



All creatures great and small



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Okavango Delta lodge connects guests to a wild range of animals

Approaching the grey bird on foot is giddily exciting.

This is no ordinary species – it's sleek, polished and can take off at a moment's notice. It is able to land anywhere and on a variety of terrains. Noisy when in flight, the solution to drowning out the cacophony is to cover your ears. Standing next to the six-cylinder, fuel-injected Robinson R44, commercial pilot Zakai gives a safety briefing, cautioning to exit to the front of the helicopter on landing.

It never gets old to experience the beauty of the Okavango Delta from a bird's eye view, secretly hoping none of them will be soaring at our level of 500 feet. What a privilege to see the magnificent Monachira Camp from the air before Zakai safely lands the helicopter following the 25-minute flight in a northerly direction from Maun.

Opened in May 2025, the property's newness is felt in the enthusiasm of the staff. Guide Harold drives the three minutes between the chopper and the arrival area of the camp and members of the team break into song and dance for a warm welcome. At the end of a sandy pathway, tented suite number 10 is home for the next three nights. Beautifully decorated in shades of white, black, grey and brown, with some striking accents in the form of mustard-coloured cushions, the suite commands the most exquisite views over the floodplains.

In close contact

Upon opening the zip to the outside section of the tent, there is a colourful bird doing his best to appear inconspicuous. He's flapping his bright orange wings and momentarily lands on the branch of the imposing sausage tree that is casting shade on the deck. Then he vanishes, before posing properly for a picture.

At the main dining area where meals are served, a few small critters are making their way up the base of a tree and leaping from a dizzy height to run along the deck.



Tree squirrels always seem to be around, much to the chagrin of the staff. Apparently, they run off with doilies! During brunch, bright green little bee-eaters flutter from branch to veld, searching for their own meals. Surveying their surroundings after swaying on thin blades of grass, the tiny birds abruptly dart off to find insects in the sandy soil.

Commencing the afternoon game drive, Harold is keen to show off the wildlife that inhabit Moremi Game Reserve. A small breeding herd of elephants is feeding on the overwhelmingly generous greenery, while a lone male is overindulging on the fruit and leaves of marula tree. His eyes are closed and Harold explains that the elephant is eating while sleeping. He is clearly loving the nutrient-rich tree and pods, stopping short

of completely demolishing it. A lilac-breasted roller is perched atop a small rain tree. Looking in the sand for insects to catch, he takes flight, displaying the iridescent plumage that makes these birds such popular subjects for photographers.

In the shade of a sausage tree, there are two shapes lying flat in the grass. On closer inspection, it's a coalition of male lions having a nap. Oblivious to our presence, they continue their slumber until an unusual sound makes the one wake up and take notice. His mane is so dishevelled that it looks as though he has had the best sleep of his life.

The instantly recognisable call of a woodland kingfisher is heard. Scanning the trees to see where the sound is coming from seems uncomplicated, but take



Getting there

Airlink connects you from Johannesburg and Cape Town to Maun.

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www.flyairlink.com/flightschedule



into account that these birds are only around 23cm long. Suddenly, one flits past and lands on a branch to the left. Harold points out that it's a juvenile, as it lacks the red of its bill reaching right to the end.

Immovable object

We are stuck. Properly stuck. In the mud. Harold removes his shoes, alights from the vehicle and disappears into the bush barefoot and unarmed. Fearing for his safety, as there might be something lurking in the tall grass, it's a relief when he appears brandishing three large tree stumps. He has a plan to solve the dilemma. Looking at the rear of the vehicle, he announces: "It's the diff." Wedging the branch underneath the back axle, he uses the jack to hoist the right side up. Splashing is audible as he wades ankle-deep through the muddy water. The rescue team has been notified but, until they arrive, Harold

is trying his utmost to leverage the logs with the mud. Or is it the other way around? He hotfoots it into the bush again, this time dragging two pieces of an African mangosteen tree behind him. After a considerable amount of effort, we are free!

On the morning game drive, the male lions appear again. And they are not alone. A female has joined them, and one of the males is rather besotted with her. The saying "two's company and three's a crowd" has never rung truer. The honeymooners want their privacy, but the third wheel keeps on following them. Sniffing the grass where the female has previously laid down, he proceeds to do a Flehmen grimace. His brother walks away with his new flame. However, they are two incredibly handsome male lions. How will the lioness choose between them if she has to, down the line? Only time will tell.

Text and photography | **Helène Ramackers**

For more information or to book, go to machabasafaris.com.

