

TRIPS

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# My Africa

"As a wildlife photographer I have come face to face with great white sharks, orcas, anacondas and crocodiles, but my heart has never beaten as fast as when I was five meters away from a six-ton, territorial and volatile male elephant". Jorge Cervera Hauser.

BY ROBB REPORT EDITORIAL TEAM IN SPANISH



TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JORGE CERVERA HAUSE



LISTEN TO THE ARTICLE SUMMARY

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**By Jorge Cervera Hause.** "In the highlands you woke up in the morning and thought: 'Here I am, where I ought to be'," wrote Karen Blixen under the pseudonym Isak Dinesen in her book *Out of Africa* (1937). Later, Sidney Pollack brought it to the big screen in 1985, and the film won seven Academy Awards.

The aforementioned film, as well as countless documentaries and my grandfather's collection of National Geographic magazines, ignited in me an immense passion for Africa from childhood.

It was an obsession I couldn't shake until I finally visited the continent in 2007. And what an experience it was! I lived for two months in a private reserve in South Africa, participating in an Animal Planet reality show that was searching for the next generation of wildlife documentary filmmakers. At the time, it was the channel's most expensive production.

Relacionada:

[On The Edge Of The Arctic](#)

## Recommended Video



About 16 years later, after several documentaries, publications (and even two boats under my belt) I founded Sherpa GX, an adventure travel company where my passion and experience, combined with the rawest and most remote nature, come together to experience places that many people dream of... and that many don't even imagine exist.

Circumnavigating Spitsbergen on an icebreaker in search of polar bears; riding with the Kazakhs in the Altai Mountains, in eastern Mongolia; dancing with giant manta rays underwater in Revillagigedo, or sharing the fjords with orcas in the freezing Norwegian winter, are some of the expeditions we constantly do at Sherpa... but Africa will always be Africa.



Since producing *Unearthed*, I've returned to Africa many times and never tire of it. Before each trip, the anticipation and excitement are always the same as that first time.

When Ricardo Cos, a great friend of Sherpa GX, told me that he was dying to go to Africa, but on the condition that I was on the trip, I felt flattered and, at the same time, with an enormous responsibility: that of introducing someone new (and very dear) to the most enigmatic and spectacular continent that exists on this planet.

## CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

Today, Sherpa GX has an excellent relationship with the best safari operators in Africa, but how do you choose the ideal itinerary? First, you have to take into account the client's brief, which may include travel dates, budget, interests, and available time.

This time I had free rein, as long as the trip was in May. So, I decided to create a sort of "Africa 101," a tasting menu where Ricardo could see a little bit of everything I love about this place.

The fifth month is a very good one; what the industry considers shoulder season, different from the peak season, where you usually have the best safaris but also the most people, which detracts from the experience.



In southern Africa, the rains have ended and winter is about to begin. The pastures are drying up, making wildlife sightings easier. Meanwhile, in East Africa, the rainy season is drawing to a close, but the vast savanna, greener than usual, offers an incredible experience, far from the crowds, provided you choose your lodges wisely.

In the end, there were five of us on the trip: Alejandra, Ricardo's girlfriend; Diego, a childhood friend and great adventure companion; and Juan, a Colombian with whom I've shared trips to Revillagigedo National Park, the Pantanal wetlands, Chilean Patagonia, and the Galápagos Islands. They all arrived at different stages of the journey. Diego joined us in Namibia, and Juan in Zimbabwe, who, after completing the optional Sherpa excursion, would venture into Rwanda, Botswana, and Namibia.

The inspiration began with the tasting menu I mentioned in previous paragraphs. And with that said, this is how we served dinner...

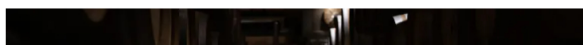
## AMUSE BOUCHE CAPE TOWN

You're sitting on the waterfront at seven in the morning, and your espresso is a balm for the soul as the cool Atlantic wind reminds you that your reservation is on the southern wing of the mainland. Clouds embrace Table Mountain in the distance—as usual—and below, the picture-postcard view of the marina and the Cape Grace Hotel, a local landmark.

The main plan for the first day is to tour vineyards, specifically in the Franschhoek region. We start the morning with a horseback ride through the vineyards of Babylonstoren, my favorite property in the area, where Kansas, my horse—very stubborn, by the way—gallops at all times, even without being asked.

After our horseback ride away from the vineyards frequented by tourists, we had our first tasting at Anthonij Rupert. This family-run winery produces the renowned sparkling wine L'Omarins, and my favorite South African reds.

Their blends and Syrah are spectacular, and I admire this winery even though —ironically— it doesn't produce a good Pinotage, the region's flagship wine.







During the tasting in the gardens of one of their farms we became friends with the Bisbee family, the same one that organizes the most important sport fishing tournament in the world in Cabo San Lucas, where I lived for four years.

Our maritime history in Baja California resulted in an impressive chemistry and a rich conversation where wine and anecdotes with mutual friends brightened a good part of the afternoon.

Our time with the Bisbees lasted so long that we missed our lunch reservation at Delaire Graff, a vineyard between Franschhoek and Stellenbosch (the other major wine region) that combines good wine with art and hospitality.

There was no other option but to do another tasting at Anthonij Rupert. The wine flowed like water, and we decided to skip dinner at Babel (a restaurant inside Babylonstoren, and my favorite in South Africa).

When we arrived at our hotel we couldn't walk in a straight line and our lack of balance confirmed that skipping dinner was a good decision.

Nothing expresses the success of a wine tasting like the fact that plans are constantly changing because the wine is good and there is a lot of laughter.



The next day, after a delicious breakfast, we were ready for our next adventure.

At nine in the morning we took off from the heliport aboard a red Airbus H135, and were able to fully admire Cape Town, Table Mountain, Lion's Head Mountain, and the DHL Stadium.

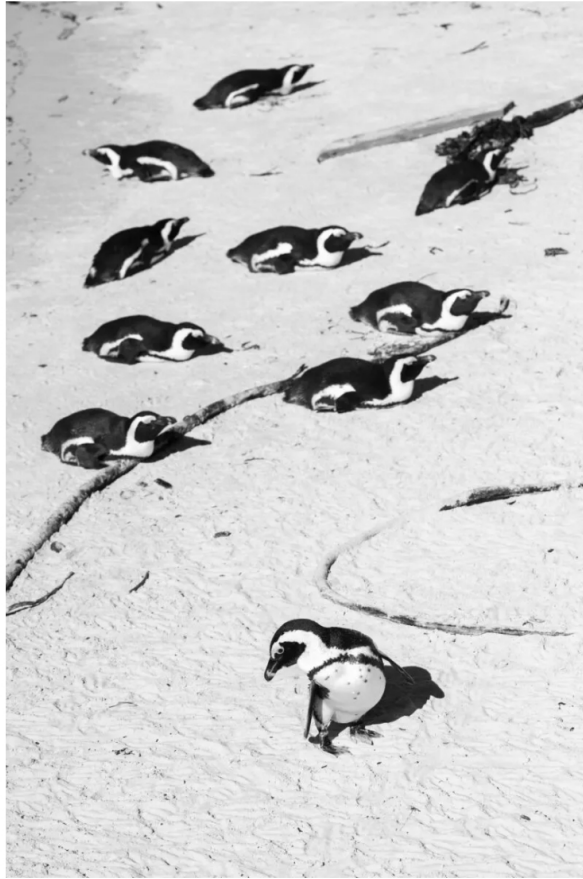
We skirted the city to the west and headed south. On these beaches, the clouds and the waves merge into one, sometimes revealing the rocky terrain through the cracks that pierce the light in the mist. After 30 minutes of cliffs and lighthouses, we finally flew over Cape Agulhas, the southernmost point of Africa.



Upon landing at Miller's Point, which in the first half of the 19th century was a whaling station, we were intercepted by a film crew who were waiting for someone else to get off the

helicopter.

Once on land, a sprinter van took us to the southernmost point of Cape Point, where we could hike to the Cape of Good Hope. This 45-minute walk along an easily accessible trail offers stunning views of the cliffs, as well as close encounters with wild ostriches and the occasional baboon.



On the drive back to Cape Town, we made a stop at Boulder's Beach to see the South African penguins, also known as jackass penguins because of the noise they make, similar to that of a donkey.

Then we headed to Simon's Town, passing by the Shark Explorers office (a project my friend Morne Hardenberg is involved in). In this picturesque coastal town, located before Kalk Bay, we stopped at Harbour House for a seafood lunch break. Mozambican shrimp are not to be missed.

## APPETIZER NAMIBIA

In Africa, getting around can be complicated, especially when you're staying in remote lodges, lost in nature. To reach Namib Outpost, it was necessary to fly with the regional airline Airlink from Cape Town to Windhoek (the capital of Namibia) and then on to Eros Airport, near the city.

There we boarded a Cessna Caravan 208 to Kulala Airstrip. From that private airstrip in Sossusvlei, we drove 45 minutes to the lodge. This is how traveling a relatively short distance in Africa becomes a 12-hour odyssey.

As a fan of Wilderness as an operator, I had already spent time at Kulala and Little Kulala in that area, but never at Namib Outpost, which belongs to the Ondili lodges segment, where the base of the mountains embraces 10 luxury suites that, in addition to the normal amenities, feature an outdoor bed (ideal for stargazing), a spacious balcony and an outdoor shower.

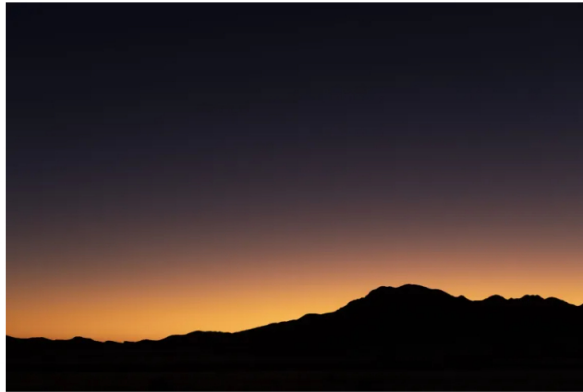




We ruled out that type of accommodation because the group of explorers I led is passionate about equestrian sports. Ricardo and Ale play polo, and Diego has been competing in show jumping since I met him when we were 10 years old. Aside from trips focused entirely on horses by specialized companies like Black Saddle Travel, Ondili is the only operator in Namibia that offers the option of horseback riding through the desert.

After seeing some oryx on the way to the lodge, with the sunset as a backdrop, we arrived for dinner and took it all in —under a starry sky— that we are in the oldest desert in the world, formed at some point between 55 and 80 million years ago.

In Africa, the days begin early, and our first itinerary would take us to Deadvlei, an ancient (now dry) swamp whose name in Afrikaans means "dead swamp." Seven hundred years ago, this place teemed with life thanks to the Tsauchab River, but climate change and the formation of dunes blocked the water, leaving behind dead trees that never decomposed: the sun mummified them without rotting them.

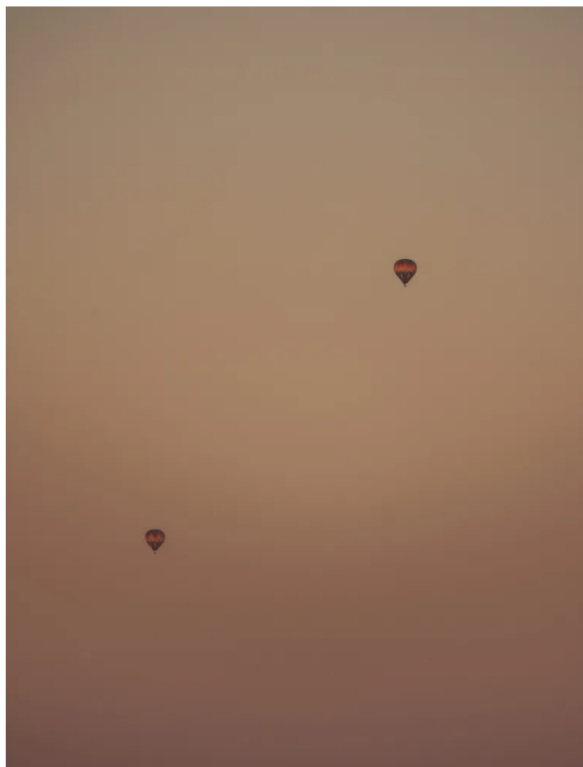


Today, surrounded by towering red dunes like Big Daddy, Deadvlei is a very popular destination, so much so that it feels like an urban tourist attraction. Although I prefer to avoid crowds, I recognize that for anyone visiting Namibia for the first time, it's a must-see.

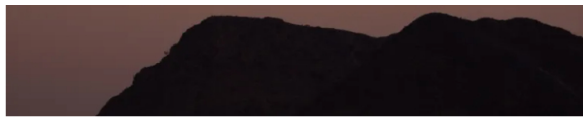
That day, a stiff neck forced me to change my plans and I opted to spend a quiet morning enjoying the scenery and a massage before riding to our fly camp, where we would spend the night.

It's often thought that on a trip like this, you have to participate in all the activities to "get the most out of" the experience—which, by the way, is no small thing. But we forget that the location and top-notch service of these lodges make simply being there a privilege.

That morning, as the Sherpa team set off for Deadvlei, I watched from my private terrace—espresso in hand—as the sky changed color: from a fiery orange to a light blue, passing through shades of pink and purple.







One by one, the hot air balloons appeared behind the mountains, as if someone had painted them on the horizon. I was enjoying that moment so much that I couldn't resist lighting a Nicaraguan cigar and inhaling its full aroma. At 11 a.m., I had a neck and back massage that perfectly complemented a pain injection, in order to be ready for the afternoon horseback ride... which I ended up canceling.

We were delayed in leaving, and a brisk gallop was essential to reach camp before sunset. Although I've been riding since childhood, I opted for a safer route. I arrived at camp by car, where everyone was already enjoying an Amarula by the campfire. From what they told me, the ride was like something out of a scene from *Hidalgo*, where Viggo Mortensen competes in Ocean of Fire, the legendary race where contenders cross 3,000 miles in the Arabian Desert.

The wind picked up during the night, reaching what I estimated to be at least 22 knots. Inside a small tent, this was a stark reminder that nature rules and we have absolutely no control over it.

The day began with a simple but comforting breakfast: fruit, cereal, eggs, coffee, and tea warmed over the fire. In the distance, the tall grasslands—the result of late rains—swayed in the wind like an ocean of green and yellow hues.



We spent that afternoon at the lodge, and in the evening we gathered in the cigar lounge, a bar under a tent between the pool and the dining room, reminiscent of early 20th-century British colonial camps. There, amidst cigars, whiskey, and laughter, we discussed the best moments of the trip so far.

The next day we took a flight back to Windhoek on a 1970s Aero Commander 560, a reliable and rare aviation gem. Once in the city, we stayed at The Weinberg—my favorite hotel—and ended the day with dinner before departing for Zimbabwe.

Relacionada:

[Mandapa, A Ritz-Carlton Reserve: Conscious Luxury Between The Culture And Nature Of Bali](#)

## MAIN COURSE ZIMBABWE

My big gamble of the trip. The sensible decision would have been to go to Botswana: a combination of the Okavango Delta and Linyanti, both for the Wilderness lodges, which I know very well, and for the abundant wildlife in both regions.

The truth is, a somewhat selfish itch had been calling me to Zimbabwe for some time. Although I was already familiar with the country, I had never actually gone on a safari there. With Sherpa, we had already organized several private trips where our clients experienced spectacular encounters with all kinds of African wildlife. But this time, it was my turn.



It's the only place where walking safaris allow you to get closer to the "big game" than anywhere else, and that's what appealed to me most. I was also hoping to see the African wild dog, the continent's most efficient hunter, with an impressive 90% success rate. To put that in perspective, lions barely reach 30%.

Zimbabwe's ecosystem is very similar to Botswana's, with its own advantages and disadvantages. As a less popular and younger safari destination, it has less infrastructure... but also less mass tourism. That combination was part of the strategy.



The second decision was the tour operator. Last year, Machaba Safaris invited us to visit their operations in Botswana and Zimbabwe. I couldn't attend due to other commitments, but Isa (my right-hand woman and a savvy traveler I trust implicitly) went in my place. Taking advantage of the trip, I coordinated with the people at Wilderness and Desert & Delta so she could directly compare the three major safari companies in the region. Surprisingly, she returned delighted with Machaba and compared their operations to the very best in southern Africa. Her enthusiasm was enough to convince me to choose them as our operator in Zimbabwe for this trip.

We flew from Windhoek to Victoria Falls in under two hours. From there, we took a Caravan 208 to Mana Pools airstrip. In Africa, private flights are prohibitively expensive and often unnecessary, so we rely on Mack Air's routes.

Our flight included several stops: first in Hwange (45 minutes) to pick up passengers; then in Kariba (an hour and a half), home to the world's largest artificial lake (180 km<sup>3</sup> of water), to refuel; and finally, after another hour of flight, we landed in Mana Pools, our destination.



The African Bush has a peculiar smell. It's a mix of damp earth with something like eucalyptus, which is actually a combination of local plants, animal droppings, and mystery. A potent petrichor with a hint of mortality. You're here, and you know you're a tourist in the food chain.

Before touching down, our pilot shouts "wild dogs" loud enough for everyone to hear. This news particularly thrilled me, as in my many visits and nearly 200 days on safari, I had never seen these highly efficient hunters, possessing the most fascinating social structure on the continent.

Juan, who had arrived in Zimbabwe directly from Johannesburg that morning, was already waiting for us in the van when we landed. We greeted each other warmly while our guide, without time or place for introductions or formalities, told us: "wild dogs are here, let's go guys."





After advancing less than 200 meters, the guide authorized us to get out of the Land Cruiser adapted for safari with three golden rules that we had to follow: do not make sudden movements, be silent and stay still.

There was already another van at the site with a single person, who later identified himself as Thomas Cahalan, owner of a high-end travel agency in London called Dorsia.

Yes, like the infamous restaurant in American Psycho where it was impossible—even for the most celebrated financier—to get a reservation. It turned out that Thomas and I had several mutual friends and acquaintances in London, but before we officially greeted each other, what led us to exchange contact information was a series of photographs.

When we arrived with the pack, he was sitting on the ground and had been patiently observing the wild dogs for quite some time, who were simply resting in the shade.

Clearly, the wild dogs had grown accustomed to their presence, and when curiosity was piqued in one of them, it decided to approach. The phrase “too close for comfort” takes on a whole new meaning when the best hunter on the African continent decides to bite the sole of your sneakers.



Thomas handled the situation with absolute calm and left Zimbabwe with the anecdote of his life: “What a sighting, right! I’ve been going on safari regularly for almost 10 years and have never experienced anything like that with the dogs.”

Our campsite at Mana Pools was [Ingwe Pan](#). Nothing special, but comfortable, next to a permanent watering hole, and where a very confident hyena visited the campsite every night to try to steal food, and even a pair of binoculars.

Mana Pools comes from the Shona word “mana,” meaning “four.” The name refers to the four bodies of water that, even during the dry season, never completely dry up and become veritable magnets for wildlife between June and October. These four natural pools—Chisasiko, Chine, Long Pool, and Chikwenya—are the heart of the national park.

By the end of May, it should already be the dry season. In fact, I’ve been to Botswana and Zambia several times around that time, and the experience has always been spectacular: the safari is practically the same as in peak season, but with the advantage of avoiding the crowds. Personally, I prefer fewer people, even if it means having to work harder to find the animals. In fact, I find it a more authentic safari experience.

But this year was different. After four years of drought in the southern part of the continent, 2025 brought a longer and more abundant rainy season than had been seen in a long time.



This, of course, is excellent for the animals, but for us it meant facing lush, dense vegetation, which disperses the wildlife thanks to the abundance of water and makes it harder to spot them among the undergrowth.

May shouldn't look like this, but part of the magic of exploring truly wild territories is being at the mercy of nature's whims. And, to be honest, navigating the unexpected makes small victories taste sweeter.



In contrast, there are small private reserves—especially in South Africa, around Kruger Park—that are favorites of what I call checklist tourism: travelers who just want to tick off lists.

Countries visited, species seen, flights taken... In these reserves you can see the Big Five (lion, elephant, rhinoceros, leopard, and buffalo) in a single day. But you'll also see light poles, fences dividing properties, and artificially separating the reserves from the national park.

It's common to use those references as geographical points, and suddenly you know exactly where in the 6,000 hectares of Sabi Sands you are standing.

These lodges—built in concrete, with a somewhat outdated 1990s luxury—are favorites of many Mexicans who simply haven't understood Africa.

Back in **Mana Pools**, I won't lie: the most exciting part of the trip happened in the first two hours after landing. It wasn't the best time for taking photos—the light was fading with each passing minute—but the experience of seeing the wild dogs interact with us is something I'll never forget.

Another great highlight was the kayaking experience on the Zambezi River. With Zambia on the other bank, we paddled among hippos. "Ignorance is bliss," but those who know a little about African wildlife know that the animal responsible for the most human deaths on the continent isn't lions, crocodiles, or grumpy elephants... it's hippos. They're second only to mosquitoes—because of the diseases they transmit—in terms of lethality.

These animals are not only extremely territorial and aggressive, but also much faster and more agile than we imagine. In the water they move with stealth, and on land they can reach speeds of up to 30 km/h in a sprint. To put that in perspective: an Olympic athlete runs at about 28 km/h. So yes, there's no way you can beat the vegan with the worst temper on the planet.

Fortunately, our canoe guides were very experienced and always prioritized our safety. But let's not forget that, in Africa, we are all part of the food chain and at the mercy of nature.

While we were on the river, our guide spotted the local lion family at a watering hole. We went back to look for them in the afternoon, but a herd of about 30 elephants appeared and practically drove them away. We spent the rest of the day trying to find them, without success. In fact, we wouldn't see them again during our entire stay at Mana Pools.



One of the main reasons I chose Zimbabwe is because it's the only country in Africa where walking safaris are more permissive than elsewhere. Being just a few meters from a wild African elephant puts things into perspective: we are insignificant, vulnerable, and that "reality check" is good for everyone.

As a wildlife photographer I have come face to face with great white sharks, orcas, crocodiles and crocodiles, but my heart had never beaten as fast as when I was five meters

anacondas and crocodiles, but my heart had never beaten as fast as when I was five meters away from a six-ton, territorial and volatile male elephant.

People are often very impressed by my photos and videos of sharks, but the reality is that the most dangerous animals are also the most intelligent. The high intelligence of an orca, a dolphin, a gorilla, or an elephant makes them unpredictable, with very distinct individual personalities, just like our own. There are calm, patient, easygoing human beings... and there are also aggressive, impulsive, even dangerous ones, who don't need provocation to react violently.

A great white shark is driven more by instinct. When you understand its behavior, it becomes more predictable: easier to read, interpret, and know how to react. With them,  $2 + 2 = 4$ . There's no room for nuance.

Our second destination in Zimbabwe was Hwange, home to the world's largest elephant population, numbering around 40,000 individuals and designated a national park since 1929.

Our camp here was **Verney's Camp**, also run by **Machaba**. More luxurious than Ingwe Pan, it has spacious rooms, two common areas (lounge and dining room), both with terraces, and amenities such as a swimming pool and fire pit facing a huge waterhole where there's always something drinking: kudus, zebras, elephants... even lions.



Our guide at Verney's was Themba, which in Shona means "someone you can trust," and shouldn't be confused with Tembo, which means elephant in Swahili. Themba is good-natured, with a mustache and very curly hair with gray strands peeking out from under his cap. He's always smiling and eager to explain and share his extensive experience.

We spent two peaceful days in Hwange, with sightings similar to those at Mana Pools. There was no sign of wild dogs, but we did witness a battle between two male zebras for the right to mate with the females in the territory.

The lions—and any other feline—continued to hide from us, and I'm not going to lie: I began to feel an enormous responsibility towards Ricardo and Ale.

## TROU NORMAND BIG FALLS

To cleanse our palates and buffer our appetites after the long, hectic days of safari, we spent a night at the historic Victoria Falls Hotel. It was opened on June 8, 1904, by the British colonialists to house workers constructing the railway infrastructure from Cairo to Cape Town, as well as visitors to the railway.

It wasn't long before royalty stayed there, and later in 1963 it hosted the Victoria Falls Conference and the talks that led to the independence of Rhodesia, which would become the republics of Zambia and Zimbabwe.



The building immediately evokes other historic hotels, such as the Hotel del Coronado in San Diego, or the Stanley Hotel in Estes Park, Colorado, which inspired Stephen King to write *The Shining*. The walls breathe history, and the photographs, engravings, lithographs, and hunting trophies instantly transport you to another era. In the background, the spray from the falls rises almost to the clouds.

The train station is still right outside the hotel, and the tracks are active. When you arrived

The train station is sunn right outside the hotel, and the tracks are active. When we arrived, the Rovos Rail train (the invaluable baby of the Von Thane family), which is the African equivalent of the Orient Express, was about to depart. On board, we relaxed with a steak dinner and two bottles of Kanonkop, one of my favorite South African Pinotages.

The next day, before flying to Nairobi, I already had a plan to experience the falls in my favorite way: by helicopter. But to do it properly, I'd have to cross over to the Zambian side, because only from there can you enter the canyon, flying between towering stone walls and very close to the water.

No one complained about getting another stamp in their passport, but despite having a driver and a van, crossing into Zambia—and then back into Zimbabwe—was like what thousands of people do every day to work in the neighboring country: long lines under the scorching May sun, until finally reaching a tiny booth with no air conditioning and the unmistakable scent of African sweat. Bureaucratic buildings have a universal aesthetic, no matter the country you're in.

We made a stop at the Royal Livingstone Hotel, Zambia's "Mickey Mouse" version, opposite the historic Victoria Falls Hotel. Built in 2001 by the river, it features colonial architecture but lacks any real history.



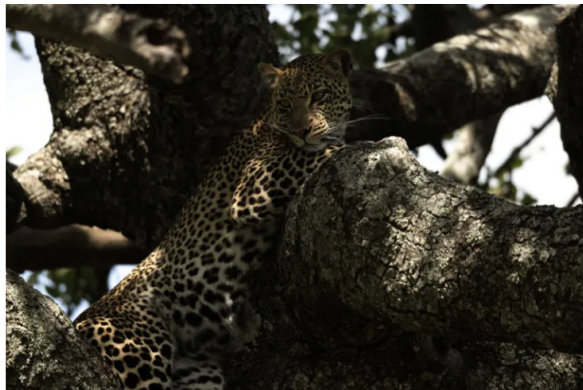
Once in Zambia, we headed to the heliport where a Bell 429 helicopter was waiting for us. The flight took us first over Victoria Falls, from where you can see the bridge connecting the two countries. From there, you can bungee jump from 111 meters high, with a four-second freefall. And although the safety measures are, shall we say, rudimentary (hardware store straps and towels wrapped around the ankles), the site has only recorded one accident in over 30 years of operation.

But the best was yet to come: flying inside the canyon and over the Zambezi rapids. "The helicopter ride of a lifetime." We returned to our hotel in Zimbabwe just to collect our luggage and head to the airport. Next stop: Nairobi, where the final leg of our trip would begin.

## DESSERT KENYA

In my opinion, East Africa is unrivaled when it comes to safaris. The Serengeti in Tanzania and the Maasai Mara in Kenya are the Africa of humanity's collective imagination. Whatever the smallest reference someone has to the African savanna, whether from a book, a film, a cartoon, or a bedtime story, they will always picture wide-open fields and solitary acacia trees with the sun setting in the background; large herds grazing, and big cats stalking them against the wind.

The Serengeti and the Mara border each other, but each has a very different personality that reflects the country. The Serengeti is The Lion King, Kenya is Out of Africa and The Man Eating Lions of Tsavo, the land of Swahili and the Maasai.



In the cradle of humanity, where time breathes among the branches of the acacias and the earth still remembers the thunder of ancient beasts, Kenya did not invent the safari as a fashion, but as a primitive rite.

From the fiery heart of the Great Rift Valley to the endless gold of the Maasai Mara, the history of the Kenyan bush wasn't written in ink. It's marked with blood, lion tracks



story of the safari came from a place as rich as Africa: the ivory, the ivory, gunpowder, and elephant bones. Here, the word safari was born, from the Swahili word for "journey," but its meaning went far beyond simply moving from one place to another: it meant transformation, crossing the threshold into the wild, where man's rules crumble before the pulse of nature.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Kenya was the bloody theater of the British Empire (where aristocrats in linen suits and colonial helmets pursued immortality wielding double-barreled rifles). Names like Denys Finch Hatton, Bror Blixen, and Chas Cottar crossed the savanna in roofless Fords, clinking bottles of gin in one hand and leopard skins drying in the other. They weren't just hunting animals: they were hunting legends...

Karen Blixen wrote of romance and ruin in the Ngong Hills, as her lovers disappeared in plane crashes or were devoured by black fevers, swallowed up by the very nature they worshipped.

Over time, the rifle fell away and the camera took its place. Kenya reinvented itself. Great hunters became conservationists, trackers became guides, and trophies became stories.

And on the former hunting grounds, luxury camps sprang up, where modern travelers can see, with a glass of wine in hand, the untamed nature of Kenya, and if they adjust their sense of smell enough, they can breathe in the blood and death that never quite left that place.

One of those luxury camps, my favorite in all of Africa, is directly correlated to Kenya's past, brilliantly adapted to the present and prepared for the future.



At the beginning of the 20th century, in 1904 to be exact, Chas Cottar, a hunter from Iowa, arrived in Africa inspired by Teddy Roosevelt's safari, and what began as an adventure transformed into an obsession. He returned with his entire family, and in 1919, together with his sons, he founded Cottar's Safari Services, becoming one of the first professional hunters in East Africa.

In a world where death lurked in every bush and the sun split the earth, the Cottars guided kings, writers, aristocrats, and mad dreamers through herds of elephants, crocodile-infested rivers, and endless plains.

Chas survived buffalo charges, leopard attacks, and moonless nights on the savanna. Until, in 1940, a rhinoceros charge killed him while he was filming. He died as he had lived: in the heart of the bush, camera in hand, his gaze fixed on the horizon, and without hesitation, facing death at full speed.

His sons Mike, Bud, and Ted continued the legacy, leading legendary expeditions in an Africa still uncharted. But Africa always exacts its toll. Mike died of the Black Death, Bud in exile, and Ted was simply swallowed up by history.

In the 1960s, Chas's grandson, Glen Cottar, rewrote the family history. He hung up his rifle, picked up a camera, and pioneered photographic safaris in Kenya, opening one of the first permanent camps in Tsavo. Hunting gave way to contemplation, and the safari became a silent dance with nature, not a conquest.





In the late 1990s, Calvin Cottar, great-grandson of the pioneer and a very good friend, founded Cottar's 1920's Safari Camp, a living tribute to the golden age of safari, but with a new soul: conservation, community, and culture. This was our accommodation for the final leg of our trip.

In the lands of the Olderkesi Conservancy, at the gateway to the Maasai Mara, the Cottars continue to guide travelers—no longer to hunt beasts, but to learn from them. Their camp is a refuge, a museum, and a shrine, where the tales of their great-great-grandfather still float in the smoke of the fire, and where the roars of the night are not a threat... they are heritage.

Its director, Calvin Cottar, sees conservation as a social, not an environmental, problem, and that's where we understand each other very well. Back in 2013, along with my friends, I was laying the groundwork for implementing a tourism-based economic model as an alternative to shark fishing, while simultaneously empowering local fishing communities to take control of it, since protecting natural resources would mean protecting their interests and families. Without realizing it, I was applying the same model that Calvin implemented with the Maasai cattle herders, always empowering them and looking out for their interests.

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He never wanted to buy their land. The 7,000 acres of Olderkesi belong to the community, but they are leased in a way that is more profitable for them than cattle ranching, and at the same time, it is land for the exclusive use of Cottar's, which borders both the Mara and the Serengeti. Because it is a lease, Calvin is obligated to always treat the owners fairly, otherwise, they won't renew the lease. All of Cottar's guides are Maasai from the Olderkesi communities.

Our guide, Enock Sayagie, is one of them. He speaks perfect Spanish and has traveled the world promoting the business and giving interviews on television and in print media. He embodies the grace and presence of a stoic Maasai warrior, delivering delightful insights with an intimidating, quiet confidence on every game drive. He has been a safari guide for Queen Elizabeth, Angelina Jolie, Eluid Kipchoge, and many other public figures.

After talking about Kenya and the legacy of the Cottar family, I think our safari experience on this trip becomes somewhat irrelevant, but I can tell you that the big cats finally appeared.

No sooner had we landed on Cottar's private airstrip than a leopard appeared. We suspected she had cubs hidden somewhere, given the frequency and precision of her hunts. The first night, with the help of my Leica Calinox (an infrared scope with military technology), we spotted a male lion walking near the camp.

The lions, after days of searching, finally appeared on the last day, four hours from the camp. We found a buffalo carcass that looked perfectly staged by the art department of a Hollywood production: fresh, dramatic, brutal. We tracked (it sounds like a pack) the footprints and after a couple of kilometers we found the survey pride basking on the rocks. This group, with more than 20 felines, operates on the other side of the Olderkesi hills and specializes in hunting buffalo. After spending some time with them, we took refuge in the shade of a baobab tree to eat something and celebrate the end of the safari with a cigar and a whisky.





On our way back to camp, we were enveloped by a storm that was the perfect ending: cinematic, intense, worthy of Kenya. Three hours, several landslides, and two river crossings later, we were back. Exhausted, soaked... happy.

Because every great concert needs an encore, after the rain had passed, everyone on the deck of their tent enjoyed one of Cottar's oldest traditions, where they prepare a hot bath for you in a canvas tub (the same canvas used in the tent) accompanied by fruit, cheeses, nuts, and the drink of your choice, in my case, chamomile tea.

In the golden days of untamed Africa, when the world still believed the wild could be conquered, one man left the plains of Iowa to follow the call of the African thunder. His name was Charles "Chas" Cottar, and his legacy would not be an ordinary story, but an epic forged in fire, gunpowder, and honor.