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Narrator: From CurtCo Media.

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Narrator: Coming up on the show,

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Dereck Joubert: There's about three hundred and fifty thousand acres there, and we have in three camps, about 45 guests a day. So the number of acres for guests is crazy.

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Bruce Wallin: That's Dereck Joubert. I'm Bruce Wallin and this is Travel That Matters. Hello, everybody, and welcome to Travel That Matters, I'm your host, Bruce Wallin, and this is the podcast where we explore the world's most exceptional and meaningful travel experiences. I've been a luxury travel editor for more than 20 years, and in that time I've met so many fascinating people. But I have to say the two most impressive people I've met are unquestionably Dereck and Beverly Joubert. Dereck and Beverly are best known as Multi Emmy award winning filmmakers who have made nearly 40 wildlife films for National Geographic over the years. But what most people don't know about them is that they also operate one of the top luxury safari companies in all of Africa. Their company, Great Plains Conservation, has camps in Botswana's Okavango Delta and Kenya's Masai Mara along the Zambezi River in Zimbabwe and in other absolutely prime spots for wildlife. And in each of these camps, they offer a private safari experience that gets you just about as close to nature as you would want to get. But I think what's most impressive about Dereck and Beverly is all the work that they put into protecting that wildlife. They run foundations that support rhinos, lions, elephants, and it's just it's a huge part of everything that they do. Their camps, their films their work with National Geographic, just everything. And of course, as you'd probably expect of two wildlife activists and National Geographic explorers, they've had some pretty wild adventures along the way. But in the end, the Joubert's story is really a love story. It's about their love of wildlife, their love of Africa. And most of all, it's their love for each other, which, as we will soon learn, has the power to save lives. Before we get into Dereck and Beverly stories of love and adventure, I just want to talk a little bit about what it's like to actually go on safari with Great Plains. A few years ago, I did one of these, you know, multigenerational safaris that you hear about and took my mother on safari for the very first time, and here's a woman, she was 75 years old. I had a, you know, 75 year old. I had my two teenagers, I had my five year old daughter, my wife and we all travel. We were based in Los Angeles. It's a long trip from Los Angeles to Botswana. I mean, it was, I think, four flights, 36 hours. You know, we land on the strip of Selinda Reserve, which is one of the Great Plains camps. And I mean, my five year old is having a complete meltdown at this point. My mother, you know, she looks like

she's not going to make it to the age of 76. And we were having a complete implosion. But then our guide, his name is Foster. And by the way, that's another thing about Great Plains camps is the guiding is absolutely first rate. Foster just kind of handles everything, gets us all on the safari vehicle, tells us it's another hour's drive to the to the camp, which was not exactly welcome news at that point. You know, we're all kind of settling in, driving along five minutes in Foster turns to me and says, hey, do you mind if I take a little detour? And I look back, my five year old's already passed out. My teenagers look like they want to kill me. But I said, sure, let's do it. So sure enough, we take a little detour and almost immediately we see a pride of lions on an ant hill, mother, cubs male lion. The whole deal. And they're right there. I wake up my five year old, and this is the first thing she sees in Africa, is a pride of lions right in front of her. And I look at my mom and she's got tears in her eyes. And I, you know, like, there could be tears of exhaustion, they could be tears of joy. But it was this realization like, oh my god, this is real. Like, this really happens. You really come here and get right there with the wildlife. Now, the magic of that experience is made possible not only by people like Foster and the rest of the Great Plains staff, but also by the camp settings in some of Africa's most spectacular private conservancies. We're about to talk to Dereck and Beverly about what makes these settings so special and how a Great Plains safari takes the excitement of their films and their own personal adventures and brings it all to life. Dereck Beverley, welcome to Travel That Matters.

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Dereck Joubert: Thank you very much, Bruce, and thanks for having us. You left out of your introductions that we're also friends and frequent tormentors of you.

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Bruce Wallin: Yes, well, always happy to be tormented by you, Dereck, and just so happy the two of you could join me here today. My safari experiences with with Great Plains have have obviously been special and have stood out in my my travels. And I want to know what is it that you guys do that makes that experience different?

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Dereck Joubert: We encourage a different kind of travel within Great Plains. Instead of the snapshot, go and see it for a day and a half and move on to the next camp, we encourage people to come into our camps and to spend five or six days. And even that is a mini version of what Beverly and I go through on a yearly basis. And during that week long experience, you can find the leopard. Get to know her routine and then spend time with her. Understand how she hunts, whether she's got cubs or not. It's a deeper dive into that experience, and I think that for us, there are versions of this and one is the books and films and media that we deal with. And in

introducing people to that as well. And the worst version is coming for a day and a half and see a leopard.

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Beverly Joubert: You know, our camps are really part of the environment, so that's very different. And so no fences, the animals walk through all the time. So for a guest to be able to come into an area where there's a potential that at nighttime, you know, you will hear a leopard at nighttime. You might also hear the baboons or the rabbits calling because that leopard is going through. And in fact, that's how we found the female that we call Fig because she loves being in fig trees all day long along the river and bush. She decided that it was going to be safer and more secure for her to give birth under tent five.

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Narrator: Despite the danger of being trampled, Fig is on the lookout for an even greater threat. The inevitable nomadic lions.

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Bruce Wallin: That was, of course, a clip from your most recent film, Jade Eyed Leopard. And that's Jeremy Irons, of course, narrating as he so often does with your films. Beverly, what you're telling me is this particular film you can actually see the star of it if you're a guest at Mara Plains.

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Dereck Joubert: Totally. It gets worse than that. So we were just there now in December following Fig again, and this time she gave birth to two cubs in camp. But on top of the tent. And so these tiny little cubs were using the tent as a hammock and sliding down, clawing their way back up and down. And so fortunately, we didn't have any guest complaints, but certainly they didn't sleep at night.

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Bruce Wallin: OK, so maybe not always in that form, but but that that idea the up-close experience with wildlife, not just leopards, but lions, giraffes, whatever it is, it's different in the public parks, and the private concessions, right? So can you just explain that a little bit, is what's the difference between the the safari experience and a private concession versus the public lands?

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Dereck Joubert: Well, the big difference really is other mass tourism, in some cases, into the national parks, or the more private experience in the conservancies. And I struggle with the mass tourism experience when there are a dozen other minibuses around. So the experience is very different, but also the interactivity with the communities, with the conservation itself, is far more meaningful, I think. And so at Great Plains, what we do is we always invest in conservancies or

concessions around national parks, so that we can be much more strategic and also protect that flank of the national park. But as such, it gives us meaningful interactions in private and in quiet.

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Beverly Joubert: Once they leave us, they will become true ambassadors, true ambassadors for the area, for the country, but also for the wildlife. And also, we want them to be ambassadors in seeing a change within themselves after you've had that experience where you truly are part of nature. It's impossible to go back and you actually feel the infection of wanting to share all that knowledge with everyone else.

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Bruce Wallin: Okay, so tell me a little bit about the conservation at one of your, your concessions. So let's say Selinda. First of all, how big is it, how many guests and what's going on from a conservation perspective?

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Dereck Joubert: There's about 350 thousand acres there and we have in three camps, about 45 guests a day. So the number of acres for guests is crazy, but that's what one does in these private concessions to create that exclusivity. But more exciting for me is the recovery in this place over the 15 years that we've had it. And I remember sitting there watching elephants come down to drink, running down to drink, drinking for six seconds and running back to the forest because they were persecuted. By the way, this is some of the highest densities of elephants in the world now. Where we can drive in amongst the elephant herds and separate mother and calf and everybody's calm. And I think for me, that's a big thank you.

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Beverly Joubert: And it does show that you can bring nature back. You've just got to put the right conservation policies in place. And that's really what we do at Great Plains. You know, when we formed Great Plains after taking over this concession, we knew that this was a great model and we could do it in many other areas that were vulnerable, that had iconic wildlife in the areas. But they were vulnerable because they were at this pinch point, they were being slowly closed in by no longer having a buffer zone for the national parks.

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Bruce Wallin: Aside from obviously contributing financially, how do the guests at the Great Plains camps, how did they get involved with your conservation efforts?

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Dereck Joubert: Well, one perfect example of this is a number of years

ago we were talking to the president of Botswana and talking about their goal to bring the rhino numbers up, and so we offered to help. And so our target was to increase the population of Botswana's rhinos by 100. And so we set about raising funds to do that. And the first place we looked to help us raise funds was our guests. And so people coming in and out of Great Plains contributed and some people contributed \$100. It cost us forty five thousand dollars to move every rhino. Some people bought two or three moves or rhinos. And so we were able to fund the entire operation through our guests and our guests friends and that portfolio and a good number of those came on some of those translocations with us, which are very dramatic, I mean, slinging a rhino underneath a helicopter is a very, very dramatic and moving moment that we've now been able to move eighty seven. And from those there've been fifty six or fifty seven babies, so huge success.

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Beverly Joubert: And that's not the only way. I mean, we have so many ways many guests want to get involved with the community and you'll see they'll have these cultural discussions with their guide and they'll get to understand what's happening in the community. And a lot of what is happening in the community is that they are living a much more basic life compared to where the guests have come from. So, for instance, many of the communities are off the grid, so no electricity at all. So, what we took on in the early part of creating Great Plains is creating these ways that a guest could buy a little solar lantern. I mean, it's really tiny. By buying those, they would be able to donate to the communities, to the schools, and the kids would be able to learn at nighttime. One of the great rewards was that at the end of the year, the principal said, my gosh, we have never seen such high marks in our pupils. But then we took it a step further and we looked at women that really in these communities needed a second chance. They didn't get great education, so we selected a group of women that wanted to study further. And this group went off to India to, for six months, to learn solar powered electronics so that they could come back and basically have a form of giving light to the communities. I mean, it empowered them in an immense way. It allowed them to create micro-businesses.

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Bruce Wallin: The community and conservation work that the Jouberts do is essential to who they are and really what Great Plains is all about. But first and foremost, the Jouberts are adventurers. They have spent the better part of the last 40 years living in the bush. It is as romantic as it sounds, but it also comes with a certain element of risk. You're about to hear a couple of stories, and just a quick disclaimer before you do, Derrick and Beverly lead a wild life. This has nothing to do with the safety of the experience at their safari camps or any other safari camp. Okay, Dereck, we're going to start with your story, and I want to hear about this now infamous 60 Minutes interview that you two did.

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Dereck Joubert: Yeah, my story pales in comparison to Beverley's, but we had 60 Minutes coming in to do a profile piece on us and the night before I was making some arrangements in camp and I was bitten by the second most deadly snake in Africa, boomslang. Eventually went back in the morning to that spot and cut its head off and send a photograph of the head to Richard Leakey in Kenya and said, what is this? And he came back to me and he said, well, I presume that if you're sending this to me now, this time in the morning, you were bitten last night, in which case you're still alive. However, you should have been dead about five hours ago. But the second thing is you will die for sure in seven days. And so I went back to Beverly and I said, we better get this 60 Minutes thing done pretty fast, I've only got about seven days to live. And so, 60 Minutes crew came in, and in the times that I wasn't drugged, I was talking quite fast because I wanted to get it done quickly. But the fun part of this was that on the way down, so 60 Minutes left and we we said goodbye and we ran to the airfield, jumped in our little plane and I had to fly this plane back down. And the other little gorgeous piece of advice that Richard Leakey gave me was, if you do fly out, don't fly under pressure. And so we flew down at low level about two or three hundred feet above the ground for four and a half hours. But the other thing is that I couldn't use my hand because it was on fire, so I had to control the throttle, the speed, the fuel and so on with my elbow. A lot of things could have gone wrong.

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Bruce Wallin: It sounds like a lot of things actually did go wrong, Derek, but as you brought up your story about the snake somehow pales in comparison to Beverly's story. We're going to take a quick break and we will be right back.

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Beverly Joubert: First of all, I need to say, put a disclaimer. I think we might be frightening our guests with both the snake story this - .

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Bruce Wallin: Come to Great Plains. It's perfectly safe.

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Beverly Joubert: So, so here's a disclaimer. I mean, Dereck and I have been exploring Africa, you know, over 40 years. And of course, we are doing it the original old way in having to be out there in the field. And of course, nothing really did happen over a 40 year period. So you have to know that there are going to be freak accidents every now and again. And so in a way, now that we both survived those situations, I suppose we have lived those nine lives in every way. But also, it didn't only happen to me, Dereck and I were together. We were walking

together with our flashlights, just going from one tent to the other, and this irate buffalo came out of the darkness. We didn't know that the buffalo was in our camp and he was there because he was wounded. We also didn't know that. And so he was pretty much septicemic. He was poisoned. And so all that when he saw us, he just collided with us. He went in between Dereck and I and sent Dereck flying. And Dereck landed on his pelvis down the pathway. But unfortunately, I got the full slap in the face from his boss. And I must have lift my arms because the horn went underneath my armpit through my chest all the way through the neck and into the face, and broke 27 bones in my body. And of course, he ran off in the darkness with me and with Dereck on the ground. This is when the story starts getting interesting.

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Dereck Joubert: So I got up, I ran after both Beverley and the buffalo. Beverly being impaled and like a rag doll on the front of her. And he was running into a bit of a sort of arc. And so I cut around and got up close enough to the two of them for one, one moment. Had I miss timed at all, left it a little too late, it would have gone bad. But I was able to get up close enough that I could jump up, do a flying kick into his shoulder and made contact and fell down. And then he tried to get to me, so he flucked Beverly off. At the time, neither of us knew that, that she had been impaled. Beverly crumpled at my feet and the buffalo ran off and then came back again. And so I jumped over Beverly, ran at him, ran past his left shoulder and drew him off. And then I fell down and he ran over me. But when I got back to Beverley, I was not entirely sure that she had made it, and so I put my finger under her nose to feel if she was still breathing and then picked her up and carried to about 150 meters. And then my broken hip and four broken ribs kicked in. And so I put her down on the pathway and Beverly said, look, I can, I can walk. You don't have to pick me up. And to which I said, I wish you'd told me that 150 meters ago. But then the story gets somewhat more serious in that we walked into the camp together and then Beverley collapsed again in my arms and I got her into to the curio store, to where I spent the next 11 hours trying to save her life. She died twice in my arms and I got her back again before dawn and before any any medical help could arrive. And so I to administer the first aid, which fortunately I had learned in the military and got her back a couple of times and before we could get help in, there was a cyclone which prevented helicopters from taking off. There were laws preventing us from flying at night. I had a bit of pain, so I couldn't fly my plane because I was giving Beverly one, two painkillers and taking one myself. So, it was a grand grand adventure, 18 hours later we got her into a decent hospital in South Africa.

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Bruce Wallin: I know you spent many months in the hospital, and I'm not going to make you relive those moments. But but I am curious how has this... I mean, near-death experiences tend to make people refocus

on on doing good works. And you know, you guys were already doing quite a bit of good works. And so like, has this changed your perspective at all?

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Beverly Joubert: Ultimately, it's given me an immense amount of respect for life and that all life is precious, but also that time is running out.

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Dereck Joubert: I was holding Beverly's hand and there's nothing more profound maybe than making these deals where I knew that if I could get one more minute with Beverly or one more hour, one more month, one more year, I made a promise that I wouldn't waste any one of those. And so our relationship, I think, has got stronger since then. It really does focus you on the things that are important.

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Bruce Wallin: I'm happy to say that Dereck and Beverly have both made a full recovery and are back doing exactly what they should be doing, which is living in the African bush, making great films and saving wildlife. So you guys are in the business of creating these memorable, incredible experiences for your safari guests, right? When was the last time that one of you had a moment on safari?

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Dereck Joubert: You know, Bruce, I think that looking into the eyes of any animal that turns and suddenly looks at you is life changing. And so much of our work as Beverly's photography and my filming focuses around those eyes again, because we want to dig into those personalities and characters and draw them out, and the window to the soul is through the eyes. But just a couple of weeks ago, we were with some baby leopards that were maybe seven days old, and I was struck by the notion that no matter what's going on in politics, in anywhere in the world, there's this cycle that continues, even though they're in diminished numbers. But there's still a leopard out there somewhere giving birth to tiny little balls of fluff that have steel blue eyes

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Bruce Wallin: Hard not to fall in love with that. But, okay, so if I wanted to see that if I wanted to see leopards and have just the most amazing safari, you guys have been everywhere all over the place you filmed, you've explored, where's the one place you would recommend I go?

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Dereck Joubert: So, one of my favorite places on the planet is Duba Plains in Botswana, and you've been there. It's sort of, it's not just home for us, but it's the resting place of our souls. It's where they are these big lions, 15 per cent bigger than than other lions we've

come across. And they wade through the Okavango . And I think that that's the pinnacle of wildness for lions, these big, iconic animals. And so that's one of my favorite places.

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Beverly Joubert: Duba, you know, will always be top there, but I'm not going to take the same one as Dereck. I mean, this whole of the Selinda Reserve, the experience that we had on the Selinda spillway. Canoeing and and making the films out of the elephant lives within my heart. I don't think I'll ever leave those incredible moments, those gentle giants all around us and what that whole experience gave. And of course, that is the whole of the Selinda Reserve. So that is Zarafa Camp and the Selinda Camp. And then, of course, it has everything else from cheetahs to lions to leopards. But I also want to get to one of the camps in Kenya that I've just fallen totally in love with because of the abundance of top predators that we see and can work with. And after Dereck and I starting the Big Cat Initiative at National Geographic, around about 2009, actually all because of this image of the leopard behind us when we were filming Eye of the Leopard, Academia changed our hearts in understanding what incredible creatures they are. But then how persecuted they are because we realize over the time of making the film, ten thousand leopards were legally allowed to be shot. And so the area that I'm getting to is really Mara Plains. Mara Plains is just phenomenal for cheetahs, for leopards and for lions and the interaction between each other.

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Dereck Joubert: Can I have another one?

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Bruce Wallin: Yes, Dereck, you can have another one. But first, Beverly's just brought up Eye of the Leopard, and for the audience Eye of the Leopard was the precursor to Jade Eyed Leopard, the clip that you heard earlier. It's my favorite wildlife film of all time. So if you haven't seen it, see that movie, it'll make you fall in love with leopards. It'll make you fall in love with Africa and definitely make you want to go on safari. So, okay, Derek, what was it that you were saying?

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Dereck Joubert: Bruce, you Beverly and I have looked into the eyes of gorillas together, and I must say that spending just an hour with a gorilla family and those big silverbacks that we saw together is life-changing. It really is. Either you looking into the eyes of extinction or you're looking into your own eyes, a mirror of who we are in many ways. You're looking into the eyes of an animal that understands that we are the greatest threat to them. And I worry about that, and I'll just end by saying the finest place for me is wherever Beverly is. So whatever she chose.

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Bruce Wallin: Well, wherever you guys end up going I would be happy to tag along. So in the meantime, Dereck and Beverly, thank you so much for joining us. It was, it was wonderful to catch back up with you.

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Beverly Joubert: Thank you, Bruce.

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Dereck Joubert: Bruce, thank you very much. We look forward to many more adventures with you.

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Narrator: And now for the Wallin wrap up.

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Bruce Wallin: We talked a lot about Safari today, and I will say the number one question I get about safaris is when is the right time to go? When should I go on safari and they're not talking about, you know, seasonal whatever, because that can vary depending on where you're going in Africa. But it's really more about like when is the right time to travel with my family and specifically with kids, too. Because people, you know, if you're looking at this as a once in a lifetime experience, when if you're going to do it once, when is the right time to do it? And with kids, I have taken my kids. I've been fortunate to take my kids at different ages, different kids, different ages, everything from five year old to an 18 year old and five is too young. I will say that she she had a wonderful time. It was an amazing experience. But you know, it's also, that's a lot of money to take a five year old on a trip that that they're going to remember through pictures primarily. But in my experience, I think the sweet spot is somewhere between about nine and 12 with the kids. It's, you know, it is they're... they're old enough to really comprehend the experience and get into it, and they're young enough that that it is going to shape their lives. Not to say that it wouldn't at an older age. It's just like they are malleable and they are, you know, excited and it's just a magical experience to to see that through their eyes. So, that's my recommendation, is go when you can. But if you do have a choice, I would say somewhere of nine to 12 is a sweet spot. I'd like to thank Dereck and Beverly Joubert for joining us today on Travel That Matters. If you or someone you know is interested in experiencing safari at its very best, share this episode with them and check out our show notes and travelthatmatterpodcast.com for more information. This episode was produced and edited for Curtco Media by A.J. Moseley and Darra Stone. Music by Joey Salvia. I'm Bruce Wallin. Enjoy your journeys and we'll see you down the road.

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Narrator: Curtco Media. Media for your mind.