



Left: Inkwenkwezi offers a diverse range of activities such as elephant interaction and getting up close and personal with cheetah. You can also canoe down to the beach, enjoy swimming in the river or go on a guided game or bird trail. Inkwenkwezi is a favourite wedding venue and was voted SABIA's 2010 Brides' Choice Gold Award winner in the safari reception category for the Eastern Cape.

On route to the luxury en-suite tented Valley Camp, we pass through grasslands and coastal thickets with evidence of fynbos, and descend into a riverine gorge with yellowwoods and rare cycads. Home to abundant bird life, local ornithologist Neil Smith has recorded 180 species including the Stanley bustard and rare ground hornbill.

Views from the deck of my luxury tent are of an impenetrable wall of green forest. No one is in sight and the bush secures total privacy. Guests at the luxury tented Valley Camp have three meals a day, with local wine and malt included. In between two daily game drives, meals are in the lapa's open plan informal lounge, bar and dining room. It's where you are free to curl up next to the cosy indoor fireplace or relax on the deck around the open-air fire pit. There's also horse riding, abseiling, quad and mountain biking, elephant interaction and guided walks in the reserve.

GIRAFFE AT THE COAST

Justin our field guide attends to our every need and also offers up a host of information. "There are over 40 species of game, including, buffalo, rhino, lion and evidence and sightings of leopard which have been encouraged by the presence of antelope to return to the area," says Justin as the safari vehicle bumps and rocks its way to the ridge of the valley.

At the top, the reserve's real charm reveals itself. A tower of giraffe lope past with a backdrop of a panoramic coastline and breaching whales out at sea. If the view of the beach alone is not enough, you can paddle a canoe all the way to the river mouth and spend the day on the beach.

THE WHITE LIONS OF INKWENKWEZI

Scanning the landscape my attention is drawn to white spots contrasting with the green bush – the white lions of Inkwenkwezi. We spend the next two hours observing the behaviour of a fully-grown white male lion, a dominant tawny female, three white cubs, two young white males and one white female lion.

The earliest recorded sighting of white lions is in the Timbavati region during 1938. However, oral tradition amongst elders in the Timbavati points to the presence of white lions going back centuries. Their white colouring blends into the light coloured sands of riverbeds and bleached grasses of the Timbavati region.

As fascination with white lions grew globally, so did the pressure from trophy hunters. From the 1970s wild white lions decreased dramatically. Many were removed and placed in breeding programmes and zoos across the world. The Global White Lion Protection Trust refers to the period from 1994 to 2006 when endemic white lions were technically extinct. Current estimations of white lions in captivity range between 300 and 500.

Since then the Trust has successfully reintroduced a pride into a 1000-hectare control area of the Timbavati. They are now hunting for themselves and are self-sufficient. The white