



4 Things to Avoid on Safari

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There are plenty of articles out there about what to do when on safari; what to pack, what to expect, what to wear, etc. Very few tell you what NOT to do, so I thought I'd venture a few that I've learnt.

- **Sleeping In**

The night chorus of the bush tends to have a wonderfully soporific effect. Combined with early morning game drives, the excitement of amazing wildlife sightings, and one or two more glasses of wine around the campfire than might be wise, Africa's night sounds might well cause drooping eyelids before the dinner conversation has run its course. Although you are on holiday, the days can still be tiring out here, much of the fatigue simply caused by an overstimulation of your senses. And inevitably, when feeling really tired, the temptation is there to tell your ranger that you'll have a little sleep in in the morning; either just going out later (if the whole vehicle is on board with this) or missing the drive entirely. Don't!

With beds this comfortable, of course it's tempting to sleep in and skip a game drive. But that would be a bad decision!



Even if you've already had some crazy wildlife viewing and think you have seen it all, I can guarantee you that you haven't. Get out as early as you can, before the sun is up if possible. Game drives are scheduled then for a reason;

temperatures are cooler (particularly in the summer), animals are more active, the light is usually better for photography... I could go on.



Even common animals like impalas offer wonderful photographic opportunities when the light is good. But you won't be there to see them if you sleep in and miss the sunrise.

I remember a few years ago when the Vomba female had made a kill near camp. She was raising a young cub at the time who wasn't used to the vehicles yet, and the only way were likely to see him was if we sat and waited patiently, hoping he'd come out. Well, we did, but he didn't. After two hours sitting in absolute silence, waiting for the little leopard to emerge, it started getting dark, so we left, leaving the two to their kill. One of the guests had to catch a flight the next morning at around 09:30, which is a bit earlier than usual, and opted to sleep in, despite my insistence that he should come out, as we could still see something special on the last drive, and we could get him back to camp in good time to catch the flight anyway.



Both these photos were taken during a drive in which I had a guest sleep in. In the first one the Ravenscourt young male had just caught this impala lamb that we had watched take its first steps. The second: The Vomba female and her cub emerge from the thickets.

He could not be persuaded though, and when we left camp in the morning we were one guest short. Not only did we bump into the Vomba female moving with her cub across the airstrip, which was both unexpected and spectacular, but we also found a male leopard who was watching an impala give birth. After we witnessed the tiny lamb's first steps, the leopard moved in and snatched it up before our horrified gazes. Obviously not a feel-good sighting, but it's certainly something you don't witness every day. To top it all off we had returned to camp before the guest had even finished his breakfast, so he would have been able to enjoy the whole drive with us. You can never see it all in the bush, so no matter how tired you are or how late a night you've had at dinner, *go out early in the morning!*

- **Listening to the Radio**

The ranger and trackers communicate via radio out in the field. Whilst out on game drive, there's a good chance you could overhear something coming over the wire, particularly if you're sitting in the front seat of the Game Viewer.

Ignore it.

We are incredibly lucky to have a low vehicle-to-area ratio here, which means that there's very little pressure on sightings, and given that vehicles might be 15km from each other, there's very little chance that what is coming through on the radio will be relevant to your drive.

Your ranger wants you to have the best time possible. He or she knows the property, knows what's out there, knows where you are in relation to anything that's been found, and has a



plan to give you the best safari you could have. If he or she is ignoring the radio, it's not because they haven't heard it, it's because either the update isn't critical (tracks of a lion/leopard have been found, not the animal itself) or you are too far away to be able to get there in time. By listening to the radio, you are only going to confuse yourself needlessly or make yourself think you're missing out on something that you aren't. Trust your guide to make the best decisions for your vehicle. You will see amazing things. That, ultimately is why your ranger works in the bush. They want to see cool stuff too!

- **Being in a Rush**

We were chatting amongst the ranging team a while ago and trying to work out how often we find predators by a) tracking them until they are spotted on foot, b) just bumping into them, or c) hearing the alarm calls of other animals that give away their position.

C) was the clear winner.



The tracking effort generally gets you into the vicinity of the animal(s) you are looking for, but it is invariably the eyes and ears of the many prey species on the reserve that will find the predator for you. Squirrels, impalas, kudus, and even tiny birds; all will announce loudly if they have seen something that represents a threat, and through their vociferousness, you can move in and find the animal yourself.

Stop and appreciate things like this three-banded plover...if you want to see more things like this... The Tamboti female, who had been found because one of the rangers heard the alarm calls of an impala herd.

It is when you are rushing about with the vehicle on that you will miss these alarm calls. Even if you are 20 metres from an alarming squirrel, the throb of a diesel engine will most likely drown its noise out. By stopping regularly, taking it slowly and appreciating the small things, you are far, far more likely to hear alarm calls of prey species, or even the calls of the predators themselves. Your ears will help you way more often than your eyes do, but by being too insistent on driving past some of the less high-profile game, it's almost a guarantee that you won't see as many of the predators either. If your ranger wants to stop quickly to explain the intricacies of a blue waxbill's nest, and birds aren't really your thing, go with it anyway! You'll be very grateful when the leopard female suddenly calls from just down the hill, and out of nowhere you're in the sighting of your life!

- **Worrying Too Much About the Photograph**

With DSLR cameras and superb lenses, the focus while out on safari is often about photography. And with social media broadcasting the most beautiful wildlife images all around the world from game reserves all across Africa, it is easy to be duped into thinking that amazing safari photographs are a dime a dozen. While you may well get presented with many great photographic opportunities on game drive, it's important to remember why you're here in the first place: to experience the magic of the African bush.

The photography aspect should always come second (although sometimes it's a very close second).

Know your camera's limitations, know your own photographic ability, and be able to accept when the situation doesn't lend itself to photography. If it doesn't, put the camera away and just enjoy. Manage your own photographic expectations, and always remember to ask your guide what he or she recommends in the situation.



This is not the best time to be taking pictures....

This is the better opportunity...

Leopard on branch in golden light?
Camera out and get snapping!
Leopard moving through thick bush while you desperately try keep it in sight from the Land Rover? Cameras down. **Ultimately, just being out in Nature should be the core reason for your visit.**



Those are just a few off the top of my head. Try as hard as you can to avoid them, and your safari will be far more rewarding.