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Questions & Answers with Scott Simpson, Exeter Safari Company Co-Founder

Dear Friends,

We are thrilled to announce that [Exeter Safari Company](#) is now part of the Rebecca Recommends portfolio. Dedicated to creating the perfect African adventure for all travel styles, co-founders Greg Tepper and Scott Simpson can arrange itineraries through South Africa's rolling winelands and beautiful Cape Region, Tanzania's Serengeti, the red sweeping dunes of Namibia and beyond.

We spoke with co-founder Scott Simpson about what sets Exeter apart and how their experience and first-hand destination knowledge can make your clients' trips extraordinary.

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Scott Simpson, Co-Founder of Exeter Safari Company

1. Why should clients go through Exeter Safari Company? What differentiates the Exeter Safari experience?

There are a few reasons why travel advisors in particular like working with Exeter Safari Company. Now, the first is obviously the two co-founders, Greg Tepper and Scott Simpson. Greg has been in the industry for a very long time. Exeter International has a fantastic reputation and has been in existence for over 30 years. Greg has also been to Africa countless times over the last 30 years and absolutely loves it. As for me, Scott Simpson, I'm from South Africa originally. It's where I was born and raised. I spent the first 30 years of my life traveling all around the continent from Southern Africa, right up to east Africa, the Indian Ocean islands and everything in between.

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I've worked in luxury travel for many years as a safari expert. I've lived in Zambia, managing safari lodges. I've managed safari operations in South Africa. I've really seen and done the industry from every possible angle.

As for planning trips with advisors, we're in their time zone, so we're able to jump on calls with them and give them answers in real time. We quote in US dollars, and guarantee the exchange rate at the time of deposit so when the clients are ready to pay, we just send a single credit card payment link. We then of course handle all international wire transfers.



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2. What inspires you when crafting safaris?

I think what's most important to me when I'm starting the itinerary-building process is taking into account who the clients are and what it is that they're actually looking to get out of this trip. I think too often clients will just end up getting shoehorned into an itinerary that thousands of other clients have done before them - just because it's a known entity, it works and it gets good results. But having traveled through Africa so extensively, having lived there for so long, I know that there's no one destination that's perfect for every client.



Maybe it's a family of five or a multigenerational group with grandparents. Maybe they want to do some safari-ing, but then the younger kids don't want to sit in a vehicle for two weeks going on two safari drives a day. So let's look more at Cape Town and Victoria Falls in South Africa. Maybe it's a couple who has been to Africa two or three times. They've done South Africa, they've done the Great Migration, they've gone

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gorilla trekking. What's next? We can start exploring destinations like Namibia or Malawi.

We spend a lot of time understanding the clients, their travel experiences and what kind of experiences they enjoy when they're traveling outside of Africa. What kind of accommodations do they like? I take inspiration from that, and then I build the perfect itinerary based on their needs. We know that no two clients have the same budget, the same interests, the same time available. So we really make it an important element to treat each client on an individual basis.



3. What is your favorite destination in Africa?

I'm a bit torn on this question just because being from South Africa, having grown up there, I feel a strong connection to the country. My family still lives there. A lot of my friends still live there and just having had the most incredible childhood and formative years there, it will always hold a special place in my heart.

That being said, if I can set aside South Africa for my biased reasons, I would have to say Namibia is my favorite destination in Africa. It's just such a truly unique place. There's nowhere else like it in Africa. It has really a bit of everything. You've got amazing wildlife viewing in places like Etosha National Park, but then you've got the

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Skeleton Coast, which is just this surreal alien landscape where bright-red sand dunes are crashing into the ocean. It's barren, but it's beautiful.



You have Sossusvlei, where the soaring red sand dunes reach into the sky. You can take a hot air balloon over that at sunrise and see the animals below you. It's honestly one of the most special places in the world at night when the sun goes down.

There's not another light for a thousand miles, and the night sky is just this absolute chandelier of stars.

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For people who have been to Africa once, twice, three times, and they're looking for something unique, Namibia should be at the absolute top of the list.



4. What is your favorite ultra-luxe safari lodge?

That's a tricky question just because there are so many amazing lodges all across Africa, each offering something different. If I had to choose, it would probably be Mara Nyika. It's such a unique camp. Each unit is three tents stitched together. One is your living area, one is your bedroom and one is your bathroom, and you can just walk between them. It's this beautiful combination of decadence and feeling like you're somewhere really special, but then it feels so authentic because everything is canvas and wood. It's located on the Naboisho Conservancy which in all of my travels to Africa, I've probably had some of the greatest game viewing. It's just so rich with wildlife. There's a relatively low density of lodges, so you're not bumping into other vehicles. Mara Nyika is the perfect safari experience for somebody who's used to staying in the best hotels in the world and now wants to experience Africa.

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5. What about a more affordable tented camp?

I have always had a soft spot for Tanda Tula located in Timbavati in South Africa, home to some of the best safari viewing anywhere in South Africa. Don & Nina, the owners, are some of the most wonderful people in the industry. The guides there are absolutely incredible. The leopard sightings there are amazing. Tanda Tula is so welcoming and in decades of sending people there, we've never had a bad comment. People absolutely love it. Tanda Tula is currently closed for a refurbishment, which is exciting because when it reopens and everything is looking fresh and sparkling, it's really going to elevate that experience. I just think for value, for money, for what the nightly rate is for what you get, it really is one of the best, more affordable camps in Africa.

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6. What is your most memorable safari experience?

It was probably on a recent trip to Kenya where we thought we were a little early to see the Great Migration (which actually wasn't the intention of the trip). We were a couple of miles from the Mara River and our guide noted dust in the distance. He said, "Hang on, guys," picked up speed and raced us towards the river. As we were pulling up, this enormous column of zebras arrived at the river's edge. From our vantage point, we could see the crocodiles lurking in the river. Remember they had not eaten in months. So, it turns out that the zebras were the very first animals of the Great Migration to arrive at the Mara River. We had completely by accident arrived there at the perfect time.

We stopped and turned the vehicle off. These zebras knew that what they were about to do was dangerous, so they were all very twitchy and nervous. Each one walked up to the water and then backed away from the crocodiles slowly, which were swimming closer and closer. Suddenly one brave zebra decided to go for it and just plowed into the water and started swimming as fast as it could. The second, the third, the fourth - they all started following. The crocodiles, in a flurry of activity, started swimming towards the zebras. About seven or eight got across and then it was about the ninth or tenth zebra that started getting caught. The crocodiles got hold of it and just pulled it into the Mara River. And before you knew it, there were eight to ten crocodiles on each zebra, just dragging them down, drowning them.

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At that point, our group is experiencing very mixed emotions. This is an incredibly difficult thing to see. You're seeing an animal be killed right in front of you, but this is why you come to Africa. It's these kinds of experiences. They bring out these emotions in you that you wouldn't feel if you were at a resort in Mexico. You come to Africa to experience the circle of life, to feel these raw emotions. We sat there for an hour and, you know, we rooted for the zebras, but on the other hand you were feeling for the crocodiles because they were now getting to eat again. And you realize that everyone has its place in this complex ecosystem. I think that memory really stays with me because of how lucky we were to see it and just how the entire group spoke about it for days afterwards. It was truly life changing.



7. How does Exeter support sustainability and conservation efforts in Africa? How can travelers be involved in these efforts?

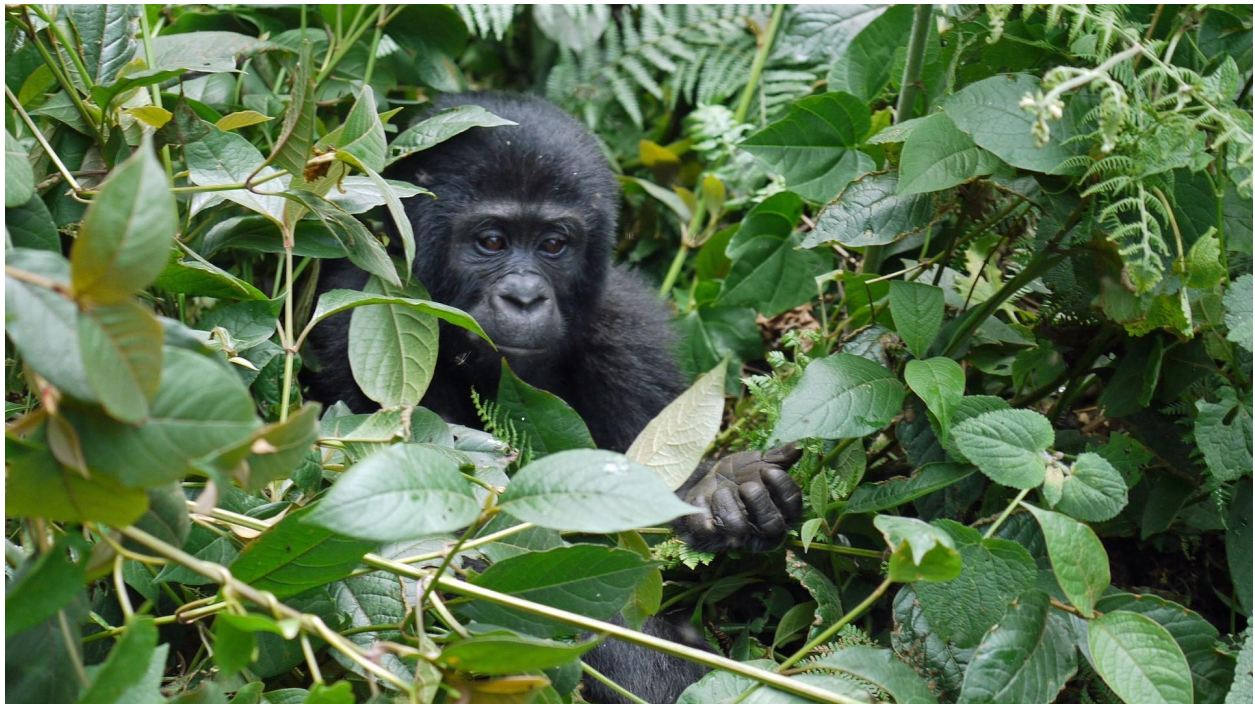
For us, it's all about partnering with the right people in Africa, so that we're sending clients to places that are supporting the initiatives who are doing really great work in their community. So for example, in Cape Town, there's an amazing nonprofit organization called Uthando. We adore working with them. We've started buying boxes and boxes of these beautiful beaded items that they make, such as key chains and bracelets, and including those as part of our pre-departure package. Before clients travel, they get a package from us with their duffle bags, luggage tags and now these little postcards with a bracelet or keychain attached with a note explaining

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that their travel is supporting this community and the women who make these beautiful items.

We also like to partner with safari lodges that truly share our ethos of protecting Africa and making sure that what we're doing is sustainable and that there is a safari industry a hundred years from now. This includes places like Segera, which is doing amazing work rehabilitating land that was previously used for cattle grazing. They have a team there of anti-poaching bloodhound dogs that guests actually go out with to experience how they're trained and kept ready for action. Guests come back from these experiences with a new appreciation of what it takes to keep these massive wildlife areas safe and these animals protected.



8. Travel within Africa is ... (fill in the blank).

Travel within Africa is life changing. We have a saying here in the office that nobody goes to Africa once, and it's just so true. We have never had travelers come back from Africa and go, "Oh, that was fun, now on to the next destination." Once it's in your blood, and once you've enjoyed a 5:30 AM safari drive with a warm cup of coffee, that feeling stays with you for life and you start getting itchy and antsy and you need to go back and do it again. So maybe you go to South Africa the first time, then east Africa, then gorilla trekking in Rwanda. Then you're heading to Namibia. There are countless

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different experiences in Africa and our goal is to have clients embrace as many of those as we can.



9. Describe your perfect day in the Bush.

My perfect day would probably be a little bit busier than most just because I adore being in the wild and I really try to maximize my time. I feel like I can sleep when I get back to the States. So on my perfect day, we're waking up at 5:30 AM. Maybe somebody is outside my tent with hot coffee and some rusks. You're getting changed into your safari gear. You're sipping your coffee. There's a slight glow on the horizon as the sun is starting to think about peeking over.

You walk out of your tent and head to the main area of the safari lodge. You meet your friends and your colleagues and you all head to the vehicle together. There's a sense of excitement because you don't know what's going to be waiting on that safari drive.

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We set off. We have great sightings of leopards in the trees. There's a lion over there, with a cub. We see a kill. We stop. We watch. We just soak in our surroundings. We break for a little tea and coffee. The sun is now rising above the horizon, and there's this beautiful pinkish-orange light that's just painting the savanna. We get back in the vehicle and carry on driving.

About an hour later, we're heading back to the lodge. We turn a corner and under a big baobab tree, there's a champagne breakfast set up. We're surprised. Nobody knew it was coming. But there it is - a full table of champagne mimosas and a hot, cooked breakfast. We sit around the table and talk about the morning's game drive. We share stories about our favorite part and soak up these beautiful surroundings.

We then head back to the safari lodge. It's maybe 11:30 AM at this point. This is where I might be a little more active than most. Some might take a little siesta just because they were up so early in the morning. As for me, I go and find the guide and I say, "Hey, would you be interested in heading out on the boats, doing a bit of fishing?" We head out onto the Zambezi River and spend an hour and a half fishing. We're catching tiger fish. We're catching tilapia. Fishing in Africa is always a magical experience!

We get back to the lodge around two or three o'clock. Everyone else is starting to stir. We all meet back in the central area of the lodge for coffee and sandwiches. We chat about the plan for that afternoon. Where are we going? What are we doing? Sounds like most of the group wants to do some combination of a walk and a safari drive. Our guide thinks it's a great idea. We set off into the bush, seeing giraffes, elephants, zebras and interesting birdlife.

We decide to stop and get out of the vehicle for a while. Our guide explains that we are going to head out on foot and do a two-mile circuit, starting and finishing at our vehicle. He walks in front. We all follow closely behind in a single file. We're walking through the Bush, which is a very intimate experience. You suddenly realize just how vulnerable you feel when you're not in a vehicle, and it just makes the whole experience a little more electric, a little more exciting. There's nothing like seeing a pride of lions on foot or elephants at a distance slowly coming closer to you. Your heart beats a little faster, but those memories just stay with you for life.

We carry on with our safari drive until it's pitch black. The guide has a spotlight and is looking in the trees. Suddenly, up in a tree, we see a pair of red, glowing eyes. We stop and look closer and it's a leopard. The leopard looks alert like he's waiting for something, and suddenly we see a little antelope about 10 feet away. It's slowly walking under the tree. Suddenly, without a sound, the leopard jumps down out of the tree onto this antelope. The antelope didn't stand a chance. It was one of the most exciting sightings I've seen coming back from a night drive.

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We arrive back at the lodge. Everyone is buzzing from what they just witnessed. It's always exciting, while a little harrowing. We all stand around the bar area, drinking gin and tonics, talking about the day, reminiscing, sharing stories. Our staff comes to tell us that dinner's ready, so we head through to the Boma area. There's a big roaring fire in the middle. Everyone takes their seats in a sort of horseshoe shape. The wine is flowing. People are joking and telling stories, getting to know each other. There are guests from France, Germany, Australia, South Africa, America, but everyone is just bonded by this shared safari experience. We have a nightcap and everyone heads back to their respective tents ready to do it all again the next day.

We are proud to have [Exeter Safari Company](#) in the Rebecca Recommends portfolio and welcome the chance to introduce you to Greg and Scott. Their incredible depth of Africa knowledge and the personal attention they pay to each safari experience results in life-changing vacations for your clients, whether this is their first or fifth time on the continent.

With fondest wishes,

Rebecca

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