

**Africa at its most magical**

**Mesmerising Ulusaba**

**SOUTH AFRICANS: LOCALS GET SPECIAL RATES AT THIS PRIVATE GAME RESERVE**



With lodges catering more than ever to the domestic market, Ulusaba's general manager Karl Langdon was quick to tell me their philosophy has always been to offer a discounted rate for resident South Africans and domestic rates will be feature of the lodge's future.



After a weekend of surprises, one more lay in store. The team told us to pack an overnight bag – we'd be spending the third and final night at Ulusaba's Treehouse Suite. A 10 minute walk along the raised walkways – a wild adventure in itself, the Treehouse Suite sits on a magnificently sized private dam, and from the veranda the wildlife viewing was unparalleled.

Almost hourly elephants would walk directly past, or the pod of resident hippo would loudly announce their presence.

This is Africa at its most magical.

I now understand why 30% of Ulusaba's guests are returning visitors – a remarkably high number for the industry.

I left Ulusaba with many photos, but more importantly, countless memories.

► [virginlimitededition.com/en-ulusaba](http://virginlimitededition.com/en-ulusaba)

**Federal Airlines**

Offers customised, exclusive charter flights to meet personal schedules and requirements as required.

While it remains a pricey endeavour, it's a much cheaper option than a private jet.

Flights are usually arranged by the lodge, providing a seamless booking experience for guests.

In an attempt to be more dynamic, the airline offers domestic packages with discounts of 50% on shuttle services to luxury lodges.

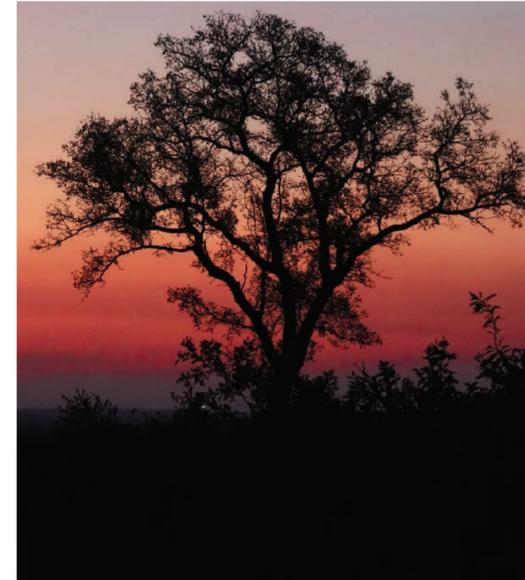
The airline's Odie Latre said: "Federal Airlines have been adaptable and have noticed South African family groups are wanting to travel more and more."

"Federal Airlines extended SADC [Southern African Development Community] group bookings special packages, in conjunction with the various lodges in the Tumbavati, Sabi Sands and Madikwe reserves."

The response from South Africans has confirmed the need.

"This period has shown us is the appetite for South African and regional visitors to visit the gems of the South African safari industry, particularly with so many good offers available."

Flights can be booked through lodges. More information is available online at [www.fedair.com](http://www.fedair.com)



an opportunistic hyena quickly made off with the treat.

Such mesmerising sightings like this are a profound reminder of why this enclave of the Kruger National Park is such a unique part of the world, and as we were to discover, this would be only one of many memories to be made at Ulusaba Private Game Reserve.

For my very first time, I was flying directly into a lodge itself, testing Federal Airlines' domestic offering.

A five-minute transfer from OR Tambo and you're in Federal Airline's private lounge, and moments later on the flight.

The 90 minute trip directly to the lodge was infinitely quicker and more comfortable than the usual six-hour drive to Kruger.

Ryan was ready to welcome us, glass of bubbly in hand.

Ulusaba is Sir Richard Branson's piece of wilderness in the Kruger's Sabi Sands and home to two distinct lodges.

Rock Lodge is magnificent-ly perched on a hilltop with

breathtaking views over the surrounding bush, and Safari Lodge (our home for the stay), a few minutes' drive away, occupies a prime position alongside the river.

Safari Lodge offers all the feel of a luxury bush break, but with an exciting twist.

The treehouse-styled lodge, blends discreetly with the landscape and features a variety of bespoke suites, connected by elevated walkways and swinging bridges.

The lodge has no fences – so the free-roaming wildlife can be easily viewed from the walkways. Imagine the thrill of walking over a swinging bridge while elephants gracefully pass through the river bed below.

Our suite overlooked pristine bushveld, including a heated splash pool from where the game-viewing continued.

It was hard to tear ourselves away from these luxury quarters for the following day's safari, but the thrill of more game sightings had us back on the vehicle.

Driving down a dry river bed we encountered a herd of elephant – our timing couldn't have been better, as Ryan told us to watch what would unfold.

The elephants began to slowly dig at the ground with their feet until a large hole had formed. They reach their trunks in, and then withdraw them, releasing a spray of dirty water.

After the second or third attempt, they drew clean water.

An almost miraculous act to witness – we'd never have guessed water was so close to the surface.

Further down the river bed awaited a second surprise. Turning the corner, the staff had set up a champagne and pancake breakfast table in the bush!

I almost couldn't believe my eyes at the table laden with over 16 toppings waiting to be tasted.

The intimate attention to detail helps set Ulusaba apart.

Over lunch I commented how much I love Guinness – there wasn't any at the lodge, but lo and behold, the following afternoon

**Jared Ruttenberg**

Since Sabi Sands Game Reserve is widely regarded as leopard country, when our guide Ryan asked what we'd like to see, leopard was the immediate response.

On our first day we thought we'd struck it lucky with spotting two cubs with their mother.

However, on route home after our sunset drink in the riverbed, Ryan brought the vehicle to a stop, shining his spotlight in a tree.

There, several meters high in the crook of an obliging jackalberry tree, was three-year-old Thlambela.

Tswana for "the swimmer", this young male had hauled an impala up the tree and we watched as he enjoyed the evening's spoils.

After a while, he dropped it and