

AFRICAN EXPLORATIONS



WINTER NEWSLETTER 2002

Welcome to our second newsletter of 2002. We hope that it has been a good year for everyone; as usual, it appears to have flown. In many ways, we have had our best season ever and would like to thank all our clients for their continued unstinting support and patronage. We are delighted to introduce a new member to our fold, Susannah Baker, who was working in the Luangwa Valley and Kafue regions in Zambia. Susannah has just returned from a wonderful trip to Malawi and we are featuring her thoughts on this beautiful and diverse country. Again, we have asked some of our clients to pen their thoughts which appear on the Galapagos Islands and South Africa. We were honoured to be nominated this year by Selfridges as their choice of travel partner to Africa, due to our exceptional personal attention and our reputation for crafting interesting and unusual safaris.

My two week trip to Malawi this October was a perfect opportunity to get to know a country of friendly people and diverse landscapes. The climate from April to November is pleasant, but can be cool at night. October is the hottest month but the temperature rarely rose above 28°C in the middle of the day. The landscape is extremely varied, ranging from the vast Nyika Plateau with its rolling hills, flowers and rocky outcrops reminiscent of Scotland, to the shores of Lake Malawi, with its white sand, crystal clear waters and myriad of multicoloured fish. I first visited Chelinda Lodge on the Nyika Plateau. Set in a spectacular location, amongst a grove of pine trees whose scent permeates the air, the view of the rolling hills is breathtaking. The chalets resemble log cabins and each is luxuriously appointed with an open fire which is most welcome as the nights can be chilly. The Lodge offers walks, drives and horse riding (and this is spectacular horse riding country!) One morning we cantered alongside a herd of eland. The birdlife is superb, with such rare species as the bar tailed trogon, and over 80 species of wild orchid are found on the plateau. We moved on to Kazuni Bush Camp, in the Vwaza Marsh. Kazuni Camp is set on the shore of a lake off the Rumphu River and each of the chalets has a view across the lake. The area is well known for its large elephant population, on one afternoon I counted 80 elephants passing close to the camp. The camp offers walks and drives. We continued on to Kaya Mawa, set on Likoma Island, which can only be described as an eco-friendly paradise!

IMPRESSIONS OF MALAWI



This exclusive Lodge is on a peninsula and there is a private honeymoon island with its own ferry! The Lodge is powered by a combination of wind and solar power. There are many water activities such as trips on a dhow, canoeing, laser boating, water skiing, wind surfing, snorkelling and fishing. Or if you prefer just to relax, the Lodge has its own private beach complete with hammocks! We finally completed our journey at Mvuu Wilderness Lodge, in Liwonde National Park. Set around a lagoon on a sweep of the Shire River, it comprises large tents, each located on a deck suspended over the lagoon. This offers the perfect vantage point to view the game coming down to the lagoon to drink. I saw bushbuck, impala, elephant and hippo. I also saw a rare Serval, which posed long enough for me to appreciate its beautiful markings. The area is renowned for its birdlife and, in my time there, I spotted twelve species I had not seen before, including the rare Palmnut Vulture. The highlight of my stay was my boat trip which allowed me to get very close to the elephants on the riverside without disturbing them. A perfect photo opportunity.

Malawi is known as the warm heart of Africa. With its temperate climate, friendly people and spectacular scenery, I can now understand that this description is well deserved.

SPECIAL OFFER TO MALAWI:
£2100.00pp for a 10 day Safari
excluding flights

HORSE RIDING IN MALAWI

We offer wonderful riding safaris on the Nyika plateau, individually tailored or set departures for 7-10 nights. The horses are superb, well schooled and even tempered. Cross dramatic western escarpments through the wonderful arrays of wild flowers that carpet the grasslands on the Nyika plateau.

SOUTH AFRICA – by Michael Davies, CBE

Our trip to South Africa was an attempt to visit some of the places of interest we had not seen before. It is a country with such a wide range of differing environments one can never hope to appreciate them all. We travelled to the edge of the Cedarberg Wilderness Area. On crossing the Brandywine River, one came to think that JR Tolkien must have been familiar with this country when writing of the adventures of the Hobbits. At Bushmanskloof, as well as enjoying the comfort of a first class lodge and the interest of all the rock art, of which the area abounds, we were able to appreciate how tourism was enabling land to be restored to its original environment. It was here, on a night drive, that we saw both Aardvark and Ardwolf, neither of which we had seen before.

The highlights of our trips were in Kwa-Zulu Natal, where we drove from Durban to the Ndumo Game Reserve in Maputaland. A little known wildlife area, but full of interest. The management and staff at the lodge were extremely friendly and Johnson, our driver guide, was superb. The scenery around the pan was enchanting and the dense bush abounded with Nyala antelope and a great variety of birds. Walking in the more open area, we saw a large herd of buffalo, many impala, Kudu, wildebeest, zebra and giraffe. The greatest excitement was being able to approach within a few metres of a couple of white rhino. We viewed from the vehicle a number of both black and white rhino, but the thrill of close contact, on foot, with these huge creature is something very special.



A visit to the sites of the Anglo Zulu wars was next on our itinerary and our stay at Fugitive's Drift was an unforgettable experience. We were lucky to have David Rattray himself to lecture us on battles at Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift. His communication ability is quite unique and everyone came away from his talks emotionally drained. The Fugitive's Drift estate is the site where the Fugitives from the rout at Isandlwana attempted to escape across the river and one is able to visit the graves of Lieutenants Melville and Coghill, both posthumously awarded the VC for their efforts in retrieving the Queen's Colours from one of the worst defeats of the British army. We will always be grateful to African Explorations for suggesting visits to both Ndumo and Fugitive's Drift, areas previously unknown to us, but providing experiences we will always remember.

KURLAND

Our wonderful, new discovery on the outskirts of Plettenberg Bay, Kurland belongs to a family, who run probably the best art gallery in SA. Each room is therefore filled with splendid pictures and antiques. Kurland is situated at the foothills of the Outeniqua pass, surrounded by paddocks and meadows. It is very child friendly indeed and offers full crèche facilities. This is a tranquil estate as well as a luxurious hotel, with just eight rooms. The property is Cape Dutch in design and the gardens are simply magnificent. There is also a well stocked library. Recline at the pool, be pampered at the spa, go for long, rambling walks, or have a leisurely game of tennis and horse ride. There is also mountain biking and they were quite happy to let us use their quads! The beach is quite nearby. Also close by is the Tzitzikamma Nature Reserve where you can walk amongst some wonderful plant varieties. We thoroughly recommend Kurland!



SELOUS

The Selous is one of the largest wilderness areas left in the world. At 55000 sq kms it is almost the same size as Ireland. The Rufiji and Ruaha Rivers converge at Stieglers gorge. Groves of tall Borassus and Doulm palms border the many channels and small lakes, adding to the primordial atmosphere. During the dry season, great concentrations of game take place in the northern Selous where permanent water is available and provide a wonderful experience for walking and game drives. Over 350 species of birds and 2000 plant species add to the complexity and attraction of this sanctuary. Once you are in the Selous you are in the African bush as it has existed for thousands of years. Walking is permitted and there is no more exciting experience than encountering large game on foot or from small boats along the river

We can recommend wonderful walking safaris with Nomad, offering an adventure through Africa's greatest wilderness. Days are spent immersed in spectacular fauna, flora and scenery. Each night is spent under the stars, experiencing the sheer majesty of the African night.



Guides have a great wealth of experience. Your informative hosts share their enormous knowledge and love of the Selous. For those preferring more permanent fixtures, we can offer either the luxurious Sand Rivers Lodge which is cantilevered and has wonderful views over the Rufiji River or the Selous Safari Camp which is a luxurious tented camp in an equally enviable location.

THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS – Paradise on Earth by Jill Whillock

We had wanted to visit the Galapagos Islands for many years and finally we made it. Thanks to Nicky Shepherd's great recommendation we chose to join a sailing boat called the Alta, a beautiful rigged sailing ketch which sleeps a maximum of 16 guests. We were very well looked after with a ratio of almost one crew member to every two guests. The passengers were wildlife/travel enthusiasts and we moulded together very well. The cabins were very comfortable and the food was excellent.

We opted for the seven day cruise so that we could get to some of the farthest islands, the itineraries are fixed for the various boats and the routes are very well planned. We never seemed to see any of the other boats and once ashore, we very rarely saw people and felt that the islands were our own private wildlife sanctuary. There were typically two landings a day, usually one wet and one dry and the wildlife and the scenery on each island was so totally different.

Once on the Islands we had to keep to specific trails but it was so natural. I had an initial worry that the wildlife would keep well away from both the paths and the visitors but this was not the case. The birds, reptiles, seals and sea lions were so relaxed that they even nested alongside the paths.

The ship's naturalist was excellent and there was always something to do, our day would start with a landing at around 7.30am. We would then have time for some snorkelling before lunch. This could be swimming with sea lions and penguins or scanning for the



Pacific Green Turtles and wonderfully coloured fish. We even had a chance once to swim close to Hammerhead sharks but they had moved on (shame!).

In the afternoon we would eagerly go ashore again for a few hours to see more wildlife or just to walk and marvel at the incredible landscapes and views of these volcanic Islands.

At the end of the day we would all clamber aboard for drinks and canapés before dinner and our naturalist would recap everything we had seen that day and brief us on what we could expect the next day.

The highlight for me was the Dolphins (my first wild dolphin sighting ever) that found our ship and swam at the bow. They jumped and played at the front and by the side of Alta, a fantastic sight. The other highlights were fluorescent micro organisms shining in the water at night, swimming with seals in the water, Blue Footed Boobies, Giant Land Iguanas and of course, Lonesome George the oldest inhabitant of the Island (Giant Tortoise) now residing comfortably at the Darwin Research centre.

By the end of the trip all the passengers were good friends and the best advice I can give is to remember one's sunscreen, lots of camera film, but most important of all your tonic water! The Galapagos Islands may grow the plants that produce the quinine, but they haven't learned that the British are very partial to their Gin and Tonic!



INDIA

Although we concentrate on individually tailoring each safari to every client, we are very pleased to offer a handful of special interest safaris, which are led by the most experienced guides in their field. India is a country steeped in culture, myth and folklore. Combine these with an incredibly diverse wildlife and the mixture is intoxicating. Of course seeing and hopefully photographing tigers is one of our priorities. To this end, we provide such eminent leaders as **Nick Garbutt**. Wildlife author, photographer and artist, Nick has lead wildlife and photo safaris in Madagascar, Africa, India, Nepal and Borneo. An accomplished photographer and 2000 winner of "Durrell Endangered Wildlife" in the BBC Wildlife Photographer of the Year Competition and 1996 winner "Urban & Garden Wildlife" in the BBC Wildlife Photographer of the Year Competition. His articles are published regularly in magazines like Africa Geographic and BBC Wildlife. **Hashim Tyabji**, former Chief Naturalist in Royal Chitwan National Park, Nepal, and former member of the Indian Board of Wildlife, Hashim is one of India's foremost naturalist leaders. He has a house near Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve where he has served as honorary wildlife warden, undertaken a bird survey, published a guide to the Reserve and acted as scientific advisor on television films about tigers. With his knowledge of Indian history and culture as an added bonus, Hashim has many admirers among the groups he has escorted. **Toby Sinclair**, born in England, has lived in India and Nepal since 1977 and few can match his knowledge



of every aspect of the subcontinent. He has produced several guidebooks including the Insight Guides Indian Wildlife and India's Western Himalayas. For several years now he has been involved full time in the production of wildlife documentaries in India and Sri Lanka. These include The Leopards of Yala (BBC), The Life of Mammals (new David Attenborough series for BBC) and the famous six-part series celebrating India's natural history 'The Land of the Tiger' (BBC). A member of several advisory committees and organisations Toby has lead many successful wildlife tours in India, Nepal & Sri Lanka. He is a keen and widely published photographer.



THE SEYCHELLES

The Seychelles is renowned for having the finest beaches in the Indian Ocean. It now has come a long way in terms of matching its beaches with the quality of accommodation. I really would suggest staying at least at two places, getting the feeling of being on a coral island and a granite island. We recommend *Fregate* with its large villas as being one of the very finest places to stay in the Seychelles. Your spacious air conditioned villa with separate bedroom and drawing room is connected by a private verandah overlooking the balmy foliage and tropical palms out to the sea, with an outside day bed and Jacuzzi. *Lemuria* on Praslin Island, with its 18 hole golf course and three beaches, is situated in an area of outstanding beauty. It is located on the northwest coast of the island and is spread over one hundred hectares of land. The beauty of being on Praslin is that one can also visit other islands, and take a buggy around the island to explore. There is also *Alphonse* Island

which has luxurious accommodation in A frame cottages, with sunken baths and outside showers. *Alphonse* is a castaway retreat and a world away in style. Situated in the Amirantes Group of islands, it is very remote. Accommodation is very pretty and deluxe villas all overlook the lagoon in the middle of the island. The island itself is surrounded by a coral reef and strewn with coconut palms. *Cousine* Island is converted from a private home, offering French colonial architecture at its best. The entire island is a nature reserve and in the middle, lies this beautiful, small hotel. The food is superb. There is a well stocked library. Apart from being an atoll, it is home to several rare and endangered species including the magpie robin. Hawksbill turtles lay their eggs on the beach. This really is like staying on your own desert island. *Banyan Tree* on Mahe is a wonderful, small, exclusive hotel on the main island. There are 35 white, pretty, Victorian style bungalows and wooden terraces reminiscent of the plantation era. Original artwork, commissioned from local artists, adorns the walls. The resort includes an Oriental garden spa for relaxing therapies. *Denis* Island is lovely, very French and has spacious, cottages tucked into groves of casuarina and coconut trees that border the beach. The cottages have large, four poster, beds with superb bathrooms and outdoor showers. Lush tropical forests cover the crescent shaped island, and the shoal-edge bank provides world-class deep sea fishing.

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We continue to offer a **5% loyalty bonus** for our clients booking a safari in consecutive years. Coupled with travelling in the low season, for instance, this can represent a substantial saving on what is otherwise known as an expensive holiday.