

A major part of many people's safari experience is capturing images of the wilderness and wildlife that are encountered on safari. This document should help you prepare yourself.

Digital

For reasonable quality images we recommend a camera with a minimum of 4 megapixels. Preferably 5+. A good quality SLR digital camera should allow you to take up to 9 images at a high resolution with no delay in writing images to the card. This can be extremely useful when there is serious action. With a good SLR you should be able to change lenses depending on your needs. You will need this facility when shooting wildlife and especially birds as the optical zoom on smaller cameras with fixed lenses does not allow you to get close enough.

If you are going out to purchase a camera, the older or semi-professional cameras are often better for your needs than the super expensive professional cameras. The reason for this is the sensor on the old cameras give you a magnification of 1.4 or 1.6. The benefit of this is that it changes your mediocre 300mm lens to a 480mm lens. Good quality memory cards are worth their price as they are not only less likely to fail but also write the images faster allowing you to shoot more images at the critical time when it is all happening. Remember to not leave your memory cards in the direct sun- they will cook!

FILM CAMERAS

Care of film

While film SLR's are definitely on the way out some people do still shoot film. We recommend that you cater for 3 spools a day for the not so serious and 6 spools a day for the serious photographer. Try to transport your film in a lead lined bag to prevent damage when going through x-ray machines at airports. Keep your film cold at all times. Depending on space the guide may be able to assist you with **some** fridge space to keep your exposed spools cool.

What film?

Most photographers prefer to shoot in positive (E6) which is commonly referred to as slide film. However if you are shooting just for memories you are better off shooting in negative (print film) as you save yourself a whack of money not having to then scan these slides into a digital image and then print. Most developers will automatically give you a copy of your prints on cd so that you can email pictures to family and friends.

Bring at least 2 spare batteries keeping in mind that one may be dud- this happens all the time!

WHAT TO PACK

Camera bags

Firstly pack your cameras into a high quality soft camera bag or pelican case. The former is much easier to keep with you in the vehicle and access your equipment. There is a lot of dust and from November to May the chance of rain and it is well worth protecting your equipment.

The little bits and pieces

In your bag the essentials are a blower to clean your sensor. An external hard drive (for the hard-core) or at least 8 gigabytes of memory cards in small sizes (2-4)gig. You don't want all your eggs in one basket. If you are ultra-serious or using a camera with 10+mega pixels and/or shooting in raw (RAW is a much larger format and used mostly by professionals for super high-quality images for publishing) you may need as many as 20 gigs of memory! A lens pen and a cleaning cloth are also a must. A remote shutter release is a great help if you are shooting off a tripod at low light but there will be few instances on safari where you will use this and as such is only for the serious.

LENSES

Size

The big question and the financial burden. What to invest in? Naturally this will depend on your budget and how serious you are. For the not so serious but want good quality images, you may want to think about some zoom lenses in the range of 18-80mm and a 200-400mm. This should cover most of the range that you need. If you want to get portraits of wildlife and decent bird images you will need an extender or converter as they are often known. The best is a 1.4 (Canon) or 1.6 (Nikon). Check that it is the correct converter and that your auto-focus and Image Stabilizing/ Vibration Reduction (if your lens has these facilities) still works with the converter.

Aperture

The aperture of a lens is one of the major determinants of price. A long lens (such as a 400mm) with a very large aperture (eg. 2.8) is extremely expensive but also very unwieldy and unless you are on a private photographic safari with a row of seats to yourself you will struggle to be able to use such a lens. So what does a large aperture do for you? Basically it allows you to shoot at a higher speed in a lower light and also for the artistic images very often a very shallow depth of field can be quite effective. Optimally what you want for shooting "free hand" (as often it all happens too quickly to set up) is an aperture of 4-5.6 on your longest zoom lens.

Macro

Many lenses come with a macro function. Unless your lens is a dedicated macro lens with a 1:1 rating it may not have the close up capabilities you desire for shooting the little guys. A great solution to this problem is to use extension tubes. They are relatively in-expensive (as lenses go) and greatly reduce your close focus. This also enables you to stalk things like dragonflies and butterflies etc. With a dedicated 50mm macro you often need to get much closer than the animals will allow you as opposed to using the extension tubes on a zoom lens. It will also reduce the number of lenses you need to carry. The downside of extension tubes is they do steal some light but in Botswana this is seldom a concern. By adding an extension tube you can often create the artistic effect of a very large aperture lens where you can achieve a very narrow depth of field. A 20mm extension tube is usually more than adequate. The longer the tube the closer you can focus but the more light you lose.

Flash

Most cameras have a built in flash but the range of these flashes are quite limited. The closer the lens to the flash (very close on in-built flash) the greater the chance of red-eye reflection. For serious photographers a good external flash is very helpful not only for night photography but for rainy and overcast days (on the few days we have such weather). A word of warning to the less experienced- use the flash moderately as a "fill-in" rather than a main source of light when shooting in the overcast conditions. An image can easily be "over-flashed"

Support

We will provide you with a bean bag (1kg canvas bag filled with rice) **on request**. You may also want to bring your own bigger or better bean bag and on request we will supply a filling for you so you need only carry the empty bag (please ensure we are advised if you require filling). Tripods are great for shooting outside of the vehicle but fairly useless in the vehicle and they are quite cumbersome. A monopod offers less stability but is far more versatile for in-vehicle shooting and walking safari. On photographic (shutter safaris) departures we supply an adjustable mount that attaches to the vehicle arm rest upon which you can tie a bean bag or use your own Wimberley/ball head or alternative tripod mount which you can attach to our universal plate.

Charging

All digital equipment is fairly heavy on batteries. Please make sure that you bring enough batteries to get you through the trip. We have 4-600 watt inverters installed into the vehicle but as with all electronic equipment this may fail. The onus is on you to make sure that you have sufficient battery power to make it through the trip. You may want to bring a 12 volt cigarette lighter charger if you do need to recharge in-case of inverter failure. While this happens very infrequently it is a reality of safaris. Be advised that even with a heavy duty inverter that we will not be able to continuously charge laptops and external hard-drives so the use of these will be limited. Naturally the guide will charge as much as he can but his first priority will be charging camera batteries and keeping everyone shooting.

For helpful photographic advice whilst on safari we recommend 'Wildlife Photography in Botswana: A Practical Guide' which can be requested from us and ordered for your arrival in Botswana, payable on invoice or in cash upon arrival at USD 25.00 per book.

