



Pygmy Hippo Pursuit

Tai National Park, Côte d'Ivoire

March 24th – April 5th, 2023

"A site of towering ebony trees, glittering epiphytes clinging to cliffsides, evergreen-carpeted peaks and valleys, and oxbows swerving round velvety plots of savannah" – Bradt Guide

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Created for Mammalwatching.com



Photo courtesy of Ben Schweinhart, an independent traveller whom we assisted with logistics when visiting Tai in 2022



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Overview

Tai National Park, Côte d'Ivoire

- Recent sightings of pygmy hippo in broad daylight, including with a calf
- Option to use kayaks to explore isolated tributaries
- Extensive surveys prior to visit to give best possible chance of sightings
- Exclusive access to network of trails proven to be used by pygmy hippo
- Likely encounters with chimpanzee and up to ten other primate species
- Possible sightings of Jentink's duiker, bongo and zebra duiker
- Liberian mongoose and Shelley's eagle-owl seen in 2022

Itinerary

Day 1

<i>Accommodation: Hotel Blawa</i>	<i>Location: Abidjan</i>	<i>Meals Included: N/A</i>
On your arrival into Abidjan's international airport, you will be transferred to your local hotel in the city.		

Day 2

<i>Accommodation: Enotel Beach Hotel</i>	<i>Location: San Pedro</i>	<i>Meals Included: N/A</i>
Your flight departs Abidjan at 12.00 this afternoon, arriving at San Pedro at 13.00. From there, you will be transferred directly to your accommodation with the rest of the day at leisure.		

Day 3

<i>Accommodation: Ecotel Touraco</i>	<i>Location: Tai NP</i>	<i>Meals Included: B, L, D</i>
<p>Early this morning you will be collected from your hotel for a full day's drive north to Tai National Park. Ecotel Touraco is situated near the Hana River in the southern section of Tai and is surprisingly well-appointed given its location. For the purposes of our visit, though, it is just base camp, albeit a comfortable one. Provide we arrive sufficiently early, and the park authorities have permitted it, you may choose to spend your first night on the banks of the Hana River or one of its tributaries in search of pygmy hippo.</p> <p>Having liaised with local guides prior to your visit, we are likely to have identified areas being used by at least one of the hippos nearby. This area will have been salted in advance to encourage the hippo to forage here – this method presents us with the best opportunity of spotting one of these elusive mammals. If no nearby hippo activity has been identified, or if park authorities are not permitting nocturnal activities due to the presence of elephant or leopard, we will nonetheless strive to walk the forest trails around the lodge to seek out some of the local wildlife.</p>		

Days 4 to 12

<i>Accommodation: Camp Chimpanzee/Ecotel Touraco</i>	<i>Location: Tai NP</i>	<i>Meals Included: B, L, D</i>
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We have nine full days in Taï NP to focus exclusively on tracking down pygmy hippo. Our exact itinerary will depend on any hippo activity that has been identified prior to our arrival. Should an area with high levels of activity be located, blinds and hides can be moved into the area to stake out this locale – salt licks can again be created to increase the chances of an encounter. Forest walks and kayaking are also activities that can be used to scour the area for signs of hippo – previous daylight encounters have been enjoyed by visitors walking the tributaries not far from camp. Our base may be the Ecotel Touraco with its creature comfort, if hippo activity is found around the Hana River. Alternatively, 'Chimpanzee Camp', a remote research camp designed for primate monitoring, may be closer to the action, in which case we may overnight here. Lastly, we may be able to overnight in hides secreted deep within the national park, if hippo activity is not found in the first two locations.

Day 10

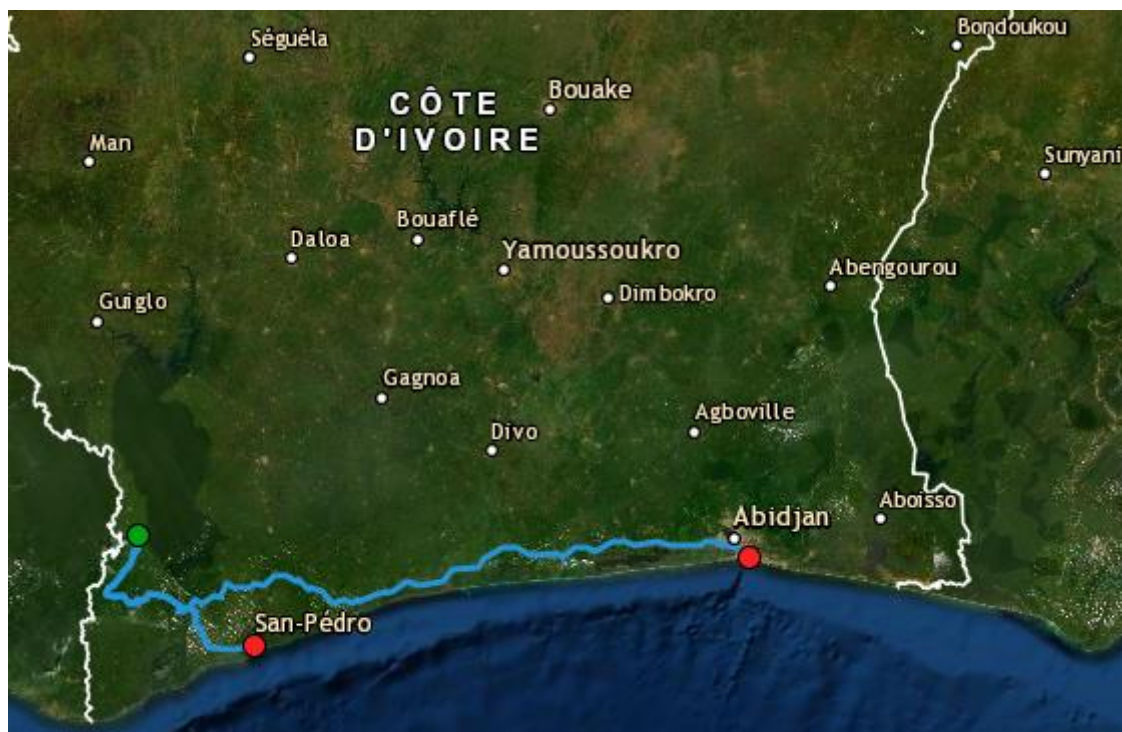
Accommodation: N/A

Location: N/A

Meals Included: B, L

This morning we will leave Ecotel Touraco before dawn to return to San Pedro. The domestic flight to Abidjan departs at 17.30, arriving at 18.30. We recommend onward flights departing later than 21.30, and we can arrange for overnight accommodation in Abidjan if required.

Tour Map





Costs & Inclusions

This tour is currently priced at £4,000 per person sharing, with no single supplement. To secure your place on this tour, a deposit payment of £1,000 is required.

We always ask for payment in Sterling (GBP), which is unusual for a safari operator. We do this as most of our clients are based in the United Kingdom. We also deal with a large number of small, local partners who use a combination of US Dollars, Euros and local currency – as such, our use of a single currency simplifies things for both us and our partners. We understand that using GBP may mean some clients, particularly in the USA, incur some additional fees. We apologise, and recommend that these clients look into low-fee options for transfers if the fees levied by their bank are unacceptably high. Payments must be made by electronic transfer to the bank details specified on your invoice. We regret that we cannot accept payment by card or cheque.

Please see the below matrix for detail on what activities are included in the cost of your tour, and what is excluded.

Included	Excluded
Pick up from airport and transfer to hotel in Abidjan	Visas
Domestic flight to San Pedro	International flights
Accommodation in San Pedro	All meals and drinks in Abidjan and San Pedro
Vehicle transfers between San Pedro and Tai	Soft/alcoholic drinks in Tai
All meals in Tai	Items of a personal nature
Drinking water in Tai	Gratuities
Accommodation in Tai	Laundry
Use of blinds/hides in Tai	Optional Activities
All wildlife activities in Tai	Accommodation before/after tour dates

Getting to Côte d'Ivoire

Abidjan International Airport is currently served by airlines including Air France, Brussels Airlines, Emirates, Ethiopian Airlines and Turkish Airlines. We recommend using Air France, connecting through Paris. Their flights arrive into Abidjan at 17.30.

Please note that, on your return, Air France depart Abidjan at 22.05, which allows for a direct transfer from your internal flight from San Pedro.

We ask that you do not book flights until we have specifically advised you by email that the tour will be going ahead.



Accommodation

As is the case across Africa, the standards of accommodation can be highly variable. We have chosen the accommodation for this itinerary carefully, but we ask clients to be aware that even with the utmost diligence the accommodation chosen may fall below standards in the west. The following accommodation options will be used during your trip:

Hotel Blawa – This boutique hotel near the airport is an ideal location for a short stay. Rooms are relatively large, comfortable, with en-suite facilities and most mod-cons. Good food is available in the hotel restaurant.

Enotel Beach Hotel – San Pedro is best known as a beach resort, and most accommodation is geared towards this – this hotel is no exception. Situated close to the main beach, this hotel is basic and slightly dated, but more than adequate for our needs.

Ecotel Touraco – Tai's only accommodation, this hotel has recently seen an upgrade and represents a surprisingly comfortable option for visitors to the national park. The lodge is made up of ten bungalows, each with en-suite facilities and electricity. There is a central restaurant.

Camp Chimpanzee – a comfortable but basic camp used by researchers deep in the forest, the trails around this camp are the best area for sightings of several rarities including pygmy hippo, Jentink's duiker, zebra duiker, Liberian mongoose and, of course, pygmy hippo.

Food & Drink

Meals are included in the tour price in Tai but not in Abidjan or San Pedro. We recommend budgeting around \$60 total per person for meals in Abidjan and San Pedro. Drinking water is included in Tai. In Tai, bottled drinking water is available. We don't recommend drinking untreated water from the tap. Soft and alcoholic drinks are not included in the tour price.

Meals in Tai are typical West African fare, the food is always of a decent standard and you won't go hungry. Most special diets can be catered for, but we do ask you give us plenty of notice to ensure you get the best possible dining experience. Please note that should you have specific dietary requirements, the options provided to you may be limited and repetitive. We apologise for this, and will do all we can to provide you with as many options as possible given the remoteness of Tai.



Game Viewing

Game-viewing in Taï is primarily conducted on foot, with walks deep into the national park one of the best ways of honing in on locations used by pygmy hippo. By far the best way to encounter pygmy hippo is by walking at night around Camp Chimpanzee, but the best option for photography is generally to boat up and down the Hana River from the Ecotel Touraco. The exact option we use will be dependent on recent sightings and the preferences of the group.

Vehicles Used

The vehicles used during transfers are closed 4x4 vehicles. With luggage, they are a tight squeeze but are reliable and secure.

Health and Vaccinations

We suggest that all clients visiting Côte d'Ivoire take a malaria prophylaxis for the duration of your stay – please consult a medical professional as to which prophylaxis is right for you. The risk of malaria in Taï in the dry season is very low, although there is always the possibility of malarial mosquitos near stagnant water. Clients may have to produce their yellow fever certificate to enter Côte d'Ivoire, and we recommend up-to-date vaccinations against cholera, diphtheria, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, meningitis, polio, rabies, tuberculosis, tetanus and typhoid – please note that the advice of a medical professional takes precedence over these suggestions.

If you are concerned about local food and water, we recommend bringing water purification tablets, and any appropriate medicine with you.

You must alert us to any serious allergies well in advance of travel.

Insurance

Clients must have an appropriate travel insurance policy in order to join this tour. As this tour travels through an area to which foreign travel advisory agencies advise against all travel, we recommend High Risk Voyager Insurance – more details can be found [here](#). Your travel insurance must cover the costs of medical evacuation and repatriation.

Pictus Safaris have tour operator liability insurance provided by Tasker and Partners. We can provide further information on this on request. Financial failure insurance provided by Protected



Trust Services ensures your money is protected in the unlikely event that Pictus Safaris becomes insolvent during or before your holiday.

Visas

The process for acquiring a visa for entry into Côte d'Ivoire is fairly straightforward. For UK citizens, the visa can be applied for in advance of travel and collected on arrival in Abidjan. Clients of other nationalities should check well in advance of travel what entry requirements pertain to them.

The fee levied by the embassy for a visa is €73. To acquire a visa you must submit a photo of your passport photo page, your flight confirmation and a hotel reservation confirmation. We will provide you details of your hotel booking.

Safety and Security

We understand that safety and security is a key concern for many potential visitors to Côte d'Ivoire, and the safety of our clients is the utmost priority for Pictus Safaris. Unrest occasionally flares up during elections. The country has been largely stable since the civil war ended in 2011. Pictus Safaris have conducted a detailed risk assessment and, based on this, believe the risk to visitors is minimal.

Abidjan and San Pedro are very stable and security incidents are extremely rare. This being said, we ask clients to exercise precautions here, including refraining from photography, especially near military installations.

Taï is entirely secure and there is currently no risk to any visitors.

With appropriate precautions taken, we have no doubt your stay in Côte d'Ivoire will be an enjoyable and safe one. Please be aware that due to the remoteness of the areas visited by this itinerary, medical assistance will be slower and of a lower quality than that which you may be used to at home. As prevention is better than cure, we recommend clients bring their own first aid kit. Taï is a wilderness area, and encounters with dangerous wildlife do happen, so we ask clients to exercise caution at all times.

About Côte d'Ivoire

Located in West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire is a regional powerhouse. With a strong economy, booming population and burgeoning industries, this country is not the obvious choice for a wildlife-watching



holiday. Unbeknownst to many, Côte d'Ivoire hosts the largest remaining tract of primary rainforest in the region, but also expansive savanna in the north and unexplored wetlands in the east. Whilst the wildernesses of central Côte d'Ivoire have been devastated by the country's rapid growth, the peripheries of the 'Ivory Coast' remain largely untouched, making this one of the most up-and-coming safari destinations in Africa.

At Pictus Safaris, we are conscious that many of our destinations have a troubled and chequered history, and Côte d'Ivoire is no exception. We fully acknowledge the realities facing the people of Côte d'Ivoire, including human rights abuses committed by the Ivorian government. Please note that Pictus Safaris does not endorse or make payments to any agencies or individuals associated with the Ivorian government.

Official Name	Republic of Côte d'Ivoire
Population	26,378,274 (2020 est.)
Area	322,463 km ²
Currency	West African CFA Franc (XOF)
Timezone	UTC
President	Alassane Ouattara
Capital City	Yamoussoukro
Independence From	France
Independence Day	7 th August 1960
National Animal	Bush Elephant
Bordering Countries	Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali
Highest Point	Mt Nimba (5,748 ft)
Lowest Point	Gulf of Guinea (0 ft)
Longest River	Black Volta (1,352 km)
Largest Lake	Lake Kossou (1,855 km ²)
Largest Protected Area	Comoé National Park (11,500 km ²)
Largest Religion	Islam (42.9%)
Largest Ethnic Group	Akan (41.1%)
Largest City	Abidjan (3,677,115 – 2021)
Official Languages	French
Drives on the...	Right
National Sport	Football
Number of Regions	14
Nationality	Ivorian
Internet Country Code	.ci

Weather

The weather in April in western Côte d'Ivoire is hot and humid. It rarely rains, and temperatures usually reach a maximum of 30°C. In the early mornings it will sometimes get as low as 25°C. We strongly recommend taking all reasonable precautions to minimise your exposure to the sun.



Money

The official currency in Côte d'Ivoire is the West African CFA Franc (XOF). £1 usually equates to about 750 XOF. \$1 stands at roughly 650 CFA at the time of writing. USD and Euros are sometimes used instead of XOF, and we recommend bringing some of both, although this is rarely needed.

Tipping is expected for local guides and staff, but is entirely at your discretion. We recommend budgeting for tips of \$10 per day per visitor as a rough guideline. This should of course reflect how much the staff member enhanced your stay, and total amounts should increase or decrease with this in mind.

Language

Côte d'Ivoire has one official language; French. English is rarely spoken, even in major cities. The western areas of Côte d'Ivoire, where Taï is located, shares a common language with much of Liberia - Krumen.

Camp staff in Taï speak limited English and fluent French.

About Taï

Taï is a vast ecosystem that, whilst under pressure, has weather the storm of poaching and mismanagement with much more success than other protected areas in Africa. The birdlife and plant life that persists here is remarkably diverse, but it is the variety of primate species that has traditionally brought visitors to this remote corner of West Africa. The tool-using chimpanzees has fascinated researchers for generations, and this area has also contributed to seminal research on the spread of Ebola. It was here that it was discovered that chimpanzees contributed to the spread of disease by feeding on red colobus. There are eleven species of primate recorded here, but Taï has much more to offer.

Deep in these forests, visitors may encounter species hardly ever seen in the region. Leopard, forest elephant, bongo and pygmy hippo might grab the headlines, but serious mammal-watchers will be just as thrilled by the potential of glimpsing Jentink's duiker, zebra duiker and giant pangolin.



Wildlife Highlights

A full mammal and bird list will be sent to you with your pre-departure information document. There are a number of highlights, however, that are worth getting excited about before then!

Tai is home to an impressive array of forest species and, although the exclusive focus of this trip is pygmy hippo, there are a litany of primate and forest antelope species you should keep an eye out for during your visit.

Tai is perhaps most famous for its well-studied population of Chimpanzee, but also offers good viewing of western red colobus, olive colobus, spot-nosed monkey and diana monkey. Other primates present in the ecosystem include sooty mangabey, Campbell's monkey, king colobus and West African potto.

The ungulate diversity is also impressive here, with an abundance of forest duikers in particular. Maxwell's duiker are extremely common, with bay duiker also regularly recorded. Infrequently seen are Ogilby's duiker, black duiker and zebra duiker, with rare sightings of Jentink's duiker and yellow-backed duiker. Royal antelope, water chevrotain and bushbuck are all possible. Forest buffalo are common in specific areas, and forest elephant are sometimes seen. Bongo are very rare, but can be located deep in the park's interior.

Lucky visitors may even get a glimpse of some of the predators that persist here. Leopard are present in good numbers, as are golden cat, although both are rarely seen. Encounters with smaller carnivores, including common cusimanse, African palm civet and four different genet species are all possible, particularly from hides at night.

Smaller mammals are not well studied here but dozens of species of bats and rodents should be present. The birding can also be extremely rewarding, with obliging populations of picathartes dotted around the park.

About Pictus Safaris

Pictus Safaris are a limited company registered with Companies House in the UK – our registration number is 12812872. Our registered address is Kemp House, 160 City Road, London, EC1V 2NX. Our trading and correspondence address is 26A Ridley Road, London, NW10 5UA.

We are a small-group safari specialist operating across Africa. True pan-African experts, we believe that the benefits of ecotourism are yet to reach many communities and ecosystems across the continent. By bringing ecotourism to lesser-visited areas, we hope to play a small part in cementing their future. To find out more about our mission, see our responsible travel policy, available on request. At our heart, we are mammal-watching specialists, and our itineraries are



designed to give our clients the very best chance of finding the rarest and most charismatic wildlife Africa has to offer.

Our founder, Tom Clode, has spent much of his life travelling across Africa in search of rare wildlife. Tom loves exploring new destinations and showing his favourite spots to clients – from Angola to Zimbabwe and everywhere in between! Tom's true passion is tracking down isolated populations of predators including African Wild Dog and Cheetah, and it is for that very reason that, when not in London, Tom is usually found in Pendjari or Niokolo-Koba.

Small Group Travel

One of the most common concerns we hear is, "I'm not sure if travelling in a group is right for me". We completely understand. At Pictus Safaris, we recognise that small-group travel is not for everybody, and that there are benefits to independent travel, particularly on safari.

This all being said, we believe that small-group safaris are an excellent way to explore Africa, for a number of reasons. Group travel is generally less expensive and safer than independent travel. And there's a huge amount to be said for the friendships that are made, the stories exchanged and the experiences shared when travelling with others. We also always ensure that clients are part of a group we feel they will enjoy being a part of – we try to match first-time safari goers with fellow first-timers for example. We always get to know our clients before travelling with them, and reserve the right to refuse bookings if we feel clients are not a good fit for Pictus Safaris or our current clients.

Our trips normally run with between four and six clients. This ensures that clients are guaranteed a window seat during game drives, and that noise is kept to a minimum if on foot. Some trips may run with as few as three clients, and extensions can run with as few as two. This trip is expected to run with four clients in total. In addition to the clients, you will be accompanied by a Pictus Safaris tour leader. In most cases, the tour leader will know your destination intimately – some destinations are impossible to visit for recce trips, so will not have been visited prior to your arrival, and these trips will be advertised as "expeditions".

On some itineraries a second tour leader will accompany the group. This is done to ensure you get the best possible experience from your tour and is often to ensure there is at least one native speaker amongst the tour leaders. There will never be more than two representatives from Pictus Safaris on your tour.



Responsible Travel Policy

Pictus Safaris have a detailed responsible travel policy that will be provided to you when you book this tour. It is the Pictus Safaris mission to ensure that the benefits of ecotourism are brought to the communities and ecosystems in little-visited areas of Africa. As such, we only use local partners who are locally-based or employ local people. We have a zero-tolerance policy towards any behaviour that is disrespectful to local people or damaging to the ecosystem. As per our terms and conditions, any such behaviour is grounds for removal from the tour.

With regard to Côte d'Ivoire, we ask that clients are aware of the environmental and societal differences between our destination and our home countries. In particular, we ask clients to consider limiting their water usage, and usage of single-use plastics. We also ask clients to dress modestly and to never take photographs of people without their permission.

We encourage clients to take the opportunity to visit a local project or community during their stay. For an additional fee, clients can visit a local market, which is a great chance to interact with the local community and to pick up some unique mementos.

Your Tour Leaders

The Pictus Safaris team are there primarily to ensure your safety, to make sure the trip runs smoothly, and to locate as much wildlife as possible. Please note that, whilst knowledgeable, the team are not qualified guides and the responsibility for guiding falls to the local partners we work with. More details about the Pictus Safaris team leading your tour will be shared in your pre-departure information document.

Protecting Your Money

Pictus Safaris client funds are held in a trust account prior to departure, meaning that the deposit and balance payments you make to us are fully protected in the unlikely event that Pictus Safaris becomes insolvent before or during your holiday. The trust account is administered by Protected Trust Services, and we can share additional details on request.

COVID-19

We recognise that COVID-19 has caused a great deal of uncertainty for clients when it comes to international travel. As such, we are keen to be fully transparent about when we ask clients to pay



deposits and why. Our suppliers require a 50% deposit to secure a booking – given the continued and understandable popularity of this itinerary, we ask for this payment (plus fixed costs that we accrue during the booking process and any single supplement) from our clients to secure a booking. The remaining payment is due 60 days prior to travel.

There are currently no COVID related entry or exit restrictions in Cote d'Ivoire.

Packing List

A packing list will be sent to you at least thirty days prior to travel. In the meantime, please do reach out to us should you have any questions concerning what you may need to bring with you, we would be happy to answer them.

Other Tours

Pictus Safaris currently offer safaris to over thirty African countries and we think they're all brilliant! Based on your interest in this safari, you may be also interested in our "Amazing Asses" tour to Eritrea, during which you have a great chance of encountering African wild ass. You may also be interested in our "Wilderness Beyond Compare" tour, which offers the chance of spotting bonobo and much more.