



Getty

GEAR & GUIDES

Should You Bring Kids on an African Safari?

From best ages to perfect accommodations, here's everything you need to know about bringing children on a safari.

JUDY KOUTSKY

August 8, 2016

I've been to [Africa](#) 20 times. It's my favorite continent, and I get excited every time I get a chance to go back. As a mom to two young and very-high energy boys, I often wonder when is the ideal age to take them for a visit. Is Africa a good vacation for kids?

"We sell so many family and multi-generation trips to Africa for a reason," says Daniel Saperstein, co-owner of Hippo Creek Safaris and [Condé Nast Traveler travel specialist](#). "There is something so unique about safari, the closeness of the animals, the amazing people met along the way, and the beauty of

the continent.” He notes that an African sojourn is often the “best trip ever taken as a family,” according to the feedback he gets from his clients.

Here, what you need to know if you’re planning on taking your kids to this amazing continent.

Q: What’s the earliest age I can bring my kids on safari?

Each camp and safari tour company has their own rules on ages, but often this is flexible. “Eight years old is a good age,” says Saperstein. “By this age, the children can engage with the guide or someone from a local village, and a trip such as this can really have a lasting impression from these kinds of interactions.” Also, kids eight and older tend to behave better out on game drives and back at the lodge.

Q: What about preschool-age kids?

“Some camps take infants and toddlers, however, remember the flights are long,” says Linda Friedman, CEO of Custom Safaris and a *Condé Nast Traveler* travel specialist. It’s not just a matter of what to do with young kids, but how they will adjust to long international flights, the time difference, and early morning wake-up times. You know your kid, but often waiting until a child is a little older makes a better experience for everyone.

Q: Do all camps accept kids?

No. You need to check with specific camps to see what their policy is on kids. Some camps in Botswana, Friedman notes, allow kids ages six to 12 to attend game drives at the lodge manager’s discretion. She also notes that nature walks and *mokoro* (canoe) activities are limited to those over the age of 16. While children younger than six cannot participate in lodge activities, child minders (aka babysitters) can be arranged during activities and at meal times at an additional cost. “Just make sure the tour operator or camp that you pick is flexible in terms of a daily schedule,” says Friedman. “When traveling with kids, you want the option of sleeping a little later or switching around the meal times.”

Q: What about an active-adventure safari trip?

A *gorilla trek in Uganda* is a great idea if you’re traveling with teens, as participants need to be 15 years old. There are also other activities beyond just the gorillas, including horseback riding, visiting local schools, meeting native Pygmies, and of course adding a few days of safari. It’s a transformative experience for teenagers and the type of thing that can lead to a lifetime of [interest in] conservation.

Try out South Africa's Singita Sabi Sand if your kids are *Lion King* fanatics. Courtesy Singita Sabi Sand

Q. I don't want to give my kids anti-malaria pills—where can we go that's low-risk for the disease?

There are a few game reserves in South Africa that are perfectly suited. “The [Madikwe Reserve](#) has wonderful and varied game viewing as well as camps that cater to families,” says Saperstein. Also, he notes, [Tswalu](#) is one of the largest private game reserves in Africa—it's malaria-free and has fantastic activities for children, including Southern Skies stargazing and daytime meerkat tracking.

Q: If I want my kids exposed to local cultures and traditions, where should I go?

Kenya and Tanzania. “Your kids will meet people dressed in their traditional *shukas* (robes) with beads often from head to toe. They are not dressing up for tourists, but actually live their daily lives dressed in this fashion,” says Saperstein. You can visit authentic Masai villages, talk to locals and often visit a school or clinic to learn more about daily life here.

Q: Where's the best place to go if my child is obsessed with lions?

“The [Masai Mara](#) in Kenya is fantastic for lion sightings” says Saperstein. (Evidence: The BBC documentary series *Big Cat Diary* has filmed there for many years.) If you want to go to South Africa, there are some amazing private game reserves there as well: [Sabi Sand](#), [Thornybush](#), [Madikwe](#), and [Timbavati](#). “Big cat sightings are a regular occurrence at those parks,” says Saperstein.

Q. What types of accommodations should I book?

“Go for properties that have family units, two bedrooms, and most importantly, two bathrooms,” says Saperstein. Why? Game drives start early, so you will all be up at dawn. Having more than one toilet and shower is a lot more necessary will speed the getting-ready process up.

Q: What about combining safari with other things?

“Combining safari with the beach, like Zanzibar, in Tanzania isn’t hard because you can easily get from one place to another,” says Saperstein. For South Africa, he recommends combining safari with **Cape Town** which can include fun things for both kids and parents, like penguin tours, Table Mountain hikes, and vineyard visits.

[EXPLORE](#) [SAFARI](#) [AFRICA](#) [FAMILY TRAVEL](#)
