



LAP OF LUXURY: You'll be spoilt rotten in the open-plan thatched Suite Royale at Thula Thula.



TAKING A DIP: Elephants bathe in the river at Thula Thula, one of the oldest reserves in KwaZulu-Natal.

Thula Thula offers a 'bush experience with benefits'

FROM PAGE 10

I asked Françoise what it was like adjusting to life in Zululand. She said she loved Paris and its culture, but had easily settled into her new environment, and found the people here friendly and warm.

She signed up for Zulu classes when arriving in Durban more than 10 years ago, but once she got to Thula Thula, she soon found that no one could understand her rather old-fashioned Zulu grammar and conversation.

She started all over again, and it is easy to see how well she communicates with her staff, handling what is clearly a frenetic environment on occasions.

On one of the evenings, she had to negotiate feeding 40 people, as well as keeping the two baby rhinos out of the lodge. They had wandered over, curious to see what was happening, and at any moment could have crashed through the kitchens into the bar. Bouillabaisse all over their horns!

This is the bush experience with benefits, no roughing it out in the open with the snap of twigs on the ground to keep you awake at night. You can sleep in the comfort of a thatched chalet, with mosquito nets. There is also a luxurious tented camp, with en-suite bathrooms and secluded outside showers. The tented camp is very popular with South Africans, where evening meals are round the braai or campfire.

And if you want your bush experience with holistic benefits, Françoise now offers yoga bush retreat weekends, which are proving to be popular with groups from Joburg and Cape Town.

Françoise is passionate about

the venture, and speaks about her "yoga ladies" with enthusiasm. In fact, I'm sure I spotted a wildebeest doing the lion pose!

If you want to practise your asanas in the peace and tranquillity of the bush, check out the website for details of available weekends.

The cost of a weekend is R3 300 for two nights all inclusive (bar expenses not included).

The weekend includes accommodation, four yoga classes, an aromatherapy massage, one game drive and a bush walk, plus a cooking class with Françoise.

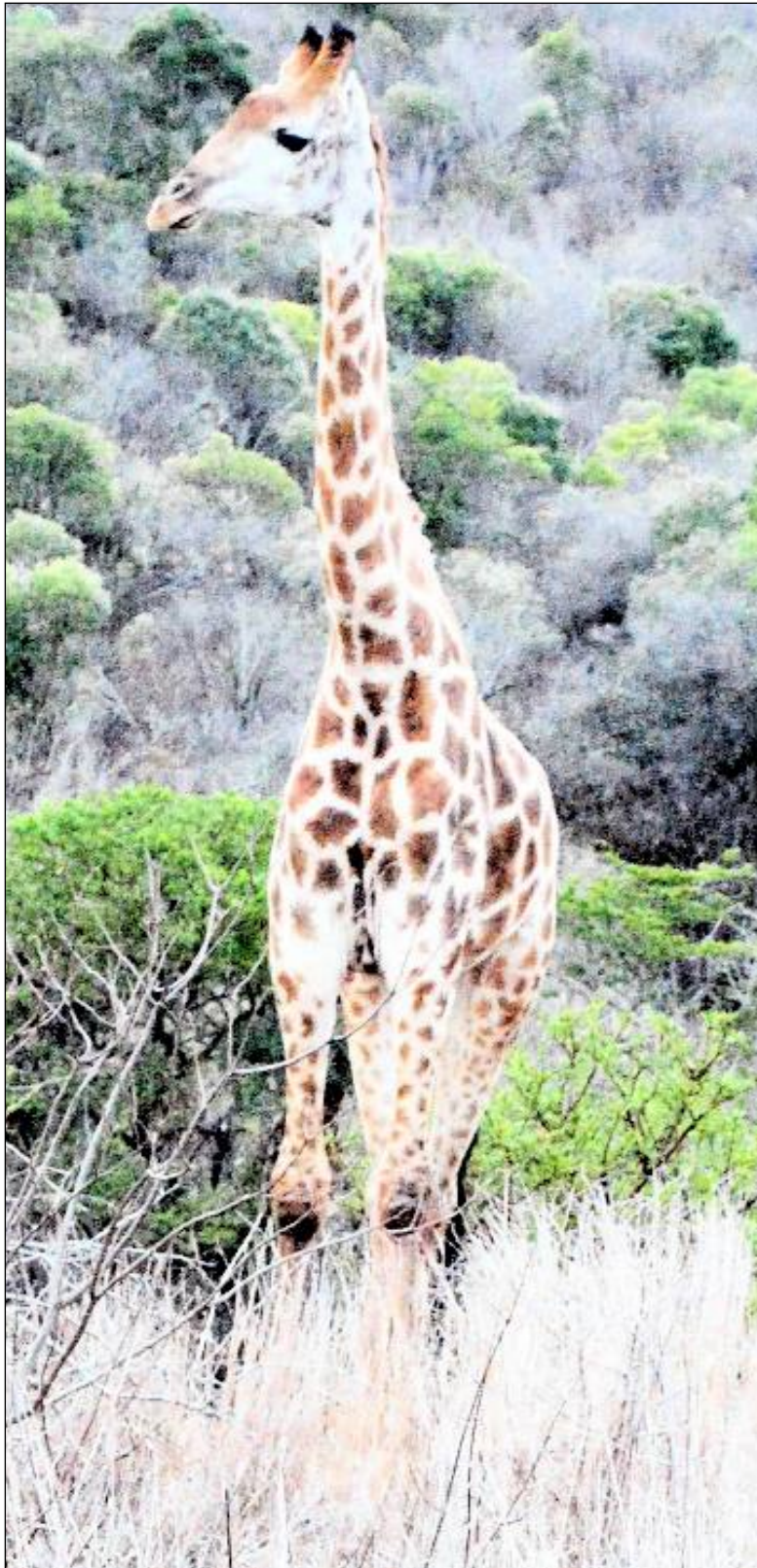
As I sat outside my room on the final afternoon, watching a duiker graze nearby, and as the shadows of acacia trees lengthened, I thought about what it is people expect from a bush experience.

Often they are disappointed if they don't see the big animals: they want to return home with photographs and stories of excitement. But perhaps, if we look a little deeper, the Gorgeous Bush-Shrike holds a lesson for us all.

It is often the sounds of the bush that are so revealing – sometimes you don't get to see everything you want to, but you will almost certainly hear something to remember.

■ HOW TO GET THERE:

Thula Thula Game reserve is a two-hour drive from Durban, near Empangeni. Check out www.thulathula.com for rates and packages at the different camps in the reserve. You can also visit for the day – rates include lunch/dinner and a game drive. Contact Françoise Malby-Anthony for details of the yoga/cookery weekends. Tel: 035 792 8322, e-mail: thula@netactive.co.za



BIG GAME: Apart from giraffe and elephants, you can also spot leopard, rhino, wildebeest, buffalo, zebra, hyena and kudu at Thula Thula.



FRENCH FLAIR: Chef Françoise Malby-Anthony cooks up a storm.



REVAMPED: Expect gorgeous views from La Splendida Hotel

Win two nights for two at La Splendida

ENTER the Sunday Independent/Star Travel Club competition to win a two-night getaway at the re-opened La Splendida Hotel in Cape Town for two adults sharing. This prize includes bed and breakfast, and is subject to availability. It expires on December 15, 2011. Terms and conditions apply.

To enter, post your details, travel club number and the lodge's name to: The Marketing Department, Box 1014, Joburg, 2000 by April 11, 2011. To join The Star Travel Club enclose a R140 membership fee payable to The Star Travel Club with your entry, as only members can enter this competition.

Alternatively, call 011 633 2341 with your credit card. This includes a three-month subscription to the Saturday Star or Pretoria News Weekend. If you join or renew your membership this year you could win a 11-night cruise aboard MSC Melody with MSC Cruises and Starlight Cruises. Monthly Starlight Cruises are also up for grabs.

Bringing a renewed sense of cool to Mouille Point, art deco landmark La Splendida Hotel has had a stylish revamp under the care of the South African hospitality group, Newmark Hotels.

Offering 'affordable chic' with mountain and sea views aplenty, the new-look La Splendida combines convenience, contemporary styling and well-priced rates in a smart, small hotel package. Just five minutes from the V&A Waterfront, Cape Town's CBD and the city's buzzing hotspots, the hotel is ideal for both business and leisure travellers and has all the mod cons, amenities and service requirements modern travellers demand.

The boutique offering has three floors and 24 en-suite rooms, including four spacious family suites. Star Travel Club members are offered a room rate of R950 per room valid from April 1 – September 30, 2011. Rate is subject to availability.

La Splendida Hotel is situated at 121 Beach Road, Mouille Point. For reservations contact La Splendida on 021 439 5119 or e-mail info@lasplendida.co.za

LA SPLENDIDA
Luxury Suites

