

Safari Sense

Tragic encounters between safari guests and wildlife are rare, but there are rules you can follow on a safari whether you are in a vehicle or on foot which help ensure both your well being and that of wildlife. We short term visitors pose the greater threat to wildlife and their environment than wild animals present for us.

One: Bear in mind at all times the levelled playing field. "Survival of the fittest" is nature's fundamental law. Lose your delusion of "fittest" and "smartest" the moment you enter the bush.



Two: Be quiet around wildlife. Do not make sudden movements. You will have better sightings if you sit and observe without speaking. This shouldn't have to be said, but NEVER talk on your cell phone. (Unfortunately, many parks now have widespread phone coverage.) Not only does your phone chatter disturb wildlife I may be at your sighting or sharing your vehicle and it will certainly antagonize me!

Three: Do not pressure wildlife; respect its privacy and comfort zones. If your driver/guide is coming too close to an animal, it may be because he wants to please you by allowing you better photo ops. This stresses wildlife. Do not be a part of it. Never request your driver/guide to leave designated game tracks and go off road where it isn't allowed to get a closer look at wildlife. Ideally, there should be no more than four vehicles at a sighting, keeping their distance and not circling an animal and effectively trapping it from escaping. Too many cars impact the ability of animals such as lions, cheetahs and leopards to hunt and to eat.

Four: Patience is the greatest virtue while on safari. Ultimately you will see more if you are prepared to stop and observe instead of snapping photos and moving on.

Five: Stay in your vehicle, unless at designated picnic or rest stops or upon the instructions of your driver/guide. But these rest stops are often in wildlife areas too so be alert at all times.

Six: Many camps and lodges are in wildlife areas and wildlife will enter camps. This is good and exactly the adventure you want, but be alert to wildlife traffic, obey the rules of the camp and do not walk to your room after dark unaccompanied. Never allow children to walk unaccompanied. Assuming that your tent/room has an en suite, never leave it during the night. If you are camping, make a good sweep with your flashlight before going to the toilet. Camps have night guards. Learn their procedures for night trips to the toilet and emergencies.

Seven: East Africa's Maasai say that the night belongs to the wild animals. At dusk, hippos emerge from rivers and lakes to wander and feed throughout the night. If you are camping by water, it is time for you to enjoy your camp fire. Be very careful if you must leave your tent at night if you are in hippo habitat.

Eight: For toilet stops while on a game drive, follow the instructions of your driver/guide. Never walk into areas where visibility is obscured, such as long grasses or dense bush. Put used toilet paper in a plastic bag carried for that purpose and dispose of it later at your accommodation. Your vehicle may carry a shovel for longer calls.

Nine: Never feed wildlife at lunch stops or in your camp. This alters their behavior and creates a dependency on handouts.

Ten: Never leave food of any kind, even if it is plastic wrapped, in your tent or room while in a wildlife area. Keep tents zippered and windows closed when you are absent. If you are camping by yourself, never leave food unattended or out over night. Food attracts baboons during the day and hyenas at night, among many other animals.

Eleven: Never litter! An animal can choke to death on a plastic bag and leave behind young offspring. Plastic water bottles, pop cans and cigarette butts look like, well, hell, in the wilderness.

Twelve: There are speed limits (40 kms an hour typically) in national parks. Observe them if you are behind your own wheel. If not, ensure that your driver/guide observes them.

Thirteen: Observe each park's specific rules – such as closing hours and which tracks to use - and ensure that your driver/guide does as well.

Fourteen: Avoid wearing perfume and other strong scents while on safari. Most animals have acute senses of smell and they might not like what you have on.

Fifteen: Wear sturdy, comfortable shoes or boots on a walking safari. Wear them in a safari vehicle too in case there is an emergency and you must walk. Never go barefoot around camp.

Sixteen: On a walking safari, obey your guide at all times. Let him/her lead. Walk single file behind the guide unless instructed otherwise. If there is an armed scout or ranger, do not walk in front of him. Do not talk unless instructed otherwise.

Seventeen: In the event of a potentially dangerous wildlife encounter, follow your guide's instructions. Remain calm, stay still and quiet, and do not run unless instructed otherwise.

Eighteen: Travel with plenty of water, sunscreen, sun hat and sunglasses.

Nineteen: An excellent pair of binoculars is essential.

Twenty: Wear neutral colors – tans, greens and browns – especially on a walking safari.

Twenty-one: Do not dangle your hands or feet over the sides of boats on lakes and rivers in which crocs and hippos reside. Do not squat at the water's edge or a croc will mistake you for an impala. When crossing a river on a walking safari, walk in single file and close together and follow your guide's instructions at all times. This is because a croc will think you and your companions are a herd of elephants crossing the river and too large a prey to investigate.

Twenty-two: The rule of thumb is that you shouldn't swim in lakes, rivers and streams as they can be infected with bilharzia, a serious health risk in freshwater in sub-Saharan Africa. Ask for local conditions before you swim.

Twenty-three: A gorilla safari involves the same wildlife rules: be quiet, keep your distance, no touching of curious gorilla youngsters, and obey your guide at all times. You mustn't bring food into the forest while gorilla trekking. You must not urinate around the gorillas. You must cover your nose and mouth with the mask provided you. Gorillas are highly susceptible to human diseases. You must also avoid direct eye contact with the silverback. He will perceive it as intimidation and a challenge to his authority.

Twenty-four: Be an informed traveler. Read about the parks and their flora and fauna before you go. Carry guidebooks. Bird life in Africa is fabulous. Chances are excellent that if you weren't interested in birds before your safari you will be by the end of it. Learn a few words in the local language.

Twenty-five: Respect your fellow travelers in their quest for photographs and video. Try not to block their view. Try to minimize your movements inside the vehicle, since this is particularly disruptive to videos. Never call out or whistle to try to get an animal to look in the camera's direction. A driver/guide cannot always see everyone in the vehicle. When he asks if it is OK to depart, don't answer yes without checking that everyone is ready to leave.

Big hats are great for blocking the sun but if you are in a vehicle with shade protection, consider taking it off. It may be blocking the view of others. Watch how many long vulture feathers you stick in your hat too.

Never photograph local people without checking first if it is OK to do so.

Twenty-six: For the sake of your fellow primates, with whom you may be sharing your safari, do not be late for game drive departures.

Safari Njema!

Have a good safari!

www.mamatembotours.com
www.congowildlifeadventures.com