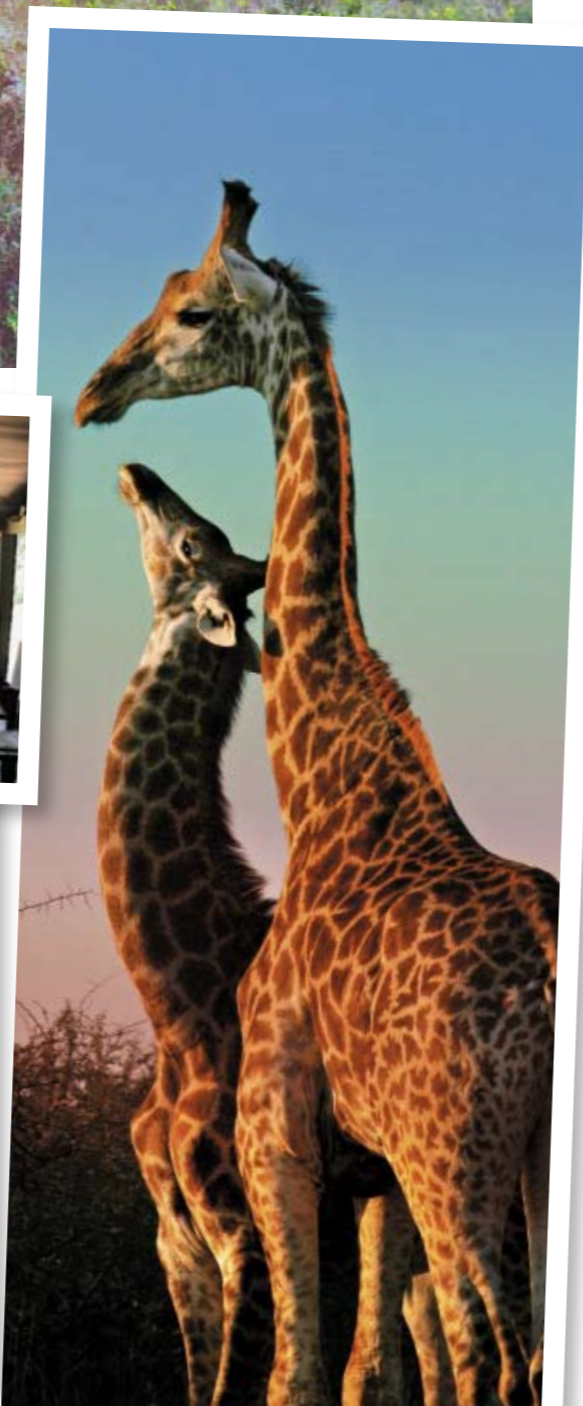
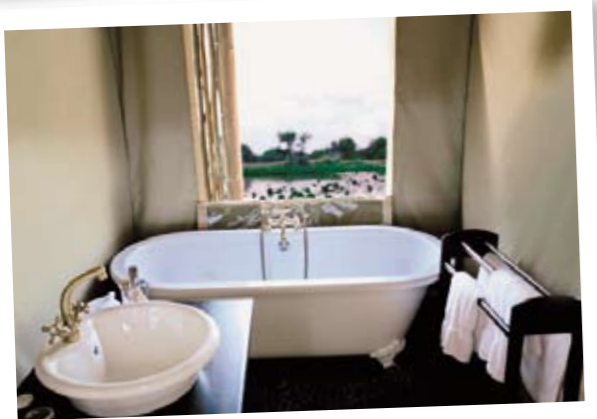


peace and tranquillity

Thula Thula, the oldest private game reserve in KwaZulu-Natal, is hidden between curving hills and lush green surroundings a mere two-hour drive from Durban.

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Did you know that a giraffe can clean its own ears with its 50cm tongue? Well, I have heard that this is a fact and was intent on seeing it for myself.

I concentrated on the scenery around me while Mom chatted away to our fellow passengers. There they were – brown-spotted, long-legged, tall-necked elegant creatures. We stopped for a moment to admire nature’s unique skyscrapers and, for a second, they looked quite strange to me. It wasn’t my lucky day and no ear-cleaning demonstration was forthcoming, as they were much too interested in their lunch to worry about hygiene.

The winding road en route to the luxury tented camp turned up some interesting buck species. We were welcomed with refreshing cold drinks on arrival and heard some interesting facts and stories about Thula Thula Exclusive Private Game Reserve.

The owner, Lawrence Anthony, is known as the ‘elephant whisperer’. He provided a home for a herd of violent elephants at Thula Thula. The animals had nowhere else to go and Lawrence was their last hope for survival. It was a long journey to winning the trust of these animals, and an understanding relationship between man and creature developed.

We had the pleasure of meeting the elephants on a game drive one night. I must say it wasn’t an easy task tracking these jumbos! We ran into the giraffes again, as well as zebra and buck, but our curiosity about the herd of elephants was only satisfied later in the evening as we were on our way back to the camp. Suddenly we heard it – rustling leaves and bark being pulled from the trees. And then we saw the elephants in the veld just in front of us.

An awestruck silence fell over the vehicle as we beheld these creatures. They

were huge, except – naturally – for the baby elephant, who was only a couple of months old. He reminded me of Dumbo and was adorable.

We had to reverse a couple of times as one of the elephants kept coming closer to the vehicle. I am not sure if she wanted to hitch a ride back to camp or was just as curious about us as we were about her.

Keeping busy

Apart from the morning bush walks and afternoon game drives conducted by the professional rangers and trackers, the following activities in the vicinity of Thula Thula are available on request:

- Sangoma expeditions in the rural Zulu village
- Game drives in Hluhluwe/Umfolozi Game Reserve
- Whale watching (June to October)
- Therapeutic spa massages
- St Lucia Estuary boat cruises (to view hippos, crocodiles and magnificent bird life)
- 18-Hole golf course in Emangeni, Richards Bay or Zimbali
- Horse-riding on the beach at St Lucia and horse safaris
- A guided tour of the Anglo-Zulu War’s battlefields

Back at the camp, there is an inviting swimming pool and lawn where children can have fun while parents relax in the hammocks.

As the herd was blocking the road, we had to turn around and follow another road back to camp. In the moonlight a few hundred metres from the herd, we came across another elephant standing next to a puddle of water. He was in a rather playful mood, slurping up some water and spraying it in our direction, and there were a couple of times when we thought we were in for a mud bath!

BOOKINGS

For information on rates and availability, please contact Thula Thula Exclusive Private Game Reserve on 035 792 8322 or visit www.thulathula.com

A STARLIT DINNER

After all the excitement, I was famished and looked forward to tasting the delicious smells teasing my taste buds when we arrived back at camp. We all sat in the boma around a crackling bonfire under the stars, discussing the game we had seen on the drive and who would be joining the rangers for the early morning bush walk the next day which, of course, this city girl never made! A stir-fry (Chinese) braai was on the menu for dinner. A delicious choice of calamari, prawns, beef, chicken and pork was available with vegetables and rice or noodles, followed by a lip-smacking dessert.

The highlight of the evening was a concert given by Thula Thula staff next to the fire, singing traditional African songs and performing entertaining dances.

A BED FIT FOR A KING

The short walk back to the tent was filled with the sound of chirping crickets and the comforting noises of other nocturnal animals in the area. While Mom enjoyed the blissful stillness of the evening on the private viewing deck, I soaked off the day’s heat in the inviting Victorian-style bath of our en-suite bathroom.

If privacy is what you seek, Thula Thula is the perfect destination for you and your family. There are only eight luxury tents in the camp, all equipped with mosquito nets, fans, and coffee- and tea-making facilities. Two of these tents are family tents offering ample space for little ones to run around and play while Mom and Dad relax and not worry about tripping over toys.

Your family will love a weekend away at this exquisite destination. The scenery, food and entertainment are world-class and I haven’t met such friendly and helpful staff in a long time. Don’t forget to have a drink at the bar with the game rangers and hosts. They have some very interesting tales to tell about life in the bush. ℓ