

Jabulani

“REJOICE” BENEATH THE LIMPOPO SUN



Photos: © SAD - Piet Filmliter

Camp Jabulani is a South African game lodge with an enormous heart. If anything permeated during my stay here, it was everyone's devout love for African wildlife and conservation, coupled with a particular affliction to preserve and sustain this rich ecological region.



“Jabulani” means rejoice in isiZulu. It is a name so fitting for a luxury lodge in this part of the world, located in the Limpopo Province, just outside of the majestic Kruger National Park. Not only is exemplary work by a passionate team of people carried out here, the circumstances surrounding its formation make for a heartwarming “out-of-Africa” story.

It all began when the lodge’s owner, Lente Roode, rescued a baby elephant after he was found – literally – stuck in the mud. Jabulani was to be his name, and although efforts were made to rehabilitate him back into the wild, it seemed he preferred the company of his human counterparts who had become his rescuers and friends. Roode then heard of 11 elephants in Zimbabwe who had lost their homes due to land reform taking place in that region, and made the bold decision to relocate them to South Africa.

Tokwe, the herd’s matriarch, accepted Jabulani into their family after a pat on his head with her trunk, and after much care and trust building between the trainers and elephants, a wonderfully tame herd that weren’t only comfortable around humans, but seemed happy (if not eager) to carry visiting guests through the African bushveld on their backs became the camp’s signature attraction. A fantastic concept resulted – a true safari experience in the Big Five Kapama Private Game Reserve, with the opportunity of elephant-back animal tracking and “Kodak moments”, complete with the ultimate in high-end lodging and eco-tourism. And thus Camp Jabulani was born. Recently, I was afforded the privilege of

visiting this remarkable part of the world by driving there myself – invoking my own ‘spirit of adventure,’ (and newly-discovered need for speed), in an all-new Mercedes-Benz GLA 45 AMG. Referred to as a compact SUV, the high-performance AMG stamp of approval means that, aside from its quintessential Mercedes-Benz capabilities, this vehicle is fast, sporty, agile and looks really good on the road too. Having said that, my five-hour drive to Limpopo Province was smooth, comfortable and surprisingly light on petrol, considering the most powerful production-series four-cylinder, 2.0-litre, hand-made engine sitting snugly under the bonnet.

On arrival, I was welcomed by a family of warm and friendly staff, managed by Roode’s daughter, Adine. The luxurious and comfortable lodge lay set among large Leadwood trees and alongside a seasonal riverbed. The main part of the camp combines natural materials such as thatched roofs, stone-clad flooring and mud walls – all with the comforts of five-star indulgence but without crossing the line into ostentatiousness. Six private suites, each with their own wooden deck and heated plunge pool, overlooking the African bush, provide a sanctuary for those seeking a romantic setting that is comfortable, exclusive and indulgent. The Zindoga Villa is a eight-person, self-contained space comprised of two separate suites joined by a lounge and dining area. A massive 225 square-metre wooden deck provides a perfect place for typically colonial G&T sundowners or a dusk-time dip in the heated pool. A chef, butler and game ranger – with a private

vehicle – service the villa’s guests for the duration of their stay.

At night, the camp’s executive chef oversees fine dining amidst the grumble of lions’ roars and haunting sound of owls’ calls. Fresh, local ingredients are used to create specialised menus that change daily, catering to a range of palates and requests, and paired, of course, with a delightful list of award-winning South African wines. During the day, Camp Jabulani becomes an activities centre with a swathe of exciting things to do – all centred around the magnificent African bushveld. Elephant interactions either by day or by night, are the camp’s main tourist draw card. The elephants are all calm-natured and comfortable around people – especially when they smell the promise of a tasty treat! Elephants have proven exceptional trackers of other wildlife, and the herd – always led by Jabulani – has become masters in the art of guaranteeing a safari full of wildlife action. Be ready to switch to elephant time however, as Jabulani and his herd often take some time out to have a sip of water or munch on some greens as they go – behaviour never discouraged by the rangers as they want the elephants to be in a calm and relaxed state at all times. Over and above this wonderful interaction with these gentle giants, game drives, guided bush walks and hot air ballooning (at an additional cost), are all alternative options by which to experience the game reserve in all of its glory. And in the summertime, a trip to one of the dams in the reserve offers guests the hilarity and complete joy of watching a herd of elephants enjoying a mid-day swim and mud





Lente Roode



bath, with babies often upping the ante when it comes to aquatic shenanigans!

And when some down time is required, the open-air, Camp Jabulani spa is also an experience to behold. World-class spa treatments, massages and wellness therapies are one hand from the spa's lapa, tucked away in the tranquil bush. Indulge in an array of invigoration either at the spa, or in the privacy of your own suite. One aspect of Camp Jabulani that really touched my heart was the Hoedspruit Endangered Species Centre (HESC), also run by Lente Roode. Focusing on the conservation and preservation of rare and endangered African species, cheetahs are at the heart of this special organisation.

The HESC's main objective with these big cats is to try, at all costs, to rehabilitate them back into the wild. When this is not possible however, successful and diversified breeding programmes have proved to be extremely successful – including the rare king cheetah.

The centre also cares for orphaned, injured and threatened animals and has sought to protect and conserve the African wild dog, rhinoceros, the black-footed cat and the southern ground hornbill. Through educational programmes for the general public

and for school children, the centre also focuses its efforts on informing people on the human encroachment into the wildlife habitats of these animals, and shares with them their policies on conservation and preservation. Moreover, the centre is involved heavily in their neighbouring communities, especially in the fight against rabies of both domestic and wild animals, and often visits these communities to vaccinate pets and stray animals. Relying on donor funding and eco-tourism to finance this project, the centre is a non-profit organisation.

Camp Jabulani and all that it has to offer makes it an exceptional destination to visit in this ecologically diverse and sensitive region of Southern Africa. For the romantic couple or the extended family – there is something for everyone when it comes to luxury accommodation and unique game experiences. From the warmth of the hospitality of the housekeeping team, to the chef who personally presents each dinner meal to the guests, and the unbridled passion for the promotion and protection of the region that the lodge occupies makes for a highly enjoyable, educational and fulfilling getaway. With a renewed love of the African bushveld, it was with a heavy heart I had to leave this special, joyful place. ■

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