

BLOW THE BUDGET

More than a lion's share

Doing a lot of nothing is a joy, writes Marianne Schwankhart

EVEN as a seasoned South African traveller and photographer, whose job takes me across the country from high-end resorts to desolate camp sites, I never get tired of being in the bush. So, when the chance arose to visit one of the Tintswalo group's private game lodges, I leapt at it.

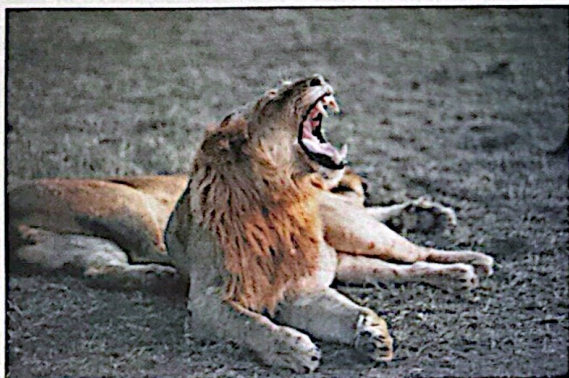
Known for sightings of lion, elephant, buffalo and sometimes leopard, what's great about this private concession bordering the Kruger National Park is that you aren't caught up in traffic jams at every game sighting. The reserve is known for its low vehicle density.

Run by Ronel and Fritz Beytenbach, privately owned Tintswalo Safari Lodge is along a seasonal river bed in an ancient sycamore tree grove. There are seven luxury units spaced far enough apart for privacy, and each has its own splash pool. A few kilometres down the road there's also a manor house. It is now available as an option for families to rent, since no children are allowed at the safari lodge.

Since I do so much travelling for work, I was eager to spend my time at the lodge doing a lot of nothing, but resisting the game drives was impossible. I managed to miss the 5am wake-up call ones. Our guide, Patrick Gumede, tried to explain that by declining, we'd miss the lodge's famous "spade breakfasts" in the bush — a kind of *skottelbraai* — but he couldn't tempt me from



ULTIMATE RELAXATION: Enjoying a hot bath is one of the many ways to unwind at the Tintswalo Safari lodge



PRIDE: The big five can be spotted

Picture: MARIANNE SCHWANKHART

my warm bed. Instead, I enjoyed my bush spa treatment, relaxing on the wooden deck and watching a couple of elephant bulls having a mid-morning cool-off.

Saving my energy and film for the afternoon drive, I spent the rest of the morning under the huge Jackalberry tree, chatting to Fritz about his planned 1 000km walk.

He explained that private clients would be able to buy a place on the foot-trip, designed to acquaint the bush-lover with this area and to raise money to create awareness about rhino poaching.

Lunch is combined with high tea and it is light, delicious and self-serve. I enjoyed the Asian pasta salads, bobotie spring rolls, iced coffee and cheese platters.

On the evening game drive we saw almost all the big five, but missed the leopards often seen in the area. Back at the camp, dinner was served communally in the boma — braai and game meat with pap and gravy. With a recipe for the best pistachio and green tea pannacotta ever, I went to my room, welcoming the noises of the bush into my dreams.

FACT FILE

Rates: R6 300 per person sharing, includes accommodation, game activities, house drinks

Where: The reserve borders the Kruger National Park to the east, the Timbavati Reserve on the north and the Sabi Sand Reserve on the south.

Visit www.tintswalo.com

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