

Anastasia's Africa

24 hours in a lodge

The rhythm of life on safari is designed to give you the best possible wildlife experience. For new safari goers, this can lead to some uncertainty about the daily routine. We aim to provide some clarity.

For most people, holidays mean spontaneity and control of their time – and what better than a safari, combining comfort and untamed wilderness, to deliver this freedom? It can come as a surprise, then, to arrive in camp and find your daily routine dictated by the workings of the bush and the logistics of running a remote operation.

Dawn alarm-calls, set mealtimes and a ban on solitary walks – it all sounds more *Tom Brown's Schooldays* than *Out of Africa*. Yet the day is designed to maximise game-viewing success and guests' safety and comfort.

The following timeline shows the framework of a typical day on safari. **Remember, however, that this is a general outline. Throughout Africa there are variations.** In southern Africa, for example, several lodges may operate a system of longer game activities with two main meals (brunch and dinner) and in Tanzania, you could find yourself staying out all day with a picnic lunch.

The routine may also vary depending on your location and the scenery and activities available.

Seasonal changes also need to be considered. The timeline presented will hold true for most times of the year except mid-winter, when it can be so chilly at dawn that even the wildlife rises late. Your morning routine may be

swopped around, so that your game drive takes place after breakfast, which will be taken earlier.

Safaris may be more structured than most ordinary holidays, but with an understanding of the routine, you can tailor them to fit your needs (even if you might not be able to arrange the whole day according to your whim). Camp staff are generally as accommodating and flexible as possible. If you're tired and want to miss a game drive or a meal, that's fine. If it's pouring with rain at dawn, the game drive can take place later, when the rain has stopped but before it gets too hot again.

Further activities can also be arranged, but be reasonable with your requests: your guides have a long working day, from dawn until after dinner, and their breaks are well earned.

Ultimately, life in a lodge is centred around you having the most enjoyable and successful safari possible. →

Dusk to dusk.
The evening draws in at The Hide, Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe

PAUL KARNSTEDT
PHOTOGRAPHY /
THE HIDE



Breakfast service. Buffalo approaching The Hide, Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe
PAUL KARNSTEDT PHOTOGRAPHY / THE HIDE



5.00-6.00 am Wake up with the animals

This isn't a holiday for enjoying lie-ins. Most game-viewing activities occur early morning and late afternoon, when the light is rich and animals are not hiding from the searing midday sun. This highly logical behaviour forms the basic structure for safari camp life.

You'll be woken in your tent or chalet by staff bringing tea or coffee (place your order the night before) and a basin of hot water for washing (if you don't have running water). Alternatively, hot drinks and rusks might be served in the dining area or round the fire before the morning's game drive, walk or *mokoro* (dugout) trip.



6.00 - 9.00 am Morning game activities

The guides will show you the best of the area. Be sure to ask if you have any special requests to see particular places or species. Water and hot drinks – usually with a snack such as rusks – are carried on board. Drink enough to avoid dehydration.

On cold winter mornings, the game drive may occur a little later, after an early breakfast, when the day is starting to warm up.



9.00 - 10.00 am Breakfast

This is the first self-control test of the day. Large amounts of good food will be laid before you, but as safari life is relatively inactive (unless you're on a walking safari), several days in camp can feel like a premeditated assault on your waistline. Expect a buffet of cereals, fruit, toast, and The Full bacon-and-eggs Monty, cooked to order.

Usually this is served at the lodge, although some camps, especially in East Africa, will vary the routine by including a bush breakfast. Staff will set this up while you're enjoying your game-viewing activity.

In southern Africa there is an increasing trend towards having longer morning game activities prior to a brunch; a real feast to see you through to afternoon tea.



10-12.30pm Free time

Tempting as it may be, you can't go wandering off into the bush on your own. Most camps or lodges have a small library containing reference books about the bush and wildlife, and possibly novels left by other guests, but it's advisable to take a couple of your own books. You could play cards or use the time for things you don't normally have time to do, such as sketching. This is an excellent time for birdwatching, as camps are usually constructed in the shade of trees. Many also overlook waterholes and there may be a hide you could sit at. You'll be surprised how good the game viewing can be at this time.

It may seem like a void at first, but you soon appreciate having this free time structured into your day. →

This highly logical behavior forms the basic structure for safari camp life



Team effort. Your guide is responsible for all wildlife-related activities with you, and will usually share meals with you. Behind the scenes, a team will take care of the rooms and the general well-being of the camp (BOTTOM RIGHT). Relaxing in camp after lunch doesn't mean your wildlife experience is put on hold

LEFT: THE BUSHCAMP COMPANY, SOUTH LUANGWA NP, ZAMBIA; RIGHT (2) OLD MONDORO, LOWER ZAMBEZI NP, ZAMBIA

WHO'S WHO IN A LODGE

Camp manager

A camp manager is your first point of contact regarding anything concerning your overall stay. He or she can liaise with head office via the radio and will try to rectify any complaints or accommodate any requests, whether regarding dietary quirks, a change in your daily timetable or your need for more camera SD cards to be sent in on the next plane. The manager will host you during meals and should check everything is comfortable and satisfactory. Essentially, his or her job is to ensure that the camp runs smoothly and guests have as flawless a stay as possible.

Guides

Guides are responsible for all game-viewing activities. They will pick routes designed to optimise your chances of spotting animals, and to provide variation in both scenery and species. They should also try to accommodate your wishes and to find wildlife you particularly want to see (though there are never guarantees – one of the chief pleasures of a safari). A guide is responsible for your safety in the bush, so it is vital you follow his or her instructions. Guides are also your primary source of information about the workings of the bush and its inhabitants, and should be happy to answer any questions. They will usually also host you during meals.

Camp staff

Behind the scenes is a team of chambermaids who will clean your tent during the morning game drive and unfurl your mosquito net during dinner; mechanics who maintain the safari vehicles and generator; and kitchen staff who create meals that defy belief given your location. Remember them when you tip, even though you may not meet them.



12.30 - 1.30pm

Lunch

Meals are usually served at set times due to the obvious logistical constraints of preparing feasts over a fire in the bush and of keeping prepared food fresh. Lunch usually comprises a buffet of salads, often with hot options, bread baked in the coals and a choice of puddings.

Meals are the main chance to mix with other guests; potluck dictates how agreeable they are! Some camps arrange a special honeymooners' lunch as a one-off treat, so newly-weds can eat in a private (but safe) spot surrounded only by wilderness.



1.30 - 3.30 pm

Siesta time

When the heat haze rises, cicadas screech and light becomes blinding, all sane living things head for cover. It's siesta time. If it's really hot and you don't have a fan, try lying beneath a damp sarong to keep cool. Some lodges will have a swimming pool or individual plunge pools to help you cool off. Alternatively, savour the peace and carry on sketching, reading or playing cards. Most tents and chalets have private verandahs where you can relax in peace.



3.30 - 4.00 pm

Afternoon tea

Mid-afternoon, staff will wake you by knocking discreetly. If you have a bucket shower, they may bring warm water now so you are fresh for afternoon tea.

You're likely to be offered cake or biscuits, however if you have had a large brunch in late morning – instead of breakfast and lunch – a spread of savouries may be served. →



AFRICAN BUSH CAMPS, HWANGE NP, ZIMBABWE

Sundowners.
Usually the guide will find a suitable spot to enjoy drinks at sunset, before a spotlight night drive back to the lodge

 **4.00 - 7.30pm**
Game viewing

The evening game drive or walk offers a chance to search for a particular species you haven't yet seen, or perhaps follow the progress of a pride or herd spotted earlier.

Guides usually find a scenic viewing spot for sundowners. Dusk is short and darkness comes quickly in Africa, so by the time you're driving back to camp, you'll probably be using a spotlight to pick out animals' luminous eyes and shadowy forms.

You're likely to return to the lodge about one-to one and a half hours after dark.

 **7.30 - 10.00pm**
Dinner time

There'll be about 15-30 minutes for freshening up or getting changed and having aperitifs round the campfire. Dinner is usually candle-lit and can be al fresco or within an open-sided dining area. Three courses, with wines, is the norm, possibly including some game meat. There may be a choice of two dishes and most lodges are very good at providing a wide ranging menu during your stay.

The food in most camps is excellent, but tell the camp manager if you have any specific dietary requirements or dislikes.

Dress codes vary between camps; smart-casual is usually appropriate.

 **10.00 - late**
Winding down

The most interesting conversations take place over digestifs around the fire. Revelry can continue into the night if people are feeling boisterous (staff will stay up as late as you want), but often it feels natural to sleep early, following the rhythms of the bush. In unlit camps, guests may be given torches or a lantern for finding their way to their tents, or they may be escorted.

By special request, or if there has been an interesting sighting in the area, there may be a night drive, if allowed in the area. An informed guide may give you a lesson in Africa's incredible stars. Fall asleep to the chorus of the bush. Animals won't pass through camp during daytime but may well do so in darkness - which spoor (footprints) will appear overnight? 🐾



Indulgence.
Most camps offer great showers and/or baths, in a wonderful outdoor setting