

Orlando Sentinel



1:44 PM EDT

Friday, June 7, 2013

83° F

- HOME LOCAL WEATHER SPORTS BUSINESS ENTERTAINMENT LIFE/FAMILY HEALTH TRAVEL OPINION VIDEOS
- EXPLORE.FLORIDA VACATION DEALS CRUISES ATTRACTIONS DAILY DISNEY BEACH GOLF SPRINGS NEWS

NBA Finals | Justin Bieber | Serena Williams | Marilyn Manson | Esther Williams | Leslie Van Houten

Search

Ads By Google



Home → Collections → Animals

amazon.com

Recon

Submit

Dreams of Africa are alive in the Okavango Delta

April 8, 2013 | By Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty, McClatchy-Tribune News Service

MAUN, Botswana - If you've paid for an African safari but you're still not clear about the details, bad on you. Making the same mistake, I didn't dig into the heart of the adventure before I headed to Southern Africa for my first wildlife safari, because I was always too busy. Bad on me!

By the time we reached the Okavango Delta, in northern Botswana, we'd been on the go for 24 hours, rocketing through nine time zones, three airplanes and four airports. Jet lagged and yawning, I ached for a hot shower and a good bed.

Ads By Google

Micato Safaris

Voted World's Best Tour Operator by Travel+Leisure for an ninth time.

www.Micato.com

Safaris in So. Africa

Top Safari Specialists Compete to Plan Your Trip. Best Advice & Value

safaris.zicasso.com

Related Articles

- Botswana Safari: It's Like Exploring
July 29, 1990
- Africa Lumbers Toward Game Parks
September 7, 2003
- Drought Threatens Africa's Animals
November 1, 1992
- Circle of life lesson for the post-'Lion King' set
March 14, 2008
- 3 Nations To Create Giant Game Reserve
December 9, 2002

Find More Stories About

- Animals
- Southern Africa
- Botswana

But when Botswana's big animals call, every moment counts. I'd barely unzipped my bag and put my toothbrush on the sink when they announced the afternoon game drive, starting at 4:30 p.m. No problem, I thought. I'll sleep late tomorrow. Until they explained that the next morning's game drive would start - as usual - at 6 a.m. sharp.

So why was I so clueless? Like most travelers who dream of Africa, we'd seen countless wildlife documentaries, thrilled to the scenery and yearned to experience those distant sights and sounds in person. Beyond that we didn't really know what to expect.

What's the Okavango Delta? The Okavango River, flowing southeast into northern Botswana from Angola and Namibia, has no outlet, either to other rivers or to the ocean. When annual spring floods reach the Delta, they slow down and spread out, refilling lagoons and marshes and turning woodland mounds into islets and this watery paradise into a self-contained sanctuary.

To protect this remarkable natural area, the Botswana government limits tourism by awarding guest concessions to qualified tour outfitters. Each company leases a specific numbered area and builds (or takes over existing structures) one or more lodges and guest tents. There are a few permanent lodges, built back in the day. But newer lodges and guest tents are required to be semi-permanent structures bolted onto raised (and sometimes terraced) wood decks that can be moved every few years.

A typical day: Your wake-up call arrives at 5:45 a.m. when a kitchen staffer knocks on your door, bearing a tray with tea or coffee and toast. Bolting it down, you hurry to the main lodge, grabbing a piece of fruit or a sweet roll to go. By 6 a.m., you, your guide and four to six other visitors are sitting in an open-topped ORV, heading away from camp in search of elephants, giraffe, antelope, rhinos, hippos, big cats, African buffalo, snakes and warthogs. Why so early? Simple. This is when the animals are awake and active.

At 9 a.m., or so, you'll stop for a trailside breakfast. By 10 or 11 a.m., as the day heats up and the animals head to the shade to sleep, the vehicles return to the lodge for lunch. Afterward, until 4:30 p.m., when the day begins to cool and the second game drives leave, you'll have time to meet your fellow guests, take a guided walk, read, browse in the gift shop, send Internet messages, swim in the pool or nap.

By 4:30 p.m., you've donned a lightweight shell, sprayed on the mosquito goo, and are out on the prowl again. As the sun drops in the west, male lions stretch and wake up, lionesses hunt, leopards steal through the underbrush and hyenas make the rounds to recent kills, hoping for leftovers. Antelope and zebras, waterbuck and bushbuck, kudus and impalas step out of the shade to graze. As the sun sets, you stop on the trail for a sundowner - wine, spirits, beer, cheese and conversation. As dusk falls, lucky visitors will hear male lions roar and hyenas cackle, a raucous chorus of yips, howls and barks.

Ads By Google

Norway in a nutshell

Most beautiful scenery in Norway. See our "Norway in a Nutshell" tour

www.norwaynutshell.com

By 8 p.m. - or later, if you've followed a leopard drag an impala up into a tree - you'll be dragging back into camp, tired but happy and ready for dinner. These leisurely and often lavish four-to-five course meals, served with wine, are entirely social, a chance to compare wildlife sightings, share personal histories and exchange email addresses. As the evening wears on, the elephants grow larger.

After digesting the lodge manager's command that you are never to walk alone at night, from your tent or to the lodge, a camp guide walks you back to your bed, leaving you with strict instructions to stay inside until the next morning. As the night turns dark and you fall asleep, you may hear huffing or rustling as animals prowl among the cabins. As there are no fences, they are free to check the swimming pool, rub up against the trees and walk past your tent. Soon you realize that they've turned the tables and you're the one in the zoo.

On the day you move to the next lodge on your itinerary, you'll join the morning game drive as usual then head for the grassy air strip nearby. The plane, a high-wing eight-seater, lands just before lunch, drops off new guests and picks you up. In 30 minutes or less you're at your next lodge in time for lunch.

Ads By Google

Meet Windstar's New Yacht

Discover Our New, All-Suite Yacht & Request the 2014 Voyage Collection!

www.WindstarCruises.com/OfficialSite

1 | 2 | Next

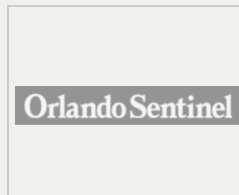
Featured Articles



Grant Hill's retirement leaves painful memories in Orlando



Islamic group: Slain man was unnamed, shot by FBI agent 7 times



Auction set for Warren Sapp's Windermere home

MORE:

Trayvon Martin video: He recorded two homeless men fighting over a bicycle

Phill Lewis Gets Year In Jail For Drunken Driving Death

New evidence in Zimmerman case: Trayvon texted about fighting, smoking marijuana

Casey Anthony bankruptcy hearing ends without ruling

Gun found on Disney ride raises questions about safety

Schamburg's Disease Causes Red Spots On The Legs