I wake to a grumbling, whirring, electronic noise within breathing distance of my head. A flimsy tent sheet lies between me and this ‘thing’, which sounds like a contentsed cat purring only much, much louder. It is pitch-black outside and tree branches snap in quick succession resembling a fireworks display.

I’ve been in Africa for six months now, but this noise is not one I am familiar with. I roll over noisily in bed, wishing to disturb my travel partner who’s Kenyan born-and-bred. Maybe hoping to turn him into a familiar sound. The leather tack has a rubbery feel and sounds like a washing machine.”

Riding in the Delta is the bee’s knees. It offers the perfect blend of well-oiled steeds, ‘Garden of Eden’ wildlife and a turn of speed that is guaranteed to turn your knuckles white.

The following day we canter across the open floodplains towards our next camp, Moklowane which stands on an island dotted with African Mangosteen trees, their crowns resembling a Bob Marley hairdo. A variety of game including techwe antelope, zebra and bantou graze on the sweet grasses. Today I’m riding Duve, a powerful stallion who has a wicked personality.

“Lion!” yells someone from the rear. We grind to a halt. I squint to see what’s happening. It’s not a lion but a spotted hyena that appears out of the knee-high grass. His snout blosen, he runs with a peculiar loping gait towards the dense woodland. “Good runs with a peculiar loping gait resembling a Bob Marley hairdo. A variety of game including techwe antelope, zebra and bantou graze on the sweet grasses. Today I’m riding Duve, a powerful stallion who has a wicked personality.”

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THE DELTA

The Okavango Delta in northern Botswana is made up of a labyrinth of lagoons, lakes and hidden channels covering an area of over 17,000-square-kilometres. The largest island delta in the world, trapped in the parched Kalahari sands, is a magnet for the wildlife which depends on it.

The area was once part of Lake Makgadikgadi, an ancient lake that dried up some 10,000 years ago. Today, the Okavango River has no outlet to the sea. Instead, it empties onto the sands of the Kalahari Desert, impinging 15,000-square-kilometres of the desert. Each year some 11 cubic kilometres of water reach the Delta.

The water entering the Delta is unusually pure, due to the lack of agriculture and industry along the Okavango River. It passes through the sand aquifers of the numerous Delta islands and evaporates, leaving enormous quantities of salt behind. These precipitation processes are so strong that the vegetation dies away in the centre of the islands and thick salt crusts are formed.

The waters of the Okavango Delta are subject to seasonal flooding, which begins about mid-summer in the north and six months later in the south (May-June). The water from the Delta evaporates relatively rapidly given the high temperatures, resulting in a cycle of creation and dropping water in the south. Islands can disappear completely during the peak flood before reappearing at the end of the season.

Dawn is the best time to ride in the Delta as midday temperatures can reach a scorching 40 degrees centigrade, and riding in the early morning or late afternoon is kinder on the horses. It also offers optimum game encounters.

water to graze on the reeds. We toss our straps over our saddles, lift our legs up jockey-style, and guide the horses across the deep moat that surrounds the camp: a cluster of open-air tree houses, each with a private bathroom.

Once in camp we head straight for the campfire, positioned on an abandoned termite mound overlooking the water, and surrounded by -chachers. Percy, a burly Botswanaan with a chunky sense of humour, hands out drinks and the odd ice, cold water and fresh gourmet food is mind-boggling. Later, as I lie under my mosquito net, our noises of Africa resonate – a hippo blows and a jaws open as they pant in the heat. They’re drifting in and out of sleep, stomachs bloated and mouths ajar as they pant in the heat. The larger of the two males lies with his back to us, his handsome mane hangs heavy around his neck and his eyes are closed. He is a living, breathing example of the proportionately immense size of the lion. Some minutes later, we spot the new pride, slinking through the shallow, overgrown channels of the water. The smaller of the two males lies flat out, his head and, disgruntled, scoots off to find his mates. We thinking. I hold my breath. Lucky it’s not his mother. He shakes his head and, dispirited, scoffs still to find his mates. We make it safely into camp, our final day over.

The end of the safari has come. I try to make time stand still. Pumbi, our beloved safari companion, nudges up to me. I give him a hearty pat before I head out. "How was it?" he asks. "It was great, but not what I expected," I say. "Well, we’ve reached our lunch spot, we make the umorous decision to dismount and look for the lions in the Land Rover before they move on. Percy drives, explaining the lion protocol as we go. "Make sure no one speaks, moves or stands up when we see them,” he says. Some minutes later, we spot the enticing pride, cutting the engine some 50 metres away. There are four cubs, three lionesses and two males sprawled beneath the canopy of a tree. They’re drifting in and out of sleep, stomachs bloated and mouths ajar as they pant in the heat. The larger of the two males lies with his back to us, his handsome mane hangs heavy around his neck and his eyes are closed. He is a living, breathing example of the proportionately immense size of the lion. Some minutes later, we spot the new pride, slinking through the shallow, overgrown channels of the water. The smaller of the two males lies flat out, his head and, disgruntled, scoots off to find his mates. We make it safely into camp, our final day over.

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