

RANGER SEAN'S BUSHVELD DIARIES

DAY 2

CREATURES FROM THE DEEP

A sunset in the African wilderness is always something to behold, and it is even more spectacular when enjoyed from a boat cruise' refreshing drink in hand as the glowing orange sun dips behind you. One afternoon we decided to round off our day's safari by doing just that with Shambala's friendly crew aboard a traditional passenger boat on the Douw Steyn Dam.

As we cruised along, we saw something 'floating' in the distance, which we all thought at first to be rocks. We continued to relax to the tranquil sounds of the water and the birds flying past, looking for a place to rest, but as we drew near to the 'rocks' we suddenly realised that they were huge heads poking above the water.

"Hippos!" exclaimed one of the guests as we approached. These giant water mammals started to speak to us with loud voices, almost like they were laughing. The large pod of herbivores announced their presence with wide open mouths as the guests rushed to snap beautiful pictures.

Hippos generally stay submerged in the water during the day and at night time they will leave the water to find food in the form of grass. They can hold their breath while submerged for up to 5 minutes.

As we approached the breath-taking view from the dam, our skipper pointed out a crocodile floating nearby.

We saw the scales of this large reptile on the surface of the water, and spotted a single eye glaring at us. These prehistoric carnivores have perfected the art of camouflage in the water to catch freshwater fish. However, they can also sometimes prey on vulnerable animals like impala that come to the water's edge for a drink. They can stay under water for a lot longer than the hippos, and often submerge themselves at the sight of attention.



Finally, as we reached the other end of the dam we were fortunate enough to encounter a herd of elephants that had come down for a drink. The perfect conclusion to the afternoon!

QUIZ

- 1) How do hippos announce their presence to other animals?
- 2) Where do hippos spend most of their time during the day?
- 3) Who can hold their breath underwater the longest? Hippos or crocodiles?
- 4) What type of animals are crocodiles?
- 5) Name two animals that crocodiles prey on