



LIONS and LEOPARDS and LUXURY, OH my!



For an exquisite safari experience, there's no place like Richard Branson's Ulusaba Private Game Reserve.

By Judy Alexandra DiEdwardo
Photographs by Horst Klemm

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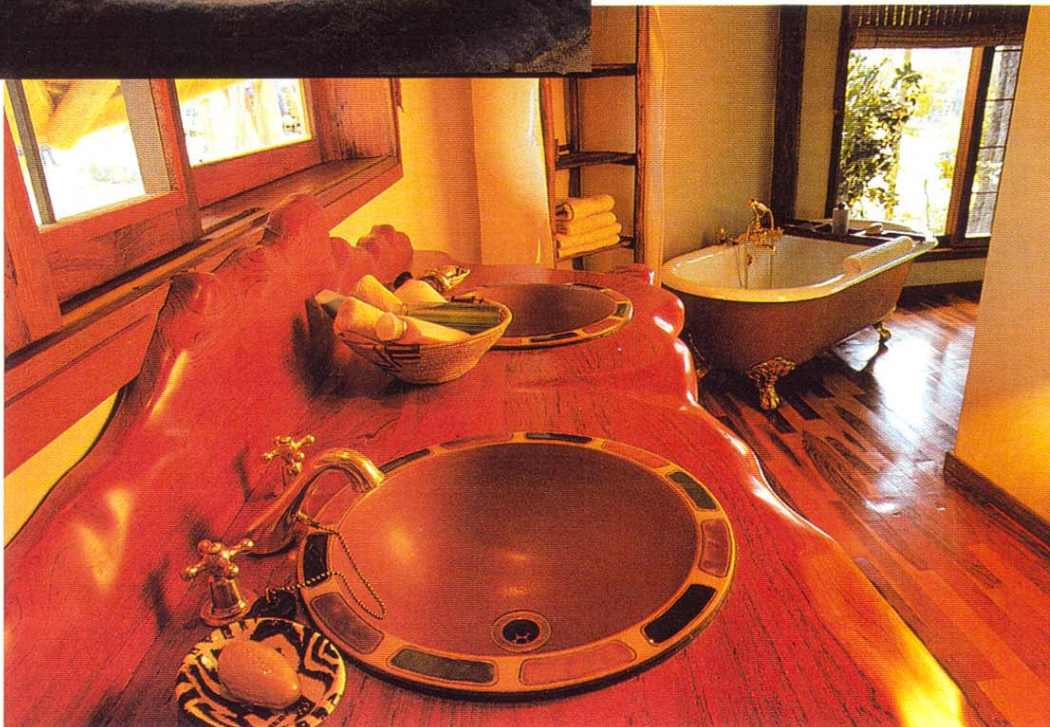
Take a walk on the wild side at Richard Branson's exquisite South African game reserve and luxury safari lodge, which brings the Virgin Atlantic Airways brainchild's innovative hospitality to this untamed landscape. The 10,000-acre Ulusaba Private Game Reserve joined his luxury hotel portfolio when the \$10 million safari compound opened in December 1999 on the northwestern edge of Kruger National Park. Once reserved for those who could bear the rigors of travel through this rugged land, Branson's establishment has forged a luxury safari experience like nothing else on the planet.

Most Fab Room: Of the 10 chalet-style cottages at Rock Lodge that span the cliff face of Ulusaba Mountain (and the tree-house-style chalets at Safari Lodge down below), my favorite is the Cameroon Room with its majestic spiral staircase and sweeping glass wall that offers unparalleled views of the Savannah.



Coollest Room Feature: The whimsical, oversized zebra-striped bathtub in Safari Lodge for sure! Like all of Ulusaba's ultra-stylish bathrooms, it comes equipped with a basket chock full of luxurious Virgin Vie bath gels and soaps.

Most Coveted Table/Dish: Leave calorie counting for your next excursion and indulge in everything that chef Craig Pienaar offers you. Be especially sure to request the roasted rack of pork with caraway seed crust served on Moroccan tomato and lemon sauce. And leave room for the iced banana parfait wrapped in white chocolate with Belgium chocolate and rum sauce. Mmm.



Things to Do: Morning and evening game drives in a 4x4 Land Rover put you at hip level with the wildlife you'll see, unlike traditional pop-top safari vehicles where there's more hardware between man and beast. Located in the 145,000-acre Sabi Sand Reserve where the area's greatest proportion of predators live, these ancient traversing grounds are prolific with the Big Five – lion, leopard, elephant, rhinoceros and buffalo – in addition to zebra, cheetah, giraffe and hippopotamus.

Favorite Spa Treatment: After a few hours of joy-riding on the Savannah and a dip in the infinity swimming pool, you'll be ready for a cool drink and a visit to the Aroma Boma spa/salon where three glass walls (draped with purple velvet curtains during treatments) afford breathtaking views of the Savannah below. I went straight for the full-body aromatherapy massage, opting for a heavenly mix of lilac and orange essential oils followed by a hydrating facial that left me feeling radiant, relaxed and ready for lunch.

Most Macho Activity: Step beyond the protection of your Land Rover for an hour-long walking safari that puts you up close and personal with the resident wildlife. Not to worry, though. Rifle-toting rangers give a thorough etiquette briefing regarding wildlife encounters to ensure your safety.

Romance Factor: For the ultimate in safari romance, you can play Tarzan and Jane at Ulusaba's Safari lodge located at the base of Ulusaba Mountain. Six of the ten sumptuous, elevated chalets tucked beneath a canopy of trees are linked to the main lodge by wooden swing bridges.

Damage: Daily all-inclusive rates from \$650.

Reservations: Call Resorts Management at (800) 557-4255. ➤

