WalkingSafaris.com

A FREE GUIDE

The Walking Safari Guide

Everything you need to know before you set out on foot in wild Africa: what a walking safari is, how it works, and where to go.



INSIDE

What a walking safari is · A morning on foot · The three formats
Safety and who leads you · Fitness and age · What to wear
When to go · Where to walk · Questions to ask before you book

Photo: The Bushcamp Company

CHAPTER 1

What is a walking safari?

A walking safari is a guided walk through wild country where elephant, buffalo and lion live. You leave the vehicle behind and explore on foot, in a small group, with an expert guide and armed backup.

It is the oldest way to experience the African bush, and for many travelers the most memorable. On foot you are part of the landscape rather than a spectator. You hear the alarm call of a baboon and the hush when something big is close. You learn to read tracks in the sand, to tell which way an elephant went and roughly when.

A walk is slow. A typical morning covers 3–5 km (2–3 miles) over three to four hours, with many stops. Much of the time goes into learning: tracks, trees, insects and birds, and the behavior of the animals around you. The big moments still come, but they are only part of it.

Most walking safaris pair a morning walk with an afternoon game drive. The vehicle covers ground and finds animals. The walk shows you how the bush works.

> *On a game drive you watch Africa through a frame. On foot there is no frame.*



Photo: Chiawa Safaris

AT A GLANCE

- **Who leads it:** a licensed walking guide, usually with an armed scout or ranger.
- **Group size:** small, usually eight walkers at most.
- **Length:** a morning walk of three to four hours; full days on foot on dedicated trails.
- **Season:** mostly the dry season. In Zambia and Zimbabwe, roughly June to October.
- **Where:** Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya and Botswana, among others.

CHAPTER 2

A morning on foot

Every camp runs its walks a little differently, but most mornings follow the same gentle rhythm.

Before dawn — A wake-up call, then coffee, tea and something light by the fire as the sky turns pale.

Briefing — Your guide explains how to walk: in single file, quietly, behind the guide, and never running. You will hear what to do if you meet an animal at close range.

Setting out — Some walks begin right from camp. Others start with a short drive, or the vehicle drives until fresh tracks are found and the group sets off from there.

On the trail — The pace is slow. You stop often for tracks, dung, birds, trees and insects, and to watch animals from a respectful distance.

Tea stop — Mid-morning, a break in the shade of a tree or on a riverbank, with tea, coffee and a snack.

Late morning — The walk ends at camp or at a waiting vehicle, in time for brunch before the heat of the day.

Afternoon — A rest, then usually a game drive, often ending with a sundowner and, where allowed, a night drive.



Photo: Lion Camp

GOOD TO KNOW

Walking is almost always optional. In most camps you can choose a walk or a drive each morning. Many travelers walk on their second or third day, once they have seen how the bush works from the vehicle. The real change, when you start spotting things for yourself, comes after a few walks.

CHAPTER 3

The three kinds of walking safari

Almost every camp in Africa will tell you it offers walking. What matters is how central walking is to the stay. We sort every camp into one of three formats. These are formats, not rankings.

FORMAT 1

Walking Expedition

Walking is the whole trip. You walk most of each day, often from camp to camp, and vehicles are used only for transfers.

Best for: experienced, fit walkers who want to be on foot all day.

FORMAT 2

Walking Camp

A guided walk is offered every day as an equal choice with the game drive, and you decide each day. Usually a morning walk and an afternoon drive.

Best for: most travelers, including first-time walkers.

FORMAT 3

Walks Offered

Walking is not a core activity. The drive leads, and a walk is available on request or as an extra, often shorter.

Best for: a taste of walking within a driving safari.



Walkers watch white rhino on a trails walk in Greater Kruger, South Africa.

WHICH IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

- **Never walked before?** Start with a Walking Camp. You get a daily walk and the reach of a vehicle.
- **Want to walk all day?** Look at Walking Expeditions and multi-night trails.
- **Traveling with young children or less mobile companions?** A lodge where walks are offered lets the walkers walk while others drive.
- **Two weeks or more?** Combine two formats, or two parks.

CHAPTER 4

Safety and who leads your walk

Walking safaris have a strong safety record because they are run by highly trained people under strict rules. The model differs by country.

COUNTRY	WHO WALKS WITH YOU
Zambia	A licensed walking guide plus an armed government scout from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife on walks in the national parks.
Zimbabwe	An armed Professional Guide, licensed after at least two years of apprenticeship and a demanding practical exam.
South Africa	Qualified trails guides, usually two, both armed, with one leading and one as backup.
Tanzania	A guide and an armed park ranger on every walk in the national parks.
Kenya	Graded guides, with armed conservancy or wildlife service rangers.
Botswana	Armed, licensed professional guides, in private concessions.

THE RULES OF THE WALK

- Walk in single file, behind the guide.
- Keep quiet, and talk only in a low voice.
- Follow every instruction at once.
- If an animal comes close, stand still and stay together.
- **Never run.** Running can trigger a chase.
- Wear muted colors and closed shoes.

Guides read animal behavior constantly and keep a respectful distance. Most walks never need more than a quiet change of direction.



A Samburu guide, an armed ranger and guests watch elephants from the grass in northern Kenya.

CHAPTER 5

How fit do you need to be?

Less fit than most people think. A walking safari is slow, with many stops. The real challenges are heat, uneven ground and time on your feet, not speed or distance.

FORMAT	A TYPICAL DAY	WHO IT SUITS
Walks Offered	A walk of an hour or two.	Almost anyone who walks regularly.
Walking Camp	One morning walk of three to four hours, about 3–5 km (2–3 miles).	Most reasonably active adults manage it comfortably.
Walking Expedition	Often two walks a day, 10 km or more in total, for several days running.	Walkers in good shape who enjoy long days outdoors.
Kruger wilderness trails	Up to about 20 km (12 miles) a day.	A reasonable level of fitness; ages 12 to 65.

Age limits

Most walking safaris set a minimum age between 12 and 16. In most places the camp or operator sets the rule.

- **Zambia:** 12 in the national parks; some camps set 14 or 16.
- **Zimbabwe:** 16 is the most common policy, with some exceptions.
- **South Africa:** Kruger's wilderness trails take ages 12 to 65.
- **Everywhere:** check each camp's policy before you book.

How to prepare

- Walk regularly for a few weeks before you travel, ideally in the shoes you will wear.
- Get used to being on your feet for three or four hours.
- Drink plenty of water on the trail. Your guide will carry extra.
- Tell your guide about any injury or condition before you set out.

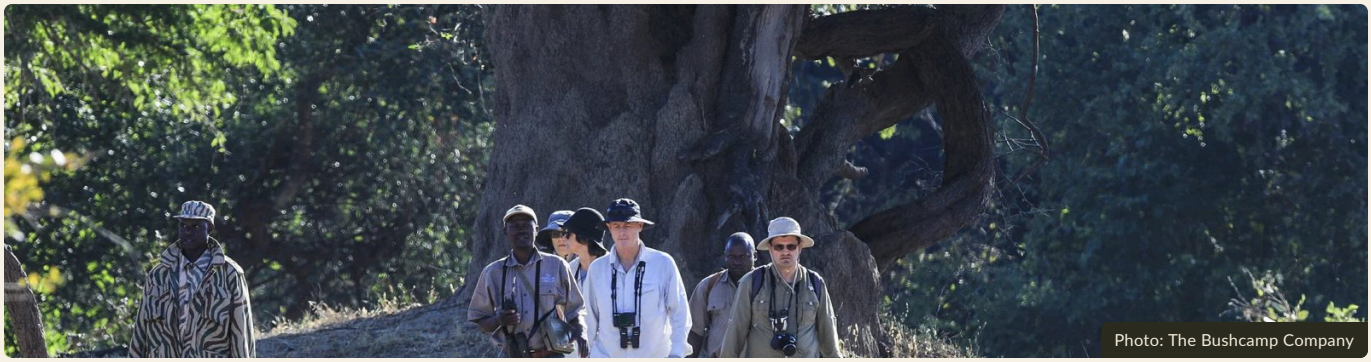


Photo: The Bushcamp Company

CHAPTER 6

What to wear and pack

It is preferable to wear earth tones on a walking safari, such as khaki, olive and light brown, because they blend in with the bush.



Earth tones and closed shoes on a walk in Botswana.

Clothing

- [ ] Shirts and trousers in khaki, olive, green, brown or beige
- [ ] Long, light sleeves and trousers for sun, thorns and insects
- [ ] A fleece or warm jacket for cold dawn starts, especially June to August
- [ ] A wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses
- [ ] Broken-in walking shoes or light boots with a thick sole
- [ ] Socks that come above the ankle

In your daypack

- [ ] Binoculars, ideally one pair per person
- [ ] Sunscreen, lip balm and insect repellent
- [ ] A refillable water bottle
- [ ] A camera with a quiet shutter
- [ ] Any personal medication

LEAVE AT HOME

White and bright colors. Dark blue and black where there are tsetse flies. Sandals. Camouflage, which is illegal for civilians in Zimbabwe and frowned on elsewhere.

CHAPTER 7

When to go

The short answer is the dry season. Grass dies back, visibility on foot improves, and animals gather near the water that remains.

Zambia and Zimbabwe

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D

Peak walking · Good walking · Shoulder, some camps open · Rains, most walking camps closed

Early season (June–July)

Cooler days and cold dawns, green country, and fewer visitors. Grass can still be long in places, so walks may be shorter.

Late season (August–October)

The classic walking months. Game gathers near the rivers and lagoons and the bush opens up. It gets hot, especially in October, so walks start early.

Elsewhere

- **South Africa:** Kruger's wilderness trails run year-round; the cooler dry months are the most comfortable.
- **Kenya:** some conservancy camps walk year-round, outside the main rains.
- **Tanzania:** walking follows the dry season in the south; in the Serengeti it moves with the migration.
- **Botswana:** private concessions walk through most of the dry season.

Book early. Walking camps are small, often four to six rooms, and most open only for the dry season. The peak months fill up a year or more ahead.



Photo: The Bushcamp Company

CHAPTER 8

Where to walk

You can take a walk in many African parks, but in only a few is walking part of everyday life. These are the places walkers return to.

PARK	COUNTRY	WHY WALK THERE
South Luangwa	Zambia	Where the walking safari began. More walking-led camps than any other park, with a licensed guide and armed scout on every walk. Rich in elephant, buffalo, hippo and Thornicroft's giraffe.
North Luangwa	Zambia	Remote and wild, with a handful of small camps built around walking, including a walking-only zone.
Mana Pools	Zimbabwe	Open Zambezi floodplain and big elephants. The highest share of walking-led camps of any park, and some of Africa's most beautiful walking ground.
Hwange	Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe's largest park, with walking mainly in private concessions led by Professional Guides.
Greater Kruger	South Africa	State-run wilderness trails and walking-focused private camps. The best chance to track rhino on foot.
Hluhluwe-iMfolozi	South Africa	The home of the wilderness trail, with multi-night walks through rhino country.
Ruaha & Nyerere	Tanzania	Big, remote parks with walks alongside an armed ranger; Ruaha has more walking than anywhere else in Tanzania.
Laikipia & Samburu	Kenya	Private ranches and community conservancies, including camel-supported walking trips.
Okavango & Tuli	Botswana	Walking in private concessions; Northern Tuli has the country's multi-day walking trails.

Walking is not allowed in some of Africa's best-known reserves, including the Masai Mara National Reserve and Botswana's Moremi. In those areas, look to the surrounding conservancies and concessions.



Photo: The Bushcamp Company

Choosing a park



Photo: Mana Pools Expeditions Company

If you want...

- **The widest choice of walking camps,** with a walk every morning and a drive every afternoon: South Luangwa.
- **Beautiful open walking ground** and close elephant encounters: Mana Pools.
- **Rhino on foot:** Greater Kruger or Hluhluwe-iMfolozi.
- **True remoteness:** North Luangwa, Katavi or Ruaha.
- **Walking in East Africa:** Kenya's Laikipia and Samburu conservancies.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Walking safaris grew from two places at about the same time.

In South Africa, game ranger Ian Player and his mentor, the Zulu game guard Magqubu Ntombela, led the first trails into the newly proclaimed iMfolozi wilderness in 1959, laying the foundations of the wilderness trail.

In Zambia's Luangwa Valley, conservationist Norman Carr launched the first commercial walking safari circuit. Government records date it to 1961: guests crossed the Luangwa River at Chibembe and walked his Wilderness Trails to Lion Camp. More than sixty years later, the valley still has more walking-led camps than anywhere else in Africa.



Photo: Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park

CHAPTER 9

Ten questions to ask before you book

Almost every camp says it offers walking. These questions show you what a walk there really looks like. They work just as well for a travel advisor as for a traveler.

1 How many walks run each day?
One every morning, two a day, or only on request? This tells you the format.

2 Who leads the walk?
Is the guide licensed for walking, and is there armed backup?

3 How many people walk together?
Eight is the usual maximum. Fewer is better.

4 How far and how long?
A typical walk is 3–5 km over three to four hours. Ask what is normal at this camp.

5 Can I choose a walk or a drive each day?
Flexibility matters if you are traveling with others.

6 What is the minimum age?
Usually 12 to 16, set by the camp or the park.

7 When is the walking season?
Most walking camps open only in the dry season.

8 Is the camp fenced or unfenced?
Some reserves are fenced on one or more sides; some are open wilderness.

9 Can we walk between camps?
A walked leg from one camp to the next is a highlight where it is offered.

10 What happens after the walk?
Most camps pair the walk with an afternoon drive, a sundowner and, where allowed, a night drive.



Photo: The Bushcamp Company

WalkingSafaris.com

On foot in wild Africa

Find the right walk

At walkingsafaris.com you will find every qualifying walking safari camp in Africa, sorted by country, park and format, along with in-depth guides to each park.

- **Find a Camp:** the full directory, filtered by format
- **Where to Walk:** park-by-park guides
- **Plan:** when to go, what to pack, how to choose
- **Stories:** the history and the experience of walking

FIELD NOTES

Sign up at walkingsafaris.com for periodic new guides, walking stories and notes on where the walking is best this season.

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