



BINOCULARS

Going on a safari is not just about a holiday and a rest – although both are extremely important to today's frenetic lifestyle. Going on safari is about learning. Learning other cultures, seeing a different country, not having to plan your day to day itinerary as it is all thought out for you, learning and seeing different animals and birds, insects and plants and about watching, patiently watching and taking it all in. Enjoying Africa in the full sense, the smell, its colours, the sunset and sunrises as the deserts and the savannah with their rocks change colour during the day.

Appreciating life, life that day after day is different to the life we know, watching the sunbird feed its young or the hornbill build its nest and the lion return to his territory after a night of fending off other males from his pride. Watching the dung beetle roll her ball of dung after having carefully planted her eggs in it. Watching the line of safari ants moving returning from having raided a termite mound.

Having been brought up in Kenya and having been in the safari business for 25 years, as a professional hunter, a guide and pilot, I hate it when I see visitors who only wish to see the "Big 5" and are so focused on this check list that they even forget where they are – they could easily be in a zoo or a European safari park. As they are not stopping on top of a hill and watching and seeing, listening and taking a deep breath and saying, "wow, I'm in Africa".

Whatever it is you are watching, be it tribes, markets, sunsets, countryside or the birds and bees or the gerenuk on his hind legs feeding off an acacia, you want to be able to watch them without changing or interfering with their daily life. You want to be at a distance and if possible a distance that makes you just blend in with your surroundings. In order to be able to enjoy what you

want to watch you need binoculars, whether you are a child or an adult. Everybody should have a pair with them, strapped to the neck, from the moment you get out of bed to when you return to it. Constantly you will see curiosity takes the better of you. If you have never before bothered to identify a bird, for example, you start wanting to do it, and the same goes with everything that you start to see. Your binoculars should be yours and not yours to share; as asking to borrow somebody else's means; asking, readjusting the focus and – losing the moment; and after a few days you stop asking and you slowly diminish the experience and the excitement.

The binoculars should be of good quality, have a reasonable field of vision and a medium magnification. So never spend less than GB£ 150 / US\$ 200. Magnification should be not less than 7 and not more than 10. Field of view should be 30 to 42. Don't buy binoculars with a zoom – they are just a gimmick. "Field of view" is important for allowing more light to enter the lenses and hence make it easier to use the binoculars in low light. It also gives you a bigger field so it's easier to focus on what you're watching, especially if it is something small.

Small pocket binoculars will have a small field of view and hence the advantage of being able to slip them into your pocket is immediately nullified when you get frustrated with using them later. That said, it's important to have binoculars that are not too heavy, especially as they are hanging round your neck for many hours.

My choice is – **Leitz or Zeiss 7x40 or 8x40 or 10x40.** Size about 15cm high and 13cm wide.

Enjoy your Safari,

Stefano Cheli