



A horseback view of a herd of giraffe in Dinaka Game Reserve, South Africa. Right: Lyndsey Price, left, and Lorraine Candy

Travel without kids

Cry freedom



Old friends Lorraine Candy, 41, editor of Elle, and our picture editor, Lyndsey Price, 40, leave their young families behind and saddle up for an adventure in the African bush, in a bid to recapture the spirit (if not the alcohol intake) of their singleton days

Lorraine Gandy

These are some of reasons I'm friends with Lyndsey:

- 1) When we first met 12 years ago, her nickname was the Putney Fox. What can I say? I was drawn to her.
- 2) Lyndsey is not girly, she's blunt, to the point and funny. I like that.
- 3) If you go to a party with Lyndsey, you have no idea what will happen, but you know it will be outrageous fun.
- 4) She once sent back a perfectly good bottle of vintage champagne because it wasn't as bubbly as she wanted it to be. Now, I admire that kind of chutzpah.
- 5) She had enough faith in me to make me godmother to her angelic five-year-old (an adorable fella, quite the opposite of my own feral offspring).

I love talking to her, drinking with her (mostly what we do) and dancing with her. But I have never wanted to go on holiday with her. Lyndsey is demanding and exacting. She is organised and efficient. She likes a thorough plan. I am not like this. I am chaotic and last-minute. Lyndsey thinks about things (a lot); I don't (she finds this frustrating).

We have so far avoided travelling together due to these practical incompatibilities. But holidaying is one thing; an adventure is another. So, bound by a love of horses that stems from our childhoods, we set off on a riding adventure – as it turned out, honeymoon aside, the best holiday I've ever had. I fell in love: in love with Africa (even the ridiculously little insects), in love with my speedy little Boerperd horse, Boggart, with the white rhino, with grumpy warthogs, with Pumba, the three-month-old hippo, and with the strangely stealthy elephants that are prone to surprising you from behind the bushes. I fell in love with the delicate springboks (who don't gallop; they "pronk" instead) and, actually, with Lyndsey.

The months of build-up to our ten-day trip were emotionally and physically stressful. I was well aware I was committing the most selfish sin of motherhood so far by leaving my seven-year-old, five-year-old and three-year-old with their dad and nanny. But I couldn't pull out, despite the temptation: we'd done so much preparation – riding trips to the country, hair-raising jumping lessons for me and much trawling of the internet in search of equipment for Lyndsey. We were committed. And the moment, on Day Two, when an elegant giraffe stepped out from behind the trees as we rode past just a few metres away, I knew I'd made the right decision.

We started the trip with four nights in a remote five-room lodge on South Africa's Dinaka Game Reserve. Sharing a room, we



Watching elephants in Botswana. Right, from top: rhinos in South Africa, "pronking" impata

easily fell into a daily routine of aimlessly following each other around as we prepared for long early-morning rides. (Water bottle? Check. Insect spray? Check. Sudocrem for sore bottoms? Check.) We transferred this cosy comic habit to our basic tent (bucket shower, open-air loo) in Botswana's Mashatu reserve.

We talked more to each other over the next four days, as we potted around that tiny space inspecting our sore knees and itchy bites, than we'd ever done. I knew Lyndsey's dad had died unexpectedly when she was 17, but she never talks about it, and I'd never fully understood the impact on her life and her personality. But here in the midday heat with no distractions, we chatted freely. Her love of horses is interwoven with happy times with her dad; they are where she keeps the memories.

Our tent became a little haven from our hectic lives of working and juggling children

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– a totally different routine. It could have been a challenge: the accommodation was basic, our wake-up call came at 5am, followed by exciting and sometimes difficult rides (with ditch jumping, galloping and steep river banks to scale). Before we left, people feared our friendship may fail, given our strident, bossy natures. But in fact, we rose to every challenge together.

When I got back home I missed her enormously, and the comic hysteria we experienced each night, zipping up our tent as leopards prowled past and all sorts of wildlife dropped noisily on to the roof. I missed our constant chatter, but also the way we could sit for ages side by side on our tiny sun deck in the middle of the African bush, silently reading. I missed the fact that, oddly, every time I looked up as I pulled on my boots, Lyndsey seemed to be bending over applying more cream to her battered bottom. It still makes me smile.

There is an addictive stillness to the African bush, despite the continual expectation of danger, which I think we both needed. Nature simply being; life just rumbling on. So different from our city lives. To justify leaving my children for such a long time, I knew the experience had to be life-changing. So much was resting on it being the adventure I'd dreamt about, and on Lyndsey being the person I could share it with. In every way that dream was fulfilled.

Lyndsey Price

Everyone needs an adventure – it's the best therapy money can buy.

Two friends, working mothers, and, according to recent stats, entering the first flush of middle age; both fiercely competitive and both sharing the same love, the horse. Lorraine and I met at work, and it didn't take long to establish that this wily blonde and I were to become lifelong pals. Lifts home led on to many nights of drunkenness and general bad behaviour, and our supporting one another through the men, the dancefloors, and the hangovers as only good friends can.

So, 12 years on, and both with a riding addiction, we took the decision to abandon our responsibilities and head to Africa for a horseback extravaganza. Our passion for all things equine had been something that we had pursued separately, only having ridden together twice before the trip. But thankfully, my concerns about my friend's abilities – and my sense of responsibility if she found herself on the ground in the middle of an elephant charge – were laid to rest as her skill in the saddle proved to be much better than billed.

Our experience of travelling together was also somewhat limited. We had survived a press trip to Paris – we did indeed get very drunk – and a Barcelona jaunt for her hen weekend. So this would be new territory for us both:



now older, possibly wiser, having had long lapses in contact because of the North London-South London divide and our young families.

I had felt high levels of stress the day before we flew out thanks to the sudden, bludgeoning realisation that I was leaving my beloved five-year-old son and husband for ten whole days. What on earth was I thinking? It had also dawned on me that I had not given any thought as to whether this high-powered glossy-magazine editor and I would get on in the unfamiliar arena of an "adventure holiday".

An e-mail from her husband made me realise she may have given this consideration: he had arranged for us to be seated together on the flight out, and separately on the way back. Our journey got off to a reassuringly familiar start: a glass of fizz; Lorraine almost knocking herself unconscious when her bag fell out of the overhead locker; competitive

The whole experience felt very surreal, a bit like Thelma and Louise riding on to the set of *Born Free*

discussions about our airline toiletries and why she had a more luxurious eye mask; a reminder of my friend's occasional lack of compassion, which meant that I dealt alone with my panic attack coming into land.

The first leg of the trip took us to the Dinaka lodge in the Waterberg Mountain area of South Africa. We met the other members of our group: Linda, the Australian editor of a Christian magazine, and Jo, a mother, horse owner and bespoke florist. So two alpha females became four. Lorraine and I often lament that we don't actually like people in general, so spending so much time with two other strong-minded women was an interesting prospect.

We hopped straight into a truck, went to meet our horses for the first time, mounted up and off we rode. The whole experience felt very surreal, a bit like Thelma and Louise riding on to the set of *Born Free*. My horse, Maximus, was heaven: polite but not dull.

The next four days consisted of getting up at ridiculous o'clock, and spending six hours a day in strange saddles. Having done this sort of trip before, Jo (or "Travel Mummy", as she became known) proved invaluable. Thus, my morning routine now included smearing Sudocrem all over my backside, and getting Lorraine to check how it was faring.

Riding among the wildlife outdid all expectations. We encountered rhinos, hippos, wildebeest and springboks. Our first giraffe sighting is something neither of us will forget. We bonded with the other girls in an exhausted state over dinner and generally found the idea of alcohol unappealing. Most confusing.

Then Botswana, with the final four days moving us into even more adventurous mode, in tents in Limpopo, with sightings of lions and elephants. We had become a high-spirited bunch, a little starved of male intervention. My relationship with Lorraine felt hugely easy: we hadn't fallen out, despite feeling at times like we were doing a Bush Tucker Trial. I laughed as I hadn't laughed for ages. The simplicity of "ride, eat, sleep" had been a truly amazing experience. I had missed my family, but loved the independence of being away. My mind was calm and my heart was happy, and the front that my best friend and I had put up for so many years had finally slipped. Our act that we loved to hate one another was gone; the truth was out – we love to love. And yes, the Nolans were right: we still love to dance. ■

Lorraine and Lyndsey travelled with *In the Saddle* (01299 272997; inthesaddle.com). The Big Five Combination Safari, for experienced riders only, combines four nights at Dinaka in South Africa with four nights at Limpopo Valley Horse Safaris in Botswana. Running from February to November, it costs £2,040pp, including full-board accommodation, drinks and road transfers, but excluding flights to Johannesburg