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Plan the perfect safari

Lavish bushcamps, G&Ts at sunset, wildlife everywhere: safaris ooze romance. But where to go? Here's how to plan your Africa adventure

Words: **Mike Unwin**. Additional research by the **Unique Honeymoons** team



You're the last two to clamber down from the vehicle, brushing the dust from each other's clothes. The flickering firelight and clink of ice tells you sundowners await, followed by an evening spent swapping anecdotes of the day's encounters under a canopy of stars. In a moment, you'll join the campfire circle. But first the two of you take your G&Ts away

from the flames' glow to contemplate the fading embers of yet another outrageous sunset. From the darkness across the river comes the low moan of a lion.

Safari means 'long journey' in Swahili. But today, safari-goers can bypass the arduous treks of yesteryear and be deep in the African bush within 24 hours of leaving Heathrow. Nonetheless, that earlier, romanticised era of Blixen and Hemingway retains its allure: a safari is, simply, one of the most enticing honeymoon adventures.

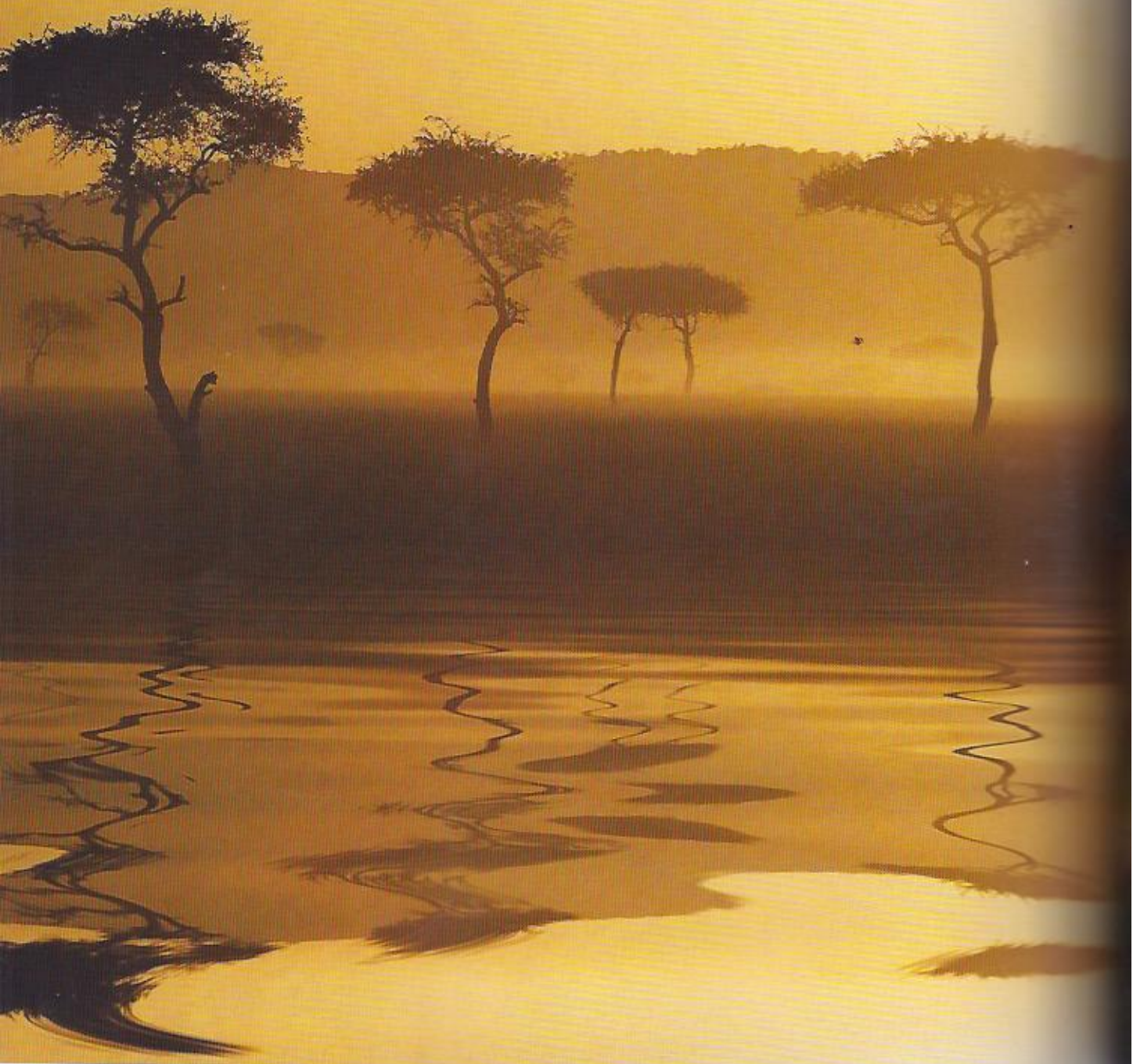
So, with half a continent at your disposal, where do you start? Should it be the endless plains of Tanzania's Serengeti or the hidden waterways of Botswana's Okavango? Would you rather sit back and enjoy the spectacle of wildebeest herds sweeping across open

savannah? Or are you both more active types, who dream of paddling past lazing crocodiles or tailing a pride of lions on foot?

Your choice of honeymoon safari comes down partly to the wildlife. The 'Big Five' top most couples' wishlists - that's lion, leopard, buffalo, elephant and rhino, so named because they were once considered the hunter's most dangerous adversaries. Many places boast all or most of these, but some offer better odds than others. Then there are the equally iconic giraffes, zebras and hippos - not forgetting the fascinating smaller stuff, from chameleons and dung beetles to meerkats and hornbills.

The good news is that - in general wildlife terms - you can't really go wrong. The sheer richness and variety at almost any one safari spot, and the grandeur of the African backdrop, is bound to blow you away.

The decision, then, comes down to other factors. Are you looking for an exclusive wilderness escape? Do you want colonial-style pampering? Or would you prefer to roll your sleeves up? Is your priority to cram in as much as possible or to enjoy a more leisurely immersion in one destination? And the clincher, of course: how much are you willing to spend? Read on for the best honeymoon safari ideas...



6 of the best safaris for honeymooners

1 MASAI MARA, KENYA

For... Big cats, big skies, big romance

Picture just one safari destination and chances are it's this one - if only because many a TV documentary has made Kenya's rolling savannahs, flat-topped acacias and lazing predators emblematic of a continent.

The Masai Mara is a northern extension of Tanzania's Serengeti, and the huge herds of wildebeest and other grazers that arrive from July to October dominate the park's ecology in a similar way. This jaw-dropping spectacle is a magnet for predators; there is no better place to notch up lion and cheetah kills in quick time, helped by the open terrain and the cats' ease around vehicles. Other draw-cards include elephant, giraffe

and rare black rhinos. This is also a great place to try a hot air balloon flight, followed by a champagne breakfast.

The Mara's downside is its popularity, sometimes leading to intrusive clusters of minibuses. For a more exclusive experience, head to upmarket camps in the west and in the private conservancies that ring the northern Mara (and can offer walking safaris, which aren't allowed inside the Reserve proper).

Budget: Options at all price levels.

When to go: Cooler and more accessible during dry season, May-Oct. July to September is best for the migration.

Where to stay: Romantic lodges and camps abound here; choice picks include the Governors' Camps of *Big Cat Diary* fame (www.governorscamp.com); the expensive but highly regarded Rekeru Camp, home to

famous Maasai guide Jackson Looseyia (www.asiliaafrica.com/rekeru); Basecamp Masai Mara (www.basecampexplorer.com), just outside the reserve, which has private outdoor showers with awesome views; the Kicheche Mara and Bush Camps (www.kicheche.com), where keen snappers could try photographic safaris; and the quietly situated Porini Lion Camp (www.porini.com). Budget options are limited to campsites near the Oloolaimutiek and Talek gates.

Add on: Combine a Masai Mara safari with time on the south Kenyan coast or the Lamu Archipelago (check Foreign Office advice before booking); here, try diving, windsurfing, a *dhow* cruise - or simply relax. >>



Wandering spread: A Maasai guide welcomes you to Mount Kenya
Wanderlust: 'Golden hour' in the Masai
Wildlife: you might even spot a cheetah