

Lush bush and beach bliss

KZN's tropical delights

THE CAPITAL ZIMBALI AND GHOST MOUNTAIN INN



Pictures: Supplied

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As a child of KwaZulu-Natal, my early memories are happily populated with the province's plentiful game parks and pristine beaches. A recent visit took in two new staycations, soaking up both beach and bush.

The Capital Zimbali, Ballito

I'd heard the name Zimbali Estate many a time but had never ventured through the impressive gates. After hearing about the equally impressive R30 million investment that The Capital Hotels, Apartments and Resorts had spent on an extensive renovation project, I was set on visiting – especially with the property being a very convenient 15-minute Uber from King Shaka International Airport.

Driving through the eco estate is akin to arriving on a tropical island resort; verdant foliage, palm trees around every corner, and monkeys leaping joyfully from tree to tree.

The Capital Zimbali is simply sprawling; from the elevated reception balcony you gaze down to see the property spill out over acres of greenery, with pools and bars guiding your eyes until you reach the beach – every bit the lush tropical paradise I anticipated it to be.

The centrepiece is the largest of the pools – stretching a striking 52m. It took me a full 36 seconds to swim the length of the pool – and that was my very fastest. Thankfully a plethora of loungers (and the nearby bar) were on hand to bring respite to my heaving chest.

The suites formed a large focus of the refurbishment, transforming rooms into flexible apartment-style accommodation – so when it was time to retire from the lush gardens a range of stylish options



awaited. My family suite had the distinct feel of an apartment (larger than mine at home in fact) with a separate lounge, ocean-view balcony and inviting bathroom.

Not forgetting one of the key elements of a resort-styled getaway is enticing food and drink offerings. With a staggering seven food and dining options you're spoiled for choice. My favourites were killer cocktails at the chic Poison Ivy Bar, a finer dining affair at The Copper Restaurant and Bar, and then grilled treats from the Fireroom.

The resort is a family-friendly haven with a dedicated space for kids – the Funverse, a creative and innovative space to ensure the little ones enjoy the resort just as

much as the adults. To top it off the Zimbali Beach Club is another great spot for the entire family to have a splendid time with curated entertainment (with the Bushbaby Kids Club with a kids pool and play area hitting the spot).

Zimbali is a destination in itself – and while shopping at Umhlanga and Ballito are minutes away, the chances are you won't want to leave this tropical paradise once you've found it. – thecapitalzimbali.co.za

Ghost Mountain Inn, Zululand

After soaking up the coastal sun, it was time to head into the hinterland of the province; the destination being Mkuze – a hub to the key sights of Zululand.



Ghost Mountain Inn is a homely family-run property that has been welcoming guests since the 1960s. Seventy-four rooms are spaced across the property and its manicured gardens, each offering different levels of comfort. The inn borders the town on the south, and on the north, the large water sanctuary of a large lake.

My visit coincided with the commendable news that Ghost Mountain had achieved certification as a Fair Trade Tourism-certified business.

This makes it part of a small group of hotels in South Africa who've gone the extra mile to demonstrate their commitment to fair,

participatory, and sustainable tourism.

Ghost Mountain is the perfect base to explore the surrounding area, and safari manager Jean offers a range of activities. The Pangolin Experience made my heart leap. In connection with the Zulu-



land Conservation Trust, I had the privilege of meeting my first-ever pangolin, Emily. The goosebumps lasted minutes as I first caught sight of her.

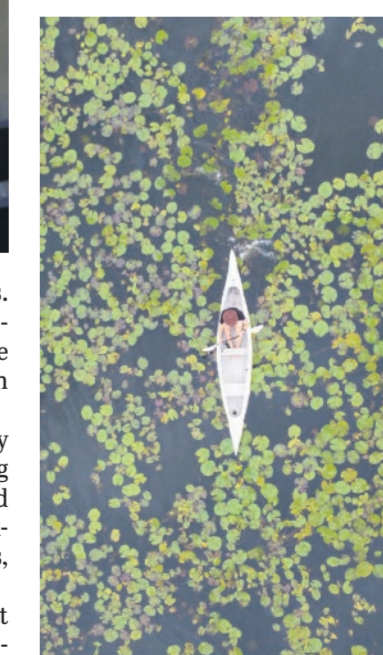
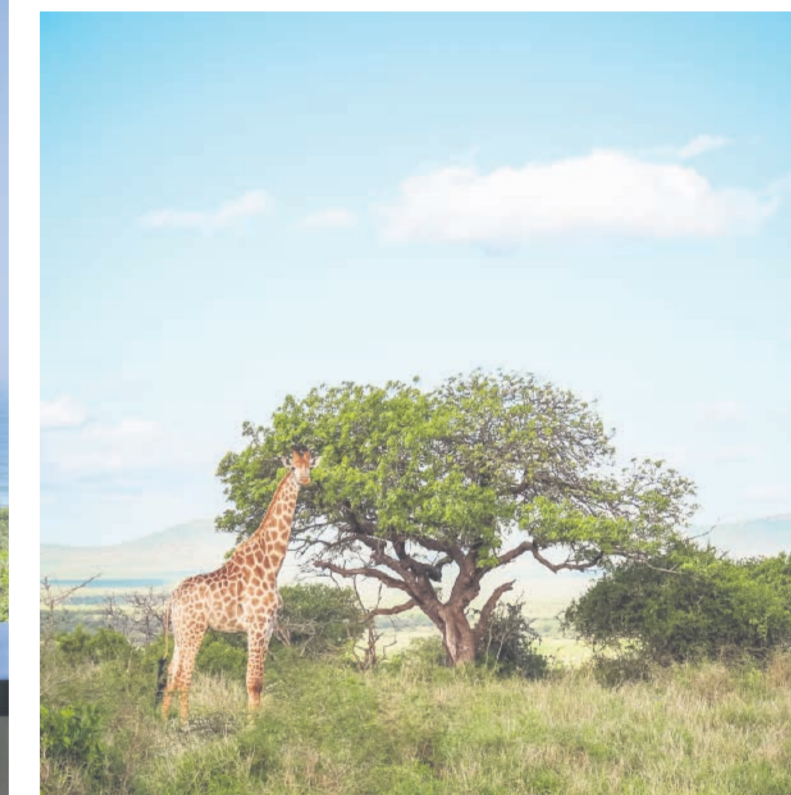
These elusive and prehistoric-looking creatures are one of the planet's most quirky critters, but sadly its most trafficked. Until the programme began here, pangolins had been extinct in the region for 80 years.

I spent the following morning with guide Isaac exploring some of the local Zululand attractions. We began with a boat cruise on Jozi Lake spotting elusive hippos and lazy crocs, and then a scenic

drive up the Lebombo Mountains. Included was a stop at a traditional homestead where Justice gave me a tour of his home and a run through Zulu customs.

Other activities organised by Ghost Mountain include fishing trips, game drives in uMkhuze and Hluhluwe Game Reserves, walking safaris, cultural experiences, hikes, and much more.

Back in the sanctuary of Ghost Mountain, there is a range of activities to engage in, including welcome down-time in the two garden pools. I'd also recommend paddling on the lake since the inn offers complimentary kayak use.



first treatment, the therapist referenced the outdoor bath, and within minutes I'd booked a return session and arrived to a rather romantic evening with candles, a glass of bubbly, and a canopy of stars overhead.

Perhaps what I'll miss most is my daily stroll down the private jetty to the small pagoda. I'd sit on the bench gazing over the water with the reflection of the mighty mountain (from which the inn gets its name) painted across the water, musing over the stories of how the mountain got its name. There's a story in that, but I'd best leave some things to be discovered in person. – ghostmountaininn.co.za