

## Lifestyle / Travel

# Marvellous MalaMala!

Out in the wilds of the African bush, *Sharon Feinstein* takes a walk among the animals on the 'trip of a lifetime'

**T**hunder crashed through the bush all night, like the beat of African drums, while rain pounded rhythmically on the tin roof of our apartment.

At dawn we stood on the broad terrace of Rattray's safari lodge facing the wide river bed with its first pools of water, the sky the colour of purple pressed grapes.

Our soft-spoken, knowledgeable guide, Gordon, grabbed his shotgun and prepared the Land Rover with blankets and flasks of water.

For two days, I had Gordon to myself as we weaved through the spiky acacia and mahogany trees, the air fragrant with scent and iridescent butterflies.

Of all the camps in southern Africa, there's nothing to touch Rattray's for game viewing, attention to detail and tasteful luxury. There are only eight rooms, a world-class chef, and a unique setting on the banks of the Sand River.

When you return from a long game-viewing drive, there's the offer of a deep massage and a cooling swimming pool.

Out here in the plains of South Africa, we are hundreds of miles from the closest Jewish communities in Pretoria and Johannesburg, the latter boasting the largest Jewish population in the country and an extraordinarily moving Holocaust museum.

Here, in the land of the safari, animals move slowly across the hush of the bush and it all seems completely still until you spot the giraffe, zebra, buffalo and slow lumbering elephants. Tawny eagles are diving through the sky. The impala, living under constant threat, jerk their heads at every sound.

I longed to see a leopard, the aloof, majestic animal that walks alone. We rounded a bend and there she was, perched on high rocks watching three cheetah eat an impala they had just caught.

Four cats in one sighting, which soon turned even more dramatic as the King stood on the horizon gazing across at the gathering vultures, realising there was food.

Within minutes, the beautifully-built male



lion charged, scattering the vultures and chasing away the three cheetah. He picked up the carcass, his muzzle soon covered in blood, and settled under a tree to eat. The death of the impala brings life to the lion for another day.

National parks can have up to 20 vehicles at a sighting, but MalaMala won't allow more than three, so the animals are never crowded.

Gordon, who has been at Rattray's MalaMala for 11 years, tells me: "Animals live in the moment in their daily struggle to find food, water and protect themselves.

"There's no thought of future or past, it's only the present, and a lot of people have lost touch with that.

"Watching them teaches us to cherish what is important in life right now, not what might be happening next week."

Reflecting on what he has observed over the years among the animals, he adds: "Elephants and primates are the most emotional creatures, and feel a great sense of loss when their young die.

"Impala will forget they've had a baby within ten minutes of it getting caught by a lion, while a female baboon will pick up the dead baby and carry it with her, sometimes for days.

"There's no real sympathy or feeling for the animal being killed. All they see is food, survival. We are the same. That's the animal side to us."

A highlight always on any safari is seeing the big five – lion, leopard, elephant, rhinoceros, buffalo – but there's a special award given at this



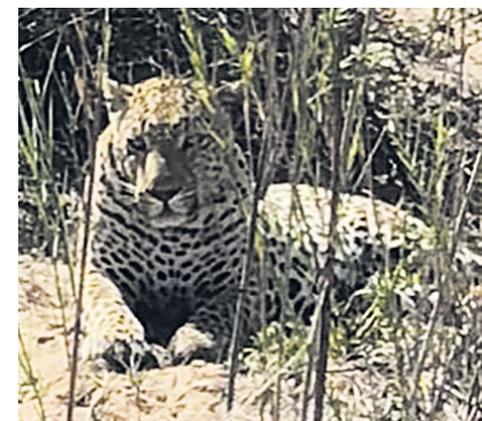
camp, a certificate for the MalaMala Seven, and I was hugely fortunate to receive it. That's because we found the three cheetah and a pack of African wild dogs and their babies.

I first visited MalaMala, one of the oldest private reserves and the most professional, years ago with

Rod Stewart and his then girlfriend. This time, as the orange sun streaked the sky behind the thorny acacias, Gordon stopped the Land Rover and served chilled wine and snacks. We listened to the lilting sound of the wood owl and watched saddle-billed storks.

The privilege of being in a camp like this won't last, with the threat of sophisticated poaching, population expansion and drought. It's a piece of forgotten paradise and a trip of a lifetime that has forever changed my life.

◆ In last week's travel review (*Keep Calme and carry on*, p29), the text was erroneously printed out of sequence. We apologise for this error. The correct version can be viewed online at [jewishnews.co.uk](http://jewishnews.co.uk)



## SHARON'S TRAVEL TIPS



Sharon stayed at MalaMala Rattray's camp, where a luxury suite starts from £913 per person, per night, on a shared basis. Details: [malamala.com](http://malamala.com)