



Meet the
Specialist

**Melissa
Hillen**

African Adventures

Melissa Hillen discusses her love of the African bush.

Having been born and bred in South Africa, I have been lucky enough to have the opportunity to visit the bush on many occasions. I have a real love and deep interest in African wildlife. In July 2003 I moved to the UK and instantly missed the continent I call home. Thankfully I joined the Africa team at Audley which provides me with a valid reason to regularly venture back home to South Africa and also explore other parts. In my travels, I have discovered Tanzania, Mozambique and I am just about to embark on a trip to Kenya and the Seychelles.

I have been extremely lucky to see and learn just how varied each country in Africa is. From game reserves in South Africa that work tirelessly towards wildlife conservation to the expansive national parks of Tanzania where the game roams free. Something that still amazes me is the annual migration of over a million wildebeest, zebra and smaller antelope across the Serengeti, with creatures enduring some of the most difficult trials and river crossings, and yet this search for water continues year after year. Where the water is, the animals will be, and of course, where the antelope are, the cats will wait and bide their time....

The bush has never disappointed me and there is always something to see, whether watching an almost inconspicuous encounter of two dung beetles battling over a dung ball or the adrenalin of seeing lions so close that they use the wheels of your 4x4 to scratch their chins. Perhaps my most thrilling encounter was on the deck of my tent as an elephant came to visit. I sat as still as can be while he reached up for the branch above my tent, completely ignoring me, but as I looked into his huge mouth, believe me, I knew he was there and didn't make a sound!

My perfect ending to an exciting day in the bush is to watch the sun set whilst enjoying an Amarula and listening to the silence...well, the crickets, cicadas and sounds of the bush, before enjoying a hearty meal and heading to bed with the anticipation of a new day...who knows what it will offer!