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22 April 2020

NEWSFLASH

Extension of Free Flying

The booking period for the free flying deal has been extended indefinitely, and is applicable to all NEW bookings made for travel up to the end of 2021.

Okavango Delta Water Levels

The good news is that the cycle of nature carries on, despite what may be happening in the world. After a challenging, but not necessarily unusually dry year, the annual inundation has finally arrived in the Delta. Bringing life back into the system, we are delighted to report that water levels are rising daily on Wilderness Safaris' Abu, Jao, Mombo and Vumbura concessions – and we may even see some changes in the Savuti channel too. This does bode well for the fauna and flora in the months ahead and of course, the safari experience when travel is back on the radar! We will keep you posted...

Bisate Day Lounge

Originally scheduled to open in May, please be advised that this has been delayed. The country lockdown restrictions in both Rwanda and South Africa as a result of COVID-19, will define the ability of the construction team to re-enter Rwanda to continue building. We will communicate a revised opening date as soon as we are able to do so.

Jao Reserve – Proposed Tubu Rebuild & Maintenance Closures - late 2020/2021/2022

Subject to change in light of COVID-19 and the impact this may have, inventory has been closed as follows:

- Between 1 September 2021 and 30 April 2022, the plan is to rebuild Tubu Tree and Little Tubu, re-opening 1 May 2022. More details will follow in due course, but for now we can advise that it will be a full rebuild including 100% solar power. The footprint of both camps will stay the same but the tented rooms will be landscape facing and not portrait style as per the existing rooms.
- During the months of November, December, January and February in 2020, 2021 and 2022 respectively, annual maintenance programmes will be carried out on a staggered basis through all the camps.

New Visa Regime Announced in Rwanda

Communicated prior to the lockdowns as a result of COVID-19, Rwanda updated their visa requirements allowing for greater ease of access (hopefully this won't change). A large number of countries may now obtain their visa on arrival and visa fees have been waived for a stay of 30 days – including Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Belgium, France, India, South Africa, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. For other countries, costs still apply.

Current Lockdown Periods in Relevant Countries

	Restriction	Duration	Date lifted - subject to change
Botswana	From 2 April to 30 April	28 days	01-May-20
Kenya	From 5 April to 5 May	30 days	06-May-20
Mozambique	From 23 March to 22 April	30 days	23-Apr-20
Namibia	From 27 March to 4 May	38 days	05-May-20
Rwanda	From 1 April to 30 April	30 days	01-May-20
Seychelles	From 8 April to 29 April	21 days	30-Apr-20
South Africa	From 26 March to 30 April	35 days	01-May-20
Zambia	From 26 March to 23 April	29 days	24-Apr-20
Zimbabwe	From 30 March until 3 May	34 days	04-May-20

CAMPS & ACTIVITIES

Exciting News re: Kalahari Plains Activities

- We are now able to offer guided walks from Kalahari Plains (in addition to the Bushman walk) for an up close and personal focus of the area. The norm is 6 guests per walk (could do more if a second qualified walking guide is available) with a minimum age of 13 years permitted. Lasting about an hour and half, the walk will leave camp just before sunrise and head out to one of the surrounding pans.
- We have also secured permission to be on drive an hour before and an hour after park closure – allowing more opportunity to view the crepuscular creatures that the Kalahari is known for (those that are active primarily during twilight).

Helicopter Horizons 2021 – Rates & Seats in Inventory

We have received the 2021 rates from Helicopter Horizons, and have loaded seats in inventory accordingly – 12 seats on all Botswana scenic flights and four seats for the transfers to/from the balloon excursion on the Vumbura concession.

The Vumbura Balloon Season for 2020

At this time, the 2020 season will operate until 31 August. Four seats have been loaded in inventory to allow for pre-booking.

No Pilot/Guide room at Mombo until the end of 2020

Further to notice given in the February update, we were unable to re-open this room as planned in mid-April. The pilot/guide room will therefore remain closed in inventory until 31 December 2020. All pilots and guides booked in the pilot/guide room over this period, will be accommodated back of house. Please rest assured they will still be hosted in the same way by the team at Mombo and Little Mombo.

INFO | Community Visits in Namibia Postponed

As a precaution and to protect our fragile communities surrounding our camps due to COVID-19, all community visits will be postponed until further notice. The camps where this will mainly have an impact are as follows:

- Doro Nawas: Excursion to Twyfelfontein (including San rock engravings, Damara Living Museum, Burnt Mountain and Organ Pipes).
- Damaraland Camp: Excursion to Twyfelfontein (on a three night stay only, or if a private vehicle is booked and paid for) including: San rock engravings, Damara Living Museum, Burnt Mountain, and Organ Pipes; plus cultural visits to the local farms at Fonteine Pos and DeRiet.
- Serra Cafema: Interacting with the Himba people - a group of semi-nomadic pastoralists who live in the Kaokoveld area.

End of the Offer – FOC Helicopter Flight for Repeat Guests

This offering in the Linyanti came to an end on 31 March 2020, and will not be offered going forward.

Linyanti Camp Configurations

Due to the additional beds required for Little DumaTau, please bear in mind the change in configuration at King's Pool and Savuti:

- From earlier this year (as a result of the unfortunate fire that destroyed 1 room) - King's Pool already has only 7 x twin rooms and 1 x suite, with a maximum bed count of 18.
- From August 2020, Savuti has 5 x twin rooms and 1 x family unit, with a maximum bed count of 12.

WILDERNESS AIR

CHANGE | Meet & Greet in Harare

Wilderness Air Zimbabwe will be offering an upgraded M&G service in Harare. Applicable to all new bookings, this revised rate and service will come into effect from 1 June. Existing bookings will be honoured at the rate previously quoted, but all new bookings for travel from 1 June will be at the revised rate.

- The increase is approximately US\$ 10.00 pp. While not everyone will get access to the lounge – it depends on the flight routing – there will be only one rate/service is available for the sake of simplicity re: costing and booking.
- HAC is the operator in Harare who handles our M&G service on behalf of Wilderness Air. They have recently opened a guest lounge on the domestic side of the airport terminal, located after security screening. All Wilderness guests arriving Harare on commercial air and departing with Wilderness Air can make use of the lounge (it is for domestic travel only and not for linking onto commercial flights departing Harare – they do not have access on the international side). Guests who do make use of the lounge, will be offered teas, coffees, drinks (beer & wine), and snacks and there is free WI-FI. This will work well for those guests who arrive Harare on the BA flight at 11h05.

TOURING & TRANSFERS

Revised Magashi Transfers

In the coming months, we plan to do away with the scheduled shuttle transfer between Kigali and Magashi, and allow the DMCs (including THA) to book private transfers to and from Akagera instead.

African Parks has established a facility at the North Gate of Akagera National Park in Rwanda – a comfort stop where guests will be able to enjoy refreshments, buy local souvenirs and make use of the bathrooms. This will allow for greater flexibility in transfer arrangements to and from Magashi. DMCs will be able to transfer their guests by private vehicle to the North Gate, where they will be met at 11:00, or on pre-booked arrangement at 15:00, by a Magashi guide and vehicle for the onward transfer to camp. Should there be a slight delay in connections, guests can relax in the safe surroundings of this facility. Do note however, that tour operators may not proceed further into Akagera National Park – *North Gate is strictly an exit gate only and misuse of this will not be tolerated by park management. In the event that guests cannot be at the North Gate by the above stipulated times, transfer to camp can be done by the DMC via the South Gate of Akagera National Park.

Accordingly, making use of the scheduled shuttle transfer to and from Kigali will no longer be a requirement and tour operators may book private transfers for those guests travelling to and from Magashi with their local DMCs. All existing bookings on the scheduled shuttle will be honoured – or these may be cancelled and costs refunded, and a private transfer at applicable costs arranged instead.

Please contact your Journey Specialist for further details and timings or refer to the published rates sheets on the Info Centre.

Pick-up Times for Transfers & Excursions

A good number of calls that our Emergency Afterhours service receives are regarding pick-up times and in particular, if the guide or driver is not there at the exact time. While our teams and partners make every effort to be on time – traffic delays, load-shedding, accidents, etc. do happen and they might be a little late. Accordingly, we are adding the following to our itinerary text and it would be appreciated if you could point this out to your clients:

Please allow for a few additional minutes to the stipulated collection times for flights, transfers or excursions as slight delays may occur due to unforeseen circumstances.

Revised Cancellation Policy for Wilderness Safaris Private Journeys (WSPJ)

Our team in the Cape have revised their cancellation policy so that it aligns with the terms and conditions of the standard Wilderness Safaris policy. Note that different policies may apply to third party suppliers that WSPJ book on your behalf i.e. Apex Shark Expeditions, Exclusive Charters, Robben Island, etc.

Recommended Family Activities in & around Cape Town

WSPJ have compiled a list of great family and kid-friendly activities which include a steam train journey to Elgin market, visiting Battery Park which includes a skate park and stand-up paddle boarding in the canal, experiencing the stars at the Iziko Planetarium, the Kid's Science Centre, chocolate-making or ceramic painting and the World of Adventure near Stellenbosch. Details are available on the Info Centre or ask your Journey Specialist for more information.

Closed - Livingstone Island

With the Zambezi River in full flow, the Victoria Falls are as spectacular as ever! Accordingly, Livingstone Island activities are now closed due to high water levels.

AIRLINES & AIRPORTS

BA/Comair Operations in South Africa postponed until Early May

In line with current lockdown regulations, all flights have been suspended and plan to start operating as follows:

- Domestic flight schedule from Sunday, 3 May 2020
- Regional flight schedule from Sunday, 10 May 2020

SAA Flight Cancellations

South African Airways (SAA) has advised the following in response to a government travel ban aimed at stopping the transmission of the Coronavirus (Covid-19):

- All International and Regional operations will be cancelled until 31 May 2020.
- All Domestic operations will be cancelled until 30 April 2020.

Airlink Suspensions

Under the previous lockdown period, Airlink suspended all operations from 26 March with the intention of re-opening on 20 April. We have not received revised dates as yet, but with the extension of the South African lockdown to 30 April, they will most likely only start operating again in May.

Hosea Kutako (Windhoek) International Airport Upgrade

Currently undergoing a major upgrade, work was scheduled to be completed in approximately one year. This may well change due to current circumstances. Before the lockdown, everything was working as per normal, although we still encourage all travellers to allow for extra time to accommodate check-in, security and connection times due to possible congestion.

Wheel Chair Usage at Victoria Falls Airport

Where possible, please request/book use of a wheel chair at Victoria Falls Airport in advance for any traveller on commercial scheduled airline, preferably when purchasing the ticket. If not arranged in advance, be aware that wheelchairs are subject to availability plus a fee of USD\$10.00 must be paid direct to National Handling Services (NHS) at Victoria Falls Airport. None of the airlines have wheelchairs - only NHS hence the requirement to request it when buying an air ticket
