

Sleeping wild ... out in the treehouse

It would be an exaggeration if we told you we'd slept in a treehouse in the middle of the African bush ... no lights, no electricity, no running water and (more importantly) no-one near us for miles. A treehouse implies ... well, house. With roof. And the platform on which we spent the night had no walls, no roof ... we really were out in the open in the middle of the bush.

OK ... so let's admit that this was a seriously luxurious platform. Built a couple of kilometres away from the main Lion Sands lodges, it's a two-story 'treehouse' ... on floor one is a tiny little loo (no flushing!) and a basin with a camping tank of cold water. Up a couple of stairs, and we found a mosquito-draped four-poster bed, the comfiest chair-for-two imaginable ... and all sorts of goodies to make sure our night under the stars was as comfortable as could be.

So there was a hot box, with a great meal (impala steaks with roast potatoes, cheese and biscuits and chocolate tart, as well as a few tins of rusks and home-made biscuits ... we were not going to starve) and a flask of coffee. There was a well-stocked cooler box, with wine, sparkling water and a six-pack of Heineken. There was elegant crockery and wine glasses, scented candles and a backgammon set. There was mozzie spray and hurricane lamps, and an extra thick duvet and two umbrellas in case of rain. And (sigh of relief) there was a radio, so we could call for help if it poured, or if we got a little nervous.

Not that we used it ... on the night we stayed there was a full moon, so not only could we hear lions in the distance, hippos a little closer, but could clear-as-daylight see ellies wander right past us ... just brilliant!

We were in the Chalkley Treehouse at the Lion Sands Private Game Reserve, and have to say that not only did we survive the night, we can't wait to go back! It's wild, it's an adventure, and it's so hugely romantic ... we think it's the ultimate pop-the-question venue, or a brilliant present, be it for an anniversary or for someone who's just in love with the bush.

Need to know: You're dropped off at around 5.30pm, perfectly timed to watch the sun go down, and then collected again the next morning around 6.30am for an early morning game drive. Leave your luggage back at the lodge and just take a small bag - all you need is a toothbrush and change of clothes. The tree house is available all year, so you can go in winter (yes, it's bitterly cold, but there's no rain, and no mozzies) or summer (lovely and warm, but the chance of rain).

Brilliant bush options

We made our way to Lion Sands Private Game Reserve in the Southern Sabi for a bit of bush-style pampering (and an outdoor sleepover adventure).



For an African bush adventure, we really can't rave enough about the Lion Sands Private Game Reserve, where you've a choice of three exceptional lodges, as well as the adventurous option of spending a night out under the stars in the Chalkley Treehouse.

Run by Nick and Robert More (whose grandfather was one of the founding members of the Sabi Sand Sandtuint in 1948) and his family, the lodge's charm is enhanced by the fact that it is steeped in history, and the family has kept the area as pristine as when it was first discovered. They've also committed themselves to conservation, with its latest cause being the fight against rhino poaching.

There are three choices of accommodation – the brilliant River Lodge, which has a dozen luxury and eight superior luxury suites; the unbelievably luxurious and glamorous Ivory Lodge, which has just six suites, and the 1933 Lodge, the More family's own gorgeous home that they offer to guests looking for a memorable family experience. Completely private, with your own butler, chef and ranger, it sleeps between four and eight people. Whichever lodge you choose, expect really

sensational food - and so much of it ... snack on the early morning game drive, a huge breakfast afterwards, lunch on the deck (or in your room, if you request, at Ivory Lodge), tea before the afternoon game drive and brilliant dinners - sometimes in the boma or out in the bush - later at night.

The owner-run element is hugely evident at Lion Sands, with careful attention being given to detail. Butlers cater for your every whim, and the staff really are unbelievably welcoming and friendly.

All the lodges offer a number of different activities ... so there's the must-not-miss early morning and later afternoon game drives, and then, for those who choose not to just chill at the pool, there's everything from clay pigeon shooting to astronomy, hippo walks to a session in the small gym based at River Lodge. There's also a really great spa at River Lodge, where Africology goodies are the products of choice (fairly fitting since you're 'roughing it' in the bush). Whether you choose to take advantage of everything on offer, or just take in the bush and relax, this destination has it all. Love it!



What you need to know ...

There are three flights daily from O.R. Tambo International Airport to Skukuza which take approximately an hour and 10 minutes. If you choose to drive there from Jozi, it will take you between four and five hours. Rates include all meals, selected local drinks (soft drinks, beers, wine and spirits), two game drives daily, refreshments and snacks and, at Ivory Lodge and 1933, laundry and mini bar. Ivory Lodge from R11 500 a person a night sharing. • River Lodge Luxury Room from R6 240 a person a night sharing, Superior Luxury Room from R7 500 a person a night sharing. • 1933 Lodge from R11 400 an adult, a night, minimum six guests • Chalkley Treehouse: You need to have a reservation at either Ivory or River Lodge (with rates as above) and you'll pay an additional R2 500 (for single or double) to stay in the treehouse. All rates are until January 1, 2013. *Details and reservations: 011-880-9992*