

Top 20 in 2010

WHETHER IT'S SUPERB SERVICE, RARE SIGHTINGS, MEMORABLE TASTES OR IMAGINATIVE DESIGN, PRIVATE EDITION SUGGESTS YOU BOOKMARK THIS LIST FOR FUTURE PLEASURE AND PURCHASE



ZULU ZEN

Given half the chance, the indigenous dry sand forest would close in on Phinda Forest Lodge. The bush is kept at bay, you suspect, only because of quiet foot traffic between the trees and perhaps a discreet foliage trim here and there by staff you never see. It is a masterful symbiosis between architecture and nature. Built 16 years ago, without felling even one of the rare Torchwood trees, the lodge has been refurbished with the same constraints. The result is a series of dark wood and glass suites that are all but hidden until your last steps. And that's what makes the interiors so extraordinary. Through a sliding screen, the suite is a combination of whites and shades of ecru dominated by a massive bed and *en suite*

bathroom. It's the most luxurious 'tree house' apartment you'll ever stay in, and if you don't mind bright little Vervet monkey eyes staring intently for you to leave the door ajar and fruit unattended, you're alone. Blissfully, silently, deliciously alone. Even the shy suni and red duiker melt into the surrounds if they sense you're near, and soon you too learn a stillness that brings quiet to the soul. You're surrounded by 23 000 hectares of the &Beyond Phinda Game Reserve in the Maputaland region of KwaZulu-Natal, but close enough to the ocean to add whale shark and turtles to top your Big Five wildlife experience. If you're a birder, begin ticking off your 'lifers'. There are 400 species to keep you focussed. The rangers and trackers

know their stuff and turn bush drives into absorbing narratives. Even dinner isn't without a Zulu tale; chef Sam Nguni praise sings his menu from the boma trees and narrates his life story of modest beginnings and his latest comely wife. Fellow guests come from around the world and conversation ranges from conservation to Obama, forest weavers and cheetah mothering. A river cruise down the Mzinene is pure 'Riverboat Queen' and at night, as you soak Hippo-like with your head and ears barely clearing the suds, you say a small prayer to proximity. Living in SA is the heart of it all. **For more information on &Beyond Phinda, call 011 809 4300 or 021 532 5800, or visit www.andbeyond.com.** - LES AUPIAIS



WILDLY DIFFERENT

At Xaxaba, Botswana's Okavango Delta snakes from the flood plains into knee-deep channels so full of life that the solitude of the Orient-Express tented camps becomes a refuge. No other wilderness experience brings you as close to nature as navigating the channels on mokoros, and you can also explore the islands on foot or watch large herds scatter from a helicopter. With guide Matsaro Matsaro, an old man compared to the young men most camps employ, the experience is decoded in as much or as little detail as you like. When bush safaris become old hat, a visit to the Delta will reconnect you. **For more information, visit www.eagleislandcamp.com or call 021 483 1600.** - BRIAN BERKMAN



KENYAN AFTERGLOW

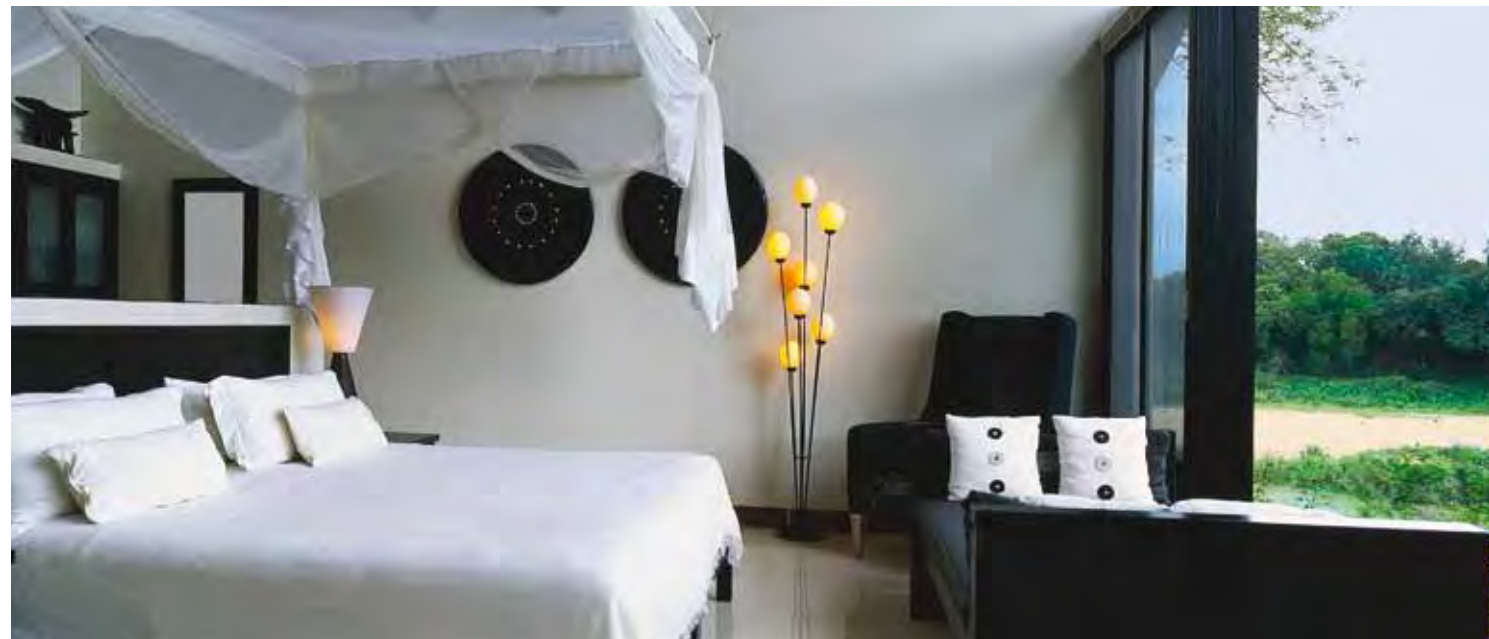
It's not hard to make Kenya romantic, but really, how many paraffin lamps do &Beyond actually own? It must have taken an army of Masai warriors to decorate the deck of our Kichwa Tembo tent with the dozens of flickering flames. A white linen tablecloth and crystal glasses caught the light, and cast it into a huge smile on my wife's face. A candlelit dinner with just the vast Masai Mara for company? Unforgettable. **For more information, visit www.andbeyond.com.** - RICHARD HOLMES

A CANDLELIT DINNER WITH JUST THE VAST MASAI MARA FOR COMPANY? UNFORGETTABLE



TRUE GREEN

Of course they're using biodegradable suds and best-practice waste management, but Earth Lodge at Sabi Sabi, in the Sabi Sands reserve, goes one step further. Their entire lodge is built deep into rock and ground to reduce any visual impact. Interior walls incorporate grasses and mud and purpose-built furniture echoes organic shapes. Pyramid-shaped ceiling lights bring the sun and stars into the 13 suites, each with its own pool. Game vehicles are limited to six guests and you'll see the Big Five, among many other species. Chef Shaneil Dina's food is arguably the best in the bush, and the Amani spa incorporates nature beautifully. **For more information, call 011 447 7172 or visit www.sabisabi.com.** – BRIAN BERKMAN



IT'S ALL IN THE DETAIL

Fully rebuilt after the 2000 Sabi river flood, Ivory Lodge, Lion Sands' six butler-driven suites, redefine contemporary bush luxury with their all-glass walls overlooking the river, and KGB-style attention to personal preferences. You may be watching the game, but your butler is watching you to anticipate a need you haven't even fully formulated. So you're a diabetic, vegetarian with celiac disease? No problem at Ivory Lodge, where even your personal, fully inclusive bar will be tailored to what you like. If you don't mind being kept awake by lion's roar, The Chalkley Treehouse is a mosquito-net enclosed bed and porta-loo set high in a tree for your night under African stars. Your butler will serve your sunset picnic dinner and collect you again in the morning. Track rhino on foot with a specialist guide or take a lesson in reading spoor from your tracker, who might even weave you a grass keepsake while you're walking together. **For more information, call 013 735 5000 or visit www.lionsands.com.** – BRIAN BERKMAN



WHAT SAY YOU ABOUT WATSU?

When fancy cocktails and caviar facials don't crack it, Shanti Ananda Maurice has all the spiritual promise of its sister Himalayan property, without the stresses of India. Enjoy India lite at this palm-fringed Mauritian idyll that elevates self-sacrifice and physical renewal to an island breakaway. Look past the asylum-white kurta pyjamas that guests swan about in, or the artful and delicious Ayurvedic cuisine, to the 35 landscaped acres at the Southern tip of Mauritius, with no other resorts or sea vessels in sight. The focus here is on the best suites on the island, but also healing Ayurvedic therapies in the 7 000m² spa. Be sure to have a Watsu treatment in the only blood-temperature saline therapy specific pool on the island. There is a full bar and extensive menu when you're not filled with virtue. A swimming beach with active coral banks is as wide as the smile you'll have when you leave. **For more information, call 011 463 8195 or visit www.shantiananda.com.** – BRIAN BERKMAN

A SWIMMING BEACH WITH ACTIVE CORAL BANKS IS AS WIDE AS THE SMILE YOU'LL HAVE WHEN YOU LEAVE



RED CARPET BUSH PHOTOGRAPHY: ROYAL MALEWANE

RED CARPET BUSH

Don't be re-routed by the number of Hollywood celebs who rate Royal Malewane in the Thornybush reserve near Kruger. Don't let the detailed luxury of Ralph Lauren linens and Molton Brown accessories diminish its real appeal: field guides of unmatched talent and expertise. When combined with old-school personal service, Chaîne des Rôtisseurs awarded cuisine and the most exclusive address in the bush, this is an essential experience. Although the six private suites are decorated with a colonial flourish, you'll want to spend most of your time in your game vehicle, where your guide will not only lecture you, but will also advise you on the best settings for your digicam or tripod for the winning shot. Experienced tracking yielded a gem; we saw a kill, and four cheetah cubs dining on duiker. The Waters Bush Spa will make you want to spend much longer than you planned. **For more information, call 015 793 0150 www.royalmalewane.com.** – BRIAN BERKMAN



BRING ON THE SIEGE

Although not private land, Noetzie beach is so difficult to access that the only other people likely to be there are guests from Pezula Hotel & Spa. With your own butler and chef on hand, you and up to four of your friends can enjoy the discreet seclusion of this stone-built beach castle. Each double suite has its own sitting room and *en suite* bathroom, and a Range Rover is at the ready to take you up the steep hill to the championship golf course, tennis courts, the spa or Zachary's exquisite restaurant at Pezula. The Private Castle exceeds all security and hospitality expectations, including full wheel-chair access with ramps. **For more information, call 044 302 3311 or visit www.pezulaprivatecastle.com.** – BRIAN BERKMAN



INTO THE BLUE

As a wilderness experience, Alaska is remarkable and largely unspoilt, but Glacier Bay, access to which is limited to only a handful of license holders, is humbling by its grand scale. Entirely surrounded by mountains and ice so dense it appears blue, Glacier Bay is closed between May and September, during the seal breeding season, and beyond October it becomes too cold and ice logged. It's best to visit the bay in September, when the glaciers carve and crack and thunder into the water with increased regularity as the seasons change. One is dwarfed by them, even nine storeys high in the ship's Crow's Nest lounge. As only one vessel is permitted access at a time, solitude is the real luxury of life on board Holland America Lines' Ryndam, watching the experience from teak deckchairs under warming blankets, sipping steaming Dutch pea soup or fortified hot chocolate, during a seven-day round trip from Vancouver. **For more information, call 011 469 5580 or visit www.hollandamerica.com.** – BRIAN BERKMAN

STIMULUS RESPONSE

It's a bloody long way from Cape Town to New York. Even in business class. After 21 hours of flying, about to start the last leg home to Cape Town, the airhostess (Jane? Sarah? It was something British) could see I was in it for the long haul. No pun intended. 'Sir, we're a little close to take-off, but you look like you could do with a coffee. Can I get you one?' Minutes later, an apparition appeared. A perfectly brewed flat white; delicate foam, beans not burnt, good temperature. It even came with biscotti, for Pete's sake. I could have wept. Skytrax says Etihad Airways has the best business class in the world. I'd have to agree. – RICHARD HOLMES

MINUTES LATER, AN APPARITION APPEARED. A PERFECTLY BREWED FLAT WHITE. IT EVEN CAME WITH BISCOTTI, FOR PETE'S SAKE



MAJEKA'S STAR

Your eyes roll back gently in your head, your palate sighs. It's not often that the full run of a four-course menu is impeccable from starter through entrée to dessert. The secret to Majeka House's fine-dining restaurant is 28-year-old chef Anri Diener, who has the delicate touch of a watercolourist. Take her tomato carpaccio. Tomato has a poor reputation in South Africa. It's often no more than a chunk of tasteless red fruit in a sea of bitter greens. Anri creates thin, almost transparent sheets of it served with a drizzle of olive oil and a small hill of fluffy, white aniseed-flavoured sorbet. The topping is a frill of baby basil, barely discernable as a leaf. It is sublime. If she transforms tomatoes, any food stuff shines from there on. She announces her courses sweetly in a light voice, more therapist than chef in charge, but according to Majeka House's owners, Lloyd van der Merwe and Karine Dequeker-van der Merwe, she runs their kitchen with an iron fist. Her taste secret? Local ingredients in season. 'A plate full of intense flavours doesn't work for me. Rather, the elements on the plate should together compose the full flavour of the meal,' she says. She reads widely, and is about to take French leave and spend time with a top French chef, all with the owners' blessing, of course. Stay the night at Majeka. They have a middle-of-winter heated pool that becomes your obligatory gentle exercise between courses. (Oh, and did we mention the chocolate mille-feuille? Swim it off.) **For reservations or further information on Majeka House, call 021 880 1549, email reservations@majekahouse.co.za or visit www.majekahouse.co.za.** – BRIAN BERKMAN



NOT AN OXYMORON

'Home Affairs? Service?' I hear you snort. Believe it, because it's true. The department we love to hate has its guardian angels; the type who rescued stranded travel journalists who've had their bag nicked on a dirty Indian train. A bag that happened to contain money, passport, and credit cards – *alles*. Thank heavens for Ntombi Moyo at the SA High Commission in New Delhi, a distant outpost of Home Affairs efficiency. Service with a smile, and a new passport in just 58 minutes; application to out the door in under an hour, I kid you not. I made my flight home that night, thanks to her. – RICHARD HOLMES



HIDDEN GEM

With fish this good, people book months in advance and travel 90 minutes from Cape Town to Pringle Bay to dine at Hook, Line and Sinkers. Our suggestion? Start with the Cape west coast mussel soup or creamy crab bisque before ordering just-landed fish, seawater prawns or calamari. The fish is cooked with farm butter in a pan on top of a wood fire that illuminates this five table, 26-seater, no-frills eatery, which is decorated by people's scrawls on the wall. Desserts include crême brûlée and a wicked chocolate pot. On Wednesday and Sunday nights, they only cook beef steak, for which they are justifiably famous. **For more information, call 028 273 8688 or visit www.hooklineandsinker.co.za.** – BRIAN BERKMAN

TART RETORTE

Until veteran hosts Len and Johan bought La Petite Tarte in the Cape Quarter, you had to pay top dollar to experience their warm and intimate hospitality at La Residence and Royal Malewane. Now the pair, a former art teacher and property manager, dish up light meals, perfect quiches and superb cakes. The flourless chocolate cake is dreamy, but Len is best known for his carrot cake (it's the pineapple, he says, as if imparting some great secret) or the pricey but delicious Mariage Frères teas on offer. Ask for what you want – if they don't have it, they'll move mountains to delight you. **Cape Quarter, 72 Waterkant Street De Waterkant Cape Town, call 021 425 9077.** – BRIAN BERKMAN



RICHE MAN, POUR MAN

Etienne Le Riche is a modest winemaker with arguably the finest Cabernet Sauvignons in the country. His recent five-star Platter rating for his Le Riche Cabernet Sauvignon 2007 bears testament to this. This cabernet is made by hand in his small Jonkershoek cellar in Stellenbosch, and he still uses open fermentation tanks with temperature control and regular manual plunging and pump-overs. This wine is matured for 18 months in barrels before bottling. Its spicy oak and ripe cherry flavours are balanced by soft, elegant tannins with a firm structure and a lingering, succulent aftertaste. The wine will benefit from a further five years of maturation, but can already be enjoyed. Etienne's Cabernets should win the taste of time test in 20 years to become a truly South African 'Great.' – SARAH REVELL



ITS SPICY OAK AND RIPE CHERRY FLAVOURS ARE BALANCED BY SOFT, ELEGANT TANNINS WITH A LINGERING AFTERTASTE



THE ABUNDANCE OF CINNAMON, CLOVES AND CEDAR IS A GREAT MATCH FOR GAME OR SPICY MEAT DISHES

GOLD RUSH

The golden triangle of South Africa's red wine district has yielded another gold medal at the 2010 Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show. Winemaker Guy Webber won't take all the credit for Stellenzicht's award for its 2007 vintage of the Golden Triangle Pinotage, and says his favourite varietal loves its location, 130m above sea level in complex, clay-rich soils. The wine was aged in a combination of French, American and Eastern European oak for 17 months, while just over a third of the final blend was aged in American oak, adding a full, rich dimension to the wine. With its deep ruby hues and slight purple edge, the 2007 Golden Triangle Pinotage has a complex nose of ripe berry fruit, herbs and spices. The abundance of cinnamon, cloves and cedar mixed with cherry, mulberry and prune flavours is a great match for game or spicy meat dishes. The golden triangle is so named for the exceptional quality wines produced in the area bordered by the Stellenbosch and Helderberg mountains to the east and south, and the road between Stellenbosch and Somerset West. – SARAH REVELL



GRACEFUL GHOST

The Ghost is a Rolls-Royce in its simplest form. It offers the true Rolls driving experience, from the authoritative driving position that offers a commanding view along the characteristically expansive Silver Satin bonnet, to a V12 engine that always remains whisper quiet. Engineered to grip the road at all times, it creates a more dynamic drive and the famous Rolls-Royce 'magic carpet ride' for driver and passengers. Inside, Ghost is refined and cosseting. The simple yet contemporary interior boasts large expanses of soft full grain leather, natural wood veneers and Blenheim wool carpets. The cashmere-blend roof lining adds to the sense of openness. It's like being cocooned in your own private sanctuary that leaves you relaxed and unruffled after the longest journey.



PRETORIA GOES EAST

The Orient Hotel and Mosaic restaurant, hosted by Mari and Chantal Dartnall, is more a treasure trove of collectables in their grand home than a hotel. Walk with zebra and eland in the conservancy, or browse the owners' extensive library, which reflects their interest in Asia, vintage cars and cuisine. Mosaic restaurant is listed in the country's top 10 for its superlative French cuisine. There are movies in the on-site cinema, a museum to house the owner's collection of sculptor Tienie Prichard's work and garages for the vintage cars, some of which are available to ferry hotel guests to and from the Rovos Rail or Blue Train stations, or to embassies for the Pretoria diplomatic corps, for whom The Orient is a second home. The Constantinople suite has a 300-year old Indian four-poster bed, swinging chairs and silk Iranian rugs on the marble floors. **For more information, call 012 371 2902 or visit www.the-orient.net.** – BRIAN BERKMAN



A HARD ACT TO FOLLOW

Romancing the object of your affection takes on a whole new meaning at 15 on Orange in Cape Town. They tempt you to sweep your lover off her (or his) feet with a cocktail so outrageously extravagant that you virtually need a bank clearance for it – and then they throw in a free night's stay in a deluxe suite to seal the deal. The hotel's Murano Bar has created a cocktail menu fit for royalty – R100 000 buys you a Monarchy 75 or a Rare Orchid on the Rock with a one-carat brilliant Shimansky diamond nestling at the bottom of the glass. Of course, the hotel can arrange that Shimansky sets the diamond in a ring or pendant to secure this truly unforgettable memory – that's if you don't swallow it! The Monarchy 75 concoction comprises Tanqueray Ten, Cointreau dry orange liqueur and a hint of fresh lime, topped up by Louis Roederer Cristal Champagne. Rare Orchid on the Rock is made up of Grey Goose vodka, fresh lime, Laurent Perrier Rosé and Rose Petal, garnished with a delicate African orchid. The carats are on the side. 15 on Orange is part of Protea Hotels' superior luxury collection, African Pride Hotels. **For more information, visit www.africanpridehotels.com.** – DEBBIE HATHWAY

EVEN FIRST-CLASS AIR TRAVEL FALLS SHORT OF THE COMFORT, ELEGANCE AND GRACE ON BOARD THESE TRAINS

A ROYAL LINE

Despite the tragic derailment earlier this year, Rovos Rail deserves a long-service award for excellence. When owner-driven personal service is all you accept, insist on travelling with Rohan Vos personally waving you off as you depart Capital Park private station, Pretoria. Even first-class air travel falls far short of the comfort, elegance and grace on board these vintage trains covering Cape Town, Durban, the Garden Route and into Africa from Pretoria, and the send off (or welcome on South/North itineraries) puts others to shame. While other trains rush the 1 200km journey from Cape coast to Pretoria, Rovos takes it at a gentle 60 kilometre/hour, stopping overnight for two full nights of restful sleep. If you book the deluxe or larger suites, your king-size bed redefines train travel. Although the costliest rail ticket in the land, its two night all-inclusive rate is good value and the two off-train excursions informative. Fine wines and delicious cuisine come standard. **For more information, call 012 315 8242 or visit www.rovos.com.** – BRIAN BERKMAN

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