



AFRICA

By Kelly Magyarics, DWS
Photos Courtesy of Sanbona Wildlife Reserve

A luxe retreat among the wildlife of South Africa.

If you've eschewed the idea of an African safari because you aren't big into sleeping in tents, donning mosquito nets or roughing it, or assumed you would have to fly to far-flung areas to catch a glimpse of rhinos, giraffes, and lions in the wild, read on. After soaking in the sights in cosmopolitan Cape Town, a few hours' drive east takes you to another world entirely.

Sanbona Wildlife Reserve in the Western Cape sits at the foot of the Warmwaterberg Mountains in the heart of the Little Karoo, one of South Africa's semi-desert regions. It boasts more than 133,000 acres (which makes it about the size of Singapore), the Cape Fold Mountains, indigenous flora and fauna and San rock art that dates back 3,500 years. Though it's technically an "animal reserve", Sanbona is so wide and expansive that it truly feels like the open bush--it's unlikely that you'll encounter a fence on any of the game drives during your stay. This region is also malaria-free and no other vaccinations are required, which make planning a trip here easy and worry-free.

Sprinkled throughout this Big 5 reserve are four upscale properties that offer experiences ranging from camping to glamping to resorting. Sanbona Explorer is a seasonal luxury tent camp featuring two-day walking expeditions; Dwyka Tented Lodge offers nine tents situated amid striking rock formations, with private decks and heated jacuzzis. Gondwana Family Lodge is a spacious property perfect for families to stretch out and a Kids on Safari program with educational and recreational activities. But it's at Tilney Manor where you'll encounter the most exclusive and tranquil sojourn. Upon your early afternoon arrival, you'll be greeted with a refreshing towel and sugar-rimmed sparkling wine cocktail. Check in, unpack and unwind in one of six open-plan suites, all which feature a private veranda complete with patio furniture, an en-suite bathroom with shower and freestanding bathtub, outdoors his and hers showers, a fireplace, neutral decor, and local artwork.

If the weather is pleasant, opt to have your three-course lunch outside, which may include dishes like halloumi, tomato and basil tart, marinated pork skewers and coconut sorbet. Meals are included with a stay at Tilney Manor, as are several cocktails and aperitifs.

Relax for a little before embarking mid-afternoon with your knowledgeable guide in an open-sided Land Rover for your first three-hour game drive. A helpful take-along species guide in your suite will help you check off the animals as you encounter them. It is not uncommon to come across Cape buffalo, zebras, hartebeest, hippos, or even a herd of elephants passing in front of your vehicle, though the lions and cheetahs tend to be a bit more elusive.

Occasionally you will also have the chance to spot some of these animals on foot, and if there is something you are just dying to see, let your guide know and he or she will do their best to track them down. Late afternoon, your guide will find the perfect spot to park and serve up snacks and your choice of Sundowner, the traditional drink in South Africa to toast the sunset--perhaps a gin and tonic or glass of local whiskey or wine.

Return to the communal living room at Tilney and be welcomed back with a selection of fortified wine or Amarula, a locally-produced cream liqueur. Dinner is a three-course affair, with specialties like biltong (South Africa's answer to beef jerky), braised springbok shank and Cape Malay Curry perfectly paired with the country's Chenin Blanc.

Tilney Manor is located in a part of South Africa that touts some of the best stargazing in the world. Weather depending, join your guide outside after dinner to take a peek in the telescope, where you might see a few of Jupiter's moons and the rings on Saturn. The Milky Way and Southern Cross are view-able with the naked eye, especially awe-inspiring for city-dwellers accustomed to pesky light pollution.



If the night is chilly you'll return to your suite to find the fire roaring; don't stay up too late though, as that early morning wake-up call comes way too quickly. Awake to tea, coffee, and muffins which will sustain you until breakfast, and you'll stop for another beverage break mid-morning during your drive. Be sure to try a steaming mug of rooibos, South Africa's floral, earthy, nutty tisane that's red-tinged and completely addictive.

After spotting more wildlife and having breakfast, relax by the rim-flow swimming pool or book a treatment at the Relaxation Retreat,

where you can enjoy a body scrub, hot stone massage or power booster facial. Treatments use Africology Skincare products, which have been developed to revitalize the skin and prevent damage done by free-radicals, stress and the sun.

Don your safari chic attire (don't forget a hat!) and gear up for another afternoon of spotting some of the most gorgeous creatures on earth. Tilney Manor is definitely the perfect base camp for a safari in South Africa.

