

# AFAR

## Why You Can (and Should) Take a Serengeti Safari Alone



Solo travelers can enjoy the safari experience as much as couples or families do.

Safaris aren't just for honeymooners. In fact, their mix of structured itineraries and communal dining is great for individual travelers.

It was around 4 p.m. and the torrential rain that started the night before was finally letting up. Nahal Gawasa, a young woman who works at [Serengeti Bushtops](#), a luxury tented camp in the remote northern Serengeti, was teaching me to bead African bracelets.

We were sitting under the shop's canvas tent, a shallow bowl of beads in each of our laps, talking about our lives. She told me about visiting her mother in Arusha—the city on the edge of Mount Kilimanjaro—and her sister in Dar es Salaam, the port city on Tanzania's coast. She told me about her boyfriend and wanted to know about mine.

We must've been talking for over an hour when I finally left to wash up and get ready for dinner. As I walked away, with a bracelet and a bit of an understanding about what life is like for this young Tanzanian woman, it dawned on me that I never would have connected with her had I not been traveling solo.



Photo by &Beyond / Extraordinary Journeys

**Traveling solo can open you up to new experiences.**

There's a common perception among travelers that safaris are meant for honeymoons or special occasions—But a safari is actually the perfect solo trip. Unlike traveling alone in cities, which requires figuring out everything from how to get around to where it's safe to walk alone at night, to the dreaded table for one, on safari in the Serengeti, everything is taken care of.

The team behind award-winning tour operator [Extraordinary Journeys](#) arranged all my transfers and, prior to my departure, helped me figure out how to get a visa (upon arrival at the airport) and prepare for the trip (get malaria pills). They even provided a duffel bag that would comply with the size and weight limits on the bush planes I'd be taking. All I had to do was pack it and show up.

The [Adventure Travel Trade Association](#) recently released a report citing solo travel as one of the top 20 travel trends of 2018, adding that “about one in four American travelers say they will travel solo in 2018.” Although solo safaris make up a tiny portion of Extraordinary Journeys' trips, cofounder Elizabeth Gordon agrees that they're ideal for travelers on their own.

“My guess as to why we are not seeing huge number of solo travelers is that people are intimidated by Africa even though it is the perfect trip for single travelers,” she says, citing all the reasons I loved my solo safari. “You stay in small camps, you don't have to go to restaurants alone, and you have a guide.” She or someone on her team works with clients beforehand to accommodate preferences for communal or solo dining, match travelers sharing vehicles on game drives, and fulfill any other requests.

As soon as my plane touched down at Seronera Airstrip in the central Serengeti, my enthusiastic guide Deus came running up to the plane to welcome me and help me with my bags. He had set up a spread of homemade cookies, coffee, and tea on the hood of the 4 x 4 he'd used to pick me up, and I took my first sip of coffee spiked with Amarula, a local version of Bailey's. As soon as we pulled out of the parking lot, we spotted two giraffes grazing on a tree.



Photo by Serengeti Bushtops Camp / Extraordinary Journeys

**The central Serengeti is home to giraffes, cheetahs, lions, and wildebeests.**

For the next three days, Deus went out of his way to make my trip unforgettable. (Because I traveled during the low season, he was effectively my personal guide.) He pointed out leopards hiding in trees that I never would have spotted on my own, navigated muddy roads in search of zebras, cheetahs, impalas, hyenas, wildebeests, and lions, and brought me to a scenic picnic spot, where we had lunch with the spotter working with him while admiring the panoramic views.

He and the team at Roving Bushtops, the luxury mobile tented camp run by the team behind Serengeti Bushtops, surprised me with a sunrise hot air balloon ride over the Serengeti. Afterward, I enjoyed breakfast under an acacia tree in the bush with the other balloon-riders, then visited a local school the company sponsors just outside the park, where the kids greeted me enthusiastically. (Top students in each class get to participate in a game drive as a field trip, and guests are encouraged to donate school supplies to support the students.)



Photo by Robin Stuart/Bushtops Camps  
**Dining solo is less intimidating on safari.**

That was just the beginning. Over the course of a week, I explored the central and northern Serengeti before ending in Grumeti, a 350,000-acre private concession that's home to five lodges and tented camps run by award-winning luxury safari operator [Singita](#).

Some evenings, I joined my guide and the other guests around the campfire or dined with the camp's manager. Other evenings, I relaxed on my own, but I never felt lonely. I spent so much time socializing with the guides, staff members, and other guests that I was happy to have a bit of down time to myself. Being alone heightened my gratitude for the chance to experience this incredible place.



Robin Stuart / Bushtops Camps

**Solo safari trips offer a mix of socializing and personal time.**

Of course, there are certain drawbacks—cost is one of them. Some camps have single supplements (an extra charge for staying in a double-occupancy tent by yourself), but Gordon has had some success encouraging camps to waive them during low season, when they might not otherwise be able to fill the tent. Singita only charges a single supplement if three or more single rooms are booked under a reservation.

The Bushtops Company charges a single supplement of around 40 percent more than a sharing guest would pay, but it waives it in April and May (the rainy season) at [Mara Bushtops](#), its camp in a private concession bordering Kenya's Masai Mara. (Its Serengeti camps shut down for the rainy season.)

If cost is a concern, consider visiting the Serengeti during the shoulder season, from November through early December or from January through March. With fewer guests around, the staff can provide even more individual attention. You won't see the wildebeest

migration, and you'll have to be OK with a certain amount of rain, but you'll still see abundant wildlife, and you might get a vehicle all to yourself, as I did.

It may not be the typical solo trip, but it will be the adventure of a lifetime.

*Extraordinary Journeys offer safaris from \$600-1000 per person per night in low season and \$1000-\$1800 per person per night in peak season.*

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