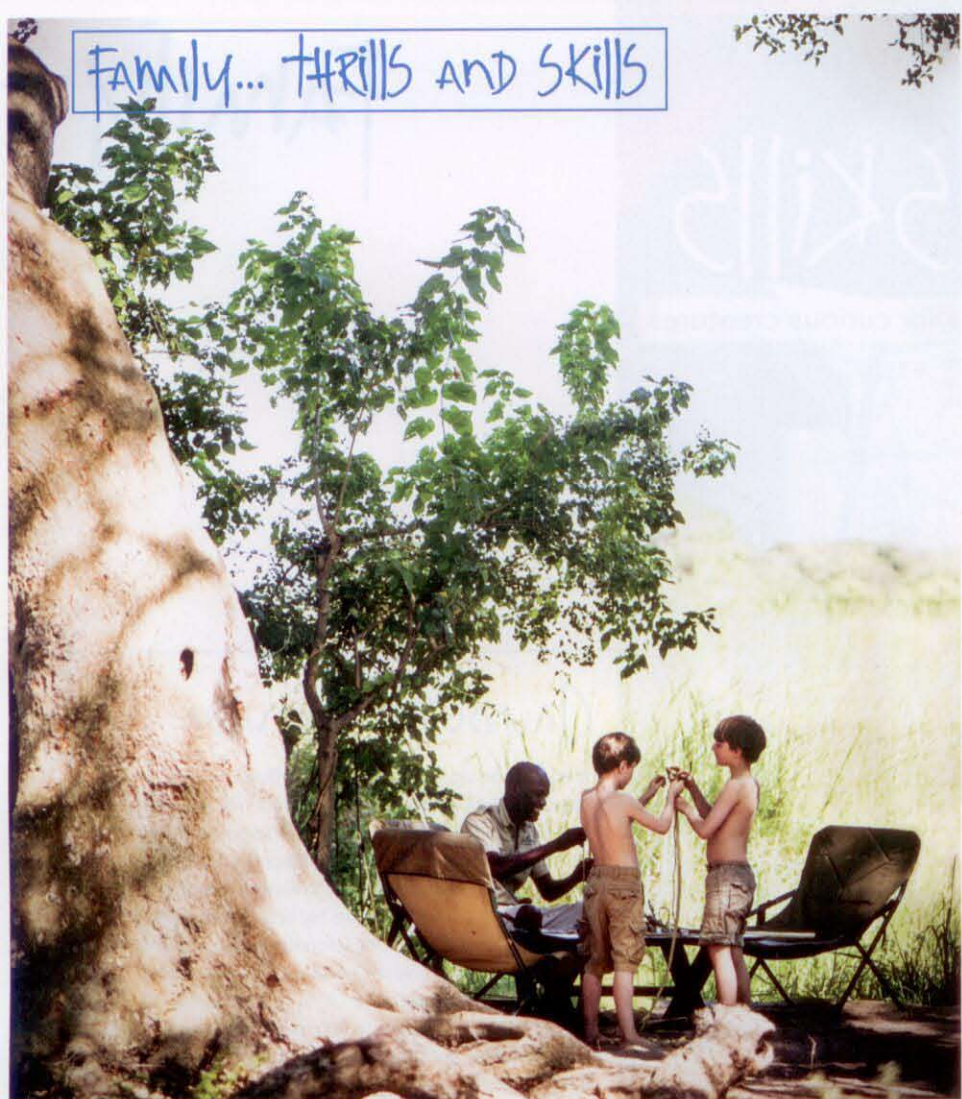


FAMILY... THRILLS AND SKILLS



FOOTSTEPS CAMP BOTSWANA

What children want in Africa is a bit of an adventure. They don't want to spend all their time sitting silently in a four-wheel-drive, no matter how splendid the game or how ravishing the birds. Which is where Ker & Downey's Young Explorers programme, based at Footsteps Camp near Shinde in Botswana's Okavango Delta, comes up trumps. Here, in a reassuringly simple camp under some jackalberry trees, are three dark-green canvas tents with all the trappings (including flushing loos) that spoil young things are used to, yet rustic enough to remind them of what bush life might have been like for explorers in the past. With only six beds, the camp is designed to be taken over by a single family or one group of friends at a time (children aged seven and upwards are welcome). Out of the kitchen comes the sort of familiar, comforting food everyone wants: roast chicken, lasagne or spaghetti bolognese, followed by ice cream. But while all that is part of the charm, what really makes the camp special is Paul Moleseng, the Botswana-born guide who runs it. He is every child's dream companion – jokey and fun yet a great leader and mentor. He not only knows every inch of the terrain around the camp – where the cheetah is hiding her cubs, the name of each bird and insect that flutters by – he also teaches his young charges key survival skills: how to track a lion by following its roar; how to fish for bream or tilapia in the big lagoons; and the trick to building a fire with nothing more than sticks and stones. He instils in them the laws of the land: that patience is required, and discipline too, for the quietest spot can suddenly erupt into danger. In the heat of the afternoon, as adults and animals slumber in the cool of the shade, he'll organise football matches using elephant dung for goalposts, or set rifle-shooting challenges with a row of tin cans. Through all the larking around, young ones subliminally learn why preserving the bush and all its inhabitants really matters and begin to understand something of the sheer, heart-thumping joy the natural world has to offer.

JOURNEY TIME An 11-hour flight to Johannesburg, then a 25-minute light-aircraft trip
TIME DIFFERENCE +2 hours

INSIDER TIP Take a suitcase big enough for the bow and arrows that Moleseng will help the children make. Otherwise you will lose them at airport security and tears will flow.

BOOK IT Africa Travel (+44 20 7843 3591; www.africatravel.com) offers a six-night trip, from £15,500, based on two adults and two children under 12, including three nights on the Young Explorers' safari, all meals, flights, transfers, park fees and game activities.