

# TAKE A RIDE ON THE WILD SIDE

## Safari on Horseback – The Ultimate Riding Holiday

By David Mitson



It's that time of year when the weather gets colder and we need something to raise our spirits. What could be more uplifting and exciting than the thought of planning a Safari on horseback?

**CTR Rep David Mitson** reports on his experience of a lifetime!

### A dangerous game

I booked my horseback safari with In the Saddle – a tour operator specialising in worldwide holidays on horseback. "This is a fast, challenging ride which will

include gallops, jumping trees dislodged by elephants and negotiating steep river banks. In addition, you are riding in areas of dangerous game", said the brochure - and it did not disappoint.

### A sobering thought

The thought of coming face to face with a lion in the wild is a sobering thought and one that kept coming to the front of my mind during the lead up to my "Big 5 Combination Safari" in South Africa and Botswana. The 'big 5' refers to five of Africa's

“ You are riding in areas of dangerous game ”

greatest wild animals - leopard, lion, elephant, buffalo and rhino, not to mention the numerous other animals I was likely to encounter such as giraffes, springbok, wildebeest, hippos, ostriches, zebras and cheetahs.

David and Cor



## DID YOU KNOW?

From a total number of at least 100,000 black rhino in 1960, spread across most of Africa south of the Sahara Desert, there are today fewer than 3500 left.



*Fun in the bush*

### Farmer's horse

After the flight to Johannesburg, it was a four hour road trip for the first half of the safari at Dinaka Lodge, based in the

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Waterberg Mountains; a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and one of the last true wilderness areas of South Africa.

We are met by Carmen and Kirsten who will be our guides for the next four days. The afternoon begins with a visit to the stables to meet our horses. My horse, Jozini, is a Boerperd, which roughly translated from Afrikaans means “farmer’s horse”. “You’ll like Jozini”, says Carmen. “She has character”. Boerperds are renowned for their temperament, stamina and intelligence and Jozini has all of these qualities, as I find out during our afternoon ride to get familiar with our horses.



*Come on Maverick - time to get going!*

### Hippo alarm

The next morning starts with a wake-up call at 5am, courtesy of two hippos in the lake at the foot

of our lodge.

We then head to the stables for our first full day's riding into the bush. Kirsten explains the tracks we are following, as we encounter our first game. Warthog, blesbok, impala, waterbuck, zebra, wilderbeest and hippo – we really are spoiled. Over the course of the next three days we see more of the African wildlife with the highlight coming on the second day.

“Can you see the rhinos grazing?” asks Carmen as our eyes scan the plains. We walk our horses slowly toward the rhinos as I wait for them to spot us and run for cover. To my surprise, they seem curious and gradually make their way to where we have stopped. As our horses graze, the rhinos approach and I find myself within 10 meters of these amazing creatures.

“20 poached in the last three months” says Carmen, ‘it is

*Rhino ‘through the horse’s ears’*





*David taking a dip with Marshall*

no wonder they are on the endangered list.”

### All change

For the next few days I swap Jozini for another Boerperd, this time a five year old by the name of Marshall.

As well as continuing our sightings of game, we also pop over some jumps, hit the gallop and ride bareback for a swim in one of the lakes.

Our final morning is a short ride out to say farewell to our horses and I'm back with Jozini for a long winding canter before the trip to our next destination – Botswana.

We say a sad goodbye to our hosts at Dinaka and head to the border to meet Cor Carelsen, owner and head guide of Limpopo Horse Safaris based in the Mashatu Game Reserve in

the Tuli Block of south eastern Botswana, where we also meet David, our other guide.

### Don't run!

The open plains provide a totally different perspective to the South African part of the safari and it is here where we are

“The next morning starts with a wakeup call at 5am, courtesy of two Hippos”

hoping to see the dangerous game such as lion, leopard and cheetah as well as some of the 350 species of bird that inhabit this region.

“If we see a lion, don't run – you run, you are prey” are the reassuring words from Cor as he



roam and you get a feel for the vast expanse of land in this outstanding part of the world.

### Remains of an Impala

During the next four days we encounter impalas, giraffes, kudus, crocodiles, baboons, jackals, elephants and lions and,

“If we see a Lion, don't run – you run, you are prey”

during one night, a leopard roams past our camp making its distinctive call. During one lunch stop under a huge Mashatu tree, Cor points out the remains of an impala in the tree. “This is where



slings his rifle over his shoulder.

Meeting a lion on horseback at close quarters is not recommended, as both David and Cor will testify to. The riding here is notched up a level and Cor talks us through our riding experience to ensure we are matched with the right horse, as this leg of the safari will be mobile, with accommodation being semi-permanent tents in the middle of the bush.

### Maverick

I am lucky enough to be given Maverick, a Fresian cross Thoroughbred and one of the horses that Cor usually rides. The horses here are a mix of Boerperd, Shire crosses, Fresian crosses and Warmbloods and are all excellently schooled by Cor, his wife Louise and their staff.

The plains are totally open with no restriction where the wildlife

a leopard would have had his dinner” explains Cor. “They drag them up into the tree so lions and hyenas can't get to it”.

After eight days in the bush and endless winding canters, jumping countless fallen trees and coming within 15 metres of elephants and giraffes, it's time to say a sad farewell to the holiday of a lifetime and look forward to the next adventure.

**If you are looking for an adventurous riding holiday with excellent horses, food, drink, wildlife and outstanding hosts then look no further. You can book a horse safari by calling Tracy at In the Saddle on 01299 272 240 or at [www.inthesaddle.com](http://www.inthesaddle.com)**