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## Saba Douglas-Hamilton: My life in travel



'Climbing leaves you at the mercy of the elements'

### **I spent the early years of my life in Lake Manyara National Park, Tanzania.**

My father was doing his DPhil on the social behaviour of wild elephants. One of my earliest memories of Manyara was being charged, in an open Land Rover, by an enormous bull elephant who stopped short, just before he hit the car. His name, I seem to remember, was Casimir.

### **There's nothing like clinging to a sheer rock wall in the Scottish mountains.**

My grandmother had a small croft on the Isle of Raasay, just off the coast of Skye. It's where my father taught my sister and me to climb. You're completely at the mercy of the elements and you feel utterly alive.

**Going to Uganda, just after Idi Amin was deposed, had a profound effect on me.**

Much of the country was still locked in civil war, there was a curfew at sunset and terrifying, drunken soldiers manned endless roadblocks. Everything, everywhere, had been shot up or looted. We lived for a while in Murchison Falls National Park – where Dad was honorary warden, fighting ivory poachers – on the edge of the Nile. It was a desperate time. There were often gun battles at night, the elephants were being massacred, and several times my father came back with bullet holes in his plane. It left an indelible mark on my heart, both in terms of the human and animal suffering, but also the freedom one has when there are no rules.



Herd times: elephants in Lake Manyara Park in Tanzania

**One of the worst nights of my life was on my honeymoon.**

My husband, Frank, took me on honeymoon to the southern Amazon in Brazil. After a few days of exploring, I became obsessed with the thought of finding a jaguar and we ended up in the Pantanal, close to the Cuiaba River. The air was fetid and hot, and thick with mosquitos. We had to share a single bed with a lacerated mosquito net, sticky polyester sheets, and right next to a thumping diesel generator. There was no escape and by dawn I wanted to hang myself. But our gamble paid off. That morning we set off down the river in a shaky little boat and within 15 minutes we bumped into a spectacular male jaguar lying out in the open on the riverbank.

**I've eaten live termites.**

It was while I was filming *Going Ape* in the Tai Forest, Ivory Coast. The idea was to follow a community of chimps and eat only what they did to see how long we could last. Mostly, we made do with the fruit that they knocked down from the treetops, but after a while I developed a ravenous hunger for protein. Luckily, you could yank the tops off the mushroom-

shaped termite mounds and pick up a few mouthfuls before they scurried off. I also tried driver ants, but within seconds they'd shredded my lips and tongue with their pincers. After that they remained off the menu.

**The best way to get the flavour of a place is to eat like the locals.**

Nothing beats sizzling hot, roasted goat fresh off the fire, sliced to size with a Samburu sword or chewed straight from the bone. Kenya is also blessed with fantastic chai and chapatis – thanks to the spice trade.

**There's a vegan restaurant where you have to say affirmations before each bite.**

It's called Café Gratitude in Venice, LA, and it's unbelievably imaginative and absolutely delicious. You have to say hilarious affirmations while you eat such as "I am powerful! I am energy! I am courageous!".

**After five years of raising kids, I'm desperate for an adventure.**

The closest and most tempting is to head into the northern frontier of Kenya with some local nomads and their camels. A few weeks of walking with them and sleeping out under the stars should do the trick.

*Saba Douglas-Hamilton presents BBC2's This Wild Life, which starts on Monday at 7pm*