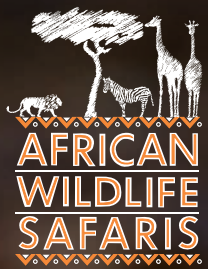


NATURAL FOCUS

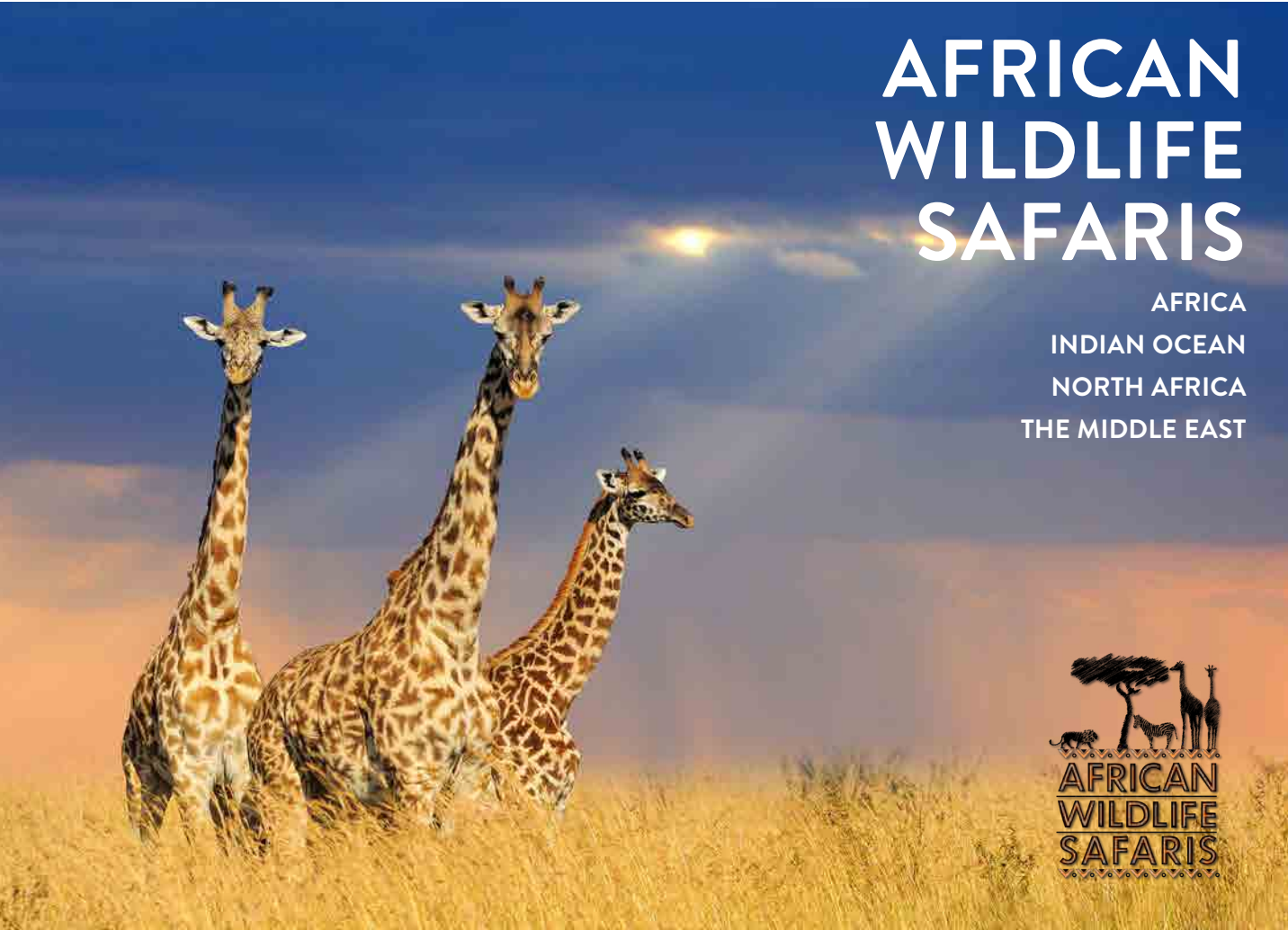


THE TALKING DRUM

2023 Newsletter - Volume 1

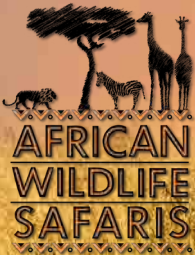


CELEBRATING
38 years
OF INSPIRATIONAL JOURNEYS



AFRICAN WILDLIFE SAFARIS

AFRICA
INDIAN OCEAN
NORTH AFRICA
THE MIDDLE EAST





NATURAL FOCUS

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND
ANTARCTICA & THE ARCTIC
CANADA & ALASKA
INDIA, SRI LANKA, NEPAL & BHUTAN
SOUTH & CENTRAL AMERICA





OUR INSPIRATIONAL JOURNEYS

Welcome to our first newsletter for 2023, full of exciting travel stories to inform and entertain you. As we begin the new year we look forward to being able to travel freely once again, and the chance to be captivated by extraordinary experiences both within our borders and overseas.

In 2022 some of our clients and staff embarked on a range of tours and safaris, enjoying the luxury of fewer tourists and returning home with wonderful memories. Many more are already booked for this year and into next year, eagerly anticipating the joys that travel always brings, especially when it brings connection with the natural world.

In February and March we have two escorted group trips departing to India - our ever-popular Taj, Temples & Tigers tour. In August Steve is leading another safari to Zambia with limited space still available. Due to pent up demand there is pressure on all travel for 2023 and into 2024, so we highly recommend you book early.


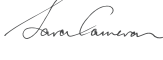
‘Slow Travel’ is definitely the current trend and something we have always recommended. Staying longer in each place and visiting fewer destinations in one trip means less time in airports and more time relaxing and enjoying the wonderful places you have come to see. On

a safari it means more time in the bush watching wild creatures in their natural environment. In a town it means wandering at leisure, breathing in the history, being immersed in the culture, discovering unique crafts and sampling local cuisine.

Small is beautiful and better for the environment, so we prefer small lodges and camps, even small ships, for a more intimate and authentic experience. Cruising the Kimberley on a small boat means access to areas others never get to see. Many of our African eco-lodges are on private concessions away from the crowds. Apart from our escorted small-group tours, all our itineraries are tailor made to suit your individual style and special interests.

This newsletter features some incredible and authentic experiences across our amazing planet – searching for wild tigers or snow leopards in India, watching bears in Alaska, discovering the local history and culture in Sri Lanka, and getting up close to Africa’s iconic wildlife. These and other trips are wonderful opportunities for choosing more sustainable options, like train journeys, wilderness safaris, walking trips, barge cruises, small ships and intimate hotels and lodges.

We hope you find plenty of travel inspiration in this newsletter, and we look forward to seeing you soon.



 Steve and Sara Cameron - Founders



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Discover Europe's rivers & canals

On the cover BENGAL TIGER

© Aditya Singh



2022 CLIENT TESTIMONIALS

"We were absolutely delighted with our long awaited family trip to Africa. Steve, Annie and their team listened to what we were hoping to achieve and planned accordingly. Their suggestions were spot on. Our stress levels were reduced by having a great itinerary in place and we felt safe at all times and had many fabulous experience. We would highly recommend AWS."

The Abrahams family

"Our sincere thanks to Annie and AWS team for making our trip to Zimbabwe more a life experience than a holiday. This was our first journey overseas since Covid and it was perfect from the smallest detail to the amazing experiences which will stay in our memories forever."

Jan and Glenn Smith



Luxury Northern Australia

"The three lodges gave us a unique insight into the outback, with extreme contrasts between areas; in particular the fauna and flora that each region offered. The hospitality through the trip was incredible."

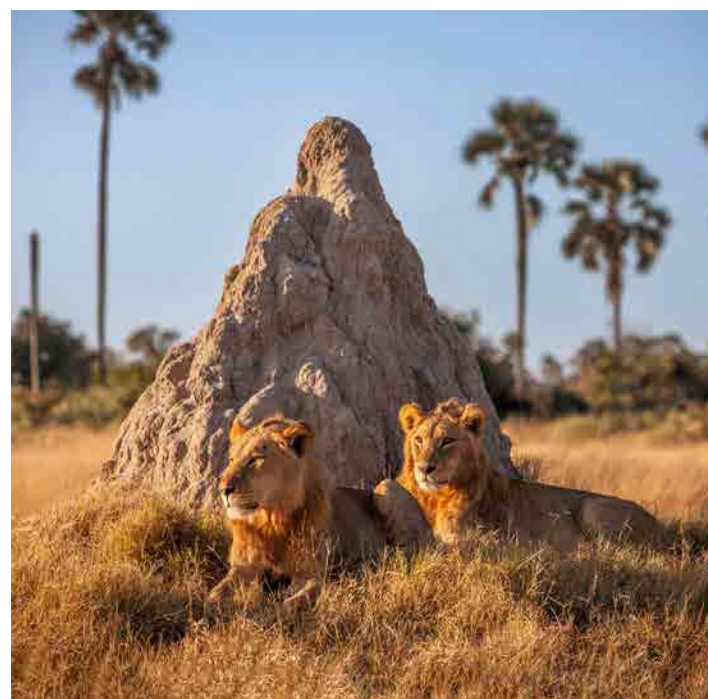
Gary Semple

"The Ultimate Africa was an amazing trip. The wildlife was exceptional and just being out and about in the bush environment was so enjoyable. The accommodation was excellent. Throughout my time I felt completely safe (including from COVID) and personally well looked after."

Anne, Ultimate Africa

"I have been travelling with African Wildlife Safaris/Natural Focus for over 20 years now. In November 2022 I joined the small group guided 'Ultimate Africa' to Botswana and Zimbabwe. The trip exceeded expectations, and everything went smoothly. After the trip I have a feeling of hope and excitement that life is largely back to normal and more adventures are on the horizon. Thanks to the team at African Wildlife Safaris for putting this fabulous trip together and being expertly guided by Annie."

Deb Corbett, Ultimate Africa

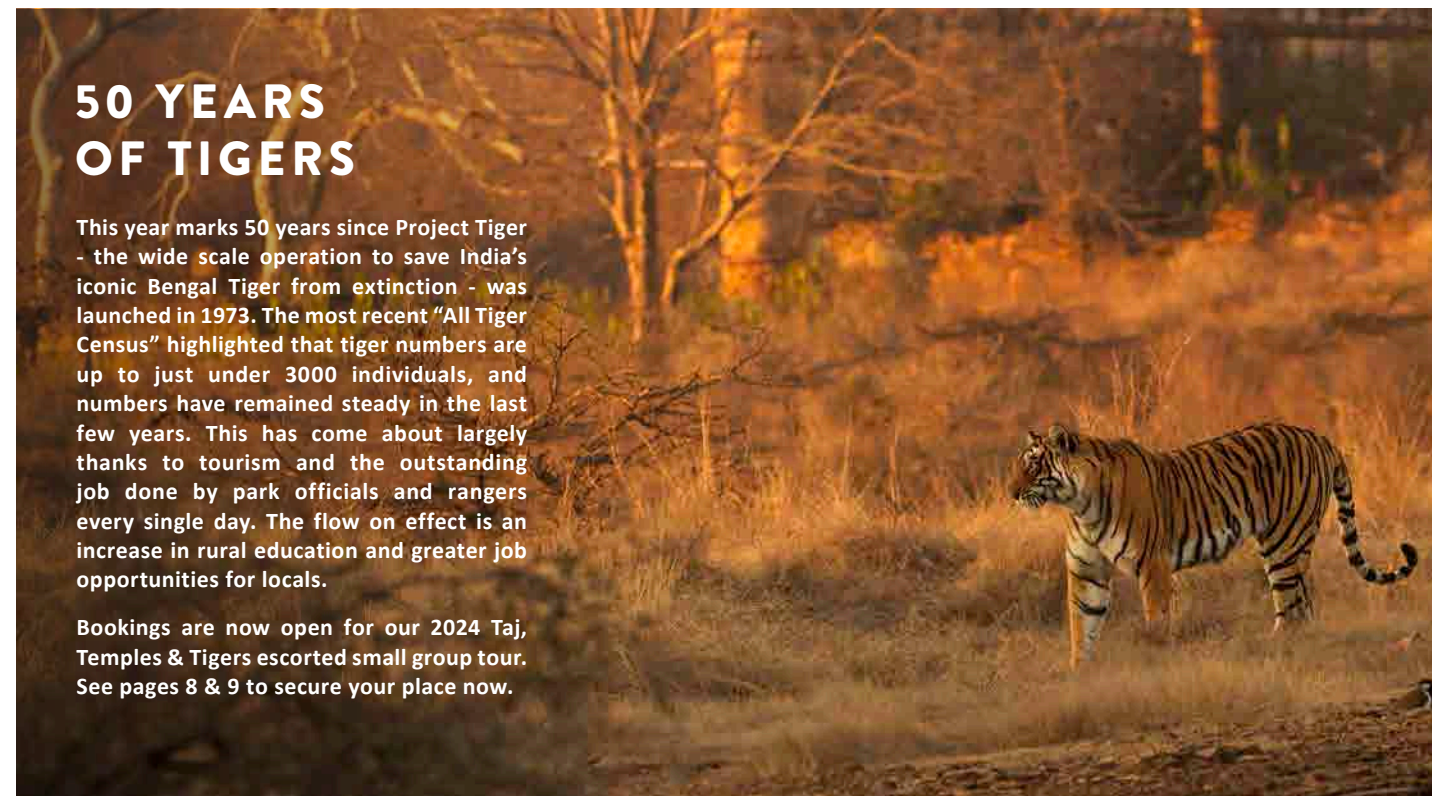


CONSERVATION UPDATE

50 YEARS OF TIGERS

This year marks 50 years since Project Tiger - the wide scale operation to save India's iconic Bengal Tiger from extinction - was launched in 1973. The most recent "All Tiger Census" highlighted that tiger numbers are up to just under 3000 individuals, and numbers have remained steady in the last few years. This has come about largely thanks to tourism and the outstanding job done by park officials and rangers every single day. The flow on effect is an increase in rural education and greater job opportunities for locals.

Bookings are now open for our 2024 Taj, Temples & Tigers escorted small group tour. See pages 8 & 9 to secure your place now.



VICTORIA FALLS ANTI-POACHING UNIT (VFAPU)

As many of our clients would know, African Wildlife Safaris have been supporting the Victoria Falls Anti-Poaching Unit (VFAPU) in Zimbabwe since its inception in 1999. In the second half of 2022 we were able to donate, together with our clients, USD \$1,643.62 to help continue in their conservation fight.

These rangers put their lives on the line to protect precious wildlife and fragile ecosystems. Their continual efforts have been even more imperative during the last two years, with limited travellers to help support this non-for-profit organisation.

Below is a graphic that shows the fantastic work and achievements of the VFAPU during 2022. For more information or if you would like to donate, please visit: <https://vfapu.com/>



VFAPU WILDLIFE CONSERVATION EXPERIENCE

In November 2022, our General Manager Anne-Marie Zambelli and some of our clients joined the VFAPU rangers on a behind-the-scenes tour in Zimbabwe's Zambezi National Park. This activity includes a presentation on the history of the unit and the challenges they face, before heading out into the park to help rangers record game sightings, identify spoor, sweep for wire snares and visit areas to investigate for any signs of poaching. The experience helps to provide more eyes on the ground to deter various forms of poaching, whilst guests get to play an important role in conservation.

For more information on this activity, contact our Africa Specialists on 1300 363 302.



GOING BUSH IN ZAMBIA

JOIN US IN AUGUST 2023



**"ABSOLUTELY AMAZING!!!
Everything was perfect.
The bush camps were
incredible. Potato Bush
was a wonderful way
to finish. Steve & Sara's
expertise & knowledge
shone through as the
itinerary was perfect."**

CATHY FLOOD - SEP 2022

With another privately guided
Zambian safari coming up in August
we have to admit that this is one of our
favourite places in Africa. Having travelled
this continent for 40 years we strive to
find areas where an authentic wildlife

safari is still possible – unfenced, wild and
without the crowds.

The beautiful South Luangwa Valley is true
African bush, criss-crossed by seasonal
streams and rivers which are a haven for
wildlife – lions, leopards, hippos, elephants
and numerous types of antelope. The safari
camps we choose are small and intimate,
with a maximum of 10 guests, and far from
tourist areas. In the dry season the receding
waters attract large numbers of game,
whilst crocs sunbake open-jawed on the
sand banks, and hippos jostle for territory
in the shallow pools. Safe, shallow pools are
also perfect for cooling off with sundowner
drinks, as we watch vibrant sunsets and the
day fading from orange to purple.

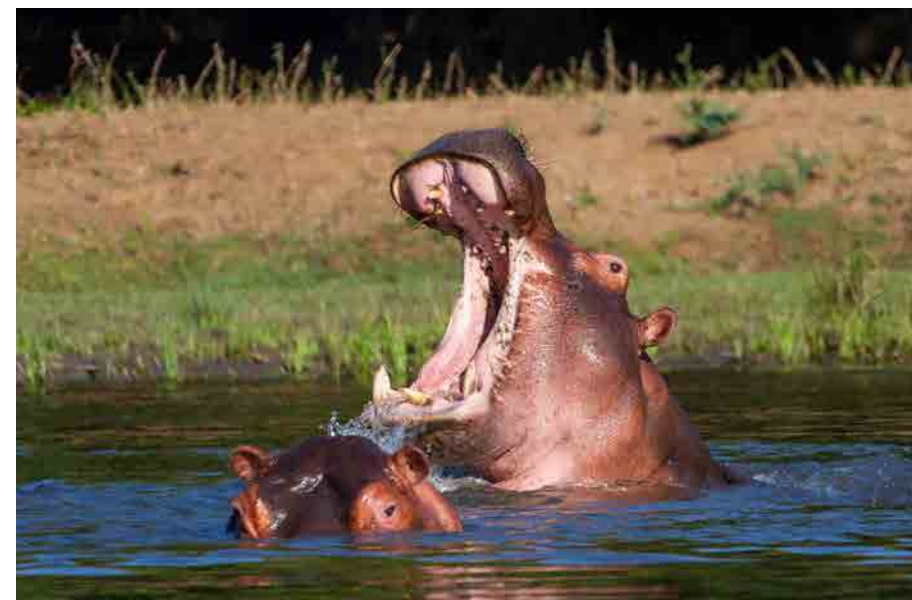
The Lower Zambezi National Park is an
absolutely stunning area on the northern
shore of the mighty Zambezi River. The
river is a paradise for birds, huge pods
of hippo, countless crocodiles lazing on

sandy islands, and a lifeline for elephants,
buffalo and other large mammals. Even
endangered wild dog flourish here, with two
large packs successfully hunting big game
like waterbuck and buffalo. Our favourite
safari camp – beautiful Potato Bush – has
a stunning position at the edge of the river
and close to the Chifungulu Channel, the
best river channel for canoeing trips.

Our next safari departing on 23 August this
year visits both these superb wildlife areas.
We stay in small, very comfortable lodges
and bush camps which are surrounded
by true wilderness, overlooking rivers or
floodplains. Accompanied by excellent local
guides we will enjoy game drives, walks and
canoe excursions, and learn more than any
book on natural history can teach you.

**For details on our Sensational Zambia
safari please see the adjacent page.**

Sara & Steve Cameron



SENSATIONAL ZAMBIA

17 days/16 nights - ex Lusaka
From AUD \$28,846 per person twin share

Departure Dates:
Wednesday 23 Aug 2023 - Limited places
Wednesday 21 Aug 2024

Escorted by African Wildlife Safaris CEO
Steve Cameron this 17-day safari visits
some of Zambia's most prestigious wildlife
areas staying at remote and exclusive
camps. Expect expert guides, game drives,
exciting walking and canoeing safaris away
from busy tourist areas guaranteeing an
unrivalled safari experience.

Designed on an all-inclusive basis (except
in Lusaka) relax, enjoy and make the most
of this unique and off-the-beaten-track
safari of a lifetime.

Departing in August 2023 and 2024 from
the Zambian city of Lusaka, this special
departure unveils the wonders of Zambia
during the peak wildlife viewing season.

Please note: Maximum group size is 8.
Singles on request. We can assist with
your airfares and book your flights in your
preferred class of travel.

For further information and full itinerary
please don't hesitate to call our Destination
Specialists on 1300 363 302.



**ENQUIRE
NOW**

TAJ, TEMPLES & TIGERS

Did you miss out on joining us on our 2023 group trips?

JOIN OUR TAJ, TEMPLES & TIGERS GROUP TOUR IN FEBRUARY 2024.

NOW is the time to book and secure your spot on our 2024 Taj, Temples and Tigers tour in February 2024 – our most successful and popular escorted small group tour.

If you love wildlife, history and culture this is perfect for you, with unprecedented opportunities to get up-close to the majestic Bengal Tiger. Nothing can prepare you for the excitement of seeing this magnificent creature in its natural habitat, a privilege that few people will ever experience. Throughout this 18-day trip you will be escorted by our General Manager Anne-Marie Zambelli, whose knowledge and zest for India (and travel in general) knows no bounds, as well as naturalist Tirath Singh who has accompanied many of our previous tours. Whilst this tour visits two of India's national parks there is also plenty of time for cultural experiences and historical sites.

DEPARTS EX DELHI

26 Feb 2024 - BOOK NOW
18 days/17 nights

TOUR COST EX DELHI

AUD \$12,995 per person twin share
Single Supplement AUD \$2,731



BOOK
NOW

HIGHLIGHTS

- Total of 11 guided tiger safaris in Bandhavgarh and Ranthambore
- The avian paradise of Keoladeo National Park
- Jhalana Leopard Reserve
- The historic treasures of Delhi, Jaipur & the beautiful Taj Mahal
- Accompanying naturalist and Australian escort

TOUR ESCORT

A passionate traveller with over 35 years' experience in the travel industry, Anne-Marie (Annie) Zambelli's knowledge is unrivalled. As our General Manager she is an expert on all our destinations. As a tour leader she is a knowledgeable, enthusiastic and entertaining travelling companion. Captivated by India on her first trip in 2002, Annie has returned many times and this will be her 13th Taj Temples & Tigers Tour.

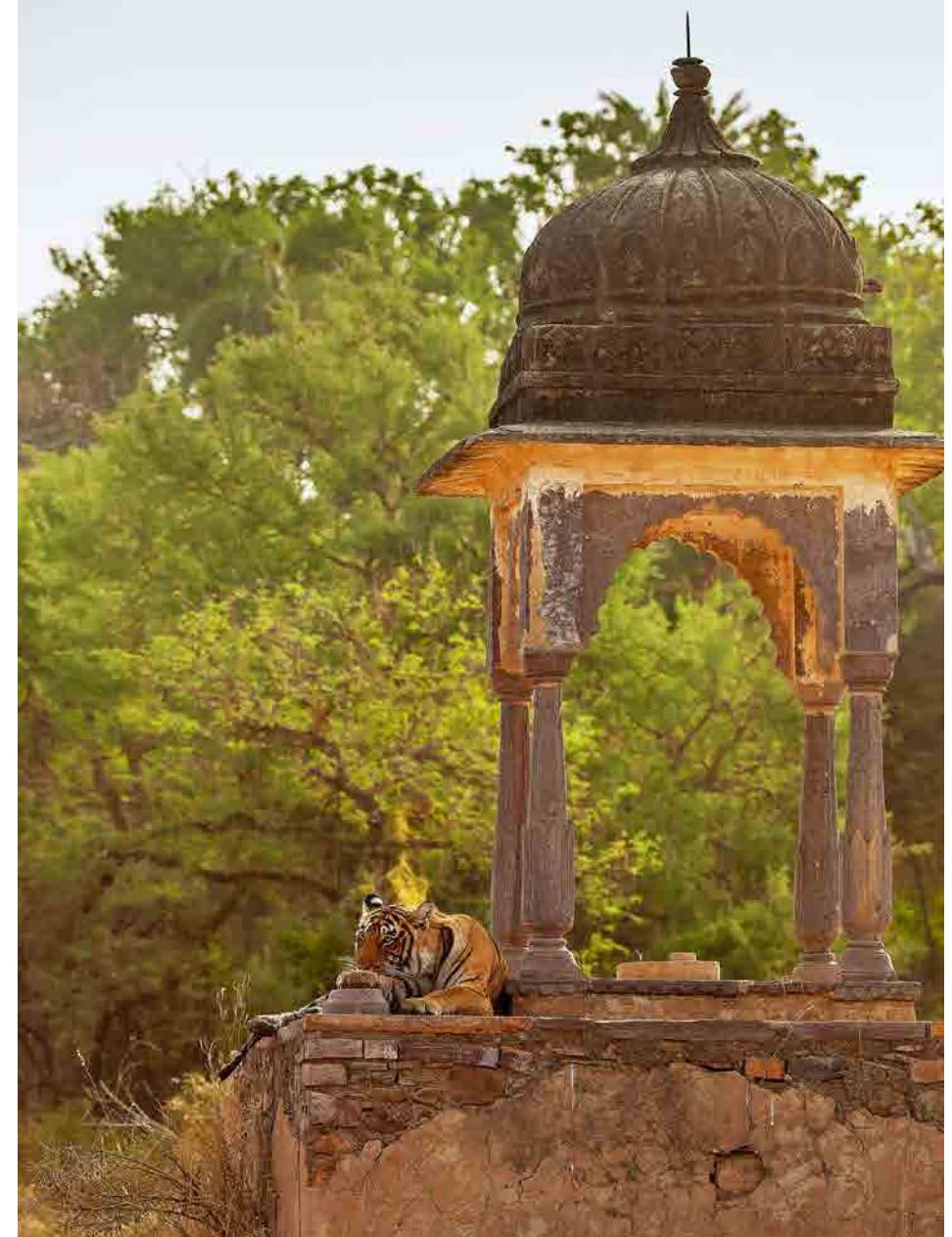


KAZIRANGA EXTENSION

There is also an option to extend your time in India and add a 3-night stay at Kaziranga National Park. Located in the north east of the country in the state of Assam, Kaziranga is home to the endangered one-horned Indian Rhinoceros.

Don't miss out!

For further information and to reserve your place, please call us on **1300 363 302**.



QUEST FOR THE SNOW LEOPARD & LAND OF THE TIGERS

Join us in February 2024 on this once in a lifetime adventure as we head to Ladakh, India, on a quest to find the elusive snow leopard. This fabled “ghost of the Himalayas” is more closely related to the tiger than the leopard, and today there are less than a hundred of these beautiful creatures left in Ladakh. This escorted group expedition promises to be one of those life-changing, extraordinary experiences, as we venture into the rarefied, winter world of Trans-Himalayan landscapes, exotic wildlife, remote mountain villages and age-old cultures.

If you are up for the adventure, this is a unique journey into high altitude regions in search of rare wildlife like snow leopards as well as wolves, ibex, red foxes, urial (mountain sheep) and many species of birds. Then returning to lower altitudes further south we will visit renowned Bandhavgarh National Park for a tiger safari. In between there will be time to explore the ancient monasteries and palaces of Leh, and the famous temples of Khajuraho.

No mountaineering experience is required for the snow leopard quest, but you will need to be a reasonable hiker and in good health. You will be heading to 4000 metres. Our expedition will be accompanied by expert trackers and a support team of chefs, porters and guides. Much of the time we will travel by vehicle, but we will also explore on foot, hiking into three valleys with our exceptional trackers and spotters.

Accommodation will be in a comfortable lodge which is partly owned by local villagers. The lodge has heating, ensuite rooms, and hearty meals prepared by the expedition staff. Our expedition will benefit the entire village bringing much needed funds in the cold winter season. At one time snow leopards were perceived as a threat to livestock, but today the villagers see the benefits of conserving leopards and their habitat.



DEPARTS EX DELHI

Sunday 11 Feb 2024 - BOOK NOW
17 days/16 nights

TOUR COST EX DELHI

AUD \$20,630 per person twin share
Single Supplement AUD \$6,371

Min 8 for tour escort. Max group size: 16

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 nights in Leh, with its stupas and monasteries
- 6 Nights in Ulley searching for snow leopards (sightings cannot be guaranteed)
- 4 nights Bandhavgarh for tiger safaris with one special full day permit
- Visit to western temples of Khajuraho
- Escorted from Delhi
- Local expert wildlife guides
- \$250 USD Snow Leopard Conservation Donation
- All tipping included

**To reserve your place please call
Steve Cameron on 1300 363 302.**



The Quest for the Snow Leopard & Land of The Tigers will be escorted from Delhi by our CEO Steve Cameron, who has been exploring the world's remote places for over 40 years. Our expedition partner and operator on the ground in India has been involved in wildlife conservation for over 30 years. They are a family of conservationists, from the present owner going back to his father and grandfather Kailash Sankhala, who was the founding director of Project Tiger, India's first tiger conservation program. They work closely with the Snow Leopard Conservancy Trust and the 1700 ft foundation as an active partner to fund community development and conservation efforts.



© Surya Ramachandran

TOUR ESCORT

Steve has been travelling the world for over 40 years. His love of travel first started in Africa, where he began leading overland safaris in 1982 across the length and breadth of Africa, before returning to Australia and co-founding African Wildlife Safaris with his wife Sara. His passion for travel, adventure, wildlife and wilderness took him to India, and in 2000 he set up Natural Focus' India program. Since then, Steve has been to the subcontinent several times, leading tours including our legendary Taj Temples and Tigers small group tour. Steve is an outgoing and insightful travelling companion, with many stories from around the world.





THE PEARL OF AFRICA

Many countries offer travellers abundant reasons to visit – great food, friendly locals, beautiful scenery and unique experiences. Yet some destinations stand out, with moments that promise to change you in ways that words can't explain. Uganda is one such jewel; aptly known as the 'Pearl of Africa'.

Part of its charm is the raw, authentic African experience one still finds here. Yes, there are upmarket lodges and Wi-Fi is widely available, yet there is still a sense that you are encountering cultures that are unfamiliar. Its serenity and remoteness draw one in, enhanced by rare encounters not widely found elsewhere.

Uganda boasts an outstanding ecological diversity. This is primate paradise. Trekking endangered mountain gorillas in the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, chimpanzees in Kibale Forest and golden monkeys in Mgahinga National Park are thrilling experiences. Observing a family of gorillas in their natural habitat feels both surreal and humbling. The Queen Elizabeth National Park where tree climbing lions dangle lazily in shady fig trees is perfect for classic game viewing safaris. Indulge in scrumptious bush breakfasts and spectacular sundowners.

It is imperative to conserve Uganda's wildlife and heritage for future generations.

Wild Frontiers offer low impact tourism plus encourage their guests to participate in community experiences, sample local food and buy local arts and crafts. As a specialist tour operator (and partner of African Wildlife Safaris), they have an intimate understanding of the country, vital when arranging journeys that exceed individual expectations.

For more information on Uganda safaris call one of our Africa Specialists on 1300 363 302.



For a truly wild experience look no further than Lemala Wildwaters Lodge in Uganda - one of Africa's most unique lodges.

Only accessible by boat, the lodge is situated on Kalagala Island, midstream within the Victoria Nile River. Dramatically perched on huge granite rocks with awe-inspiring views and roaring rapids all around, a stay here is the perfect complement to a greater Ugandan or even Tanzanian safari.

This instagram-worthy lodge has just 10 stand-alone luxury suites (including 1 family suite) that are elevated, and nestled within the surrounding rainforest. Each offers incredible river views and are linked by raised wooden walkways, providing access to the main lodge. They feature locally made furniture, beautiful bathrooms with rain showers, and to cap it off, large private balconies with a freestanding bath overlooking the rapids.

Not to be outdone, the main lodge area consisting of a restaurant, bar and library, also boasts a sensational swimming pool that cantilevers out above the river. Expert chefs create sophisticated dishes that are served in the main area, however private dinners can also be organised in your suite or poolside.

Guests can do as much or as little as they choose during their stay. Activities at the lodge are largely based around the river and the nearby adventure town of Jinja, on the shores of Lake Victoria. White-water rafting, bungee jumping, kayaking and birdwatching are all popular, with Uganda home to more than 1000 bird species.

To include Wildwaters Lodge in your next itinerary, contact one of our Africa Specialists on 1300 363 302.





FALLING FOR ZIMBABWE

With a superb collection of accommodation options within a short distance of Victoria Falls, and a sensational range of tours to boot, our long-time partner Wild Horizons will have you falling for Zimbabwe in no time!

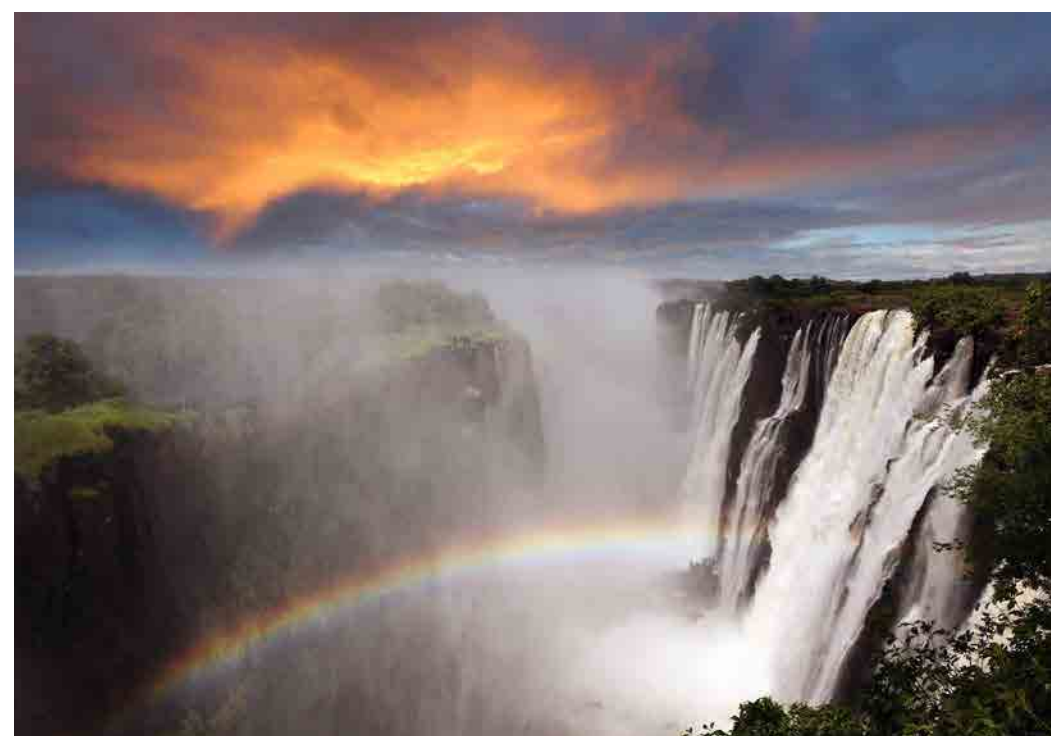
Victoria Falls is a bucket-list destination for many travellers, but there is so much more to do than just marvelling at the falls. Our trusted operator on the ground, Wild Horizons will get you out into the action to make your experience truly memorable - morning or sunset river cruises, wildlife conservation safaris (see p.5), helicopter tours and white-water rafting are just some of the possibilities. When dining in the town, there's nowhere better than the Wild Horizons Lookout Café. This iconic restaurant offers meals throughout the day, with breathtaking views of the Zambezi Gorges.

"We have visited Victoria Falls a number of times but our recent stay at Old Drift Lodge was our most enjoyable. The lodge is like a private oasis yet close to Victoria Falls and all it has to offer. The activities available to guests were extensive. Our favourite was the sundowner river cruise; watching elephants swim across the Zambezi with a blood red sunset while enjoying an ice cold beer. This was an experience to remember."

Jan and Glenn Smith Oct 2022

"The Elephant Camp is a perfect complement to any wildlife safari itinerary. It is a peaceful haven tucked away from the hustle and bustle of the town but still close enough for you to enjoy the vibe and some of the many fabulous experiences on offer. My stay here was made even more special by the warm and wonderful hospitality of the staff."

Anne Marie Zambelli, Nov 2022



WHERE TO STAY?

The Wallow

Located in its own private concession in Victoria Falls National Park, The Wallow is an intimate 16-suite camp that overlooks the Masuwe River. The lodge has a light footprint on the land, using sustainable materials such as solar power and environmentally friendly decking. The main lodge boasts a beautiful swimming pool and a sunken deck with a fire pit that overlook the river below.



The Elephant Camp

Situated a stone's throw from sister camp The Wallow, The Elephant Camp has been rated as one of the country's most luxurious camps and boasts a view of the Zambezi Gorges. The Elephant Camp Main offers 12 luxury suites with personal plunge pools and indoor and outdoor showers. For added seclusion, there are four additional suites located in a wing known as The Elephant Camp West.

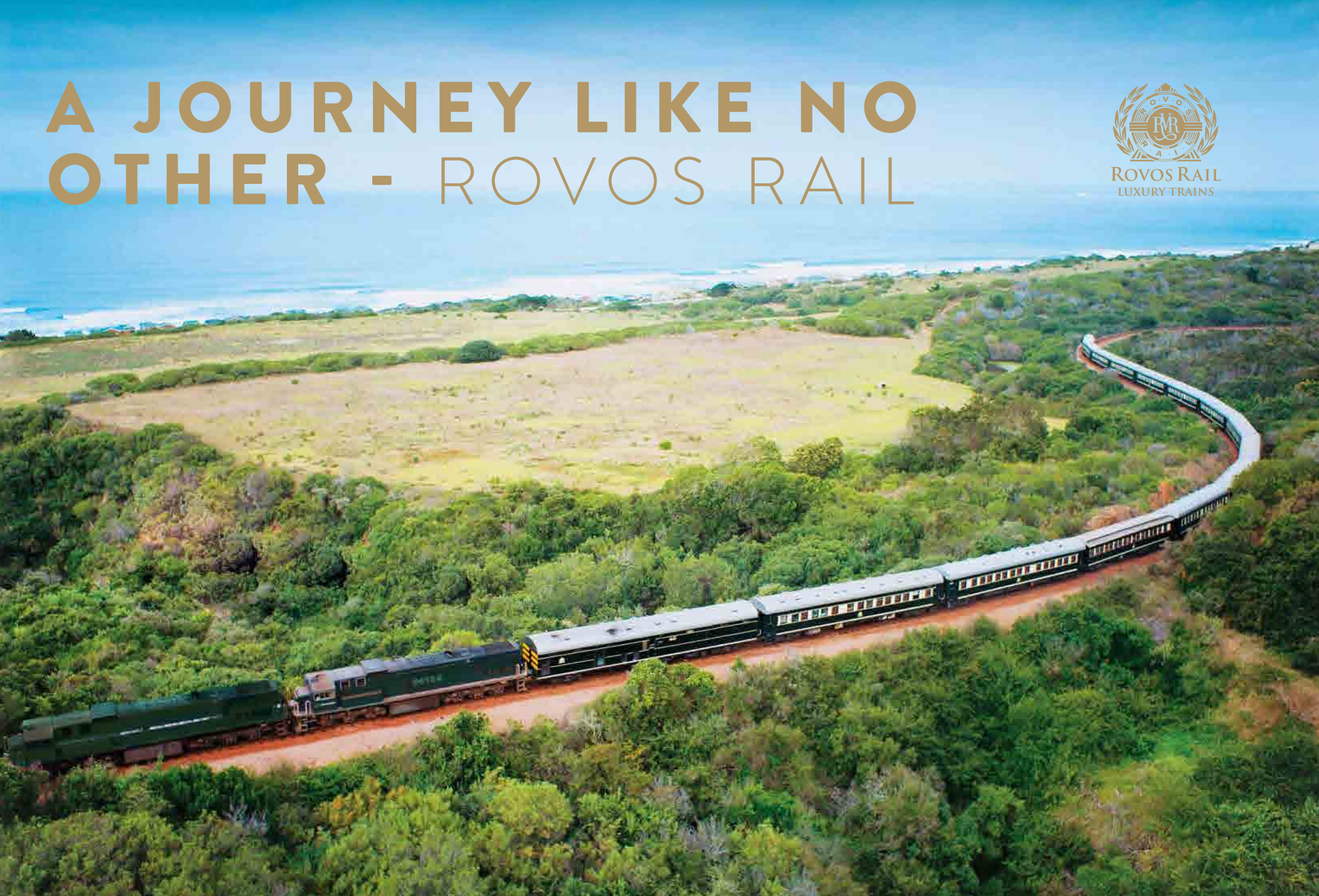


Old Drift Lodge

Just 7 kilometres upstream from the tumultuous falls, historic Old Drift Lodge accommodates guests in 14 canvas-clad suites. These resplendent suites face the Zambezi River and are fitted with private decks with a plunge pool, star beds and claw-footed bathtubs. Here, guests can explore the surrounding national park by vehicle, boat or on foot.



A JOURNEY LIKE NO OTHER - ROVOS RAIL



Rohan Vos - Rovos Rail Founder

Originally in the automotive industry running a successful spare parts business, Rohan was always intrigued by steam and railways. In 1985, he purchased several old carriages and restored them to their former glory. As a result of difficulties working with the South African Transport Services, he decided to purchase a 1938 Class 19D locomotive he found in a Johannesburg scrap heap.

Rohan negotiated to allow his train to run, and was given permission to sell tickets to offset the costs. It was here that the idea of Rovos Rail as a business was born. On 29 April, 1989, the first train was launched, consisting of a locomotive with seven carriages.

Steve Cameron - CEO AWS

"Rohan is meticulous in everything he does, which is one of the reasons Rovos is one of the leading luxury rail companies in the world. I told him once that his towels didn't dry you properly... so Rohan went off and researched the best towels to get for his trains, and replaced the whole lot!"



Journey back in time and discover the charm and wonder of a by-gone era aboard the most luxurious train in the world.

Since its beginnings in 1989, Rovos Rail has gone on to earn an international reputation for its truly world-class travel experiences across Africa.

From their first journey between Pretoria and Cape Town over 30 years ago, the company now operates 11 different routes across the African continent, ranging from 2 to 15 nights.

These unforgettable rail journeys are one of the best ways to explore the continent, linking renowned destinations such as Cape Town and Pretoria (South Africa), Victoria Falls (Zimbabwe), Windhoek (Namibia) and Dar Es Salaam (Tanzania).

Their superb carriages have been painstakingly restored to their former glory. As soon as guests step onboard, they fall in

love with the vintage wood-panelled walls, elegant furniture and decadent suites. The beautifully rebuilt trains are hauled by either diesel or electric locomotives, and carry a maximum of 72 passengers.

Guests experience the golden age of pre-war travel, and the timeless grace and romance of African exploration; sit back in comfortable chairs and marvel at the gorgeous and varied scenery passing by, enjoy discreet and friendly service, and savour top cuisine in the dining car, accompanied by a selection of South Africa's finest wines.

Each train boasts comfortable communal cars, including an Observation Car with an open air balcony, elegant Lounge Cars fitted with sofas and large picture windows, and beautiful Dining Cars, where guests enjoy outstanding meals - with dinner being a more formal affair.

To talk to one of our Destination Specialists call us on 1300 363 302.



UNDERSTATED LUXURY

BY NATURAL SELECTION



With superb safari camps and lodges located in some of the best wildlife and wilderness areas, Natural Selection has southern Africa covered. Across Botswana's Okavango Delta and Kalahari Desert, as well as Namibia's wild landscapes, and with a beautiful beach lodge on South Africa's southwest cape, they offer a choice of understated accommodation.

Legendary Jack's Camp (pictured above) in the Kalahari has been setting the standard in the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park for decades with its elegant tented suites and iconic interiors. Newly rebuilt, the camp is now even more lavish with private ensuite plunge pools. It hasn't lost any of its charm, and still boasts the fascinating Natural History Museum, and the popular Persian Tea Tent. A highlight here is the desert-adapted wildlife, from black-maned Kalahari lions and aardwolves, to the population of habituated meerkats - some of whom are so friendly they often use guests as a lookout!

To the north, the Okavango Delta and surrounding private reserves offer a completely different ecosystem to explore. The waterways and islands are a haven for all manner of birdlife and wildlife. Here, there are several outstanding camps that each sit in their own private concession. Sophisticated and intimate Tuludi (pictured right) is set within a landscape of floodplains

and emerald forests. A perfect complement to the Kalahari, there are just 7 tree-house style suits.

Two new camps set to open in 2023/2024, North Island Okavango and Tawana, will take luxury and serenity to a new level. North Island is located on a private island, whilst Tawana is named in honour of Chief Tawana Moremi, and is situated in a prime location within the Moremi Game Reserve.

The reserve was first created in 1963, and has since been expanded twice, now protecting over 5,000 square kilometres of pristine wilderness. It was the current Chief Tawana's visionary father and grandmother who were instrumental in the creation of the reserve.

For more information on Natural Selection please contact our Africa specialists on 1300 363 302.



NAMIBIA'S DESERT DELIGHTS



Endless deserts. Remarkable scenery. Unique wildlife. Exciting adventures.

This is what a Namibian safari is all about. Below we have highlighted some of our favourite lodges with Natural Selection, that combine to create a diverse Namibian itinerary.

Shipwreck Lodge

Located on Namibia's desolate Skeleton Coast, Shipwreck Lodge is designed around the countless wrecks that line the raw and rugged coastline. Unique in its location and what it offers, activities include quad biking, beachcombing and searching for rare desert-adapted wildlife such as elephant, lion and brown hyena.



Hoanib Valley Camp

This intimate camp situated in the Sesfontein Community Conservancy boasts a remarkable position at the end of a hidden valley surrounded by jagged mountains with views of the Hoanib River. Visiting local Himba or Herero peoples as well as the Giraffe Conservation Foundation to help monitor their population are popular activities. It is also possible to track black rhino.



Etosha Mountain Lodge

Located in Etosha Heights Private Reserve, and sharing a border with Etosha National Park, this lodge is the ideal place to stay and discover the region. The savannah landscape is punctuated by riverine forests, mopane woodland and isolated waterholes, that attract all manner of wildlife, including antelope, cheetah, lion and white rhino.



Kwessi Dunes

A sprawling wilderness of iconic red dune seas, the NamibRand Nature Reserve has also been designated as a Dark Sky Reserve - one of the least light-polluted areas in the world - meaning stargazing here is a true highlight. Kwessi Dunes only accommodates 24 guests in 12 comfortable air-conditioned chalets. Each chalet has a separate 'stargazer room' where guests can sleep out under the stars.



SRI LANKA

SERENE ESCAPES

It's hardly surprising that in recent times Sri Lanka has become one of the world's most popular holiday destinations. With an intoxicating mix of white sand beaches, unique wildlife, ancient ruins and rich culture this tiny island nation in the Indian Ocean offers a diversity few countries can match.

Re-defining luxury, Uga Escapes is one of Sri Lanka's leading eco-hotel operators. With five boutique properties in their portfolio, each hotel offers a different region to explore and can easily be combined into a rewarding itinerary. At each award-winning hotel guests can expect the same level of personalised service, mouth-watering cuisine and luxurious accommodation, close to some of Sri Lanka's many highlights.

Restored or constructed using environmentally friendly, biodegradable materials each hotel follows a "back to nature"

philosophy. Committed to sustainable practices, Uga has continued to plant trees and other flora to reduce their carbon footprint. Solar energy and bio gas are used where possible, clay or glass instead of plastic, LED lights are installed in the rooms and they have a water-treatment plant in place. The company is also involved in various wildlife conservation and community projects.

"At Uga, we connect travellers with serendipity and the authenticity of Sri Lanka, offering experiences with an aura of tradition and respect for the environment and the ancient culture that we feel privileged to bestow upon our guests."

Whether it's a city stay, cultural adventure, wildlife safari or a beach getaway Uga Escapes offers a unique experience for every traveller.



UGA RESIDENCE

One of the most elegant hotels in Colombo the Residence is a converted 19th century historic townhouse that offers guests a secluded, tranquil position in the heart of the city. Once frequented by the cream of colonial society this unique 11-suite hotel offers a fine dining restaurant, swimming pool and is close to the iconic Gangaramaya Temple, Beira Lake and the vibrant night life of Park Street Mews.



UGA CHENA HUTS

Offering a true wilderness experience and exclusive luxury accommodation, Chena Huts is surrounded by beaches, lush forest and exotic wildlife. Adjacent to the Yala National Park where leopards roam, this intimate lodge has 14 gorgeous cabins with private pool, air conditioning and lavish ensuite bathrooms, spread across 7 acres of spectacular wilderness. Guests can enjoy a fine dining restaurant, luxuriant spa and personalised safaris with experienced rangers.



UGA BAY

For the ultimate beach escape head to Uga Bay, a luxury hotel on the white sands of Pasikuda Beach. With serene Mediterranean style architecture and spacious gardens the hotel has a boutique feel. There are 44 spacious ocean-facing rooms with outdoor terrace or balcony, plus two villas. Relax by the beautiful pool, enjoy romantic dining experiences, exhilarating water sports and the glamorous spa. There are also local fishing villages, markets, famous Hindu temples and nearby historic sites to explore.



UGA JUNGLE BEACH

On the sensational north east coast of Sri Lanka near historic Trincomalee, this boutique, beachfront hotel nestles in natural bush close to cultural treasures and wildlife sanctuaries. Jungle Beach boasts 49 luxurious modern chalets that blend into their natural surroundings, with spectacular views of the Indian Ocean or the nearby lagoon. Enjoy the hotel's many facilities, tour Trincomalee, follow local cycle trails, or take a boat cruise to one of the world's best spots for finding the mighty blue whale.



UGA ULAGALLA

Once the village chieftain's mansion this gorgeous hotel is where Uga Escapes first started. Completely renovated, the 150 year old mansion is surrounded by 58-acres of lush gardens with 25 large private villas, each with its own pool. The hotel is just an hour's drive from the UNESCO World Heritage rock fortress of Sigiriya and other cultural sites. Enjoy special dining experiences, traditional rice harvesting festivals, tuk tuk tours, kayaking and other adventures.



UNCOVERING THE MAGIC OF THE KIMBERLEY

THE LUXURY OF SMALL SHIP ADVENTURES

Western Australia's Kimberley Coast is a place of great natural beauty. The almost mystical landscapes, overlaid with an ancient indigenous culture offer unique adventures, diverse wildlife and out-of-this-world experiences.

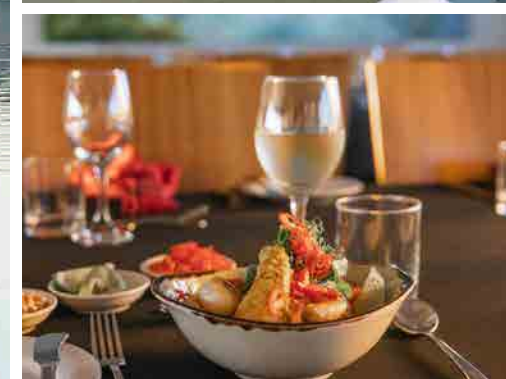
By far the best way to experience the Kimberley is on board a small ship which has been purpose built for ocean cruising as well as for coastal exploration, allowing access to shallow waters and inland rivers.

With this in mind we highly recommend the True North and the True North II - two boutique expedition ships which can travel many kilometres upriver such as cruising the King George River right up to the famous Twin Falls for a 'shower on the bow'. Passengers can then head ashore for a hike or take an optional helicopter flight to the top of the falls (both vessels have their own onboard helicopter).

These are no ordinary cruises. With ample adventure boats onboard, guests have the opportunity to choose what they want to do, when they want. Every day there are multiple activities to choose from, such as fishing, swimming or hiking, mud crabbing, collecting oysters or sunset drinks on the beach. There is also unique access to special cultural and rock art sites.



TRUE NORTH
N



With a small number of passengers but a high crew to passenger ratio, these beautiful ships offer a laid-back luxury, friendly, personalised service, elegant cabins and gourmet meals.

The **TRUE NORTH** carries 36 passengers and features 18 air-conditioned cabins with ensuite facilities. The dining room offers panoramic windows so guests never miss any of the action, and there is a lounge, sundeck, forward observation lounge, alfresco bar and 6 dedicated adventure boats for river exploration.

The **TRUE NORTH II** offers a more intimate experience for 20 guests in 10 air-conditioned cabins featuring either ensuite or private facilities. The ship has a dining/lounge area,

sundeck, outdoor bar and dedicated sports deck, as well as multiple adventure boats for guided activities.

These fantastic Kimberley cruises range from 4 to 13 nights in length. Or you can venture beyond the Kimberley 'Across the Top' from Darwin to Cairns, cruise the Great Barrier Reef, or head south to Kangaroo Island. A unique journey in 2023 (15 to 21 April) is from Broome to Ningaloo Reef to witness a rare solar eclipse. But hurry! As we go to print only limited cabins are available for this and some other popular voyages.

For 2023 and 2024 departure dates or more information please call one of our Destination Specialists on 1300 363 302.



INCREIBLE IGUAZÚ

BEAUTIFUL BUENOS AIRES

| BY JAMES CAMERON |

Often referred to as the “Paris of South America” due to its glorious boulevards, superb cafe culture, innovative dining and iconic tango and arts scene, Buenos Aires is the perfect place to start or end any South American adventure.

I’ve had the pleasure of visiting twice - including spending 3 nights here after a trip through Bolivia. The city also boasts beautiful neighbourhoods, fascinating museums, and of course, the famous Recoleta Cemetery (a must visit!) where several notable people are buried, including legendary singer Eva Perón.

A slow and relaxed cycling tour of the city is the perfect way to discover some of its hidden gems and beautiful parklands. Each suburb has its own flavour and highlights. The Sunday market in San

Telmo is a popular place to begin a day, whilst the street art, cheese and wine bars and the restaurants of Palermo can be explored in the afternoon and evening.

A highlight for me (and any steak or red wine lovers) was dining at Don Julio restaurant, which now sits at #14 in “The World’s 50 Best Restaurants”. The experience was superb, from enjoying a few glasses of champagne outside as we waited for a table, to the interior decor and finally the steak and wine itself.

Just 2 hours flight from Buenos Aires, Iguazu Falls on the Argentinean and Brazilian border combines well, for either a day trip or a short stay. Find out more on page 25.

Call one of our Destination Specialists on 1300 363 302.



DID YOU KNOW?

One of the planet’s most awe-inspiring waterfalls, the Iguazú Falls (or Iguacu in Brazil) straddle the Argentinean/Brazilian border and are simply an astonishing sight to behold. A short flight from both Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro, the falls have been historically important over the centuries. Tourists flock to experience the sheer scale of the cataracts, the thrills of white-water rafting, exploring the luxuriant jungle and uncovering the area’s fascinating history.

Legend of the Cataracts

According to Guaraní tradition the falls originated when a warrior named Caroba incurred the wrath of a forest god by escaping downriver in a canoe with a beautiful young girl, Naipí, whom the god desired. Infuriated the god caused the river to collapse creating the falls, over which Naipí fell and turned into a rock.

Tourism

Iguazú Falls attracts well over 1.3 million visitors every year. There are countless hotels on offer but only two are located in the national parks surrounding Iguazú Falls - the beautiful Gran Meliá Iguazú on the Argentinean side, and Belmond Hotel das Cataratas on the Brazilian side.

UNESCO History

Edmundo de Barros, a Brazilian army officer proposed Iguazú Falls become a national park back in 1897. Due to country boundaries, it wasn’t until 1984 that this became a reality, and Iguazú National Park was created on the Argentinean side, and Iguacu National Park two years later on the Brazilian side. Within these parks the rainforest delta surrounding the falls is home to over 2,000 species of plants.

European history

The first European born explorer to view Iguazú Falls was the Spanish Conquistador Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca in 1541 after whom one of the falls on the Argentinean side is named.



THE LEADERS



For many Antarctica is a lifetime travel goal, but visiting the white continent is no longer as daunting as it once seemed. In the last 15 years tourism has flourished and today there are more comfortable cruise ships plus the option to fly, saving valuable time and avoiding the infamous Drake Passage - regarded as one of the roughest sections of ocean in the world.

The "leaders of the poles", Quark Expeditions has led the way in polar travel for over 30 years. Every voyage is accompanied by a highly experienced expedition team which is the best in the business. These seasoned Polar veterans are qualified marine biologists, ecologists, geologists, ornithologists and glaciologists, many of whom have completed PHD studies in their field.

Quark Expeditions' highly-trained polar staff lead an outstanding range of "off the beaten track" adventures including stand-up paddleboards, sea-kayaks, cross-country skiing, camping, heli-hiking and heli-skiing. These thrilling activities let you experience more remote regions of the continent that are rarely explored.

For a true bucket-list adventure, cruise along the beautiful Antarctic Peninsula onboard one of Quark's exceptional expedition ships - the World Explorer or the Ultramarine - and discover magnificent landscapes and icy seas home to Chinstrap and Gentoo penguins, humpback whales, orcas and elephant seals. Alternatively, combine the Antarctic Peninsula with the magical island of South Georgia, often called "the Galapagos of the Southern Ocean" because of its amazing biodiversity.

Since its maiden voyage in November 2019, the World Explorer has been one of the finest vessels to grace the Polar regions, and features a wellness centre and gym. Their newest vessel, the Ultramarine boasts two twin-engine helicopters, allowing for even greater polar explorations. Both vessels carry enough zodiacs for all passengers to disembark at any one time, giving you more time to explore the Antarctic wilderness.

There is truly no better way to discover the polar regions than with Quark Expeditions aboard one of these superb vessels.

 **Quark Expeditions®**
The Leader in Polar Adventures



OF THE POLES

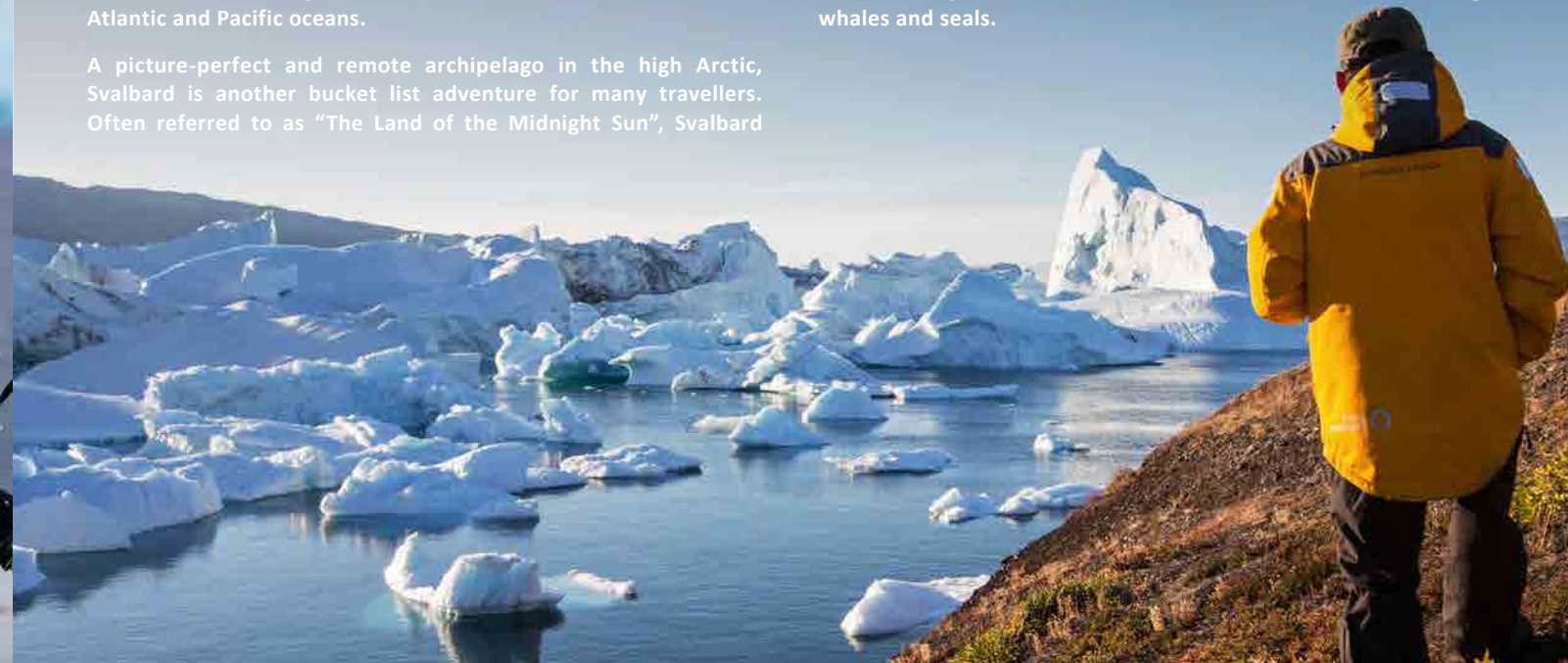
Fly north to the very top of the world and discover a winter wonderland of adventure during the Arctic summer with Quark Expeditions.

Voyage aboard the Ultramarine to regions few people ever get to see as you cruise the coastline and islands of Greenland and the Canadian Arctic. The region's mesmerising landscapes are home to small, isolated communities, unique arctic wildlife and seabirds. Discover remarkable history following in the footsteps of legendary explorers such as Sir John Franklin as you navigate the Northwest Passage - the famous sea route that connects the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

A picture-perfect and remote archipelago in the high Arctic, Svalbard is another bucket list adventure for many travellers. Often referred to as "The Land of the Midnight Sun", Svalbard

is bathed in sunlight during the short summer period (June-August) and comes alive with beautiful wildflowers and millions of migrating seabirds nesting on the cliffs. This is the very best time to go, as polar bears and other wildlife like Arctic fox emerge from their winter dens.

Exploring these magical islands by luxury expedition cruise ship is the only way to enjoy a truly in-depth Arctic experience, as many top sights are only accessible along the coastline. Sail close to glaciers and towering cliffs crowded with countless seabirds, and look out for polar bears, walruses, reindeers, arctic foxes, beluga whales and seals.



ULTRAMARINE

Quark Expedition's newest state-of-the-art vessel has changed the face of polar tourism. Ultra-luxurious, the Ultramarine features spa-inspired bathrooms, sauna, gym, and two "Ready-rooms" specifically designed for returning from excursions. Sea-kayaks, paddleboards and ski equipment will be available for optional activities whilst the vessel has two helicopters operating on dual helipads for flight-see excursions.



ANCHORAGE

GATEWAY TO ALASKA

When planning an Alaska adventure, Anchorage is a fantastic place to start.

Truly in the centre of it all, Anchorage has easy access to five of Alaska's national parks with both day and multi-day tours available, making it the perfect base to experience the best of Alaska.

These show-stopping parks offer spectacular outdoor adventures, like soaring around the summit of North America's tallest peak, sea kayaking with whales, or close-up bear viewing tours. World-renowned Katmai National Park, a short flight from Anchorage, is one of the best places in the world to see brown bears. Not only do some 2,200 bears reside here, but it also boasts mesmerising scenery including the famed "Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes".

Anchorage city offers hundreds of miles of trails and thousands of acres of parkland to explore. Walking and cycling are popular options, as is jumping aboard the Alaska Railroad, with trains departing daily to hotspots such as Seward, Talkeetna and Fairbanks. Surrounded by sparkling blue water, Seward is the gateway to Kenai Fjords National Park. This beautiful wilderness is home to tidewater glaciers and all manner of wildlife.

Visitors can also learn about Dena'ina Athabascan heritage and other local cultures at the Anchorage Museum and Alaska Native Heritage Center. At the end of the day, relax with Alaska's largest

variety of dining, performing arts, and other city attractions at your fingertips.

Winter is also a special time to visit Anchorage. There is a huge range of activities on offer, including heli-skiing, snowboarding, dog sledding, cross-country skiing, and the Fur Rendezvous (Fur Rondy) Festival, which started in 1936, and attracts many visitors each year. The winter months also offer an opportunity to see the spectacular Northern Lights.

East of the city, magical Prince William Sound is another major highlight, and accessible from the small town of Whittier, just over 70 minutes' drive from Anchorage. This remarkable region is wilderness on a grand scale; home to massive tidewater glaciers, waterfalls and picturesque islands.

The Sound can be explored on a daytrip or a week-long cruise, with amazing opportunities to see marine life such as seals, sea lions, humpback whales and otters. Accompanied by expert guides, travellers can enjoy nature hikes, kayaking, paddle-boarding, exploring remote inlets by motorised dinghy and beach combing tidal pools.

For more information on Anchorage and Alaskan bear viewing or cruises, contact our Destination Specialists on 1300 363 302.



VISIT KATMAI IN 2024

“Katmai provided exactly what we went there for; Bears! Perry, the head guide, is highly experienced and knows many of the bears by sight. We saw bears every day, on foot and up close on multiple occasions” - Michael King



There are few places in the world more spectacular for bear viewing than Alaska’s Katmai National Park. The park is home to the world’s largest concentration of grizzly bears – approximately 2,200 – and the best place to see them is at Katmai Wilderness Lodge - a remote, but comfortable eco lodge on the shores of Kukak Bay.

Families of bears are often seen roaming the picturesque meadows and coastal flats right outside the lodge, which is already full for 2023. If you would like to go we urge you to book now for 2024. With a maximum of 12 guests at the lodge you are unlikely to see any other people in the area, making this an intimate and unique wilderness experience.



The lodge is managed by Perry and Angela Mollan who love welcoming visitors and sharing their knowledge of the flora and fauna. Perry is a fourth generation Alaskan and he and Angela have lived and worked in the park for many years. They even got married here. They and other experienced guides take guests on daily excursions by boat or on foot to look for bears. With 42 different mammal species in the park visitors may also see seals, sea otters, fox and possibly wolves and whales.

For more information on Katmai call one of our Destination Specialists on 1300 363 302.



© Perry and Angela Mollan

MOUNTAIN MAJESTY

“OUR PEAK OF THE ROCKIES”

Canada’s Rocky Mountains are fabled for their snow-capped peaks, giant glaciers, turquoise lakes and forests filled with amazing fauna and flora. Banff and Jasper National Parks are both UNESCO World Heritage Sites. This year-round destination offers stunning sightseeing, wildlife viewing, hiking and swimming in summer and sensational snowsports in winter.

Exploring the Rockies could not be easier as there is an excellent road and rail infrastructure. VIA Rail (see page 32) have a range of scenic train journeys, while driving gives you the freedom to explore as you like. Amongst some of the world’s most stunning scenery are fabulous hotels and below are some of our top picks:



Fairmont Banff Springs

Stay in a romantic 1888 castle just minutes from the picturesque town of Banff. This year-round luxury resort is close to all the action, from hiking alongside pristine blue lakes, to a breathtaking gondola ride to the top of the peaks.



Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise

This much photographed chateau hotel has an idyllic setting at the foot of Lake Louise facing the majestic Victoria Glacier. Perfect for all seasons this luxury resort is close to world-class skiing in winter and scenic hiking trails in summer.



Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge

In the heart of Jasper National Park this luxury hotel has been welcoming guests since the 1900s. Reconnect with nature amongst majestic mountains, then unwind in the beautiful spa or by the pool and enjoy a range of dining experiences.



CONNECTING CANADA - VIA RAIL

With a comprehensive network linking the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, plus a wide range of affordable fares, VIA Rail is the perfect choice for hassle-free travel across Canada.

Their rail system seamlessly connects the country's major cities including Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal. Simply sit back in your spacious seat and let the many sights of the world's second-largest country roll by. For longer itineraries trains are conveniently equipped with comfortable sleeping berths and washroom facilities, or private cabins for one or two guests, which have their own washroom and toilet. Some also offer indulgent private ensuite cabins complete with personal concierge service - known as Prestige Class.

The Canadian - The Great Western Way

Via Rail's most popular long distance route covers a colossal 4,466 scenic kilometres between Vancouver and Toronto. The Canadian is your window to witnessing the diverse scenery of Canada, from twinkling city lights to wide open prairies and snow-capped Rocky Mountains peaks, this 4-night route has got the country covered.

The Rockies

Rail travel within British Columbia's renowned Rocky Mountains is also easy, and VIA Rail effortlessly connects you between cities and towns including Jasper, Kamloops, Prince George and Prince Rupert. The train between Jasper and Prince Rupert

travels through gorgeous alpine vistas on this spectacular 1,160km railroad.

Travel in Style - Prestige Class

The best way to travel onboard the Canadian is in the Prestige Car - that features a spacious L-shaped leather couch by day and a Murphy bed for two at night. Guests also enjoy their own private washroom with a shower, complimentary bar service, priority seating in the dining car and a personal concierge attendant.

Enjoy the luxuries of extra space, comfort and privacy in these beautiful cabins. There really is no better way to travel across Canada.



Winnipeg - Churchill

JOURNEY TO THE REALM OF THE POLAR BEAR

VIA Rail also boast several "adventure" routes within their network to iconic Canadian destinations such as the tiny town of Churchill in far north Manitoba.

Winnipeg - Churchill

Leave the clamour of Winnipeg behind as you enter the realm of the polar bear. At the end of this 2-night 1,697km track is Churchill, where sub-arctic species prowl the tundra beneath skies illuminated by the aurora borealis as the weather turns cold. Churchill is known as "The Polar Bear Capital of the World", with bear viewing possible from June through to November, however mid-October to mid-November is considered the peak time for sightings.

The train accommodates guests in comfortable Economy Class - with recliner chairs - or Sleeper Plus - with lie-flat beds, access to the 'dome car', and one private washroom with shower facilities per carriage. Year-round, Via Rail's glass-domed observation car (pictured above-right) gives passengers unrivalled views of stunning Canadian scenery and magical night skies. The train runs year-round twice weekly departing Winnipeg on Tuesdays and Sundays.



To book, call one of
our Canada experts
on **1300 363 302**.

www.viarail.ca



DISCOVER THE CANALS & WATERWAYS OF EUROPE



Europe will forever hold an attraction for travellers thanks to its sheer diversity: a fascinating history, rich and varied cultures, famous cities, dramatic landscapes and the legendary coastline of the Mediterranean Sea.

One of the best ways to discover its many treasures is by cruising the endless canals and waterways that criss-cross the continent on board an intimate hotel barge. Natural Focus offer a variety of hotel barges that accommodate between 4 and 20 guests and operate cruises in over nine countries, including France, England, Scotland and Italy.

These expertly designed cruise itineraries run between April and October and cater to all travellers, including families. Each departure combines visits to historic sites and small towns, wineries and distilleries, with time to relax onboard or walk or cycle along the meandering tow paths.

The barges offer outstanding service and superb cuisine. As soon as you step foot on board your week-long culinary adventure begins. Each delightful feast and candlelit dinner is prepared by highly trained onboard chefs. Enjoy the tastes of each region,

as dishes are created using only the freshest artisanal fare sourced from local markets enroute.

Scotland offers magical scenery and local legends to be revealed at every turn, as you float along the Caledonian Canal and lochs of the Great Glen. In France discover the timeless beauty of the Loire Valley, or learn the history of the Cathars and famous Carcassonne as you glide down the beautiful Canal Du Midi - a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The canal is considered by many as "the" engineering masterpiece of the 17th century, joining with the Canal de Garonne to connect the Mediterranean Sea with the Atlantic Ocean. Aside from its many locks, aqueducts and tunnels, the canal meanders past picturesque villages, ancient Roman fortifications and renowned vineyards.

Some departures may also have a certain focus; sports lovers can choose a golf or tennis itinerary, while other interests include art, culinary delights and walking. Without doubt this is a delightful way to "slow travel" through Europe.



Travel with family & friends

Sharing adventures with family and friends is one of life's greatest pleasures. Aside from creating lifelong memories, travelling with friends and family as a private group allows for greater freedom to choose your own experiences. Natural Focus offers a wide selection of cruises through Europe on these beautiful small vessels which can be booked privately for small groups. With everything taken care of, this really is the ultimate way to experience a country in all its richness.

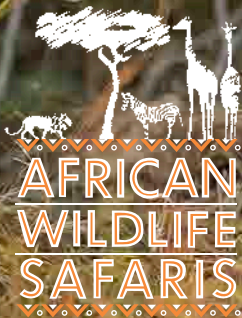
For more details please contact one of our Destination Specialists on 1300 363 302.



"The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it."

Robert Swan OBE


NATURAL FOCUS



www.africanwildlifesafaris.com | www.naturalfocussafaris.com.au

