

The term 'private vehicle' is often used in the context of safaris and game drives but what exactly does it mean? And, more importantly, do you need one?

When you go on safari as part of a group you will find that you almost always have a vehicle to yourselves, for members of your group only.

When you travel alone, or as a couple, you will usually find that you are sharing your transport with other people.

How might this affect your safari?

Road transport on safari can be put into 3 categories

- short transfers
- long transfers
- game drives

- **Short transfers**

By this we mean transfers from the airport on arrival to the hotel where you'll be staying your first night and any similar transfers in the course of your itinerary.

If there are other people travelling between the same two points as you are, you will quite likely find yourself sharing these journeys; and in most cases it has minimal impact on your enjoyment.

- **Long transfers**

In the course of your safari you may need to travel by road between game reserves; either because there are no airstrips or for reasons of cost. If you are the only people making this journey you may well have a vehicle to yourself but if there are others on the same route you will almost certainly share. Once again; since this is a point to point journey as long as everyone is comfortable this should not detract from your enjoyment.

- **Game Drives**

Game drives are the primary activity of most safaris. This is when you will have most of your game sightings and the most opportunities for photography.

In most camps and lodges you will be allocated a guide and vehicle for your game drives and will have the same guide throughout your stay. How many people there are sharing your vehicle depends on the policy of the camp or lodge. However, you will almost certainly find that you are sharing your game drives with between 2-4 other guests. *(You should check this before booking. I really would not book into any camp or lodge where they are going to put more than 6 people into a vehicle.)*

In many cases this is absolutely fine and is a great way to meet and get to know other guests.

However there are occasions when this will not suit your needs.

Why might this be a problem?

Not everyone checks in and out of camps on the same day. So you will often find that your fellow passengers change – sometimes on a daily basis. Whilst you get to meet more people the guide will have a responsibility to ensure that all his clients see as much as possible.

So; if you spent yesterday watching a pride of lions with cubs and are looking forward to seeing something different today but new people in your vehicle have not yet seen the lions, chances are your guide will go back to the lions. He'll want to give his new passengers a good sighting on their first game drive. He won't risk leaving it for a day in case they move and cannot be re-located.

Another thing that may hamper your enjoyment is that it is unlikely that everyone in the vehicle will be as keen on photography as you are.

Whilst you want to spend as much time as necessary with the sightings and wait for the right moment to take your photos there will be others who simply want to see as many species as possible and will want to take a quick photo and then move on.

It is all too common on game drives for people to be obsessed with seeing the so called Big 5 and to take little interest in lesser species and even less in birdlife.

This can be extremely frustrating and is one of the most common causes for complaint on game drives.

Even being in a game drive vehicle where everyone is keen on photography can be problematic too.

In an open game drive vehicle you will often find that the action is happening on the opposite side of the vehicle to where you are sitting.

In a closed vehicle with a pop-up roof hatch (the most common type of game drive vehicle in Kenya and Tanzania) you can find that if everyone is trying to stand up and take photos at the same time it becomes pretty tight for space and does rely on everyone being considerate.

A Private Vehicle

The solution is to make sure that you book a private vehicle and guide for your game drives. Unfortunately, as you might expect, this costs extra,

Depending on the camp, the season and the demand, a private vehicle can cost between \$150-\$300 per day extra.

This extra cost is significant, especially when added to the cost of an already expensive safari and, understandably, most people are reluctant to pay it.

Keeping costs down

If you are concerned that game drives in a shared vehicle may lead to problems but find the additional cost of a private vehicle prohibitive what can you do about it?

Occasional PV

Most safaris will combine visits to more than one game reserve. A popular option is to reserve a private vehicle for just one day in each reserve, or even for the duration of your stay in one reserve only.

After you've shared a vehicle for the first couple of days and have a feel for the reserve and where the best photo opportunities are, enjoy your last day in a PV where you can choose where to go and how long to stay.

Be aware though that in high season you cannot expect the camp to have a spare guide and vehicle standing by 'just in case' someone wants them. You will need to book in advance to secure this service.

Choose the right camp

The range of camps and lodges is huge; from intimate camps with just 6 tents to lodges with over 100 rooms. Not surprisingly, some are more sympathetic to photographers than others. With a little bit of research you can choose a camp where you have an excellent chance of finding yourself amongst other photography enthusiasts and a private vehicle is not necessary.

Most of the camps mentioned in our accommodation lists are photographer friendly.

Photography groups

There are quite a few companies specialising in photographic safaris. Some of them only offer tailor-made safaris, but there are some that offer scheduled departures specifically designed for photographers.

The guide and the vehicles will be for the group's exclusive use and everyone will share your interest in getting great photographs.