





INTO THE WILD

ANSWER THE CALL OF NATURE WITH A LUXURY SAFARI IN SOUTH AFRICA

BY // GEORGINA WILSON-POWELL

Opposite page: A lion rests. This page: Dinner at Royal Malewane. Following pages clockwise from top: A buffalo; one of the royal suites; an elephant; a bathroom at Royal Malewane; a leopard; one of the rooftop terraces.

Heading into the bush, bumping around in a rattling old Land Rover, dust flying in your wake... this is a lot of people's idea of what a safari holiday in South Africa would be like and indeed it can be. But if you know where to look a safari holiday can be a whole lot more... more relaxing, more luxurious and more captivating than you ever thought possible. >

Kruger National Park is the largest game reserve in South Africa and is over 100 years old. Founded by Paul Kruger in 1898 as Sabie Game Reserve to control hunting and protect diminished species, in 2002 it became part of a larger park, the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, which also includes the Limpopo National Park in Mozambique and Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe. It is home to more mammals than any other African game reserve, with 147 species as well as 517 different types of bird.

Sitting pretty on a private reserve in the park is Royal Malewane, an African diamond in the rough, when even the rough is not really all that rough, but a mesmerising African landscape. A luxury lodge on 13,000 hectares Royal Malewane has access to spectacular wildlife viewing and extensive flora and fauna but it's dwarfed by the seemingly, never-ending African skies.

The lodge is removed from the modern world and yet it has not forgotten it. It is easily accessible by road (or private jet or helicopter for those who want to be there in a hurry) and has all the luxury that you expect from a hotel nominated for Best Hotel in the World by Vertuoso Best of the Best 2008.

In terms of accommodation, you may only be a branch away from the African wilderness but Royal Malewane offers old style colonial splendour. The Royal suites are linked to the main camp by elevated walkways that span the complex meaning you have your very own sumptuous treehouse. As active as your imagination might have been when you were younger, not many children will have dreamed of having a treehouse that comes with its own butler, terrace and infinity pool, a private dining room and lounge and thatched gazebo. Each suite sleeps four people, in two bedrooms, with only the odd animal to disturb your privacy. If you always thought getting close to nature, meant basic, think again!

Once settled in your treetop suite, you can start to think about what type of game drive to go on in the national park. The hotel offers individually tailored excursions in specially adapted 4x4s which can be undertaken at dawn, at sundown or at night. Avoiding the heat of the day is not just better for you but also you're more likely to see the animals as they make their way to watering holes at the start and end of the day.



“SITTING PRETTY ON A PRIVATE RESERVE IN THE PARK IS ROYAL MALEWENE, AN AFRICAN DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH, WHEN EVEN THE ROUGH IS NOT REALLY ALL THAT ROUGH, BUT A MESMERISING AFRICAN LANDSCAPE.”

Whilst you are on a game drive, you can learn how to spot animal tracks and what signs to look for, taught by one of the only surviving master trackers in South Africa. He offers a fascinating insight into a way of life from Africa's past. If you are an experienced rider, the hotel can also facilitate game drives on horseback for a more unusual experience.

Spend more than one day in the bush and you will see the eternal battle of life and death enacted around you as the animal food chain comes to life before your eyes. Kruger National Park is home to one of the most diverse selection of wildlife in South Africa. As well as the big five, there are also plenty of cheetahs, zebras, impalas, eland, giraffes and waterbuck to watch.

Once back from the majesty of

the bush, Royal Malewane can provide more than a shower to get rid of the inevitable dust, it has one of the most exclusive spas on the continent. Regularly awarded by guides and magazines like **Tatler** (most recently included in its 101 Best Spas in the World list), the Waters of Royal Malewane Bush Spa centres around hydrotherapy as there is a private underground supply of mineral rich water at the hotel. It is used throughout, for the heated pool in the central courtyard, the hot and cold baths, Jacuzzi and steam rooms. Luxurious massages and body treatments are available from internationally qualified therapists, which are guaranteed to refresh and relax your mind and body. If you are staying in a royal suite then each one comes with four complimentary massage treat-



terns and the whole hotel takes on an air of magical beauty.

If tracking animals, spa treatments and therapies and fine food, still don't quench your thirst for a luxury holiday, Royal Malewane has yet more up its khaki sleeve. As appropriate for such a resort, the lodge is heavily involved in the conservation of its environment and has various projects underway such as the wildlife rehabilitation centre, which has a special emphasis on preserving local cheetah populations, which you can visit. If you're after an activity a little more light-hearted than hot air balloon flights can be arranged. You might be high up in the trees at the hotel but nothing can prepare you for an early morning glide over expansive terrain, silently watching as the wildlife below goes about its business at dawn. Simply spectacular! For those who can't bear to leave the clubs at home and miss the fairway then there is also access to a top of the range golf course, perfect for those who want a relaxing stroll and to get in a few rounds on holiday.

Africa's national parks and game reserves have an endless pull over many people eager to seek out animal excitement in the wild, a stay at Royal Malewane means you can combine this with one of the most luxurious holidays known to man. ■

Specialist safari tour operator African & Indian Explorations offer a stay at the Royal Malewane Lodge from AED3957 per person per night on a fully inclusive basis. Excludes flights. For more information visit: www.africanexplorations.com or call T: +44 1993 822 443.

ments per day, meaning you can lie back and enjoy what has to be one of the pinnacles of opulence, set deep within the African bush.

You might be watching the animals having to run, chase and hunt their next meal, but yours will be a lot easier to source and will definitely be a lot more delicious. Royal Malewane is the first lodge to boast a Chaine des Rotisseurs Blazon for its cuisine. The accolade is a prestigious South African award given to restaurants which demonstrate exceptional fine dining. Sumptuous cuisine is a signatory feature of the lodge, despite its rural location, mouthwatering meals you'll remember for the rest of your life are a daily occurrence. However, when dining it won't just be the food you'll remember, as night sets in, the wooded landscape is lit by lan-

THE BIG FIVE

The Kruger National Park is lucky enough to play host to the big five, which can now only be found together in South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and Botswana. The big five are so named as they are the most difficult for humans to hunt in Africa on foot. Surprisingly the buffalo is the most dangerous of the five, it has caused the most fatalities of hunters out of the group. The big five consists of:

- Black or white rhinoceros
- Cape buffalo
- Leopard
- Lions
- African elephant

