

AFRICAN EXPLORATIONS



NEWSLETTER 2004

Welcome to our latest round up of comment and thoughts about Africa and, ever increasingly, India. This is a special year, being our 15th year of trading here in the United Kingdom and we are marking the occasion by opening a satellite office in South Africa. A foothold in Africa gives us the ability to visit other African countries more easily and frequently and we can also keep a number of key overheads down. The (significant) resulting savings will get passed to our clients, which is wonderful news! We will therefore be writing to you again a bit later in the year with pointers on how to access some stunning prices and new safaris.

We have also been increasingly busy in India, where our trademark ethos of providing excellent guiding, value and lovely off-the-beaten-track locations continues to gather pace. The emphasis is not only on wildlife but also the spiritual, cultural and architectural aspects of India. All our holidays and safaris, as you will know, are utterly individually hand-crafted and our reputation for this has brought an increase in the number of honeymoons and safaris that we have been creating. We welcome Susannah Baker back from a second sojourn in India - having now worked in both Africa and India she can discuss both with equal verve and will be taking a leading role in developing our highly personalised Indian portfolio. Finally, thank you all again for your continued support - we do value your custom very highly and it is one of the joys of being a small, highly personal, business that we can count so many of our clients also as friends.

SOUTH AFRICA: A DIFFERING EMPHASIS

Lucia van der Post recently wrote an enlightened article about staying at the more genuine older properties and working farms that one can find in South Africa. This more "grass roots" approach is refreshing, so much of South Africa having undoubtedly become very 'designer' in style - and price! To illustrate the type of property that is certain to become very much more popular in the years to come we have some real gems on the "flower route", Julian Melck's property near Hopefield on the west coast of the Cape being a good example. Julian is both bon viveur host and guide on his wheat, cattle and sheep farm whose 18th century buildings are listed as a National Monument; some converted into very comfortable accommodation. It is very much a working farm with errant warthog sometimes finding their way into the pot; the meals and ambience are excellent! In season the wild flowers are magnificent and activities include riding, walking and swimming. Julian, a passionate aviator, is also easily persuaded to indulge anyone wanting a bird's eye view of the west coast.



SOUTH AFRICA: A differing emphasis



Kersefontein

In the Overberg region, Brin and Judi Rebstein have sympathetically converted their very old Cape Dutch farmhouse. The guest accommodation consists of refurbished slave quarters which were built shortly after the farm was founded in 1723. They have a 14 metre salt water swimming pool, set in a citrus orchard. Also in the Overberg, Nic and Nicole Dupper (who built a first class reputation for outstanding cuisine and hosting at Bartholomew's Klip) have recently purchased a lovely country home, Blue Gum. The property is set on the slopes

of the Klein Rivier mountains and the fresh mountain air, spectacular views and warm welcome all combine to make this a really good choice as a base to visit Stanford, Hermanus and Gansbaai.

We are able to offer our clients a substantial saving of up to 30% on a number of select hotels in South Africa. This offer will be for a limited period; please call us for details

SOUTH AFRICA: Malaria Free Areas

Malaria is a key factor in deciding to view game in South Africa over other wilder and more "genuine" African destinations. True malaria-free areas are few and, whilst several new properties have sprung up in malaria-free Madikwe (which borders Botswana and features some very interesting new properties), we particularly enjoy Makweti Safari Lodge. Makweti is small, highly personable, well managed and off the normal tourism trail being located in Welgevonden Game Reserve (Limpopo Province) - clients have been enjoying it immensely.

Not too far distant from Makweti, in African terms, is Ant's Nest which is also currently malaria free. Ant and Tessa Baber's property is well known for those who particularly want to ride horses in South Africa and the Baber's have built a new addition to the property - "Ant's Hill". The new lodge has been creatively designed using natural stone and lovely local woods such as wild olive and acacia. Mixed with exotic furniture and brightly coloured fabrics from Kenya the result is unique, comfortable and homely. Superb views of the gorge and waterfall can be enjoyed through large bi-folding doors which are open in the summer but can be closed in the winter, keeping you cosy in front of the roaring fire.



TANZANIA

Tanzania never fails to amaze us. As a wildlife destination it is simply unequalled and there are so many reasons to go there, apart from the well known Serengeti and Ngorongoro: the country has the highest freestanding mountain in the world (Kili), the second deepest lake in the world (Tanganyika) and second largest (Victoria), the largest game reserve in Africa, over 25% of its land mass is given over to reserves and National Parks, it has a fabulous and in many places totally unspoiled coastline - and that's just the tip of the iceberg. New areas and camps spring up all the time: for instance there have been exciting developments in Ruaha, Katavi and the Selous in the south and, in the more accessible north, African Explorations have unique access to a growing list of areas where we feature completely private safaris with one's own guide and vehicle.

These safaris are exceptional value, guided by the finest of local Tanzanian guides who we have worked with for many years (and are literally adored by all our clients!). In developing this rapport we have access to some unusual, private, permanent and semi-permanent camps as well as a small farm in the Ngorongoro Highlands, all with a very Tanzanian flavour yet being of exceptional quality.

We recently organised a safari for a small group of friends who are well travelled in Africa but had not yet visited Tanzania. Jenny Bouskell's reaction to the trip illustrates much of the above:

"Nicky and Jonathan's advice and attention to detail in planning our safari were excellent. They recommended a relaxed, flexible trip with suggestions as to what to do and see based on our various conversations and Jonathan's huge depth of experience 'in-country'. Our guide, Emmanuel, was fantastic, brilliant at finding birds and animals and we felt that this part of Africa was all ours! This was most noticeable in the Serengeti where we had a private camp - VIP treatment! - just for the six of us and where we saw a vast range of animals including Honey Badger, Serval, Caracal, cheetah with cubs and lion in trees. We also saw (I counted the species) 117 different birds, what a country! Brighton, our cook, merits special mention for producing the best food of any safari using nothing more than open coals. Tanzania is incredible and the utter flexibility of each day made the safari a very personal, exciting and rewarding holiday"



ZIMBABWE

We deeply feel the pains that continue to plague Zimbabwe, however (at risk of being contentious?) we also feel that it is worth reminding clients that there are some excellent safaris still running in the country, despite the immense problems faced by operators. Supporting the safari industry does not necessarily mean supporting Mugabe; if the safari industry collapsed completely then much more of the wildlife would also vanish. There are some superb deals there for the taking. James and Janine Varden visited us recently, the couple run fantastic riding, canoeing and walking safaris in Mavuradona and the Mana Pools areas - perhaps this is one to think about?



NAMIBIA

Spectacular, inspiring, huge, dramatic, utterly different - all adjectives that combine to

describe Namibia. In visiting Namibia we suggest that one actually puts the wildlife element to one side, concentrating instead on exploring the Skeleton Coast, Sossusvlei and Damaraland, for example. The wildlife in these regions may not be prolific but the scenery and pure drama certainly makes up for it! Nicky created a holiday for Michael and Carol de Lisle Bush who went to Namibia with two friends and sent back the following notes:

"Take Nicky's advice and stay overnight somewhere on arrival at Windhoek if you are travelling straight to Namibia from Europe! The country is huge, hot and can be high; resist the temptation to rush into the safari! Nicky suggested that we fly, where possible, between the places we stayed at - another piece of good advice and our pilots were all fun, professional and very efficient.

Sossusvlei is essential, photographs cannot do the dunes real justice and the aerial view we were treated to of the Skeleton Coast (and Walvis Bay) was unmissable. We experienced



dramatic remoteness in Damaraland at Etendeke Camp, I doubt it comes wider or more open than here and our guide, 'Boni', has to be the most clued



up in the country! Nicky chose not to offer us the very posh new camp (Serra Cafema) right up in the North, instead suggesting Epupa Falls; it fitted what we wanted perfectly. Being right on the rushing Kunene River it literally borders Angola and the glimpse we had into the lives of the Himba people in the area was fascinating. We saw a good variety of game, especially the desert-adapted elephant and other species. This was a bonus as Nicky had stressed that Namibia is not a 'game rich' country, instead being a place where the game was highly specialised and far less prolific than most other African counties."

We have recently built holidays to Namibia that include South Africa and Botswana, so there is plenty of choice for all tastes. We can also offer riding in Namibia (which, for serious equestrians, dovetails well with the excellent riding in Botswana).

MALAWI AND SOUTHERN TANZANIA: A special guided safari

We all love Malawi, it remains a much under-rated country. It combines well with Zambia and Tanzania and we offer you a superb guided safari for a maximum of 5 guests, led by renowned professional guide David Foot. This is an unusual safari combining Malawi and southern Tanzania, a real must for those who have traversed the more popular parks of Africa and who are seeking something truly different. The safari begins with two nights at Vwaza Marsh and then four nights in Nyika National Park. Both have been reviewed in previous newsletters and represent two of the most beautiful areas in Malawi, combining magnificent scenery with superb elephant populations at Vwaza and excellent birding and game viewing in the Nyika, where you will stay at Chelinda.

You then move on to Ruaha, in southern Tanzania, for three nights at Mwangusi Camp and finally conclude with four nights in the Selous at Richard Bonham's Camp.

The safari takes in some simply fantastic country, which you get a bird's eye view of as David flies you from camp to camp in his Cessna



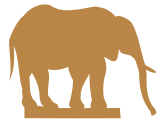
(this is why it is limited to 5 guests!). This really is a very special safari indeed; David is normally busy running his own lodge on the Nyika plateau (lovely riding country!) and so this is a rare opportunity to have him host this unique trip. The cost for the trip is a very reasonable £3300.00 per person, sharing, excluding international airfares and it runs October 3-16.

BOTSWANA - Bushman Safari 2005 led by Ralph Bousfield

Ralph Bousfield will be leading two bushmen trips. He really is the most knowledgeable and charismatic guide, and I cannot recommend this safari highly enough. Ralph will be guiding 2 Mobile Expeditions in 2005 - 10 night trips - which include the best that Botswana has to offer: 5 nights in the incredible Eden of the Okavango Delta, on a Mobile safari, 2 nights in the Kalahari, staying at the fabulous Jack's Camp and 3 nights in the Western Kalahari with the Zu/'hoasi bushmen, on a Mobile safari.

Lake Turkana, Kenya
and Omo Delta/
Ethiopian
Expedition for
2 weeks led
by Ron
Beaton
08 October
2005
£3850.00
p/p excluding
airfares.





INDIA FEATURE IN THE SUNDAY TIMES WITH BRIAN JACKMAN

We asked Brian Jackman, the respected travel writer, to go to India with his wife Annabelle in search of tigers. For those who may have missed Brian's excellent resulting piece in the Sunday Times, here is a précis:

" Even before I set foot in India I knew what I most wanted to see. Not the Taj Mahal. Not the erotic temple carvings of Khajuraho, Delhi's Red Fort or even the dreamy lake palaces of Udaipur. Maybe it was Kipling's Jungle Book that sowed the first seed but, for as long as I can remember, I had wanted to see a wild tiger.

I was heading to Madhya Pradesh, the wild heart of Mother India, whose tiger reserves offer visitors the best guarantee of meeting the elusive lord of the jungle. I saw my first tiger in Kanha, India's finest national park, in 1988; India has changed since then. What had drawn me back was one of the country's newest tiger reserves, a little known national park called Pench where I was told I might still find the land of the tiger as it was in Kipling's day.

Getting there is easy but the best reason for going is that tourism in Pench is still a novelty. The park has been open to visitors for less than two years, as yet there are few places to stay and Bagh Van Lodge - by far the best - opened only last December. Consequently you pretty much have the whole of Pench to yourself! Bagh Van - a dozen small cottages and a communal dining room with verandah - overlooks a dried up watercourse along which leopards, sloth bears and even tigers sometimes pass by at night. The park is only 5 minutes away and wildlife here is truly wild. Pench was the home of Mowgli, the wolf boy, and the Seoni pack that adopted him. The offspring of the Seoni wolves still hunt across these rolling hills, along with the descendents of Shere Khan the tiger.

Inside the park the fields give way to jungle but don't expect to find the liana-tangled rainforest of mythology. **Hashim Tyabji**, one of India's most respected tiger experts became my guide for the next four days and told me that jungli simply means "wilderness", and it's true. The tall trees close in on both sides of the track: kapok, tamarind, frankincense, flame of the forest and endless aisles of teak but most of the time you can look deep enough into the forest to see any tiger within 100 yards of the path. There are an estimated 51 tiger in Pench. Even so, in a park the size of Bedfordshire, there are still a million places they can hide. By day Orioles call with fluted voices,

Chital - gentle spotted deer - drift among the trees and Peacocks strut. But do not be lulled by this air of tranquillity; all is an illusion, an Indian rope trick of the senses. You can never escape the tension that comes with being in tiger country: "Today you may not have seen the tiger", says Hashim, "but the tiger has seen you".

Game viewing in India is not like Africa, you must work hard to pin down your tiger. Shere Khan is a mainly solitary animal and you must scour every track for the telltale fresh pugmarks. You must become the thing you hunt, listening for the alarm cries and using your vision, probing where a big cat might hide. Only then, if you are lucky, will the big cat show itself to you.

Early next morning we try again. The Seoni wolf pack proves as elusive as the tiger but at least we are treated to 12 dhole, the wild dogs of India, loping through the forest. For an hour we watch them playing before they vanish into the trees. We spot shaggy brown sambar stags, ungainly nilgai and a herd of gaur but still no tiger. By now it is 3 hours since dawn and the sun is hot; nearby is the spot where the park's 5 riding elephants are stabled. Every morning before dawn the elephants and mahouts march on tiger patrol, news of their location being relayed back so that visitors can be ushered on elephant-back into the big cat's presence. Word comes through that a tiger has been found. Our breakfast is abandoned - we hurry back into the forest. The elephant wait by the roadside and, as soon as I am perched sidesaddle on the elephant's broad back, we are off. Almost as suddenly, there is the tiger: 250kg of molten copper reclining on a throne of leaves. "It's the Bodha Nullah Tiger", whispers Hashim, "male, six years old

and in his prime". Even in repose he cannot fail to make you gasp. He is so big, so unbelievably orange. Unlike most cats, tiger's eyes have round pupils which gives them a stare as if they are looking deep into your soul. Noting the huge forepaws and the great shaggy head with its broad muzzle you know that you are in the presence of the ultimate carnivore. Barely a couple of yards beneath my legs he opens his jaws in a cavernous yawn then slinks off through the trees. Twice he treats us to an impressive growl and we follow him for a while but, when at last he stops and stretches out full length in the shade, we leave him to his morning siesta. Mission accomplished."

Tiger viewing can be dovetailed with almost any other aspect of India. The best times to see tiger are between November and March.



*Hashim Tyabji will be giving a talk at the Nehru Centre, Mayfair on 1st September at 7.00pm
Tickets will be £15.00 of which £5.00 will be donated per person to Global Tiger Patrol. Please contact us now for tickets.*

ANANDA - THE SPA OF THE FUTURE

Our reputation is as a wildlife specialist and our client's record of tiger viewing is impressive (if we may say so!), due to superlative guiding. But India is not all wildlife and temples! To illustrate this Nicky recently visited Ananda, which lies in the foothills of the Himalayas and is listed as one of the top ten spas in the world. She was entirely impressed! Nicky writes:

"Following a fascinating journey from Hardwar I passed through the town of Rishikesh, which is the 'birthplace of yoga'. I continued on a scenic, winding road until I was confronted by an imposing and beautiful palace, swathed in sunlight. This was my first sight of Ananda.

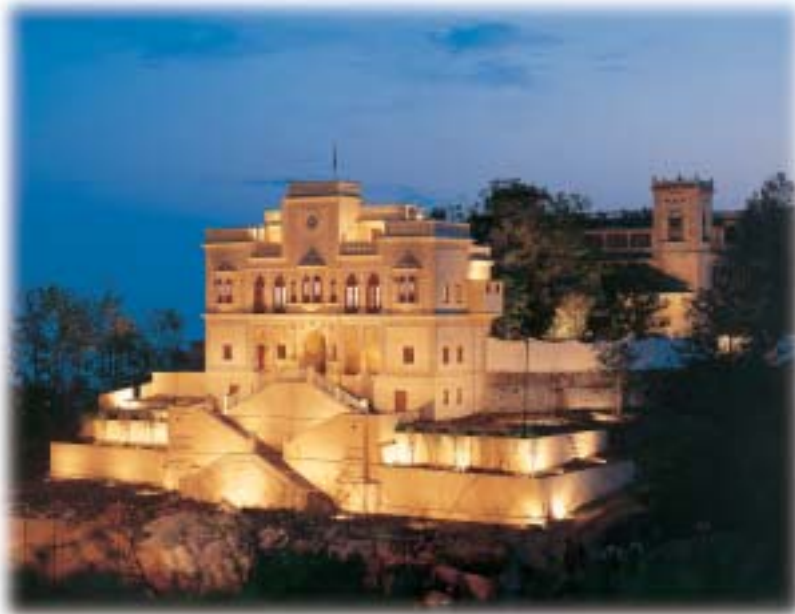
Here one can forget either the hippy connotations of yoga or the superficiality that sometimes accompanies the modern 'spa mentality'. I think that 'wellness' is in danger of becoming a much overused term; often the surrounding environment is far from ideal and so many establishments introduce massages and a Jacuzzi and think, by default, that this lifts them to spa status. Gloriously, nothing could be further from the truth at Ananda. There are few places that this genuine, tranquil and beautiful spa retreat where yoga and ayurveda are an integral part of the whole.



Ananda's service is impeccable; the atmosphere of pure calm is intoxicating and invigorating. The range of treatments and facilities are considerable. If taken individually the ayurvedic and massage treatments are quite expensive so, for those knowing what they want to do, it is cheaper to choose one of Ananda's

inclusive packages - but I can help all our clients with this and there is something for everyone. I loved the all weather outdoor swimming pool, which was surreal to use in January when it was incredibly cool outside! But it is the spiritualism of Ananda which

is so overwhelmingly positive. As an ayurvedic doctor confided to me, any form of helpful treatment or cure needs to be a positive and integral part of one's daily routine for at least two weeks to see any result. (So many people want to try too much, which ends up a negative). Ananda's aura of spirituality, to my mind, also stems from the practice of yoga and so I was interested to discover that



India's finest yoga teacher, Vinay Menon, based here. Unusually, one-on-one yoga sessions are the norm (as well as group sessions), and this can really help back pain or other body-frame ailments. I have been, generally, a sceptic about this sort of thing but I can genuinely recommend the principles of Ananda to anyone and I now do yoga on a regular weekly basis. If there's a downside to Ananda one could say (in Indian terms, please note, where value is superb!)

that the property is expensive but this is not some hairy-legged place to go and 'play yoga', instead being a professional provider of physical and spiritual wellbeing..... I loved it."

Ananda makes another excellent addition to a holiday to India, as well as a stand-alone reason for going to the subcontinent. It is therefore important to bear in mind that one does not, at all, have to partake in the yoga, treatments or meditation. Simply as a place to relax it has few peers and the gardens are a reason to visit in themselves. There are also wonderful walks in the foothills of the Himalayas as well as golf and, of course, whitewater rafting for certain months of the year. Nicky found the Aarti ceremony held



locally each evening to be especially fascinating - and the scenery certainly lends itself as a spectacle! Ananda draws an interesting and eclectic mix of people, Nicky shared the property with just a handful of

guests of differing nationalities, some there as couples (or families) and some on their own.

THE WONDERFUL VARIATIONS OF INDIA

It can be hard to believe just what is achievable in a relatively short holiday to India. However Jan Gethin recently travelled with us, accompanied by Laura Graves, and we first sent them tiger viewing, and then onto Kerala. This is a perfect combination and the variation in their experiences are illustrated by their notes on the trip:

"From the outset we had a good feeling about the holiday. Nicola Shepherd spent hours finding out about us; the kind of things we enjoyed doing; what sort of places we liked staying in; how active (or not) we wanted to be. It proved to be time well spent. Our final itinerary was a dream package that gave us maximum flexibility and incorporated everything we asked for. Each stage of our journey through India worked like a charm, from the moment we touched down in Delhi right through to our departure from Mumbai 19 days later and including everything in between.

And what in-betweens! The peace of Manender Farm; fruit picked straight from the tree; honey from the comb; a personal introduction to the very buffalo whose milk provided our yoghurt and creme caramel. The drive to Agra, weaving through rickshaws, handcarts, goats, pigs, camels and even the odd elephant. That first gin and tonic on our terrace overlooking the Taj Mahal. Our visit was even timed to coincide with the full moon. Beat that for attention to detail.

Malabar House, an oasis of calm in the heart of bustling Fort Cochin's old town; the tranquillity of drifting through Kerala's backwaters; the idyll that is Surya Samudra on the edge of the Arabian Sea. It's hard to single out one highlight; the trip was simply bursting with them. But Bagh Van Lodge in Pench deserves a special mention. On our second game drive, riding high on the landrover's rear seat, we spotted a freshly killed Sambar barely camouflaged in the grass to the side of the path.



We signalled to our driver and guide. Leopard kill? Probably. Engine off and wait. After 15 minutes, soft growls from either side of the track. She has cubs. Decide to pull forward and turn around a little higher up, so we don't disturb her. We round the bend, and there she is, right on the track about 12' ahead. A fully grown female tiger. She

looks, slowly turns and strolls into the trees and lies down, still in full view. We pull back again, watching her watching us. A further 30 minutes pass. She walks across the path towards the kill, but we know she's uneasy. She emerges once again from the bush, pink tongue flicking across her lips and a growl that signals it's time we left. Check watches.

One whole hour. That afternoon we return to the same spot, and there she is again; lying in the grass opposite the kill. We think; two days ago we were looking at the Taj Mahal bathed in the soft light of a full moon, now we're gazing into the eyes of a tiger. This is India, ma'am."

Kerala can offer a tremendous range of possibilities as well as the renowned backwaters. The ocean is nearby, it isn't very far to some interesting nature reserves and National Parks, there are some very secluded properties in that part of India and we also feature dedicated ayurvedic treatments.



SHOWS 2004

Finally, as well as various other localised events we will have a stand at the following major shows during 2004. We very much look forward to seeing everyone who cannot find time to visit us at the office!

1. Surrey County Show, Stoke Park, Guildford: 31st May
2. Ponds at West Park, Rockbourne, Hants: 18th June
www.pondsatwestpark.co.uk
3. Daily Telegraph House & Garden Show, Earls Court, London: 24/7 June
4. CLA Game Fair, Blenheim, Oxfordshire: 23/5 July
5. Blenheim International Horse Trials, Blenheim, Oxfordshire: 9/12 Sept

**AFRICAN
EXPLORATIONS**



Afex House, Holwell, Burford, Oxfordshire OX18 4JS

Tel: 01993 822443 Fax: 01993 822414

Email: safaris@globalnet.co.uk www.explorationcompany.com

**INDIAN
EXPLORATIONS**

