

JUNE/JULY 2005

WEDDINGDAY

WEDDING

THE

BRIDAL WISH LIST

This season's hottest must-haves

THE STYLE BIBLE

THE RECEPTION X-FACTOR

How to create a show-stopping party

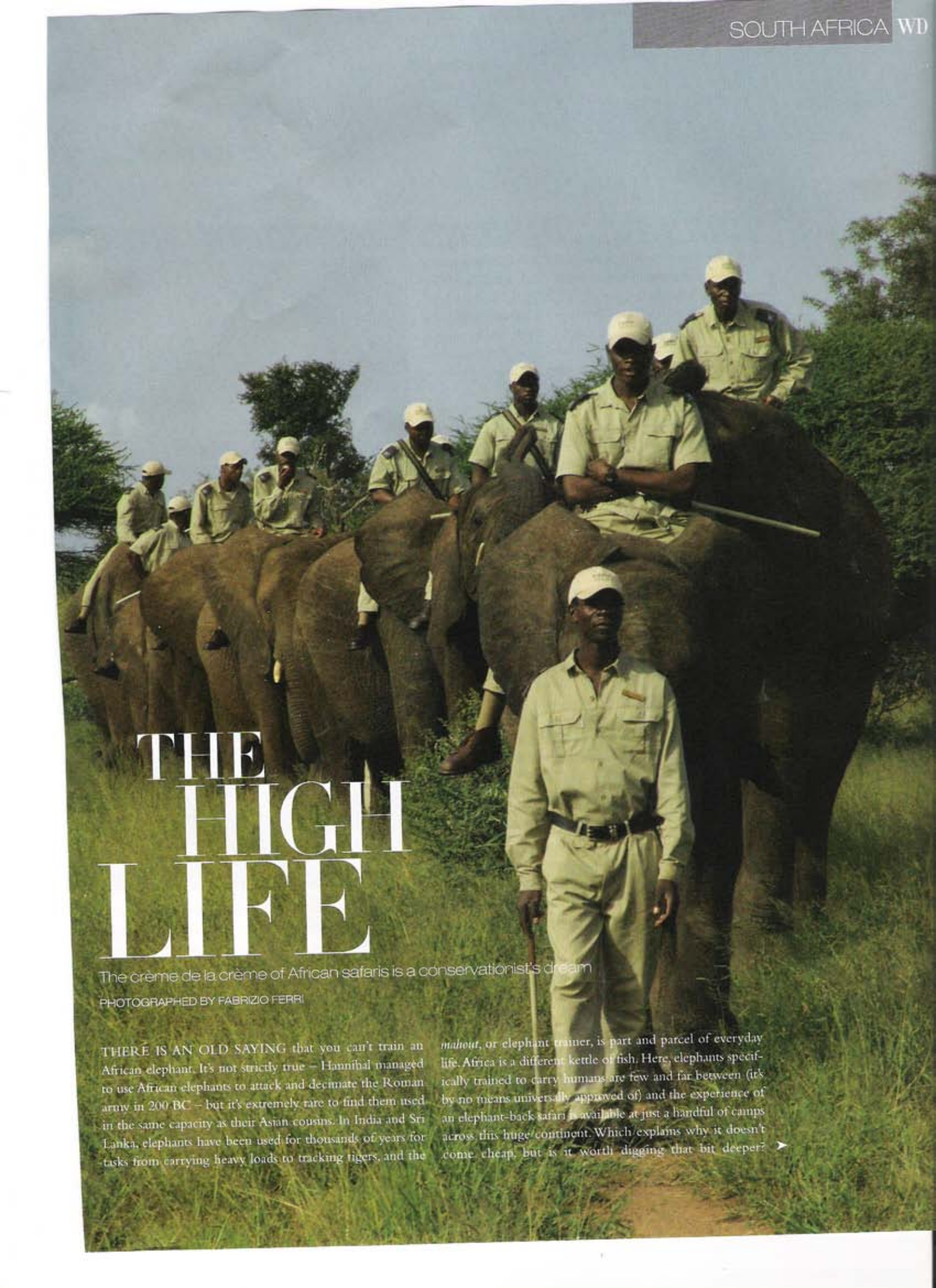
STAR ATTRACTION

Effortless red-carpet glamour

COOUTURE SPECIAL

JUNE/JULY 2005





THE HIGH LIFE

The crème de la crème of African safaris is a conservationist's dream

PHOTOGRAPHED BY FABRIZIO FERRI

THERE IS AN OLD SAYING that you can't train an African elephant. It's not strictly true – Hannibal managed to use African elephants to attack and decimate the Roman army in 200 BC – but it's extremely rare to find them used in the same capacity as their Asian cousins. In India and Sri Lanka, elephants have been used for thousands of years for tasks from carrying heavy loads to tracking tigers, and the

mahout, or elephant trainer, is part and parcel of everyday life. Africa is a different kettle of fish. Here, elephants specifically trained to carry humans are few and far between (it's by no means universally approved of) and the experience of an elephant-back safari is available at just a handful of camps across this huge continent. Which explains why it doesn't come cheap, but is it worth digging that bit deeper? ►

There's absolutely no doubting that conservationist Lente Roode's Camp Jabulani, in South Africa's Kapama Private Game Reserve, was born of her staunch desire to protect and work with the wildlife of this area. Controlled tourism in the reserve is used as a means to fund the local Hoedspruit Research and Breeding Centre for Endangered Species, which Lente established in 1988. All the money from the four camps on Kapama is ploughed back into conservation; and Jabulani, the newest and most exclusive, is something of the jewel in her crown.

Lente is highly regarded for the work she's done with endangered species over the past two decades. She started with a programme for breeding cheetahs, which were facing extinction at the time, but her work has since evolved to protecting other threatened species, including what might be a black-maned Barbary lion (previously thought to be extinct). Three of these lions were rescued from a circus in Mozambique. She has also rescued wild dog, antelope, white rhino, caracal, bushbuk, and, of course, elephants.

Kapama Private Game Reserve occupies 13,000 hectares of bush bordering South Africa's Kruger National

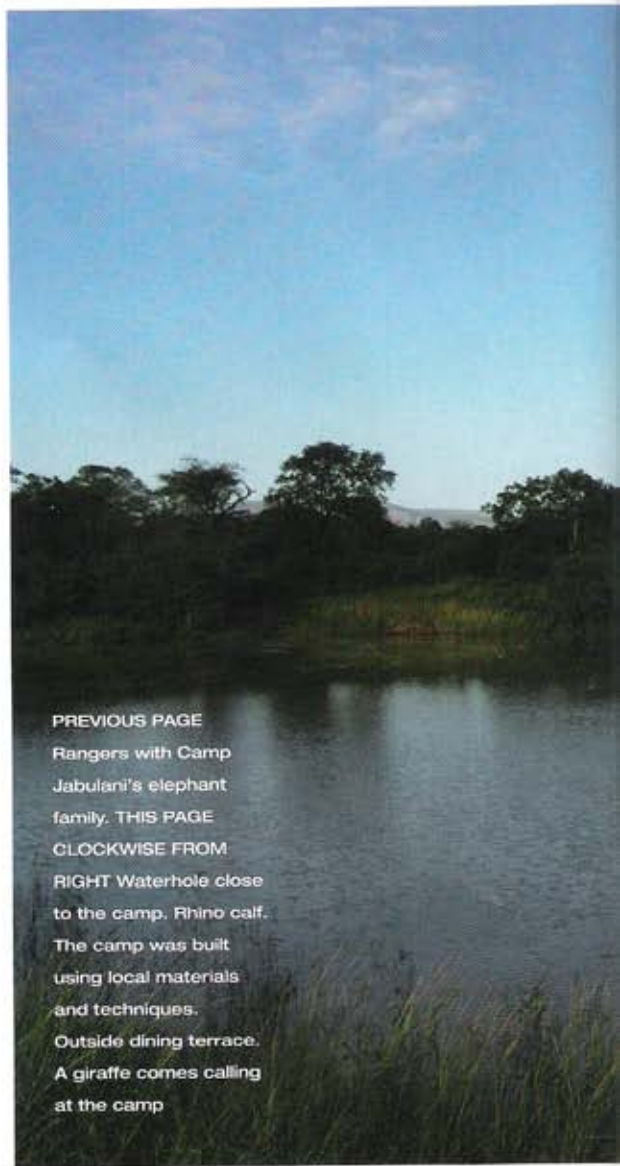
WHILE THE CAMP IS LUXURIOUS AND QUITE BEAUTIFUL, IT IS THE FAMILY OF ELEPHANTS THAT IS THE REAL LURE FOR HONEYMOONERS

Park, which butts on to the border of Mozambique in the far north of the country and is named after the Swazi king who ruled and hunted in the Drakensberg mountains in the 1880s. Some of the reserve was farmland that Lente's father bought back in the Fifties and it was where the family grew up. It's

also where she began her love affair with the African wildlife – adopting an orphaned cheetah as part of her childhood menagerie.

To help raise as much awareness of its conservation aims as possible, Camp Jabulani was opened by Prince and Princess Michael of Kent in July 2003. It's named after an orphaned three-month-old elephant Lente rescued from Zimbabwe and took back to the reserve to hand-rear. This baby was followed soon after by another 12 elephants, rescued from poachers in Zimbabwe and relocated to Kapama. And, although the camp is luxurious and rather beautiful in itself, it's this wonderful family of elephants that is the huge lure for honeymooners. They are the basis of Camp Jabulani's extraordinary elephant-back safari.

The camp is a very intimate experience. With only 16 guests at Jabulani at any one time, you will never feel overwhelmed by people (there are far more animals), even though you all dine together at one big table. Lente kept the camp small because she wanted her guests to be able to share her love of the reserve and its animals at first hand. It's rather more like an extended and exclusive house party held



PREVIOUS PAGE

Rangers with Camp Jabulani's elephant family. THIS PAGE

CLOCKWISE FROM

RIGHT Waterhole close to the camp. Rhino calf.

The camp was built using local materials

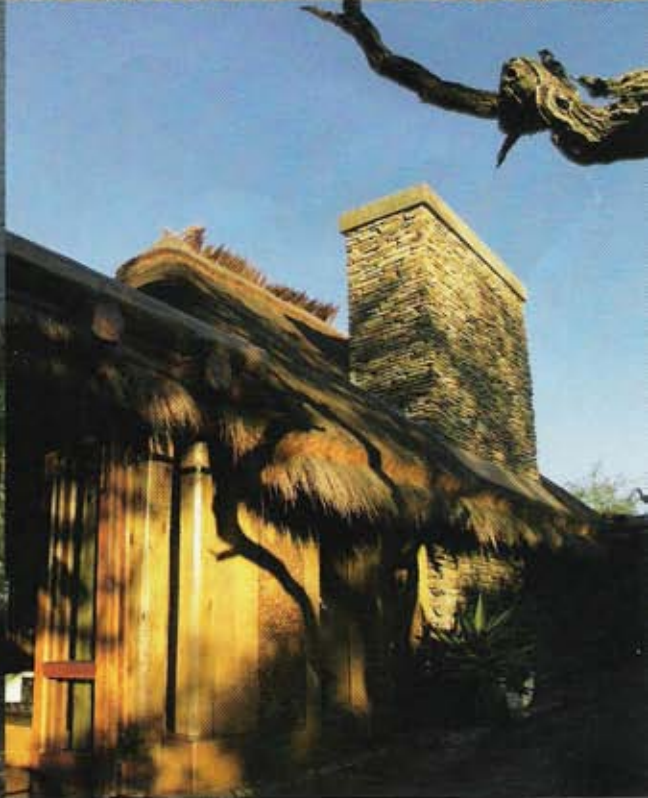
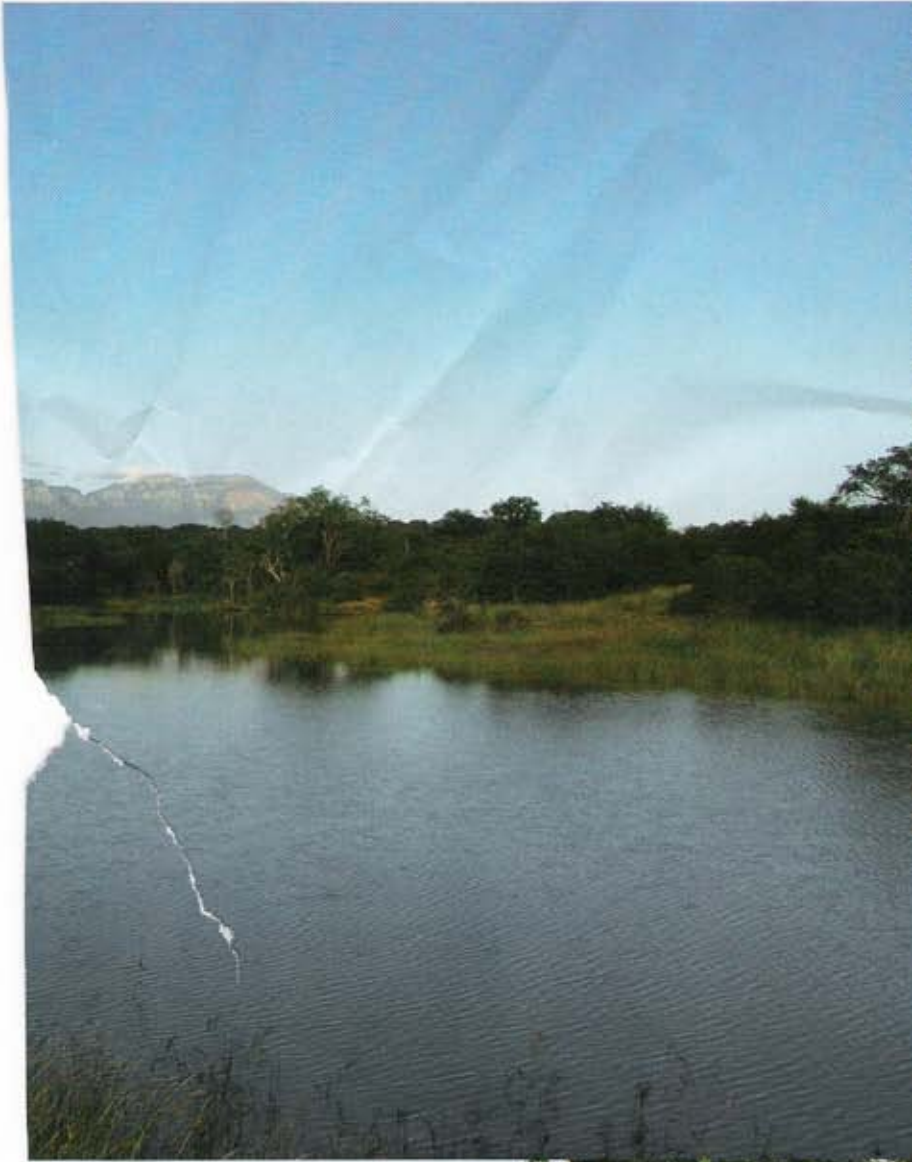
and techniques.

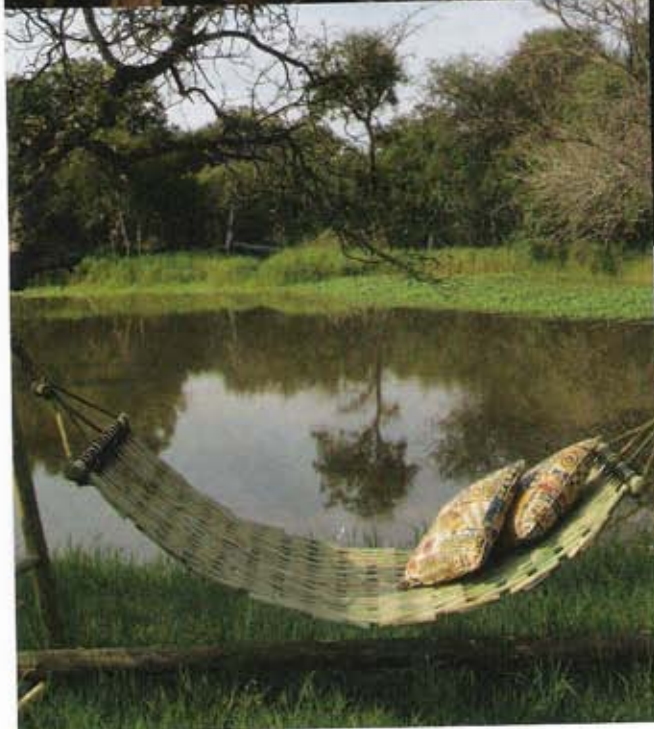
Outside dining terrace.

A giraffe comes calling at the camp

by very accommodating friends. There's an impeccable attention to detail that's testimony to the care that went into creating the sort of luxury safari experience that would draw visitors back time and time again. But at ZAR12,000 (about £1,000) a night, that's nothing more than you'd expect. Lente's answer to whether or not this price is justified (it doesn't, in fact, differ wildly from other elephant-back safaris in Africa) is that not only is this an all-inclusive luxury resort but it's in this way that the camp becomes self-sustaining, thus protecting the future of this elephant family. Which is her overwhelming priority.

To reach the six opulent tented suites, built on stilts above a seasonal river, guests cross suspension bridges over a watering hole where the animals collect at nightfall. >





summer afternoons when there's nothing better to do than sit on your deck with a cold drink. You might think something as urban as a gym would be surplus to requirements in such an environment but they've provided one all the same, and the in-house masseuse is actually a tremendous bonus after an intensive three-hour drive over bumpy terrain.

The atmosphere is old-world and colonial, with a smattering of well-chosen African artefacts carefully positioned in the suites and common spaces. It's very chilled and totally quiet, with nothing to break the silence apart from the sounds of the bush – such as the gentle swish of a giraffe's tail as it wanders past, bird calls or the stealthy plod of elephants as they crack through the trees.

The thatched area housing the bar and dining area is open-plan, very grand but comfortable. This leads on to a teak deck and outdoor fireplace – the *boma*. The furniture is a somewhat kitsch mix of stiff zebra-skin upright chairs and soft, deep couches that are just right for sinking into with a clinking gin and tonic at night in front of a roaring fire. Relaxation is key here – another great spot, and a favourite with guests, is the hammock by the watering hole.

For cooler nights there's an inside dining table next to another gigantic stone fireplace. The food here is absolutely spectacular – not only does the chef serve up incredibly tasty food, but the variety, presentation and service is also impeccable. They work hard to accommodate any dietary requests, as long as they're told in advance. A normal breakfast was home-made muesli with yoghurt, fresh still-warm muffins, full English breakfast and plates of fresh fruit such as pineapple, kiwi and strawberries. Lunches are lighter – quiches, salads and sandwiches – and the evening meals are always something of a surprise. You can expect anything from springbok steaks to curry.

The staff at Jabulani deserve a special mention. Nothing is regimented here (which, I suppose, is one of the many luxuries you get with paying a premium price) and they are always totally available to guests, whatever the time. Yes, totally available. Whether it's to leap off in the middle of dinner to track the lions you just heard roaring around you, or to whisk up any number of special food requests because you want to try every traditional dish you've heard about, as well as some old favourites from home.

Because of its size and intimacy the camp feels very grown up. No children are allowed here, although other camps in the reserve do take them. Camp Jabulani is all about two people getting away and relaxing totally, in the privacy of first-class, pristine accommodation. ➤

IT'S QUIET, APART FROM THE SOUNDS OF THE BUSH – THE SWISH OF A GIRAFFE'S TAIL, BIRD CALLS OR THE SLOW PLOD OF ELEPHANTS



CLOCKWISE FROM
FAR LEFT Open-air
bar area. View of the
Drakensburgs.
The views from
Camp Jabulani
(three images)

Completely surrounded by bush and woodland, you feel you really are in the thick of it. Passing lions marking out their territory can clearly be heard roaring nearby, but the knowledge that there's a protective electric fence around each suite makes sleeping come a little easier. Even so, hearing the roars in the dark of night is a deeply primordial experience and wildly romantic.

This is safari in full-on glamorous style – no bucket showers here. Each suite has a free-standing Victorian bath, a glorious outside shower that leaves you revelling in the clear fresh air, an individual plunge pool and a wraparound private viewing deck. For colder evenings and mornings there's a big fireplace where your butler will light a roaring fire, but also air-conditioning to ease the heat of sultry, high-

It's also about going on safari, on foot or by vehicle, and getting up close and personal with the animals. You need three days here to fully appreciate the surroundings and the wildlife that lives among the lowveld of marula,

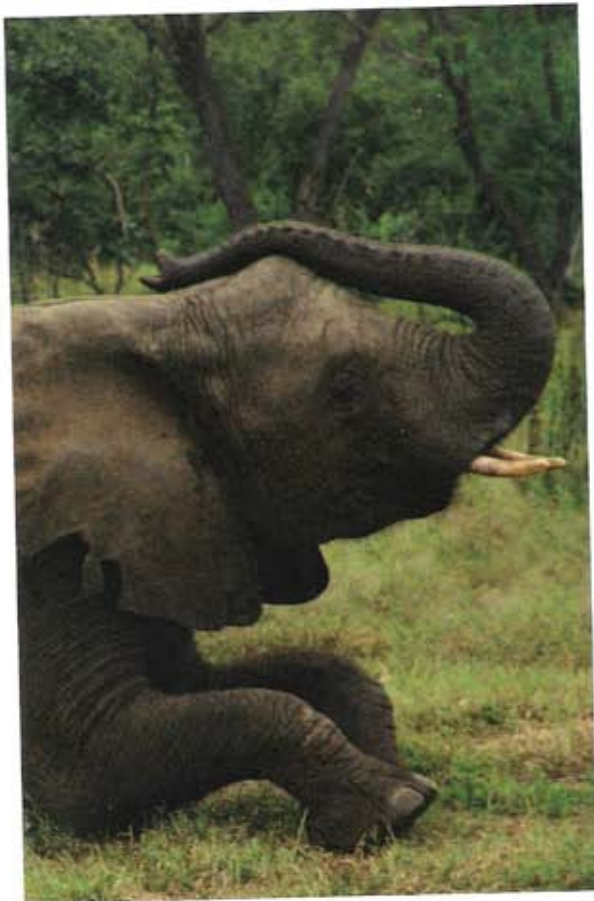
mahogany, acacia, silver clusterleaf, jackalberry and tamboti trees. Drives go out in the mists of the early morning, between 5am and 5.30am, and again in the late afternoon and early evening as the heat falls, the animals come to drink and the predators to hunt. The rangers are knowledgeable about not only the animals but the plant life too, and a quiet walk with them is fascinating. The 'Little Five' – including dung beetles and termites – have as much to offer this environment as the Big Five.

A game relocation programme was introduced to the reserve some time ago and it now supports a wide variety of game, including elephants, buffalo, rhinoceros, giraffe, impala, blue wildebeest and kudu, as well as the big predators – lion, leopard, cheetah and spotted hyena.

It's here, too, that Jabulani's family of elephants – those that Lente rescued, nurtured and fought for – comes into its own, to give you an extraordinary experience. Safari on elephant back really is the most incredible sensation. The movement of these animals is strong and steady, if a little unpredictable. Although exposed, you feel totally safe aboard as they wend their way in single file through the bush. Perched up on canvas-

covered saddles behind the elephant handler, you have a bird's-eye view through the long grasses and trees. Not all rangers welcome the domestication of elephants in this way but there's no denying that it's a powerful, moving and memorable way to journey through the bush.

If you want a temporary break from game drives there is plenty to do, including bird watching. There are 350 species here, including the rare gymnogeg and knob-billed duck, and the bird hide is a peaceful hideaway. You can also get out and about for clay pigeon shooting, bush walks,



DRIVES GO OUT IN THE MISTS OF THE EARLY MORNING, AND AGAIN AS THE HEAT FALLS AND ANIMALS COME OUT TO DRINK – AND HUNT

NEED TO KNOW

HOW TO GET THERE There are several options.

By car If you're driving, it will take about four and a half hours from Johannesburg. Dullstroom is an ideal and picturesque halfway stop. Kapama can give full directions.

By train Rovos Rail (Pride of Africa – see our honeymoon supplement), 020 7225 0164, www.rovos.co.za.

By air South African Airways flies to Johannesburg and Cape Town, 00 27 11 978 5313, www.flysaa.com. South African Express Airways flies daily between Eastgate Airport in Hoedspruit and Jo'burg (one hour) and Cape Town (two hours), 00 27 11 978 5577, www.saeexpress.co.za. Private aircraft can be requested – contact Kapama (see below) or Eastgate Airport, 00 27 15 793 3681.

KAPAMA PRIVATE GAME RESERVE, PO Box 912 – 031, Silverton 0127, South Africa, 00 27 12 804 4840/1. For details of Camp Jabulani, go to www.kapama.co.za.

CURRENCY South African Rand (ZAR): £1 = 11.50 ZAR. You won't need money at Jabulani unless it's for gifts or telephones, as the price is all-inclusive.

CLIMATE October to April are very hot during the day. This is when most creatures give birth, so expect to see newborns among the lush vegetation, and hence lots of predators. During winter (May to September) the days are usually pleasant but nights very cold. Wind and rain storms can blow in, but vegetation is much less dense so game viewing is excellent.

WHAT TO TAKE

Comfortable walking shoes or boots, sunhat, sunglasses, high-protection sunblock, camera, lots of film, binoculars, layers of light clothing in neutral colours, bathing suit, warm clothes for early mornings – fleeces, scarves, gloves. Pack a torch, too.

ESSENTIAL READING

Inspirational books about South Africa – try Lonely Planet, Dorling Kindersley, Rough Guides.

LOCAL PLACE OF INTEREST

Pilgrims' Rest – founded in 1873 as a result of the gold rush and now a National Monument.

Lowveld escarpment – near the mountain villages of Sable and Grasko and mostly accessible by hikers, you'll find streams and waterfalls. Further north are the Mac-Mac falls.

Blyde River and Bourke's Luck Potholes These extraordinary potholes and rock formations can be seen from paths and footbridges overlooking them. The landscape is beautiful and hangs over a river 800m below the summit.

Kruger National Park – one of the most famous game parks in Africa, bordering Mozambique and close to Kapama.

SELF DRIVE Land Rovers can be provided on request.

picnics, and bush *braais* (barbecues). Boat trips can take you out at sunset to get closer to the hippos and crocodiles, and Jabulani can even arrange quad-biking, white water rafting, microlighting or helicopter trips into the Drakensberg mountains for a private picnic.

Camp Jabulani is that rare thing: a place that actually creates indelible memories, where you see a multitude of wildlife in its native habitat, and which you leave – maybe reluctantly – feeling recharged and at one with the world. ■