

# Safari So Good at Disney's Animal Kingdom

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — Walkabout boots all laced up? Pith helmet on good and tight? You bet your binoculars there's adventure ahead!

Kilimanjaro Safaris is where we'll really get to see the animals — living under trees, wallowing in waterholes and grazing the savanna's grasses. The safari is the largest attraction in Disney's Animal Kingdom theme park.

There are wild animals here — the kind you find in Africa. Zebras, lions, giraffes and the rest are all living naturally in the broad grasslands, pools, waterfalls and lush green forests. You won't see any fences — no visible barriers. The animals are separated in secret ways into agreeable groups for peaceful coexistence so they — and you — live fearlessly.

## Secrets the Animals Know

**Climb right up there on a 32-passenger, open-sided vehicle — a kind of oversized all-terrain truck with canvas awnings for shade and bench seats high enough to see past the bushes. It has hard rubber tires to take the rocky trails, and a tank-like disposition to plow through the underbrush and ignore rickety bridges, threatening geysers and challenging hippos while submarining its way across a flooded river ford. Up front is our guide and driver.**

All along the way, your guide will give advice and information about the journey and the “dangers” we'll face, and about the even greater dangers threatening the world's wild animal population. He or she will be in radio contact with a bush pilot and his co-pilot — both of whom are committed to saving the reserve's native wildlife. They will fly ahead in their spotter plane to make sure we really can find the animals we're looking for.

Off we go down the dirt trail rutted with the tracks of a thousand dusty lorries and into the African forest. It is a land of bright red earth, towering trees that create a canopy and lush grasses sheltering small groups of forest antelope.

## Look Out for Rhinos

**Crossing the Bongo Pool, where the animals come to drink, we may spot impressive-looking black rhinos, among Africa's most fascinating creatures. One rhino might wade in the water 30 feet away as we splash through the shallows. On the right, if we're lucky, we'll catch a glimpse of the rare okapi. It's one of the most beautiful and secretive animals of the African forest.**

More hippos are at the base of cascading waterfalls. Falls dropping down the hillside create turbulent pools for crocodiles. Our truck makes its way over a twisted, bumpy wooden bridge directly over the lounging crocs.

## Discovering the Savanna

**After passing through an area of heavy vegetation, we emerge for a spectacular view of the vast savannah — grassland ranges where no buffalo roam but plenty of other animals do, in families and herds, foraging for food: spectacular spotted giraffes, sable antelope, Thomson's gazelle and gangling ostriches who can outrace our truck any day of the week. It's a land of strange trees that look like acacias and ebony.**

Termite mounds up to 20 feet high dot the landscape.

As we move along the bumpy trail out into the flat grasslands, we discover the mandrill baboon family on rocks and in the trees peering inquisitively at our passing truck.

Around another bend, at the elephant range, the herd is moving among the trees, reaching up with their trunks for lower branches.

### **Searching for Big Red**

**Back in the area where the earth is sunset red, we begin looking for two of the bush country's most popular inhabitants — Big Red and her elephant baby Little Red — so named because when they roll in the rust-red dust they take on the color of this soil.**

There are other elephants off to the left under the baobab trees as our vehicle plunges right into the waters of an elephant pool for more than 100 feet.

Over on the island, a flock of pink flamingos gracefully makes its way to the water's edge, slender beaks reaching down in search of baby shrimp and tiny water creatures.

Passing between large kopje rocks up to 12 feet high we discover native "cave" paintings, prehistoric pictures of tribal life, visible after hundreds of years. At nearby pools white rhinos are wallowing in the mud or eyeing us from the tall grass. There are other hoofed animals: the kudu, scimitar-horned oryx and the long-horned eland along with sharp-eyed cheetahs up there among the rocks.

Around another mound of rock kopje lions rest on the rich red rocks. Down below are a half-dozen warthog burrows ranged around the edge of a geothermal field filled with bubbling geysers and mudpots. This is where we get our first startling hint of trouble in the area.

Poachers!

### **Danger in the Wilds**

**One of the reserve's wardens radios us with an alarming message — ivory poachers have wounded Big Red, and Little Red is missing. The bush pilot asks us to help out by forcing the poachers east along the eroded gorge — straight towards the waiting wardens. Glad to help, we begin the chase! There is no sign of Little Red.**

From the plane, our flying spotter radios that he sees the poachers ahead. "We're going after them," he advises.

A dirty, beat-up vehicle races away through a field of geysers spouting 20 feet into the air. In pursuit, we dodge the spouts as the poachers' jeep disappears around the bend. We pass their tented camp. Campfires are still smoldering. Elephant tusks are scattered about.

From the pilot comes the message: "The rangers are here and the poachers are in custody."

As our vehicle continues around a rocky bend, the pilot waves us past a halted jeep. A ranger trains his rifle on two poachers still trapped inside the mud-covered, smashed vehicle. Beside it, in the back of a small flat-bed truck, is a baby elephant still covered with rust-red dust. Little Red is safe and will be returned to his mother.

Detouring around three large waterfalls and across a 100-foot pool, we rejoin the main road and enter the lushest vegetation yet — giant bamboo, palms and big-leaf trees — near the heart of gorilla country where we find the Park Ranger Station.

Our safari is over, but the memories are lasting. And there is much more to see on foot down Pangani Forest Exploration Trail, through the bird-filled jungle and at other discovery experiences in Disney's Animal Kingdom.

Kilimanjaro Safaris features Disney's FASTPASS — offered at no charge to park guests — designed to reduce waiting times at popular attractions in all four Walt Disney World theme parks.

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