

WILDERNESS PRODUCT

CAMP REVIEWS

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BOTSWANA

During May, Aurelie Dubreuil visited Botswana and this is what she had to say about Wilderness DumaTau.

I recently had the pleasure of staying at DumaTau in the Linyanti Wildlife Reserve, and it was an unforgettable experience. From the moment we arrived, the staff made us feel like family, providing exceptional service and hospitality. We stayed in the family room, which was luxurious and well-appointed, with all the bells and whistles. The private plunge pool and spacious bath added to the sense of indulgence, making it a perfect retreat after a day of adventure.

The highlight of our stay was the fishing excursion on the barge. Although we didn't catch any fish ourselves, our guide did, making the trip exciting and memorable. The camp also offers various game viewing opportunities, although our time was limited due to our educational trip and camp inspections at Savuti and King's Pool. The food at DumaTau was exceptional, with a well-thought-out vegetarian option that catered to all tastes. Each meal was a culinary delight, prepared with care and creativity.

The staff at DumaTau truly stand out. Their warmth and attentiveness made our stay special. Our guide BK was knowledgeable and ensured our comfort during game drives, providing ponchos and hot water bottles to keep us warm during the cooler mornings.

Despite not having much time for game viewing, our experience at DumaTau was one of my favourites. The combination of excellent service, luxurious accommodation, and unique activities made it a standout destination. I highly recommend DumaTau to anyone looking for an extraordinary safari experience in Botswana.



Mosiuwa Mofokeng, Kabelo Mothibeli, Siphokazi Kalo and Alex Rautenbach recently went on a Botswana educational trip and shared some feedback on their stays at Chitabe, Jao, King's Pool and Vumbura Plains.

Alex flew in directly to Maun from Cape Town to meet her Johannesburg colleagues. The 2h40 min direct flight on Airlink is a convenient way to link the two tourist destinations. Cape Town International Airport's Departures is a small and stress-free environment, allowing for an enjoyable start to your travels. On arrival at Maun, we had a swift connection to Wilderness Air and flew in a Cessna 208 Grand Caravan to the Chitabe Concession.

Wilderness Chitabe

Our guide Phinley is the oldest guide at Chitabe and a treasure trove of information. On arrival we were warmly greeted with songs by the staff, and managers Mass and Gloria – so friendly and accommodating, with a good sense of humour. Chitabe is a charming camp, but what really stands out in this area are the amazing game sightings. We saw the cutest hyena cubs playing just outside their den; very curious creatures that came up to the vehicle and started chewing on the tyres! Furthermore, we had a great cheetah sighting with two cubs, saw a leopard resting in the shade of a tree, guarding its prey above, and beautiful blonde lions. The back-of-house visit was very informative; and it was good to see **Wilderness Chitabe Lediba** – a smaller camp with a wonderful private and personalised offering. Besides the game, we can also highly recommend the fig cake which was served during one of the afternoon teas.



Wilderness Jao

Our next destination was Wilderness Jao. The flight from Chitabe to Jao is breath-taking... as you fly over the floodplains you can spot red lechwe crossing the channels, elephants gracefully meandering along, and hippo heads dotted in the lagoons. The accommodation at Jao is next-level luxury, a modern and ultra-chic take on a bush offering. The afternoon boat safari produced great sightings of jacanas, fish eagles, storks, herons, etc., and naturally, hippos. Our guide Gift added a great touch of sophistication to the guiding style, and the staff at the lodge are highly trained, especially the waiters. The afternoon mokoro ride was a wonderfully relaxing experience, which culminated in a surprise bar set-up where we met up with other guests, and the sundowners turned into a festive party with the beautiful African sun setting in the horizon. So special! The vegetarian options at all the Wilderness camps we stayed at were delicious, and varied, with the Jao option being especially delish (a vegetable curry). Gift also took us to visit **Wilderness Jacana**, which is a charming and intimate camp, wild and authentic.



Wilderness King's Pool

From Jao we continued on to Wilderness King's Pool in the Linyanti (approx 40min flight). We were warmly greeted by Martin, the GM, and Kayla, the Service Standards Manager for Wilderness, who was staying at King's Pool for a few days. King's Pool just seems to have the perfect balance of olde worlde charm, authenticity and modern comfort, and has a magical location overlooking an oxbow lake that has water throughout the year. The elevated rooms offer the best vantage point, especially from the outside sala, from where we saw elephants and even a giraffe crossing the river, crocodiles basking on the banks of the river, and hippos dominating the waters. You can have a full safari experience without having to leave your room. This is the definitely the place for elephant lovers, as you get to see loads of them. The breakfast wraps can be highly recommended, and they had the best fluffy muffins.



We undertook a day of site inspections of **Wilderness Savuti** and **Wilderness DumaTau** with game drives in between. At Savuti we met the very competent GM Sasha, who took us to the camp's log hide – from which we had the closest and most thrilling ellie viewing by the waterhole. There is something about being on foot, and so close which amps up the wild experience. We continued the drive to DumaTau, which has an enviable location on the water. Slick and chic, the Osprey Retreat features a wellness centre, gym and lap pool. DumaTau has very interesting dishes on the lunch menu, local dishes with a modern twist. The Matabele Bowl is a crowd pleaser.



Wilderness Vumbura Plains

At Vumbura’s airstrip, we were met by Ona, who whisked us off to a surprise welcome tea/coffee station in the bush. Thereafter we continued on a game drive following leopard tracks, and eventually found a big male lounging in a tree. Safely at Wilderness Vumbura Plains we were delighted by a boma evening with a lovely choir, drumming and dance show. We stayed in one of the family tents at Vumbura Plains North. The rooms are exquisitely decorated reflecting the nature and waterlilies, with beautifully curated furniture and accessories. One thing to bear in mind is that the rooms are very open plan apropos the bathroom, so great for couples, but they don’t offer much privacy. Vumbura Plains South is basically an extension, and mirrors Vumbura North. We also got to visit **Wilderness Little Vumbura** which you can only access by boat. It is a cosy and intimate camp, with an authentic bush feel. On our game drive we saw lions (including a sad injured one) and had an ellie that joined our bush lunch (very exciting!).

After another surprise set up – this time a barbeque lunch in the bush, we were treated to yet again another surprise: a helicopter scenic flight with Helicopter Horizons over the Delta. Breath-taking and highly recommended.

Ona, our guide, joined us for dinner and entertained us with some funny “believe it or not” stories about Mandalay Kay (a key legend from that area).

A truly inspiring and enriching educational!



During April, Carel Loubser visited Wilderness Vumbura Plains South and Wilderness Mombo.

We left South Africa hoping for two things: my wife wanted to experience her first mokoro ride, and we both hoped to have a memorable leopard sighting. To increase our probability, we booked Vumbura Plains and Mombo. With the Okavango Delta flood starting to come in about a month ago, it was with relief that we saw more and more water as we approached the airstrip at Vumbura Plains. At least we were able to tick off one wish.



Our last morning drive at Vumbura Plains started slowly. It was great not to rush, and to take in the sounds and smells and keep an eye on the animal tracks at a slow pace.

A couple of hours into our drive, an update came across the radio that the pride of six lions we had seen lazing around a few days before had been spotted, and were on the move. With a couple of hours left before our charter flight to Mombo, we slowly made our way to the area of the sighting.

As we arrived, the two lionesses and their four sub-adults were relaxing, and lazing around again. This time, at least, they were in an area underneath a big tree, using the termite mound as their surveyor's point. We managed to get some beautiful photo opportunities of the three young lions on the termite mound. It was not long before a lioness spotted a herd of blue wildebeest grazing a couple of hundred meters away and decided to approach them slowly with the sun perfectly behind her. The script started playing out as many before, with the wildebeest becoming aware of the stalking lioness and scattering off in different directions. And... an unsuccessful hunt.



Only this time, the lioness did not give up and kept approaching, crouching further. We were in pursuit with the cameras, ready to capture a very unlikely lion kill.

The next moment, she sprang into action like Usain Bolt out of the starting blocks, rushing towards the wildebeest. Our slow stalk turned into a rush to get past a large bush blocking our view. As we drove around the



bush, we expected a disappointed lioness to turn back to the pride, but instead, there was a cloud of dust as the vehicle came to a stop, and the cameras began shuttering away.

The wildebeest did scatter, but one unlucky one was resting behind the bush. With probably 100 different safari experiences behind me, I finally managed to experience a successful hunt.



Off to **Wilderness Mombo!** Our first afternoon drive was slow, but there were plenty of giraffe, wildebeest, impala, baboons, and zebra. As expected, many hyenas scavenged the area for something to eat. A leopard sighting would be great, but as the sun started to set, we lost light, making photography much more difficult.

The guides tend to plan the next day together with guests the night before, and our plan was to look for the wild dogs seen late on the drive the night before. Luckily, a call came through early, and we slowly approached a female leopard walking through the woodlands.



We hoped she might jump up as she approached several big fallen leadwood and jackalberry trees. Not only did she pass them all, but all trees worth climbing. After about 30 minutes, she finally entertained us by climbing a massive termite mound. As an excellent professional photographer friend later said, a leopard on a termite mound is probably more memorable than one in a big tree. He should know, considering he is permanently on safari and has photographed it all...



ZAMBIA

In June Thando Maphosa, Bev De Boer, Neela Naidoo and Bronwyn Lambrecht headed out on a Zambezi educational where they had so much fun (and enhanced experiences, most importantly).

Wilderness Shumba

On arrival at Lusaka International Airport, we were met by a Staravia representative and escorted to their lounge for refreshments before our flight out to Kafue. The duration of the flight was an hour and 15 minutes and was relatively smooth for the time and heat of the day.

On arrival at Shumba Airstrip we were welcomed by our guide James and we took a slow drive to camp enjoying the scenery and sightings en route. A highlight for one of the ladies was seeing a puku antelope for the first time. The sunset was just as captivating.

Upon approaching the camp an elephant popped out of the bush, surprising us, and we were thrilled with this welcome to the camp. Once he wandered off, we were welcomed by the camp staff, offered refreshments and settled into our spacious and comfortable rooms, each with great views over the Busanga Plains.

At high tea that afternoon we got to know the staff members better – and they are truly the heart of the camp with their warm and humorous personalities, attending to our every need, not to mention the abundance of delicious food they served us. Our surprise sundowner was nothing short of amazing – this was really special and we will forever cherish the conversations we shared here.

Shumba has an idyllic location overlooking the Busanga Plains and even though they are going through a drought at the moment, the game was plentiful. Shumba means "lion" in Shona, and the area didn't disappoint – we were treated to a sighting of two lion prides meeting up after a long time apart and we witnessed both the pleasure of them seeing each other again as well a scuffle between the youngsters sizing each other up. Later on in the drive we came across an older female lion with her four cubs and it was delightful watching them get up to mischief. Birding was also plentiful and it was fun to getting to see a few new species on our checklist.



James, our guide, is extremely knowledgeable about the fauna and flora as well as the area as a whole. His calm, patient and kind nature meant our time with him was filled with valuable learnings about everything big and small. This was a very enriching experience overall.

After three wonderful days at Shumba it was time to say goodbye; and after a 90-minute flight we arrived in Livingstone for two nights at Wilderness Toka Leya.

Wilderness Toka Leya

Staying at Toka Leya, set within Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park, is truly an exceptional experience as it feels like you're on a Zambezi River island, but just 20 minutes from Livingstone and the Victoria Falls.

Staff were amazing from the minute we arrived, giving us such a warm welcome. Eunice and her team really made us feel at home. We loved everything, from the food to the activities on offer – each of us also got to plant a tree! On one of the afternoons, we had a relaxing time on the Zambezi enjoying sundowners with the hippos singing melodies for us. We also got to visit the renowned Victoria Falls on the Zambian side – such a cherished moment.

The tents are spacious and luxurious with the most breath-taking views of the famed river; the main areas are most inviting and this lodge is just a perfect starter or end to a safari for honeymooners, couples and families.



ZIMBABWE

Wilderness Davison's

Our journey from Toka Leya to Davison's was remarkably smooth, as if we were still in the same country! The logistics flowed seamlessly from one point to the next. Upon arrival, we were greeted with singing and dancing that echoed a heartfelt "welcome home". Davison's is nestled beautifully under trees, without fences and a modest elevation; it gave us a profound sense of freedom and safety. It was our first experience of communal dining, where the delightful food brought guests and management together, creating a warm atmosphere for sharing safari stories.

The following morning, we had the privilege of being guided by Aminata Jackson, a pioneering female Zimbabwean guide. Her expertise and insights enriched our bush experience as we explored. We couldn't contain our joy when another vehicle approached and discovered it was an all-women group out in the bush! It was a moment of pride and empowerment.

Overall, Davison's provided an unforgettable blend of adventure and hospitality. It left us with cherished memories and the unique beauty of the Hwange National Park wilderness.



Wilderness Linkwasha

In the afternoon, our Linkwasha guide Josh picked us up, and it took us around 30 minutes to reach the camp from Davison's. Josh immediately won us over with his deep passion for the bush and the Wilderness brand. Our afternoon game drive was nothing short of thrilling, as we followed lions on the hunt for buffalo! Despite eventually having to return to camp because the lions took a route we couldn't follow, we cherished the experience. Returning to camp was a delight; Linkwasha felt like a warm sanctuary after our chilly adventure. We enjoyed a lovely braai (BBQ) dinner, gathered around the fireplaces to warm up and share stories, then retired to our tents. This camp has all the comforts you could wish for – including electric blankets!

The next morning was wonderfully relaxed as we spent time in the hide. Although it was too cold for many animals to visit the waterhole early on, we were visited by a lone elephant (bless his heart). Then it was time for us to move on to Chikwenya...



Wilderness Chikwenya

This was our last destination; what a breath-taking area Mana Pools National Park is! This was the ideal location to end our trip as we were very laid back and had no rush to go find another pride of lions or leopards.

Staying at Wilderness Chikwenya offers a unique off-the-beaten-path experience. Nestled in a valley overlooking the Zambezi River, we were captivated by the lodge's beautiful layout and the majestic welcoming tree. The spacious tents, complete with baths as well as expansive decks and seating areas, afforded spectacular views of the Zambezi Mountain Range and the river itself.

The team at Chikwenya was incredibly friendly and attentive. The meals were consistently delicious and flavourful. Causemore, our jolly and well experienced guide took us on a river cruise on the first afternoon, and one of the standout moments was witnessing an elephant crossing the river, as well as the sound of hippos and the beautiful birds flying over us as the sun was setting.

Chikwenya is great for safari lovers who want a genuine wilderness experience. It's also ideal for photographers, as Causemore suggests staying at least three nights to fully appreciate the beautiful sunrises, sunsets, and amazing birdwatching.

