



Greetings from Africa!

This month we share the success of our first ever photographic Great Wilderness Journey. Ona Basimane, a wildlife photographer and field guide trainer recently led this Exploration. He recounts his adventure:

Being the first of its kind, the trip was a major success. All guests had been to East Africa, and one had also been to Botswana before. They were all interested in photography and were willing to absorb and apply a few tricks and tips I shared as we went along. The camps complimented each other well in terms of game offering at each unique location.

Toka Leya Camp/Victoria Falls sightseeing

I met guests at Harry Mwanga Nkumbula International Airport and we proceeded to cross the border to view the Falls from the more picturesque Zimbabwe side. We spent about two hours there before heading to Toka Leya Camp, Zambia. We got to camp late in the afternoon but the guests were enthusiastic to head out and track the resident herd of white rhino. This worked out well, as it is possibly the only camp on the itinerary where we stood a chance to see these magnificent animals. The guests thoroughly enjoyed the experience of approaching the rhinos on foot and taking photographs. We were the only guests at camp that night and the atmosphere was great.



White rhino at Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park



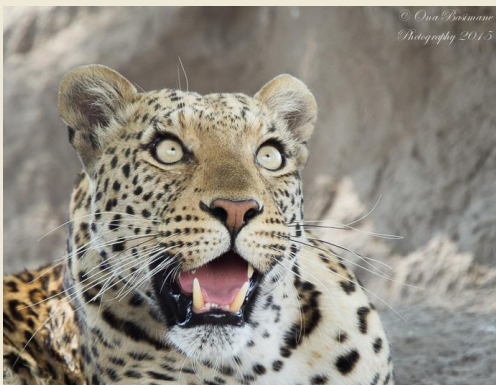
A Nile crocodile along the Chobe River

Chobe River Boat Cruise

We flew to Kasane the following morning for a boat cruise in the Chobe River. Sightings included elephant, buffalo, hippo and numerous crocodile along the river. That afternoon we flew to Linyanti and I helped the guests to visualize the geography of the area before we landed.

Linyanti Tented Camp

As to be expected at this time of the year, the area boasted big herds of elephant, and we saw them not only during the game drives, but around the camp as well. The three nights here certainly were one of the most intense wildlife viewing experiences I have ever had as a guide. Besides the elephant, we had a leopard on an impala kill on the first morning. When we arrived at the leopard sighting, she was high up the tree and photography was a challenge. We watched her for a short while and then went off to have a coffee break. On coming back we found her on a different branch making it easier for us to photograph her. Things improved even more when she decided to come down and lie in the shade, next to a termite mound. Our patience paid off as the leopard now provided us with ample opportunities for photography. This also provided me the chance to interpret behaviour and help guests anticipate and be ready to photograph her every move.



A leopard watching a kite circling above her stashed impala kill



A relaxed sable antelope seen on the way to the airstrip

The following day, we picked up two female wild dogs which appeared to have just dispersed from their natal pack and were searching for males to establish a pack. They provided great photographic opportunities. On the last morning, we went out in search of a newly discovered brown hyaena denning site. This mission was side swept when we found a small bachelor herd of buffalo at the spot and then four young male lion also appeared out of the bushes and started stalking the buffalo. The buffalo saw the lion and ran away. This ended the somehow full-bellied lions' half-hearted attempt at hunting. This summed up a great stay at the camp. However the game viewing did not end here as

we had a great sable bull sighting on the way to the airstrip as well a newly born elephant calf with the mother. Other highlights include numerous roan and sable encounters.

Gomoti Tented Camp

The acacia savanna that makes up the Gomoti area is dry at this time of the year, with the acacia woodlands providing great browse for the antelopes. Such conditions delivered unique sightings such as honey badger, bat-eared fox and black-backed jackal. We also saw a number of raptors. The resident wild dog pack came to camp's waterhole every day and guests had a treat of photographing young pups. On the last night a short night drive which proved worthwhile as we spotted three African civet cats, numerous Springhares, a white-faced owl as well as a young male lion. On the last morning, we tracked down a big male leopard, which had been sighted at the waterhole by staff members while they were setting up morning tea and coffee. We followed him for half an hour before he proceeded to lie down. Save for a few glowing eyes at night by the waterhole, we did not have a good sighting of hyaena on the trip. However we were treated to a big female who we found lying by a pan next to the road. She was very relaxed and allowed close approach, which was good for photography.



Wild dog pup watching his littermates playing at Gomoti



Lioness dragging a lechwe carcass into the shade at Jacana

Jacana Camp

We took a short flight from Gomoti to the Jao concession to start the last leg of the Exploration. Besides the beautiful, classic Okavango Delta landscape, Jacana offers great sightings of birds such as the wattled cranes. At this time of the year, the floodplains are dry which allows for extensive game drive routes. On our first morning drive, we encountered a pride of five lion that had clearly been on the rampage the previous night as they had four red lechwe carcasses with them. In a display of power and strength, we witnessed two lionesses dragging different carcasses to the shade.

We watched them for about two hours and the guests came away with great photographs. The following morning, the scenario was a different one as we found three new males with the pride. To top it all off, one of the males had isolated a young female and was mating with her. This provided great photographic opportunities. The pair eventually disappeared into an ivory palm thicket.

Back at camp the staff who weave and make baskets demonstrated the cultural art to guests. We then had a boat cruise and encountered some hippo in a lagoon. The ride back towards camp allowed for some great sunset images. On the last morning, we wrapped the trip up with a mokoro excursion. I had heard a Pel's fishing owl calling throughout the night at an island opposite the camp and so I asked the polers to take us there and see if we could find this Okavango special. We were lucky and found the bird roosting in a big jackalberry tree. While photography was a challenge because of thick foliage, we had a great view and guests managed to squeeze in a few shots.



A mating pair along the Jao floodplains



Sundowner tonic: wild dog contemplates crossing the Linyanti River

Jacana to Maun International Airport

After breakfast, our flight to Maun provided great views of the Delta below. I helped the guests through immigration and bid them farewell.

Conclusion

This trip was a major success and the guests enjoyed not only the comfort of the camps, the food offering, the warmth of the staff at each camp, but also the fact that they had a photography guide with them.

Click here for detailed information on the Great Wilderness Journey and click [here](#) to read more about all our amazing journeys.

To view our availability report [click here](#).

Until next time,
The Explorations Team

For more information on Explorations, you can also contact your journey specialist or email explorations@wilderness.co.za

