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5 African Safaris That Are Actually Family-Friendly

Many safaris outfits aren't optimized for families with young kids—or demanding teens. Here are five notable exceptions. Plus three others exclusively for grown-ups.



PACK TO PACK A game drive at the teen-friendly Jack's Camp in Botswana.

By Heidi Mitchell

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SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA slid off the top of the travel bucket list during the past two years. Government border closures, required isolation periods and many unknowns (Do I want to share a puddle-jumper with strangers? What if I get sick?) rendered a photo-safari holiday unappetizing. But now that restrictions have been lifted, bookings are roaring back, especially for entire clans. Jacqui Goodwin, head of travel company Gray & Co.'s Cape Town office, cites a 35% increase in safari bookings compared to 2019, with more than 50% of them by families. Trips for families with young children have tripled.

But not every game reserve is optimal for families. Many camps are located in remote areas, requiring small-aircraft flights and bumpy 4x4 drives. Some lodges are aimed at couples, don't have connecting rooms or don't allow kids at all, while most follow a daily routine (predawn wake-up calls, long morning drives) that would make a tween scream. Nevertheless, a handful of lodges cater specifically to families. "I know camps where kids learn bush skills from Maasai guides and interact with kids from completely different cultures," said Ms. Goodwin.

For ideas of where to venture into the wild with your brood—as well as three other trips exclusively for adults—read on.





ILLUSTRATION: KERRY HYNDMAN

BEST FOR: TEENS

Jack's Camp, Botswana

Renovated last year, Jack's Camp still maintains its signature retro-glam style, a throwback to a 1940s aesthetic. The camp, set in the Kalahari desert and an hour's bush flight from the Botswana town of Maun, features an extravagantly cushioned Persian Tea Tent, a canvas-topped Pool Pavilion and nine tented guest quarters, each one stuffed with enough antiques and curios to supply a month's worth of #vintagevibes content for your budding TikTok account. Since Jack's is adjacent to the million-acre Makgadikgadi Pans National Park, it's a particularly good choice for teenagers eager to explore. Camp activities include quad biking, scouting walks with Bushmen, horseback riding and safari drives. *Double tents from \$1,450 per adult, \$875 per teen (up to two), [NaturalSelection.travel](https://www.naturalselectiontravel.com)*

BEST FOR: TWEENS

Saruni Mara Lodge, Kenya





Saruni Mara Lodge in Kenya, on a private concession bordering the Masai Mara National Reserve.

On a private concession bordering the Masai Mara National Reserve, Saruni Mara Lodge promotes the region's cultural assets as well as the wildlife attractions. The guides, all local Maasai warriors, run a family-oriented program named the Warrior Academy, where participants (ages 3 and up) learn to fashion bows and arrows, track animals and spot medicinal plants. The lodge consists of seven types of accommodations: five rooms built for two and then two villas—one sleeps four and the other sleeps six. Families can also hang out together on their own private veranda and try to spy one of 550 bird species or attempt to keep quiet as a herd of elephant march by. *From \$2,120 per night for the two-bedroom Family Villa, Saruni.com*

BEST FOR: LITTLE KIDS

Kwandwe Private Game Reserve, South Africa





South Africa's Kwandwe's Ecce Lodge, in a private game reserve near Port Elizabeth.

PHOTO: HONEST WORK

Travel experts often recommend South Africa for families with young kids because flights tend to be direct, and in areas like the Eastern Cape malaria is virtually nonexistent. Kwandwe's Ecce Lodge, set in a private game reserve near Port Elizabeth, overlooks a deep shale escarpment where Big-Five game roam. Of the six guest quarters, three are two-bedrooms that sleep two adults and two kids under 16. Each party gets its own guide and vehicle so you can venture out on your own schedule, then cool off in your plunge pool when back at the lodge. *From \$3,350 a night for 2-bedroom suites, Kwandwe.com*

Morukuru Family Madikwe, South Africa



Morukuru Family Camp in northwest South Africa.

In northwest South Africa, in the Madikwe Game Reserve, Morukuru Family Camp comprises three separate exclusive-use houses, each with its own staff of eight that includes a tracker, a guide and a chef. You can plan your own schedule; Skip the morning game drive in favor of a massage, for example, while the camp's babysitters mind the kids. Families can organize a night sleeping in the open air in Morukuru's elevated platform called a "hide," overlooking a watering hole. Beds are draped in mosquito netting and you'll be equipped with a walkie talkie just in case anyone in your party gets the jitters. *Three-bedroom Morukuru River House and 5-bedroom Farm House from \$2,340 per night, four people; Morukuru.com*

BEST FOR: MULTIGENERATIONAL FAMILIES

Laragai House, Kenya



The 8-bedroom Laragai House in Kenya's Borana Conservancy.

Few lodges in game reserves offer exclusive-use homes that can accommodate large groups with varied needs. A notable exception is Laragai House, an eight-bedroom, fully staffed safari retreat that sleeps 16. Isolated among 32,000 acres in Kenya's Borana Conservancy, the thatch-roof house provides all the amenities of a family compound: a dining room, a bar, a drawing room, a pool house, a TV room and even a games room. At your own pace, you can head out on a game-viewing drive or track rhinos; go paddle-boarding or mountain biking; then reconvene for picnics or sundowners in any one of the surrounding spectacular spots. *Exclusive-use from \$4,515 for up to six guests per night, LaragaiHouse.com*

Grown-up Safaris

Three African adventures for the 18-and-over crowd

BEST FOR: ASTRONOMY BUFFS

Tuludi, Botswana



Conservation-driven tourism company Natural Selection's most luxe property opened in 2019 in Khwai Private Reserve in the eastern reaches of Botswana's Okavango Delta. Game drives take place in jeeps and in traditional mokoro dugout boats. The retreat's seven stylish treehouse-inspired tents stand on the edge of a vast flood plain. Book three nights and you can take your fourth in the Sky Suite, a remote, open-air platform with a king-size bed. *Two-person tents from \$990 per night; Sky Suite surcharge from \$495 per person, per night; [NaturalSelection.travel](https://www.naturalselectiontravel.com)*

BEST FOR: WANDERERS

Serengeti Under Canvas, Tanzania



If you're determined to see the Great Wildebeest Migration—where millions of animals stampede across the grasslands of East Africa—you often have to resign yourself to driving for hours from your lodge to the site of the action. andBeyond's Under Canvas mobile camp offers a more efficient option: the camp, with just nine tents, moves with the herds. Guests travel around in rugged vehicles and each day pull up to find their own private campsite, complete with chandeliers, crystal, china and outdoor heated bucket showers. *Two-person tents start at \$915 per person, per night;* andBeyond.com

Best for: SEASONED SAFARI-GOERS

Congo Conservation Company, Republic of the Congo



Guests at the Odzala Discovery Camps, run by the Congo Conservation Company, kayaking down the Lekoli River.

PHOTO: SCOTT RAMSAY

The Republic of the Congo is a far more rustic and adventurous safari

destination than the usual spots in southern and eastern Africa, but Congo Conservation Company (CCC) caters to thrillseekers looking for a more authentic wildlife experience. CCC's camps are all in the Congo Basin, where the animals endemic to the rainforest take center stage. Seven to 10-day trips include tracking the elusive Western Lowland gorillas, though you're nearly certain to see forest elephants, monkeys, buffalo, bongo antelopes and flocks of African grey parrots. And rather than stay confined to a 4X4, guests can also explore by foot or kayak. Accommodations are either in forest cabins close to the gorillas (at Ngaga Camp), or in thatched chalets in the grasslands (Lango Camp) or the lagoon-like bai (Mboko Camp). *Seven-night safaris from \$12,750, per person;*

CongoConservation.travel

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