



Elephant Extravaganza – South Africa

I have been to South Africa several times but it is always new and special to be part of someone's first safari!

Our safari began with a full day to relax and recover at the ever elegant Saxon hotel in Johannesburg. We approached the entrance to the hotel – concealed behind a huge wooden-door gated entrance. The door opened to reveal a beautifully landscaped space. We were greeted warmly and our bags were taken to our room quickly. The Saxon is beyond words. We enjoyed an hour at their magnificent spa. Go for the hot stone therapy back and shoulder massage – just like heaven! Lunch was great on the courtyard; the best club sandwich ever and a seafood salad with prawns, lobster and langoustines on a bed of arugala.



The Saxon

The next morning we were transferred on time to the airport to board our flight to Hoedspruit. We were met by Ray, our guide from Camp Jabulani and we literally crossed the road and were in the Kapama Game Reserve. The reserve is very close to airport but we heard no noise from aircrafts at all.





Camp Jabulani gets high scores for accommodation, food and service. Rudolf is the chef and his wife Lezan is the manager and together they run a fine camp. The draw to Jabulani is of course the elephant back safaris and intimate interaction. The first afternoon we enjoyed an introduction to the elephant team, touching, feeling and feeding. We saddled up and we went on a game drive/walk – we saw general plains game during the walk. The ride ended with surprise sundowners at a watering hole. After a few G&Ts and Amarula we finished with a very productive night drive.



The next day we went to the Hoedspruit Cheetah Conservation Center. We met the founder, Letta and she gave a very informative talk and took us to the king cheetah which she raised from a cub. Jabulani's guests have free reign to enter the hold with her, touch and interact with the king cheetah. They release about 50 cheetahs a year back into the wild.



King cheetah

That afternoon we did a game drive to another sundowner spot. The elephant team met us and we enjoyed an elephant-back night walk – complete with our own spot light. The walk ended at the elephant enclosure where they sleep at night.

Fortunately, the elephants are out in the bush all day being elephants, and sleep in the corral only at night. You will likely not see wild elephants near this camp as they are weary of the “trained” team and tend to stay away.



We then took a very hot and bumpy charter flight to Private Granite Suites at Londolozi – about 15 minutes. We were met by our tracker Like and drove to camp. On arrival we were greeted by Kerin and her team – headed up by Cry. The food was outrageously good, prepared by the chef – Eric, self trained by his father who was the chef at Singita.



Cry – staff village visit

Our room was unlike any I had ever seen before; living room, bedroom, dressing area, bathroom, deck, private plunge pool, outdoor shower and lounge area. I had pre arranged a private dinner in the room. I pulled Kerin aside to be sure it was going to happen. She said yes, we are doing it for everyone tonight. After the night drive we were greeted and told to go the rooms and when we were ready for dinner, we were to dial 9. The room was dark, lit only by candle light and the table was dressed in front of the picture window (lanterns hanging from the trees outside). Candles everywhere, rose petals on the bed, bubble bath and a bucket of champagne. We went from room to room – amazed with what they had created.



Private Granite Suites at Londolozi

Jules was our guide and the game viewing here is spectacular – leopard and lion on every game drive, elephant, wildebeest, buffalo, hyena, eagles, giraffe, hippo, plains game (you name it, we saw it !). On the first night game drive we were lucky enough to have a male lion chasing a female, darting in front of our vehicle. They were mating and what a sight to see and hear from 5 feet away.



The next stop was one of my favorite cities in the world, Cape Town and we stayed at the boutique guesthouse, Kensington Place.

We spent 2 days with our guide Thomas exploring the peninsula and visiting the wine lands (Waterfront and Solms Delta estates). We enjoyed dinner at The Showroom Restaurant and Ba ia on the waterfront. Cape Town never disappoints even with dreary weather it is the most beautiful city.



Thomas – Cape Town guide

Lastly was Grootbos Nature Reserve. This reserve boasts some of the last milkwood forests on earth. And you can help revitalize the forest by planting a tree!



September is the peak of whale watching season and Walker Bay lived up to its reputation. The whales come to within 30 meters of the DeKelders shore. We could see whales breaching (count to 13 and they will breach again) mating groups, moms with their babies. We enjoyed a scenic flight over the bay to see the whales from the air. There must have been 20 in short the time we were over the bay en route to Cape Town to fly home.



I have visited South Africa in April, May and September. From a game viewing point of view this September safari was the best. The bush is thin and dry which makes game viewing and pursuing easier. We saw the whole range from 105 degrees in Kapama game reserve to 39 in Cape Town. A visit to the Cape is always a mixed bag. If you are asking yourself "When should I go on vacation?" I would pick the off season in the Cape; you will hit whale/shark season June-October and capture incredible photographs of the storm clouds rising over the mountains and stretching out to sea.

South Africa is also attractive due to the current Rand to dollar exchange rate. You can eat in some of the best restaurants in Cape Town and spend \$1.00 on a glass of wine and racks of lamb for \$15.00 – try that in the US. Given today's economy we all trying to save a few dollars, and remember an investment in travel does not loose any value.

Traveling to Africa is naturally a passion for me. I am always impressed with the camps that accommodate so few people can change the lives of so many people in the surrounding communities; the staff village at Londolozi for instance where they have installed a computer lab to teach life skills. Our butler Cry worked his way up and is now being promoted to management at Private Granite Suites. We must continue traveling to these reserves and parks in order to conserve the natural habitats and most importantly to ensure that we brighten the future of other people.