

**TRAVEL + INDULGENCE**

Cruise fans eager to set sail again

**TRAVERSAL**

Gorillas in Virunga National Park, left; lions in Sabi Sands Game Reserve, above; a ranger removes a snare from the Serengeti, below

**QUESTIONS OF SURVIVAL**

Tough times for African safari operators

**SUSAN KUROSAWA**

**IN THE KNOW**

Operators mentioned in this feature have charitable foundations and philanthropic trusts that accept donations for conservation initiatives and community projects or are linked to non-profit organisations such as Africa Foundation or African Parks. Details on individual websites.

- [africafoundation.org](http://africafoundation.org)
- [africanparks.org](http://africanparks.org)
- [bushtales.africanbushcamps.com](http://bushtales.africanbushcamps.com)

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tswana, considered a model of en-
vironmental stewardship under former president Ian Khama, has seen wildlife slaughtering increase since 2018, when incoming President Mokgweetsi Masisi’s disarming of bush patrols coincided with an increase in ivory poaching. But this year the enemy is harder to spot. At least six rhinos in areas usually well surveyed by safari vehicles have fallen prey to poachers in this southern African nation since COVID-19 restrictions have killed tourism. In the north-west of South Africa, rhino deaths so far this year stand at nine. Thirteen rangers have been killed at Virunga National Park, famous for mountain gorilla populations, in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Across southern and eastern Africa, lodges, camps and game reserves are closed to tourists as the continent battles COVID-19, with serious financial implications for staff, villagers and park employees. While the closure of the world may have given Mother Nature an opportunity to breathe and regenerate, the pause button is potentially dangerous to wildlife in regions usually patrolled by rangers.

Jacques Smit, marketing director for Sabi Sabi’s four lodges in South Africa’s 65,000ha Sabi Sands Game Reserve, says teams are in place to monitor the environment. “We remain committed to habitat management, conservation initiatives and anti-poaching. We also have a team that heads out daily to observe animals, as we’ve always done, only now with no guests. This allows us to check the reserve, its condition, and wildlife behaviours.”

In Tanzania, Alex Walker’s mobile safari company, Serian, has launched Mission Possible Serengeti in response to a spike in snaring of wild animals by villagers with no money to purchase food. “The animals are more vulnerable than ever,” he says. “The immediate vacuum of game-viewing vehicles traversing these wild areas, coupled with reduced budgets for anti-poaching units as a result of a lack of tourism-generated fees... will create a perfect storm for the bushmeat trade.”

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