

Module # 1 – Component # 1



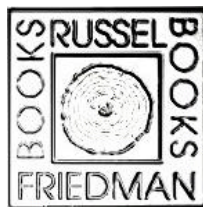
Presents

The Guide's Guide to Guiding

By

Garth Thompson

Illustrations by **Dov Fedler**



Dedication

I dedicate this book to Dave Rushworth, under whom I was apprenticed. I could never have wished to learn from a better naturalist. I have yet to meet anyone with so much time for his fellow man.

Acknowledgements

There are many people to whom I owe a great deal of thanks for their assistance in bringing this book to fruition.

First and foremost, I would like to thank Colin Bell and Haggis Black for their staunch support and persistent encouragement. Their belief in the book has enabled me to bring this project, about which I have talked for many years, to completion. Despite being two of the busiest people I know, they both tirelessly read, edited and advised on each chapter as they were slowly churned out. Thanks to Haggis for his invaluable advice on medical matters. Both Haggis and Colin are enthusiastic and acclaimed photographers, and their input on photography is appreciated.

Special thanks go to my son David for his patient assistance in helping his computer illiterate father conquer the quirks and stresses that these frustrating machines seem to present at the most inopportune times. Thanks to Mel, my wife, and our children, for their understanding when I became a virtual recluse in order to finalise the book.

For reasons too numerous to mention, I would also like to thank the following people: Di Black, Sara and Steve Cameron, Sally Carney, Susie Cazenove, Nancy Cherry, Gary Clarke, Mari Dos Santos, Russel Friedman, Debbie Gardner, Liberty Henwick, Dee and Brian Keating, Henrietta Loyd, Mark Nolting, Paul Schambreger, Susie Strange, Jan Teede, Keith Vincent, Dave Waddy, Arnie Wallace and Brian Worsley.

My special thanks to Dov Fedler, the cartoonist, with whom I spent happy days filled with laughter as he created pertinent illustrations.

Most of all, I wish to thank my clients, many of whom are now close friends. They have made my work so varied and interesting by accompanying me on wide-ranging and exciting adventures. Together, we have watched, experienced, appreciated and shared many windows of Africa's infinite beauty. Without these special people, none of the valuable lessons I have learnt would have been possible.

It is thanks to the precious time and convictions of all of the above friends that we have A Guide's Guide to Guiding.

Foreword

When I first met Garth in 1982, he was working at Hwange Safari Lodge as a professional guide. It was the first of what was to become my annual safari pilgrimage to Africa, leading groups from the Calgary Zoo travel program. Garth was young, keen and energetic: he had all the necessary behavioural traits that would eventually lead to his remarkable success in his field. On that first trip to Zimbabwe, he represented my first contact with a full-time 'professional naturalist guide'. I must say, after enjoying a dozen Zimbabwe safaris utilizing Garth's professional guiding services, he has set a standard that I have used as a measuring stick for nature interpretation all over the world.

Not only is his plant and animal taxonomic knowledge extensive, but his comprehension of the ecological web and our place in it is profound. Knowledge, however, is a baseline tool that would serve no function had he not honed his own skills to transmit this information. And merely being a good storyteller is not enough, even with the appropriate knowledge base. Garth has a unique gift that has enabled him to weave his sensitivity of his clients' needs with the interpretive opportunities of a wilderness environment. He is continually questioning the complexity of the natural world around him, always challenging his own intellect and that of his peers and clients. Like a construction engineer, he builds upon this foundation of knowledge, and utilizes an almost poetic form of storytelling to share his understanding of the natural world with the people around him.

As a naturalist, he is ever keen and enquiring. As a storyteller, he is a master. As an advocate for the natural world, Planet Earth has no better friend. And now as an author, you have no better teacher. Drink in his words, as they are written by one who has lived by his convictions and beliefs, and by his own critical self-analysis. Without really knowing it, Garth has spent most of his life preparing to write this book. Those of us who have chosen our nature interpretation careers are incredibly fortunate that he has taken the time to share his hard-won experiences with us. We will all prosper professionally, and perhaps just as important, personally, from this creative masterpiece.

Brian Keating
Head of Conservation Outreach,
Calgary Zoological Society, Canada

Introduction

This book is a tribute to the guides of Africa, past, present and future. I trust that some of the lessons I have learnt over the years will be of benefit to you and that they will assist in giving the most important person to our industry, the tourist, a better safari experience. Without the tourist there would be very few national parks and safari companies. You and I would be employed in another profession. It is the tourists who come to us with their desires and expectations. Do we fulfil them?

As you read the words of this book, I sadly confess that, in 21 years of active guiding, I have broken many rules in the 'principles of guiding', something that I am not at all proud of. I trust that you will be able to learn from my mistakes and avoid having to follow the same path.

Guiding is much like politics and religion. There are basic principles, but many varied opinions and different viewpoints. I am sure that much could be added to this book with the input of many other learned guides. Indeed, some may not agree with all that I have written, but the object of this book is to present a few thoughts, ideas and lessons to those who are starting out in this exciting occupation.

May you enjoy this privileged profession as much as I have. I trust that you will reap the great rewards that it has to offer, in particular those of a closer understanding and connection with wildlife and nature, as well as peace of mind, camaraderie and fulfilment from sharing all that our incredible continent has to offer with our fellow man.

Garth Thompson
Harare 2001

Preamble

Ever since I can remember, I wanted to be a game ranger. Not an uncommon desire among the young boys I grew up alongside in what was then Rhodesia. We yearned to swap our confined, concrete classroom for the freedom and adventure of the 'Bush University'!

Each year at school when Careers Day came around, I would stand and stare for long periods at the display behind the desk on the Department of National Parks stand. These black and white photos portrayed a band of dedicated men, chasing giraffe across open plains in open short-wheel-base Land Rovers, with the intent to capture and translocate. Firing a tranquillizing dart into the rounded rump of a white rhino. Teaching wildlife conservation to groups of eager children out in the wild. Capturing poachers bent on pillaging our country's national treasures. Collecting snares that would inflict pain and suffering on innocent animals, resulting in a torturous death. I collected every pamphlet, brochure and renewed sheet available. I took them home and consumed each word with hungry enthusiasm and youthful fantasy!

My brothers and I were very fortunate in that our parents took us camping in the various unspoilt national parks that graced so much of our country. These adventures and invaluable exposure occurred during most school holidays and over long weekends.

I never realized that my guiding career really started at a young age. I had a yearning desire to explore any new area, wild or tame. I would then share the most scenic parts with family and friends. Growing up in the outer suburbs of what is now Harare, I discovered many little patches of wilderness. When my parents had friends around for afternoon tea over weekends, I was often called upon to take their guests to these various wild places.

So began a lifetime of guiding people from all corners of the earth. When I had finished my army service, my life-long dream came true: I was employed as the assistant wildlife manager at a lodge adjoining Hwange National Park. The lodge was situated within 30 000 hectares of private reserve bordering the national park.

In 1980, when Zimbabwe attained its independence, the tourist industry was reborn. I was extremely fortunate to be apprenticed to one of the best naturalists Africa has ever produced. As good a naturalist as he was, he was even more in tune with people. Dave Rushworth had been in the Department of National Parks

since 1962. He had been a ranger and warden in many of the country's national parks. His knowledge on all aspects of nature was phenomenal. He imparted this knowledge to all, in a patient, kind and dedicated manner.

Dave Rushworth had absolutely no need for money. He was oblivious to time and did not succumb to stress or pressure. He was equally at home with the rich, the poor, old and young alike. He treated all as equals and gave 110 per cent of himself to everyone, all of the time! From Dave I was fortunate to learn about many aspects of wildlife, but most of all, how to give our guests what they had come on safari for: a genuine wildlife experience, and to really feel wanted.

I worked for and learnt from this good man for three years. Dave then departed to manage a park for the king of Swaziland. I was left to step into his huge shoes. A few years later my wife and I were offered a partnership in one of the safari camps bordering Mana Pools National Park in the Zambezi Valley. During the years that we managed our new camp we also started up a small tour operation to facilitate our bookings. This was to grow and develop into a company arranging itineraries to many of the lodges, camps and safari operations around Zimbabwe and the neighbouring countries. At this time we started our own canoeing and walking safaris through Mana Pools National Park, a park where I have had the privilege of sharing its incredible scenery and concentrated wildlife with many people of all ages, from many walks of life, nationalities and social standing.

As a tour operator we would visit nearly every camp and lodge in Zimbabwe annually, as well as a number of camps in Botswana, Zambia and Namibia. During the last 21 years I have been fortunate to work as a guide in most parks within Zimbabwe. The Okavango Delta in Botswana, the Skeleton Coast and Etosha National parks of Namibia: the Luangwa Valley and Zambezi National Park in Zambia. The Serengeti, Ngorongoro Crater, the Selous and the Mahale Chimpanzee Park in Tanzania. Zanzibar and its cultural history combined with diving among its rich and diverse underwater gardens. Climbing to the summit of Africa's highest mountain, Kilimanjaro. The game-rich parks of Kenya and as far afield as the Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda, home to the rare and endangered mountain gorillas.

These are some of Africa's crown jewels that my childhood fantasy has enriched me with, not to mention the numerous life-long friends that I made while sharing these spectacles. Strong bonds and relationships are forged by time spent in the wild together.

As a guide I have been afforded the opportunity to give slide shows and wildlife lectures to many groups of people in North America, Europe, the Far East, Australasia and Africa. These audiences have varied from three year olds in nursery schools to Prince Phillip in Buckingham Palace.

It has indeed been a privilege to be a guide in Africa. I sincerely hope that those of you who are involved in this profession appreciate how fortunate we are to be paid to experience and share all that Africa has to offer with our fellow man, from so many different parts of the world, varied cultures, interesting and diverse personalities.

To those of you who have dreamt and fantasised about becoming a guide, to show and share the unlimited wonders that our great continent has to offer, I can assure you, it is all possible. You only need the desire to work with people for many hours of your waking day. A positive attitude, an enquiring mind and a genuine love and appreciation for all things wild. One small word of advice, never lose sight of the real reason you are there.

Module # 1 - Component # 1

What is Guiding all About?

Introduction to Guiding

Driving good-looking people around in an open safari vehicle, in your sleeveless khaki shirt, showing off your muscular sun drenched arms and impressing your guests on how close you can get to lions on a kill? Telling hunting stories around the campfire each night after your sixth Scotch? If that is your idea of guiding, not only have you purchased the wrong book, you are also in the wrong profession!

Guiding is essentially about a genuine enjoyment of people and an honest appreciation of, and dedication to, all the many faces nature has to offer us. It is indeed a privileged occupation. Imagine being paid to take people out into the wilds of Africa, every morning, afternoon and evening. To sit around the warm, flickering flames of a campfire each evening, savoring the rich smell of wood smoke, while friendships are formed and forged. The people for whom you are interpreting Africa have worked long and hard for months, even years, to come and see what you have to show them in a couple of weeks. They have great expectations of this brief interval of time.

You hold in your hands the opportunity to realize their dreams and fantasies of Africa - or to destroy them. It all depends on one **little** thing that in fact should play the **biggest** part in life: Your **attitude**. It's not their attitude that is relevant – they are paying you for a service and they are on a well-earned holiday.

*'Attitude is a **little** thing which gives you **big** results'*

What is Each Client's History?

Do you know or care? I was very fortunate to learn my greatest lesson in guiding in my third year as a guide. In 1983 a group of sixteen enthusiastic Texans from the Fort Worth Zoo spent four days on safari with us in Hwange National Park before moving on to a number of other parks around Zimbabwe. The group was as mixed and varied as you would expect any group of that size to be. Old and young, fat and thin, loud and quiet - you can imagine how many diverse personalities were present.

A few months later I went on my first visit to that amazing country, the United States of America. My young eyes were out on stalks for the entire duration of the visit. I went to Fort Worth to give a slide show at the zoo. The following night the group of sixteen safari 'alumni' got together at someone's home, each person bringing along their ten best slides from their recent African safari. As all relived their various experiences, I marveled at the delight and joy they showed as each slide came up. It was enthralling to see, some months after I had been with them on safari, how much it had meant to them. I asked myself, Had I really pulled out all the stops? I thought I had given of my best, but, what if I hadn't? Could I have done more to give these appreciative people a better wildlife experience?

After the slide show we stood around chatting and eating. I began talking to a girl called Becky, a quiet and unobtrusive soul, plump and in her mid-thirties, the type of person who doesn't expect the level of attention that an extrovert, blonde bombshell would. I asked her the standard run-of-the-mill question; 'So, when are you coming back to Africa?' I was expecting the standard reply of 'Oh, I just can't wait!' But Becky replied, sadly 'Never' I was quite shocked at this unusual reply, and asked her why. She went on to tell me that both she and her husband had saved up for **five** years to send **her** to Africa! It had been her childhood dream to visit the great game reserves of Africa. I asked, with a little trepidation, how she had enjoyed her once-in-a-lifetime experience. She said it was better than she had ever imagined...

How many people like Becky go through our hands without us knowing the background to their visit? Imagine a sulky, bored Romeo, rally driver of a guide, showering his attention on the good-looking blonde in the seat next to him, while ignoring his duty to show and share the countless wonders that Africa has to offer to the Becky's in the back of the vehicle?

More Food for Thought

Some years ago I was having lunch with friends who had been on a number of canoeing and walking safaris with our company. We were discussing how expensive safaris had become. Charles said they had planned to buy and install a satellite dish and decoder that year, but had decided instead to use the money to come on yet another canoe trip, from which they believed their two daughters would receive a richer experience.

On the way home I thought to myself, here is a family that would rather spend their savings on canoeing with us for five days, than buy a satellite system that would give them more than a hundred different TV channels, and would last them for many years! It made me realize what value, importance and priority a wildlife experience holds for people. Imagine giving them a mediocre safari!

In the mid-1980s a radiologist sold her deep freeze to pay for staying at our safari camp in the Zambezi Valley. I only found this out some time later and once again felt so privileged to be able to share all that a safari can offer with someone who had made such a personal sacrifice. Little did we know at the time that she would eventually give up her career as a radiologist and come to work in tourism as a travel consultant. Thanks to her enthusiasm and dedication to wildlife, combined with an understanding of a client's desires and aspirations, she eventually ended up as the managing director of a highly successful tour operator. Today, she is a prominent personality in the tourist industry of southern and central Africa. How much the travel industry owes to that deep freeze!

Wildlife Junkies

Over the years we have come to know a number of interesting characters who can ill afford a safari to Africa, yet they save up for two to three years to come out for their wildlife 'fix'. For some it is the most important event in their lives. Back in the large cities from which they hail, whenever the opportunity arises, they talk, dream, read and watch Africa on video and TV.

Do we as guides realize the importance and responsibility of our work? Do we take what we do for granted? Are we as enthusiastic as we were when we struggled to land our first job in the tourist industry?

Create the Magic

As guides, we hold in our hands the opportunity to make or break the dreams and fantasies that people have of Africa.

For many, some of the first words they uttered in life was 'jumbo', 'hippo' and 'zebra'. As children, they grew up on books depicting the animals of Africa. During the 50s and 60s they were exposed to Tarzan films and the Daktari series. In recent times, the public has enjoyed well-produced wildlife documentaries that have taken years to film by patient and dedicated photographers and naturalists. They have read famous and romantic novels set in Africa, and listened to the colorful and enthusiastic stories of friends and colleagues who had just returned from an African safari. Visitors to Africa certainly have high expectations; but don't we all have high expectations of our hard-earned holidays? Look at all the promises in the glossy brochures, which lure visitors to our exciting continent. As a guide, the onus is now on you to create the magic.

What is Guiding all About?

Guiding is far more about people than animals. You may spend ten hours a day looking at four-legged animals, but you will spend between fifteen and eighteen hours daily with the two-legged ones. There are very few professions where you spend so much time with the same people. On a canoeing, walking or mobile camping safari, you are with your clients every waking hour, which is normally from dawn till around ten at night. Most of these safaris are five days or longer. During this time you are their guide, teacher, protector, friend, doctor, storyteller, cook and dish-washer.

I am often asked, 'You must hate taking out all those foreigners and being with people for so much of the time?' But look at it another way. As a guide you see the best side of humanity. Firstly, you work in the biggest and most beautiful office in the world. Secondly, your clients are on holiday, they are out for a good time; they want fun, laughter and safe adventure. They are also on foreign turf. That aggressive chief executive from Manhattan is out of his depth - he hasn't a clue how to track a rhino, or where to try and find your resident leopard. People who have high-ranking positions in society are often feared or idolized by the minions around them. In a wilderness situation, however, their platinum credit card can't protect them from a charging lion. That's why they hired you.

In modern society, people are worried about image, their looks, brand of clothes, jewelry, how they present themselves, what car they drive, where they live, what schools their children go to, which ski resort they frequent, which cocktail party is the right one to be seen at, who not to be associated with. Yet, when these same people are out on safari, they drop all the social barriers and pretences they need to survive in **their** jungle. They meet other guests in the various safari camps who come from totally different social, financial, political and cultural backgrounds. Life-long friendships are often formed.

What draws these social opposites together? The answer lies in the beauty and simplicity of untouched nature. If you had a little hand in it, too, imagine how rewarding it would feel.

When about to take some high-ranking businessmen out on safari in the past, I had been forewarned by their staff that I would be in for a hard time, because of their reputation for being fussy, aggressive, sullen, impatient, restless and difficult to please. But once the 'ogres' arrive, they turn out to be quite the opposite. When invited to visit them back in their ivory towers, eyebrows are raised by the staff, as the top executive would give an ecstatic welcome to a khaki-clad, rankless imposter.

Guiding is such a privileged profession: your 'office' is a massive park, teeming with so many colorful and interesting forms of wildlife. In turn, your park is a theatre, an amazing open air amphitheatre, where the props are real living trees, clouds, rivers and mountains. The orchestra comprises the combined melody made up from the sounds of the wind, bird song, gurgling rivers, a lion's roar, a hippo's snort, the eerie yodel of a black backed jackal. The animals the actors, whose beauty and actions speak their parts. You are the presenter, with endless opportunities to share an ever-changing and unwritten show with your fellow man. Your guests from all corners of the globe and from all walks of life, are the mobile audience.

What Have They Come To See?

My family and I had never skied until the year of writing this book. What did we want out of a skiing holiday? Simple: lots of snow to ski on! We weren't too worried about the accommodation or standard of food; they would be added bonuses if the skiing was good.

Most people on a once-in-a-lifetime holiday to Africa want to be able to go back and say they saw a lot of game, mostly big! Birds, plants, insects, exclusivity, etc. are an added bonus. This raw fact may not fit into your perception of what you have to offer the clients with your immense bush knowledge. Sadly, it is a fact that applies to most first-time visitors.

Many visitors who have the money and desire to come back to Africa a second time will then be interested and specialize in the smaller animals, birds and plants, but they will still enjoy watching a big bull elephant stand on its hind legs to reach up into the browse line of an acacia tree, or a herd of five hundred buffalo in an extended line, their beady, bloodshot eyes peering over wet black noses at the intrusion to their daily grazing. No matter how many times one has been to Africa, who doesn't still enjoy the thrill of a lion kill, the squabbling growls erupting from around the carcass, the smell of an opened gut, the bloodstained faces of scruffy cubs?

If we had gone skiing and there was not enough snow to ski on, but we had a brilliant ski instructor who explained to us how the Alps were formed, what was their geological make up, educated us on all the different pines and firs, took us to the best restaurants in the village, related the long and interesting history of the village, we would have made a friend and may have been impressed at his wide knowledge and enthusiasm for his job, **but** we would not have fulfilled our yearning desire to ski. When we returned home and all our friends enquired how our skiing holiday went, we would have said, 'Well, we met a very knowledgeable ski instructor who taught us so much; he was such a nice guy'. But did you ski?, would be the constant question. 'No, not really, there was hardly any snow to ski on,' would be the deflated reply! Remember that visitors come to Africa for maximum wildlife experiences. If they didn't, they would visit the safari parks in their own countries.

The 'Walking Encyclopedia'

Try not to impress your clients with how 'extremely knowledgeable' you are without showing them the 'snow,' what they have fantasized and dreamt about over the months prior to leaving for this game-rich continent. Leak out your knowledge at the appropriate times in the right quantities. The guests want to 'ski' on maximum 'snow' for as long as physically possible. They hunger to see more and more game. While you may have become bored with seeing your millionth impala, they may have never laid eyes on such a graceful creature, whose lithe body with its acrobatic leaps represents the ballerina of the bush.

So try to and look at everything through the eyes of a keen and enthusiastic first-timer.

'Everything, is a once-in-a-lifetime experience'

Stop and spend at least ten minutes with their first impala herd. After your eager passengers have fired off half a roll of film on these perfectly formed animals, their index fingers will have stopped twitching and they will have calmed down and become receptive as you point out the difference in the sexes and the scent glands on the hind legs. You can then explain in simple English about their breeding, rutting, extended gestation and fetus retention in times of drought, feeding habits, rumination, great leaping abilities, etc. Only half of what you say will be retained, but it is relaxing for your guests to sit and watch and appreciate the animal while you unobtrusively educate them on what will later become a 'common' animal.

Never tire of spending time with any animal, no matter how common it may be or how many times your guests have visited Africa. These Africa 'Junkies' come back time and again for their African 'fix' because the first time you took them on safari you 'spent time' slowly introducing them to all the members and secrets of the animal community in your park or country. Through this slow and gentle introduction using the correct blend of information, sightings and excitement, you will have them hooked on the earth's most incredible addiction.

Recently, I was a guest on a safari into the Okavango Delta. Some of the members in our group had never been to Africa before. Imagine their eager expectations of what they might see as we entered the Moremi Game Reserve, an animal warehouse filled with such a variety of different species of mammals, birds and trees. We arrived at our camp after dark on the first evening. Early the next morning we set off with our guide, who we hoped would show us the exciting wares that this massive wildlife shop window had to offer.

Our guide was a young zoology graduate from Oxford University. As we drove from camp, we stopped every hundred meters so that he could point out various animals' footprints, dung, and birds. He described the full life-cycle and habits of various insects and spiders. He gave us a botany lesson on some of the interesting trees, grasses and aquatic plants. After about two hours we encountered our first mammals, a small herd of red lechwe. They were on the opposite side of a big lagoon, about 200 meters from the vehicle. After briefly watching them we turned around and headed back to camp for breakfast, arriving at around 09:30.

After breakfast, we showered and read and relaxed until lunch, after which it was suggested that we have a little rest and meet at the mess tent for tea and cakes at 15:30, followed by an afternoon game drive at 16:00.

At 16:20, after sitting around sipping tea and wasting good light and game viewing time, we left camp. We were all champing at the bit to get out and find some animals.

A few hundred meters down the road we left the vehicle and walked over to a baobab tree for an interesting 15-minute lecture on this amazing botanical landmark. Then we drove another two kilometres, rounded a small scrubby acacia tree, and there, set up beside a large lagoon was a drinks table, with all the imaginable beverages displayed on it, a silver ice bucket, crystal glasses, etc. There was a small campfire burning, surrounded by a ring of canvas chairs. It was still about 45 minutes before sunset.

Our charming guide offered us drinks and then produced a large map of the Okavango Delta and its surrounding area. He glanced at his assistant guide and said, 'Where shall we start? Ten thousand or one hundred thousand years ago?' For the remainder of the afternoon we were given the most detailed lecture on how the Okavango Delta was formed. When it was dark we had another drink and drove back to camp with the spotlight on, all of us desperately hoping we would see more than just the baboons we had disturbed when we walked up to the baobab tree earlier on. We were fortunate in seeing the small resident herd of impala that lived close to camp.

Although our guide had impressed us with the great extent of his knowledge, we, the guests, clients, tourists, wildlife enthusiasts, photographers, call us what you like, had only seen a herd of lechwe from a distance, a frightened troop of baboons and a family of impala illuminated by the spotlight, **all day!** Surely we could have had the lecture on the geological history of the delta while we lounged around camp from 09:30 till 16:20? It was our first day of game viewing and everyone was yearning to see a variety of interesting and exciting animals. Think about the Australians in our group who had never been to Africa before, and how much they wanted to see an elephant, buffalo or lion.

All the interesting lectures on spiders, plants and insects should have been reserved for later on the seven-day safari, after satisfying the desire to see the masses of mammals that live in Moremi Game Reserve. Afternoon safari activities can be so productive for game sightings; the light is perfect for photography. We were all anticipating an active afternoon's game drive.

In the fast moving society of the First World, people have very little time to relax and enjoy their environment. Time is extremely precious to people, so don't waste it trying to impress someone with how knowledgeable **you** are! Imagine your first days skiing, how keen you would be to get out there and give it a go. How would you feel if your ski instructor spent the whole day giving you lectures on the geological formation of the Alps? Your guests have come for the 'snow', let them ski!

How Much Does a Day Cost?

Have you ever thought about what goes into the cost of a day on safari?

Before we get into the 'all-inclusive' daily rate of the safari operation that you represent, or the airfare and air charters to get to your park, let's look at the personal sacrifice that most guests make before going on a safari holiday.

Most First World countries offer between two and five weeks' leave per annum to their hard-working citizens. Americans are rarely given more than two weeks' leave per year, and in a number of executive positions it is frowned upon to take both weeks consecutively.

To be as unbiased as possible, the following equation is formulated for a client earning **four weeks'** leave a year:

- Lets say that the average safari client earns the equivalent of US\$5 000 a month.
- Of the 12 months during each year, he or she works for 11 months to earn one month's leave.
- Let us presume that person works a 5-day week.
- He or she therefore works for 220 days of the 11 months. This represents 20 working days each month. Earning \$5 000 per month divided by 20 working days equates to a daily income of \$250.
- Our visitors have worked long and stressful days to earn their leave. From the above example it is easy to ascertain that they have **worked 11 days** to earn **1 day's** leave.
- If they earn \$250 per day and have worked for 11 days to receive one well-earned day's leave, this precious day is equal to \$2 750!

The point I am trying to make is that if you waste a day's safari or part thereof because you were disinterested, burnt out, disorganized; if you didn't take your radio when you left camp on your game drive; if you forgot to check your vehicle

and all its equipment, and you had a flat tyre and no wheel spanner with which to change it, or you ran out of fuel, took a risk and got horribly stuck, (the list is endless), you would have cost your guests part of a day of a holiday they worked long and hard to earn.

On top of the \$2 750 per day, we have not even taken into account the daily cost of staying in your camp. Let's say the average daily rate of an African safari camp is \$325 per person per day. Don't forget the additional costs such as air fares, travel insurance, safari clothes, equipment, film, house and pet minders, many hours spent researching the safari, surfing the net, speaking to tour operators, reading books and watching videos on Africa and its wealth of flora and fauna.

Every visitor to Africa is going to place a different value on the daily cost of his or her safari. Even if you were to refund them all the money lost from a bad day, you could never refund the loss in terms of eagerness, anticipation and time for each safari outing. The measure of disappointment is incalculable while the time lost is priceless and irreplaceable.

Most people are easy going and understanding when things don't go according to plan; however there are many unplanned events that Africa can throw at you from every conceivable angle. Try your level best to ensure that the cause of the wasted time and opportunity was not because of your negligence. Try to realize all visitors dreams and desires with what our incredible continent has to offer.

The Author

Garth Thompson was born and raised in Zimbabwe. His three children are 5th generation Zimbabweans. He has played a prominent role in the regions tourist trade for the past 22 years, being one of the pioneers of Zimbabwe's fledgling tourism industry since its independence in 1980. Starting out as a wildlife guide at the age of 21 in Hwange National Park, he went on to owning and operating safari operations in Mana Pools National Park in the Zambezi Valley. During this time, assisted by his wife Mel, they opened a tour operation, aimed initially at marketing and booking their safaris. This company went on to become a prominent supplier of guests to many camps and lodges in Zimbabwe and its neighbouring countries. He was nominated as the Tourism Personality of 1988.

Garth has guided in most parks in Zimbabwe, Botswana, Tanzania, Kenya and Namibia and to a lesser extent in Rwanda, Uganda, Mozambique and Zambia. His favorite safaris are on foot and by canoe in the Zambezi Valley, which is where he conducts the majority of his safaris. He enjoys a following of long standing clients, who safari with him on a regular basis. Most have become lifelong friends.

For any additional information and ideas you may have on guiding he welcomes contact at e-mail address: gartht@mweb.co.zw