
ISILEMBE
A unique Big 5 experience | Zululand, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa



Untamed, Unhurried.
Unmistakably Isilembe.

A *unique* Big 5 experience awaits

Zululand holds a particular kind of quiet.

It is there in the low call of a fish eagle over the river, in trees leaning toward the light, in the patience of a leopard with no reason to hurry.

Isilembe sits within this land, not upon it, every element designed to honour the ground that came first. Elephants move between river and mountain, lions patrol ancient pathways, and more than 400 species of bird share the sky above.

This is a Big 5 experience made for travellers who want more than a sighting: who want to understand the place that makes the sighting possible. Its wildlife, its people and the quiet moments in between.





A *Big 5 reserve* you will not share with a crowd, and a lodge small enough that the bush stays in charge.

Why Isilembe

What we *hold to*

Land First

The reserve is not a backdrop to the lodge. Decisions about water, fire and grazing are made in that order, and the lodge lives with the answer.

Guided By Locals

Our guiding team is drawn from the communities bordering the reserve. Their knowledge of this ground did not come from a manual.

A Personal Experience

Small enough that the chef knows how you take your coffee by the second morning, and that nobody raises their voice at dinner.

Zululand

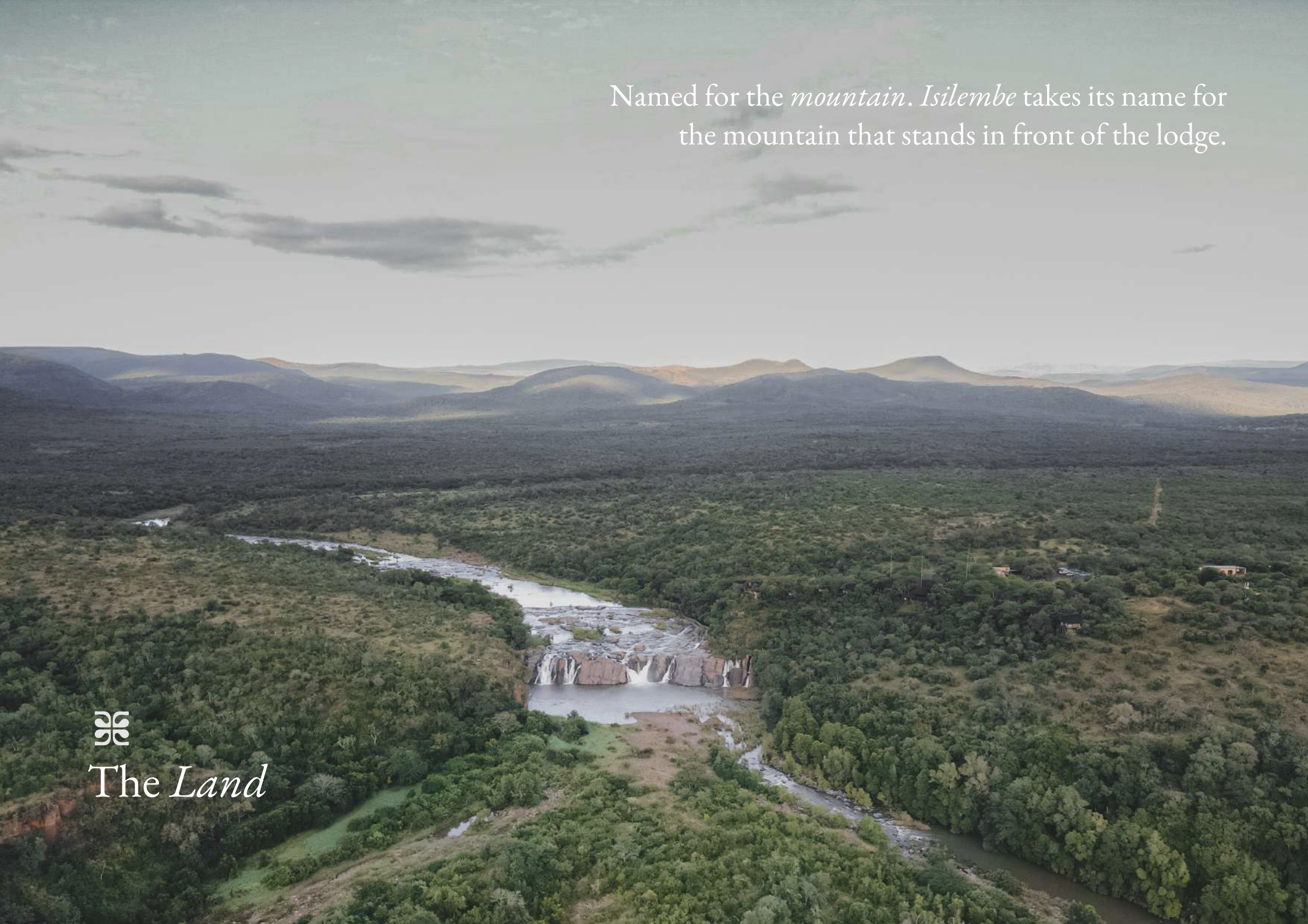
Isilembe carries a Zulu name and sits on Zulu land. The food, the language and the craft are part of the stay, not an excursion from it.

Time, Unhurried

Two safari activities a day, and no obligation to fill the hours between. Some of the best of Isilembe happens from a chair on your deck.

Curated Experience

A member of our team speaks with every guest ahead of the stay, so that once you are here there is nothing left to decide.



Named for the *mountain*. *Isilembe* takes its name for the mountain that stands in front of the lodge.

The *Land*

A *land* like no other

Zululand is a landscape of contrasts. Open savannah gives way to riverine forest, granite outcrops rise above wetlands, and within a single day the reserve can shift from golden grassland to a green, water-fed valley.

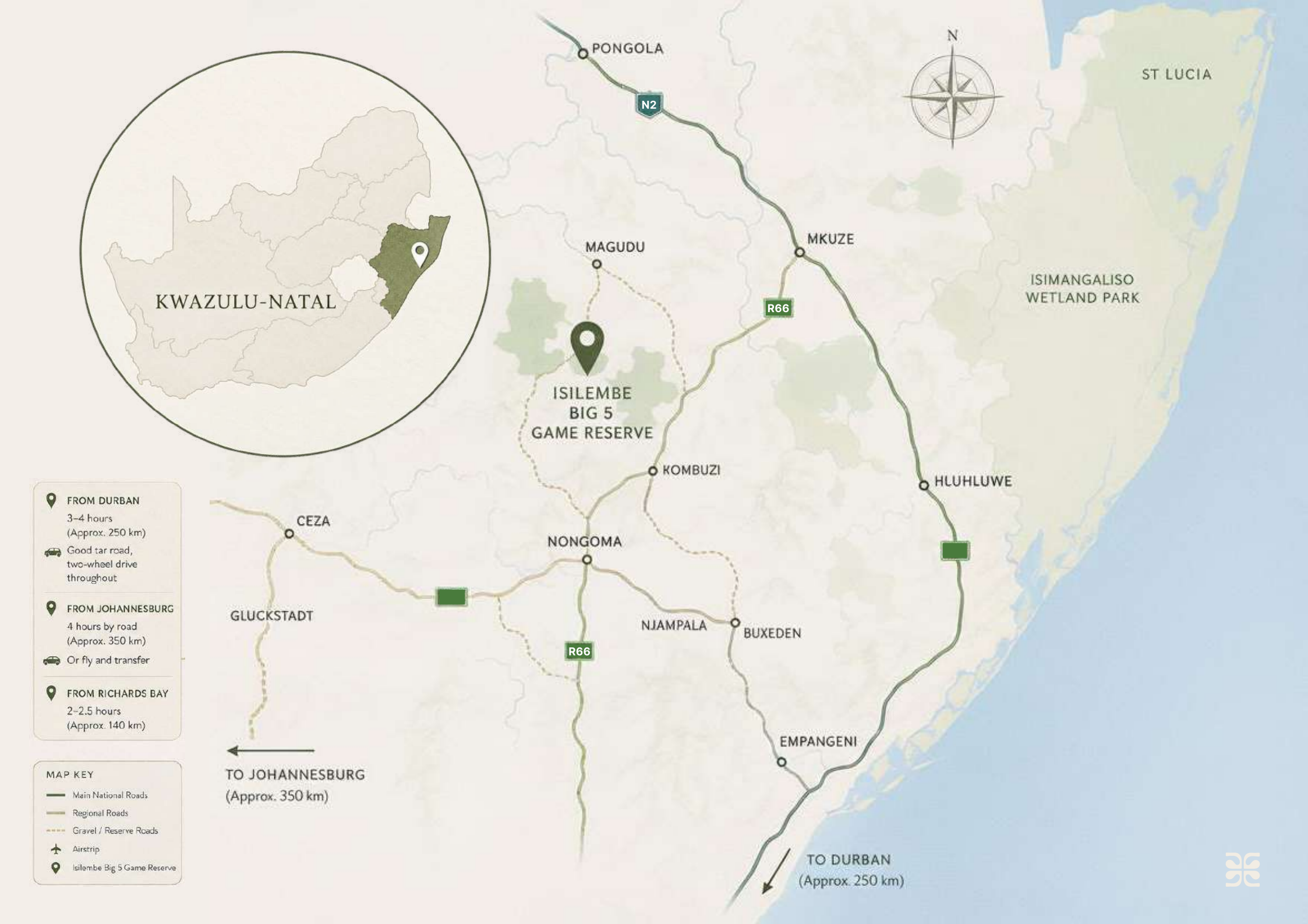
That variety is why the Big 5 viewing is good. It is also why a slow morning here can turn up a nyala, a boomslang, a flowering aloe and a dung beetle rolling something twice its size — and why the guides will happily stop for all four.

- **OPEN SAVANNAH**
- **GRANITE OUTCROPS**
- **RIVERINE FOREST**
- **MKUZE FALLS FRONTAGE**
- **SEASONAL PANS**
- **WETLANDS**



Finding *us*

Isilembe lies in northern **KwaZulu-Natal**, within reach of Durban and Richards Bay. Remote enough to matter and close enough to reach with ease.


KWAZULU-NATAL
PONGOLA
N2
N
ST LUCIA
MAGUDU
MKUZE
ISIMANGALISO
WETLAND PARK
R66
ISILEMBE
BIG 5
GAME RESERVE
KOMBUZI
HLUHLUWE
CEZA
NONGOMA
GLUCKSTADT
NJAMPALA
BUXEDEN
R66
EMPANGENI
TO JOHANNESBURG
(Approx. 350 km)
TO DURBAN
(Approx. 250 km)
FROM DURBAN
3–4 hours
(Approx. 250 km)
Good tar road, two-wheel drive throughout
FROM JOHANNESBURG
4 hours by road
(Approx. 350 km)
Or fly and transfer
FROM RICHARDS BAY
2–2.5 hours
(Approx. 140 km)
MAP KEY
Main National Roads
Regional Roads
Gravel / Reserve Roads
Airstrip
Isilembe Big 5 Game Reserve

Region information

Location	Northern KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
Reserve size	14,000 hectares
Altitude	300 - 600 m
Malaria	Low-risk
Best time to travel	Year-round
Summer	Warm to hot, humid, afternoon rain. September to April.
Winter	Mild days, cold mornings, dry. May to August.
Power	230v AC, plug types C, D, M, N. Adapters available.
Connectivity	Wireless internet in the main lodge areas and suites
Languages	isiZulu and English



Two safari activities a day, and the good sense to leave the rest of it *open*.

Days *here*

Days shaped by the bush, *not the clock.*

Before you arrive, your days are already taking shape. A member of our team speaks with every guest ahead of the stay — not to sell an itinerary, but to understand one.

The pace you hope to keep. The experiences that matter most. Whether children are joining. Whether solitude or company is what you are after.

That conversation becomes the quiet architecture of your stay, so that once you are here there is nothing left to decide.



Exploring *Isilembe*



Game Drives | Out before first light, when the bush is coolest.

An equally unhurried search at dusk, as the light turns gold.



River Down The Mkuze | Trade the vehicle for the water and the pace changes entirely.



On Foot | The pace drops and the detail arrives.

Tracks, middens, medicinal plants and the architecture of a termite mound.



Birding | From the ordinary miracle of a lilac-breasted roller to the specials that draw people to Zululand specifically.

Best from November to March.

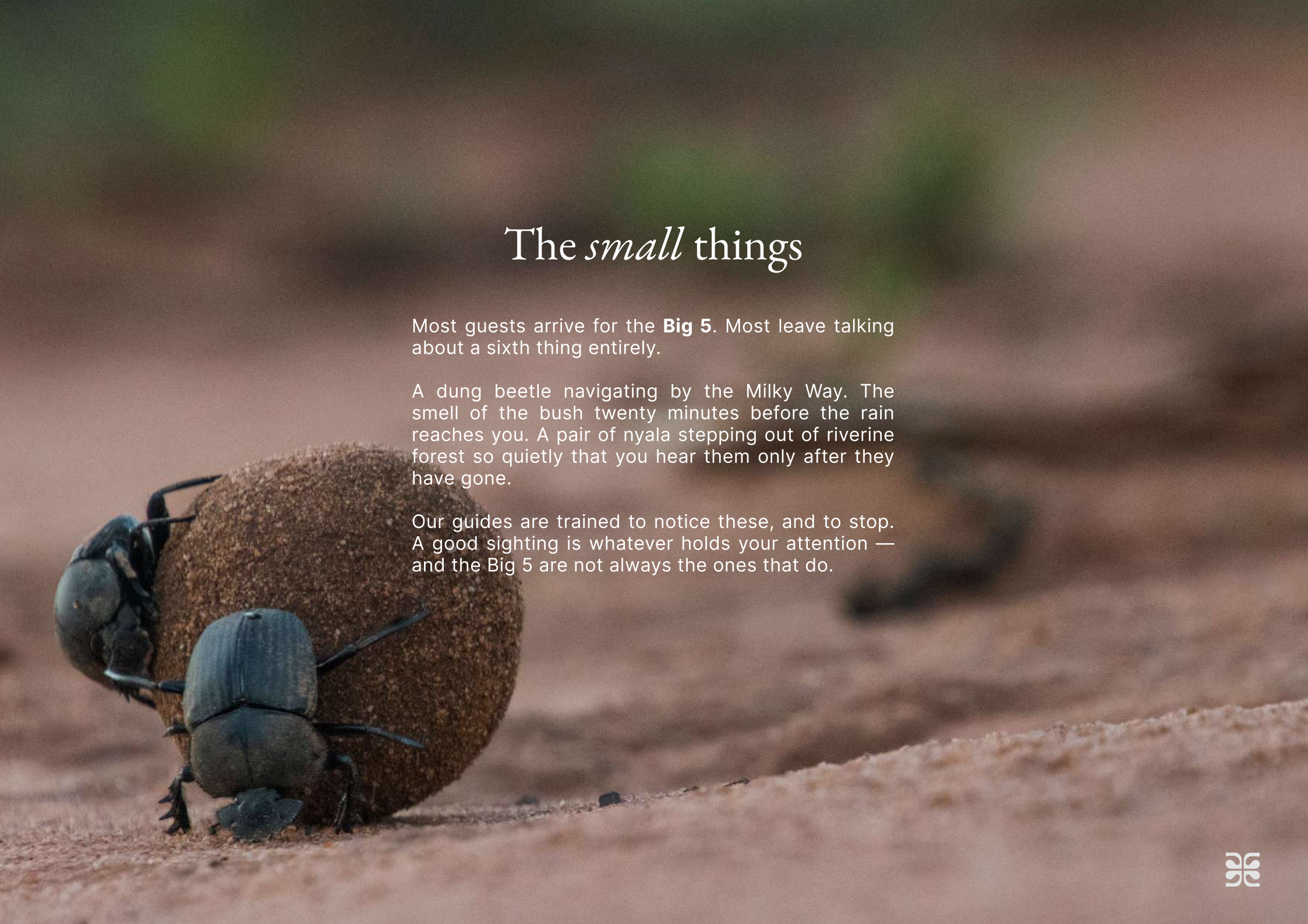


Photography | A guide who understands light and animal behaviour.



Under The Stars | A night out on the reserve.

Lanterns, a fire and the running commentary of hyena somewhere in the dark.



The *small* things

Most guests arrive for the **Big 5**. Most leave talking about a sixth thing entirely.

A dung beetle navigating by the Milky Way. The smell of the bush twenty minutes before the rain reaches you. A pair of nyala stepping out of riverine forest so quietly that you hear them only after they have gone.

Our guides are trained to notice these, and to stop. A good sighting is whatever holds your attention — and the Big 5 are not always the ones that do.

Conservation

Guests are welcome to see the work, when the work allows. These are not performances and they cannot be scheduled to order.

RHINO MONITORING

Join the team on a monitoring round. What you may see and photograph is governed by security protocol, and we will explain why.

HABITAT REHABILITATION

Alien clearing, erosion control and water monitoring — the unglamorous majority of conservation, and the part that decides whether the rest works.

Zululand

The culture here is living, not curated. What we offer is an introduction, on terms set by the people who live it.

A DAY IN THE VALLEY

Time in a neighbouring homestead — the cooking, the cattle, the household economy. Arranged with the family, and paid for properly.

CRAFT AND CLOTH

Beadwork and basketry from makers we buy from year-round, whether or not guests are in camp.

The *table*

Breakfast in the field. Lunch when the heat says so. High tea before the afternoon drive, and dinner on the deck beside the falls — the sound of falling water standing in for conversation, when conversation is not needed.

The kitchen cooks close to home: **Zululand** produce, a garden that earns its keep, and a South African wine list chosen for the food rather than the labels.

All meals are included, along with a house selection of local spirits, house wines, beers, soft drinks, juices, coffee and tea. Champagne, fine wines and premium spirits are available separately.





Little rangers

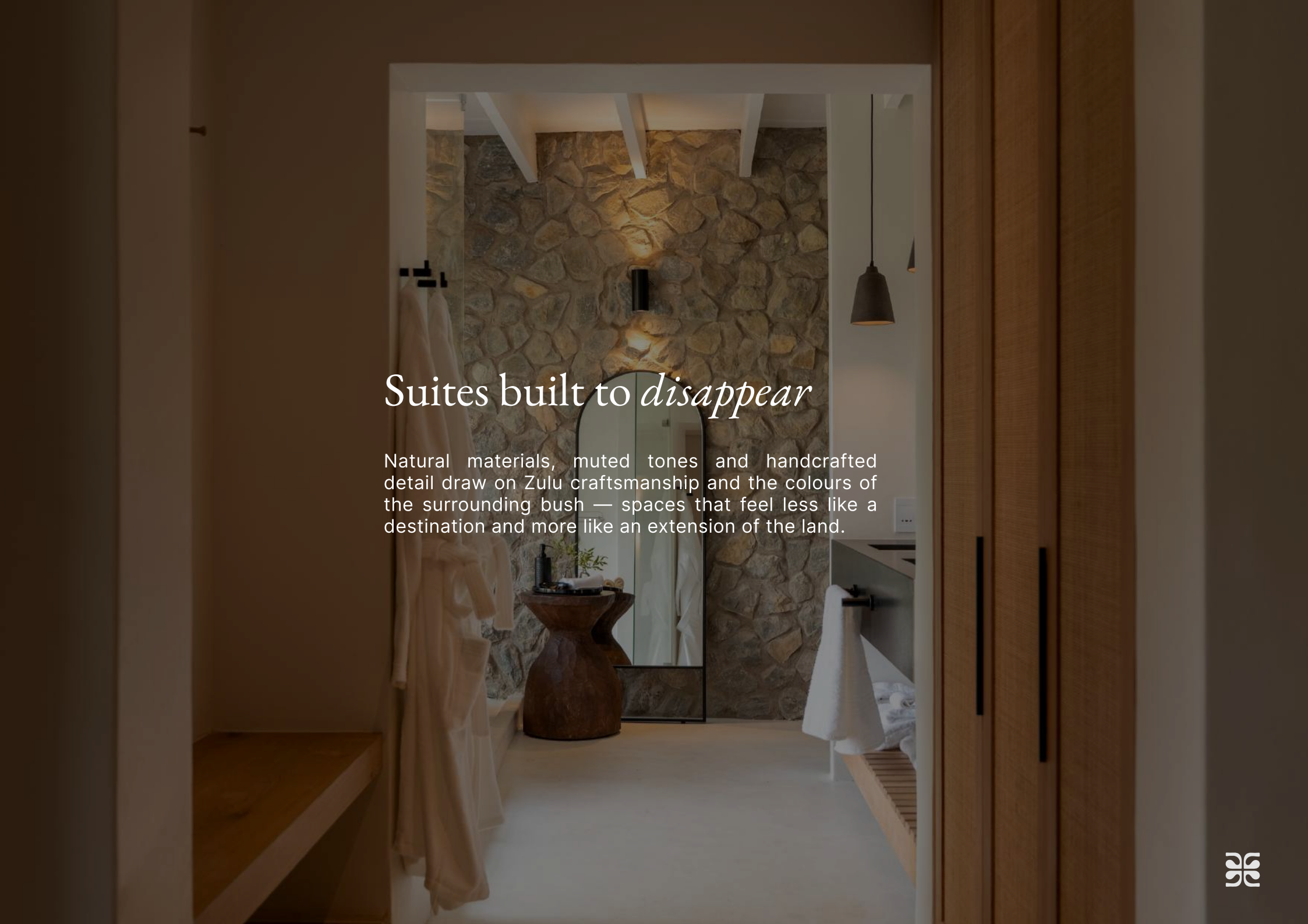
Children of all ages are welcome. Tracking here is made for children and their parents together: a morning spent reading prints, following calls and learning the language of the land.

Little Rangers	A children's programme at no charge: a bush book, tracking, bug hunts and a Bush Ranger certificate to take home.
Family Houses	Sycamore Fig House and Baobab House are made for families, with their own lounge and deck.
Game Drives	Children under 6 join game drives on a private vehicle, and a short morning baby game drive can be arranged.
Babysitting	Available on request, booked in advance.



Seven suites and *two* family houses,
Intimate and exclusive

Where you *sleep*



Suites built to *disappear*

Natural materials, muted tones and handcrafted detail draw on Zulu craftsmanship and the colours of the surrounding bush — spaces that feel less like a destination and more like an extension of the land.

7 Deluxe Suites

Marula, Red Ivory, Tamboti, Knobthorn, Fever Tree, Corkwood and Wild Fig. A king bed, an indoor and an outdoor shower, and a private deck facing the bush. Room for two children on extra beds

Sycamore Fig House

Two bedrooms with a shared lounge and deck, for two adults and two children.

Baobab House

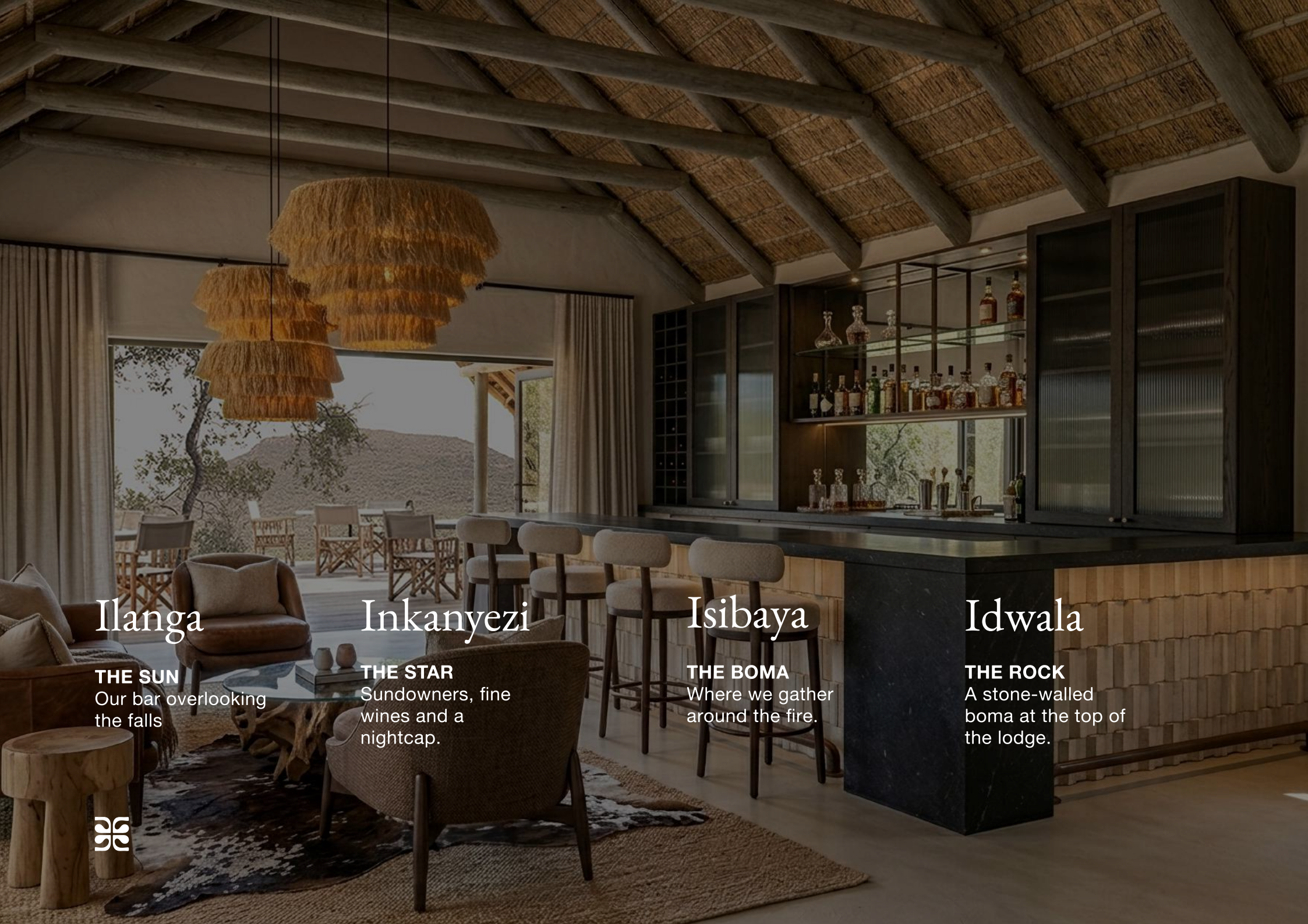
Three bedrooms with a lounge and deck, for four adults and four children. Ideal for families and small groups.




Stone, timber and glass, shaped by hand.



The *Lodge*



Ilanga

THE SUN
Our bar overlooking the falls

Inkanyezi

THE STAR
Sundowners, fine wines and a nightcap.

Isibaya

THE BOMA
Where we gather around the fire.

Idwala

THE ROCK
A stone-walled boma at the top of the lodge.



All *inclusive*, all year.

One rate, all year round, with no seasons to plan around. Up to 26 guests at a time across seven suites and two family houses.

Every stay includes:

- Luxury accommodation
- All meals, from coffee to dinner
- House beverages: local spirits, beers, house wines, soft drinks, juices, teas and coffees
- Two shared game drives a day with a qualified guide
- Guided bush walks on request
- Laundry service and WIFI in the main lodge and suites
- Return transfers between the **Isilembe** airstrip and the lodge.



*Why t*his exists

A lodge is the means.
The reserve is the point.

A deeper kind of *belonging*

Conservation that does not work for the people living alongside it does not work for long. **Zululand** has learned this the expensive way, more than once.

Isilembe employs from the surrounding communities, buys from them, and trains people into skilled roles rather than importing those roles from elsewhere. Craft is bought outright and at a fair price, whether or not guests are in camp.



Built to protect *what it shares*

Isilembe exists because of a simple belief: that Zululand's wilderness deserves more custodians, not more visitors.

Land under tourism is land not under the plough — and that argument only holds if the tourism pays for the conservation rather than the other way round.

Every guest night carries a conservation levy collected on your invoice and directed to the reserve's ecological work: monitoring, anti-poaching, habitat rehabilitation and the long, unphotogenic business of getting water and fire right.

26 guests at full occupancy

14 000 hectares under protection




Come for the Big 5,
Stay for everything else.
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