

Apr 10 - 24 2009 : Bushman Initiation Hunt

An incredible opportunity to experience a dignified and sensitive Bushman safari.

Uncharted Africa Safari Company, in conjunction with the Bushmen people themselves, offer a unique and fascinating opportunity to experience the age-old rituals and traditions associated with an initiation hunt.

The eland is the most important animal to the Bushmen, both as a practical resource (food, skin etc) and as a spiritual symbol. It is the largest antelope in the world and the only animal in the Kalahari that stores large quantities of fat (both in its dewlap and its hump).

Fat is one of the only foods in the desert that is storable for the Bushmen as they have no system of refrigeration nor means of food preservation.

One can therefore appreciate the great importance and value of this life-giving substance and majestic animal to the Bushmen people.

The rite of passage from boyhood to man is sanctified by the successful hunt of a large antelope. Sadly, this tradition is threatened with extinction because the Bushmen are too poor to forfeit the money that they could earn through hunting trophies. As a result, they are unable to hunt for ritual purposes.

Uncharted Africa Safari Co has created a safari experience where Guests are able to accompany an authentic Bushmen hunt and respectfully observe the related rituals and tradition related to its successful conclusion.

In so doing, sustainable cultural tourism preserves the Bushmen culture for future generations.

Your Guide will be Ralph Bousfield, in consultation with Community leaders thus ensuring a unique experience that combines both culture and wildlife in an educational, yet non-intrusive, fashion.

DAY 1

Arrive by plane at midday and transfer down a dusty red road to a remote campsite deep in the ancestral gathering lands of the Zu/'hoasi Bushmen.

Uncharted Africa Safari vehicles are top-of-the-range, extremely comfortable Toyota Landcruisers. The multiple thoughtful details including roof top seats, leather beanbags for photography and ponchos, to keep one warm during sunrise drives, make them perfect for game viewing.

After a delicious and refreshing lunch, head off to your tent for a rest.

Camp will be comprised of large tents equipped in a luxurious fashion unequalled on any other mobile safari. Real beds, flush loos, down pillows, pure cotton sheets, Persian rugs, bone-handled silver cutlery, damask table linen, teak and brass classically styled campaign kit combine comfort with style. The only concessions to roughing it are the bucket showers, which are private and en suite.

Uncharted Africa Safari Co. is renowned throughout the industry for menus that emphasise fresh tastes and originality.

Three course meals under the stars include such treats as fresh tomato and basil soup, ostrich piccata, roast Botswana beef, delectable orange tarts and impossibly rich, but light, chocolate puddings.

Teas are indulgent affairs with treats like triple layer, banana caramel cake, tangy lemon curd biscuits and the best brownies in the bush!

All bread is baked daily, and full cooked English breakfasts are on offer every morning.

After tea, walk through the bush to the nearby Bushmen village where you will be met in a traditional manner by the elders of the community. Around the fire before dinner, listen to the history of the Bushmen people, whose origins can be traced back 30 000 years, and learn about the complex political challenges that are confronting them today. Enjoy a delicious dinner under the stars.

The Bushmen with whom we conduct our hunts are the last of the greatest hunters alive today. To hunt a large antelope with Bushmen in a truly authentic manner is an incredible privilege and a rare and special experience.

However, it must be accepted that as such, the success of the hunt could never be guaranteed. We will aim for eland but if unsuccessful, will hunt a gemsbok, wildebeest or kudu as all of these species are incorporated in the initiation rituals.

Please also bear in mind that activities detailed below may vary from the order detailed below due to the spontaneous and authentic nature of the experience, and depending on where the hunt takes place, there may be several nights spent fly camping under the stars in Mosquito net tents.

DAY 2

After a restful night's sleep, meet the men after breakfast to prepare for a traditional hunt.

Walk into the bush and search out the poison grub beetle, gathering suitable roots, sanseveria leaves and branches for the manufacture of rope, bows and arrows.

Return to camp for a lunch and siesta.

After tea, return to the Bushmen village, where you will watch the men prepare bows, arrows and

quivers while young boys demonstrate various traditional games that provide training for the hand-to-eye co-ordination skills that will be so necessary when on the hunt.

DAY 3 - 8

Depart early after hearty cooked breakfasts for a day's traditional hunting with the men.

Spend the next few days with the men tracking, hunting and gathering - observing and sharing in their astounding knowledge of their environment.

Days will be spent searching the area for eland tracks, stalking and, hopefully, hunting down some wild quarry using traditional bows and arrows. This is a real expedition and, at times, may be physically demanding.

A picnic lunch will be taken with to enable one to be flexible and react fast to the day's events.

Return to camp hopefully bearing the results of a day's hunt and prepare the meat to share and sample around the fire.

The following morning, join the Bushmen in the very sensitive job of sharing the meat among all the band members (men, women and children). The hunter whose arrow killed the antelope performs this task, and is a time of great excitement and rejoicing.

If you can bear tearing yourself away from the fascinating preparations for the evening's celebrations, return to camp for a lunch and siesta.

The successful hunter will undergo the ritual ceremony of the hunt led by the elders, receiving tattoos to indicate his passage into manhood as a hunter.

A huge feast and incredible trance dance will follow, through which all the community bond and are healed by their Healers. This is a deeply spiritual experience for the Bushmen people.

It is a great privilege for our Guests to have the opportunity to observe the mysterious passage of the Healer into a state of altered consciousness (entirely induced by breathing technique), where he can make contact with his ancestors.

The eland has taken on an almost God-like significance in all San Bushman culture and lore. The hair from between the eyes of the eland is removed, burnt and inserted into the incisions that are made between the eyes of the hunter, on his temples and on his arms. The hunter is thus tattooed to imbue him with the power of the eland.

When a young girl reaches puberty and menstruates for the first time, the week long ritual she undergoes culminates in a symbolic eland dance.

The most important trance, a healing dance of the San Bushman is another eland dance and is the embodiment of Bushman spirituality.

It is therefore no wonder that eland have been elevated to deity status, and why the eland is often featured in ancient San rock art.

Depending on the success of the hunt, we may have time to join in a morning gathering expedition with the men, women and children.

Your Guide will point out the distinct ecological characteristics of this area and its animal and bird species while spontaneous gathering and discussions about the uses of plants and wildlife by your Bushmen Guides provide the link between culture and wild environment that we seek to offer our Guests on these very special safaris.

An adolescent Bushman girl knows more than 115 species of usable plants and an extraordinary variety of plants and herbs with both culinary and medicinal value will be found.

After lunch and a siesta, return to the Bushmen village where you will learn from the women how to prepare their bush foods using only the most basic of tools and an open fire. You will be able to sample a variety of foods from wild spinach and roast beetles to ostrich egg omelette cooked on the coals.

Some of the women may also show you how they make beads from ostrich eggs and the simple, but striking jewellery that they make from porcupine quills, seeds and ostrich eggs. Leather is also decorated with both glass and ostrich beads to complex and beautiful effect.

As the sun sets and the evening draws close, the women may spontaneously perform the melon dance, around the evening fire.

This unselfconscious and free-spirited traditional dance represents the joyful celebration of a successful harvest.

Return to camp for a rather more conventional, but still delicious, meal and retire to bed.

DAY 9

Awake the next morning to a light breakfast. Bid the community farewell and drive by vehicle to the airstrip to meet up with your light aircraft transfer to Jack's Camp.

Head off after tea in the beautiful evening light to see one of Africa's rarest carnivores – the brown hyaena.

Due to a PhD research programme on this cleverly adapted desert species, the cubs are habituated and allow us to observe their social behaviour without disturbance.

Stop to watch the sun set and listen to an explanation of how the Makgadikgadi pans, the remnants of the world's largest ever superlake, were formed.

Return to camp for a lavish dinner in the elegant mess tent, a designated national museum of Botswana.

Day 10

Set off in the morning to visit some of the Kalahari's sexiest meerkats. ('Suricate' to science minded people and 'Timon' to Lion King fans). Get up close and personal with these captivating creatures.

On chilly mornings, you might well find a meerkat snuggling up to you for warmth. Or, in the absence of a termite mound or tree, using your head as a sentry lookout post...

By spending quality time with these incredibly social, superbly adapted animals, you will be able to see how they interact with each other and their environment.

You also get the chance to see the desert through the eyes of a meerkat – which, despite the fact that it's only a foot off the ground, is a pretty spectacular vantage point, and definitely one of the most special and memorable game experiences you will encounter in Botswana.

Arrive at Jack's Camp, surely one of the most romantic camps in Africa...

Jack's Camp is pitched on a low grassland knoll amongst an oasis of dignified desert palms and Kalahari acacia. After the rains, when the sea of grass is still high and feathery, the camp is all but invisible until seconds before your arrival!

The camp's hub is a romantic canvas pavilion of low spires and finials. With a fluttering valance beneath its eaves, this could be the site for a medieval jousting tourney, were it not a deciduous green. Three poles support the main chamber where everyone meets for meals at a long communal dining table.

Jack's Camp is renowned throughout the industry for its fresh and original menus.

Three course meals such as fresh tomato and basil soup, ostrich piccata, roast Botswana beef and impossibly rich, but light, chocolate puddings

Teas are indulgent affairs; treats like homemade chicken pies, tangy lemon curd biscuits and the best brownies in the bush! Bread is baked daily. Full cooked English breakfasts are on offer every morning and the eggs benedict brunch is legendary.

Ten green roomy and stylish canvas tents with en-suite bathrooms, indoor and outdoor showers (for those who want to feel the Kalahari breeze on their skin) have been fashioned in classical 1940's style creating an oasis of civilization in what can be the harshest of stark environments...

Persian rugs underfoot, cool cotton sheets and mahogany and brass campaign-style kit from the family safari stores form a striking contrast with the rugged wilderness viewed from the comfort of one's own verandah.

After a picnic breakfast, visit a remote cattle post to learn about the traditional culture of the Batswana people.

Close by is the famous Chapman's Baobab (Also known as the Seven Sisters) which is acknowledged to be the third largest tree in Africa.

This famous landmark was noted by Chapman, when he passed with Thomas Baines in 1861, and was the campsite of early explorers like Livingstone and Selous when they pioneered the area.

There are a multitude of names on this tree, and Chapman's name is indicated by his initials "J.C.". This colossal, seven stemmed, specimen, visible from great distances across the pan, was used as a landmark for the early explorers of the region.

Visiting this incredible tree, offers one an opportunity to gain a fascinating insight into the history of the early explorers.

Return to camp for a refreshing lunch, and a relaxing afternoon siesta.

After tea, travel down to the pans where you will be given a brief safety talk before mounting your trusty quad bike to head off across the pans. Watch the sun set and the stars rise.

This is one of the only places in the world where the silence is so complete you can hear the blood circulating through your ears. There is not one visual landmark to be seen, and one swiftly loses one's sense of perspective where 16000 square kilometres of baking soda void are, inhabited only by you and a few gazillion invisible brine shrimp!

DAY 11

Early in the morning, comb the edge of the extinct lakeshore to find some of the many stone tools and fossils that litter the pan surface and learn of the origins of early man. Return to camp for a huge brunch.

Say your farewells and drive to the airstrip. Next stop, the enigmatic Tsodilo Hills.

You will be met by your Guide and private vehicle at the Tsodilo airstrip, and transferred by road to the tented camp. The Tsodilo Hills are one of the most rewarding destinations in Botswana. Apart from the incredible paintings, there is a certain atmosphere that shrouds these hills – an atmosphere that lures one to return again and again. The Tsodilo Hills

consist of 3 main hills – the male, the female, the child. There is also a fourth hill removed from the other 3 and which remains unnamed. Legend has it that the fourth hill is the male hill's first wife, that he left for a younger wife and she is now lurking in the background, looking on with sadness and distress.

Like Australia's Ayers Rock, the Tsodilo Hills rise abruptly from a rippled, ocean-like expanse of desert and are threaded with myth, legend and spiritual significance for both the Makoko and Dzucwa San and the Mbukushu people.

The Mbukushu believe that the gods lowered themselves and their cattle down a rope on to the summits, while the San see the Tsodilo Hills as the site of creation itself. These four masses of rock are the 'slippery hills' of Sir Laurens van der Post

There is evidence that the area of the Tsodilo Hills has been inhabited by ancestors of the present day San for nearly 35 000 years. Numerous flaked stone tools have been excavated and Bantu sites have been dated back as early as 500AD.. In addition, 2750 individual outline-style paintings at over 200 sites have been discovered and catalogued. Although no date can be fixed on most of the rock painting, some are clearly fairly recent –later than 700AD – because of their degree of preservation and their depiction of cattle, which were brought in around that time. Most paintings are on the Female Hill and show a variety of animal hunting scenes, abstract patterns and social events.

Among the rare artefacts found in the area are ancient tools, pottery, and animal bone fish hooks dating back more than 20 000 years. It is thought that people came to these hills about 100,000 years ago during the Middle Stone Age.

We start the visit to Tsodilo Hills with a guided walk to the more accessible paintings, then climb to the summit to sit and watch the sun set over the scrub, as the Bushmen have done since the dawn of time. Return to camp for a lavish dinner under the stars.

DAY 12 – 14

Spend the next three days exploring the hills with your Guide. Be prepared for a little climbing, as you explore some of the less accessible and more interesting paintings, as well as exposing you to some breathtaking scenery. You will see the Laurens van der Post panel, the dancing penises, and even an ancient penguin! You can also visit some sacred Bushmen sites, or just sit in the shade of a rocky outcrop and enjoy the view of the surrounding mjombo woodlands.

DAY 15

After breakfast, visit the nearby Bushman village to meet some of the local people and learn about their history and culture. You can buy traditional crafts and see how the people are dealing with the challenges of urbanization.

Say your goodbyes to this enigmatic and spiritual place and transfer by private air charter from Tsodilo to Maun.