

LION SANDS TINGA LODGE

KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA

By Helène Ramackers

Two lionesses are fast asleep next to Huhlwa Road, which incidentally happens to be the Lion Sands Tinga Lodge staff access route. The younger of the two raises her head to snuffle the early morning air. A herd of buffaloes are recumbent a mere kilometre away. Will the lionesses endeavour to hunt? They don't look emaciated enough to attempt a feeding frenzy and continue their daybreak slumber.

It is our last game drive at Lion Sands Tinga Lodge and what a perfect way to end our two night stay here with the grand finale of a lion sighting – we started off two days prior with some serious bundu bashing to witness the catnap of three male lions from the Tsalala breakaway pride. The one seemed transfixed by our presence and I can still feel his yellow eyes staring into my soul.

To recharge my batteries, the one and only place I profess wanting to go to is the Bush. The wide open spaces, the untainted air, the animals in their natural habitat; I can go on for days about the benefits of waking up surrounded by Mother Nature. Having my husband and daughter accompany me makes a family breakaway so much more gratifying, especially seeing the wonder of her experiences through my daughter's eyes.

As a family of three, we are accommodated in the newly-built Tinga Hi'Nkweni (pronounced Hing Kweni) Family Villa. A self-contained freestanding Villa, it is generous in size and at 3714 sq ft, it feels like home the moment you open the imposing wooden front door. An outside area with a private pool and covered patio, hot summer days are well spent in the refreshing clear water under powder blue skies. As we enter our Villa, our jaws drop in unison at the sheer size of where we are staying. A kitchenette with a dining section, a lounge area, two full en-suite bedrooms with all the modern conveniences you can hope for – air conditioning, ceiling fans, a digital safe, hairdryer, in-room telephone, indoor and outdoor showers, a freestanding bath, double vanities and free Wi-Fi, it can accommodate four adults and two children with ease.

We are ushered to the main deck at Lion Sands Tinga Lodge for lunch and a hot day coupled with a warm breeze has us rushing through our meal to get back to the comfort of our Villa. The food is delicious and my husband orders the baby marrow & mint soup and for main course, he has the battered fish & chips while my daughter and I opt for the grilled beef fillet on ciabatta bread. A few vervet monkeys innocently sit and wait in the branches of the jackalberry tree, eyes cast sideways, to pounce given half a chance.

After High Tea at 4pm, which is a selection of treats – chocolate eclairs, vegetable pizza, chocolate chip biscuits and a fruit bowl - we embark on our game drive with guide Jabulani Manzini and tracker Wanted Lubisi. Traversing the 12,500 acre private concession you are spoilt with animal sightings galore. The reserve is teeming with baby impalas and as we round a corner, we laugh at the vision of a hyena oblivious to our existence, having a nap in a mud puddle. A herd of buffalo have the same idea and once they have finished feeding, immerse themselves one by one in a pool of mud to cool off.

Out in the clearing, the most beautiful leopard cub sits all alone waiting for her mother. She seems quite relaxed and at eight months of age, can fend for herself. She seems unbothered by the hyena sounds in the distance. Back at Lion Sands Tinga Lodge, we are seated on the main deck where we enjoy a delectable dinner.

We are escorted to our Villa as walking after dark and before sunrise is not permitted as animals are free to roam. My daughter and I play a game of noughts and crosses before calling it a night. The fresh air has done her the world of good and she is asleep as her head touches the soft and silky pillow. My nightly ritual of a shower before bed time is restorative and the Africology products are so fragrant that I make a mental note to purchase some at the gift shop to take home with me.

My sleep is disturbed by the most incredible electric storm with thunder, lightning and rain creating a blank canvas for the following day's game drive. Another advantage of staying at Hi'Nkweni Villa is that you have your own private safari vehicle and guiding team, so you can tailor-make your preference of when to go on safari. We decide to wait for the rain to abate before heading out.

It is still drizzling slightly as we meander through the reserve and the birds are relishing the cooler atmosphere. The most colourful violet backed starling is perched on a tree branch and we see a yellow billed hornbill catching an insect to feed its chicks, safely esconded in the bark of a tree.

Two elephant cows are followed by their young, eating their way through the surrounding vegetation. The small calf is the cutest baby I have ever seen and stays securely tucked behind his mother. Jabulani guesses the calf to be less than a month old because he is still pink behind his ears. Another indicator of his age is the fact that his mom keeps him close to her by emitting a rumble. Much to our amusement, the small tot tries to feed on a shrub but elephants that age haven't grasped the use of their trunks quite yet.

Back at Lion Sands Tinga Lodge, it is time for breakfast. My daughter loves croissants and gets brought a whole plate full of miniature ones. My husband and I thoroughly enjoy our English breakfast and by now the day has warmed up enough to justify a swim in our pool.

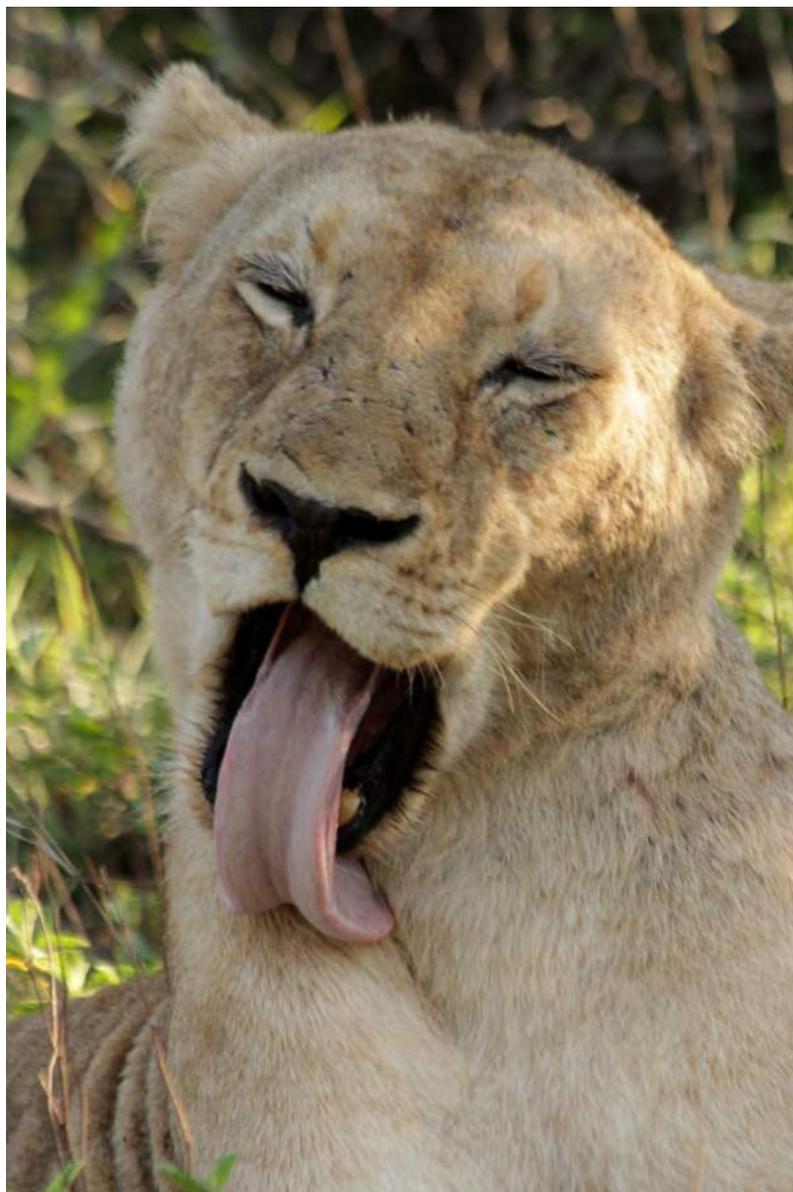
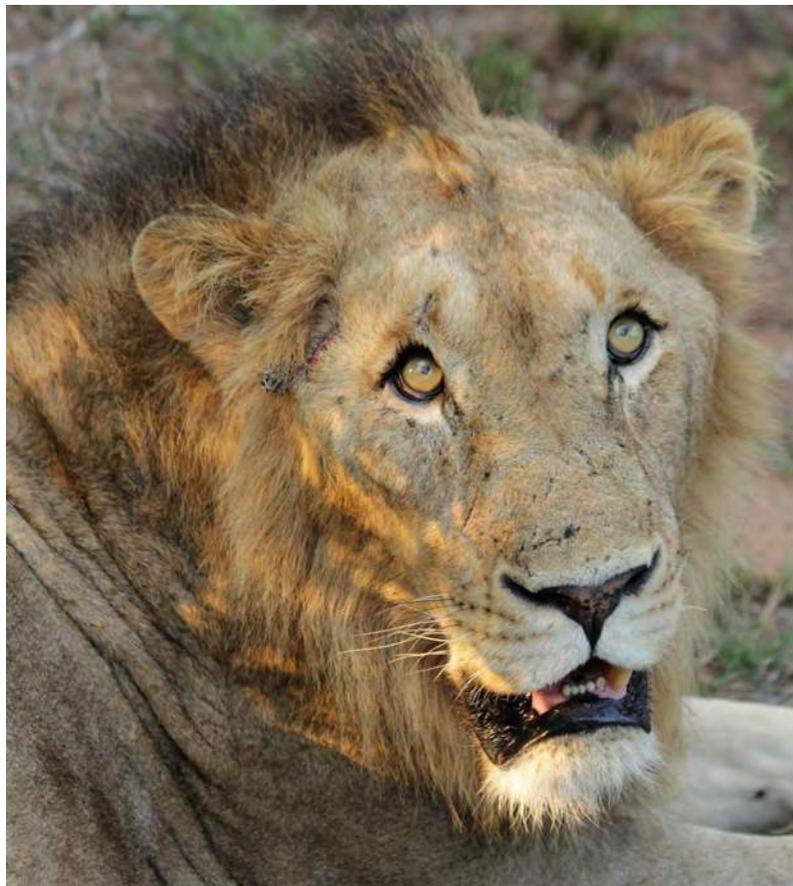
The late afternoon game drive is uneventful as the heavy rain the previous night doesn't allow for us to go off-road with the risk of soil erosion. During our drinks stop, we take in the most picturesque sunset with different hues of pink and oranges. It is suggested to us to dine in our Villa, which seems like a good idea and our three courses are promptly brought to us. My daughter and I feast on the beef fillet while my husband chooses to make his dinner into a meat and fish combination. The food is very tasty and with everyone satiated, we play a game of 30 seconds before retiring to bed.

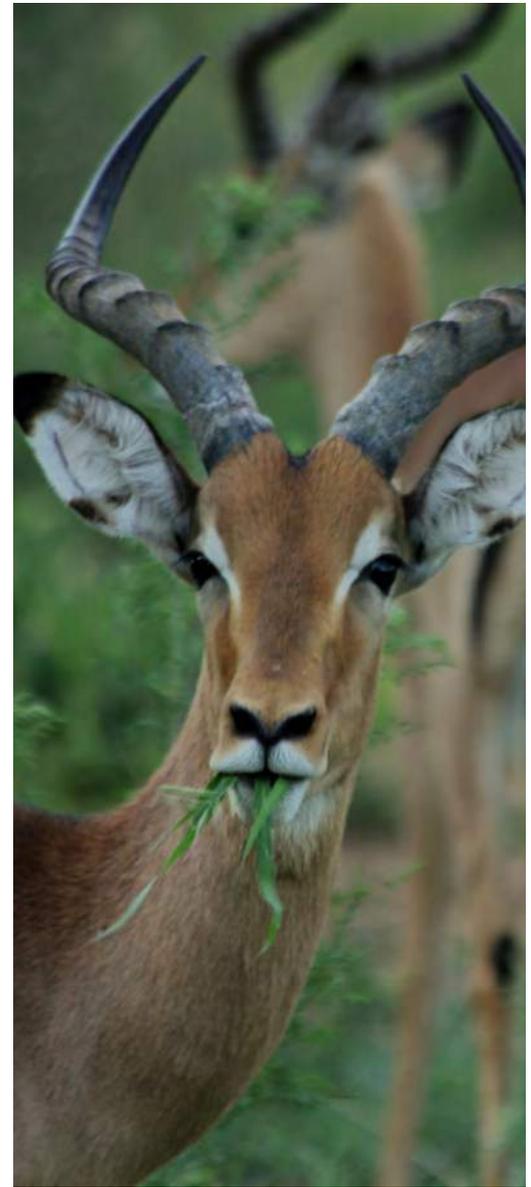
As we finish our last game drive, a woodland kingfisher calls out. He rapidly takes off, showcasing his exquisite bright blue wings. A different bird will be transporting us home and as the gleaming Airlink Embraer 135 plane takes flight, the jets propel us into the skies, homeward bound.

Views expressed are the author's own.

Thank you to Taryn van Niekerk from MORE for arranging our stay. | Photographs courtesy of Lion Sands Tinga Lodge and by Heléne Ramackers

<https://www.lionsands.com/our-lodges/tinga-lodge/>





TRAVEL TIPS

The closest airport to Lion Sands Tinga Lodge is Skukuza Airport.

Lion Sands Game Reserve is situated in a low-risk malaria area. Speak to your healthcare practitioner before travelling about anti-malaria prophylactics.

Kruger National Park has summer rainfall (November to March), making it lush and green.

Winter is the dry season with lower temperatures and pleasant, sunny days.

When entering Kruger National Park, you will be liable for an entrance fee as well as a conservation fee, which you can settle at Skukuza Airport or added to your Lion Sands account.

GETTING THERE:



Airlink is a privately owned Airline business. The Regional Feeder Airline offers a wide network of regional and domestic flights within southern Africa and operates as a franchisee to SAA.

Route Specific Information: Direct scheduled flights between Johannesburg and Cape Town to Skukuza Airport, Kruger National Park.

Connectivity: Through our alliance with SAA travellers can connect conveniently with SAA, their Partner airlines and other carriers throughout Southern Africa and the world.

Frequent Flyer Programme: Airlink is a member of South African Airways (SAA) Loyalty programme - Voyager.

Websites: www.flyairlink.com and www.skukuzaairport.com
 Flight Bookings: online, booking agent or SAA Central Reservations +27 11 978 1111.

