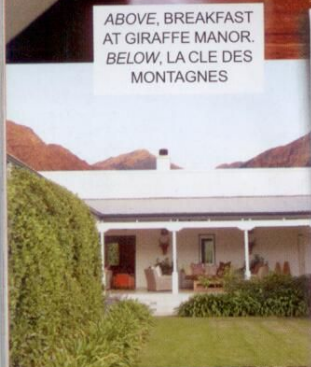


ABOVE, BREAKFAST AT GIRAFFE MANOR. BELOW, LA CLÉ DES MONTAGNES



Above, Gisele Bündchen at Giraffe Manor, 2015. Left, at Boulders Beach National Park



Cape Town's Clifton Bungalow

## WILDLIFE

Top choice for a group in **CAPE TOWN** is a private villa from Perfect Hideaways, which has the best houses in the country. Clifton Bungalow, a hop from the white-powder beaches of Clifton, is probably the most ravishing beach house in Cape Town – soaring ceilings, a palette of breezy whites and creams, lots of tactile driftwood. Do the city (don't miss the Boulders Beach penguins or the dassies on Table Mountain), then head inland to Franschhoek and the country's finest food: Grande Provence for a vineyard picnic, Bread & Wine for boozy lunches in dappled shade. Bed down in pitch-perfect La Clé des Montagnes, which has private Cape Dutch houses with mountain views, beautiful interiors, private pools and not one but THREE butlers. Then zip over to malaria-free Kwandwe Private Game Reserve to take over Melton Manor (it sleeps eight) and bump around the bush gawking at the Big Five while the Blue Crane Conservation Club pampers the sprogs. **BOOK IT** *Africa Travel* ([africatravel.com](http://africatravel.com); 020 7843 3591) offers three nights at La Clé des Montagnes, including breakfast, and three nights full-board at Melton Manor, including game drives, from £2,570 per person, based on eight sharing, including flights and transfers. Clifton Bungalow, from £720 a night, sleeps eight; contact Perfect Hideaways ([perfecthideaways.co.za](http://perfecthideaways.co.za); [stay@perfecthideaways.co.za](mailto:stay@perfecthideaways.co.za); 00 27 217 900972).

Every trip to Kenya must start or end at **GIRAFFE MANOR**, in Nairobi – it's just so insane to have the long-necked creatures stick their heads through the window and lick the yogurt from your morning muesli. (Gisele Bündchen is partial to a spot of tea there, FYI.) Stay at the new four-bedroom Garden Manor before flying to Enasoit, a family home in the Laikipia highlands that sleeps up to 16 and has views of a watering hole and salt licks, so babies and grannies can spot wildlife while the rest of you head off on game drives. (The estate also has a resident ostrich, a warthog and a zebra.) Finish at Cottar's five-bedroom Private Homestead in the Maasai Mara – the world's greatest game reserve – where scorching afternoons can be spent in the new 80ft pool. The Brudenell-Bruces are regulars here; at night, they dance around tent poles while lions pad past. **BOOK IT:** *Red Savannah* ([redsavannah.com](http://redsavannah.com); 01242 787800) can organise a similar 10-night trip from £110,600 for 10 people, excluding international flights.

## BOATS

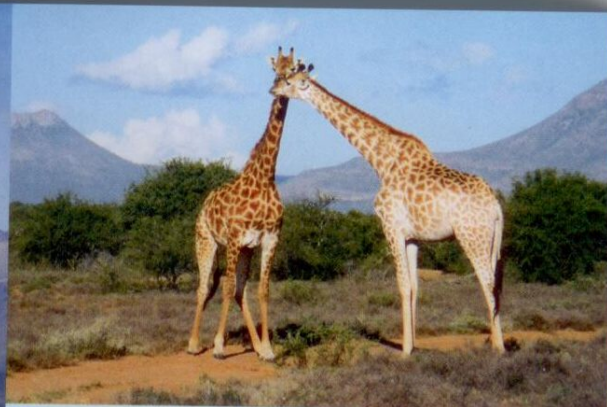
For a proper take-to-the-high-seas-me-hearties adventure, opt for **TIGER BLUE**, a traditional jaw-dropper of an Indonesian phinisi that sleeps 10. Inside, it's all cool Balinese style (including child-friendly cabins), while outside are sprawling decks, billowing sails and outdoor beds for those who wish to sleep beneath the stars. A cracking team will sail you around Raja Ampat, guide you up the peaks of Wayag and point out the birds of paradise. **BOOK IT** *Elegant Resorts* ([elegantresorts.co.uk](http://elegantresorts.co.uk); 01244 897517) offers seven nights from £30,295 per boat, full board, based on eight sharing, including activities, excursions and transfers.

**SOLANDGE**, a six-deck, 242ft yacht with eight cabins and 29 crew, is the top choice for a group knees-up along the Dalmatian coast, with party and spa decks, plus gym, pool and cinema – all linked by lift. Stop-off spots include the Bonj Les Bains beach club on Hvar and snorkelling at sheltered Dobrec Bay, which is perfect for children. **BOOK IT** *Burgess* ([burgessyachts.com](http://burgessyachts.com); 020 7766 4300) offers seven nights from £708,500 for up to 12 people, excluding operating expenses.

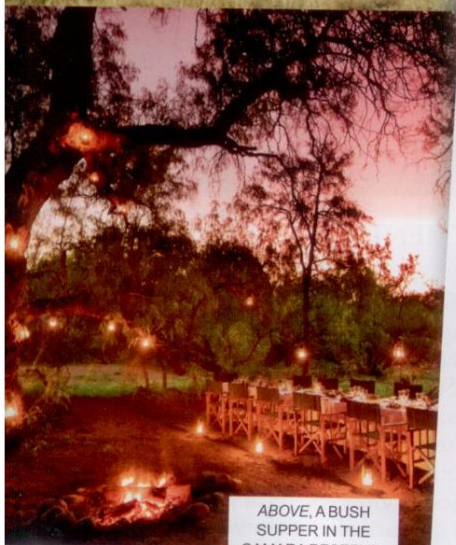


The phinisi Tiger Blue under full sail in Indonesia

A mountaintop picnic. *Right*, friendly giraffes



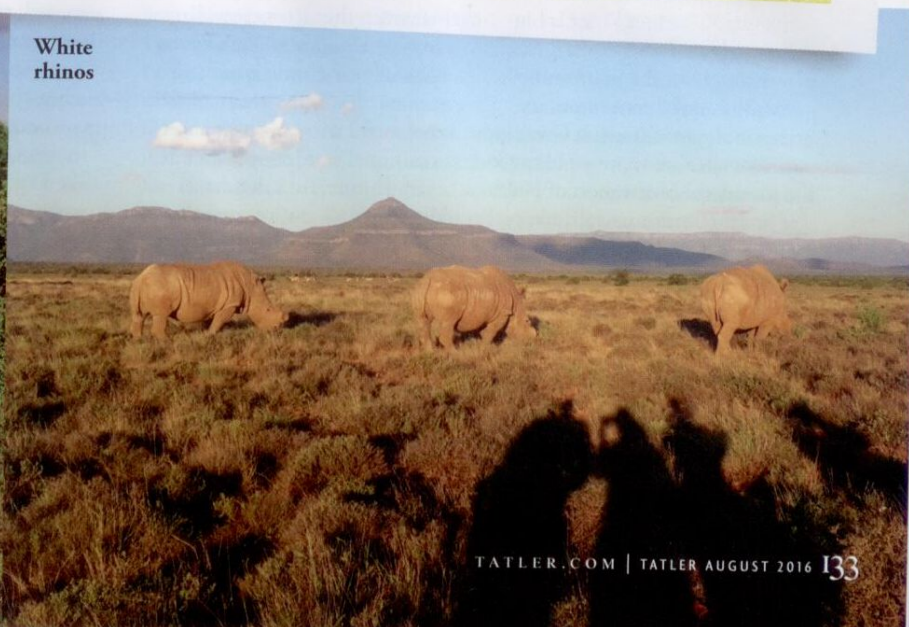
ABOVE, PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST & ABOVE RIGHT, HER WORK. BELOW, A CHEETAH IN FRONT OF THE MAIN LODGE AT SAMARA



ABOVE, A BUSH SUPPER IN THE SAMARA RESERVE. BELOW, GIRAFFE-SPOTTING



White rhinos



# BRING YOUR CUBS

*Cheeky monkeys for the children and moody cheetahs for the grown-ups – this is the perfect safari for all ages. By Francisca Kellett*

If you love Africa, if you've a thing for those vast skies and open plains and the heart-thumping crazy thrill of it all, then having kids is a real downer. You can still go – Cape Town, Marrakesh and so on – of course you can. But doing a safari? With actual, pointy-toothed predators and no phone signal and poorly thought-through medical facilities? Nah. So you count the months and the years, and you take your sensible bucket-and-spade holidays and then they hit answering-back age (seven, just so you know) and you think, YES. It is time.

We wanted an African adventure, but we didn't want malaria or things that were likely to gobble up the youngest one (who, aged four, just had to suck it up and come; your first family safari is about your eldest – no point denying it). So we chose Samara in South Africa. You probably haven't heard of Samara. It's in the Karoo, which you probably haven't heard of either. Which is a shame, because it's AWESOME (the seven-year-old's word, not mine). The Karoo is a vast semi-desert in South Africa's nether regions – a couple of days' drive from Cape Town or a three-hour zip from Port Elizabeth. We'd started in Cape Town, where my husband and I lived 15 years ago – ostensibly so I could kickstart my travel-writing career doing guidebooks, but really so we could spend a year on the beach and in the bush. We had a blast.

Returning to Cape Town was glorious, but it's the Karoo that ticked the kids' 'oh, THIS is what Africa should look like' boxes – shimmering, cactus-studded plains, deep canyons, jagged mountains all hazy and purple in the distance, eagles swooping overhead. And sheep, which the smallest in our party was terribly excited by. But then you pass through the gates of the Samara Private Game Reserve and the sheep are all gone. Samara is wild.

Samara is wild and Samara is vast: 27,000 hectares, bought up over 19 years by Sarah and Mark Tompkins – she's South African,



he's a London chairman of something important. They snapped up 11 farms, tore down fences and buildings and at first just left the land to lie and recover. The Karoo was once crammed with wildlife – vast herds of galloping antelopes, prowling lions, marauding rhinos – but sheep-farming and hunting more or less wiped out the lot. No longer. Sarah and her team slowly reintroduced everything, from kudus and elands to giraffes, rhinos and cheetahs. Cheetahs are the big success story: Mark and Sarah's breeding programme has restocked national parks across South Africa.

But, for now, there are no lions or other large, nasty predators (although there is talk of reintroducing them in 2017, along with a small herd of elephants later this year). It's that lack of big bitey things that makes Samara so fantastic for families. You can bump out into the wilderness on a private game drive with sharp-eyed head ranger Tendai, like we did, and see impalas leaping and zebras grazing and baboons angrily lolloping about, and lots and lots of determined tortoises. And giraffes, which you can walk alongside, because you can get out of your game vehicle at Samara, unlike in most safari places, as there's nothing here to eat you (cheetahs don't eat humans and, anyway, they are collared at Samara – as the lions will be – so the rangers always know where they are). And the small people in your party will be thrilled, because they're walking with giraffes, and giraffes are massive. Tendai, by the way, used to tame wild African elephants, which means he's quite tough, which means you will trust him.

This is handy on the adults-only game drives too, where you'll track the rather more stumpy white rhino. Move slowly, Tendai told us, keep in single file and never, ever run. 'You can go behind me if you're scared.' I went behind him. And then three rhinos slowly ambled towards us, huge ears swivelling, tiny eyes peering at us like the Queen might peer at Jeremy Corbyn, and then they meandered past, huffing and puffing and looking a bit put out. It was insane. We did the same with one of the reserve's cheetahs. Tracked it to the top of a mountain and walked up to it, just like that. It was sleeping under a tree

and looked jolly pissed off at our arrival, but then rolled its eyes in a resigned sort of way and slumped back into the shade.

So the kids can come on drives, or you can leave them back at camp with the delightful Benedict, a softly spoken ranger who gives them special rucksacks and caps and torches and has them yomping round looking for monkeys, whizzing up homemade Play-Doh, or whipping out paints for them to fling at rocks and generally keeping them distracted from the fact that their parents are off strolling with cheetahs. We came back from one drive to find ours hopping about on the lodge's veranda, squealing that they'd just seen some buffalo, right there, in the camp.

All sorts of stuff comes into the camp. Tortoises that hiss when you touch them; meerkats, in nervous tag teams; very large, very shiny millipedes (if one wanders into your room, you'll find a flip-flop most useful for flinging it back out into the bush); vervet monkeys and a big family of baboons that woke us all up one morning by drumming their feet on our roof. Accommodation is in the main lodge, or in sweet Karoo-style bungalows – polished concrete floors, lots of places to flop in the baking afternoons, a wide veranda for sundowners. And there's the Manor House, which you can take over exclusively and looks like a *House & Garden* covershoot.

The staff are universally divine and like to spring things on guests – surprise pancakes for the girls at breakfast; a BBQ in the reed boma one night; an extraordinary picnic at the top of a mountain for lunch. It was on that mountaintop, sitting at a table with views that over the plains below – soul-soaring views that make your spine tingle, that make you feel a way that only views in Africa can make you feel – with the children busy colouring in pictures of cheetahs, and Tendai pointing out a kori bustard rising heavily on the thermals, that the 'Africa feeling' hit me again. We were back, and our children were there with us, and it was thrilling.

**BOOK IT** *Africa Travel* ([africatravel.com](http://africatravel.com); 020 7843 3591) offers four nights at Samara, Karoo Lodge, full-board, from £5,860, based on two adults and two children under 12, including flights, transfers and game activities.

