

Debbie and John Addison

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The passionate pair behind Wild Frontiers have been crafting unique safari experiences since 1988. We talked to them about their lives, their work and the reasons they love Africa

What was your first experience in Africa?

John: I was born here. I am 7th generation.

Debbie: One of my first experiences when I was pretty ‘green’ to the bush was being ‘hosted’ at a camp in Botswana’s Okavango Delta by the owner and his girlfriend at the time. I assumed I would be staying in a chalet or tent but my bedroom was literally a metal bed in an open area between my host’s room, the guest room and a wetland. And on my first night in the open, my host forgot to give me a mosquito net. I lay there, terrified, on my bed (no roof, no building, just the bed, under the stars, in my sleeping bag) listening to the sounds around me and fending off mosquitoes – imagining that at any minute, a ‘furry’ predator or croc would drag me off. As the sun came up, I finally fell asleep – exhausted but happy to be alive!

When did you decide you wanted to work in Africa?

Debbie: It wasn’t a conscious decision – more of a natural progression for me. Loving my experiences in the bush, it seemed to be the right thing to do. Then I met John while I was working in Botswana in a lodge, and the rest is history!

John: There was never a decision needed – I love this place.

Tell us about Wild Frontiers

Debbie: We founded the company in 1988, after spending six months exploring north of the Limpopo in our trusty Land Cruiser, ‘Betsy’. Wild Frontiers is a reflection of John and I. We like to design safaris and experiences that are exciting and different, in the places that we love. Over the

years we have been at the forefront of new ideas and destinations. It's important to be passionate about what you do – and we are.

What is the most challenging thing about working in Africa?

John: Having to sit behind a desk when you know you could be out in the bush.

And your favourite part of the job?

John: Making people love and respect the places we love.

What's the Wild Frontiers philosophy?

John: We are hands on. And we know the places and the people we deal with.

Debbie: Yes, we won't recommend a place that hasn't been tried and tested by one of our team. We are creative, but we believe the key thing when designing a holiday for someone is to actually listen to what they like. After all, it is their trip!

What's next?

Debbie: We are always on the lookout for new things. Mountain-bike safaris, hiking up active volcanoes or visiting areas totally off the beaten track! We have too many ideas brewing.

What's been the most memorable experience for you in the bush?

Debbie: There are honestly so many – from canoeing in Mana Pools National Park before it was 'commercial', hiking in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, snorkelling in Lake Malawi, sitting with gorillas and lazing on houseboats to witnessing several solar eclipses (Libya was the best so far!), visiting São Tomé, camping on a container boat on Lake Tanganyika and having an elephant smell me as I slept on top of a vehicle. But if I had to sum it up, waking up in the African bush, the smell and the dawn chorus, and the pre-dawn chill... lovely. Each time, it makes me smile and realise how lucky I am.

How has tourism in Africa changed since you launched Wild Frontiers?

John: There are more people going into the wild, which is good, but sometimes there are too many people for the infrastructure to support. It's a lot more expensive now. I fear that we may price ourselves out of the market, so only the rich are able to see our parks. We need the young to be able to see Africa, as they are the ones who will be tasked with looking after it.

What do you think the situation will be in 10 years?

Debbie: Sadly, I think Africa will become an 'elite' destination – scattered with unnecessary trappings that people think they need on a safari. I hope I am wrong.