

GET OUT OF TOWN

Where the Wild things are

There's something special about waking up to the sounds of nature, stepping out onto a wooden deck with a cup of coffee, and watching meandering elephant in the glimmering rays of a Lowveld dawn, all amid five-star luxury. **By Benno Stander**



With Tinga ideally situated between two rivers, it is regarded by many as having the highest incidence of leopard sightings in KNP

Tinga is one of only seven private concessions in the Kruger National Park and as far as prime wildlife diversity goes, this concession with its two lodges, Narina and Legends, definitely has the lion's share.

Wedged between the Sabie and Sand rivers, Tinga is practically surrounded by permanent water which draws animals from all over the park to this 5 500 hectare tract of promised land.

The concession was formerly known as Jakkalsbessie, but was renamed Tinga after a legendary lion that won a ferocious territorial battle against another male. According to legend, the fight took place right under the jackal-berry tree in front of Tinga Legends.

Besides lion, buffalo and elephant frequenting the banks right in front of the lodges, this area is also commonly regarded as having the highest incidence of leopard sightings - enough to spark the interest of any wildlife enthusiast. And the best part of the deal is that all this can be explored and enjoyed right in the lap of five-star luxury.

On arrival at Narina, the reception was of such an extravagant nature that, for a moment, I forgot I was there to work and felt more like a celebrity as an attendant with warm facecloths, porters and managers, all welcomed me. The attention

went down well with a glass of chilled home-made lemonade.

Each suite is strategically situated so that it has a clear view of the river, while maintaining guest privacy. After a long game drive on a warm winter's day such as only the Lowveld can dish up, the private heated pool on the deck really does the job.

While enjoying the view of the sun as it starts making its way down to the horizon, I suddenly hear a rustle in the nearby bush. Despite the safe height of the verandah, I can't help but wonder how high is safe enough, and keep a steady gaze in the direction of the approaching noise. One after another, a number of elephant start appearing, slowly making their way down to the water. I keep rather still, so that they don't notice me peering from above, until a young female catches sight of me, turns towards me with a glare, and then briskly walks off. With such great wildlife right on my doorstep, I looked forward to the game drive.

Nick More, director of Tinga and Lion Sands says, "What sets us apart is our people. You can build fancy lodges and have all the modern conveniences, but the difference at the end of the day, and what makes people talk positively, is the heart and soul of the place, the warmth within the



Tinga director, Nick More, with his right hand man, Nick Leuenberger



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fancy walls."

In 2010 Tinga won the KNP concession of the year award, and has its sights set on taking it again this year. However, Nick feels that they don't intentionally go all out to win the award, but rather to comply diligently with, and improve on, the comprehensive set of rules laid down by SANParks. These include, among others, energy consumption, waste management, erosion control and alien plant control.

After a lengthy drive through dense bush, we find a relaxed white rhino grazing next to the road. We follow him closely as he ambles along, stopping for a bite now and then. He doesn't seem to mind the camera shutter going off like a machine gun, and quietly goes about his business.

On our way back we find a pack of hyena next to the road. As we pass they stare at me so intently, that I almost expect one of them to point and another to take out a camera.

At the lodge it seems as if our arrival has been eagerly awaited.

Before dozing off that night, I hear a lion roar somewhere in the distance, and an owl hoot from a tree above.

Surrounded by so much luxury, it's easy to forget that you're actually in wild Africa. Then I hear a rustling sound in the nearby bush, and wonder if I remembered to close the bathroom window!

Special offer

Get it readers can spend four nights at Tinga and only pay for three. For reservations, call (011) 880-9992 or email res@tinga.co.za

