

ASSOCIATED PRODUCT

# FIRST-HAND FEEDBACK

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## SOUTH AFRICA

**Kim Meecham went on an educational trip to the recently rebuilt MORE Family Collection's Monwana Game Lodge in Thornybush. Now named as the No.1 Safari Lodge in the Travel + Leisure Readers' Awards for 2024, here is Kim's feedback on her amazing stay there.**

Located in Thornybush Private Nature Reserve, Monwana is able to traverse all 14,000 hectares of the reserve, which equates to close to 850 km of road that can be explored! The lodge is an hour's transfer from Hoedspruit's Eastgate Airport on good roads, or 25 minutes from the Thornybush Airstrip.

The reserve is home to the Big Five and within our short visit we had great sightings of lion, leopard, elephant, buffalo and rhino, and one of the very best interactions with wild dogs I have ever had. (I have decided their collective name should change to either chaos or frenzy – pack does them no justice,) closely followed by one, then two, then three, then four and finally five hyenas!

Colin was our guide/storyteller and had us all intrigued with the continuing dynamics of lion prides within the reserve. Who says nature is not smart! Benny was our tracker and kept us all highly amused, and staggered at his tracking skills as the chaos or frenzy of hunting wild dogs progressed!

Monwana's vehicles have everything! From binoculars, to ponchos, to beautiful blankets and hot water bottles for those chilly starts. Six seats with an additional seat next to the guide/ranger if required.

Their rather lovely tag line is #cominghome and MORE have gone out of their way to make this lodge home. Familiar feelings of Lion Sands Ivory Lodge insinuate their way through with the paint choices in creams and blacks, while quirky spaces like the guest bathroom with fabulous wallpaper add interest to the beautiful spaces. It really was amazing see how sunshine changed the whole appearance of the main areas – the staff opened the doors and allowed the outside in – and the lodge came alive! Large open areas, big fires to keep us warm and happy smiling faces offering warm scented water and hand towels to freshen up, and welcome drinks on return. The beautiful and cosy wine cellar can be set up with a family table, or a more romantic offering for two guests. In the summer, outside eating is an option overlooking the waterhole – under enormous trees and the evening sky. The main area also offers access to the small gym, curio shop and pool area. My absolute best though... the hornbills that make themselves at home in the main areas and bar.

Monwana have six beautifully appointed suites that offer everything from hairdryers to gin! Two of which are family suites with a second bedroom that can sleep three children in twin beds. All suites have their own plunge pools and outdoor showers, air conditioning, overhead fans, underfloor heating and heated towel racks in the bathrooms – bliss when it's cold and wet out!

The suites want for nothing – providing most luxury amenities expected from a five-star lodge. Along with the suites is the Monwana Residence, offering two identical suites on either side of a large living and dining area – both suites have their own plunge pool plus a larger pool and fire-pit deck feeding out from the main area. This a great option for four guests wanting exclusivity with a private vehicle and butler. Additional guests can be accommodated in the suites close by and all activities and meals can be taken at the Residence.

The food was delicious and offered a very varied menu, accommodating the vegetarian in our little group. Our dedicated butler Hudson was also the "wine man" and was very keen to share his knowledge, and his

recommendations for our evening meal. The lodge can cater for all dietary requirements, including kosher (which must be arranged prior to arrival and will incur additional costs).

Little spoils like a flapjack and mimosa station in the riverbed in front of the lodge, on arrival back to camp after the morning activity, added a wonderful touch. Handwritten notes left on bathroom mirrors from housekeeping – wishing you a warm welcome, sleep well and thank you for visiting – made it very personal. Little gifts on your bed for turn down, and the “Ndlulamithi – taller than the trees” story about giraffes perfectly closed off the day.

Colin took us back of house and it was so wonderful to see staff housing that was built with care and consideration, from higher management to the general staff quarters – this made my heart happy! The back of house set up is seriously impressive with a large water treatment plant that basically runs this “green lodge” – from heating to cooling to safe drinking water – this lodge has spent a small fortune on making it a very eco-friendly lodge!

Monwana offers everything and this lodge can be sold confidently with the MORE partner lodges in Lion Sands or with any other luxury lodge in the Sands and beyond.




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## BOTSWANA

**Mosiuwa Mofokeng, Kabelo Mothibeli, Siphokazi Kalo and Alex Rautenbach recently went on a Botswana educational trip, and shared some feedback on their stay.**

Alex flew in directly to Maun from Cape Town to meet her Johannesburg colleagues. The 2h40-min direct flight on Airlink is a convenient way to link the two tourist destinations. The Cape Town International Departures is a small and stress-free environment, allowing for an enjoyable start to your travels. On arrival at Maun International Airport, we had a swift connection to Wilderness Air.

On arrival at Xakanaxa airstrip in the Moremi, we were met by Jonah, a young guide who drove us to **Okuti Lodge**, in the Ker & Downey portfolio. On the way, you stop at the entrance gate to the Moremi Game Reserve, where the guide has to sign in the guests. Once inside the reserve, all vehicles have to respect the park rules which includes no off-road driving. There are also camping sites inside the park, so one encounters self-drive vehicles. Okuti Lodge is a lovely place located on the Maunachira River and is run by wonderful and competent staff. The dome-shaped tents are a unique design and full of character. The units are quite close to each other, but are spacious with a good flow inside, with the beds facing the river. There are two family tents that can accommodate up to six people (kids seven years and older welcome). There are inside and outside showers and fans over the

beds and in the sitting area. No tea/coffee station nor minibar, but hot beverages are brought to the room in the morning, and there is complimentary sherry in the rooms in the evening. Dining is communal with great fresh options, and guests are encouraged to gather around the fire before dinner, with staff entertaining guests with songs and dances. Jonah stood out here as a guide, who taught us so much in a very casual and fun manner. We had an amazing lion and cubs (just over a month old) viewing. There were quite a few vehicles on the sighting, but it was well managed. A truly inspiring and enriching educational!

