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Why You Need To Take African Safari

by Fiona Harper

Why You Need To Take African Safari

Driving through open savannah, in the dark, tracking a pride of lions is one of those rare holiday experiences that will stay in your memory bank forever. Travel writer Fiona Harper recommends putting a South African safari on your Bucket List today.

Besides extraordinary safari lodgings, spectacular game drives in open topped jeeps at dawn feature post-safari breakfast diversions beside waterholes. Or dusk drives bathed in blazing orange twilight, pausing to watch the sun dip below the horizon, gin and tonic in hand. South Africa knows how to show visitors a good time.

Here's why you should go:

Nambiti Private Game Reserve

A Big Five Game Reserve, Nambiti is midway between coastal Durban and inland Johannesburg. The Drakensberg Mountains dominate the horizon with their basaltic buttress rising above the plains.

It takes about 3 hours to drive to Nambiti from Johannesburg but if you're cashed up you could charter an aircraft and land at the parks airstrip or heli landing pads. KwaZulu Natal province is renowned for its extraordinarily beautiful landscapes & Nambiti doesn't disappoint.



A former cattle station 15 years ago, the land was since declared a 21,000 acre nature reserve and revegetated with native plants and wildlife including the Big Five. Lion, leopard, elephant, rhinoceros and buffalo are the most coveted animals to spot from open-sided jeeps during twice daily jaunts. The lesser known, but no less unique, Small Five are also in residence at Nambiti: ant lion, leopard tortoise, elephant shrew, rhinoceros beetle and buffalo weaver (a bird). You'll need to keep your eyes peeled to spot them though!

Lions Valley Lodge is one of nine lodges and a tented camp discreetly located around the park. Freestanding thatched roof huts have commanding views. Particularly from the suitably named Romance Suite where dual bathtubs overlook a raised deck, down the valley to the ridge beyond. Don't be surprised to spot giraffes their necks elegantly extended skywards, grazing beyond the glass walled shower. www.nambiti.com

2. Timbavati Game Reserve

Sharing an unfenced border with world famous Kruger National Park, Timbavati forms part of a significant wildlife movement corridor. A cooperative of sorts, the park was established by conservation minded landowners to address degradation of former wilderness and to protect remaining unspoilt tracts of land. The elusive White Lions of Timbavati are the most famous residents, their white coats attributed to lions holding spiritual powers.

Stretching across over 53,000 hectares of bushveld, 12 lodges offer a variety of accommodation from tented camps through to five star luxury with an African twist.

Camping was rarely as dignified as the style on offer at Tanda Tula Safari Camp. For a start, vast adobe-walled ensuite bathrooms are attached to each tent, complete with a claw foot bath and an open roofed hot shower. Canvas walls roll up on three sides affording views over the riverbed from a wrought iron king-sized bed piled with fluffy doonas and cushions. With safaris setting out each morning before dawn (the best time to spot wildlife - the second best time is dusk), fresh toast and steaming tea are delivered to your tent by the same trackers who take you on safari. It's luxurious glamping not camping. www.tandatula.com

Across an open savannah plain, Kings Camp is more King than camp. In thatched roof bungalows, zebra and antelope skins adorn polished concrete floors, crisp white netting is draped over a hardwood carved four poster bed. Returning from dinner served on fine china, don't be surprised to find that candles have been lit, the bath has been run and is filled with aromatic rose petals.

A trifle formal in a Colonial fashion, one of the most fun features of Kings Camp is enjoying the curiosity of cheeky monkeys beside the swimming pool, viewed from the glass sided gym. www.kingscamp.com

Karkloof Spa

Combining wellness with wildebeest, Karkloof Spa is a retreat within the wilderness, situated on a small private Pietermaritzburg landholding about an hour and a half out of Durban.

While wildlife viewing is part of any visit to Karkloof, the real attraction is pampering and relaxation. It's the kind of place you'd go to chill out in seclusion with a loved one. Sure, you could spend your days with leisurely hikes to waterfalls, riding mountain bike trails, swimming laps in the pool or taking game drives at dusk.

Or you could enter the spa after breakfast and not emerge until it's time to dress for dinner. And why not? Exceptionally trained Thai therapists administer therapeutic treatments in exquisite surroundings. Treatment rooms are bathed in natural light overlooking the veld. Steam rooms and therapy pools, a sauna, Jacuzzi, soothing floatation tank, a glass-walled pedicure lounge and a conservatory-like relaxation lounge encourage endless pampering. Healthy sustenance is on hand at the-spa café ensuring you needn't leave to satisfy hunger pangs.

Accustomed to sending guests into blissful oblivion, with muscles relaxed into a jelly-like state, staff are on hand with an electric buggy to take you back to your villa. Therapy is exhausting!

You probably won't want to leave.

More information www.southafrica.net

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