

The Big Five

Many first-time safarists go to Africa with the intention to see the Big Five—lion, elephant, rhinoceros, leopard and buffalo. First coined by hunters to denote the five “most dangerous animals,” the term “Big Five” is today mostly used for promotional purposes. Claiming to have The Big Five is considered to be a plus.

However, the animal responsible for the most human deaths per year is missing from the list. While no one would contest the ferocity of any of these animals when cornered or wounded, the hippopotamus is strangely absent, considering that it is responsible for more human deaths than any of the Big Five. By the way, the deaths caused by hippos are usually without malice or forethought. Cold comfort to the next of kin of those unfortunate humans who were summarily snapped in half by these tubby tubemouthed vegetarians because they were mistakenly perceived as a threat. In rare cases hippos have resorted to eating left-over meat when going short on veggies.

Keep in mind that some of Africa’s best safari destinations do not have all of the Big Five and that there are many hundreds of other animal and bird species to see.

Travelers who are obsessed with the idea of seeing the Big Five on their first trip are best advised to spend the extra money and opt for a private game reserve where expert rangers can track the animals into the bush instead of waiting for them to come to the road. On their follow-up journeys these visitors will, like other seasoned safarists, begin to understand that seeing the Big Five is only one dimension of a multi-faceted experience. Beyond the thrill of the Big Five is a whole universe of animals, large and small, that makes for equally fascinating viewing.

Our chart on the opposite page indicates where you are likely to find the Big Five and in the following two pages there is a listing of what you may expect to encounter by way of larger mammals in the most important safari areas in Southern and East Africa.



ODDS OF ENCOUNTERING THE BIG FIVE



BOTSWANA

Okavango Delta	●	●	►	►	○ ○ ¹
Moremi	●	●	●	●	○ ○
Chobe	►	●	►	●	○ ○
Central Kalahari	○	○	○	●	○ ○

KENYA

Amboseli	●	●	○	○	○ ○
Masai Mara	●	●	●	●	○ ►
Meru/Samburu	►	►	○	►	○ ○
Tsavo	●	●	►	●	○ ○

MALAWI

Liwonde	○	●	○	○	○ ○
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NAMIBIA

Etosha	○	●	○	●	○ ►
East Caprivi	►	●	►	►	○ ○
Skeleton Coast	○	○	○	○	○ ○

SOUTH AFRICA

Kruger NP	●	●	○	●	► ○
KNP Private	●	►	●	●	► ○
Hluhluwe	●	●	○	►	● ►
Phinda	●	●	●	►	● ►

TANZANIA

Ngorongoro	●	●	○	●	○ ►
Serengeti	●	●	●	●	► ►
Selous	●	●	●	●	○ ○
Katavi	●	●	○	●	○ ○
Ruaha	●	●	○	►	○ ○

UGANDA

Murchison Falls	►	►	○	○	○ ○
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ZAMBIA

Kafue	►	►	○	►	○ ○
South Luangwa	●	●	●	●	○ ○

ZIMBABWE

Hwange	●	●	►	►	○ ○
Matusadona	●	●	○	►	○ ○
Mana Pools	●	●	►	►	○ ○

Excellent ● Good ► Reasonable ○ Extinct or N/A ○
 1. Indicates White Rhino/Black Rhino

WHAT'S TO SEE AT THE MAJOR DESTINATIONS

	Lion	Leopard	Cheetah	Elephant	Black Rhino	White Rhino	Hippo	Buffalo	Eland	Greater Kudu	Sable Antelope	Gemsbok/Oryx	Wild Dog
BOTSWANA													
Moremi/Okavango	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Almost always encountered	Rarely seen but present	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally		Almost always encountered
Linyanti/Selinda	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Almost always encountered			Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered		Almost always encountered
Kwando	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Almost always encountered			Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered		Almost always encountered
Central Kalahari	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Frequently seen						Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered		Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered
Savute (SW Chobe)	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered				Rarely seen but present	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally		Rarely seen but present
Chobe (Northern region)	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered			Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally		Rarely seen but present
Tuli (Mashatu)	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered					Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered			
ZIMBABWE													
Hwange (Makalolo/Somalisa)	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered		Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Rarely seen but present	Almost always encountered
Matusadona	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered		Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered		Almost always encountered			
Mana Pools	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen		Almost always encountered			Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered			Almost always encountered
ZAMBIA													
South Luangwa	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen		Almost always encountered			Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered			
North Luangwa	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally		Almost always encountered			Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered			
Lower Zambezi	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen		Almost always encountered			Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered			Rarely seen but present
Kafue (Busanga Plains)	Almost always encountered	Rarely seen but present	Frequently seen	Rarely seen but present			Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered		Seen occasionally
Kafue (Central)	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Almost always encountered			Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered		Seen occasionally
NAMIBIA													
Etosha	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered			Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered		Almost always encountered	
SOUTH AFRICA													
Kruger National Park	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered		Rarely seen but present
Private Kruger (Sabi)	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered		Almost always encountered
Phinda	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Almost always encountered		Almost always encountered		Almost always encountered			
Kwandwe	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Frequently seen	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered		Almost always encountered	

Almost always encountered
 Seen occasionally
 Frequently seen
 Rarely seen but present

WHAT'S TO SEE AT THE MAJOR DESTINATIONS

	Lion	Leopard	Cheetah	Elephant	Black Rhino	White Rhino	Hippo	Buffalo	Eland	Greater Kudu	Sable Antelope	Gemsbok/Oryx	Wild Dog	Girollas	Chimpanzees	
TANZANIA																
Lake Manyara	Almost always encountered	Rarely seen but present	Rarely seen but present	Almost always encountered			Almost always encountered	Frequently seen								
Ngorongoro	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Frequently seen	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen		Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Frequently seen			Seen occasionally				
Serengeti (Southeastern)	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Frequently seen	Seen occasionally			Seen occasionally	Seen occasionally	Frequently seen				Seen occasionally			
Serengeti (North & Western)	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Frequently seen			Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Frequently seen				Seen occasionally			
Tarangire	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Almost always encountered			Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Frequently seen				Seen occasionally			
Selous	Frequently seen	Seen occasionally	Rarely seen but present	Almost always encountered	Rarely seen but present		Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Frequently seen			Seen occasionally			
Ruaha	Frequently seen	Seen occasionally	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered	Rarely seen but present		Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally			
Mahale/Gombe																Almost always encountered
Katavi	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally		Almost always encountered			Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Frequently seen		Rarely seen but present		Seen occasionally			
KENYA																
Amboseli	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally	Frequently seen	Almost always encountered			Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Seen occasionally				Seen occasionally			
Tsavo	Almost always encountered	Rarely seen but present	Seen occasionally	Almost always encountered	Rarely seen but present		Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Seen occasionally				Seen occasionally			
Maasai Mara	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally		Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Frequently seen							
Lake Nakuru	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Rarely seen but present		Frequently seen	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Frequently seen							
Samburu	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Almost always encountered				Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Seen occasionally			Almost always encountered			
Lewn Downs	Seen occasionally	Seen occasionally	Seen occasionally	Frequently seen	Frequently seen	Almost always encountered		Frequently seen	Rarely seen but present	Frequently seen			Almost always encountered		Rarely seen but present	
UGANDA																
Queen Elizabeth	Almost always encountered	Frequently seen		Almost always encountered			Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered								Almost always encountered
Murchison Falls	Almost always encountered	Seen occasionally		Almost always encountered			Almost always encountered	Almost always encountered								
Bwindi																Almost always encountered
Kibale																Almost always encountered
RWANDA																
Volcanoes N.P.																Almost always encountered

Almost always encountered
 Seen occasionally
 Frequently seen
 Rarely seen but present