



# Top of the rock

Luxury bush lodge proves to be a big cat hotspot

**It isn't every day** that you can enjoy a five-star, three-course vegetarian dinner on the banks of the Sand River. Paraffin lamps have been lit, a sommelier is pouring wine and the starter of fig salad with chevin, rocket, pecan, pomegranate and balsamic dressing has just been served.

*For more information  
or to book a  
stay, please visit  
[www.singita.com](http://www.singita.com).*

This is Singita Boulders Lodge in the Sabi Sands Game Reserve and, before even arriving at the lodge, senior field guide Marc Eshenlohr has taken us on a short game drive and showed us our first leopard.

The subsequent check-in included a delightful washing-of-the-hands ritual, rather than a simple spraying with hand sanitiser, followed by a superb welcome drink. Access to the glass-fronted, ultra-spacious suite involves crossing a lily pond! Inside, the lounge area, bedroom, dressing area and bathroom, all offering magnificent views over the Sand River, provide a semblance of the natural elements with contemporary African design, using natural materials and fabrics.

Outside, the private deck with its sitting area, heated plunge pool and outdoor shower wraps around the suite, creating space and light and a seamless connection to the wilderness. That Singita takes its commitment to preserve wilderness areas for future generations seriously is evident in the use of sustainable practices, such as using glass rather than plastic bottles; offering guests refillable water bottles; using paper bags in waste bins; providing tote bags in which visitors can store personal belongings on game drives; and focusing on locally sourced food.

At the lodge, we soon discover, virtually anything is possible. Everything is about individuality, personal



preference and providing a tranquil experience while tapping into the energy of nature. A personalised brunch menu (vegetarian at our request) changes daily and offers a smorgasbord of tantalising, modern-day classic dishes. We are unable to make a choice, and enthusiastically go with a recommendation to order small portions of every option.

High tea is yet another feast of beautifully presented sweet and savoury delights. And then it is time to venture out on the afternoon drive.

### **The lion's share**

The landscape is varied, offering everything from spectacular river crossings and tall trees to open clearings and undulating, rolling areas with plenty of plains game. The highlight comes in the form of a slumbering pride of lions, sprawled across the dirt track. Three lionesses are lying close together, touching each other with heavy paws. A dark-maned male and another lioness are sleeping on a patch of grass a little to the side of the road. A young male – sporting a light-

*Wildlife both big and small are part of each visitor's experience.*



**Great food and better views make the dining area a wonderful place to spend time.**



#### How to get there

Airlink connects Johannesburg and Cape Town with Skukuza. Go to page 85 for schedules. [www.flyairlink.com/flightschedule](http://www.flyairlink.com/flightschedule)



brown tuft of a beard – stirs, gets up, yawns and shakes his head from side to side a number of times before walking up to an adult female that he rubs his head against affectionally. Another female rises and, after performing a luxurious stretch, she walks a few paces before flopping down beside the group of three.

The following morning, we find more lions in the magical golden hour, followed by a lot of elephants. That theme continues through the morning as we come across yet more lions and, close to a beautiful mountain of rocky boulders, another huge herd of elephants. Two youngsters are playfully running around, while a tiny baby zig-zags below its mummy's tummy.

We follow the herd to a waterhole that is visible from the last of the lodge's suites and, surprised to see them moving past the water, watch them head straight to the suite's private deck to dip their trunks in the plunge pool there.

#### Treetop treasure

Saving the best for last, we are treated to three sightings of a beautiful leopard, known to the field guides as Nkuwe. Marc had told us about her – she had given birth to two cubs a few months earlier, but had barely been seen since. Despite everyone's best efforts, Nkuwe remained elusive.

Then, just as we had given up actively searching for leopards the day before leaving, we jolted in our seats as Marc suddenly slammed on the brakes beside a patch of thick bush with tall grass. "Leopard!"

There she was, raising her head, emerging from the vegetation and moving to a small tree to scrape her nails on the bark. Afterwards, she slowly strolled forward to climb a termite mound to use as a lookout point. Our sighting didn't last long before she slunk back into the tall grass and we lost sight of her. That same afternoon, however, we found her again, actively surveying her surroundings from the fork of a marula tree. Our third – and best – sighting occurred the following morning. She had obviously successfully hunted and was resting, with a full tummy, on a limb of a jackalberry tree. At the top of the tree canopy was one of her cubs, almost entirely camouflaged.

The exclusivity of this large private concession introduces a new type of luxury and the incredible game viewing of threatened species is a testament to the commitment of the guides, trackers and anti-poaching teams in this area.

The name Singita means 'Place of Miracles'. Now we knew why.

Text | **Fransje van Riel** Photography | **Supplied**