



AFRICAN BUSH CAMPS



TIPPING POINT



If there is one thing that gives travellers sleepless nights on safari it's the tipping conundrum: who, how and what's fair? So we sought the opinions of tour operators, lodge owners and camp managers to help solve this perennial concern

Above: Morning service. Preparing for breakfast at Bumi Hills Safari Lodge, overlooking Lake Kariba, Zimbabwe

"If ever there was a subject that makes the [insert your nationality here] sweat under the collar and feel socially awkward it has to be gratuities," says David Cartwright of ATI Holidays. "The thought of causing offence by giving too little, paying too much or inadvisably proffering a tip is enough to keep you awake at night."

Often problematic, certainly contentious, the moral dilemma of tipping is one that has been troubling travellers to Africa for decades, a "dark cloud that sits over you during your entire holiday", as one *Travel Africa* reader put it: knowing who to tip, how much and whether it is better to use gratuity boxes or not?

Perhaps the best place to start

is: what exactly is a gratuity? According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a tip is: "A sum of money given to someone as a reward for a service."

'Reward' being the operative word. "While there is an element of expectation, tipping is discretionary and we feel that guides and general staff should only be tipped on the basis that you are delighted with their service and not simply as a matter of course," says Safari Consultants' Rob Slater.

He cites two reasons for this view: "First, we are trying to encourage the companies we use to pay their staff appropriate wages. Second, we believe that a gratuity is a reward for good

service, and to simply tip for the sake of doing so breeds mediocrity."

HOW MUCH?

To compound the issue for the confused traveller, different companies and lodges advise varying amounts. Unfortunately, there is no hard-and-fast answer. "I still struggle with what to recommend," says Cartwright. "Suggesting a figure leaves me staring at the floor, or vaguely mumbling some or other percentage, for fear of offending the sensibilities of the individual and placing undue pressure on them to pay more than they can comfortably afford."

I can feel your collective shoulders slump: "If they don't know, how am I supposed to?" But fear not. Based on the responses received from the 20-plus Africa specialists polled, there is a general rule of thumb to be had:

- **Guides/drivers – US\$10 per day per person**
- **General staff – US\$10 per day per person.**

This is only a guide, however. While, your tour operator or host may advise an amount that is more or less than this ballpark figure, you don't have to abide by it. It is your choice how much you tip, if at all.

There are other

considerations. Regional variances, for one: what is too much in Uganda may not be enough in Botswana. In Zambia a service charge is mandatory, included in your bill and distributed among staff accordingly so, theoretically, there is no need for anything further.

Private guides should receive more (assuming they have done a good job), as he or she may only be guiding one or two people, rather than six. Sometimes, there will be assistant guides – should you wish to show your appreciation to them, a lower amount than the main guide is perfectly acceptable.

Additionally, while staying in five-star accommodation may naturally suggest a gratuity should be higher, most of our experts felt that a tip should not be relative to the cost of a trip, but to the quality of service.

HOW TO GIVE

Having established how much you want to give, how do you ensure the right people receive it? While the traveller has to cope with different policies in different places, the general consensus is: tip guides directly and use the communal gratuity box for general staff. If the lodge doesn't have a communal box, talk to the manager about the best approach.

"Often travellers feel weird about tipping and

how to do it, which they don't need to," says Gemma Heyns of African Bush Camps. "If tipping is in person, eye contact, a solid handshake, a few words of appreciation followed by the handing over of the tip is the best method. The days of a secret handshake to discreetly transfer the monies are no more."

She adds: "Putting the monies in an envelope helps to make the tipper more comfortable in that the amount is not immediately revealed." A note explaining what the gratuity is for is also well received.

"Guides and general staff should only be tipped on the basis that **you are delighted** with their service"

While offering a gift – such as a wildlife book – will be appreciated, it is no substitute for cash and should only be made in addition to a tip. Likewise, while US dollars and euros are readily accepted, where possible tip in the local currency. Exchanging money, especially for those living remotely, isn't always straightforward – and a percentage of your tip will end up in a banker's pocket.

GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND

A gratuity, says Heyns, should be in recognition

of someone going above and beyond. For example, "in the middle of the bush, beautiful cuisine is often produced with limited fridge space, running on minimal power, with the added challenge of an elephant eating the last watermelon, which was intended for dessert. Defeating the challenges faced is worthy of being tipped."

But remember, tipping is not obligatory. "If your guide is rude and inattentive, feel free to not tip at all," says Nikki Mayer of Seolo Africa. "He or she does earn a salary and the lodge management appreciate the fact that

tipping reinforces great hospitality. Likewise by not tipping, you are doing the lodge a service in letting a guide know that they need to up their game."

Our best advice is to ask before you travel, or on arrival at the lodge – to avoid that embarrassing conversation on departure. However, the amount suggested is not definitive – give what you can afford and only if you feel the service deserves it.

As Mayer says: "Paying a tip should be a happy event – after all, you pay a tip out of gratitude."

PHIL CLISBY

LIVINGSTONES SUPPLY CO.
Est. 1986

For the Finest Hospitality Products
PRESUME LIVINGSTONES!

Browse our site for over 1600 hospitality products
www.livingstonessupplyco.co.za

WE SHARPEN OUR PENCIL FOR YOU

In support of
ENDANGERED WILDLIFE TRUST
www.ewt.org.za

Easy ordering and advice on quality products delivered throughout Africa!

CALL US TO ORDER +2711 802 5800