

ASSOCIATED PRODUCT

FIRST-HAND FEEDBACK

[South Africa](#)

November 2023

SOUTH AFRICA

Debray, Suraj, Reda, Deirdre and Rene from our Travel Design Team, recently visited Kapama Private Game Reserve and Thornybush Game Reserve in South Africa:

Kapama Private Game Reserve is a mere 20-minute road transfer from Hoedspruit so ideal for guests wanting quick access to start their African Safari. The reserve comprises 15,000 hectares of pristine African bush. The reserve is fenced, but this did not affect the excellent game viewing we experienced while at Kapama – from a male lion roaring next to our vehicle, to big herds of buffalo, and even a leopard at our morning coffee stop walking along the road. Kapama Private Game Reserve has 4 lodges all focused around spa and wellness offerings.

Kapama Karula is their flagship lodge, with 12 luxury villas with an amazing spa, which features a spa pool with built in loungers and underwater jets, and a hydrotherapy room with steam room and ice plunge. The food was excellent and beautifully presented.

Kapama Southern Camp is a great luxury offering for families with a relaxed atmosphere. The family suites have a separate bedroom for the children, which is accessible from inside the main villa.

Kapama Buffalo Camp is an intimate 10-tent luxury safari camp. The tents are located in the treetops along an elevated wooden walkway. No kids under 16 years are allowed so ideal for guests looking for a quiet, more intimate experience. We all felt this camp was similar to our tented “classic” camps in Botswana.

Kapama River Lodge is their largest camp with 62 rooms. Ideal for groups and conferences, there is a large staff complement making sure all runs smoothly. The lodge has a resort feel with an amazing spa overlooking the bush.

Overall, I was very impressed with the reserve, the camps and the game viewing. An ideal place for guests wanting a luxury spa experience, great game viewing and excellent food.



Thornybush Game Reserve in South Africa:

“Always be on the lookout, as you never know what might cross your road”

We were 5 minutes into the reserve from the Thornybush Game Reserve gate, all of us chatting to each other while we eagerly anticipated our arrival at the lodge. To be honest, with the excitement we were definitely not keeping an eye on the game, as we were being transferred in a closed vehicle. Then boom! I spot a leopard crossing the road (+/-50 metres from us).

Leopard sightings are rare, and more often than not, you will always get a chance to see 4 of the so-called “Big 5” (elephant, lion, rhino and buffalo) first, because the leopard is so elusive. Naturally, with this excitement, I excitedly tapped on our Sable Tours driver’s shoulder to stop the vehicle, and we all scrambled to get our phones/cameras out for this special sighting. A healthy young male leopard doing his rounds, marking his territory. Sadly, the moment did not last long as he made his way into some bushes, but we did manage to capture pictures and videos during this brief moment. This is a key lesson and reminder to always be on the lookout, as you never know what might cross your road.

With 14,000 hectares of traversing in the Thornybush Reserve, there are great game-viewing opportunities. We were spoilt with excellent sightings including 3 other leopards viewed in separate locations just on one drive, and a very healthy, large successful pride of lions that took down two buffalo bulls while we were there. Also, interesting to see the tracker and guide both wear earpiece radio connections in order for the guide to still be able to engage with the guests whilst the tracker keeps an ear out for any potential action happening out in the reserve so they always on alert. Also, to co-ordinate key sighting in order for guests not to wait for their turn at the sighting but to rather have a sundowner instead.



Credit to Suraj Jivan

Siviti Timbavati Plains in the Thornybush Game Reserve in South Africa:

On route to our overnight in the Thornybush. We stopped to have a quick site visit of the recently launched Siviti Timbavati Plains lodge. Now let's not get confused by the name as the lodge is based in the southern part of the Thornybush that neighbours the Timbavati reserve unfenced.

Siviti, formerly known as Thornybush River Lodge, is proudly part of Greater Kruger National Park. With only six private suites, including the superb two-suite Timbavati Villa, Siviti is limited to 12 guests, ensuring an intimate wilderness experience. With fabulous panoramic views from the main lodge and private suites, you will feel right at home from the moment you arrive. They have recently installed a Kosher Kitchen, as well as a comfy sunken hide / lounge where you can view animals up close when they come through for a drink at the lodge watering hole. This makes for a unique offering and for those who are keen photographers. Children under the age of 16 years are not permitted unless booked on exclusive use basis.

The latest addition, not too far from Siviti is the Siviti Timbavati Homestead that is located on the banks of the Timbavati River. Consisting of 4 spacious en-suite bedrooms, kitchen, upstairs and downstairs lounge area and a bar. The Homestead forms part of their "family friendly" offering and children of any age are welcome. Children over 6 are welcome on game drives, children below 6 years are welcome at the discretion of the field guide. With a fully-catered or self-catered option available, the Homestead is ideal for families or groups traveling together. Siviti can traverse the full 14 000 hectares of the Thornybush reserve making for great game viewing opportunities.

MORE Family Collection's Monwana Game Lodge in Thornybush Game Reserve, South Africa:

Our first overnight in the Thornybush was at the new updated Monwana Game Lodge, where we really experienced their tag line... "Coming Home". We were warmly welcomed by Jarryd and his team to their secluded and intimate home. The main areas are spacious, allowing guests to find a private spot to read a book or lounge by the neatly tucked-away pool. The suites all have private plunge pools, modern furnishings, and a well-stocked mini bar, with attention paid to every detail. The Residence is a lavish space which is usually occupied by the owners, and here you truly get a sense of their preferences and taste. The Residence is a 2-bedroomed villa experience and suitable for a family or 2 couples travelling together.

The cuisine was exceptional and of a very high standard. The level of service was equally matched, and what was most impressive was that they could relay all our dietary requirements without asking us. Those with dietary requirements received personalised menus, which was such a special touch knowing that the menus were well thought-out, taking everyone into consideration.

This home is so tastefully decorated and luxurious, one would never imagine what goes on behind the scenes, where state of the art engineering equipment is quietly tucked away, but furiously working hard at recycling, purifying and heating the water for human consumption, and for the cooling and heating systems in the rooms. This was an extraordinary experience to witness how efficiently and passionately this lodge is working to conserve this precious resource.

Monwana has a unique logo which looks like a finger-print and the owners of this property have clearly left an indelible mark on every aspect this amazing home, allowing visitors to truly feel like they are coming home.

Thornybush Game Lodge in the Thornybush Game Reserve in South Africa:

Our second night was at their newly refurbished Game lodge, which is great for groups of 32 pax, but also great for smaller families as well as honeymooners, with some intimacy. The rooms are well decorated with funky Afrochic wallpaper adding some colour, which looks amazing. We were fortunate to stay in their Kamara house that recently opened in May and offers an exclusive experience, perfect for multi-gen families or friends.

We also viewed their expanded Wellness & Spa centre. Wellness Safari experiences are being offered exclusively for Thornybush Game Lodge, Kamara House, Saseka Tented Camp and Little Saseka guests. Our Guide Kaden and Tracker John "The Best" were very knowledgeable and kept us entertained. The lodge is great value for money for those wanting a 5-Star luxury experience.

Serondella Lodge is intimacy at its best in the Thornybush Game Reserve in South Africa:

This luxurious and intimate boutique safari lodge is a haven for honeymooners, families, multi-generational travellers and couples who wish to avoid big crowds. The game-viewing is phenomenal, and you need not go far for it. An abundance of wildlife makes its way to the lodge's watering hole to drink and bathe while you watch from the comfort of your spacious suite, on the main viewing deck, at the public pool or even while you swim in your own private plunge pool (apart from their one family unit, Willem's Den, that is bush facing). The product offering is a great value for money, especially when coupled with the honeymoon or stay-pay deals.



Sandor, Heidi, Dominique S, Lucky and Alex visited Brookdale Estate for a site inspection and lunch:

Brookdale is on the outskirts of Paarl, a real gem in the Cape Winelands. It is located in a valley surrounded by majestic mountains, vineyards and rolling hills. The Manor House has 5 huge bedrooms (with beautiful bathrooms) and there is one outside room. There are various lounges and outdoor seating spaces, so that guests never feel on top of each other, but rather have all these nooks to escape to in privacy. One can book individual rooms only or the whole house for exclusive-use.

Because it's so spacious and airy, it works well either way. It's the attention to the finer things that stands out. The minibar is included in the BB rate, and you won't find these miniature gin and whisky plastic bottles, but instead elegant glass decanters with a good amount of gin etc., plus fresh herbs and lemon to add to your drinks. The complimentary snacks are home-made, plus the most radically addictive Amaretto almond biscuits, olives from the estate, rusks and crisps. There are cleverly hidden plug points that can easily be popped out from furniture surfaces, and a hidden TV at the foot of the bed, which can be popped out with a remote control. Each room is individually decorated but within the same theme and style, stunning materials and embroidery, beautiful melange cotton rope bags for the pool... finely curated for the discerning guest.

There is a lovely lap pool and outside pool room, and a helicopter landing lawn. A recent addition is their off-site bistro and tasting room (award winning Chenin Blanc). The winemaker, Kiara Scott, is truly remarkable. Young, dynamic female who combines a very scientific and analytical approach to wine making with intuition, gut feel and bravery that is earning Brookdale some amazing awards. The cuisine is fine dining but relaxed and outstanding.

What really elevates the whole experience is the hands-on approach by the charming managing couple, Yvonne and Gary, who have many years of experience (worked at Singita, and as managing couple on the estate of Sol Kerzner). They just get it so right, with Yvonne's hosting abilities and Gary's magical touch in the kitchen (fine dining chef). This property would work so well right at the end of a busy safari, where guests can just chill and relax for a few days before heading back home.

It's a great base for visiting Franschhoek (only 20 minutes away) and the greater Winelands region. Would work well for all markets. They do take kids and can accommodate a roll-away bed in a suite (for kids 12 years and under). Can highly recommend this property – a real gem!



Preshima visited Tsala Treetop lodge, Walkers Beach, and experienced Newstead Vineyards and Ocean Blue Adventures:

Plettenberg Bay

A 2-night trip to Plettenberg Bay (Plett) was a great reminder of how beautiful, diverse, and full of adventure this part of South Africa truly is. This is heaven for adrenaline enthusiasts – those seeking adventure thrills like canopy tours, ziplining, one of the world's highest bungee-jumps, skydiving, hiking trails for both novices and experienced hikers, ocean adventures like swimming with seals, SUP'ing, kayaking, whale and dolphin safaris... but also those looking for a laid-back experience during the Arts Festival – boutique wine farms, and craft breweries. Plett is a great half-way stop for self-drive guests between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth.

It is also one of the 10 best places in the world to see bioluminescent waters. Bioluminescence is a fascinating phenomenon found in various organisms, including fireflies, glow worms, etc., that causes the water to glow or sparkle in different colours. During the month of March, for 3 days only, residents and lucky guests are fortunate to witness this.

I spent a night at Tsala Treetop Lodge and Walkers Beach, including a wine-tasting experience at Newstead Vineyards and a whale-watching experience at Ocean Blue Adventures.

Walkers Beach

WOW! Walkers Beach offers an unforgettable experience, ideally located in the heart of Plettenberg Bay with direct access to Central Beach and magnificent views of the bay, the Robberg Peninsula, and the Tsitsikamma mountain range. An ocean and mountain view – what more could one ask for?

There is a “barefoot luxury” approach to the décor, with tastefully appointed art pieces throughout the property. Guests looking for an intimate, home-away-from-home, and luxurious hospitality experience will fall in love with Walkers Beach. Jayne and Shelley were our lovely hosts; nothing was too much trouble, and all the Walkers Beach staff were super friendly and attentive.

Ideal for most guests: families looking for an exclusive-use experience (children 12+ years are welcome), honeymoon travellers, small groups (maximum 20 guests), guests looking for easy access to Plett Beach and easy access to many activities (at an additional cost).

All 11 suites have the frills and fancies one would need: spacious rooms, bathrooms (double basin), and outdoor balconies, either with direct access to one of the two pools or a small garden area, and other rooms with a 180-degree view of Plettenberg Beach. The suites are open-plan (bedroom and shower), so there is very little privacy; however, the lavatory is separate and private. I personally like the recyclable and locally sourced bathroom

amenities, mark-up face cloth, and delicious selection of teas. A lift is available to access the three levels of suites, so guests with walking disabilities have access to the suites and main area. The suites are not paraplegic-friendly at this stage, but this may be a possibility in the future.

Breakfast was delicious and fresh, continental style, with homemade muffins and juices, cold meats, a selection of cheeses, fresh salmon, and a selection of hot breakfast options. The Eggs Benedict was my absolute favourite! Walkers Beach is a lovely gem that offers great comfort and unique experiences.



Hunter Hotel & Tsala Treetop Lodge

PARADISE! A magnificent, beautiful garden setting, 20 minutes from Plettenberg Bay. A haven and sanctuary for guests looking for a quiet and secluded experience. The property has enough on offer so guests can kick off their shoes, sit back, relax, and enjoy themselves.

We popped into the Hunter Hotel first to have a delicious, hearty lunch. This hotel has an old-world charm with antique, dark wood furniture, beautiful chandeliers in the main area, and individual rooms scattered throughout the property; some are thatched and all are tastefully decorated, offering a warm and cosy welcome. Hunter Hotel is ideal for honeymooners, small groups, and families. A kids’ centre, pool, gym, three restaurant options, and a chapel with a beautiful forest setting for weddings and renewals are available on the property.

Tsala Treetop Lodge - As the name implies, guests will certainly enjoy a treetop experience. Each suite is built high, overlooking a nearby forest. I was in a 2-bedroom suite, which is ideal for families or couples travelling together. These suites also have a small kitchenette (stove, sink, mini fridge), which is great if families are travelling with babies.

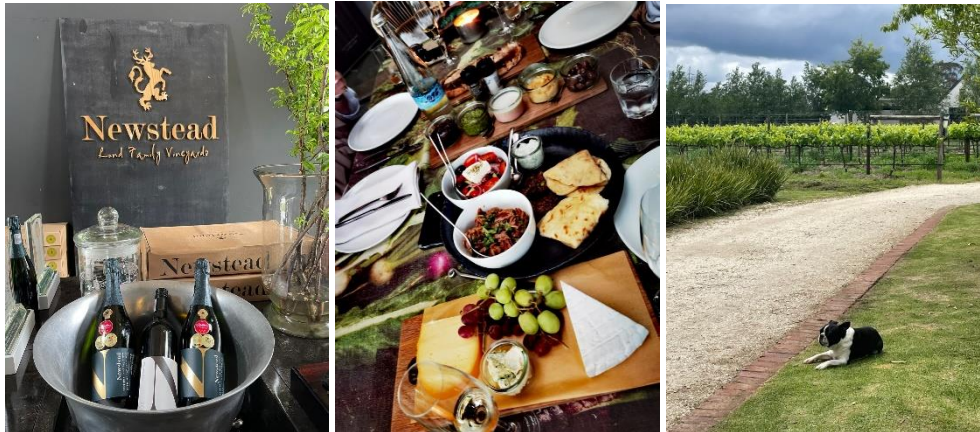
Zinzi Restaurant did not disappoint. Their winter menu has delicious African cuisine options with great flavours and spices. The engaging George was our host for the evening.



Newstead Lund Family Vineyards

A lovely family-owned and run boutique wine estate that has won many awards, such as Newstead MCC Blanc de Blanc 2015, took a Double Gold Medal and Trophy for Best Blanc de Blanc and was named the Top Scoring Cap Classique for 2020.

They are meticulous in how the grapes are grown, using organic fertilisers and recycled grey water. Personally, the Sauvignon Blanc is the best I have tasted. The wine tasting was enjoyed with a tapas-style selection of cold meat and cheese platters, homemade hummus, and bread. Newstead is a lovely stop en route to guests Plettenberg accommodation or a self-drive trip along the garden route.



Khanyi, Mpho, Zitha and Ella visited, Lion Sands Narina and River, Londolozi Founders and Leopard Hills; our experience was amazing:

After years of enjoying safaris throughout Africa, this was a lovely “sho’t left” from the best all-around safari experience. Thanks to the incredible staff at Lion Sands Narina and River, Londolozi, Leopard Hills, Kirkman’s and Savanna Lodge.

The teams at these lodges provided us with memorable experiences, creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. From the moment we arrived until our departure day, their passion for their work shone through, ensuring that every aspect of our stay was truly exceptional.

The African continent is the only place in the world where big game still roams freely in great numbers – in particular, the Kruger National Park area and the neighbouring private game reserves, including the Sabi Sands. In these areas we had an opportunity to see the Big Five up close and personal.

The lodges actively engage with local communities to promote sustainable development and education about the importance of wildlife conservation. These projects not only benefit the local communities but also contribute to the overall sustainability of the reserves. By supporting education, agriculture, and animal welfare, these lodges play a crucial role in empowering and improving the lives of those living in the area. They also have projects like school feeding, vegetable gardens, orphanages, and vet programs where they teach their communities with livestock how to care for their animals.

We were truly impressed by the dedication and expertise of the guides, who shared their extensive knowledge about the local flora and fauna. It was inspiring to see how these initiatives contributed to the overall sustainability of the ecosystem.

Accommodation:

- Lion Sands – you have an option to stay in the tree house of your choice depending which lodge you book with Lion Sands – but you will need to book this prior to arrival at an additional cost.

- Londolozi's Healing House – immerse yourself in the tranquil surroundings; this is such a great place to relax and enjoy.
- Leopard Hills – the talented chefs create diverse menus, ensuring that every meal is a culinary delight. Whether you choose to indulge in a romantic dinner for two or join the other guests for a lively communal dining experience will leave you craving for more.

Getting to the lodges is easy access:

Sable Tours provided smooth and easy access to the lodges, including transfers between them, and a scenic drive back to explore the local towns and vastness of the area. The driver's constant chatting kept the atmosphere in the car lively and engaging, making the drive fly by in no time.

Lion Sands' exclusive access allows you to experience unique wildlife sightings and enjoy the beauty of the Sabie River without any disturbance. When visiting Lion Sands, you can fly with Airlink into Skukuza Airport (SZK), which is the nearest airport. Lion Sands provides a transfer in open safari vehicles, and the airport is just 15–25-minutes to the lodge. Furthermore, Lion Sands have access to the perennial Sabie River. You are not allowed to drive on their reserve.

Londolozi and Leopard Hills can be accessed via Federal Air's into Ulusaba airstrip or Airlink's KMIA and Skukuza Airport, both offering scenic and relaxed driving experiences.

All lodges offer a serene and secluded environment, perfect for those seeking a peaceful getaway. With a range of amenities and activities available, guests of all ages can enjoy their stay. Kruger and Sabi Sands have a well-managed gate access, and no unauthorised vehicles are allowed to traverse within their reserve.

During our visit, we were fortunate to witness numerous game species such as buffalo, wild dogs, elephants, leopards, hyenas and lions, and we also enjoyed night game drives.

Deshni, Muzi, Doreen, Lindi, Nikita, Mosiuwa, Dewald, Ianka, Lauren and Paul visited Morukuru Farmhouse in Madikwe.

Home away from home! That is the perfect way to describe Morukuru Farmhouse... This exclusive-use homestead exceeded our expectations – from the level of service to the incredible game viewing experience. Madikwe Game Reserve sprawls across 75,000 hectares of land.

The Morukuru properties are situated on 6,000 hectares of private land in the east of Madikwe Game Reserve, in which only Morukuru is allowed to traverse. The game viewing was amazing, and while we unfortunately did not get to see any elusive leopards, we were treated to watching 2 different packs of wild dogs – which was quite the highlight. The Farmhouse has been beautifully renovated, with a very modern contemporary look yet still looking like a farmhouse from the outside. With its sprawling lawns, a luxurious swimming pool and beautiful new deck at the back, it is certainly an amazing property for families. The property is fenced in so kids of all ages are welcome.

The exclusivity of the house provides guests with privacy and space, which is quite unique. The Madikwe Reserve is busy, but only 3 vehicles are permitted per sighting. Morukuru Farmhouse has one vehicle that can take up to 10 people – if guests would like an additional vehicle this can be arranged. The staff were exceptional – they made us feel at home from the moment we got there. The open concept kitchen and dining areas provides a feeling of “our house is your house”. This property would work well for all guests from small groups travelling together to multi-gen families and couples.

