

On a Grand Safari with Peter Hayward



By [Cari Coetzee](#)

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For years, Hayward's Grand Safari Company have dazzled and delighted clients with tented safari experiences on a grand scale. A world first and only, the company have racked up multiple awards over the years, including World's Leading Glamping Operator in the World Travel Awards 2017 and Best Mobile Safari in the Safari Awards 2017. We asked Peter Hayward, owner of Hayward's Grand Safaris, to tell us more about his regular forays into the African wild.



Peter Hayward (owner) and Celia du Preez (production executive), Hayward's Grand Safaris.

■ ***Tell us about Hayward's Grand Safaris and what differentiates it from any other safari camp or experience.***

The Hayward's concept was born out of a very intensive survey of what was happening in the tourism world. We all know that tourism is very much linked to hospitality and hotels, places to stay - the obvious fact is that you can't go to places where there is no accommodation.

Very few people know the Transkei or Wild Coast - one of the most beautiful coasts in Africa - because there are very few places to stay. The same would go for the Kalahari - we've all heard of the Kalahari and that it's a magnificent wildlife destination, but unless you have an expensive Range Rover kitted out with all the necessary equipment, you're not going to the Kalahari because there's nowhere to stay.

Technically, that's how the concept was born, of providing this hotel facility in the middle of nowhere so that people can experience a new area which never had hotel facilities before. We want to be in areas where we can offer a totally new experience to people.

It lends itself to many different industries - from the filmmaking industry where people want to get out in the middle of nowhere to make movies or documentaries and the car launch industry who want to host the press where they've never been before (we've won best car launch in the world), to private events.

We're not new to the tented industry, people have always put up little camps - since hunting was invented. What makes us different is that we put up camps on a grand scale, we build hotels for up to 200 people at a time and 90 staff - we would have up to 300 people out in the middle of nowhere with the closest town maybe 300-500km away. We have to keep the guests, the staff and the whole experience alive. That's quite a big responsibility.

Most importantly, the infrastructure going into that environment has to be very eco-friendly, you don't want to leave any footprints behind. We go in with a light touch, build an amazing facility, have an amazing event, but when we're finished, it must all disappear - it's a military extraction.

This also teaches guests the privilege of getting into wildlife areas like that - there's a certain amount of rarity in it that makes guests realise how privileged they are. We were the first people in 112 years allowed to camp in the Kruger Park - the animals didn't run away because they hadn't seen people or trucks before, they continued to hunt and live naturally. You really want to create that privileged feeling for the client - they pay a lot of money for it to happen.

Quite a lot of that money is left behind for the land custodian - whether it's a Parks board, a tribal authority or a trust. We negotiate with them about how much they are going to charge and we like for them to charge us because it's such a privilege. That money then goes into social responsibility programmes - from rebuilding schools and planting trees to bolstering security to aid in the rhino poaching issue. Guests have got the chance to be part of wildlife. They're not just tourist coming through, they can get their hands dirty and the money they spend can go towards wildlife conservation.

We also only do one group at a time, and we don't send them off with a bunch of juniors. I've never missed a safari in 28 years, I've run every single one. The reason being that it's a very dangerous product - guests will be doing shooters till 3am in the morning, but I need to get them to bed in one piece and there might be a lion in camp... There's an element of risk, it is high adventure, so we have to put in all the checks and balances.

On safari, we take care of ourselves, the guests, the custodians and the environment. Those are the four main factors in our approach when going into a wildlife area.

“ We're not in tourism, we're in special events. ”

■ **So, what do you do when there is a lion in camp?**

You greet the lion... You really do, you have to let them know you're there! If a lion does come into the camp, we send in our command team of game rangers. When animals come into camp, predominantly it's because they are inquisitive - they have their territory marked and when they find a grand safari, they are going to have a look. We've had a rhino walk into camp and go from tent to tent at 2pm in the afternoon while everyone is having a rest. We had a whole guiding team walk behind the rhino and just keeping him moving until he's out on the other side. That's why you're really on safari in a tent because you are hoping for an encounter.

The only time we put the fence up is when we're in a game reserve where animals are used to electric fencing... and to keep the clients in.

■ **Haywards have won multiple awards - 2017, in particular, was a good year. What is the value of these awards to your business?**

We're pioneers of this concept - we were the first people to start grand safari camps. At the time we started, the law was no camp should have more than 16 people in it including staff. We came along with 120 guests and 90 staff. So, in our business, because it's not run-of-the-mill, the awards are really important because it lends credibility to the product. You are going to serious buyers and you are asking for large amounts of money to put on a safari to their specifications - it's very bespoke, we're building the safari for them and no two safaris are ever the same. It's like building a hotel and I've worked out that we've built around 250 hotels in the last 10 years. The awards are important because they verify for the client that the money they are going to spend is, in fact, going into something that's credible.

We're also very particular in getting ratings from our guests, so apart from the awards we like to rate the guest experience with every single guest. We would ask them every morning about 22 points of what their experience was the previous 24 hours and they rate it one to 10. Any rating under 9.5 means we start an investigation - if there's something they don't like, we change it. There's no point in asking the guest how the trip was at the end because you can't do anything about it.

I've got on record somewhere between 60 and 80,000 response forms and we average around 9.7. For me, that's even more exciting. The crew - the butlers, stewards, housekeepers, etc. - work for these numbers and they are measured by it. At the end of the safari, the scores are tallied and the winning team gets double bonuses and prizes. It's a game - we keep it light and fun, everyone is trying to get 10 out of 10. No one wants 9.5 because it's not good enough - you can lose with 9.5 at Haywards.

If they perform well, they get their bonuses, their salaries may go up, and their hours may go up because they bring home the bacon. Because they often work between safaris on other jobs, we give them letters of commendation with the fact that they are part of the team that brought in all these awards.

■ **Is this glamping?**

Tents are the oldest form of accommodation - except for caves and crevices - on planet earth and it's a completely green form of accommodation. Everyone has a connection with tents, it's sort of a DNA memory.

But we don't camp, and we don't "glamp" - we're beyond glamping now. The glamping concept is slightly different to what we do - it's more the one night wonder, candles are lit, it's all very pretty and then you go home the next day.

We've run a camp for 21 days and put 2,500 people through it, 150 people a night back-to-back - all the laundry changes, toilet changes, booze, ice, etc., it's like running a hotel. We're in the middle of the bush or desert and our water is in a borehole 60km away so military trucks would bring water just to shower people. What do you do with the waste, the

sewage, how do you store the food - from bread rolls to oysters? Behind the scenes, it's a military operation to get all the supplies in and drive all the waste out.

We're a Grand Safari.

I always say I was the only guy stupid enough to start such a business, that's why I'm the only person in it - there are far easier ways to make money! You have to have a certain amount of passion.

■ ***What does the perfect client look like?***

Finitely, I can do 12 camps a year. It's paramount that the 12 camps are done with the right clients - clients that want to make a difference, who would like to meet the locals, would like to see what legacy they can leave behind. Safari means to journey and get your hands dirty. We try to keep it real, so for us, those 12 clients are paramount in the greater scheme of things. The right client helps us make the right impact in terms of the product.

You're also looking for a client with an enquiring mind, who wants to experience the history, culture and natural wonders. Who wants to trade with the people, be it experiences or beads. For them, there's value in what they experience.

■ ***You've mentioned certain sustainable and responsible tourism aspects around setting up a grand safari. Is there anything you would like to add?***

At the end of the day, it's responsible tourism. It's one thing to say that a concrete hotel is a sustainable tourism or eco-friendly product - it can't really be eco-friendly because it's thousands of tonnes of concrete sitting in the middle of what used to be a grass patch. The hotel might be run on a sustainable basis which is a good thing. Structures are a part of our lives, so we can't knock that.

What we have proved with tents in the last 27 years is that you definitely don't need bricks and mortar to have an experience. So much tourism doesn't happen in this country because people are convinced they need a lodge first. We're building a whole new concept of accommodation, it's more semi-permanent - it's hotels, but they are off the grid and they are tented.

This is what tourism in the future should look like. You are able to move in with a very light touch into very pristine wilderness areas and when it gets a bit long in the tooth, you extract the "hotel" and go put it somewhere else. The bush grows back and nothing is left behind.

Being respectful of the environment is the big thing, people have to realise it's sacred. The last green areas left in Africa

and the world are very sacred. You can't protect it if you there are developers allowed to come in and put up hotels - and with the hotels come the noise, the lights, the cars, etc.

The big thing we're staring in the face right now is where will tourism be in 30 years, what will it look like? The children coming through right now, although they are high-tech, they seem to be a little bit more adamant the resources and how rare they are becoming. They are not scared to speak out - they are more the age of 'give' while we were more the age of 'take'.

So in 30 years time, we hope we have a whole new set of political thinking, a whole new way of doing things. We're not going to change the planet with the type of mindsets we have now.

ABOUT CARI COETZEE

Cari Coetzee is a contributor to Bizcommunity Tourism, Agriculture and Lifestyle.

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