



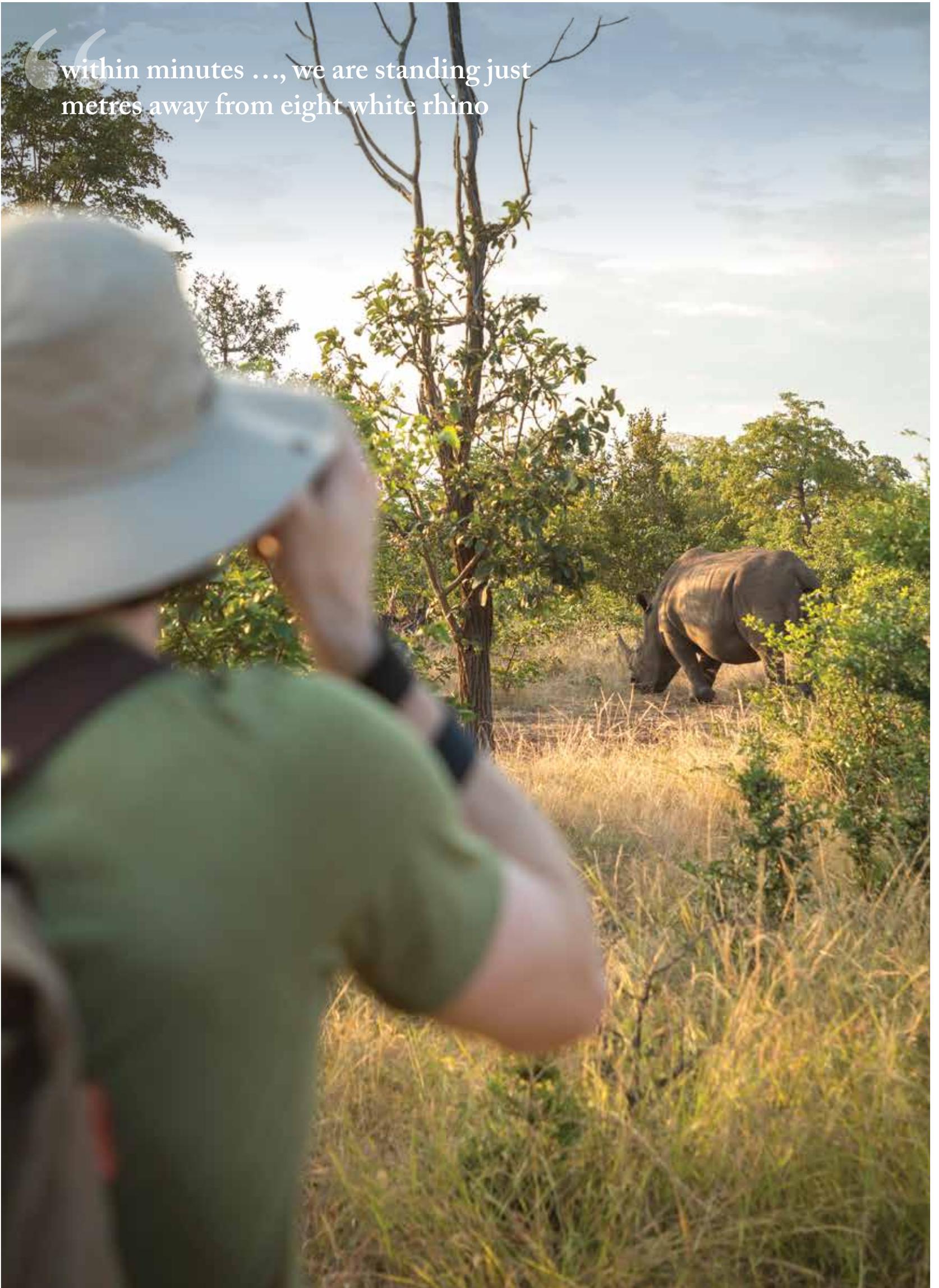


FUTURE  
TRAVELS

# FALLING FOR *Africa*

A first-time safari in Zambia and Botswana meeting the people, seeing the wildlife and gazing at the UNESCO Victoria Falls in Livingstone creates vivid memories for **Katrina Holden** set to last a lifetime.

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Previous spread: Leopard leaping, Chobe National Park, Botswana  
 1: Rhino viewing, Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park  
 2: Riverside infinity pool, Sanctuary Sussi & Chuma, Livingstone, Zambia  
 3: Mokoro excursion, Zambezi River, Zambia  
 4: The ladies of the AKP Chipego bike shop

## BOTSWANA & ZAMBIA

I'm walking through open shrub in single file. Our small group of travellers are following in earnest the armed ranger who is leading us, on foot, through the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park in Zambia to see one of Africa's big five: rhinoceros. I feel safe with the presence of a ranger at the front and rear of our column and yet my heart pumps faster as adrenaline surges through my body. Within minutes of leaving our vehicle, we are standing just metres away from eight white rhino, including a mother and baby. We watch, mesmerised by their distinct shape and protruding horns as they continue to graze quietly. They appear to barely notice us as we keep our respectful distance but, weighing in each at more than 1000 kilograms and knowing they

can reach top speed in just a few strides, there's a nervous tension in the air as we cautiously dare to stare at these amazing creatures.

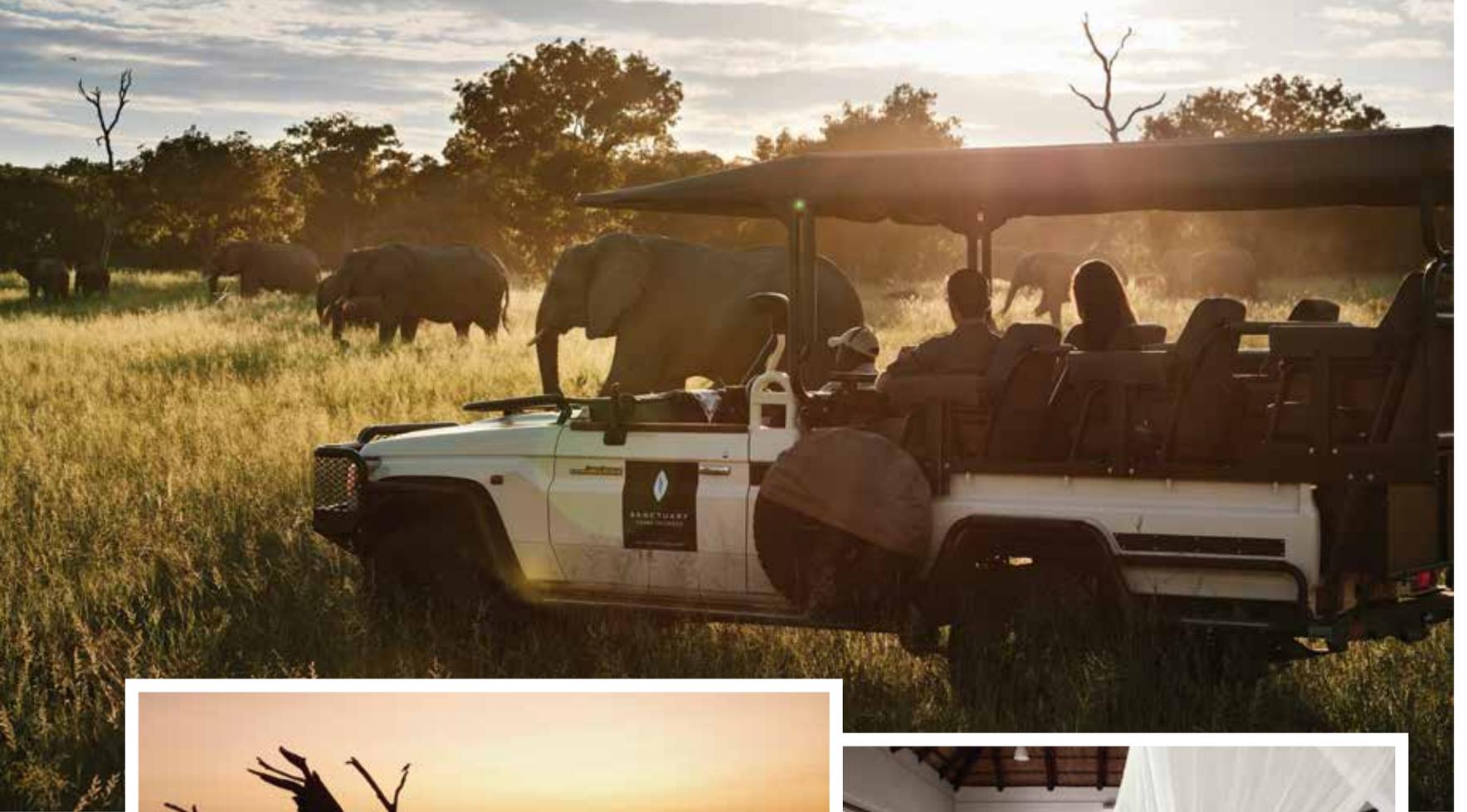
This is one of several highlights of my first safari journey, transported to a world so different from my own – of African culture, wildlife and wonder – by the Abercrombie & Kent team. In Zambia, we're staying at Sanctuary Sussi & Chuma where 12 treehouses raised on platforms line the banks of the famed Zambezi river. On its large timber deck overlooking the river, we chat with fellow guests over a gin and tonic about the adventures of each day as the sound of Cape turtle doves trill in the distance. A swimming pool sits right on the river's edge where staff can set up an intimate dinner table for your party.

As I lie in bed in my treehouse in the early hours of the morning, I can hear the sounds coming from hippopotamus down at the water. At breakfast, a cheeky monkey boldly darts towards our outdoor table, attempting to help himself to our breakfast. He's harmless and provides much laughter and fascination amongst the guests – after all, we don't see this back home over a bowl of Weet Bix.

Our guide Shadreck collects us for the drive to nearby UNESCO World Heritage site, Mosi-oa-Tunya (Victoria Falls), just near Livingstone – just 10 minutes from our lodge. At the falls, the noise is all-encompassing as 500 million cubic litres of water from the Zambezi river cascade down a 108-metre-deep gorge. Wearing

raincoats, we tentatively make our way across a bridge named 'Knife's Edge'. It's an awe-inspiring display of the power of nature as the water thunders downward creating mists and its own light rainfall pattern as it pounds fiercely against rock.

We visit nearby Nakatindi village, a 10-minute drive from Sanctuary Sussi & Chuma, to see first-hand the positive impact that the work of Abercrombie & Kent Philanthropy (AKP) and Sanctuary Retreats Philanthropy is having at a local level. Five entrepreneurial women have run the village's Chipego bike shop since 2015. Bikes are the main form of transport here and are of vital importance in enabling locals to get to high school, places of work and to access health care. A&K Philanthropy organises the



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- 5: Elephant viewing, Chobe National Park, Botswana
- 6: Sundowners on the Chobe River, Botswana
- 7: Sanctuary Chobe Chilwero, Chobe National Park, Botswana
- 8: Sishemo Beads Shop
- 9: Victoria Falls
- 10: Lioness and cub

shipment of containers of damaged and deconstructed bikes from different locations around the world and the enterprising women at Chipego then re-assemble the bikes completely and sell them to locals, as well as donate a portion to the local school.

At the Sishemo bead shop, another non-profit enterprise, a group of women make beautiful jewellery out of old glass bottles that have been kiln-fired.

During my visit to the village, I meet with Victoria Foord, a philanthropy co-ordinator for Abercrombie & Kent Philanthropy. She is one of nine full time A&K Philanthropy co-ordinators around the world working onsite and managing projects.

“We’ve been working in Nakatindi for 10 years across all of our four key areas: education, healthcare, enterprise and conservation,” says

Victoria. “Our biggest initiative at the moment is the school lunch programme where we feed all 850 kids a school lunch every day. You can’t learn anything if you’re too hungry and for many villagers, it’s potentially their only meal of the day. We’ve been doing it for about five years now and the increase in attendance and enrolment levels has been extraordinary. Our next big project at the school is a library and computer learning centre.”

Victoria explains that AKP runs essentially as a non-government organisation.

“In a lot of ways, it’s a more sustainable model in the long run than endlessly applying for grants or trying to find donors – that’s such hard work and what I did for 10 years before this job. We’re still fundraising in a sense here as guests donate and that’s what drives our major projects but for the most part it’s a very different

kind of interaction and a different way of sustainably supporting our community. Over half of our guests will visit the village. Of those, many will buy from the Sishemo bead shop, so they are already supporting a project here. Many guests keep in touch and leave either one-off donations as they check out, or send very sizeable contributions later that allow us to build a library or something sizeable that requires serious funding. Our guest donations drive the majority of our projects and then a bed levy from Sanctuary Retreats properties covers our general expenses – that’s the company’s ongoing major investment.”

Our African adventure with Abercrombie & Kent had actually began back in Botswana, after landing at Kasane International Airport and transferring to our lodge, Sanctuary Chobe Chilwero. Our room is beautifully appointed with a canopy four-poster bed,



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“the water thunders downward creating mists and its own light rainfall



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air-conditioning, a deep-soaking bath and a deck from which we watch baboons dart across the lawn. Gourmet meals are served on a terrace overlooking Chobe River in the distance.

On our first safari drive, our guide Cavin takes us down a discrete dirt road, just moments after we'd entered the Chobe National Park. "I want to show you something very special, hold on," he warns. The morning wind whips through our hair as we make our way through the bush in an open-air safari vehicle. Cavin comes to a complete stop, reminding us to be quiet.

On the path just metres before us, a lithe animal emerges from the shrub and slinks slowly across the track. The unmistakable print of its fur catches the light of the sun filtering through the trees.

It's a leopard, not just one but a pair. It's a rare sighting as the elusive

cats normally travel solo. We're only five minutes in to our first safari drive and we cannot possibly foresee the memorable moments we'll experience in the next few days watching animals in the wild. Chobe National Park has been a protected wildlife area for more than 50 years, so animals here are incredibly relaxed around safari vehicles.

Chobe has the highest population of elephants in all of Africa – and we see plenty of them: crossing the tracks in front of our vehicle; sprinkling red dirt on their backs to keep cool; and while cruising the Chobe River one afternoon, we watch elephants as they splash and swim in the water and then precariously emerge, struggling to hurl their huge bodies back onto the riverbank.

Driving through fields with Zambezi teak, mahogany and baobab trees we see large troops of

baboon; impalas leap high in the air; hippopotamus eyes are bulging from the surface of the water; and a crocodile suns itself on a rock. Later, we encounter a tower of 13 giraffes including babies, and a male and female mating. We pass a dazzle of zebras, their distinct black and white stripes shining in the daylight.

The highlight for me comes late one afternoon when we spot a male lion, king of the pride, resting in the grass. Just steps away, five cubs play and four lionesses sit idly by.

One lioness licks the cub's fur with her thick, pink tongue as he rolls innocently from front to back. It's another rare sighting, viewing the male lion in residence with his pride. I'm overcome with emotion. Seeing animals in their natural habitat has been a poignant reminder that these special creatures do not exist for our amusement or entertainment. Observing animals at play, tending to their young, foraging and mating is an unparalleled experience that affects me more deeply than I had ever imagined. 🦁

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