



BOUTIQUE SAFARI ADVENTURES

Time to soak up nature's stillness. *Private Edition* travel writers uncover three Lowveld game lodges – new, or newly refurbished – designed for the most discerning traveller.

SERENITY IN THE SABI SANDS

Tranquility. Even the word, exhaled slowly, is enough to calm frayed nerves. Tengile River Lodge – the newest offering from conservation group &Beyond in the Sabi Sands Game Reserve – delivers on this promise. ('Tengile' meaning tranquil in Tsonga.)

With just nine suites strung along a sharp bend in the Sand River, &Beyond Tengile has upped the ante when it comes to bushveld luxury.

Each opulent suite, with a private deck and pool, stretches across 200m², and although expansive bedrooms and bathrooms come standard, the real magic happens under those wide Lowveld skies.

The colours and textures of Sabi Sands are echoed in the inspired décor by designer Michele Throssell: a blend of organic African and colonial elements complemented by contemporary touches.

Slatted raw woods lends a rustic feel to the ceilings, while the textured bark of the surrounding woodland inspired the fabrics and materials flowing through the suites. Throughout the lodge, materials, furniture and décor were sourced from local designers and artisans.

'We worked hard on the concept of bringing the outside in,' explains &Beyond's chief executive officer, Joss Kent. 'We have tried to create the ultimate space where guests can feel at home and be provided with everything that they need, without having to leave their suite.'

It's certainly tempting to simply settle in for the duration. Throssell has subtly integrated the rich heritage of the region into the space. Rusted sheet metal evokes colonial vernacular architecture, while stonework from the century-old Selati Railway – which once ran through here, connecting the gold mines of Johannesburg with

the port city of Maputo in Mozambique – was used to create the terrazzo floors.

As with all &Beyond properties, sustainability and reducing the environmental impact was a key consideration in the building of &Beyond Tengile. Steel frames reduce the need for permanent foundations, wastewater is recycled for irrigation, and energy efficiency is maximised through wide eaves, covered terraces, cross-ventilation and insulation.

Beyond the lodge, the wildlife experience is simply unforgettable. The game-rich Sabi Sands is famous worldwide for its big-cat sightings, and &Beyond's highly trained guides ensure guests, local and foreign, soak up an unforgettable time out in the bush. Back at Tengile, warm hospitality is the hallmark, whether it's creating a celebratory dinner in the privacy of your suite, or shaking up your favourite cocktail at the stylish bar.

The lodge has refined the notion of ultimate bushveld luxury, all while focusing on the one element we all seek: tranquility. andbeyond.com
Richard Holmes

PRIVILEGED VIEWING

At dawn, post Lowveld thunderstorm, we stood on the broad terrace of Rattray's Camp facing the wide riverbed 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. There are never more than four in a Landie, and for two days I had Gordon to myself as we weaved through the spiky acacia and mahogany trees.

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

There's not much to touch Rattray's for game viewing, attention to detail and tasteful luxury.

'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 happen next week,' says Gordon, who has been at Mala Mala Rattray's for 11 years.

Seeing the Big Five is always a highlight but there's a special award at this camp – a certificate for the Mala Mala Seven – and I was hugely fortunate to receive it. That's because we found three cheetah and a pack of African wild dogs and their pups.

'Only five percent of our guests get the certificate. You were lucky, and have a good, positive aura,' Gordon smiled when he presented it.

The privilege of being in a camp like this is at risk, with the threat of sophisticated poaching, population expansion and drought. It's a piece of paradise and a trip of a lifetime. malamala.com
Sharon Feinstein





A SUSTAINABLE SAFARI

Jock Safari Lodge general manager Louis Strauss stood us up at breakfast. He was called to an important meeting, apparently... What could be more important than promoting your lodge to five members of the media, hungry for information to share with the public? Well, saving the life of a baby rhino, that's what. The tracking team had located her early that morning, dehydrated and disorientated. Her mother had been killed by poachers a few days earlier. The Kruger National Park helicopter crew and vets were called, and she was darted, stabilised and flown to Care for Wild rehabilitation facility.

This is what makes Jock Safari Lodge so special - its absolute commitment to conservation. The lodge is owned and managed by non-profit conservation organisation, the Caleo Foundation, and managed by Louis and Belinda Strauss, who are visibly passionate and hands-on (as we witnessed that morning at breakfast) about conserving and showcasing the land and animals, and are actively involved with numerous conservation and research projects of rare and endangered species.

Working closely with SANParks, the team at Jock Safari Lodge also focuses on protecting fragile, unique ecosystems in and around the concession. The lodge itself has been built to the most stringent eco-management criteria in South Africa.

Perfectly positioned in the southern area of the Kruger National Park, Jock Safari Lodge rests at the confluence of the Mitomeni and Biyamiti rivers. This 6 000ha exclusive concession is situated half way between Skukuza and the Malelane Gate.

The legendary wildlife experiences are enhanced by 23km of exclusive dry riverbed that only Jock guests can enjoy. The Big Five sightings of lion, leopard, black and white rhino, herds of buffalo and elephant are frequent and the birding experience exceptional.

Jock Safari Lodge offers two recently refurbished and redesigned luxury lodges. The main camp features 12 secluded thatched suites, each with a private deck, an outdoor Victorian bath and shower, as well as a plunge pool and enclosed sala (day bed) for day- or nighttime use. The Fitzpatrick Lodge, a private villa a few kilometres away from the main camp, is a perfect space for families or friends travelling together.

As is so often the case with safari holidays, the game guides can make or break the experience. Guide extraordinaire and manager of the lodge Lazarus Mkhonto filled every moment in the bush with new and rare discoveries and fascinating tidbits about the wild. There is no queueing to catch a glimpse of a leopard and no time limit on prime sightings. The pace is relaxed and so personal. jocksafarilodge.com

Catherine Davis ■