

ISSUE 3: DEC 2025 - MARCH 2026

southern africa travel



From Coast
to Coast

Green Season
Birding

PLUS

Sutherland,
beyond
the stars

*Explore the
heart of KAZA
where two rivers meet*

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WELCOME



EDITOR'S COMMENT

Welcome to the latest issue of Travel Southern Africa, where every page is an invitation to wander deeper, linger longer and reconnect with the wild, wondrous places that make this region so unforgettable.

Our feature story ventures into KAZA – the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area, a five-country wilderness safeguarding vital wildlife corridors. Here, elephants roam freely, communities and conservation thrive together, and the spirit of wild Africa beats with resilience, collaboration and a powerful sense of shared purpose.

From there, we trade savannas for shorelines in Coast to Coast, a journey along South Africa's diverse shoreline, and slip into full holiday mode with Beach Breaks, a sun-drenched collection of escapes across Mozambique, Zanzibar, Malawi and South Africa's Eastern Cape. Think salt on your skin, sunlit horizons and the gentle rhythm of coastal living – each destination offering its own flavour of barefoot bliss.

For those who delight in green season safaris, our birding feature reveals why this time of year is an absolute treasure, especially for photographers and quiet observers. And if you've ever wondered what lies beyond the telescopes, we invite you to explore Sutherland beyond the stars, where silence, science and starlight meet.

This issue also showcases soulful safaris at Hideaways Amava River Lodge and Pungwe Safari Camp – places where connection, simplicity and authenticity take centre stage. And if you desire a more adventurous safari, then Relaxation is Overrated is just for you. Threaded through it all is a strong focus on responsible tourism: travelling with intention, supporting local communities, and ensuring that the places we love remain protected for generations to come.

Wherever your next journey leads, may these pages inspire you to explore a little deeper.

Tessa

#TravelSouthernAfrica

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COVER

Cover pic - Elephants on the Chobe River
credit: Johan Enslin
Go Gravel Photo Safaris

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We welcome editorial and photographic submissions to the magazine.

Accompanying images should be sent in high-res.jpg and minimum 3MB in size.

Please send a synopsis of the proposed article to
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for consideration.

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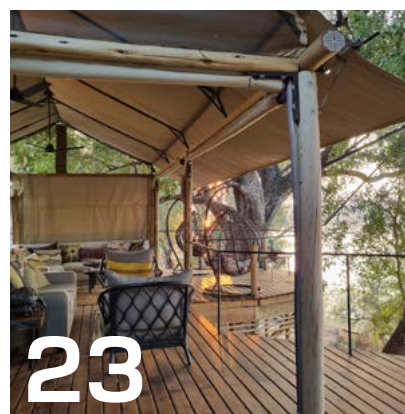
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Southern Sun

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With 25+ years in travel and a deep love for Africa, Claire promotes sustainable hotels and safari lodges through her PR business, Umlingo. Based in the UK, she works with the trade partners, tourist boards, and airlines – and occasionally writes about her travels. Pg 28



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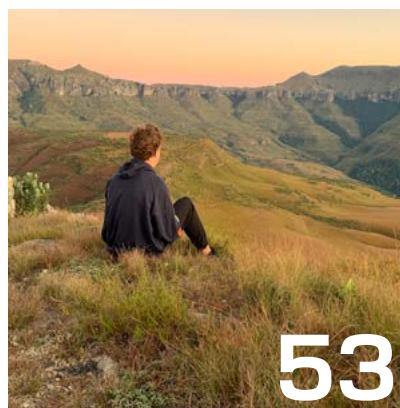
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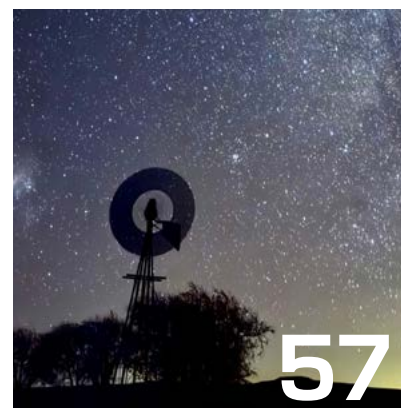
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SUE SEGER

Sue is a veteran journalist and communications strategist who has covered South African politics across the Mandela, Mbeki and Zuma eras. A former Natal Witness correspondent and Noseweek journalist, she now freelances as a writer, editor, rapporteur and passionate traveller.
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SHARON WAUGH

Sharon is a former cruise ship entertainment host turned travel writer and blogger (of The Sharonicles), based in Cape Town. After visiting 58 countries, she is passionate about the life-changing magic of travel and inspiring others through storytelling to embark on their own adventures.
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EXPLORE SOUTHERN AFRICA & THE SADC REGION



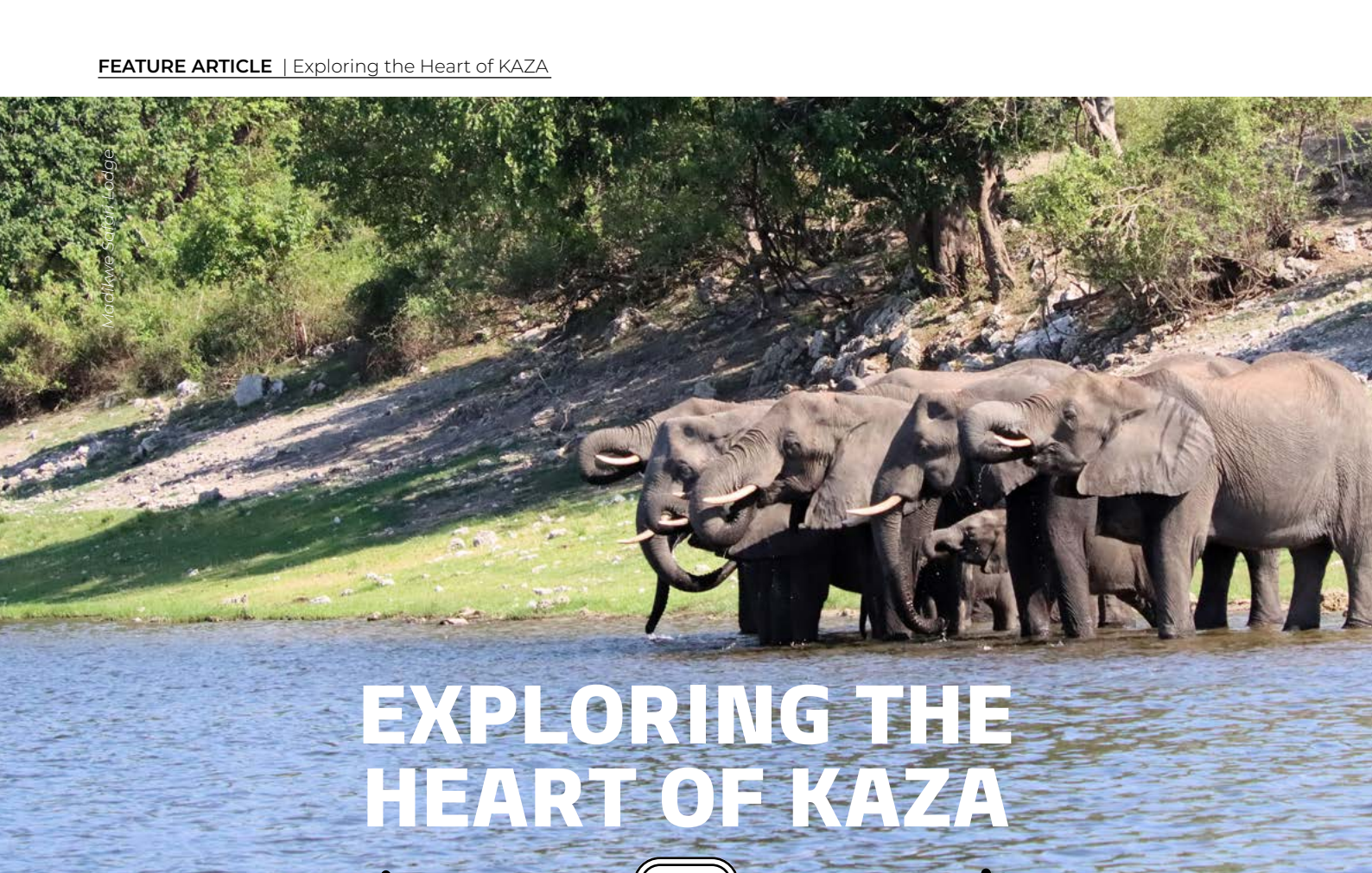
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**Your Next Stop,
Paradise**



EXPLORING THE HEART OF KAZA

WHERE TWO RIVERS MEET

Words & Pics **Tessa Buhrmann**



In this wild corner of southern Africa, where four countries meet and two great rivers flow, the rhythm of life moves to the steady pulse of water. The Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA) is not a single place, but a living landscape – five countries bound together by rivers, wildlife, and shared purpose. And at its heart, the Chobe and Zambezi Rivers tell a story of connection, resilience, and wonder.



Chobe Game Lodge |

These two rivers – mighty in scale, generous in spirit – carve through Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, shaping ecosystems, nourishing communities, and inviting travellers into a world where adventure meets authenticity. It's a place that feels both vast and intimate, where borders blur and elephants cross as freely as the wind.

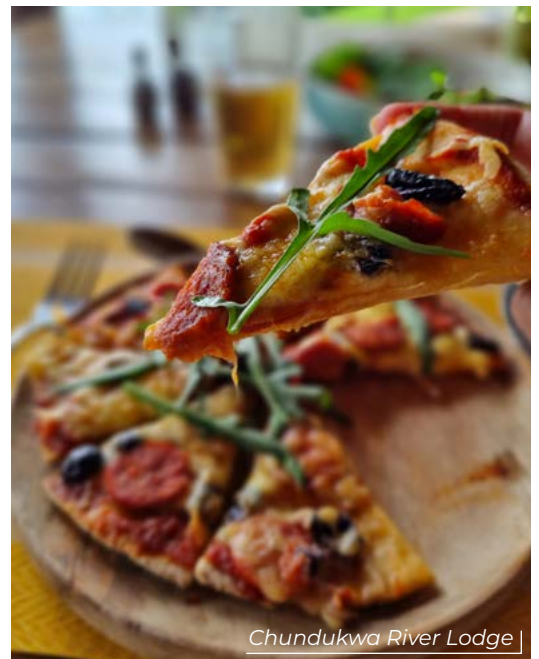
The Chobe River begins its journey in Angola and flows along the northern edge of Botswana, forming a natural border with Namibia's Zambezi Region (formerly the Caprivi Strip). Its wide floodplains and riverine forests teem with life – elephants by the hundred, buffalo herds and fish eagles calling from tall jackalberry trees.

The river's moods change with the seasons. In the dry months, it draws wildlife in droves; in the rainy season, its banks swell and shimmer, feeding the land with life. It's here, along these fertile floodplains, that you'll find some of Africa's most memorable safaris – by vehicle, by boat, and even by silent, solar-powered cruises that drift quietly among hippos and crocs.

Further downstream, the Chobe merges with the Zambezi River near the border town of Kazungula, famously known as the African Quadripoint – the only place on Earth where four countries meet. From the sleek lines of the Kazungula Bridge, you can gaze across Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe in one breathtaking sweep.

Below this confluence, the Zambezi grows wide and majestic, flowing past sandbanks and wooded islands before gathering pace toward one of nature's greatest spectacles – the Victoria Falls, or Mosi-oa-Tunya, "The Smoke that Thunders." When the Zambezi is in full flood, its roar can be heard for miles, the spray rising like misty curtains over the rainforest.

In the rainy season, the Zambezi's abundance causes a curious natural phenomenon – the backflow of the Chobe River. Floodwaters surge upstream, reversing its direction until the levels equalise once more. It's a powerful reminder that these rivers are alive – shifting, breathing, forever intertwined.



Chundukwa River Lodge |



Rock Pratincole - Ichingo River Lodge |



Chobe River sunrise



And Beyond Chobe Under Canvas

Botswana – Where Elephants Roam

There are few sights as moving as watching elephants cross the Chobe River at dusk. The setting sun paints the water in liquid gold as herds wade through the shallows, trunks raised, calves huddled close.

A boat cruise on the Chobe River is an essential experience – whether aboard one of the larger safari boats or a private launch from your lodge. It's relaxed, unhurried, and perfect for photographers. Birdlife here is astonishing – African skimmers, kingfishers, bee-eaters – and the sunsets, as any local will tell you, are legendary.

For something quieter and more sustainable, opt for a silent electric safari with Chobe Game Lodge. The hum of engines gives way to the whispers of the bush – the rustle of grass, the call of a hornbill, the low rumble of elephants in the distance.

If you want to truly immerse yourself, spend a night sleeping under canvas in the wild. With only the thin wall of your tent separating you from the wilderness, it's both humbling and exhilarating. And for photography lovers, there's nothing quite like a Pangolin Photo Safari – revolving camera mounts, expert guidance, and the ever-changing theatre of life on the river.

Namibia – River Life and Quiet Moments

Across the water, Namibia's Zambezi Region feels wonderfully unhurried. Lodges like Ichingo Chobe River Lodge and Serondela Lodge offer intimate escapes on the river's edge, where mornings begin with bird calls and coffee on your deck, and evenings fade into starlight.

A birding boat cruise is pure joy here – the Kasai Channel alive with jacanas, kingfishers, pratincoles, and storks – and during the dry season, African skimmers. If you're lucky, you might spot a pair of white-backed night herons tucked into the reeds.

Take the time to connect with local communities too. Whether chatting with your Namibian guide or visiting a nearby village, you'll gain a deeper understanding of life along the river – the fishing traditions, the resilience, and the warmth of the people who call this region home.

Zambia – Community, Creativity and the Spirit of the Zambezi

Across the bridge in Zambia, the Zambezi slows again, winding gently past villages, forests, and lodges perched above its banks. Here, life feels grounded and generous – a blend of river rhythms, creativity, and community.

At Waterberry Lodge, guests are invited to visit the Tukongote Community Projects, an inspiring example of tourism in action. What began as a preschool has blossomed into a thriving education hub with classrooms, a library, computer lab, adult learning centre, and even a thriving farm – a place of hope and opportunity, powered by passion.

Nearby, Chundukwa River Lodge is a celebration of farm-to-table living. Meals are as colourful as the gardens they come from – fresh, local, beautifully plated. The lodge also offers horseback safaris along the river, where you might ride through open woodlands and finish with a riverside picnic, the Zambezi shimmering in the background.

Join Jollyboys Backpackers on a relaxed and insightful Livingstone town tour, where local guides share the town's fascinating history, vibrant markets, colonial landmarks, and community projects. It's a wonderful way to experience the authentic rhythm of daily life in Zambia's adventure capital – with plenty of local flavour and friendly smiles along the way.

And for a touch of romance, there's The Royal Livingstone Express – a beautifully restored vintage train that rumbles through the bush to the Victoria Falls Bridge. Dinner is served on crisp linen as the sun dips low and the river roars far below – an experience that lingers long after the journey ends.

Zimbabwe – Adventures by Land, Water and Air

On the Zimbabwean side, the Zambezi continues to impress. At Old Drift

Lodge, elephants are regular visitors – often pausing to drink from your private plunge pool as if they own the place (which, truth be told, they do). A sundowner cruise from nearby Tsowa Safari Island is the perfect way to round off the day – G&T in hand, watching the sky shift from fiery orange to deep indigo. Or join The Victorian Safari Company for a classic brunch safari in Zambezi National Park, complete with Persian rugs, folding chairs, and bubbles on ice beside the river.

The Victoria Falls dining scene is every bit as captivating. At Dusty Road, a soulful restaurant in the heart of Chinotimba Township, you'll savour authentic Zimbabwean dishes served with warmth and flair – from peanut-spiced greens to tender grilled meats – all in a vibrant, art-filled space that celebrates local creativity and community. Then there's The Boma at Victoria Falls Safari Lodge – a festive feast of African flavours and live entertainment, where drumming, dancing, and storytelling turn dinner into an unforgettable evening beneath the stars.

To step back in time, hop aboard the Bamba Tram for a scenic ride through Zambezi National Park to the historic Victoria Falls Bridge. Stroll across to the Zambian side and take in the sweeping views as your guide shares stories of the bridge's construction and the early explorers who first mapped this wild region.

And, of course, no visit is complete without standing in the spray of Victoria Falls itself. The experience is pure sensory magic – the thunderous roar, the cool mist, and the ever-present rainbows. For a truly unforgettable

perspective, take to the skies on a Flight of Angels helicopter ride and watch the mighty Zambezi curve and tumble into the gorge below – one of those rare moments that stays with you forever.

The Heartbeat of Africa

What makes KAZA so extraordinary isn't just its scale – though it is vast, spanning over 500,000 square kilometres – it's the way everything here connects. Rivers feed wetlands, wildlife crosses borders, and people share stories that flow like the rivers, carrying history and hope.

To travel through this region is to witness Africa at its most elemental – wild, generous, and deeply alive. Whether you come for the elephants, the culture, the adventure, or simply to feel the rhythm of the rivers, you'll find yourself drawn into a story much larger than your own.

Because here, along the Chobe and the Zambezi, life flows – endlessly, beautifully – from one country to the next.



Getting drenched Victoria Falls



Chobe River Boat Cruise - pic Ryan Enslin

Seven Must-Do Experiences in the KAZA Region

- ☐ Cruise the Chobe River at sunset
- ☐ Take a silent electric safari
- ☐ Drift through Namibia's Kasai Channel
- ☐ Visit a Community Project
- ☐ Ride along the Zambezi on horseback
- ☐ Toast the sunset in style
- ☐ Feel the thunder of Victoria Falls

essentials:

Where to Stay

Botswana

Chobe Game Lodge – <https://www.chobegamelodge.com/>
 Chobe Safari Lodge – <https://www.chobesafarilodge.com/>
 AndBeyond Under Canvas – <https://www.andbeyond.com/lodge-editorial/chobe-under-canvas/>

Namibia

Ichingo Chobe River Lodge by Mantis - <https://ichingochoberiverlodge.com/>
 Serondela Lodge – <https://www.serondelalodge.com/>

Zambia

Jollyboys Backpackers - <https://backpackzambia.com/>
 Waterberry Zambezi Lodge – <https://www.waterberrylodge.com/>
 Chundukwa River Lodge – <https://www.chundukwariverlodge.com/>

Zimbabwe

Old Drift Lodge - <https://wildhorizons.co.za/old-drift-lodge/>
 Tsowa Safari Island - <https://www.tsowasafariisland.co.za/>
 Victoria Falls Safari Lodge - <https://victoria-falls-safari-lodge.com/>
 Shongwe Oasis - <https://shongwe-oasis.com/>

For more details
on the KAZA
region – check
out Africa's Eden
Tourism -



<https://africaseden.travel/>

Experiences

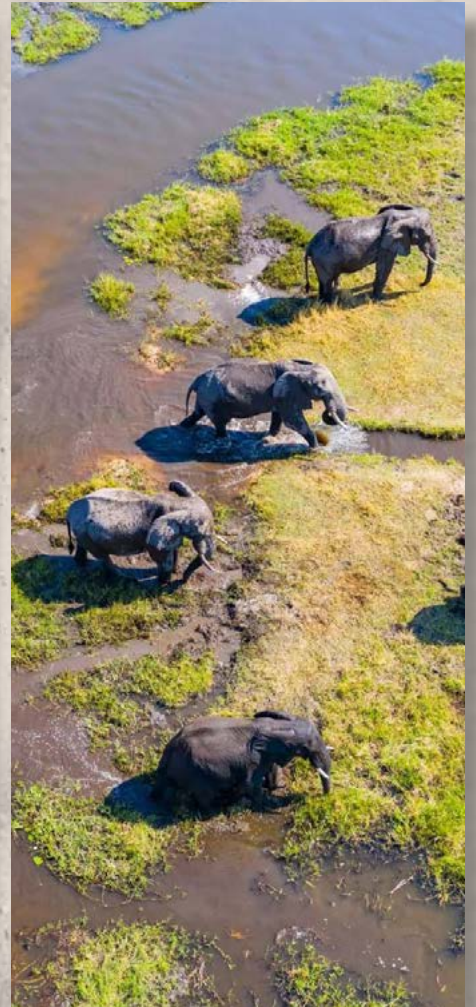
Pangolin Photo Safari - <https://www.pangolinphoto.com/>
 Bamba Tram – <https://bambavictoriafalls.com/>
 Flight of Angels - <https://zambezihelicopters.com/flight-of-angels/>

Dining

Royal Livingstone Express – <https://www.anantara.com/en/royal-livingstone/offers/royal-livingstone-express>
 Dusty Road – <https://www.dustyroad.africa/>
 The Boma - <https://theboma.co.zw/>

TRAVEL LEISURE

ZAMBIA, ZIMBABWE & BOTSWANA



Travel & Leisure Zambia, Zimbabwe & Botswana is a triannual international magazine that showcases the tourism offerings of these three remarkable countries in a balanced and authentic way.

While the content is thoughtfully curated, it remains true to the essence of each experience – offering readers a genuine glimpse into what travel in the region really feels like. The magazine also features real-life stories from fellow travellers, making it the perfect source of inspiration for your next adventure.



www.zambiatravelmagazine.com



SOUTH AFRICA

THE POWER OF CONNECTION

Words **Tessa Buhrmann**

Pics **Sourced**

Clodagh De Gaijao - unsplash



In a world that thrives on connection, South Africa stands as a destination where business meets experience. From bustling Johannesburg to coastal Cape Town and warm Durban, the country is redefining Africa's meetings and exhibitions landscape.

"South Africa is more than a venue. It's an experience that stays with delegates long after the conference ends."

South African Tourism



The global opportunity

The global MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences & Exhibitions) market was valued at an estimated US \$345.8 billion in 2021, with growth forecasts pointing toward an industry worth US \$2.1 trillion by 2031. These projections were highlighted by South Africa's Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille during Meetings Africa 2024. At the same time she reiterated that Africa's business events segment is seeing significant momentum – one estimate places it at roughly US \$12.7 billion (R240bn) in 2023, of which South Africa is already contributing around US \$6.4-6.6 billion.

Put simply: buyers and exhibitors are actively looking for new venues; destinations that combine good infrastructure, accessibility and a value-plus leisure offer are winning. South Africa has everything to play for.

South Africa's rising profile

South Africa has long held the #1 spot on the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) rankings, and the 2024 statistics reaffirm this position. Once again recognised as the top meetings and conference destination in Africa and the Middle East, the country hosted 98 international association meetings in 2023 under ICCA criteria.

Major business-events trade shows such as Meetings Africa – held annually in Johannesburg – delivered a total economic contribution of R 388.5 million in 2023 and R 420 million in 2024. Such performance both underscores South Africa's credentials and signals upward potential for organisers seeking fresh destinations.

Key city hubs & sectors

South Africa's business events landscape benefits from multiple destination-clusters that combine strong infrastructure, accommodation depth and leisure add-ons. Below are three of the standout hubs:

Johannesburg / Gauteng

As the country's economic engine, Johannesburg delivers high-end venues, excellent connectivity and a pulse of business energy. The Sandton Convention Centre and other venues in the vicinity are central to the business events ecosystem.

For exhibitions aligned to finance, technology, mining, pharmaceuticals and corporate services, Johannesburg offers deep local industry sectors, international flight connectivity and strong hotel room inventory.



Cape Town / Western Cape

The Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC), which has hosted nearly 9 500 events over its lifetime, including 738 international association conferences, is one of several large venues capable of hosting in excess of 1000 delegates. The Western Cape Convention Bureau notes that key economic sectors targeted for exhibitions include: agri-processing,

energy & renewables, ICT/manufacturing, health & pharmaceuticals and tourism infrastructure.

For exhibition organisers looking to combine business event delivery with unforgettable leisure stays, Cape Town offers the ideal mix of business infrastructure and holiday-destination wizardry (Table Mountain, wine routes, beaches).



Durban / KwaZulu-Natal

The multi-award winning Durban ICC has been named Africa's Leading Meetings & Conference Centre an incredible 20 times at the World Travel Awards and ranks among the world's Top 17 convention centres by the AIPC – two decades of setting the global gold standard, right in the heart of Durban. The Durban ICC complex includes Africa's largest flat-floor, column-free exhibition space and is adjacent to hotel inventory and a coastal destination that lends to after-hours leisure.

Durban is particularly strong for events in sectors such as maritime, logistics, manufacturing, trade shows for commodities and African-facing consumer/industry exhibitions.

Sector-led exhibition opportunities

With the above hubs established, exhibition organisers can align with sectors where South Africa offers strength, credibility and regional reach:

- **Energy & Renewables:** South Africa is a regional focal point for energy transition initiatives; Cape Town hosts major shows in this space.
- **ICT / Tech:** Exhibitions that bring together tech innovation, start-ups, digital services find in Cape Town (and Johannesburg) a vibrant ecosystem.
- **Agri-processing / Food & Beverage:** Cape Town has an established F&B trade-show track record and a globally recognised wine, agrifood and value-chain cluster.
- **Manufacturing / Mining / Industrial:** Johannesburg and the broader Gauteng region remain the nerve-centre for heavy industry trade exhibitions.
- **Health & Pharmaceuticals / Life Sciences:** The CTICC noted a rise in medical-themed international conferences (32.6 % of international events in one year) which signals capacity in that sector.
- **Tourism / Travel & Hospitality:** South Africa itself is a travel destination, so exhibitions in this space (including inbound-tourism trade shows) benefit from strong alignment with brand positioning.

Leisure-tourism spin-off: Why this matters

Business events don't just fill a conference hall – they bring high-value visitors who stay in hotels, dine in restaurants, hire transport, visit local attractions and often extend their stay into leisure time.

South Africa offers an exceptional breadth of experiences within one destination. World-class safari regions, renowned wine routes, and vibrant cultural centres provide strong incentives for pre- and post-conference travel, while more than 3,000 kilometres of coastline offer everything from rugged wilderness to tropical beach escapes. Few countries combine such diversity and accessibility, making South Africa an outstanding choice for business events with added travel appeal.

In South Africa's case:

- International delegates bring global visibility and are likely to extend their stay into domestic holiday time (or return with family/friends), so the destination benefits twice. Indeed, a key comment in the industry is that "business travellers often extend their stays to explore the destination or return with family and friends."



<https://visitdurban.travel/>

- Exhibitions and conferences drive hotel occupancy outside traditional holiday peaks. This can help smooth seasonality and stabilise tourism revenue.
- They generate demand for local suppliers, transport, restaurants, culture and sightseeing – spreading economic benefit beyond the venue itself into the wider tourism ecosystem. For example, Meetings Africa 2023 created or maintained 770 jobs across direct, indirect and induced categories.
- From the delegate's perspective, mixing business with the incentive/holiday option is a compelling proposition – South Africa's combination of wildlife and safari, vineyards, beaches and culture sets it apart from many standard business-event destinations.

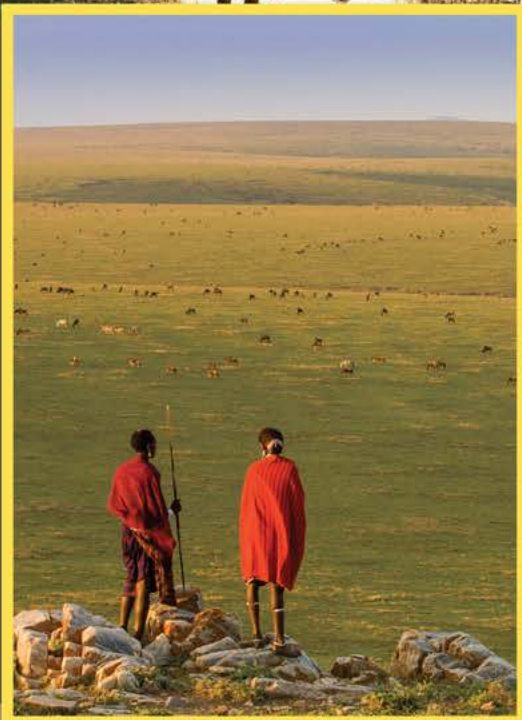
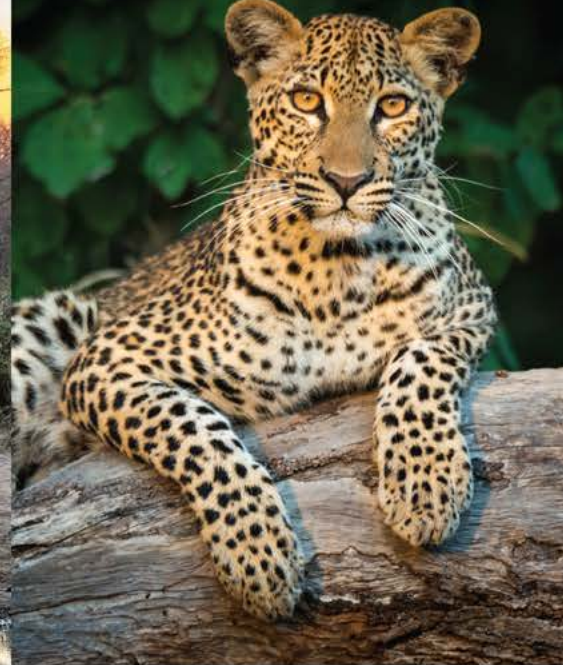
When the meetings end, the memories begin. Extend your delegates' experience into a journey through South Africa's extraordinary landscapes and cultures.

For exhibitors, trade-show organisers and association planners seeking a destination that offers professional business-event infrastructure and an unforgettable destination for delegates, South Africa ticks the box. Whether you're hosting a technology expo in Cape Town, an industrial trade show in Johannesburg, or a maritime/logistics exhibition in Durban, you'll benefit from high-quality venues, strong business-event credentials, and the added value of leisure-destination appeal. South Africa is not just somewhere to hold an event – it's somewhere that will leave a legacy.

Plan your next exhibition or conference at
www.southafrica.net/business-events
#MeetSouthAfrica | #InspiringNewWays

WHY CHOOSE SOUTH AFRICA?

- **World-class venues:** The CTICC, Durban ICC, Sandton Convention Centre and others offer cutting-edge infrastructure, exhibition hall flexibility, connectivity and hybrid-event readiness.
- **Connectivity & access:** Major cities are internationally connected and combined with strong accommodation ecosystems, are well positioned to host large delegates and exhibitors.
- **Value proposition:** Relative to many global cities, South Africa offers strong value in terms of accommodation, F&B and event-services cost, which is attractive to organisers conscious of ROI.
- **Leisure infrastructure:** Less travel required to turn a conference into an experience – from Big Five safari to Cape Town's beaches, Durban's coastline or Joburg's urban culture.
- **Supportive business-events ecosystem:** The South African National Convention Bureau (SANCB) and provincial convention bureaux actively bid for, support and enhance business-events delivery in South Africa. For example: since April 2024 the SANCB submitted 81 bids and has secured 53 international business events for 2024-29, bringing an estimated R 617 million and over 24 000 delegates.



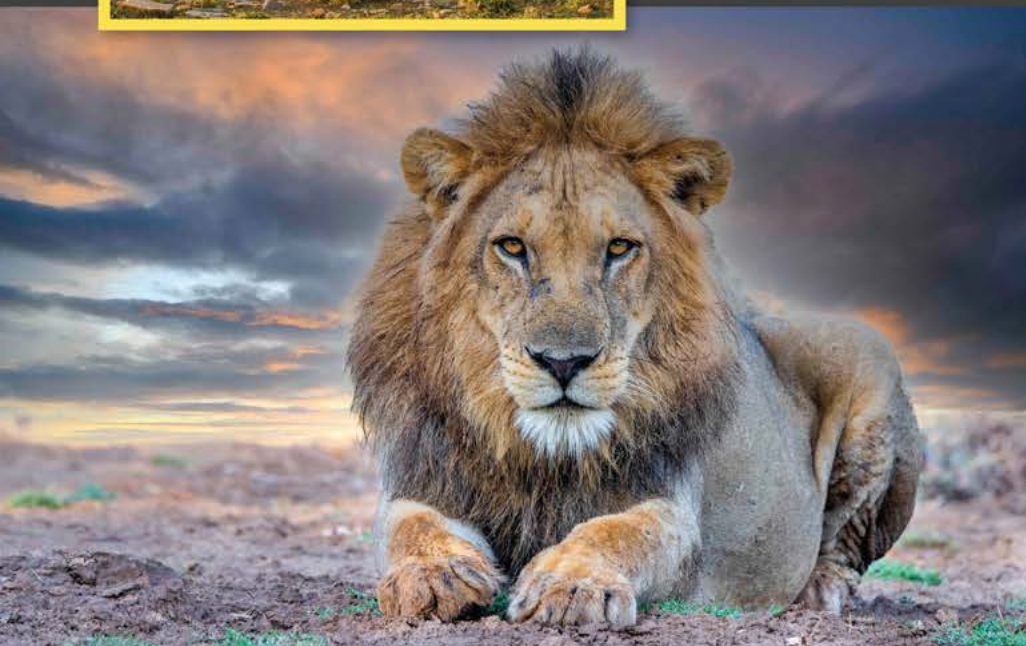
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**DAVID
ROGERS**

TRAVEL

“ It was a fantastic trip, and everything worked like clockwork. So, excellent all around. Amazing animals, great staff and the three camps were each nice with random surprises which were fun. The hot air balloon was also very cool, and a perfect change of pace. We look forward to our next African adventure. ” MARC TARPENNING (USA)



MADAGASCAR

A FAMILY ADVENTURE LIKE NO OTHER



Words **Garth Jenman**
Pics **Jenman African Safaris**



Coquerel's Sifaka Lemur -
Andasibe National Park

Our recent family trip to Madagascar was an incredible expedition into a unique and unexpected medley of sights and sounds, cultures and histories. Our family of four travelled with two other families – one of four and one of five – a lively mix of ages ranging from nine to fifty-six. There were magical moments for each of us, and shared memories that will no doubt become part of our collective family story.

Coming from South Africa and having travelled extensively through many African countries, we had expected something of an “extension” of Africa – interesting wildlife, similar terrain, flora, foods and crafts. What we discovered instead was an experience unlike anything we have had before on the African continent. An island that feels at once ancient and otherworldly, offering a unique blend of nature and culture. A destination that is unhurried, surprising, and filled with quiet wonder.

After landing in the capital, Antananarivo, we spent our first night at the quaint and centrally located Hotel Nosy Manga. With its warm hospitality and homely atmosphere, it was the perfect soft landing before our early start the next morning.

Our journey eastward to Andasibe took us through rolling countryside dotted with rice paddies, cascading waterfalls, forest stations and small rural villages where children waved as we passed.

We stopped at the Exotic Park in Marozevo (locally known as Peyrieras Reserve, founded by French entomologist André Peyriéra). A must for anyone fascinated by Madagascar's extraordinary biodiversity. Here, we saw iridescent chameleons, jewel-toned frogs no bigger than a fingernail, and



a variety of snakes and lizards found nowhere else on earth. We took sooooo many photos here! The Reserve is far more than just a tourist site – it's an important centre for breeding and protecting Madagascar's more vulnerable species. With its strong focus on education, it offers a fascinating and accessible introduction to the island's extraordinary wildlife before visitors' head deeper into the nearby forests.

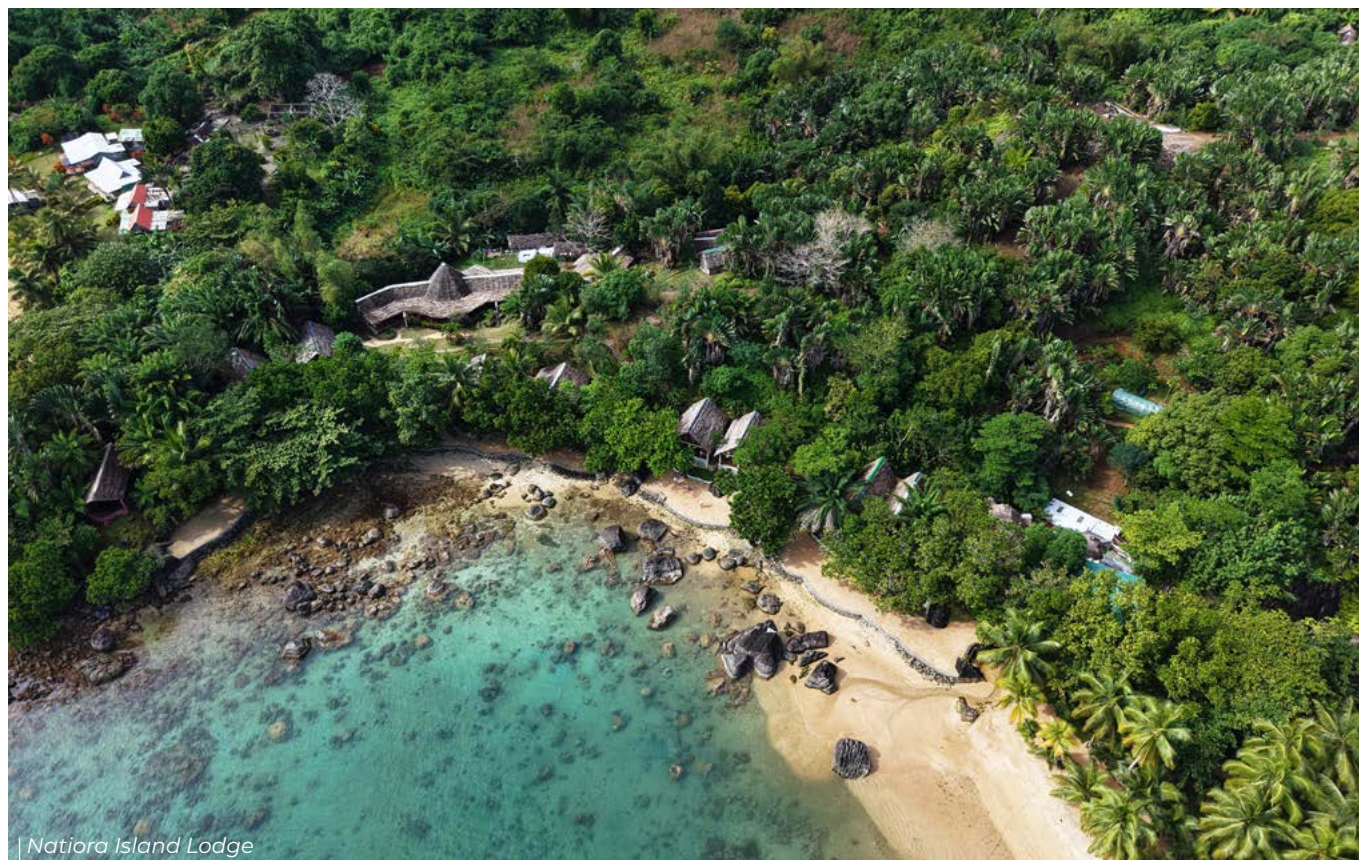
That afternoon, we set out on a three-hour guided walk through the lush evergreen forest of Analamazaotra Reserve (located alongside Andasibe-

Mantadia National Park). The call of the indri, the largest of all lemurs, echoed through the trees, and when we finally spotted them high in the canopy, it was incredible, a true privilege. Their expressive faces and human-like gestures were captivating, and our guide explained that understanding their courtship dances and social behaviours is vital to conservation efforts.

Our two nights at Relais de Mantadia were filled with good food, laughter, and the sounds of the forest at night.

Leaving Andasibe, we drove through the countryside to Manambato, once





| Natiara Island Lodge



a bustling holiday resort on the shores of Lake Rasoabe. From here, a covered motorboat transferred us along the legendary Pangalanes Canal to our next stop. This route, said to be the second longest canal in the world, is a continuous waterway of about 645 km in length, which leads from Tamatave, the northernmost end point, to the village of Farafangana in the south, running parallel to the Indian Ocean. There are so many aspects of life to see along the banks, unique to the people and culture of Madagascar – from women washing clothes in the shallows, to children paddling narrow wooden pirogues.

Our destination was Akanin'ny Nofy,

meaning “Nest of Dreams”, on the shores of Lake Ampitabe – a fitting name for such an idyllic setting.

We stayed at Palmarium Beach Lodge, nestled amid palms and sand, with lake views so tranquil they seemed painted. The nearby Palmarium Reserve was an absolute highlight. Here, we were able to observe a variety of lemurs up close, from playful black-and-white ruffed lemurs, inquisitive crowned lemurs, and the gentle, wide-eyed sifakas leaping gracefully between trees.

That evening, we set out on a nocturnal walk in search of the elusive aye-aye, Madagascar's strangest and most endangered lemur, which have been introduced to the island and are looked after, fed and guarded around the clock. With their spindly fingers and curious faces, they looked almost mythical. Watching them gnaw open coconuts in the still darkness was an unforgettable experience – the sounds of crunching husks amplified in the darkness, creating a sense of stillness in time.

From Akanin'ny Nofy, we continued to Toamasina (Tamatave), where we stayed at Hotel Beach 501, one of the best-known accommodations on the east coast of Madagascar. The following day we boarded a small charter flight north to Ile Sainte Marie, then took a short boat transfer across glassy turquoise waters to Ile Aux Nattes, a tiny island just off its southern tip.

Staying at the delightful island resort of Sambatra Beach Lodge, we enjoyed the white sandy beaches, swaying coconut palm trees, and crystal-clear ocean waters. Known for its scenic beauty and remote serenity, our three families found plenty to do – from swimming, paddling, and exploratory hiking, to leisurely reading and relaxing along the quiet and shady beaches. This was a kind of heaven like no other!

Evenings brought everyone together at the beach bar – parents sharing travel tales while the teenagers enjoyed the evening chatter around the bar. The staff welcomed us with warmth and easy smiles; their joy and pride in their island were infectious.

After three blissful nights, we moved on to the main island of Ile Sainte Marie, a long, slender stretch of tropical beauty fringed by lagoons and coral reefs. Once a haven for pirates, the island has a colourful history and a fascinating cultural blend of Malagasy, Creole, and European influences.

We split our group between two exquisite lodges, Natiara and Samaria, each perched above their own picture-perfect coves. At Natiara, we had access to stand-up paddle boards and canoes

and experienced some of the best snorkelling one could imagine while exploring the open waters.

While staying at Natiora, we learned about inspiring local conservation initiatives shaping the island's future. The Tsara Kobaby project, which is working to create a vast terrestrial and marine protected area around Sainte-Marie. Through community patrols, forest monitoring, and training in sustainable livelihoods, the project is helping to weave conservation into everyday island life. Equally impressive is Projet Récif Île Sainte-Marie, which monitors coral reefs and marine ecosystems using globally recognised scientific methods.

Knowing that both land and sea are being carefully protected added a deep sense of appreciation to our time here – a reminder that this island paradise is also a living, breathing conservation story.

For our final stop, we rented two self-catering beach houses on the island's quieter east coast to give us a completely different experience of Ile Sainte Marie. We hired scooters to explore the island, which was a highlight for the teenagers, who relished the freedom of exploring independently without the adults! Daily explorations included setting off along good, quiet roads to find hidden beaches and small villages.

We shopped for fresh local produce – fragrant vanilla, bright limes, coconuts, and just-caught fish – and cooked our meals together, often dining outdoors



under a canopy of stars. We swam, snorkelled, browsed for souvenirs, and bought beautifully woven baskets and locally made crafts that now fill our homes with happy reminders of our time there. One evening, we celebrated a birthday at A-Varangue, a charming restaurant overlooking the sea. Its laid-back atmosphere, excellent food, and friendly service made for a perfect farewell dinner.

We loved the island's 'old-school' charm and relaxed local vibe, we weren't treated as intruders or outsiders, and we were never harassed by anyone. We were welcomed everywhere we went, and we all felt completely safe in our surroundings, even when riding or walking at night.

Our final day took us back to Antananarivo, where we returned to Hotel Nosy Manga for one last night. We shopped at the local craft market before leaving, making sure to spend the last of our Malagasy Ariary on locally made goods – hand-made jewellery, crafts, and specialty items, such as cinnamon and vanilla.

As we boarded our flight home, there was a collective sigh – that bittersweet blend of gratitude and reluctance that comes at the end of a truly special journey. We all agreed this was one of our best family holidays, and worthy of another visit in the not-too-distant future.



Ring-tailed Lemur - Andasibe National Park



Amava River Lodge

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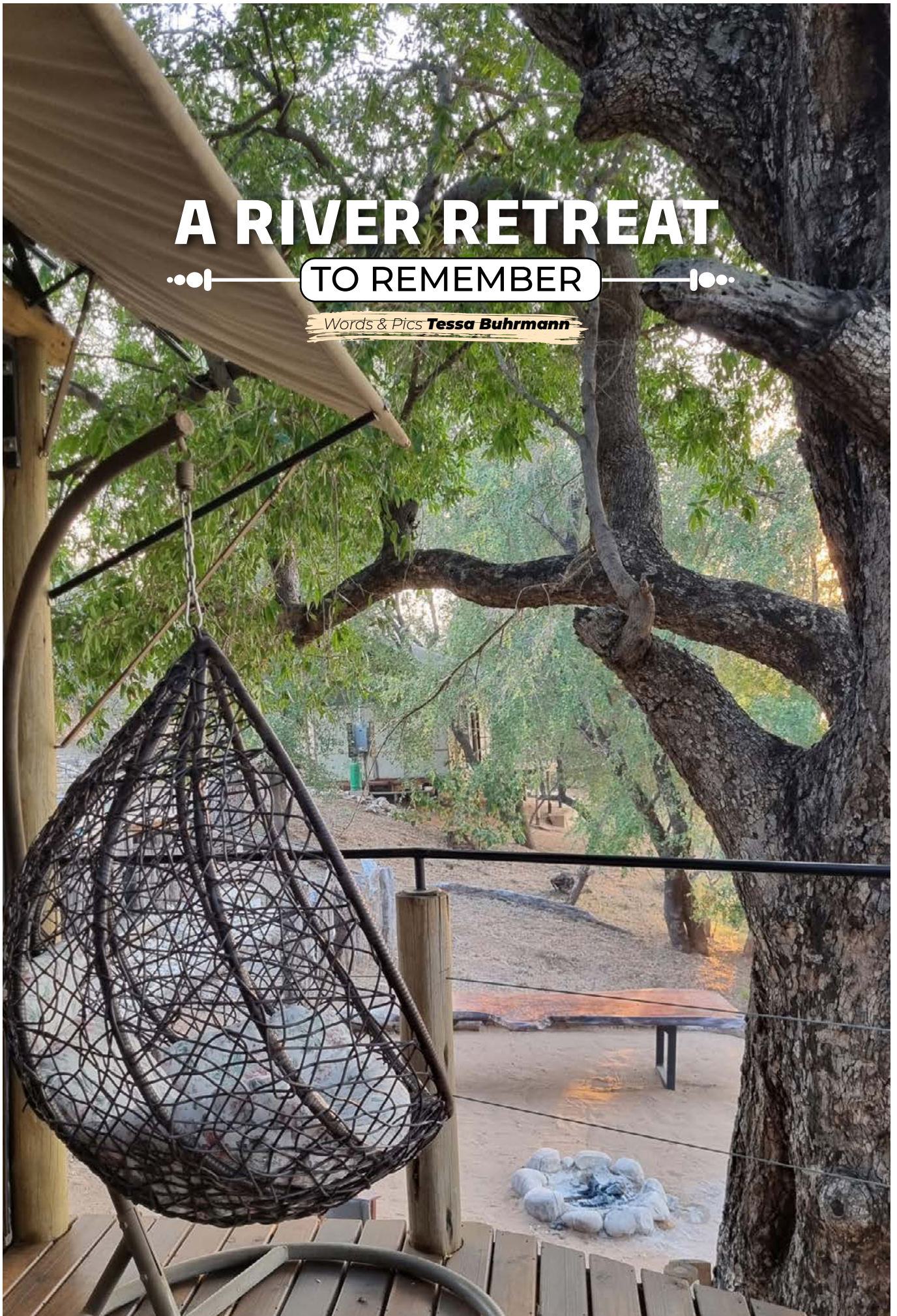
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A RIVER RETREAT

TO REMEMBER

Words & Pics **Tessa Buhrmann**





There's something about a river that changes the pace of a safari. It slows the rhythm, softens the edges, and invites you to linger a little longer.

At Hideaways Amava River Lodge, perched alongside the Olifants River in the Balule Private Game Reserve, I find myself doing exactly that – lingering on the deck, coffee in hand, wondering whether it might be worth skipping a game drive or two. That view is persuasive. But then again, so is the wild beyond it.



From the moment we arrive, the river becomes central to our stay. The water shimmers through the trees, shifting from soft morning gold to deep afternoon greens, always alive, always offering something to see. Elephants are constant companions, wading and drinking in great, relaxed herds. Giraffes amble beneath the trees across the river, impala flicker in and out of view, and Nile crocodiles – some impressively large – rest on the sun-warmed sandbanks. The birdlife astonishes, an abundance of waterbirds, including a Goliath Heron sharing the sandbank with a crocodile, and a rolling chorus of calls that becomes the soundtrack to our stay. And then there is the leopard.

We've just settled onto the deck when a troop of baboons erupts into frantic alarm calls. Scanning the opposite bank, we are rewarded with that unmistakable silhouette – a leopard walking along the riverbank with cool indifference. A sighting from the comfort of a lodge deck feels like the ultimate safari luxury.

Still, Amava River Lodge has a way of reminding you that the bush is best experienced from every angle. And so, despite the temptation of riverside

idleness, we climb into the safari vehicle for morning and afternoon drives. Early mornings bring that essential first coffee stop in the bush – steam rising into crisp air, the sun edging over the horizon. The Balule landscape unfolds before us: groves of mopane glow amber in the afternoon light, creating a haven for majestic kudu and shy steenbok, and ancient rocky koppies catch the last of the sun, signalling that it's time for sundowners. With the quintessential G&T in hand, we watch the sky shift from apricot to indigo in slow, spectacular gradients.

One morning, though, we choose to stay behind. And I'm so glad we do. Sunrise on the Olifants is its own kind of safari – quiet, gentle, and deeply restorative.

As the first light touches the water, the bush comes alive around us. The enchanting melody of a White-browed Robin-chat fills the air, punctuated by the repetitive refrain of a pair of spurfowl. Somewhere downriver, hippos grunt in contented chorus. Sitting there with a mug of hot coffee, wrapped in birdsong and river breeze, feels like a moment made just for us.

Back at the lodge, comfort is taken seriously – beautifully so.

Amava River Lodge blends natural textures with elegant simplicity, the kind of understated luxury that never competes with the wilderness around it. The pool, tucked beneath a canopy of trees, becomes our refuge in the hot hours of the day. The bar and the ever-ready coffee and hot-chocolate station ensure there is always something delicious within reach (a dangerous convenience, as it turns out).

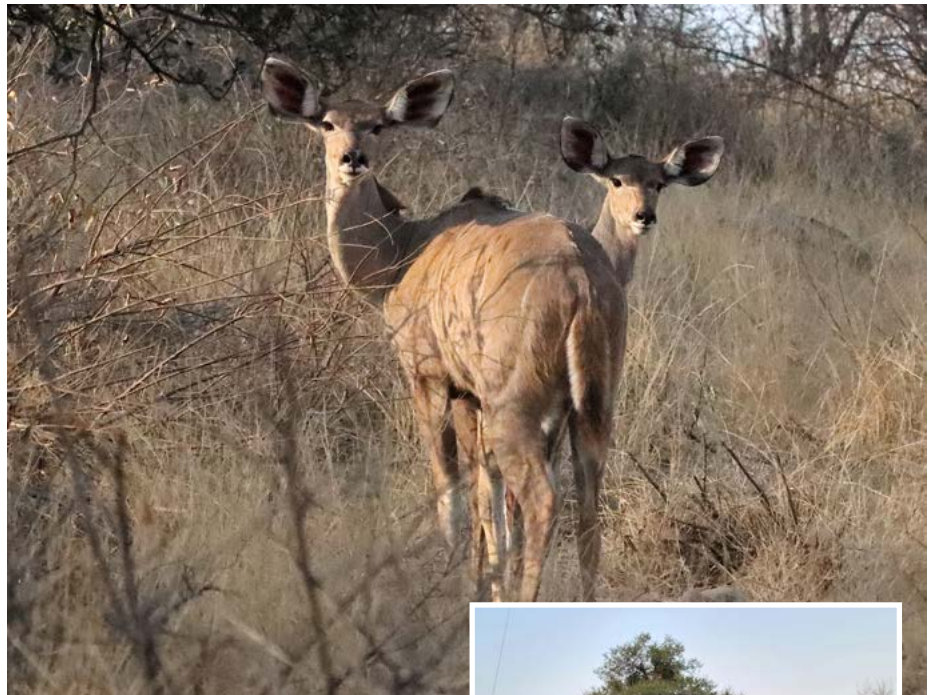
But it is the cuisine that truly surprises us. Chef Geshom creates meals that are both beautiful and nourishing – vibrant salads, flavourful mains, delicate desserts – all plated with a finesse that contrasts delightfully with the rugged landscape outside. I lose count of how many times we find ourselves saying, “We shouldn’t be this hungry,” moments before tucking into another delicious dish. Safari days have a way of working up an appetite, but even so, Amava’s culinary offering exceeds every expectation.

Our tented suite – No. 5, tucked beneath large, shady trees – feels like a gentle embrace from the bush. Spacious, stylish, and thoughtfully appointed, it strikes that perfect balance between adventure and comfort. The deck overlooking the river quickly becomes our favourite place to be. Early mornings are spent with binoculars in hand and a steaming mug of coffee close by; afternoons bring the welcome chill of something cold and refreshing; and in between are hours simply watching the river, letting the bush reveal its stories at its own unhurried pace.

*It's amazing how quickly
a place settles under
your skin.*

After just two nights, packing up feels entirely too soon. As we head toward the vehicle, the river shimmers below us one last time, elephants moving through the shallows in that slow, deliberate way that makes you forget about clocks altogether. That’s when we agree: two nights at Amava is not enough. You need three at the very least – preferably four – to sink fully into the rhythm of this river and the wilderness that surrounds it.

Leaving is harder than expected. But that, I believe, is the sign of a truly memorable safari. Amava River Lodge doesn’t just give you a place to stay – it gives you space to breathe, to watch, to reconnect with nature and with yourself. And as the Olifants River slips out of view behind us, I know this is a place we’ll return to – for longer next time, and with the same sense of wonder we feel from the very first moment.



<https://hideawaysafrica.com/accommodation/hideaways-amava-river-lodge/>

COASTAL CALM

& ISLAND MAGIC



Bawe Island, Zanzibar

Looking for the ultimate summer reset? Think wild beaches, private islands and warm waters that melt the stress right off your shoulders. From Mozambique's Anvil Bay to Zanzibar's Bawe Island and Malawi's Blue Zebra retreat, these are the beach breaks that deliver sunshine, solitude and serious barefoot bliss.



A Barefoot Paradise on the Beach at Anvil Bay Chemucane - Mozambique

Words & Pics **Tessa Buhrmann**

Mine are the only footsteps along this stretch of beach at Anvil Bay. The sun warms my bare shoulders and my toes revel in the fine white sand. It was here, on this secluded shoreline in Mozambique, that the late Paul Bell once dreamed of creating a community-run beach camp on the spot where his family had camped for more than half a century.



That dream became reality when the Mozambique Government granted the Chemucane Community an ecotourism concession in the Maputo Special Reserve. A joint venture was formed between the community and the Bell Foundation, and with support from the World Bank and the Bell and Ford Foundations, Anvil Bay took shape. The project sourced local materials and services, transferred new skills, created jobs, and today ensures that the community shares in profits while concession fees support conservation across the reserve.

Anvil Bay is still the epitome of low-impact luxury: miles of untouched beach fringed by coastal forest, with lakes, wetlands and grasslands stretching beyond the dunes.

Getting there is part of the adventure – ours more dramatic than necessary – but even arriving after dark, we were met with warmth, fresh sashimi and chilled chardonnay.

A short stroll along the beach led us to our casinha, tucked into the coastal forest canopy. This thatch-and-canvas retreat, crafted entirely by local artisans, features simple, elegant furniture built on-site and a king-size bed draped in soft netting. Each *casinha* has a private deck, shower, minibar, plug points and luxurious linen. You'd never guess you're in a tent; with the canvas sides rolled up, you appear suspended among the trees – none of which was removed during construction. The soundtrack of rolling waves a constant refrain.

I rose early to birdsong and soft morning light. Pink ghost crabs scattered as I reached the shoreline just in time for sunrise. The ocean shifted from blush to amber as plovers dashed in and out of the surf in pursuit of breakfast. The warm sea beckoned, and I looked forward to snorkelling later that day. For the

adventurous, the list is long: kayaks, paddleboards, fat-bikes, guided trails, fishing and ocean safaris where dolphins, turtles, manta rays and even whale sharks may appear. Humpback whales pass seasonally, and in summer, Loggerhead and Leatherback turtles return to nest.

Now overseen by Ricky Bell and managed by Jonito Timbane and his dedicated team, Anvil Bay beautifully reflects both community values and conservation purpose. Jonito moved here after visiting his uncle at the beach camp, fell in love with the place and asked to stay. He began as a camp attendant, learned plumbing and electrical work during the lodge's construction, and gradually stepped into management.

The nearby lake is the perfect sundowner spot, a detour past the solar farm – Anvil Bay is entirely off-grid – led us there. Solar panels feed a battery bank, backed by a generator, while a borehole and reverse-osmosis system provide fresh drinking water.

A wooden deck overlooks the lake, a paradise for birders with about 350 species recorded. But on this evening, it was two young bull elephants that stole the show, sparring and splashing as hippos grumbled nearby. We're told that elephants often wander through camp, their visits announced by dung-beetle-claimed mounds.

As the sky paled into evening and the lake settled into stillness, Paul Bell's quiet legacy felt woven into everything around us – a vision rooted in community, wilderness and deep connection. Anvil Bay is more than a beach camp; it's a reminder of what responsible tourism looks like when it honours both people and place.

<https://anvilbay.com/>





A Private Island Escape to Bawe Island - Zanzibar

Words **Claire Roadley**
Pics **Supplied**

Always dreamed of a private island escape in the Maldives or Seychelles but never quite made it happen? Zanzibar offers a magical alternative – closer to home, wrapped in that unmistakable African warmth. After a safari in the Serengeti, I returned to Zanzibar and was utterly blown away.

A member of The Cocoon Collection's welcome team whisked us through fast-track arrivals at the airport (remember, you now need inbound travel insurance alongside your visa). Within minutes we were at the Stone Town Marina boarding a plush speedboat.

It's only a 15-minute hop to Bawe Island, but feeling the ocean breeze on

my skin was the perfect prelude to the island bliss ahead.

Stepping through the carved, studded doors of my Sunrise Villa, I was struck by the sheer space and sense of privacy. Outside, an elegant lounge and dining area, circular daybed, wooden deck, private infinity pool, and my own stretch of beach beckoned – and I hadn't even stepped indoors yet. The lush gardens feel wonderfully established; a sign of how sensitively the resort was built around the island's existing vegetation despite being just over a year old.

Inside, the villa reveals a cool, spacious living room with sliding doors to the pool, a stocked minibar, TV, daybed, plenty of storage, and a dreamy four-poster bed. The outdoor bathroom is pure island romance – double vanities,

a freestanding bath under the stars, and a shower with a view. And for those wanting to truly "push the boat out," Bawe also offers Maldivian-style overwater villas.

Each guest receives a personalised bicycle for exploring, although your private butler is only a WhatsApp away should you prefer a golf-cart lift. My butler, Asifiwa, was exceptional – arranging our Stone Town transfers, our excursion to Prison Island, and all our restaurant bookings. Sunset at The View Bar is unmissable, when pink skies melt into a canopy of stars.

Days are as active or relaxed as you choose. There's a dive and water sports centre, gym, tennis and padel courts, a games area, and a supervised kids club so parents can sneak off for a dive – or a decadent session at the Healing Earth Spa.

The beach around the main pool and Sand restaurant is the stuff of postcards: powder-soft sand, unbelievably blue water, and superb snorkelling in the newly declared Changuu-Bawe Marine Conservation Area. For grown-ups, the adults-only Beach Club offers luxe loungers, dreamy daybeds, and signature cocktails.

If it's barefoot beach bliss you're after – wrapped in warm Zanzibari hospitality – Bawe Island by The Cocoon Collection delivers it in bucketfuls. I can't wait to return.

<https://www.baweisland.com/>



Island Time on Lake Malawi at Blue Zebra Island Lodge – Malawi

Words **Sarah Kingdom**
Pics **Supplied**

Imagine arriving at a tiny island in the middle of Lake Malawi, where the water shimmers like blown glass and the soundtrack is nothing more than waves, wind, and birdsong. That's the essence of Blue Zebra Island Lodge – a quiet, barefoot escape surrounded by one of Africa's most extraordinary lake landscapes.



Life on Nankoma Island settles quickly into a natural rhythm. Mornings begin with soft light spilling over the water and a chorus of sunbirds, doves, and fish eagles calling from the island's indigenous forest. The chalets, tucked among trees and perched above the shoreline, open out to the lake so completely that the boundary between indoors and nature almost disappears. With no cars or crowds, the island offers a rare feeling of stillness – the sort that sinks in without effort.



and the unmistakable cry of fish eagles echoing across the bays. With binoculars in hand and time on your side, the island becomes a wonderfully intimate birding destination.

Kayaking around the island adds another perspective – gliding past hidden coves, watching schools of cichlids shimmer below the surface, and drifting close to reed beds where waders and weavers flit about.

As the day fades, an easy paddle or boat outing offers the chance to watch the sky shift through soft pastels while

the moon casts a silver path across the water.

Afternoons often unfold in true island style: a dip in the infinity pool, a lazy hour in a hammock, or simply sitting on a balcony watching otters play close to shore. Blue Zebra blends that lovely mix of quiet adventure and deep relaxation, creating an atmosphere that feels both grounding and restorative.

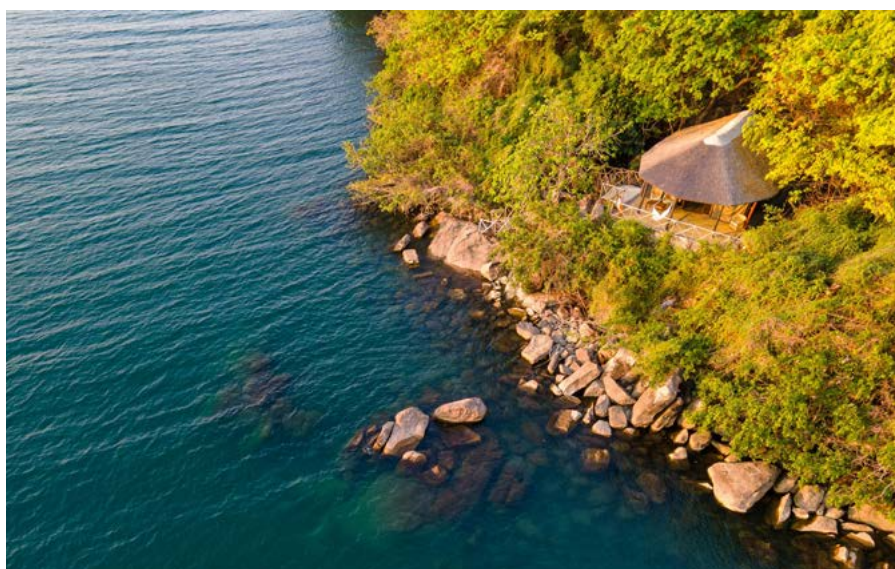
In the end, it's the combination of lake, forest, birds, and brilliant underwater life that defines the experience – an island escape where nature takes the lead and everything else gently follows.

<https://bluezebra.mw/>



Much of the magic here lies just beneath the surface. Lake Malawi's underwater world is famous for its cichlids, and snorkelling around the island feels like drifting through a living kaleidoscope. Slip into the warm, clear water and bright flashes of colour appear instantly – gleaming blues, yellows, and reds weaving between rocks and crevices. It's an ever-moving tapestry, and every snorkel session reveals something different.

Beyond the water, the island invites slow, exploratory wandering. Well-marked hiking trails loop through shady groves, along rocky shorelines, and up gentle rises with sweeping lake views. These walks are perfect for birding, and the island's residents never disappoint – kingfishers perched on overhanging branches, herons stalking the shallows,





Jeffreys Bay – More Than a Surfing Hotspot

Words & Pics **Tessa Buhrmann**

Tucked along the pristine shores of South Africa's Eastern Cape, Jeffreys Bay is a coastal gem where beach lovers, surfers and sunseekers all find their happy place. Revered for its world-class waves and laid-back seaside charm, J-Bay has a way of pulling you into its rhythm the moment you arrive.

We reached town just as the SA Longboard Championships were wrapping up, and the parking lot at Supertubes Collection Guest House – our home for a few blissful days – was a colourful mix of VW combis, surf-laden SUVs and sandy-footed spectators. With its unbeatable location overlooking the iconic Supertubes break, the guesthouse is the perfect base for salt-sprayed early mornings and slow, sun-soaked afternoons.

From luxury rooms to B&B and self-catering suites, Supertubes Collection fits seamlessly into its coastal surrounds. My room captured that beach-house elegance so effortlessly, but it was the balcony that stole the moment – endless blue ocean, rolling surf, and that unmistakable J-Bay energy. Unpacking could wait. The beach was calling.

It's easy to see why Supertubes sits among the top right-hand waves in the world. Surfers – pros, locals, hopefuls, and wide-eyed beginners – carved their way along the reef, each set drawing a crowd to the sand. For anyone dreaming of joining them, surf schools dotted along the beachfront make it more accessible than you'd think.

But beach bliss in Jeffreys Bay extends far beyond the break. A gentle stroll

along Main Beach reveals wide golden sands, tidal treasures, and the soothing soundtrack of crashing waves. Seagulls gather at the shoreline, oystercatchers perch on rocks, and if you look closely, you'll spot the delicate pansy shells and cowries that make this coastline famous.

For a deeper dive into the region's marine treasures, the Jeffreys Bay Shell Museum near Main Beach offers a surprisingly captivating detour. From

delicate micro shells to magnificent cowries and the beautifully displayed paper nautilus, it's a celebration of the ocean's artistry.

Sunrise is when J-Bay is at its most magical. Surfers are already in the water, the horizon glows in soft peach and gold, and breakfast on the Supertubes deck feels like a celebration of everything that makes this coastline special. Fresh sea air, lush gardens, and that wide blue ocean – it's the kind of moment that stays with you.

And when hunger strikes later in the day, Walskipper's quirky, toes-in-the-sand setting or a beachfront cappuccino in town makes the perfect end to another salty, sunlit adventure.

Whether you're chasing waves, wandering beaches, or simply soaking up the coastal calm, Jeffreys Bay promises a beach break that lingers long after the sand has been shaken from your shoes.



<https://www.supertubesguesthouse.co.za/>





SUSTAINABILITY

HAS BECOME SOUTH AFRICA'S NEXT HOSPITALITY BENCHMARK

Words **Dream Hotels & Resorts**

With water scarcity, rising energy costs and increasingly climate-conscious travellers shaping the Southern African hospitality landscape, the industry must turn principles into practice and ensure sustainability is no longer a buzzword, but the line between resilience and risk.

Hotels across the country are grappling with how to make sustainability a lived, operational reality rather than a marketing claim. The key takeaway from the 2025 Hospitality Industry Think Tank was clear, "if your own team isn't living it, guests will see through it".

This is the exact sentiment that is now echoed across the industry, as sustainability efforts that exist only in corporate decks or glossy brochures are increasingly being called out by guests who expect to see tangible proof. From food-waste reduction and linen reuse for same stay guests to smart water management and meaningful local partnerships, travellers (especially younger generations) want to know that their accommodation choices align with their personal values.

"Guests are incredibly perceptive," said Reinhard Visser, Chief of Operations at Dream Hotels & Resorts. "They notice when the story we tell matches the reality they experience, from the cleaning products in their rooms to the food on their plates. That's why we see sustainability not as a campaign, but as a daily discipline."

The everyday work of sustainability

Across the sector, that "daily discipline" is taking new forms. Grow tunnels, kitchen gardens and local sourcing are increasingly replacing long supply

chains. Refurbishment waste is being reimaged, where furniture is restored or redirected to community projects instead of landfills or being replaced entirely. In several lodges and resorts, teams are even removing invasive plant species, restoring natural vegetation and running quieter, more considerate game-viewing practices to protect ecosystems and enhance the guest experience.

Visser adds that sustainability also demands rethinking procurement in a way that benefits local economies: "When it comes to reducing carbon footprints, it's important to consider who you're buying from. We work with local farmers and artisans because that's how the value stays in the community. Every transaction becomes part of a shared cycle of renewal."

Water and energy security remain major operational risks, forcing hospitality businesses to rethink their infrastructure strategies. For many operators, resource efficiency, such as greywater systems and solar power, is fast becoming the only way to maintain profitability and guest comfort during periods of instability.

Sustainability beyond the environment

While often overlooked, there is no denying that sustainability is social and economic in nature, too. A recurring

theme from the Think Tank was that transformation and training must work hand in hand, with panellists arguing that South Africa's tourism sector can be one of the most powerful engines for inclusive growth, but only if empowerment extends beyond compliance.

"Aiming for 51 percent ownership means little if that ownership doesn't come with real decision-making power or the ability to grow," said one panellist. As such, creating space for black entrepreneurs to own, operate, and influence tourism assets will determine how genuinely sustainable the sector becomes.

The same goes for people development. Fragmented training models and slow grant processes continue to block the pipeline for hospitality jobs. The industry's call is for a shared training framework that places learnerships where they're needed most, such as in rural and peri-urban areas that supply much of the tourism workforce.

For many in the sector, sustainability is becoming the defining measure of success. "We want to be remembered as the generation that didn't just talk about change, but lived it," Visser said. "Every time we choose to reuse instead of replace, to source locally instead of import, or to repair instead of discard, we're shaping the future of South African hospitality."



<https://touchingdreams.co.za>

PUNGWE SAFARI CAMP



AND THE MANYELETI STORY

Words & Pics **Tessa Buhrmann**

*There are places in the bush where you feel yourself exhale
without even realising you've been holding your breath.
Pungwe Safari Camp is one of them.*



Tucked deep in the Manyeleti, where the trees hold the heat of the day and the night sky feels impossibly close, this little camp works its way under your skin in the gentlest of ways. It's a place where simplicity is not a sacrifice but a rare luxury, and where the wild feels close enough to touch.

Each dawn begins with a familiar ritual. The kettle hums over the open fire in the same spot it has stood since the camp's earliest days, sending up a lazy curl of woodsmoke as the first robin-chats greet the dawn.

There's no rush – just the crackle of flames, the soft clink of mugs, and the mist lifting gently off the surrounding bush. It's the kind of morning that reminds me how little I actually need.

Days unfold easily at Pungwe. Bush breakfasts under wide skies. Long, unhurried hours where I lose myself in the quiet. Evenings around the fire, where the glow of the flames and the stories shared are all the entertainment we need. Dinner is served under a scatter of stars, candlelight casting soft circles of light, while nightjars call from somewhere in the distance.

Unfenced and unfussy, Pungwe invites the wild to wander freely. Elephants move quietly between the tents, barely a whisper in the dust, and sometimes – if you're lucky – a leopard slips by

like a shadow between patches of moonlight. This is safari stripped of pretence, offering something richer than opulence: presence.

In an endeavour to understand Pungwe fully, I sit with Michel Girardin, the man whose quiet conviction is woven into the soul of the camp. He talks about simplicity in a way that makes me realise how much we've complicated safari over the years. Four tents. Eight beds. No pool. No Wi-Fi. No artificially pumped waterhole to force wildlife into view. And far from apologising for it, he is proud of every single thing the camp doesn't have.

Everything here is intentional. In a world where connection has become relentless, Michel's version of luxury is the chance to disconnect – to be fully present without a single ping or push notification. "People don't even realise that having no Wi-Fi is a luxury," he says wryly. "They've forgotten what it feels like."

He is equally pragmatic about the realities of summer in the Lowveld. The heat builds, the donkey boilers puff away, and even the cold-water pipes turn warm. His advice? "Go sit in the shade with a kikoi. That's our natural air-conditioning." But everything comes down to expectation. Guests who understand the philosophy fall in love with it. Those who arrive expecting chrome and marble are in the wrong place. The real luxury here is the bush itself, the warmth of the Pungwe team, and the abundance of wildlife the Manyeleti offers.



Housekeeper, Emma Mathebula



Who needs these trappings of luxury when the bush itself, the wonderful Pungwe team and the incredible wildlife sightings the Manyeleti offers is a luxury in itself.

The team is central to Pungwe's story. Many have grown up with the reserve woven into their lives. Senior guide Isaac Baloyi, now 22 years with the camp, still takes pride in positioning the vehicle so guests can capture the perfect shot. Never Mathebula has guided here for 18 years, following in the footsteps of his father, a Manyeleti field ranger for nearly three decades; the reserve is in his blood. Salphina Khosa, whose family walked from Gaza Province through Kruger during the Mozambican civil war, has been part of Pungwe for two decades. Her late husband, Frans, is immortalised in the nearby Frans Bridge – named after the day he cycled into fifteen lions and escaped up a tree, leaving behind both his bicycle and the two live chickens he'd been transporting.

Behind the scenes, the rhythm of camp life is kept steady by the likes of Carol Sibuyi, who arrived at 21 from a small cooking school in Hluvukani and now manages Pungwe's kitchen with remarkable composure – and creates a delicious bush breakfast over open flames!

She cooks with instinct and heart, teaching guests Shangaan greetings between courses.

And then there's Nandrick Mthabine, whose quiet efficiency keeps the camp

running – from lighting donkey boilers to ensuring the dawn kettle sings on time – all while being able to recite every Serie A top goal scorer since 1990. Their stories reflect exactly what sustainable, meaningful employment can bring: stability, pride, and the chance to grow within the landscapes that shaped them.

But one cannot fully understand Pungwe without understanding the dynamics of the Manyeleti. As the afternoon light softens and the sky turns from apricot to deep plum, Michel tells the story of the reserve's name. "‘Nyaleti' means 'star' in Shangaan," he explains. "Add 'ma'... and you have Manyeleti – the place of stars." A poetic name for a place whose history is anything but easy.

Positioned between the Sabi Sand and the Timbavati, the Manyeleti was shaped by the apartheid-era homeland system. It formed part of Gazankulu, the Shangaan/Tsonga "bantustan," and became one of the few places where Black South Africans could visit when Kruger excluded them. Its creation, however, displaced the communities who lived there. After democracy, a land claim by 172 individuals with verified ancestral ties finally gained momentum – and on 25 November last year, after two decades of bureaucracy and perseverance, they received their title deeds.

Like the Makuleke of northern Kruger, the claimants chose not to settle inside the reserve. Instead, they opted to keep the land wild while benefiting from tourism and conservation. Their vision, Michel tells me, rests on three pillars: community land ownership, private-



Senior guides, Never Mathebula and Isaac Baloyi |



sector tourism management, and government-led ecological protection. It is a model with the potential to redefine conservation frameworks across the Greater Kruger – if remaining hurdles, particularly around revenue allocation, can be resolved.

Michel's passion, however, extends far beyond Pungwe. What drives him is ensuring that protected areas do not become "islands of opulence in a sea of poverty."

With close to two million people living within 50–80 kilometres of Kruger, he believes the Manyeleti's long-term future must be rooted in inclusive, meaningful community benefit. Employment alone isn't enough; real transformation requires entrepreneurship, skills development, and long-term support.

And change is already stirring. Through workshops and supplier-buyer events – including those linked to broader incubation programmes – Michel has met a growing network of local farmers and entrepreneurs offering everything from meat and vegetables to cleaning products and fully compliant waste-management services. One woman running an impressive waste-management business stands out for her professionalism and readiness to serve lodges that barely knew such a service existed. Recent gatherings in the reserve have revealed far more talent and capacity than anyone anticipated, and Michel is determined to help channel that momentum.

For him, the old, crumbling buildings at the former main camp aren't relics but opportunities waiting to be unlocked. He imagines a community-owned laundry serving all lodges, a revived petrol station, a small mechanical workshop servicing lodge vehicles, a dedicated waste-management enterprise, and even a community-run game-drive

operation supported by a major vehicle brand. Practical ideas, all rooted in Fair Trade Tourism principles. *"Mintiro ya vula vula,"* he says – work speaks. And in the Manyeleti, it feels like the time has come.

Later that afternoon, as giraffes move slowly across the horizon and the sun bleeds into the trees, Michel's conviction was unwavering. "The Manyeleti is a jewel," he says quietly. "An undiscovered one. And it's ready."



<https://www.pungwe.co.za/>

WHERE WHALES MEET THE WILD:

A WEEKEND AT MORUKURU BEACH LODGE

Words **Sue Segar**

Pics **Morukuru Beach Lodge**



It's eight o'clock and I've just woken up and sit with a mug of coffee in hand. From the private balcony of my suite at Morukuru Beach Lodge, I have a 180-degree view of the Indian Ocean. Wherever I look, I see the large grey forms of whales dotting the sea. It's a heart-stopping sight.



There's not much action right now, just a few spy-hops as the whales lift their heads to look around, but even in the stillness, I can feel them – a powerful presence beneath the waves. Between the ocean and I stretches a vast garden of fynbos and rolling white dunes, the landscape that defines the De Hoop Nature Reserve, a World Heritage Site celebrated for its birds, wildlife and the extraordinary shrubland of the Cape Floral Kingdom.

The ocean here is part of a Marine Protected Area that extends five kilometres out to sea, home to over 250 fish species and, between June and November, hundreds of southern right whales. These gentle giants migrate from the icy Antarctic to these warmer waters each winter to calve and nurse their young.

I first fell in love with this wild coastline while doing the De Hoop Trail's Vlei to Whales walk, and I've returned now to experience a weekend at Morukuru Beach Lodge – a five-suite eco-luxury hideaway located at Koppie Alleen, part of the Morukuru Family collection of private lodges.



We left Cape Town on a Friday morning, taking a slow three-hour drive through the rolling farmlands and quaint rural towns of the Overberg – Caledon, Napier and Bredasdorp – past fields of canola and wheat, framed by the purple mountains towards Hermanus. As we neared the reserve, windmills and grazing livestock gave way to fynbos, dunes and sea.

De Hoop, known as the “Jewel of the Cape”, spans 36 000 hectares and is home to more than 1 500 plant species, 260 bird species and a wealth of wildlife, from bontebok and eland to Cape mountain zebra, ostriches and baboons. Its 70 km coastline and saline wetland is on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance to birds.

At the lodge, we were welcomed with warm smiles and a refreshing drink before checking into our room and then heading to the outdoor dining area beside the pool for lunch. Chef Pieter Brown served a fresh beetroot and spekboom salad with Morukuru’s own honey dressing, followed by perfectly grilled local fish.

Morukuru Family was founded by Dutch couple Ed and Anka Zeeman, whose African safari to Kenya in the 1990s inspired a lifelong commitment to conservation and community. After creating exclusive-use lodges in the Madikwe Game Reserve, they expanded to De Hoop and Johannesburg, guided by their ethos of sustainability and local sourcing.

Nearly all the lodge’s ingredients come from within 100 km – vegetables from Villiersdorp, craft beer and gin from Swellendam, fish from Struisbaai, meat

from Bredasdorp and cheeses from Stonehouse Farm in Stanford.

Chef Pieter, who, among other top spots, has worked at Grootbos and Babylonstoren, describes his style as “African cooking using seasonal, raw, original flavours.” A keen forager (outside the protected reserve), he incorporates fynbos, buchu, wild sage and dune spinach into his menus, creating a true taste of place.

Morukuru’s eco-friendly design, by architect Nick Plewman and Dutch interior designer Janine Feikes-Butter, mirrors the natural environment. Built from regional sandstone and organic materials, with floor-to-ceiling glass framing endless ocean views, it blends seamlessly with its surroundings.

That afternoon, after a rest in our sumptuous bedroom, we met our guide Marizelle Brand for an evening stroll to the dunes. Guests are paired with a guide for their stay, ensuring a personal connection with the land. We tried our hand at sandboarding before settling into the soft sand for sundowners, watching whales spout in the distance and a lone eland graze below.

The whales were never far away, their breath rising in misty spouts across the bay. Marizelle told us some arrive as early as May, travelling 10 000 km from the Antarctic to calve, with as many as 1 200 mother-and-calf pairs recorded in the reserve.

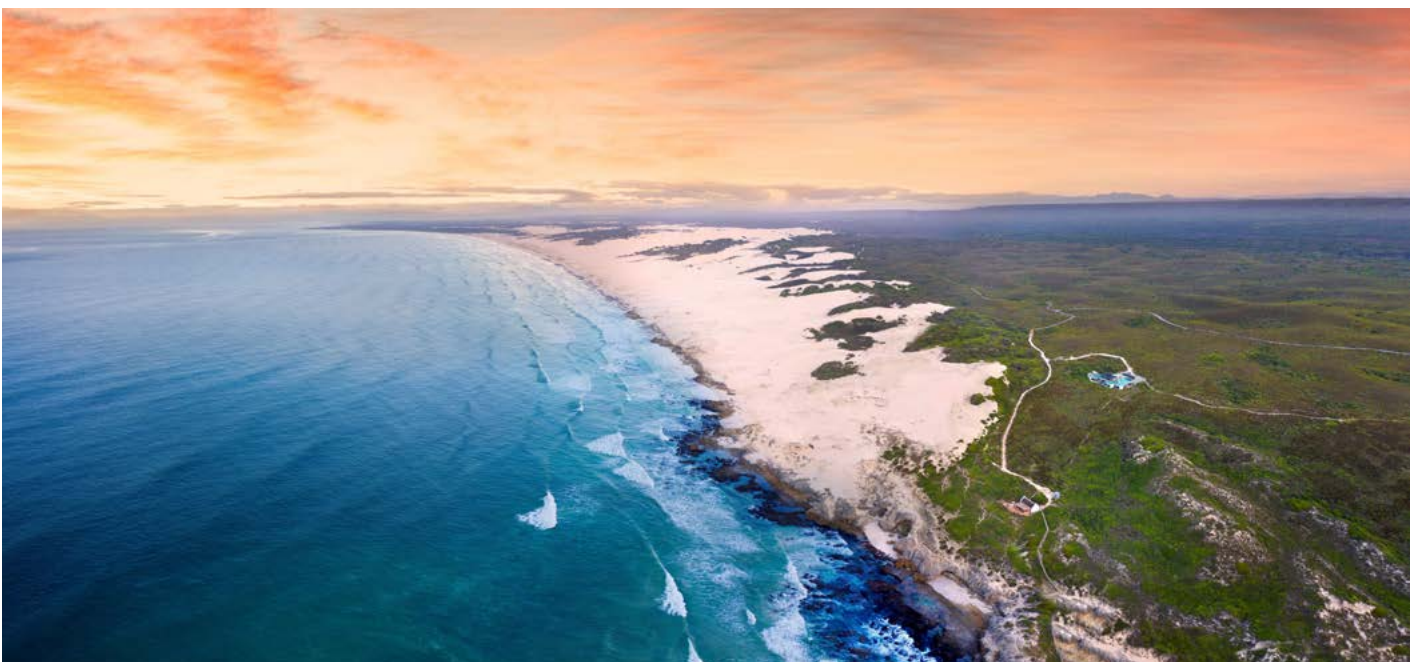
Back at the lodge, dinner was served beside a glowing fire – prawn carpaccio, fresh fish and a local cheeseboard, the table lit by hand-painted Kapula candles from nearby Bredasdorp. Later, back in our suite, we found our fireplace had been lit, and we sat quietly, reading and reflecting on the beauty of this wild coast.

Activities at Morukuru include guided nature drives, marine and fynbos walks, dune explorations, mountain biking, and excellent birdwatching. So, the next morning, after breakfast, we joined Marizelle for a marine walk. Driving past Morukuru’s other De Hoop property, Ocean House, we walked along a path through the flower-dotted veld to the beach. At Hippo Pools, a favourite swimming spot, we explored rockpools teeming with tiny fish, crabs, sea hares, starfish and flatworms.

“Sometimes we see octopus here,” said Marizelle, “and I still get as excited as a child every time.”

Lunch that day was a fragrant Malay seafood curry with a poached pear salad, followed by chocolate brownies. Afterwards, we joined a nature drive through the reserve, the air filled with the scent of flowering Blombos and the haunting song of Southern Boubous.

We watched a troop of baboons feasting on dune sage and, at a nearby waterhole, a group of Blue Cranes performing their elaborate courtship dances beside a water hole. Marizelle explained that these courtship dances are vital to the survival of South Africa’s national bird, the Blue Crane, and that understanding their behaviour helps conservationists better protect the species. De Hoop





also plays a crucial role in conserving bontebok, once nearly extinct but now thriving here alongside eland, zebra, and more than 260 bird species.

For the Zeemans, promoting conservation, community upliftment and sustainability is at the heart of everything. Through the Morukuru Goodwill Foundation, established in 2007, they support projects from anti-poaching and wildlife relocation to turtle rescue and fynbos restoration.

Despite its protected status, De Hoop is not immune to marine litter. Morukuru's "Plastic for Coffee" initiative invites guests at Bites Beach Café to collect beach litter in exchange for a cup of coffee.

They also organise an annual beach clean-up every May, and in this year, the team collected more than 50 kgs of litter. Plastic ingestion and entanglement remains one of the greatest threats to sea turtles and other these marine creatures.

The Foundation also supports turtle rehabilitation through the Two Oceans Aquarium Turtle Conservation Centre, funding care for rescued loggerhead and green turtles – Kai, Nori and

Habanero, with the goal of releasing them back into the ocean here at De Hoop. Since his release on 08 December 2023, Bheni travelled 18,000km over 420 days. His final location, before his satellite tag stopped transmitting in late December 2024, was Lake Ghoubet in Djibouti.

Earlier this year, the Foundation partnered with the Landmark Foundation and CapeNature in a leopard conservation initiative to monitor leopards and other mammals in the De Hoop Nature Reserve using state-of-the-art camera trap stations – more than 20 of the planned 31 have already been installed. Guests are able to join the team on these camera inspections, offering a unique opportunity to be part of research in action. Recent footage of a caracal mother and her kitten caused great excitement among rangers and visitors alike.

On our final morning, after an early swim at Hippo Pools, we stopped for fish and chips at Bites Beach Café, a restored fisherman's cottage nestled among the dunes. Watching whales breaching offshore, I couldn't imagine a more perfect farewell.

As we left De Hoop, I looked out once more at the dunes, fynbos and sea. The whales were still there, moving slowly through the blue expanse, timeless and unhurried.



Leopard Sightings in De Hoop Nature Reserve

Exciting news from the Landmark Leopard & Predator Project camera trap survey, proudly supported by the Morukuru Goodwill Foundation:

- Since May 2025, 22 leopard images (0.2% of total captures) have been recorded across 14 of 21 camera stations in De Hoop.
- Two male leopards have been identified so far – one recognisable by a distinctive lip scar (likely from a past encounter), and another detected near Infanta, showing minimal territorial overlap.
- A 2012 survey recorded five leopards within De Hoop, and this new study aims to compare current leopard density with those earlier results.
- De Hoop is a key refuge for leopards and other predators, and findings like these inform proactive conservation strategies – including the creation of ecological corridors to ensure long-term survival and ecosystem health.

essentials:

Where to stay & what to do:

<https://morukuru.com/locations/de-hoop-nature-reserve/>



GREEN SEASON BIRDING AT PAFURI

... PLUS 5 OTHER SUMMER BIRDING HOTSPOTS

Words & Pics **Return Africa**

RETURN Africa - Marius Swart
www.returnafrica.com

As the first thunderclouds gather over Pafuri and the scent of rain drifts through the fever tree forest, the skies shift. Bee-eaters streak overhead, cuckoos call from hidden branches, and swallows stitch the air above the floodplains.

According to Zach Savage, one of RETURN Africa's guides, the spectacle truly begins with the European Bee-eaters. "They arrive in flocks, and you often hear them before you see them. They're colourful, prolific, and they change the sky," he says.

For birders, it is one of the most exciting times to visit. For travellers, it is a chance to watch the land breathe in rhythm with the seasons. One guest reflected, "We love birding and saw 31 lifers on this trip."

The green season begins in October, just before the rains. European Bee-eaters arrive first, followed by flashes of Klaas's Cuckoo and the unmistakable call of the Red-chested Cuckoo, Piet-my-vrou. Zach notes that some migrants trickle in even earlier, from late August into September, with Yellow-billed Kites and Wahlberg's Eagles leading the way.

Not all migrants are simple to tell apart, especially for first-time visitors. Cuckoos and raptors are often misidentified.

"Guests sometimes mistake Wahlberg's Eagles for Steppe or Tawny Eagles," Zach says. "But the square tail gives them away. And Brown-hooded Kingfishers, which are resident, are often confused with the more seasonal Woodland Kingfishers. Watching tail shapes, flight patterns, and listening for calls helps. It is this attention to detail that makes birding in Pafuri feel like a puzzle that rewards patience.

Migration is not just about arrival, it's about what happens once the birds are here. Mass roosts of bee-eaters turn bare mopane into shifting tapestries of colour. Cuckoos call relentlessly, and sunbirds flit between blossoms.

After good rains from November through January, Lesser Spotted Eagles gather in flocks of 30 or more at seasonal floodplains, foraging at termite eruptions. Broad-billed Rollers, arriving mid-to-late October, hawk insects at dusk in flight, like nightjars. Watching them hunt against the darkening sky is unforgettable.

Migrants follow their own rhythms, but guides know the patterns. Zach explains, "Some waders, like Sandpipers, Stints or Plovers, only arrive in spring on their way to the coast. Broad-billed Rollers are best seen along forest edges and in the Fever Tree Forest by the Limpopo River. It is all about being in the right place at the right time."

These birds are not just a spectacle; they are part of a working system.

"Most of the migrants are insectivores," Zach notes. "Swallows feed on mosquitoes, while waders and herons take larvae in the pans. They help hold insect populations in balance, which is vital in the green season."

Birding at Pafuri changes dramatically with the season.

- **Dry Season:** Guests typically see 120 to 150 species over three nights. Identification is simpler, perfect for novice birders. Residents include Tawny Eagles, Pels Fishing Owls, as well as Little and White-fronted Bee-eaters.
- **Green Season / Summer:** Species lists jump to above 200. Migrants add complexity, including Wahlberg's and Lesser Spotted Eagles; Broad-billed and European Rollers; European and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters. Some migrants even displace residents, creating fascinating interactions.

Migration is more than movement; it is a story of return.

"The birds remind us that the land, rivers, and seasons are part of a larger cycle of renewal. Each year, when the migrants come home, so too can we," Zach Savage says.



<https://returnafrica.com/pafuri-camp/>



RETURN Africa - Woodland Kingfisher - Harald van Lennep



RETURN Africa - Broad-billed Roller - Neil Parkin



European Bee-eater - by Giles Laurent

Southern Africa Summer Birding Add-On: Five Essential Hotspots

Summer birding across southern Africa reveals an explosion of colour, song, and migratory movement. From wetlands to woodlands, pans to floodplains, these five iconic destinations complement Pafuri beautifully – each offering unique species, habitats, and seasonal highlights.

1 Mkhuze Game Reserve – KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Why go: Sand Forest, fig forest, acacia woodland, and pans – a compact mosaic with over 420 species.

Summer highlights: Migrants arrive, wetlands brim with life, and the fig forest comes alive with song.

Key Specials: Neergaard's Sunbird, Pink-throated Twinspot, Green Malkoha, African Broadbill and Rudd's Apalis.

Where to bird: Nsumo Pan and Kubube bird hides, the Fig forest walk and Sand Forest tracks

Don't miss: Early-morning fig forest chorus and waterbird spectacles at Nsumo.

Where to bird: Shallow floodplains (for jacanas & painted snipes), papyrus channels (for coucals, cisticolas) and island woodlands (parrots, kingfishers, owls).

Don't miss: A silent mokoro glide at sunrise – birding bliss.

3 Chobe National Park – Botswana

Why go: The Chobe River floodplain is one of Africa's most productive summer birding landscapes.

Summer highlights: Massive waterbird concentrations, dazzling migrants, and superb boat-based viewing.

Key Specials: Slaty Egret, African Openbill, Yellow-billed Oxpecker, Coppery-tailed Coucal and Luapula Cisticola.

Where to bird: Chobe Riverboat cruises, floodplain edges and riparian thickets.

Don't miss: Early-morning river cruises when the floodplains come alive with feeding herons, storks, and elusive specials moving between the reeds.

2 Okavango Delta – Botswana

Why go: Africa's largest inland delta; a summer paradise of reeds, channels, islands, and floodplains.

Summer highlights: Breeding waterbirds, rising water levels, and superb mokoro bird photography.

Key Specials: Slaty Egret (Botswana near-endemic), Coppery-tailed Coucal, African Pygmy Goose, Greater Painted-snipe and Pel's Fishing Owl.



Saddle-billed Stork - Okavango Delta - Wikimedia



Flamingos etosha pans - pxhere.com



African Pitta Mana Pools Zimbabwe - Wikimedia

5

Etosha National Park – Namibia

Why go: Vast salt pans transform into shallow summer wetlands, attracting exceptional wader and flamingo numbers.

Summer highlights: Flamingo breeding eruptions, pan-edge birding, and rare Namibian endemics.

Key Specials: Greater and Lesser Flamingo, Great White Pelican, Bare-cheeked Babbler, White-tailed Shrike and Double-banded Courser.

Where to bird: Etosha Pan shorelines, Pelican Point and Fischer's Pan as well as mopane woodlands.

Don't miss: Clouds of flamingos crossing the pan under summer storm light.

These five destinations form an excellent summer birding circuit that complements Pafuri's riverine forests, migrants, pittas, and Limpopo specials. Together, they showcase the best of southern Africa's seasonal birding abundance – from desert pans and delta channels to Zambezi floodplains and lush sand forests.

Learn more about birding here



<https://www.simplybirdingafrica.co.za/>

4

Mana Pools National Park – Zimbabwe

Why go: A UNESCO wilderness with riverine forest, Albida groves, and Zambezi floodplains – idyllic for walking and birding.

Summer highlights: Carmine Bee-eater colonies, floodplain waders, skimmer breeding, and lush riverine forest.

Key Specials: African Pitta, Lilian's Lovebird, Carmine Bee-eater, Wattled Crane and Pel's Fishing Owl.

Where to bird: Zambezi riverbanks, Albida woodlands, floodplain pools and mopane woodland edges.

Don't miss: Dawn light over the Zambezi with fish eagles calling.

IN CONVERSATION

GOODMAN NCOBENI

RECLAIMING THE KZN SOUTH COAST

For decades, the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast was shorthand for the classic family beach holiday – cars packed to the roof, children in the backseat, and a week of surf, sun and sand waiting down the N2. But over the years, the region's shine faded. Ageing infrastructure, inconsistent service delivery and dwindling investment thinned out the once-reliable crowds. COVID-19, says Goodman Ncobeni, General Manager of Blue Marlin All-Inclusive Seascape in Scottburgh, "felt like the final blow."



Yet something remarkable has been happening over the past few years: the South Coast is stirring again.

South Africa welcomed nearly 8.9 million tourists in 2024 – a 5% annual rise – and KwaZulu-Natal was among the beneficiaries. On the South Coast, domestic arrivals strengthened and festive-season occupancy peaked, with major establishments reporting 100% over the 2023/2024 holidays. According to South Coast Tourism and Investment Enterprise, this renewed interest reflects cleaner, safer beaches, an expanding range of accommodation options, and the quiet determination of local residents.

And this, Ncobeni emphasises, has been the real catalyst.

"When you see people repainting walkways, clearing bushes, planting gardens... it tells you the community

hasn't given up," he says. "Visitors pick up on that. It reassures them that this place is cared for."

The region now boasts seven Blue Flag beaches, the highest it has ever achieved, reinforcing the sense of environmental recovery. This has dovetailed with renewed private investment, from small-scale guesthouse upgrades to major refurbishments. Among the most notable is the R15-million makeover of the Blue Marlin, a landmark hotel since the 1950s. Its shift to an all-inclusive model has already boosted annual occupancy to around 50% and generated new jobs for local residents.

"People think all-inclusive is something you have to fly overseas for," Ncobeni says. "We wanted to prove you can have a Club Med-style holiday right here, at a price South Africans can manage. It makes things predictable for

families, especially those watching their budgets."

The ripple effect, he says, is unmistakable. Local transport providers, dive centres and tour operators are reporting busier seasons, and collaborations with nearby nature reserves are drawing travellers back to the region's abundant natural assets. Even discussions around reopening a small regional airport – *"unthinkable ten years ago,"* he notes – point to rising confidence.

Of course, challenges remain. Infrastructure issues still threaten momentum, and long-term progress depends on sustained service delivery. But Ncobeni believes the shift is real.

"The South Coast is finding its rhythm again," he says. "Not out of nostalgia – out of community, pride, and the belief that this place still has so much to offer."





WILD COAST SUN

SOUTH AFRICA'S MOST BEAUTIFUL SECRET



Where the land surrenders to the sea in a swirl of green hills and rolling surf, you'll find Wild Coast Sun, a destination that still feels undiscovered. This is South Africa at its most soulful: untamed, unhurried, and irresistibly alive.

Stretching along the Eastern Cape's dramatic shoreline, the Wild Coast is a journey into nature's masterpiece. Here, endless beaches without footprints, cliffside trails kissed by salt air, and rivers that carve through ancient valleys before spilling into the ocean invite you to slow down and experience that coastal magic. It's the kind of place where you can ride on horseback through shallow surf, hike between coastal villages, or play a round of championship golf with ocean and river views, watching the sun melt into the horizon.

Family-friendly days give way to star-filled nights and the sound of waves as your lullaby. Here, in a landscape still pleasantly wild, time stretches out.

Activities range from hiking escarpments to kayaking estuaries, from vibrant cultural encounters to enjoying exciting water rides at the Wild Waves Water Park.

So if you're craving a place that feels far from everything, yet closer to what matters, answer the call at Wild Coast Sun. The adventure starts where the road ends.

<https://www.suninternational.com/wild-coast-sun/specials/extend-your-stay/>



FROM **COAST** TO COAST

SOUTH AFRICA'S ENDLESS SUMMER

Words & Pics **Sourced**



South Coast Tourism - Shutterstock

There is a moment each year when the soft shift in the breeze signals summer's return – a change subtle enough to miss, yet powerful enough to stir that familiar longing for the ocean. South Africa's coastline, stretching more than 2,800 kilometres from the icy Atlantic to the warm Indian Ocean, offers an ever-changing story of cliffs, coves, sweeping sandy bays, and wild tropical stretches.

Travel Southern Africa follows that journey – a coast-to-coast celebration of summer, seen through the sensory richness and quiet wonder that this shoreline inspires.



Cape Point - Wikimedia |

Garden Route – Forests, Bays & Ocean Playgrounds

Eastward, the scenery shifts as the Garden Route unfurls – a lush, layered world where indigenous forest leans towards the sea. In Wilderness, kayaks slip along reed-lined waterways while paragliders drift overhead like bright-coloured petals caught on the wind.

Knysna, cradled by lagoon and forest, remains a quintessential summer retreat. Cruises glide across the water toward the iconic Heads, and oysters – fresh, briny, and irresistible – are part of the coastal ritual.

The beaches of Plettenberg Bay stretch wide and welcoming, perfect for long walks, sandcastle afternoons, and marine safaris where dolphins arc through the waves. In Tsitsikamma

Western Cape – The Wild Atlantic & Coastal Cool

The Western Cape's Atlantic coastline has a personality all its own – brisk, invigorating, and endlessly photogenic. On the West Coast, the village of Paternoster glimmers under the morning sun, its whitewashed cottages scattered along a gentle curve of beach. Fishermen haul in their catch as gulls circle overhead, and at the celebrated Wolfgat, meals echo the landscape with ingredients sourced from dunes and shoreline.

In the West Coast National Park, summer turns the Langebaan Lagoon into a mirror of turquoise, where flamingos wade and kitesurfers ride the afternoon wind.

Further south, Cape Town's beaches are alive with summer energy – the glamour of Camps Bay, the tucked-away coves of Clifton, and the vibrant buzz of beach cafés and promenade life.

A drive along Chapman's Peak remains one of the Cape's great coastal experiences, each curve revealing cliffs that drop into the ocean below. At Cape Point, rugged cliffs and windswept views mark the place where the Atlantic shows its full dramatic force. A little further east, Hermanus, and Gansbaai, offer the last lingering opportunities of the season to spot whales, either from guided ocean safaris or from the famed cliff path.



Knysna |

National Park, the scent of salt and fynbos rises as visitors cross the suspension bridge at Storms River Mouth, waves thundering below.

At Nature's Valley, time seems to pause altogether. Here, the sea laps onto a long, quiet beach framed by forested peaks – a

place where summer invites barefoot wandering and slow, sun-filled days.



Jeffrey's Bay - Alexandre Carniato Pexels

Eastern Cape – Untamed and Undiscovered

The Eastern Cape brings a sense of raw authenticity – an untamed beauty where rural simplicity meets spectacular coastline. Jeffreys Bay vibrates with surf culture, drawing wave-chasers from around the world to its legendary breaks.

As the road winds further northeast, the world softens. Morgan Bay offers vast skies and golden cliffs that plunge into the ocean, while Chintsa exudes slow, easy summer days spent between hammock, beach, and sea.

Beyond these towns lies the Wild Coast, one of South Africa's most remarkable stretches of shoreline. Here, waterfalls tumble straight into the sea at Mkhambathi Nature Reserve, and the dramatic rock formation of Hole in the Wall stands as a monument to centuries of wind and waves.

Community-led hikes connect villages through green hills and coastal paths, and visitors often stay in homestays where meals, stories, and traditions are shared freely. It is a coastline that gifts travellers intimacy and perspective – a reminder of how deeply summer experiences can resonate when shaped by both nature and community.

KwaZulu-Natal – Warm Seas & Coastal Culture

Further north, the coastline transforms again. KwaZulu-Natal is defined by its warmth – not only in its sea temperatures, but in its culture, colours, and energy.

In Durban, the Golden Mile stretches out in a lively mosaic of swimmers, surfers, cyclists, and families enjoying the sunshine. Vendors carve pineapples dusted with chilli salt, while the scent of curry floats from nearby kitchens. A hearty bunny chow, eaten with sandy hands after a swim, feels like the essence of Durban's summer.

Umhlanga Rocks blends luxury with laid-back coastal culture. The iconic lighthouse watches over families on the beach, while restaurants and rooftop bars offer sweeping ocean views, especially beautiful as the sun dips and the sky softens.

Umhlanga Rocks - The Oyster Box - Magda Ehlers Pexels



Beyond the city, nature takes over. In St Lucia, part of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park, hippos graze near the estuary and the beaches run wild and uninterrupted. Sodwana Bay, further north, is a treasure for divers – home to coral reefs alive with colour, and turtle nesting during the summer months.

At Kosi Bay, the coastline reaches its most tranquil and untouched. Traditional fish traps stand as symbols of centuries-old practice, and a series of coastal lakes shimmer beneath iconic Kosi palms. It is a place where lagoon and ocean meet in quiet harmony, offering a gentler kind of coastal magic.

By the time the coast gives way to Mozambique, the journey has revealed a coastline of extraordinary contrast – from icy Atlantic currents to warm Indian breezes, from rugged cliffs to glassy lagoons, from bustling urban beaches to remote wilderness shores.

What connects all these places is the unmistakable joy of a South African summer. It's in the shared appreciation of sunsets over the sea, in spontaneous swims, in sand that clings stubbornly to feet and memories. It's in the seafood braais, the laughter carried on evening breezes, and the simple act of sinking into a beach chair with a good book and the sound of the waves.

South Africa's coastline invites travellers to move slowly, to savour detours, to open themselves to the sensory richness of each region. From west to east, from cool to warm, from the wild edges to the polished promenades – the coast offers a journey that lingers long after summer fades.



South Coast Tourism - Shutterstock |



<https://www.southafrica.net/>



TOP COAST-TO-COAST EXPERIENCES

South Africa's coastline delivers a summer full of contrasts – from icy Atlantic dips to balmy Indian Ocean swims. Here are the standout experiences that capture the spirit of a coast-to-coast adventure:

Western Cape

- ❑ Wander the white beaches and dune paths around Paternoster
- ❑ Picnic or paddle on the turquoise Langebaan Lagoon
- ❑ Follow the winding bends of Chapman's Peak Drive
- ❑ Spend long, golden afternoons on Camps Bay or Clifton
- ❑ Walk the Hermanus Cliff Path in search of late-season whales

Garden Route

- ❑ Kayak through reed-fringed waterways in Wilderness
- ❑ Taste fresh oysters on the Knysna Lagoon
- ❑ Cross the dramatic suspension bridge at Storms River Mouth
- ❑ Join a marine safari in Plettenberg Bay
- ❑ Go barefoot on the untouched sands of Nature's Valley

Eastern Cape

- ❑ Watch surfers ride perfect breaks at Jeffreys Bay
- ❑ Slow down in the coastal calm of Morgan Bay and Chintsa
- ❑ Marvel at Hole in the Wall and the cliffs of Coffee Bay
- ❑ Hike between hilltop villages on the Wild Coast
- ❑ Witness waterfalls plunge straight into the ocean at Mkhambathi

KwaZulu-Natal

- ❑ Cycle or stroll the vibrant Durban Golden Mile
- ❑ Sip sunset cocktails overlooking the Umhlanga lighthouse
- ❑ Explore the wild beaches and hippo-filled estuary at St Lucia
- ❑ Dive coral gardens and spot nesting turtles in Sodwana Bay
- ❑ Visit the ancient Kosi Bay fish traps at sunrise



RELAXATION IS OVERRATED

THE BUCKET LIST FOR PEOPLE WHO HATE SITTING STILL

Words **Grant Wood** | Pics **Supplied**



Your bucket list just got obliterated. Africa doesn't mess around with gentle thrills or half-hearted experiences. This is where scorpions glow in the desert, where you can free-fall towards crocodile-infested waters, and your morning run might involve actual lions.

Forget spa weekends and wine tastings. Here, relaxation means collapsing after walking by elephants, and fine dining happens under stars so bright they hurt your eyes. We're talking about a continent that rewrites what it means to travel – where every sunrise demands movement, adrenaline, and the kind of chaos that couch-sitters will never understand.

This is the ultimate bucket list for people who hate sitting still. Ready to move?

Scorpion Safari – Desert Grace by Gondwana Collection, Sesriem, Namibia

Forget everything you know about after-dark adventures, at Desert Grace, located near Sesriem, Namibia, the real thrill begins when the sun sets. Armed with a UV torch, you'll head out on foot with an expert guide in search of glowing scorpions, which light up an eerie blue-green under the beam and freeze like tiny aliens in the dark.

It's a surreal, safe, and surprisingly fascinating experience that older kids love; just the right mix of creepy and cool to fill the time between dinner and bedtime. And the night doesn't end there: with almost zero light pollution, the desert sky explodes with stars.

Your guide will point out constellations and planets with crystal clarity, making this a double feature of wildlife and wonder you won't forget.



Big 5 Walking Safari – Onguma Trails Camp, Onguma Nature Reserve, northern Namibia

If lounging in a 4x4 isn't your style, Onguma Trails Camp delivers the kind of safari that gets your heart properly racing. Tucked on the eastern fringe of Etosha, this is a walking adventure through wild, untamed terrain, where every footstep could bring you closer to lions, rhinos, elephants, or something smaller but just as wild.

You'll cover 6–8 km a day with expert guides who'll teach you to track animals, read the land, and spot the stories hidden in every broken branch and paw print. It's sweaty, raw, and unforgettable. After a day on the move, your reward? A seriously stylish bell tent, a soak in a wood-fired hot tub, and dinner under stars so bright they barely seem real.

Departures run every five days from April to September – just bring your boots and your nerve.



Shearwater Bungee – Victoria Falls Bridge (between Zimbabwe and Zambia)

Shearwater's Victoria Falls Bridge Adventures offer the ultimate thrill for serious adrenaline seekers. Take the plunge with a heart-stopping bungee jump off the iconic bridge – free-falling 111 metres towards the roaring Zambezi River before being snapped back in a rush of speed and euphoria.

Want even more? The bridge swing sends you flying in a giant arc through the Batoka Gorge, combining a near-vertical drop with wild, soaring momentum. For something fast and furious, the zip line races you 300 metres across the gorge with the spray of the

falls at your back and raw African beauty all around. Can't choose just one? Go for the Big Air Combo and experience all three in one pulse-pounding session.

Set against the backdrop of one of the Seven Natural Wonders, this is a high-wire adventure at its most intense!

Salt Pans Ultra Marathon – Makgadikgadi Salt Pans, Botswana

The Salt Pans Ultra in Botswana, sponsored by Desert & Delta Safaris, is one of the world's toughest flat-route races and a true test of mental and physical endurance. Set in the vast Makgadikgadi Salt Pans, the second-largest salt flats on Earth, this race offers two brutal options: 50 km or 100 km across a landscape that stretches to the horizon in every direction.

There are no route markers, no shade, and no distractions – just

intense heat, glaring white salt, and a silence so deep it feels ancient. This is not just a race; it's a journey through one of the most remote and hauntingly beautiful places on the planet. Runners must navigate with precision and dig deep to keep moving forward.

The Salt Pans Ultra strips everything back to the essentials: your willpower, your instincts, and your connection to a landscape where humanity began. It's raw, relentless, and unforgettable for those bold enough to take it on.





Mountain Biking Safari – Imvelo Safari Lodges, Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe

At Imvelo's remote Jozibanini Camp, mountain biking becomes a wild, heart-pounding adventure. Tear across ancient fossil dunes sculpted by fierce Kalahari winds and elephant footsteps, racing along hard-packed trails carved through untamed wilderness. Unlike anywhere else in Hwange Park, these natural tracks let you push your limits while wildlife watches from just metres away.

Feel the endorphins peak as the sun beats down and the sense-inducing landscape rushes past, every turn packed with raw energy and stunning views. Then, take a well-earned break with a lunch beneath a sprawling Acacia tree, surrounded by the sights and sounds of the wild. With a support vehicle on hand for refreshments or a quick escape, this ride is as flexible as it is thrilling. Mountain biking at Jozibanini is a rare and electrifying way to explore the

African wilderness; an experience that adrenaline junkies will never forget.

Chichele Presidential Lodge – Walking Safaris & Hillside Explorations, South Luangwa National Park, Zambia

Prepare for the ultimate adrenaline rush at Chichele Presidential Lodge, where Zambia's wildest adventures await! This former presidential hideaway perches dramatically on towering cliffs, launching you straight into heart-pounding escarpment trails that'll test your limits.

Walking safaris aren't for the faint-hearted. You'll have armed scouts lead you into predator territory where every snap of a twig could signal wildlife nearby. Track massive elephant herds on foot, following fresh prints while your heart hammers against your ribs.

Feel the electric thrill of locking eyes with a leopard or stumbling upon a lion's kill site. With over 450 bird species shrieking overhead and massive

baobabs towering like ancient giants, nature in South Luangwa National Park is raw and unfiltered. Navigate cliff-edge paths with jaw-dropping views of endless floodplains below, where giraffes and kudu bolt across your path without warning.

This isn't just a safari – it's survival-mode luxury that'll spike your pulse and redefine adventure forever!

16 Degrees South – Specialist Expedition Safaris, Matusadona & Mana Pools, Zimbabwe

Forget cookie-cutter safaris. 16 Degrees South delivers raw African wilderness that'll test your limits. These Private Expeditionary Safari Camps strip away safari park crowds, dropping you deep in Zimbabwe's most remote corners where only the bold dare venture.

With minimal ecological footprints, these mobile expeditions trade resort glamour for heart-pounding isolation and genuine wilderness immersion. Your personally curated safari becomes a custom adventure, whether you're tracking Jurassic-era fossils on a dinosaur safari, conquering multi-day wilderness trails that test your endurance, or soaring over it all on a helicopter expedition. Expert guides navigate you through territories where lions rule and ancient baobabs stand guard over secrets few will ever witness. This isn't tourism but expedition-level adventure built entirely on your terms, delivering supreme comfort without compromise in Africa's last true frontiers.

If you crave comfort, stay home. Africa isn't for those who want predictable. It's for the ones who chase the heartbeat of the wild – who trade silence for wind, stillness for sweat, and calm for chaos. So, lace up, strap in, and step far beyond your comfort zone – because in Africa, adventure isn't an activity. It's a way of life.



essentials:

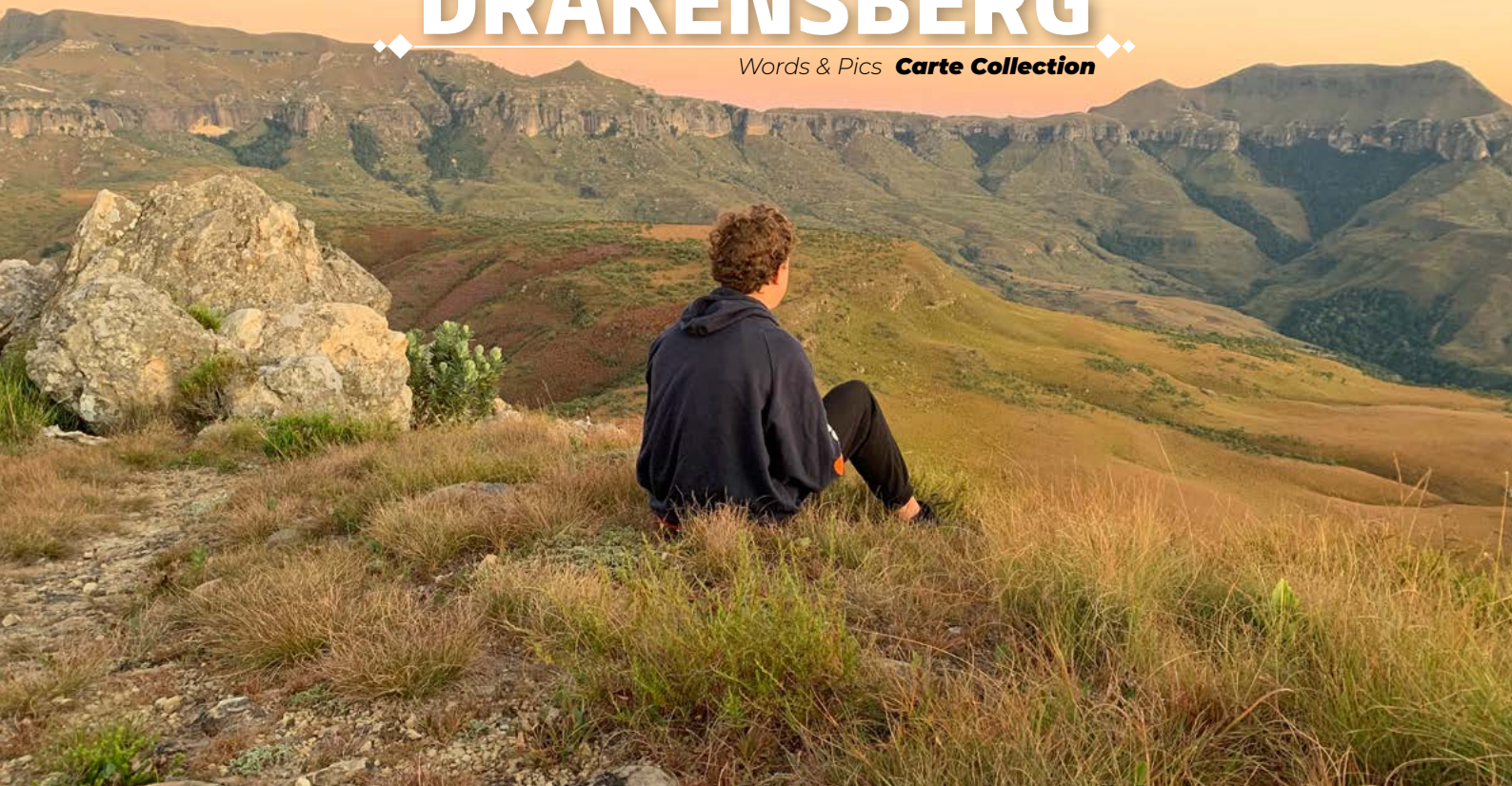
For more info



<https://africaseden.travel/>

WALKING THE WILD HEART OF THE NORTHERN DRAKENSBERG

Words & Pics **Carte Collection**



There's a special kind of stillness in the Northern Drakensberg – a quiet hum of life that lingers beneath the rustle of leaves and the whisper of wind through the valleys.

Here, where the escarpment rises in sweeping folds of sandstone and the light dances off tumbling streams, a new walking experience invites you to journey through one of South Africa's most awe-inspiring landscapes – The Northern Drakensberg Nature Way.

This four-day slackpacking trail meanders for 55 kilometres through the newly established Northern Drakensberg Nature Reserve (NDNR), offering hikers the best of both worlds: immersion in wild beauty and the comfort of warm hospitality at the end of each day. Your overnight bags are transferred from one lodge to the next, freeing you to walk with only a light daypack, to breathe deeply, and to reconnect with the mountain's rhythm.



A Landscape Protected

The Northern Drakensberg Nature Reserve is far more than a beautiful backdrop. It's the result of years of dedication and cooperation – a true conservation success story. Private landowners, conservation organisations, and the World Wildlife Fund have joined forces to consolidate a patchwork of land into a 6,500-hectare corridor, connecting Sterkfontein Nature Reserve in the Free State with the uKhahlamba/ Maloti Drakensberg Park in KwaZulu-Natal – a UNESCO World Heritage Site celebrated for its biodiversity and ancient San rock art.

The goals of the NDNR go beyond preservation. They include enhancing regional water security, protecting cultural heritage, and uplifting local communities through eco-tourism and employment. Walking here is to step into a living example of how conservation and community can thrive together.

Day 1: The Cavern to Greenfire Lodge (12 km | 767 m ascent)

Your adventure begins at The Cavern, a family-run mountain retreat known for its warmth and hospitality. The trail starts beneath the canopy of the Fern Forest – a lush, shaded world of ferns, mosses, and trickling streams – before emerging onto

a steep ascent through Rustler's Gap, where the landscape opens dramatically, revealing sweeping views.

The contour path that follows, known as Bishop's Inkaba, winds its way below the cliff line, past the top of Charlies Bush. Wildflowers brighten the path, and eland or mountain reedbuck might be spotted grazing on the ridges. After a steady climb up to Stoney Pass and a gentle descent, Greenfire Lodge is a welcome sight – remote, rustic, and tucked into the mountains. Dinner is hearty, the fire crackles, and the night sky, unpolluted and infinite, reminds you just how far you've come from your everyday reality.

Day 2: Greenfire Lodge to Berghouse Cottages (18 km | 337 m ascent)

The second day is the longest but perhaps the most varied. The route follows a mountain bike path that traces the mini escarpment before joining an old jeep track. The walking is easy, with the trail undulating gently along ridgelines that offer spectacular views in every direction.

*As you pass behind Montusi Mountain,
the path dips towards the
Wanhoop Stream – a perfect place
to pause, remove your boots, and cool your
feet in the crystal-clear water.*

The final stretch climbs steadily towards Berghouse Cottages, thatch chalets perch on the hillside, each with a front-row seat to the drama of the Amphitheatre – one of the Drakensberg's most iconic landmarks. The cottages are beautifully appointed, meals are served in-room, and the mountain light at sunset is something you'll never forget.



Day 3: Berghouse Cottages to Montusi Mountain Lodge (9 km | 204 m ascent)

After the exertion of the previous day, this stage offers a gentler rhythm. You'll descend to the Wanhooop River and follow a wide, meandering trail that winds through open grasslands alive with birdlife.

The route climbs slowly towards Montusi Mountain Lodge, where you're welcomed by expansive lawns and the scent of the mountains carried on the breeze. The freestanding chalets each enjoy uninterrupted views, while the main lodge offers inviting lounges, a bar, and a terrace perfect for a relaxed afternoon lunch. This is a day for rest – to stretch out tired legs, journal by the pool, or simply sit in stillness as the clouds drift across the peaks.

Day 4: Montusi to The Cavern (16 km | 492 m ascent)

The final leg of the journey is a fitting finale – a trail that seems to distil all the beauty and challenge of the Berg into one day. From Montusi's stables, the path climbs gently past the top of

a waterfall and then descends into the gorge below, where the sound of rushing water echoes through the valley.



Following the river for a short distance, you'll soon join the quad biking track to All Out Adventures, where a quick coffee and friendly faces provide a cheerful mid-morning stop. Then comes the last ascent – a zigzagging climb up “down-time” and along Trilby Hill, rewarded with panoramic views of the escarpment. The path contours the ridge before curving below Camel's Hump, crossing Mpumlanga- and First Ridge, across the top of the Grotto, and finally descending past Cowslip Falls Dam towards The Cavern.

It's a triumphant finish – feet dusty, heart full – as the mountains bid farewell and you find yourself back where you began; but somehow changed.

A Journey Worth Taking

The Northern Drakensberg Nature Way is more than a trail; it's an immersion in the soul of the Berg – its ecology, its history, and its people. It's a celebration of conservation in action and a reminder that protecting wild spaces can also create livelihoods and unforgettable experiences.

Whether you walk it in summer's lush greens or winter's golden hues, this journey offers more than a hiking adventure – it offers connection: to nature, to others, and to the timeless rhythm of the mountains.



<https://www.ndnr.co.za/nature-way/>

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SUTHERLAND:

IF YOU ARE AWESTRUCK
BY THE STARS, WAIT 'TIL YOU SEE
WHAT'S UNDER YOUR FEET

Words **Sharon Waugh**

Pics **Ulrich Gernholtz / Rogge Cloof Private Nature Reserve**

The Wonders Above

It was an icy winter night in Sutherland, the coldest part of the country, and the chill of the ever-so-slight breeze cut right through me. I tried to comfort myself with the thought that cold air tends to be clearer than warm air, so the more I shivered, the more stars I was likely to see. My teeth chattered as I directed my gaze towards the night sky. The sight of a faint cloud blocking my view of the stars was somewhat disappointing – until I realised that that was not in fact a cloud but the Milky Way itself. A dense cluster of flaming balls of gas, some millions of light years away, so densely packed they could be confused with streaks of cirrus. I couldn't feel the cold after that, just a sense of awe.

After being further wonderstruck at various constellations seen through different telescopes as part of our stargazing experience, I became aware of how infinitely insignificant my problems were, and a shooting star reduced me to tears. seen.

Earlier that day, we had visited SALT – the Southern African Large Telescope – and watched the massive dome, of what is currently the Southern hemisphere's largest single optical telescope, rotate in what felt like a moment straight out of a science fiction film.

When I woke up the next morning at Rogge Cloof Private Game Reserve, a dark sky resort and member of the Cape Country Routes, I was incredibly satisfied with my Sutherland experience, little did I know, the wonders below would be just as extraordinary as those above.

The Wonders Below

After a hearty breakfast, we embarked on a hike Rogge Cloof's desolate yet striking Karoo landscape.

We found our way to Poet's Cave, where we amused ourselves smashing sheets of ice from the stream onto rocks – a strangely satisfying Karoo-style stress reliever – before heading back.

Next, we boarded a safari vehicle for a game drive quite unlike any other. As Salpeterkop, an extinct volcano last active roughly 66 million years ago, loomed in the distance, the terracotta coloured dust we were driving on turned grey. The vehicle came to a stop, and we enjoyed tea, coffee and some biltong, a much needed treat after our hike.

While Rogge Cloof is home to vast numbers of springbok and other wildlife, we had seen few if any on this drive, but this safari experience was about to reveal a very different kind of animal, or at least

the remnants of one. Our guide, Cari van Eeden, led us onto what's known as the Fossil Plain and gestured for us to look down.

There in the dirt were fossils, everywhere. Cari pointed out what seemed to be most of the skeleton of an eight-foot reptile, its head, spine, and tail visible in the dirt. A few feet away, four vertebrae lay in a perfect line. Cari knelt and brushed away sand to reveal a rib, then gently covered it again. "It's from a therapsid," she explained, "possibly a pareiasaur."

We returned to the safari vehicle, posed for some photos with it (the vehicle, not the fossil!) and began the journey back to the lodge, still processing what we'd just seen.

I tried making sense of what we had just seen. My initial assumption was that anything that ended with an "saur" must be a dinosaur. I was wrong. Cari explained that therapsids were not dinosaurs at all, but early mammal-like reptiles that lived more than 252 million years ago, long before the first dinosaurs appeared.

A few months earlier, I had visited the West Coast Fossil Park, one of the few places in the world where fossils remain visible in the ground. There, a world-class museum showcases the remains of prehistoric mammals like short-necked giraffes, sabre-toothed cats, and African bears, dating back five million years. I found the experience to be fascinating.



SALT - Southern African Large Telescope |



Guide Cari van Eeden

According to my (limited) understanding of all things prehistoric, dinosaur fossils are generally found very deep in the earth, embedded in the rock, and people go to great lengths to retrieve them.

Yet here we were sipping tea in the open veld of a nature reserve in Sutherland, where the fossils of oversized lizard-like creatures that lived before the dinosaurs (and at least 247 million years before those of the mammals of the West Coast Fossil Park) were just lying in the dirt, above ground – with not even a palaeontologist in sight!

My mind was blown. It took me most of the drive back to our accommodation to realise the significance of it all.

Other reasons to visit Rogge Cloof Private Nature Reserve

On another game drive at sunset, we saw some of the reserve's many springboks and Rosalyn, one of the cheetahs that roam the reserve. We stayed in comfortable, eco-friendly accommodation, enjoyed excellent meals in the Rittersaal Dining Hall, and sampled the estate's very own wines during a delightful tasting.

Rogge Cloof prides itself on its stars and springboks, which feature in its logo. Personally, I feel it should be "stars, springboks, and therapsids," though admittedly, it doesn't roll off the tongue quite as well.

Either way, the next time you go to Sutherland, yes, look up. Try to take in the magnitude of the universe in all its infinite brilliance, but don't forget to look down too. You never know what remarkable things may be lying in the dirt.

essentials:

Getting there

Sutherland is a 4-hour drive from Cape Town International Airport.



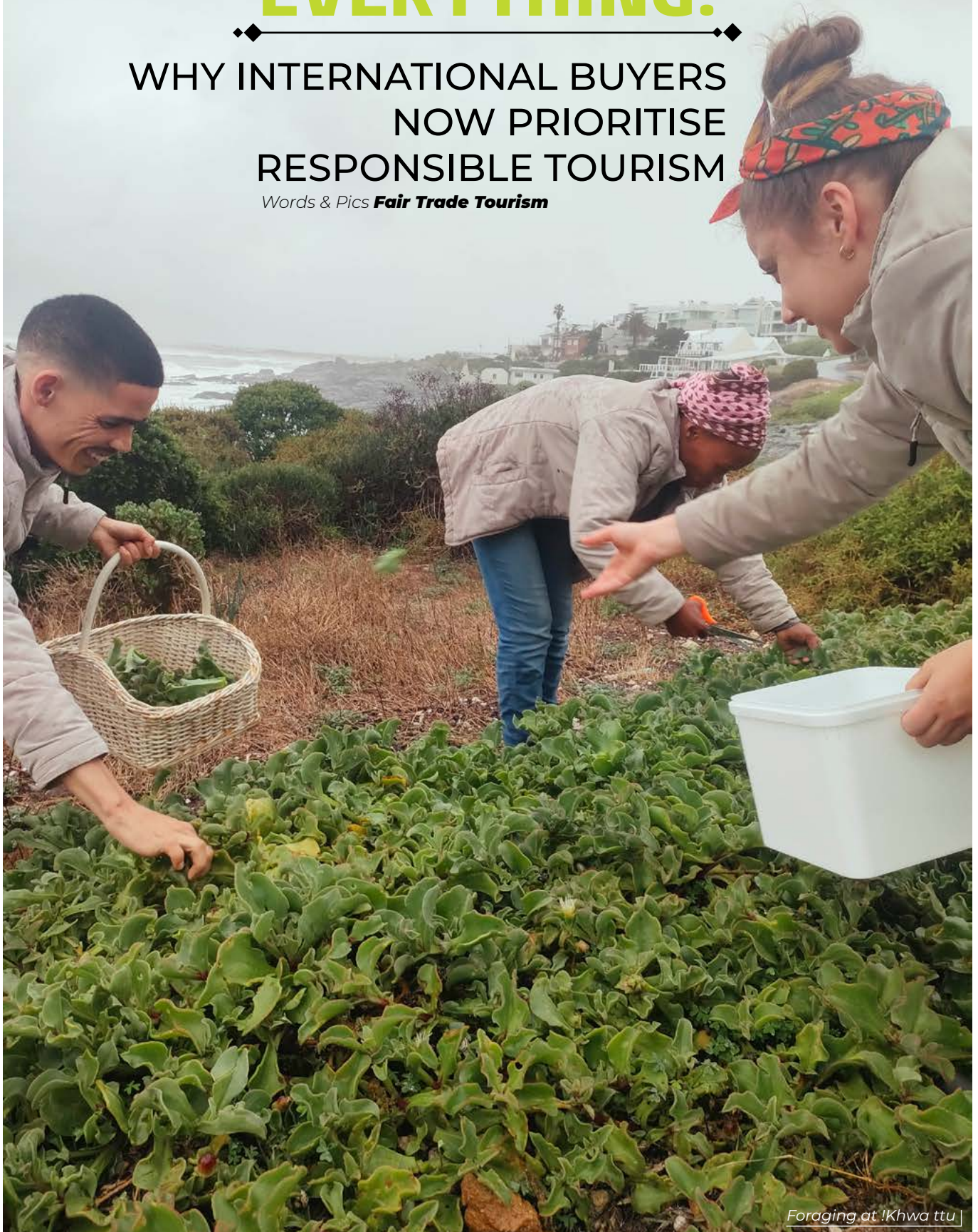
Where to Stay:

<https://www.capecountryroutes.com/rogge-cloof/>

THE CONVERSATION THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING:

WHY INTERNATIONAL BUYERS
NOW PRIORITISE
RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Words & Pics **Fair Trade Tourism**



Foraging at !Khwa ttu |

Michael Daiber still remembers the moment his understanding of tourism shifted. A major international tour operator was visiting !Khwa ttu San Culture and Education Centre, and Michael had meticulously planned what he assumed they wanted: sweeping West Coast landscapes, immersive cultural programmes, and a classic game drive.

But halfway to the vehicle, the buyer wandered off the route, drawn instead to a staff member feeding chickens behind the scenes. What followed would rewrite Michael's assumptions entirely.



!Khwa ttu's chicken project

The woman shared the story of !Khwa ttu's chicken project – how the restaurant team had suggested keeping hens to supply fresh eggs, how the manure enriched the vegetable gardens, how she personally knew which hen laid the brightest-orange yolks. She spoke of her journey from unemployment to becoming, as she put it, “the mother of all these chickens.”



Harvesting medicinal herbs at !Khwa ttu

The buyer stopped the tour. “I’ve seen enough,” he said. “This story is more

important than the big herd of zebra you can find anywhere.”

A decade later, that tiny project still draws about 4,500 visitors a year – not for wildlife, but for human connection and demonstrable impact. And increasingly, it’s exactly the kind of story that shapes how international buyers choose their partners.

A New Economic Reality

For years, tourism marketed itself around place and experience: good locations, comfortable rooms, great food, wildlife, culture. Sustainability was a “nice to have” – visible but not decisive. That world has changed.

As PJ Basson of Montagu Country Hotel explains, the shift first became clear during a 2015 UK trade mission. Among several properties presenting to tour operators, one stood out: the only one with proven responsible tourism practices. Buyers gravitated toward them.

“I wanted to do business,” PJ says. “I wanted to be the company operators automatically turn to.” Responsible practices weren’t a moral add-on; they were a commercial strategy.

The numbers support this shift. Booking.com reports that 53% of travellers now consider their environmental and community impact, and 69% want to leave destinations better than they found them. As a result, operators arrive with detailed sustainability questionnaires covering energy, water, waste, carbon, staff demographics, local procurement, and community investment – sometimes running to dozens of pages.

When Data Translates into Opportunity

At Ghost Mountain Inn, those forms initially felt overwhelming. “We started getting these incredibly long questionnaires,” recalls Director Jean Toucher. Gathering the information required digging through departments and translating informal practices into measurable systems.

Then a couple approached the hotel requesting a carbon-neutral wedding. Thanks to their meticulous data records, Jean had everything at hand. The clients’

auditors reviewed the hotel’s footprint and recommended a small offset: planting indigenous trees and a few fruit trees to complement the hotel’s school programme.

That one request expanded into a larger initiative – restoring indigenous forest cover, removing invasive species, and strengthening community partnerships.

The booking wasn’t secured because the property is beautiful – though it is – but because it could prove its footprint and its positive impact. “Every business is looking for its USP,” Jean says. “And we don’t all want to differentiate on price.”

Responsible Tourism as Good Business

At Flatdogs Camp in Zambia, responsible tourism isn’t a trend – it’s DNA. Project Luangwa, established in 1990, supports learners through secondary and tertiary education, breaking the barriers that keep rural youth out of school.

Three decades later, the results span generations: graduates becoming vets with Conservation South Luangwa, teachers returning to uplift local learners, and new families continuing the education journey.

Flatdogs’ investment in solar power reflects the same philosophy. It was partly environmental, but also a hedge against rising energy costs. “Zesco’s prices have quadrupled,” says co-owner Jess Salmon. “We’re formally off-grid now, and our team is more interested in getting solar themselves. The whole village is making greener choices.”

In these cases, responsible tourism isn’t box-ticking. It is resilience, reputation, and relevance.

The Power of Staff-Led Impact

Some of the most compelling initiatives come directly from staff. The now-famous chicken project at !Khwa ttu began as a staff suggestion – one Michael initially resisted. Concerns about logistics and animal welfare gave him pause, but the team was committed.

“They just loved it,” he recalls. The kitchen, garden, and restaurant teams created a closed-loop food system and a powerful storytelling culture. Staff could share knowledge authentically, and



Ghost Mountain Inn wedding

guests responded – with enthusiasm, bookings, and glowing reviews.

This pattern appears again and again among responsible tourism leaders: when staff are involved, pride deepens, guest experience improves, and operations strengthen.

“You have to involve people,” Jess says. “Ask them what they think is appropriate on village visits, what worries them, what guests get wrong. It changes everything.”

When Good Stories Need Proof

Even with genuine impact, greenwashing has made buyers cautious. Ghost Mountain Inn has been embedded in community and environmental work since the 1960s, long before “responsible tourism” existed as a term. Yet by the early 2010s, Jean found that authenticity alone no longer sufficed.

“Greenwashing diluted our story,” she says. “People weren’t believing us.”

The post-COVID travel shift – toward smaller, more conscious journeys – prompted the hotel to formalise what it had always done. Documentation became essential, especially with the



Chundu villagers - Flatdogs

development of the luxury Sala Beach House. Systems once held in the memories of long-serving staff now needed to be codified and scaled.

The lesson: responsible tourism isn’t only about doing good – it’s about showing it, consistently and credibly.

Certification as a Framework (Not the Story)

For many businesses, certification provided the structure needed to measure, organise, and communicate their work. For PJ, it strengthened community partnerships and helped operators cut through uncertainty. For Jean, it offered an efficient way to answer international questionnaires: “Now I just send them the certificate. It helps hugely.”

But certification is not the story. The story is the substance behind it:

- !Khwa ttu’s staff-led food system
- Flatdogs’ multi-generational education programme
- Ghost Mountain Inn’s ecological restoration
- Montagu Country Hotel’s community partnerships

These are unique, grounded, and impossible to replicate.

And that is ultimately what international buyers want: authentic, measurable, community-rooted impact that makes travel meaningful.

What Fair Trade Tourism Offers



Fair Trade Tourism (FTT) provides Africa-focused, independently verified certification that aligns with global sustainability standards. It helps tourism businesses:

- organise and measure their existing responsible practices
- identify gaps and build long-term systems
- simplify international sustainability questionnaires
- offer third-party credibility in a market wary of greenwashing

Certification doesn’t dictate what businesses should do – it helps them prove it.



Dinner at Chalestons - Montagu Country Hotel

Essentials:

<https://khwattu.org/>

<https://www.montagucountryhotel.co.za/>

<https://www.ghostmountaininn.co.za/>

<https://salabeach.co.za/>



For more info on certification check out <https://www.fairtradetourism.org/>



WHY THE TRUE VALUE OF YOUR WINE

GOES BEYOND THE PRICE TAG

Fairtrade Africa Marks 20 Years – Let's All Build a Fairer South Africa Together

That glass of wine you pour at the end of a long day carries more than flavour, it carries stories. Behind every sip are the farmers tending vines under unpredictable skies, the workers who hand-pick grapes, and the communities whose livelihoods depend on fairness.

As South Africa's wine, coffee, and cocoa industries face rising costs, erratic weather, and fierce global competition, one question grows louder: *what is the true value of what we consume?*

For Isaac Tongola, Executive Director of Fairtrade Africa, fairness must flow through the entire value chain – from producers to the consumers who savour the final product.

"A fair price is multifaceted. It ensures that producers earn a sustainable income while consumers receive transparency and value," he explains. "In South Africa, we've long had a strong institutional framework for fairness, but these are being tested by inflation, rising administered prices, and a growing cost-of-living crisis. This is why sustainable, fair farming matters now more than ever. It strengthens our economy, protects our environment, and safeguards production and food security for future generations."

20 Years of Fairness in Action

For two decades, Fairtrade Africa has stood for one powerful principle: that trade should reward those who cultivate the land responsibly and treat

workers fairly. From empowering coffee cooperatives in East Africa to improving labour conditions on South African wine farms, Fairtrade's impact has been both local and lasting.

Marking its 20-year milestone, the organisation is relaunching its successful *Be Fair Right Now* (BFRN) campaign in South Africa – an invitation for everyone to rethink what fairness really means.

"For 20 years, Fairtrade Africa has stood with farmers, workers, and communities across Africa and the Middle East, building fairer futures from the ground up," Tongola adds. "From empowering coffee cooperatives in East Africa to improving labour conditions on South African wine farms, our legacy is one of progress built through partnership but now, we're calling on consumers, retailers, and brands to be part of that legacy – to redefine value not by what something costs, but by what it contributes."

Where Fairness Meets Flavour

Fairtrade-certified farms embody resilience. They invest in sustainable practices that reduce emissions, protect soil health, and improve livelihoods through access to healthcare, education, fair wages, and community development. These commitments strengthen rural communities and help secure South Africa's agricultural future.

The Be Fair Right Now campaign celebrates these achievements while reminding South Africans that fairness is a choice made every time we shop. Choosing Fairtrade coffee, wine, chocolate, or tea directly supports farmers who are building a more equitable and sustainable agricultural system – rooted in dignity and respect for people and the planet.

Join the Movement - and Win

Running from November 2025 to mid-January 2026, the campaign features an engaging online quiz that helps consumers explore how fair their current purchases are – and learn simple steps toward more ethical shopping. Participants stand a chance to win a Fairtrade hamper or the ultimate Fairtrade Experience: an all-inclusive weekend getaway in the winelands.



Over 18? Enter here
<https://www.befairrightnow-sa.org/>



Birds on the Brink by Alan Lee and Shamiso Banda

Birds on the Brink is a compelling and beautifully presented tribute to the coastal and terrestrial species most at risk in South Africa, Lesotho and Eswatini. Through striking imagery and expert storytelling, it reveals not only the beauty and quirks of these vulnerable birds, but also the mounting human pressures pushing them towards the edge. First-hand accounts from scientists and conservationists add emotional weight, showcasing the dedication behind every hard-won conservation success. Both a vital reference and a powerful call to action, this book reminds us that while the threats are real, so too is our ability – and responsibility – to protect our shared future.



Sappi Tree Spotting Cape: From Coast to Kalahari by Val Thomas and Rina Grant

This edition of the Sappi Tree Spotting series brings the Cape's remarkable diversity to life, guiding readers from coastal forests to the Kalahari's arid edges. With clear terminology, vivid illustrations and practical seasonal grids, it makes tree identification both simple and inspiring. A beautifully accessible companion for anyone exploring the region's extraordinary indigenous trees. The other books in the series: Sappi Tree Spotting Lowveld, Sappi Tree Spotting Highlands, Sappi Tree Spotting KwaZulu-Natal & Eastern Cape and Sappi Tree Spotting Bushveld.



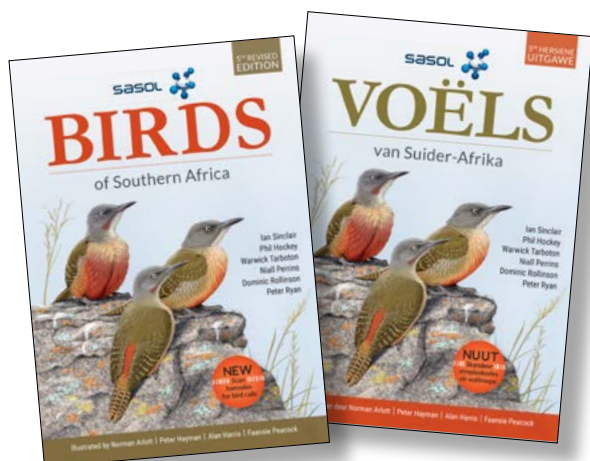
The Last Lions by Colin Bell & Don Pinnock

This powerful and deeply moving book tracks the dramatic decline of Africa's lions, whose range has shrunk by 85% and whose numbers hover at just over 20,000. Through striking photography and compelling stories from rangers, scientists and communities, it reveals both the crisis and the courage behind efforts to protect these iconic cats. While unflinching in its truths, it ultimately offers hope, showcasing innovative approaches to coexistence and issuing an urgent call to act before it's too late.



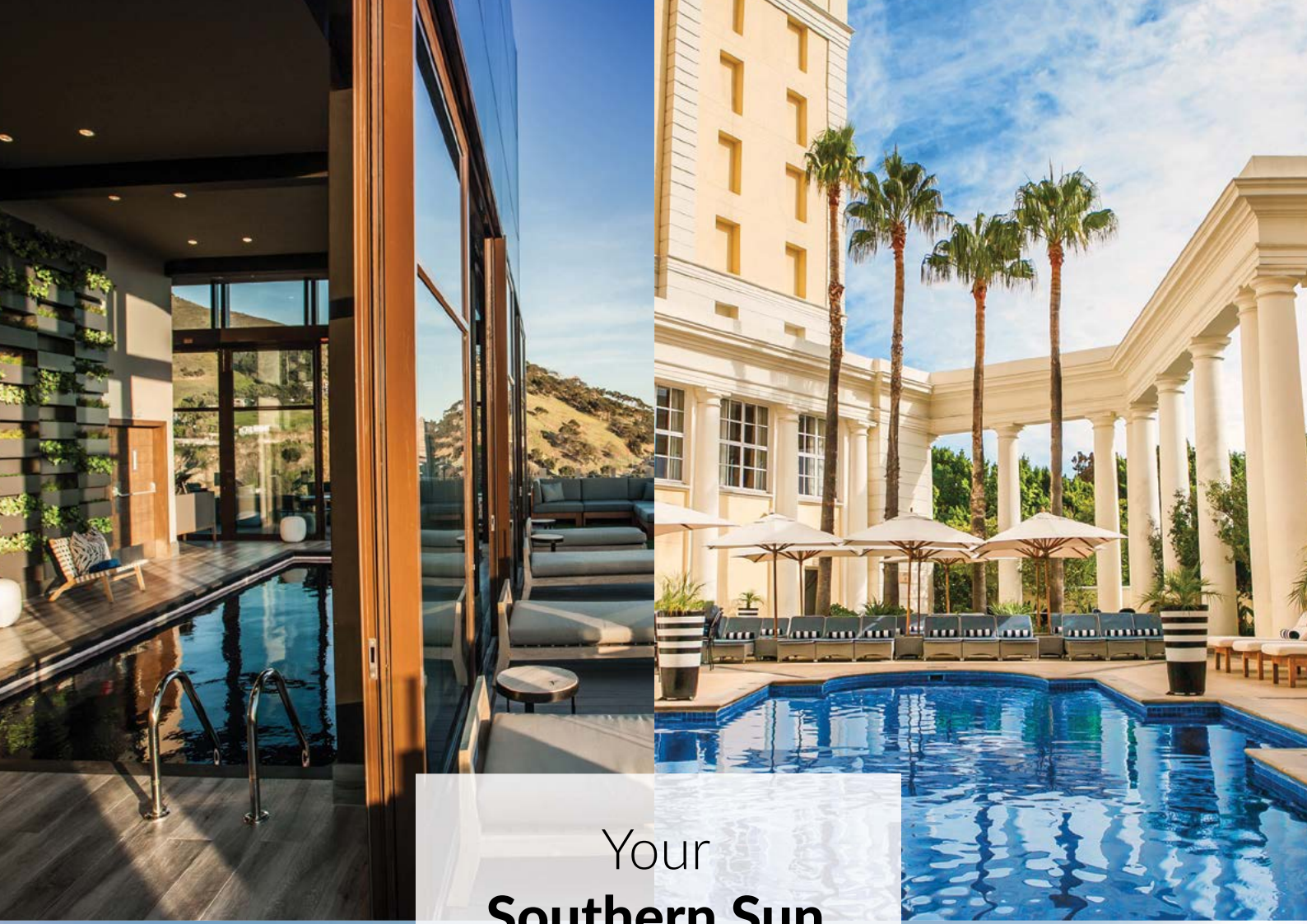
Sasol Birds of Southern Africa - 5th REVISED EDITION

by Ian Sinclair, Phil Hockey, Warwick Tarboton, Niall Perrins, Dominic Rollinson & Peter Ryan

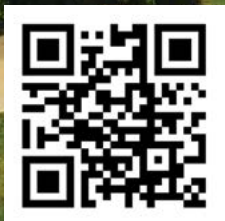


Now in its fifth edition, and available in both English and Afrikaans, Sasol Birds of Southern Africa remains the definitive companion for anyone exploring the region's extraordinary birdlife. Fully updated by a stellar panel of ornithologists and enriched with over 3,000 illustrations – including 800 brand-new artworks – the guide captures the colour, behaviour, and subtle differences that make southern African birding so rewarding. The scan-and-play call feature brings the bush to life, while revised maps, fresh records, and expert annotations ensure accuracy in the field. Beautifully crafted and scientifically robust, it's an essential, inspiring guide for both budding and seasoned birders.





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