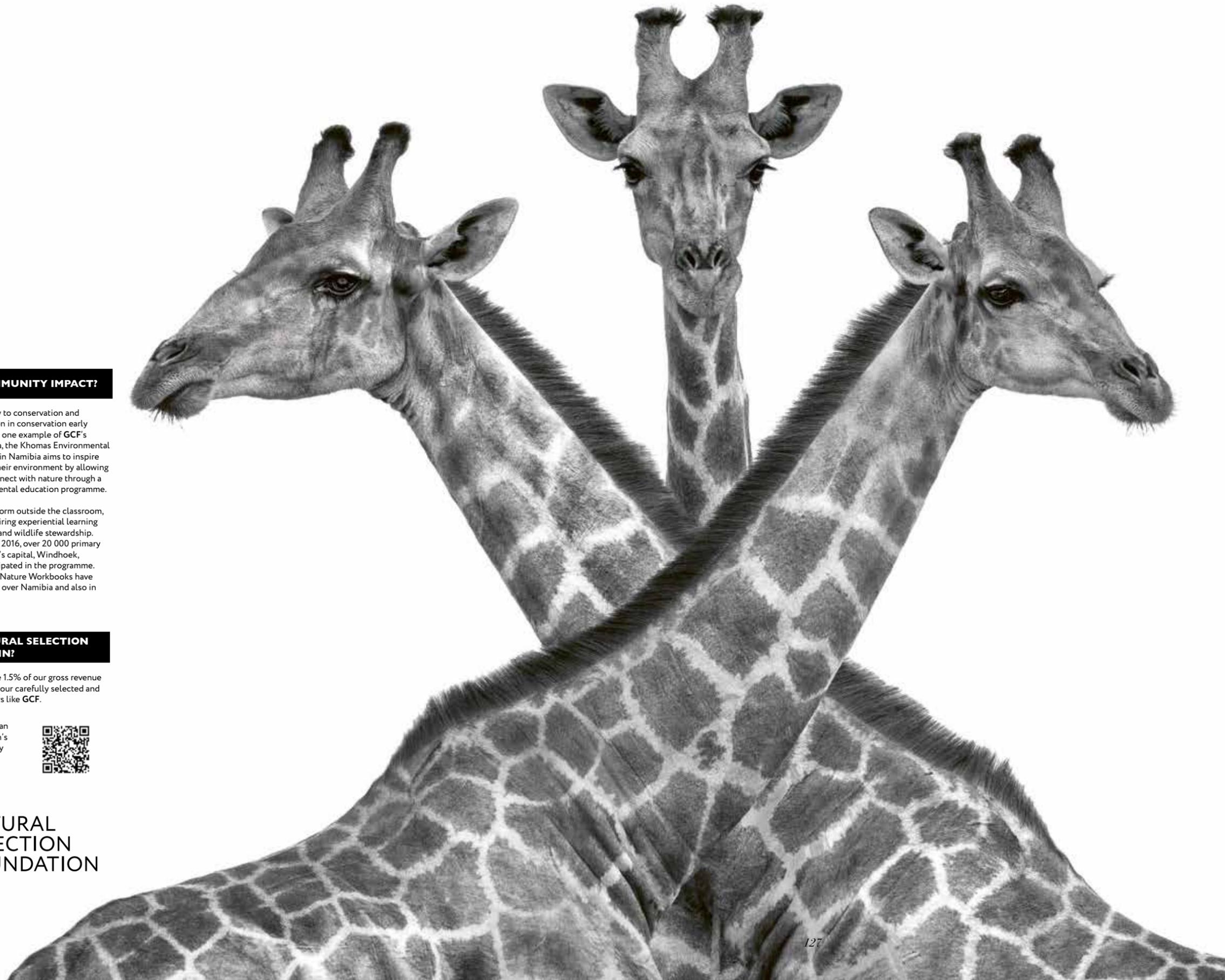
Community involvement is key to conservation and sparking an interest and passion in conservation early can make all the difference. As one example of GCF's programmes throughout Africa, the Khomas Environmental Education Programme (KEEP) in Namibia aims to inspire young Namibians to care for their environment by allowing them the opportunity to reconnect with nature through a targeted field-based environmental education programme.

KEEP provides a learning platform outside the classroom, in nature, with the goal of inspiring experiential learning and modelling environmental and wildlife stewardship. Since the programme's start in 2016, over 20 000 primary school students from Namibia's capital, Windhoek, and 1 000 teachers have participated in the programme. Additionally, over 15 000 GCF Nature Workbooks have been distributed to schools all over Namibia and also in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

HOW DOES NATURAL SELECTION FIT IN?

We at Natural Selection donate 1.5% of our gross revenue to conservation and directly to our carefully selected and dedicated conservation partners like GCF.

Using the QR code here, you can help support Natural Selection's mission to make a difference by donating to GCF through the Natural Selection Foundation.





SKELETON COAST

WHY YOU WILL LOVE IT

Explore a remote corner of Namibia visited by few travellers

Discover the history of the shipwrecks that litter the coastline

Set out on safari to view a diversity of desert-adapted wildlife

Scan the seas for marine mammals, including seals, whales and dolphins

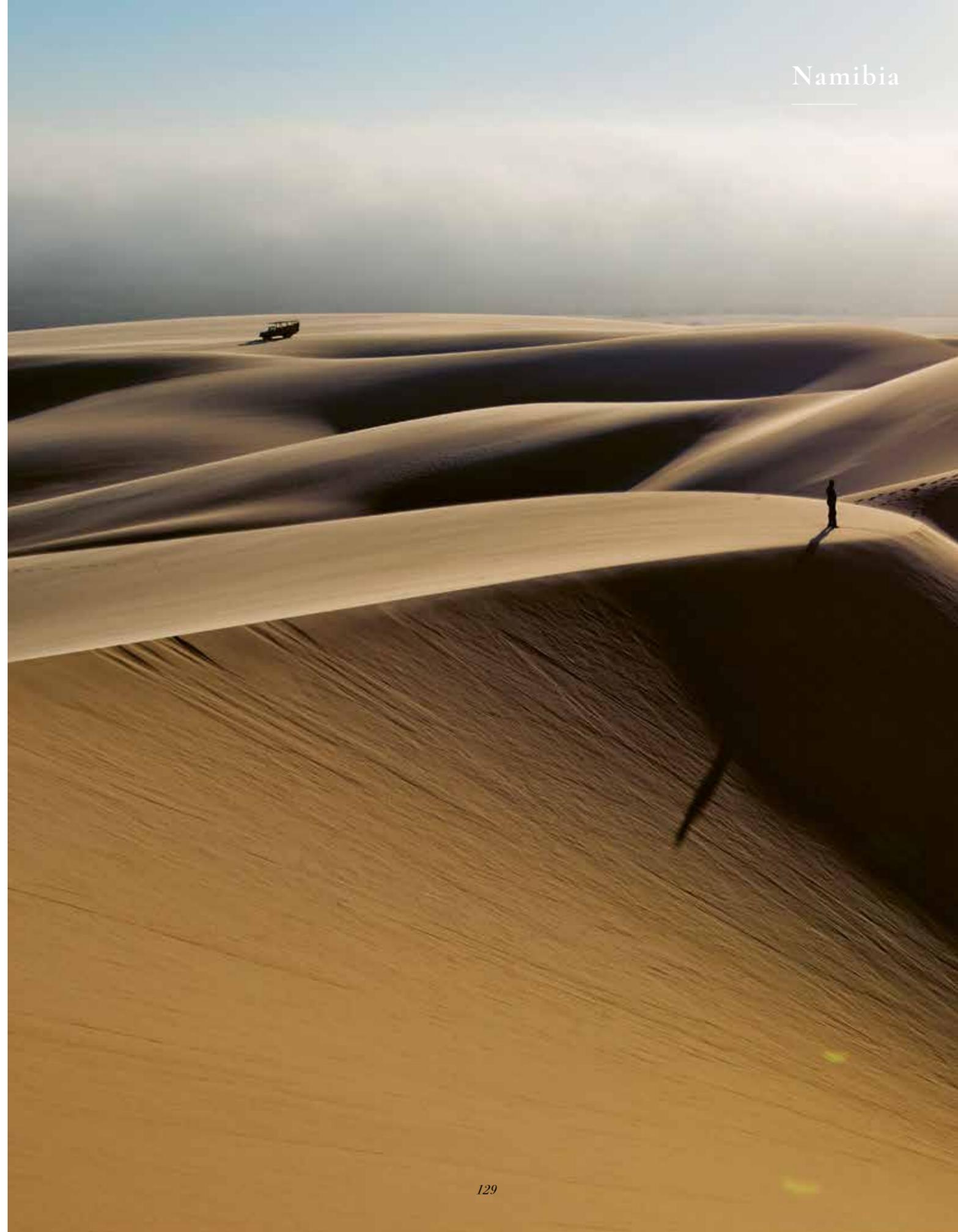
Admire unique geological formations and climb the 'Roaring Dunes'

There is remote, and then there is the Skeleton Coast of Namibia, a raw and rugged sweep of coastline where the icy Atlantic pounds a shoreline backed by a rolling sea of windswept dunes. Infamous for its rough seas, rocky shallows and thick fog, the beaches of the Skeleton Coast come littered with bleached whale bones and the wrecks of more than a thousand ships that have met their end on this lonely shore.

The Skeleton Coast National Park stretches along Namibia's coastline for some 500 kilometres, from the Uqab River north to the Kunene River and the border with Angola. With much of the park off-limits to visitors, it's a singular coastal landscape, enigmatic in its harsh beauty. And yet it offers far more allure than simple isolation.

The Skeleton Coast is a crucial habitat for the region's famed desert elephants and elusive brown hyena, both iconic species of the Skeleton Coast. Remarkably, this region even supports a pride of desert lion that have adapted their diet to include seals hunted from the abundant coastal colonies that can be visited on guided nature drives.

Natural Selection is proud to support the groundbreaking Desert Lion Conservation Project, which uses satellite monitoring, early alert towers and lion rangers to mitigate human-wildlife conflict and protect the desert-adapted lions of north-west Namibia.





Desert-adapted oryx, springbok, black-backed jackal, giraffe, baboon and zebra etch out an existence here. But it's a land that also rewards a detailed gaze, and the patience to seek out the smaller species, from dune-dwelling beetles, translucent ghekos and colourful lichens. There's a world of microflora and fauna also waiting to be explored.

Birdlife is prolific here too, with more than 200 species recorded, including coastal species, migratory waterbirds and desert residents such as Rüppell's korhaan and Benguela long-billed lark.



Shipwreck Lodge occupies an exclusive concession deep in the Skeleton Coast National Park, offering a unique opportunity to immerse yourself in this far-flung coastal desert.

FEATURE by Andrew Thompson

From the desert to the *deep blue sea*

*THIS UNFORGETTABLE DAY-
LONG ADVENTURE JOURNEYS
OVERLAND FROM HOANIB VALLEY
CAMP TO SHIPWRECK LODGE*

Though many guests opt for a short scenic flight to whisk them between Hoanib Valley Camp in Kaokoland and Shipwreck Lodge on the Skeleton Coast, travellers combining these two lodges into their Namibian itinerary also have the opportunity to journey overland on an unforgettable 4x4 adventure.

Available as either a guided transfer or a self-drive adventure, and in either direction, this memorable experience takes travellers through some of the most mysterious landscapes in northern Namibia, with the opportunity to discover the hardy desert-adapted wildlife that calls these plains and riverbeds home.

When travelling west towards the coast, your journey begins at Hoanib Valley Camp in Kaokoland, a captivating landscape of rolling dunes, rugged mountains and desert plains interlaced by ancient riverbeds. The Hoarusib and Hoanib rivers are ephemeral waterways, flowing only in times of flood, yet they cut a definitive path through this timeless landscape.

The road to and from the coast follows these watercourses for much of the way, and while they may seem parched on the surface, below ground they sustain the region's trees, plants and animals. It is here in the riverbeds that you are likely to spot elephant, giraffe, oryx, antelope and perhaps even a shy brown hyena.

As the road nears the coast and the Namib Desert, the ecosystem subtly changes. Though even less annual rainfall occurs here – this is the world's second-driest desert – banks of Atlantic fog create a unique microclimate supporting a diversity of microflora and fauna.

Near the coast, a walk from the Hoarusib River reveals stunning castle-like geological formations of clay, while further along you can step from the vehicle to explore lichen fields of delicate desert microflora. With every kilometre the magic of this landscape is revealed, making a guided transfer the ideal way to discover the smaller mysteries of the desert.



The journey ends at Shipwreck Lodge, set between towering dunes and windswept seas, where the 'bones' of old shipwrecks dot the shoreline of the haunting Skeleton Coast. And while the landscape may be rugged, the lodge is a luxurious sanctuary ideal for relaxing after your unforgettable overland adventure.

The overland journey between Hoanib Valley Camp and Shipwreck Lodge is offered exclusively to Natural Selection guests. The journey, one-way, covers 158 kilometres and takes approximately five hours.

Speak to your booking agent, the Natural Selection reservations team, or your camp manager for further information on cost and bookings.

Making a *difference* in Namibia

Together with our partners, these are some of the Community Outreach and Wildlife Conservation projects we support in Namibia.

1.



ANTI-POACHING IN ETOSHA HEIGHTS

An anti-poaching camp and team have been established in Etosha Heights Private Reserve to protect the rhino population and to prevent illegal hunting along the boundaries. These dedicated rangers use advanced anti-poaching technology and go through intensive training so that they can be dispatched 24 hours a day.

2.



HUMAN-LION CONFLICT MITIGATION

The lions in north-west Namibia are a uniquely desert-adapted population facing numerous challenges. Here we proudly support the Desert Lion Early Warning Mitigation Project and Lion Ranger Programme, pioneering initiatives that address human-wildlife conflict and promote coexistence between lions and local communities.

3.



THE KHOMAS ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME (KEEP)

Few projects are as thrilling as those that inspire young minds through conservation. The Giraffe Conservation Foundation's KEEP programme targets urban primary schools in underprivileged areas, fostering a connection to nature and encouraging environmental stewardship. Integrated with the national curriculum, it provides hands-on experiences in Namibia's bush, igniting a passion for the environment. The excitement and impact on these young participants are palpable.

4.



BLACK RHINO RELOCATION PROGRAMME

Rhino conservation is our top priority in north-west Namibia. It is home to the largest free-ranging population of black rhino in the world. Here we support a black rhino reintroduction programme which involves relocating females in an attempt to help expand the breeding range of this critically endangered species. This programme requires a multi-faceted approach, and we remain committed to Save the Rhino Trust's (SRT) mission to sustain the monitoring and protection of these reintroduced animals long into the future.

5.



SKELETON COAST BROWN HYENA PROJECT

To support the survival of brown hyena in north-west Namibia, we work with the Skeleton Coast Brown Hyena Project, who is conducting the first official density survey in Skeleton Coast National Park using camera traps. This initiative will enhance knowledge about brown hyena and update the Red Data Book on carnivores and IUCN range maps. Additionally, we have donated 7 GPS collars to the project to help provide more important information.

6.



DESERT-DWELLING GIRAFFE CONSERVATION

The Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF) is the leading authority on giraffe conservation in Africa, focusing exclusively on these animals. Through extensive research, GCF has identified four distinct giraffe species, elevating the conservation status of some populations to critically endangered.

In north-west Namibia, Angolan giraffe numbers have risen in recent years, but the population still faces severe environmental challenges and threats. GCF, in partnership with Hoanib Valley Camp, is fostering awareness and protection for this iconic species in the region.

Travel that *matters*

For more information on the projects we support, or if you would like to assist further in our community or conservation work, please scan the QR code or visit: www.naturalselectionfoundation.org.



South Africa





DE HOOP NATURE RESERVE

WHY YOU WILL LOVE IT

Experience some of the world's best land-based whale-watching

Discover rich biodiversity amid the 'fynbos' of the Cape Floristic Region

Delve into pristine rock pools on engaging guided coastal walks

Discover the rich archaeological heritage of the De Hoop coastline

Enjoy South African wines and seasonal Cape cooking

Take a packed lunch to spend a carefree day exploring rock pools and fynbos-covered hills

Soak up the sea views from Lekkerwater's wood-fired hot tub

Often referred to as the 'jewel' of South Africa's beautiful Western Cape province, De Hoop Nature Reserve is a coastal reserve world famous for its rich biodiversity. Set in the heart of the Cape Floristic Region – the smallest, but most diverse of the planet's six floral kingdoms – De Hoop's 34 000 hectares under conservation offer an array of land and marine activities. And with Natural Selection's Lekkerwater lodge enjoying an exclusive concession in the remote eastern reaches of the reserve, guests are guaranteed to have this biodiversity hotspot all to themselves.

A designated UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2004, the Cape Floristic Region's rich ecological diversity makes for an engaging wilderness experience unique in southern Africa. Here nature walks in the company of expert guides explore the biodiversity of the Cape's endemic fynbos vegetation, with the chance to spot a range of species on foot, from Cape mountain zebra to bontebok and eland. De Hoop also contains some of Africa's best-preserved examples of coastal Stone Age archaeology, with evidence emerging that the area was crucial in human evolution.

De Hoop Nature Reserve is a birding hotspot with the fynbos, coastal landscape and De Hoop Vlei – designated a Ramsar wetland of global importance – playing host to more than 260 resident and migrant bird species. You can expect to see Caspian terns, lesser and greater flamingos, pelicans, cardinal woodpeckers, African fish eagles, endangered African black oystercatchers and many waterfowl species. The reserve is also home to the Western Cape's only remaining breeding colony of the endangered Cape vulture, located on the steep slopes of the Potberg mountains behind Lekkerwater.





But it's the larger visitors that draw most travellers to De Hoop, as hundreds of southern right whales arrive from Antarctica to calve and mate in the calm waters offshore. Whale-watching is best from July to October, as mothers nurse their calves before tackling the long journey south to their summer feeding grounds in the Southern Ocean.

The De Hoop Marine Protected Area stretches five kilometres out to sea from De Hoop, creating a haven for both whales and myriad marine life. Keep your binoculars focused on the water and you'll likely spot dolphins and Cape fur seals frolicking in the waves.

Migrating humpback whales are often spotted as winter gives way to summer, and the warmer months are the ideal time for exploring the rich intertidal zones of the reserve. Here guided nature walks unpack the fascinating ecology of the rock pools and sandy beaches that stretch either side of Lekkerwater.

At low tide, guests can expect to get up close and personal with the smaller sea creatures that inhabit the rock pools; some of which are deep enough for a cooling swim!

It's an ideal activity for families, and when the kids get tired of looking at limpets and crabs, the enthusiastic Lekkerwater guides are always quick to set up fun-filled games on the beach, or perhaps lead young ones in learning moments around conservation and ocean plastic with a fun bit of beachcombing.

From marine conservation to the simple pleasures of a relaxing coastal holiday, De Hoop Nature Reserve is a largely undiscovered gem close to the southern tip of Africa, and the perfect extension to a holiday in Cape Town, South Africa's 'Mother City'.

DEEPLY IMMERSED IN NATURE & HUMAN HISTORY

Lekkerwater

DE HOOP NATURE RESERVE

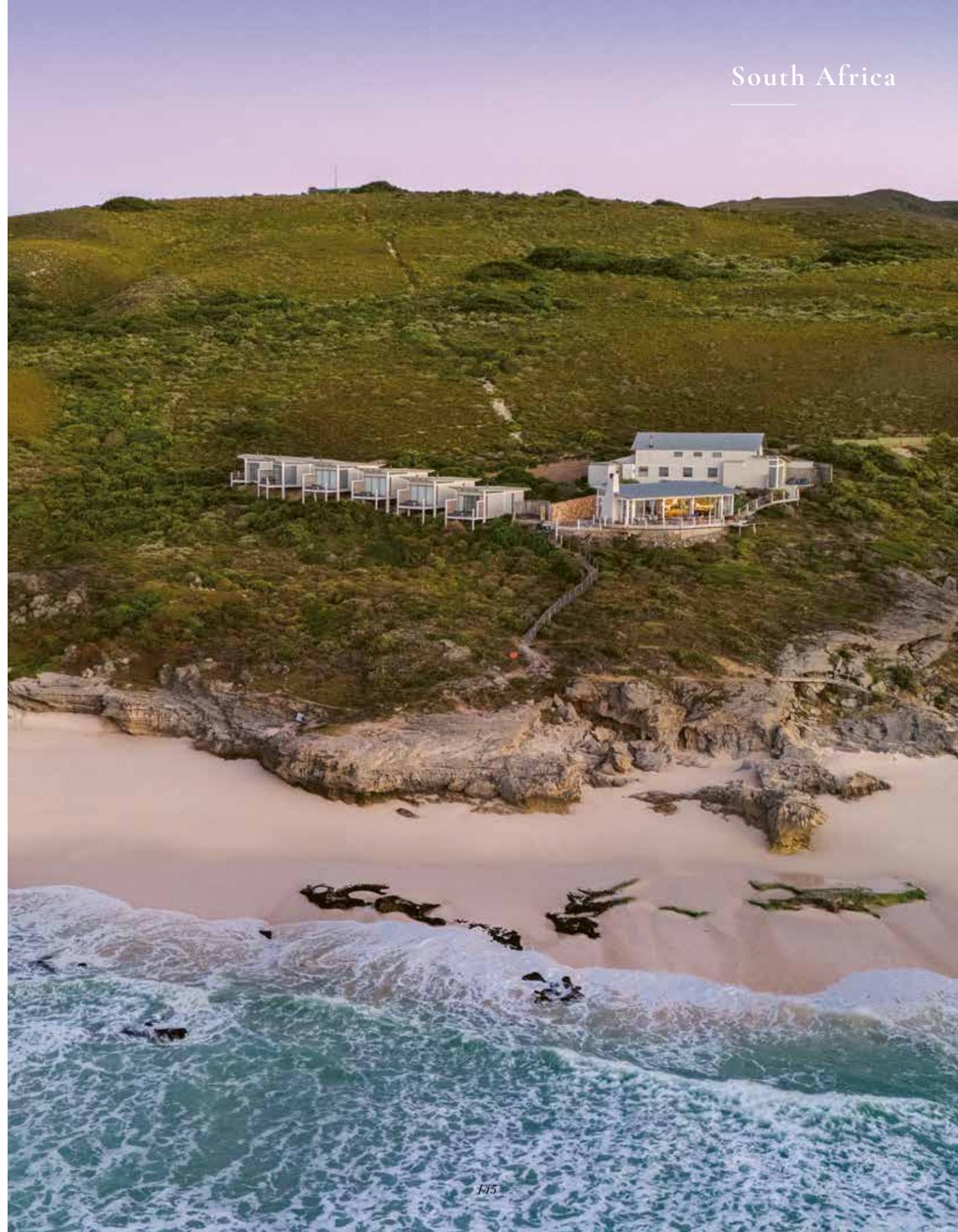
Set on an exclusive concession in the eastern reaches of De Hoop Nature Reserve, a scenic three-hour drive from Cape Town, **LEKKERWATER** offers guests exclusive access to one of the Cape's biodiversity hotspots, where you'll discover a world of coastal adventures right on the doorstep.

Spend your days exploring the pristine intertidal ecosystem on interpretive marine walks. Led by expert guides, take a deep dive into the ecology of the Cape coast, from octopi in the shallows to the pods of dolphins leaping through the waves offshore. Inland, the endemic fynbos vegetation that carpets the coastal dunes is no less remarkable. Engaging nature walks bring to life the rich biodiversity of the Cape Floral Region as well as the ancient human history that has been discovered in coastal caves nearby.

From July to October, De Hoop offers some of the world's finest land-based whale-watching. Guests can look forward to watching whales and dolphins from the comfort of their suite.

Lekkerwater was once home to a presidential retreat – South Africa's 'Camp David', if you will – and the reimagined beach lodge takes full advantage of the privacy and dramatic location of the original. At Lekkerwater – meaning 'good water' in Afrikaans – just seven rooms are perched on the shoreline, decorated in a subtle coastal motif with open-plan design and private decks offering a sense of light and space.

Wooden boardwalks connect the rooms to the main lodge, where communal lounge and dining spaces lead onto wide sea-view terraces. There's a plunge pool for summer days and a wood-fired hot tub down on the beach for soaking up a day of seaside adventure.





MKAMBATI NATURE RESERVE

WHY YOU WILL LOVE IT

A spectacular scenic reserve along South Africa's famed Wild Coast

A biodiversity hotspot with a unique combination of land and marine wildlife

Shining example of community and conservation in partnership

Predator-free reserve ideal for families

Front-row seat to the annual Sardine Run, the 'greatest shoal on earth'

Contemporary beach lodge with private pools and seaside location

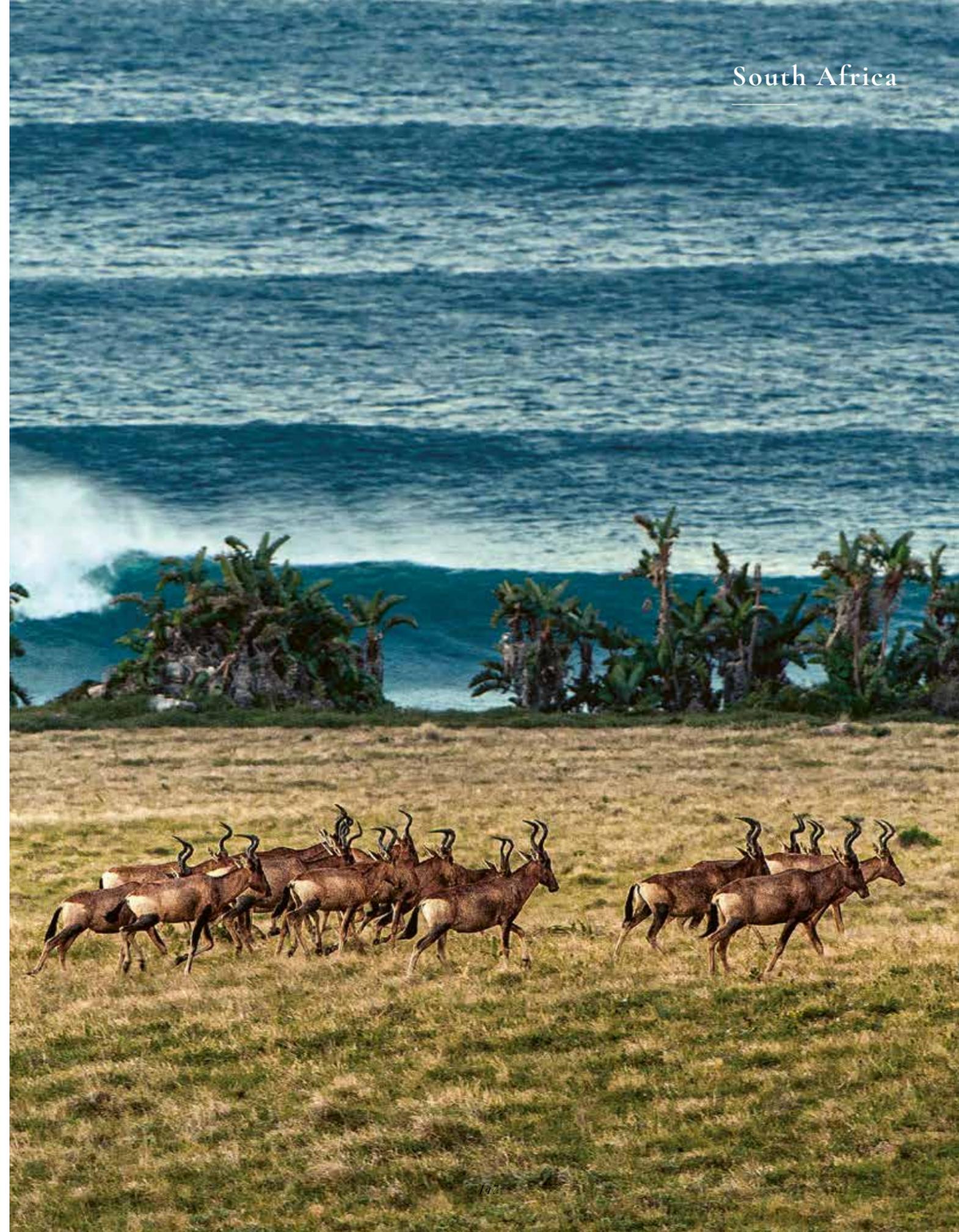
A wide range of nature-based activities, led by expert guides

Steeped in a rich history and promising abundant natural beauty, Mkambati Nature Reserve is located in the heart of South Africa's famous Wild Coast, a dramatic landscape of rolling hills cascading down to a rugged wave-washed shoreline.

Covering 7 700 hectares, with two-thirds of that set aside as a private concession for GweGwe Beach Lodge, Mkambati offers a unique sea and land safari in the heart of culturally rich Pondoland communities. Mkambati sits at the heart of the Maputaland-Pondoland area, one of the world's 34 most important biodiversity hotspots, which contain most of the earth's ecological richness, yet are threatened.

Mkambati is also a remarkable example of community and conservation in partnership. In the early-1900s, local villagers were forcibly removed from the area. With the end of apartheid in 1994, the local community sought restitution, and a decade later regained ownership of their ancestral lands and formed the Mkambati Land Trust.

Recognising the upliftment potential in sustainable nature-based tourism, the trust has partnered with Mkambati Matters to operate GweGwe Beach Lodge, providing much-needed employment and economic opportunities in this remote corner of South Africa. The most recently employed are the Green Griffons - an all women ranger team tasked with the protection of the reserve.





And Mkambati is certainly a glorious part of the country. Here the landscape is defined by lush grasslands that stretch down to the coast to create an unforgettable scenic backdrop. On nature drives and walks through the reserve, guests can look forward to spotting herds of eland, red hartebeest and zebra... perhaps with humpback whales breaching in the distance!

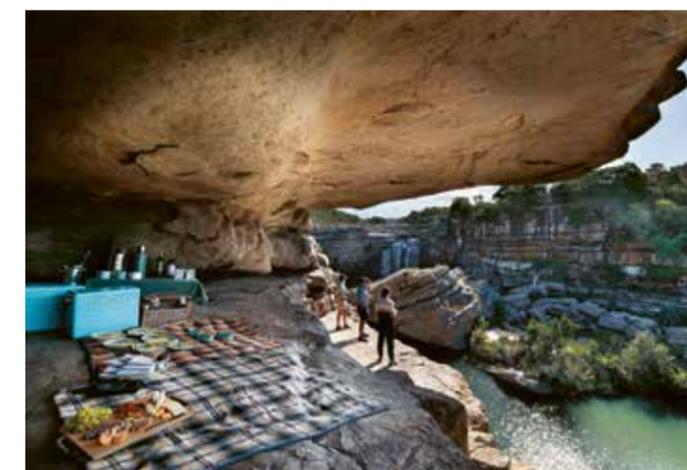
These grassy hills are punctuated by dramatic rocky outcrops and deep gorges filled with ancient forests, a glimpse into the untouched wilderness of Pondoland. Mkambati's plant life is certainly diverse: there are more than 2 000 species here, many of which are endemic to the region. Iconic red milkwoods stand resilient against the coastal winds, while the Mkambati palm is a signature endemic found only along the Mtentu and Msikaba rivers.

These rivers join the Indian Ocean in dramatic fashion, spilling over waterfalls or forming wide estuaries crucial for healthy fish stocks in the region. Offshore the seas have been designated a Marine Protected Area since 1981, and teem with marine life. Each winter, visitors can witness the world-renowned Sardine Run, when vast shoals of sardines migrate up the coast, attracting marine predators in a spectacular feeding frenzy. Humpback whales make seasonal appearances along the coast, often breaching just offshore from GweGwe, while dolphins regularly arrive in the bay where the GweGwe River flows into the ocean.

The birdlife of Mkambati is equally captivating. Grasslands attract species such as the jackal buzzard, marsh harrier, and the endangered southern ground hornbill, while secretary birds and black-headed herons are often seen hunting for prey in the marshy lowlands. In the forested river gorges, thick canopies provide refuge for trumpeter hornbills. The reserve's position along the Pondoland coastline places it at the edge of the range for African grass owls and it hosts a small population of swamp nightjars, marking one of the southernmost sightings of this species. Determined birders may also catch a glimpse of the elusive black-rumped buttonquail, an endangered species sought after by twitchers.

Guests at GweGwe Beach Lodge have the opportunity to spend busy days exploring this remarkable landscape, or take it easy and soak up a lazy beach escape. Nature drives and guided walks allow for a true immersion in the history and ecology of the reserve while allowing plenty of time for quiet moments of reflection and connection.

Woven through the experience is the history of this land and the community that cares for it, making Mkambati a shining example of how conservation, tourism, and community empowerment can work hand in hand.



BEACH & BUSH WILD AS ONE

GweGwe Beach Lodge

MKAMBATI NATURE RESERVE

Set metres from the Indian Ocean, in the heart of Mkambati Nature Reserve, **GWEGWE BEACH LODGE** offers an unforgettable seaside escape just an hour's flight from Durban.

With all the breezy charm of an elegant beach house, GweGwe offers nine suites, including two family units, each with a private pool and garden framed by wide sea views. Indoors there's a bright coastal motif of blues and greens and driftwood textures. The main lodge is similarly elegant in its organic tones, featuring eye-catching artworks celebrating the heritage of Pondoland. Here guests can settle in at the fireside for sundowners and enjoy contemporary cuisine that taps into the abundant seafood of the region. Entirely off-grid, the lodge has been built with solar power and water efficiency in mind, ensuring a light footprint on this sensitive coastal landscape.

With a wide range of nature-based activities to enjoy in a predator-free reserve that allows for both guided excursions and independent exploring, GweGwe is ideal for families, adventure seekers and multi-generational travellers looking for extended stays on South Africa's dramatic Wild Coast.



Travel *like you mean it*....

It's as simple as that. Travel to make a meaningful difference. Choose to travel with a company like Natural Selection, because we make sure that every visitor's trip counts!

Simply by making the choice to go on one of our safaris, you are already leaving a positive impact on conservation and local people. Together we can make a significant difference to this beautiful, yet fragile planet of ours.

For more information on the projects we support, or if you would like to assist further in our conservation or community work, please visit: www.naturalselectionfoundation.org

TRAVEL THAT
MATTERS





Photographers & Contributors

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