

# On Safari

RIDING THROUGH AFRICA

*By Pam Gleason*

**H**ave you ever dreamed of riding through the African veldt surrounded by wild animals? Does the thought of encountering a herd of elephants thrill you? Do you love to be close to nature?

If so, you might consider taking a horseback safari. It really is possible to ride with herds of wildebeest and zebra. You might even come upon a pride of lions lazing in the shade or encounter elephants browsing the treetops. Although most any kind of African safari will bring you close to the animals, when you are on a horse, you are not just an observer, you are a part of the scene. Being on a horse makes you less threatening to wildlife, so you can approach the other animals without frightening them. Occasionally (if an elephant spooks your horse, for instance) you might even be in the action!

If the thought of a safari makes your heart flutter, you might consider calling Heidi Beaumont of International Ventures, Ltd., a safari company based in Connecticut. Heidi and her partner Margaret Sanko have owned and operated the company for the past 17 years. International Ventures offers unique experiences in Africa, including riding, photography, luxury and wing safaris, and even a safari that combines getting close to the animals with a tour of the vineyards of South Africa's wine country. You can also book a safari designed for romance, perfect for honeymoons. "Envision sipping champagne on your private terrace as you gaze out over the vast African plains or the pristine Indian Ocean," declares the brochure.

International Ventures has an Aiken connection through Heidi, who comes to town every winter to



hunt, event and enjoy her horses. Heidi's first introduction to Aiken included the Hitchcock Woods and the Aiken Horse Show. Six years ago, she was traveling back from a winter of showing in Florida. She stayed in Aiken, had lunch at the Horse Show and enjoyed the atmosphere so much she decided to come back. Within a few years, she had bought property and started building a house. Coming down each winter to ride, she fell in love with the Woods and thought she could do something to help support and preserve it.

"I had participated in a silent auction before as a fundraiser," says Heidi. "I thought that I would love to do something to help the Woods. I suggested it would be a good idea to have a silent auction. I offered to donate a safari."

The silent auction was a great success, and the safari was definitely the highlight of the event. Heidi and her company donated a safari again the next year and the next. This year, 2007, will be the fourth year that International Ventures will participate in the silent auction. This year's trip is a horseback safari, perfect for adventurous souls.

"There is no other place like the Hitchcock Woods," says Heidi. "I'm just glad to be able to contribute." 🐾



**Hitchcock Woods Foundation**