

MEERKAT

EXPERIENCE AT TSWALU

** Northern Cape

Tswalu is South Africa's biggest private game reserve at a staggering 114 000 hectares and this vast stretch of the southern Kalahari is home to some of the country's quirkiest creatures. The inclusive safari experience provides the opportunity to see rare, endangered, and elusive animals that call this valuable conservation area home, including up close and personal moments with the local meerkats.

There are three colonies of habituated meerkats, always ready to offer endless entertainment. Their habituation means they allow for human presence without it disrupting their activities. Guests can spend some time with the mobs at their burrows on an early morning game drive before the meerkats venture out for the day.

Veronique Venter, one of the resident meerkat habituators, says, "On the cute side, it's amazing how you start noticing individuals and their personalities – it's not that different to a human family. You get the quiet one, the crazy one, the clumsy one and so on!" To observe these curious animals from such close proximity is indeed a rare privilege. **tswalu.com**

FOR THOSE
WHO'VE
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THE USUAL
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THESE ARE
A FEW OF MY
FAVOURITES.



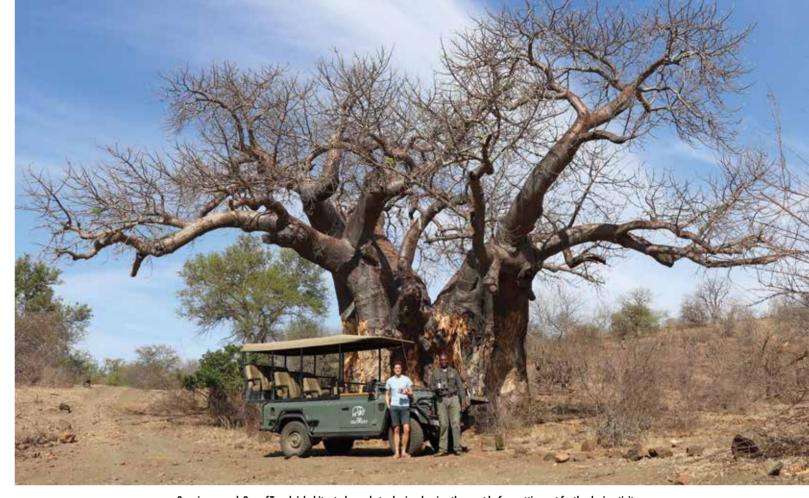
HELICOPTER EXPERIENCES AT BABANANGO

** KwaZulu-Natal

You might have seen the Big 5 from metres away in a vehicle, but few experiences could rival soaring above the bush on a helicopter flight. KwaZulu-Natal's Babanango Game Reserve is a sprawling new 19 250-hectare reserve where wildlife is being reintroduced into an area they once roamed decades before – the biggest private rewilding project in South Africa since Phinda Game Reserve. Thanks to their innovative safari offerings, you can take a flip in their resident conservation chopper.

Guests can book a scenic flight over the reserve, which could include a short stop in the bush, or join in one of the daily conservation flights, aimed to monitor the reserve fences. This offers rare insight into the strict antipoaching security measures Babanango takes to ensure the safety of their beautiful rhino.

And, with the imminent launch of walking wilderness trails and even Big Five white-water rafting on the cards, the Babanango team certainly knows how to sexy up the safari experience. Extend your stay to include a night or two at the elevated Zulu Rock Lodge, the farm-styled Valley Lodge, or the nearly completed five-star Traveller's Camp. babanango.co.za



Opening spread: One of Tswalu's habituated meerkat colonies clearing the coast before setting out for the day's activity.

Clockwise from top left: One of the magnificent baobabs you'll meet during your stay at The Outpost — this one over 30m in diameter; soaring high above the game at Babanango Game Reserve on an anti-poaching patrol flight; feel the thrill of the bush up close and personal as the guides lead you on a Marataba Walking Safari; stroll along the suspended walkways that lead you to the private Safari Lodge Treehouse at Ulusaba.



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42



BIG 5 HIKING TRAILS AT MARATABA MOUNTAIN LODGE

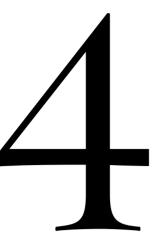
** Limpopo

If you've frequented the back of a game vehicle a few times, maybe it's time to trade in the seat for a walking safari. Few experiences get the adrenaline pumping like a true walk in the wild. Just over three hours from Johannesburg, Marataba Luxury Lodges offers walking safaris in the Marakele National Park.

From the intimate Mountain Lodge where I was staying, we headed out on our walking safari and within two minutes were abruptly stopped by the raised hand of our guide, Kim. Soon we saw what she'd noticed - black rhino standing guard in the thicket ahead. We had to replot our hike, and head in a different direction. From the get-go, adrenaline was pumping and added to the thrill of an unforgettable safari experience.

The uniqueness of the Marataba terrain only adds to the experience - millions of years-old sandstone mountains run the length of the reserve and many of the hiking trails wind up the ravines that give access up the sides. As if this isn't enough, guests are also treated to a water safari on the perennial Mothlabatsi River in the Waterberg Biosphere as one of the activities during a visit. more.co.za/marataba

• • SOUTH AFRICA • •



PRIVATE TREEHOUSE AT ULUSABA

** Mpumalanga

Regular Kruger-goers know what the Big Five in the a privilege it is to leave behind the masses for the seclusion of a private lodge. If you're keen to take that one Heading to the north step further, then Sir Richard Branson may have a surprise up his sleeve. His two Kruger lodges are located in the Sabi Sand Reserve: the hilltop Rock Lodge and riverside Safari Lodge. What many don't know, is guests can book a stand-alone treehouse for an as we turned a corner unforgettable night in the wild.

From Safari Lodge, a thrilling a startling 32-metre 10-minute walk along suspended bridges and walkways takes you to the Treehouse Suite. Since the lodge has no fences, this walk is a safari in itself, with the opportunity to spot game walking bushveld history. below. Reaching the Xikwenga Dam, Once these giants your private suite awaits, replete with a viewing deck, bathroom and lounge area. largest fever tree fore There's no shortage of wildlife that passes by, including a resident pod of hippos in the adjacent dam. Sitting on mecca for water bird the deck watching elephants drink just metres away, I couldn't help but think how many times Richard had done where at the touch the same – and in the wild surrounds sides of your private how many of his wild dreams had been birthed in the self-same spot. virginlimitededition.com/ulusaba

AFRICA'S TREES AT THE OUT

** Limpopo

While you can of cou Park's most northern something else waitin begin to see fewer pe but more of the ancie

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rareearth.co.za



GETTING THERE

•• FLY SAA flies between Cape Town and Johannesburg and Durban and Johannesburg daily. From t and take a short (or long) road trip to any of the destinations mentioned. Visit www.flysaa

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