

South African Safari

By **Judy Koutsky**

Looking to book a trip with equal parts culture and adventure in a tourist-friendly environment? Consider visiting the South African bush. [Thanda Safari](#), a member of The Leading Hotels of the World, is a luxury safari camp located in the heart of Zululand in KwaZulu-Natal, a province in the Southeast part of the country. Visitors come face-to-face with the Big Five (lion, elephant, Cape buffalo, leopard and rhino) while giving them a chance to experience the conservation efforts in the region (including protecting the elusive white rhino) first-hand.



The rhino-tracking walking safari allows guests to get up close to these amazing animals and learn about conservation.

Get Up Close and Personal with Animals

Thanda is located on a private game reserve that traverses almost 35,000 acres of wilderness. Guests go on game drives in safari vehicles twice a day and see plenty, including: cheetah, giraffe, zebra, hyena, warthog, wild dog, elephant shrew, rhino beetle, leopard tortoise, ant lion and more than 400 species of birds. The nice part about traveling on a game reserve, versus in a national park, is that it's private land, so the safari guide is able to go off-road to get up close to the animals. It's not uncommon to get within a few feet of a lioness and her cubs snuggling under the shade for a nap in the morning, or preparing for hunt as the sun goes down.



Game drives are twice a day at dawn and dusk and it's not uncommon to see lions.

Choose How You Get Around

In addition to daily game drives in vehicles, guests can go on a bush walk (a walking safari) with a trained safari guide, who explains how to track animals on foot, looking for paw prints in the dirt. He gives an in-depth explanation of the plant, animal and bird life all around—basically, National Geographic brought to life. Another option is to partake in a wildlife photography safari. This includes a 90-minute session with Thanda's resident wildlife photographer, who will talk about light, movement, speed, distance and framing. Then budding wildlife photographers go out on a game drive—with the photo expert—and put their newly-found photo skills to work.



Thanda is very involved in animal conservation and habitat protection.

Learn About Conservation

Thanda has a dedicated Rhino Monitoring Conservation Team that tracks and records the movements of these animals in order to maintain their health and safety and protect their environment. Guests can go out with the team and track the rhino on foot, with an experienced guide. A portion of the proceeds go directly to the Anti-Poaching Program. Visitors can also spend a day with the conservation team out in the field through the "Path of Wildlife" excursion, working with the animals, monitoring the elephant families and checking the reserve to make sure the habitat is maintained.



The traditional Zulu dance is performed by local village women.

Get to Know the Zulu People

The Zulus are the largest ethnic group in South Africa, with the majority living in KwaZulu-Natal, where Thanda Safaris is located. The Thanda team partners up with nearby Zulu communities to help fund

schools and community projects. Guests at Thanda can choose an excursion called Following in the Footsteps of the Zulus to visit a traditional homestead and village, including a local school. Money from each excursion goes toward the Zulu fund.



The Oyster Box Hotel is known throughout Africa for its food, spa and luxe accommodations.

Enjoy Luxury Accommodations in the Wild

Thanda has three types of accommodations— The Safari Lodge, The Villa iZulu and Thanda Tented Camps—each one catering to a different type of stay and traveler. All are luxury accommodations, but very different experiences. Villa iZulu is an all-inclusive five-star villa and is ideal for families and groups of friends. It can accommodate 10 guests in five suites, plus it has a large boma (living room area), a library wine cellar, heated swimming pool and a large viewing deck looking out onto a waterhole often visited by elephants. The villa also comes with a private game-viewing vehicle and ranger, plus a personal chef and masseuse. For couples, including many honeymooners, the Safari Lodge is luxurious and private, with nine expansive suites, each with private outdoor plunge pools and indoor and outdoor showers. The lodge also has its own library, cigar bar, well-stocked wine cellar and outdoor lounge with views of the animals. If you're looking for a real authentic, traditional safari experience you should stay at the Tented Camps which is the most rustic experience. There are 14 spacious-sized tents and one grande deluxe tent. Even though it's a canvas tent, there's a proper king bed inside. You can hear the sounds of the animals outside, but an electric fence will prevent them from getting too close.





Day beds are a great way to take in animal sightings.

The rooms come with claw-bathtubs, private sun decks, which are great for viewing the animals, and luxury bathrooms. There's also a large pool and lounge area in the main area. Villas prices start at \$3,35 lodge prices start at \$575 per person; tent prices start at \$301.



Romantic sunset dinners can be arranged at various spots throughout the property

Photos by: Christian Sperka
