

Reflections on a Safari to Kruger Park with Wild 4 Photographic, April 2009

When we booked with Wild 4 I have to admit that I was a little anxious about the organisation that we were sending our money to. The web site looked great, but was there anything to support it? Would there actually be anyone waiting there to meet us when we got off the plane in Hoedspruit? As it turned out not only was there someone there to meet us, but there was someone who had absolutely everything organized to perfection.

I had chosen Wild 4 because I wanted to see if I could take some wildlife shots that I would be happy to show to anyone, and Bridget was hoping that it wouldn't be too boring for her. Stuart was the perfect guide for both of us. He is even more of a photographic enthusiast than I am, he has encyclopedic knowledge not only of what the animals are, but also of their habits and behaviour, and he has phenomenal eyesight. This combination served to put us in the right place at the right time to for me to get some terrific photographs, and for Bridget to become an avid wildlife observer.

This is going to sound like a commercial, but it is actually just the comments of a pair of very very satisfied customers.

Stuart's vehicle conversion provided an excellent photographic platform. He and the others in the "4" (although with the addition of Molly, this should really now be "5") couldn't have done more to make our trip wonderful. Hot water bottles and blankets for the chilly mornings, breakfast rusks, morning snacks, cleverly varied packed lunches and delicious home cooked evening meals pampered us and left us wanting for nothing.

We had elected to have a private safari, and so had the whole vehicle to ourselves. The extra space was nice, but Stuart only takes a maximum of three photographers on a trip anyway, so each one has their own compartment spanning the full width of the vehicle. The real benefit was the lack of pressure to move on if one wanted to stay and develop some longer term feel for an animal. We spent two hours just watching and following a leopard as it moved from tree to tree, and half a day watching the lions in, on and around their giraffe kill.

Another concern for us when booking was the accommodation. Other than for the Big Cats, Wild 4 for preference uses the camps in Kruger. These looked on the web to be rather rudimentary, and we have never been the rugged outdoor tent living types. In the event, we should not have worried. Wild 4 books the best rooms at the camps, and while they certainly aren't five star, they are clean and comfortable, with en-suite bathrooms. We went on safari to see and photograph the animals, not to be waited on while we sat around drinking sundowners or swimming in a pool, so the amount of time spent at the camp was actually pretty limited and the facilities we needed were all there. If you do want a luxury safari then Stuart can book you into anywhere you want, but from our point of view it would be a complete waste of money, and I am sure he wouldn't encourage you to spend your money that way. If you want a more expensive trip, just stay longer!! If you want to snap some animals so you can say you saw them and get back to the bar, book your safari with someone else.

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Stuart has a questionnaire that he has you fill out before you go that asks what your objectives for the trip are. Mine was simply, at the end of the trip, to have three or four photographs that I would be happy to show to anyone, even a professional wildlife photographer. Take a look for yourself by following the Kruger link on my site

www.squashfan.com

and make your own judgement. I think that it is fair to say, that thanks to Stuart and Wild 4 finding the animals, putting us in the right place and letting us know what to expect, my objectives were more than met. Stuart has a wealth of experience, not just of the animals, but also of photographing them. Whatever level of photographer you are, Stuart has something to offer you. My thanks to him for all his help.

Wild 4 is a family operation that deserves to succeed. They offer quality, value and above all enthusiasm for their business. It would not surprise me if every one of their customers now counts them amongst their friends and keeps in touch with them. We would certainly like to be counted in that group. We hope to be able to safari with them again one day.

David and Bridget Barry