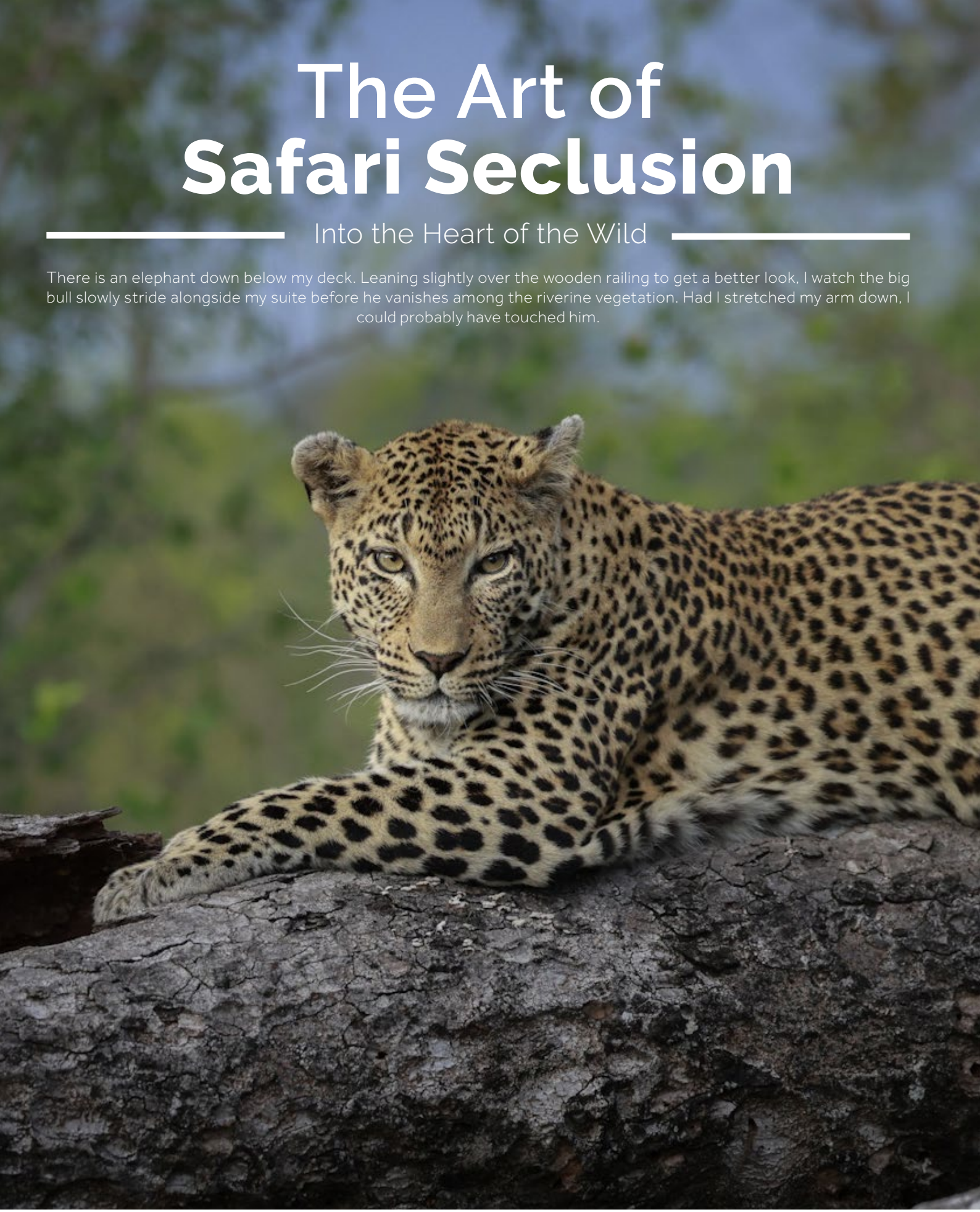
The Art of **Safari Seclusion**

Into the Heart of the Wild

There is an elephant down below my deck. Leaning slightly over the wooden railing to get a better look, I watch the big bull slowly stride alongside my suite before he vanishes among the riverine vegetation. Had I stretched my arm down, I could probably have touched him.





It's a spectacular welcome to Londolozi Game Reserve's most luxurious camp, Private Granite Suites. Keywords here, in one of South Africa's most exclusive prime wildlife areas, are tranquillity, seclusion, and indulgence. The camp comprises only three units, each overlooking the Sand River, which means that, at maximum capacity, there are just six guests.

I am staying in Suite Number Three. The lounge features a comfortable seating area and a large framed glass window set into roughly hewn granite stones, offering an immersive view of the pristine environment and its resident wildlife. A floor-to-ceiling glass sliding door provides access to the covered deck. Soft, fabric-covered loungers promise daytime relaxation. A dining table and chairs also sit on the deck, and the uncovered section extends further out with traditional sun loungers, an umbrella, a heated plunge pool, and, for a truly memorable experience, a freestanding Victorian outdoor bath.

The bedroom, with its king-sized, mosquito-draped bed, as well as his-and-hers wardrobes and cupboards, also opens onto the deck via sliding doors, as does the sumptuous bathroom. A hallway with a vanity table, replete with sunscreen, a hairdryer, and all the basics, sits between the bedroom and bathroom, where the granite-stone theme continues.

This year marks Londolozi Game Reserve's 100th anniversary and, as a celebratory gesture, there is a prettily packaged stationery gift. It is a nice touch.

Lunch is served at 1.30 pm. Meandering along the snaking wooden boardwalk towards the main camp, I sit at one of the three tables overlooking the river to peruse the menu. The choices range from light, healthy fare to more traditional, hearty meals.

It is just after 3.30 pm when I meet ranger Shaun D'Araujo and tracker Advice Ngwenya for the afternoon game drive. With a combined 20 years of guiding and tracking wildlife at Londolozi, I know I am in good hands.

A crackle over the radio informs D'Araujo that a female leopard has been sighted across the river in the northern part of the reserve. Keen to follow up, we cross the concrete





causeway over the Sand River and make our way to the area, where we find a large breeding herd of elephants, including one exceptionally cute, very small calf. Of the leopard, there is no sign.

Waiting for the elephants to cross in front of us, D'Araujo loops around in a semi-circle and, scanning the area, points to a clump of high grass.

"There!"

I follow his gesture to find, with some difficulty, a very well-concealed patch of spotted fur. Up ahead of us, at the base of a towering marula tree, are the remains of a partially eaten male impala.

Elephants trump leopards, and it is clear that the big cat has given way to the herd.

After about 20 minutes, the leopard rises from cover and slowly moves toward the tree. She stays vigilant, looking around to ensure no other intruders are nearby. She gently opens her mouth to seize her kill and move it slightly closer to the tree.

Calculating her move by eyeing the trunk several times, she seizes the kill once more and attempts to jump up and hoist it out of reach of other predators. Unfortunately for her, the carcass is too heavy, and she is unsuccessful. After a few more failed attempts, she gives up and jumps against the

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bark, climbing onto one of the upper branches, where she lies down.

Not even a second later, two spotted hyenas crash through the bush, galloping towards the kill. Excited whimpering permeates the air as the two predators clamp down on either side of the carcass, clumsily parading around as if they are simultaneously carrying a flag. It takes them only a minute or so to tear off large chunks of meat, with which they each disappear.

Back at camp, the atmosphere is one of starry night skies and a large collection of flickering paraffin lamps. A wood fire crackles and tables are set with white tablecloths for dinner. It is a welcome sight.

We are back out in the bush early the next morning, heading south, where we find a large male lion sleeping in the thick bush. He is one of the two Gijima males, relative newcomers to the reserve. Both large-maned brothers have recently shaken up the lion dynamics at Londolozi, emerging victorious in the battle for territory. This king, however, is not up to much, so after a while we leave him to his slumber.

The rising sun warms us up quickly. Hats donned and sunscreen applied, we stop to stretch our legs and enjoy a coffee at a dam before heading on through a particularly beautiful area of riverine forest hugging the south-eastern corner of the Sand River.

Emerging from the forest, we virtually stumble across 11 lions, known as the Msuthu Pride, resting in the shade. One lioness lazily raises her head momentarily before flopping down again. They look full and very content.

The last afternoon yields a stunning sighting of the Nkoveni female, one of the reserve's most iconic and frequently seen leopards, posing magnificently on a fallen marula tree.

And later that evening, as I listen to lions calling in the distance while enjoying a private dinner on my deck, I know that the magic of this place will stay with me for a long time to come.

For more information or to make a reservation, visit www.londolozi.com.

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