

# AFRICAN EXPLORATIONS



*Safaris of distinction to Africa, India and the Galapagos Islands*

## AFRICAN EXPLORATIONS NEWSLETTER 2002

We are delighted to present our first newsletter of 2002. Despite the turmoil of last year we remain completely positive about the future of our industry, where we are most fortunate to deal with a discerning clientele. We hope you will enjoy reading this issue but there is a change to our usual format; instead of subjecting you to our usual style of writing we are opting for a refreshing change of viewpoint. We have asked some of you, our valued clients, to write about your most memorable experiences in the countries you visited when travelling with African or Indian Explorations. In addition, this issue features some specially negotiated offers, which we think you might find of interest. Thank you for travelling with us!

### MADAGASCAR – by Mrs Anne Phillips

As two intrepid pensioners, we asked Nicky Shepherd of African Explorations to arrange a two week tour of Madagascar for us. Taking into consideration that we were venturing round the fourth largest island and fourth poorest country in the world, it was remarkable that all our tour arrangements, guides, internal flights, etc worked with teutonic timing and efficiency. All accommodation, although

the Indri has greater likeness to a panda than a lemur. Whilst most lemurs grunt the Indri sings, an eerie, wailing sound which carries for up to two miles. There are nine different species of lemur in Perinet, although it is unlikely that you will see them all. Perinet is also home to a large variety of chameleons, beautiful and varied insects and spiders, and lots of reptiles. It is a good place for bird watching, especially for the Madagascar green sunbird and Vasa parrots. Botanists too, will not be disappointed. The tropical island of Isle St. Marie is also spectacular, with deserted beaches overhung by coconut palms. Most of the small villages comprise bamboo and



sometimes very basic because of location, was spotlessly clean and an excellent French cuisine prevailed everywhere. The scenery was stunning and we saw lemurs in sizes from 2 metres to a few centimetres. At Perinet Nature Reserve, our stay in the Station Hotel was a 1920's time warp. The Perinet Special Reserve is a must for anyone interested in the flora and fauna of the eastern rainforest. The reserve protects the largest of the lemur family, the Indri. Most people see indris in Perinet, and if you don't see them you will certainly hear them. Standing about three feet high, with barely visible tails, black and white markings and surprised teddy-bear faces,

palm huts. The Berenty Nature Reserve in the south was not to be missed. Berenty is famous for its ringtailed lemurs and sifakas. Apart from other varieties of lemurs there are also noisy groups of fruit bats or flying foxes. Bird watching is particularly rewarding. The joy of Berenty is the selection of broad forest trails that allow safe wandering on your own. A final few days on the beach at Nosy Be, where we were the only couple who were married and consistently with the same partner, was restful and amusing. A working knowledge of French is a must; this is a wonderful experience – but don't expect The Ritz!

## MADAGASCAR – Hotel Tsarabanjina



Hotel Tsarabanjina has been developed on an uninhabited island, a paradise in the Mitsio Archipelago. The 22-hectare island is small but offers lush vegetation and crystal clear water. The hotel exemplifies the term "barefoot luxury", mixed with cordon bleu catering with a strong seafood influence and excellent service, on a Robinson Crusoe style island. A hammock rests in a corner of the private verandah capturing the cool sea breeze. A fully equipped PADI dive centre allows guests to dive from the beach or explore the coral of neighbouring islands by boat.

African Explorations offers a wonderful insight into Madagascar with two week holidays covering Tsarabajina, Perinet and Berenty, incorporating various off-the-beaten-track areas and landscapes. The cost is from £2565.00 per person, excluding international airfares.

## BOTSWANA BUSHMAN SAFARI – 10 Days

For many years it has not been possible to offer a genuine non-patronising Bushman experience due to the threat of exploitation. For the first time ever, we can offer our clients an incredible opportunity to experience a dignified and sensitive Bushman safari.

Search for Africa's most rarely seen carnivore, the brown hyaena. Due to a PhD research programme the cubs are habituated, allowing for closer observation. Guided game drives into the Makgadikgadi Game Reserve will explain how the Kalahari was formed and how unique desert species such as suricates and gemsbok are adapted. Head off across the pans, watch the sun rise and set. There are few visual benchmarks to be seen and one swiftly loses sense of perspective. 16 000 square kilometres of baking soda void and you are the only people in it! Visit the ancestral gathering lands of the Joan/Huansi Bushmen. Guiding will be by PhD Researchers, who have been guiding in the Kalahari for no less than three years. They consult with Community leaders to ensure a unique experience that combines both culture and wildlife in a sensitive and dignified fashion. Listen to the history of the Bushmen people, from their origins to the complex political challenges that are confronting them today.

Walk out into the bush with the men, women, children and your guides to find suitable plants to be harvested. Return to the Bushmen village and prepare your gathering tool by the fire for the next few days.

Some of the women will show us how they make beads from ostrich eggs. Prepare for a traditional hunt. Watch the men prepare bows, arrows and quivers.

Meet the traditional healer, who still uses ancient remedies and cures. Observe a trance dance, a deeply spiritual experience for the Bushmen people. The aim of the trance is to provide both healing and also to clear the air of conflict and tension.

The cost per person amounts to £4098.00 per person on a fully inclusive basis. Excludes international flights.



At 5.30 in the morning, on Zambia's Busanga Plain in late August, I find it hard to believe that I am only some 15 degrees south of the equator. It is freezing cold and in the grey pre-dawn light the landscape bears, at least to my untrained eye, a passing resemblance to an English country park.

However, a few minutes into my early morning game drive with Nathan, this potentially dangerous illusion is shattered by the appearance of a large black-maned lion padding silently across the grass towards us. Some 20 feet from the vehicle he sits down, yawns carnivorously and sniffs the air, apparently oblivious of us two humans and the hot, malodorous, pile of steel and rubber in which we are sitting. Directly behind him the great scarlet disc of the sun is edging slowly above the horizon and, as it frees itself from its earthly moorings, it frames this magnificent creature in a corona of fire. It is a moment of such numinous perfection that I want to freeze it forever.

As I watch, transfixed, Nathan nudges me and we see four lionesses moving purposively across the plain towards us followed by four tumbling, playful cubs, no more than a few months old. Nearing us, one of the lionesses bounds up to the lion, rolls on her back



and starts licking and rubbing him in an apparent display of real affection. Again, this equally dangerous illusion of anthropomorphic cuddliness is shattered by one of the other lionesses who, sensing our presence, fixes us with her gleaming golden stare and snarls angrily at the vehicle, displaying a set of canines that have been lethally honed by evolution over a hundred thousand years of ancestral predation.

Later that morning we come across a pair of cheetahs lying on a mound in the shade of a tree and, later still, we see zebras, hippopotamus, crocodiles and several varieties of antelope. All quite astonishing in the wondrousness of their existence, but for me almost reduced to the ordinary by that transcendent early morning encounter.



## ROBIN POPE SPECIAL OFFER

5 nights with Robin Pope,  
3 nights Sausage Tree Camp,  
1 night Tongabezi from £2405.00  
per person excluding airfares.

Nkwali 7 nights, Sindabezi 3 nights,  
£1600.00 per person  
excluding airfares.

## WILDLIFE SAFARI IN INDIA— by Mrs Carrie Wilkie

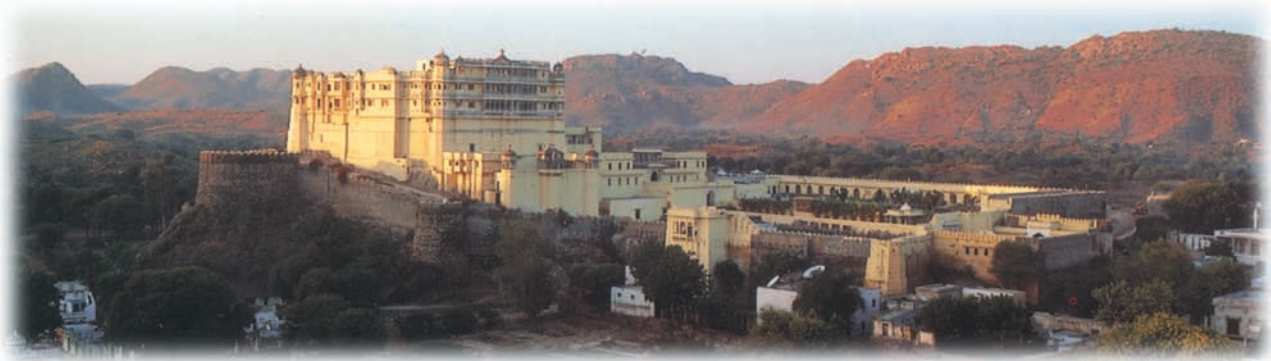
Our Indian holiday evolved from our great interest in conservation – we love Africa, but felt that the tiger's plight justified a change of destination. Consequently our Indian sojourn was primarily geared towards seeing these magnificent animals but also aimed to visit the most spectacular of Indian architectural marvels to learn a little more about the culture and traditions of this amazingly colourful and diverse country. Our trip started in Bombay where we visited the Dhobi Ghats (where a caste undertake the city's washing outdoors in a series of deep tanks and channels, unfailingly bicycling it back to its rightful owner each evening). We also visited an exquisite Jain Temple and the Gandhi Museum. The Museum is situated in the house where the great man lived and exhibits include his few personal belongings and a wonderful diorama of his life. We met our guide Hashim Tyabji (a well-known ornithologist) and drove to Kanha. We had wonderful photographic opportunities passing through small, rural villages; with the colours of the people and the landscape brilliantly accentuated by the freshness of the rain. We met a man on a bicycle who had just seen a tiger cross the road – we headed back to the vicinity but this particular master of camouflage had disappeared.

On our evening drive into the Park we were rewarded by a sighting of six wild dogs (Dhole). They are a very attractive species with reddish colouring, a large head and very strong neck and jaw, making them very efficient predators. Soon it was time for us to depart for the next destination, the Maharajah's Palace of Kawardha. We were greeted here with garlands of marigolds

stability and balance, and at all times is extremely patient and careful in finding the next foothold. We were lucky enough to see a beautiful tigress hiding in long grass. She was quite calm and relaxed while surrounded by us all on elephant-back and, after taking a leisurely drink from a small pool, she walked slowly and purposefully away.

We drove to our next National Park, Dudhwa in Uttar Pradesh, where we stayed with Billy Arjan Singh at his home 'Tiger Haven'. Billy is elderly now, but still an ardent tiger conservationist who has had several wildlife documentaries made about his life and efforts to save the tiger, as well as having several books published. Dudhwa consists of really varied terrain, ideal for tigers, with woods, plains and open grassland. We saw many beautiful butterflies and birds here too and, although the park is very pressured from all sides, our stay here was peaceful and idyllic. We drove to Jaipur in Rajasthan to see the Amber Palace. We were lucky enough to have the chief guide take us round the palace and he showed us many secret passages which were used by the Maharajah's 365 wives/concubines and some of the public rooms.

The decoration of the building is incredible with wonderful inlay work involving millions of semi-precious stones. Craftsmen from Persia were brought to India for the purpose. The Palace of the Winds overlooks the streets of Jaipur and was built for all the women of the court to watch the pageantry and processions in the street below, but without being seen themselves. We were



and the burning of incense sticks. We were taken to visit a tribal village of the Baiga people, who live very simply in the cleanest of mud huts and were extremely humble and dignified. On our return to the Palace in the evening we were treated to a display of stick dancing (the sticks used to be weapons). The temple in Kawardha is spectacular, a fairy-tale building, icing-sugar white in the brilliant sunshine with a contrasting flame tree outside. We visited the Maharajah's old garden, complete with wonderful but dilapidated ancient irrigation engineering, a Step Well and a Ladies' Bathing Well.

Our next stop was Bandhavgarh National Park in the state of Madhya Pradesh. This park was the most beautiful we visited with stunning scenery consisting of wonderful forested rocky outcrops and open grassy areas. Here the game-viewing was on elephant-back and the chief Mahout had been featured in National Geographic.

We negotiated steep cliff climbs and descents. When descending, the elephant appears to almost sit on its back legs so as to give

able to look down on to the street and see caparisoned horses enroute to a wedding. Our accommodation here was Raj Vilas. We had a stunning 'tent' situated at the rear of extensive gardens adjacent to a wild area.

Up early for our four hour drive to the showpiece of Indian tiger conservation – Ranthambore National Park. Fateh Singh and his son have created a superb example of a Park where the infrastructure benefits all. The philosophy is that without the tiger everything else crumbles, conversely everything exists because of the tiger. It was here that we had our most spectacular tiger sighting. On our first evening drive a tigress came to a stream to drink very near the vehicle and stayed for about ten minutes. Our early morning drive turned out to be stunning too, with two sightings of (usually) nocturnal Sloth Bears.

*'The eyes of the tiger are the brightest of any animal on earth. They blaze back the ambient light with awe-inspiring intensity. It would be a tragedy, and a terrible dereliction of duty, if we allowed that magical fire to burn out.'*  
**Billy Arjan Singh**

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### SHOWS 2002

6,7,8 June	South of England Show, Ardingly, West Sussex
14,15,16 June	Three Counties, Malvern, Worcestershire
27,28,29,30 June	House and Garden Show, Earls Court, London
26,27,28 July September	CLA Game Fair, Romsey, Hants Blenheim International Horse Trials