

MAKE YOUR NEXT SAFARI THE BEST

Be sure to keep these seven things top of mind that travellers often overlook when booking an African safari.

More travellers are choosing African safaris for their next holiday, and while AI tools and online sites can assist travellers in planning a trip, there are many overlooked details that can drastically impact the overall experience. Sam Wenger, Founder of Africa guide and travel agency RefinedRoutes, says the best journeys are designed on lived experiences rather than travel templates.

Wenger, a Swiss-born hotelier, explains: "Safari isn't static. Landscapes, wildlife movement, service standards and access rules shift constantly. This means what worked last year – or even last month – may not be right for the traveller today."

Operating from Africa, Wenger works with an experienced team that conducts continuous lodge inspections, connecting directly with owners and guiding teams while using a streamlined digital process for ease of planning and booking. Drawing on his experience, Wenger shares seven key elements often overlooked by the novice safari traveller.

1 TIMING BEYOND PEAK SEASON

Many travellers immediately opt for peak season without understanding how rainfall, water levels, and grass height change week by week. These variables affect wildlife behaviour, visibility, and access when on safari. Green and shoulder seasons are often dismissed, yet for the right traveller, there are fewer vehicles, richer landscapes, exceptional birdlife and a more relaxed safari rhythm.

"The best timing depends on what you want to experience," says Wenger. "Peak season is busy for a reason, but it's not automatically better. Birdlife viewing, animal activity, and flowers all differ from season to season, and it really depends on what you want to experience most."



2 WHERE YOU'RE ALLOWED TO GO

A lodge's setting matters as much as its luxury. Concession areas and national parks operate under different rules, and this can influence off-road driving, night safaris, walking permissions and crowd density. Unfortunately, travellers often only discover these limitations once they arrive.

"It's vital to verify access in person because knowing exactly what's allowed, and what isn't, throughout the year prevents disappointment and shapes expectations from the start," notes Wenger.

3 GUIDING CALIBRE

Wildlife sightings depend heavily on the guiding skill of those leading the safari. Specialist abilities such as tracking, birding or photography, as well as staying with the same guide throughout a visit, significantly deepen the experience.

"There is a five-star experience, and there is a real five-star experience, and this is honestly where a good guide makes all the difference," says Wenger. "Booking with experts on the ground will ensure you're getting the best."

4 TRANSFER MATH & SAFARI FLOW

Every transfer costs time, and this can often be an entire morning. Overly ambitious routing can reduce time in nature and increase fatigue. The safari itinerary must minimise moves while ensuring more seamless transfers at intentional pacing. Wenger says this will ensure guests spend more time experiencing Africa rather than moving through it.

5 ROOM PLACEMENT WITHIN A LODGE

Not all rooms within a lodge are equal, and this is often something a traveller only learns once they've checked in. Wind exposure, proximity to shared areas, waterhole orientation and privacy all affect comfort, especially over longer stays. Wenger says, unfortunately, these aren't details you can find online, but they can significantly impact your overall experience.

6 RECOVERY & SAFARI FATIGUE

Safari adventures are incredible, but they can be tiring. Early starts, heat and sensory intensity can be exhausting for travellers, and without protected rest days, even exceptional wildlife encounters can lose their impact. Wenger explains: "Modern safari luxury is about balance. Movement creates awe; recovery allows it to land."

7 OVERLOOKED LOGISTICS

Finally, Wenger says there are hidden details in the logistics that can derail a safari experience. Light aircraft weight limits, private vehicle policies, children's rules, walking permissions and connectivity vary widely between regions and lodges. "It's important to establish any limitations ahead of time. When logistics are handled honestly, the experience feels effortless," says Wenger.

Finally, Wenger emphasises that a real five-star safari goes beyond aesthetics. It includes guiding continuity, thoughtful service without theatre, strong kitchen leadership, excellent sleep quality, well-maintained infrastructure and management teams that show presence.



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Opening in June

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Inspired by the elephants that roam this valley, Nzovu Rundu is designed as an intimate retreat where every moment blends adventure with serenity. From game drives in the National Park to tranquil canoeing and boat cruises, each experience immerses guests in the magic of the Zambezi. Evenings bring golden sunsets, the perfect close to a day of exploration.

SHEARDING SAFARI

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