

ASSOCIATED PRODUCT

FIRST-HAND FEEDBACK

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SOUTH AFRICA

Dominique Geyser and Preshima Naidoo from our Associated Product team recently visited a few lodges in the Timbavati.

The new Walkers Plains Camp

We were already familiar with the Tanda Tula Plains Camp that was used as a temporary location for Tanda Tula Safari Camp guests during their rebuild. This property has now been taken back by the owners of Walkers and has since been rebranded to Walkers Plains Camp. They opened commercially this past June, and we were fortunate to be invited to experience their new rebranded offering. Walkers is based on the western side of the Timbavati closer to the entrance gate. We flew from OR Tambo in Johannesburg with Federal Airlines and landed at Rock Fig Airstrip. It was then a short drive through the reserve in an open game vehicle. We were warmly welcomed by the Walkers team and owner-managers. The lodge is situated facing magnificent plains with a waterhole out front. This attracts general game and birds throughout the day and night, so guests are entertained by seeing them coming in for a drink.

The homestead-style lodge is very intimate and homely. You immediately feel you can kick back and relax. The food was fresh and amazing! We could order several options from the menu and it was beautifully presented. The eight rooms, two of which are two-bedroomed family rooms (children over 8 are welcome) are beautifully appointed, with private plunge pools and breathtaking views of the surrounding savannah, and the Drakensberg Mountains as a backdrop. Wildlife sightings were top notch – some of the rarest we have seen, as well as great prides of lions, large herds of buffalo, rhino, elephant and leopard, all in just two days. The guides were also well presented, very professional and made sure the Mocha-Choca-Rula kept flowing! We thoroughly enjoyed the comfort, beauty and intimate hospitality of Walkers Plains Camp, and would highly recommend this offering for multigenerational families as well as groups of close friends.

**The new Tanda Tula Safari Camp**

We were very excited to see the newly rebuilt Tanda Tula Safari Camp. On arrival we were welcomed with big smiles and warm hugs at the very impressive new entrance to the lodge. From here, we were guided through into

the main lodge, which has panoramic open vistas of the bush and dry riverbed. Layout is modern and open plan, with an Afro-chic feel. Large glass panels allow uninterrupted views yet protect from the elements. They have kept some of the old Tanda Tula furniture, keeping the old Tandies spirit alive. These pieces complement, and are well-placed amongst the new, more modern furniture. We were pleased they decided to keep those elements in. The horizontal lines of the lodge draw your eye out over to the large rim-flow heated pool which still overlooks the waterhole. Next to that is the new gym and spa, which was still being completed when we were there, but looks like it's going to be a stunning setup, and also overlooks the busy waterhole. Their new boma is an interesting design – what looks to be a large woven basket! Something we had not seen before. Accommodation... we were lost for words on the work that has been done to the rooms. It's a next-level high-standard offering: large, open plan rooms with expansive decks, sunken lounges and plunge pools; also, outdoor and indoor showers as well as a bath and double vanity; plus minibars in the rooms, and high-tech aircon and lighting systems. They also have coffee machines and a great selection of teas, board games and books, which is a nice touch. There are two very spacious family suites that can accommodate families of four and offer in-room dining.

Their dining options offered incredibly diverse choices, incorporating flavours from around the world but retaining their African flair. The meals are served plated on beautiful modern crockery. Very high-end but you still feel at home in the relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Our guide and tracker were very professional and extremely knowledgeable, focusing on the smaller things when the game viewing was quiet. Tanda Tula is owner managed; very hands-on with much attention to detail. Furthermore, their long-standing staff (some have been there over 20 years) make this lodge super special. Overall, we just loved the look and energy of the new Tanda Tula. You can now tie their new premier level offering in with Sabi Sands / Lion Sands Ivory Lodge, as an example. Also, it's a lovely intro to a safari and would pair well with Wilderness Botswana camps such as Jao, Mombo, Vumbura Plains, DumaTau, and Bisate in Rwanda.



Kambaku River Sands

We were welcomed and shown around (mini site inspection) by the assistant duty / host manager – then served a light lunch. We loved the curio shop, which was well stocked and more affordable than the other camps. The accommodation here has a more classic safari feel. The spacious thatched rooms have aircon, Wi-Fi and a patio deck overlooking the bush and/or the riverbed. Levelled sand pathways and few stairs make it easier for those who struggle walking; however, we would recommend allocating rooms closest to main areas. The main lodge has undergone recent maintenance and has a high thatched roof. The main lounge area flows into the dining, bar and pool deck area that overlooks the riverbed, which was busy with passing game. Ellies come to drink from the pool, which is a highlight for many. They have a large bar with a lot of drinks styles to choose from. They also have premier wines that they recommend purchasing that will pair with the menu of the day, which is a nice touch. Food was more traditional safari style. Also loved the location of the wine cellar and private dining offering, as it has a large window facing the dry riverbed, eye level with the passing game. Hot breakfasts and dinners are plated, while brunches and lunches are more buffet style. They had planned to serve dinner in the riverbed, but it was a bit cold, so we dined in the main area close to the indoor fire pit, which was a nice touch and created a lovely ambience. The spa and gym are located on the opposite side of the camp away from bustle of the main area. It's quite an impressive, extensive setup, with many services on offer. We did not have time to experience any of the treatments, but the staff were friendly when we came to have a look. They offer a sleep-out hide, which we did not

get to see fully set up, but can imagine how stunning it would be with all the lanterns lit up. It's a lovely extra offering / experience to add. Note accommodation at the lodge for the night still needs to be booked should weather conditions suddenly change. The sleep-out needs to be pre-booked, and can only be settled in camp.

Game viewing in this traversing area was just amazing. We saw so many rare sightings, and great birding. The tracker for us stood out. He has been tracking for 20+ years, and interacted with the guests and assisted the guide in providing more information. Although older in age, his eyesight was amazing, spotting a chameleon at night and just minutes after that, a bush baby. He was always smiling and also left the vehicle a number of times to track on foot. One of the best trackers we experienced whilst in the Timbavati. Owners live on site and are very hands-on. They host dinners and interact with guests, which is a nice touch. We also got to visit Kambaku Safari lodge which has a more intimate feel, nice for families with younger children. They have the lovely Kambaku Kubs programme, offering to teach and keep children entertained.

Overall, lovely classic safari style lodges and the wildlife sightings in this area were incredible. We now have a better understanding of the offering and differences between their River Sands and Safari Lodge so we can better pair the lodges to the right markets, which we recommend for small groups of friends and multi-gen families.



Some of the Johannesburg Operations and Reservations teams went on a full day site inspection visit of a few hotels in Johannesburg. Here is their feedback.

We set off from the office and navigated through the morning traffic, making our way to our first property inspection, **Fairlawns Boutique Hotel and Spa**. Online pictures definitely do not do justice to this property. Despite being in the heart of the city, this property offers one a feeling of seclusion. The staff was very welcoming and friendly. We were treated to a delicious breakfast, which everyone enjoyed. However, we didn't get to see the spa as it was closed for renovations.

The next stop was at **Athol Place House and Villas**. Nice little gem, with a home-away-from-home feel. Reception is in the lovely 9-bedroomed main house. The property can be booked on an exclusive-use basis only, and management was quite proud to tell us how busy they have been.

Thereafter we visited **The DaVinci Hotel**. We felt that the hotel has a corporate feel. It has a black and white colour scheme, and would be most suitable for business travellers and leisure guests visiting Sandton for retail therapy.

We then moved onto **The Peech Hotel**. Here we gathered around the fireplace, warmed up with some hot beverages whilst we learnt more about the history of the Peech, from Vicky Peech herself. This is an amazing 4-Star property with 5-Star service levels. They are very eco-conscious and are planning on getting off the grid soon.



Welcome home! That was how we were welcomed at our next stop, **Sanctuary Mandela**. It is a beautiful and tastefully decorated home with art and photographs that reminded us of Madiba's history and our heritage. We all loved the immersive tour of the property and the names of the different rooms that all pay homage to the incredible human that was Nelson Mandela. It is a great overnight night stop after a Johannesburg and Soweto tour.

Following this, we visited the **Four Seasons Hotel The Westcliff**, a luxury hotel with striking pink buildings that can be seen from the highway. We were served a buffet lunch so we could sample their current menu. A unique feature of this hotel is the elevator that connects the reception area to the main restaurants, and offers stunning views of Johannesburg, including the Johannesburg Zoo.

Our day ended at **The Saxon Boutique Hotel and Spa** with high tea, which was well presented and featured teas from around the world. It is a luxury boutique hotel in the centre of Johannesburg that offers security, privacy, and exclusivity.

TANZANIA

Ianka Van Wyk and Bavisha Budhia, recently travelled on an East Africa educational, and visited our partner properties in Zanzibar.

Baraza Resort

On arrival in Abeid Amani Karume International Airport, we collected our luggage and exited the airport where we were met by a Meet & Greet representative of Zanzibar Travel Services. The transfer vehicle was clean and comfortable; however, the road infrastructure in Zanzibar is poor, which added to our travelling time from the airport to the hotel, taking about two hours. On arrival at Baraza Resort, we were welcomed by Simone. We checked in and were taken to our room by our personal concierge, Khalid. The hotel has a lovely Arabian / Moroccan feel to it. We stayed in a two-bedroomed Garden Villa which is huge; each room has its own en-suite bathroom and is separated by a lounge. It also has a small garden, plunge pool and sunbed.

There are multiple restaurants one can dine at – Chai Tea at the Chai Lounge, Ocean Lounge, Livingstone Terrace, Dhahabu Bar & Lounge, and Sultans Lounge. On Thursday nights after dinner they hold a beach party for hotel guests. The great thing about this property is that even though the hotel was full, it didn't feel crowded or busy, as there is such a variety of options where one can relax. They have one of the best beaches we viewed in Zanzibar. It's a public beach, but it's not congested.



Zuri Zanzibar

Zuri Zanzibar is located on the northern point of the island, an approximately 2h30 transfer from the airport. The welcome is warm and inviting, which leaves you quite intrigued about what they have to offer. We were met by the duty manager, given a full briefing and shown to our room. The property has a lot of stairs so if you have elderly guests who might have difficulty with stairs or walking please share this with the property, as they have a golf cart service available.

This is an absolutely stunning 5-Star property. It has a total of 56 rooms, which consist of bungalows, suites and villas. Much of the décor is crafted from recycled materials, and they work closely with local communities and projects. Dining is available at the main pool and beach restaurant as well as the Dhow Bar located on the beach. The beach is open to the public, so it can get a bit busy, but the views are amazing! The hotel also has a spa on site, and guests can also participate in yoga and meditation sessions. Guests can book on arrival or pre-book; over

the high season pre-booking is recommended. Activities on offer include sunset cruises, snorkelling, diving, Stone Town / Spice Tour, a complimentary signature Zuri Spice Tour and a Village Tour.



Guest feedback from a recent East Africa journey

A guest who travelled to East Africa shared the following feedback on their Kilimanjaro trek, Lake Manyara Tree Lodge, Chem Chem Lodge, One Nature Serengeti and Fanjove Island in Tanzania, and Angama Mara in Kenya:

“The Kili climb was epic”.

“Fell in love with Chem Chem and had some nice lion sightings”.

“One Nature in the Serengeti was incredible; staff, food, service, atmosphere, guiding and location”.

“LOVED Fanjove, the décor was beautiful, understated but perfect for the island, loved it”.

“Angama Mara – wonderful with best guiding here”.