



JULY 2017 – NEWSLETTER

Dear Partners in Travel,

We've passed the halfway mark of 2017 – unbelievable how time can fly!

It has been an exciting yet challenging six months for the South African Tourism industry. The traditional peak South African summer season remained buoyant and availability always a challenge. We're now in the midst of the South African winter/low season but some areas of the country remain very popular from certain markets and the safari areas of Kruger and Madikwe are still subject to unusually high occupancy levels.

To intensify the challenging availability situation there has been the unfortunate occurrence of fires at two of the larger safari lodges in these areas. A fire in the public area of Lion Sands River Lodge has forced the closure of the lodge (rooms were fortunately unaffected). After careful consideration by the owners on how to proceed with the rebuild and scale of the project, they've scheduled the re-opening of the lodge for March 2018. A fire at Tau Game Lodge in Madikwe was more extensive and a big part of the lodge destroyed. A re-opening date has not yet been set. The knock-on effect of displaced bookings into other safari lodges naturally aggravates the availability situation in these two areas.

Most people would also be aware of the devastating forest fires that affected the Garden Route area around Knysna & Plettenberg Bay in early June. As it was during the middle of peak season from India (one of our major source markets) and an area particularly popular in this market, we felt the impact severely as we had to relocate a significant number of guests during this period. Fortunately none of our guests was in any danger and all safely moved to alternative accommodation and itineraries re-scheduled. The loss of over 400 rooms at hotels and guesthouses in this area will however have a major impact on availability in the foreseeable future, particularly when the summer season starts again in October. Some of the hotels destroyed or badly damaged forcing closure include Plettenberg Park, Knysna Hollow, Kanonkop Heights Vila and Phantom Forest. The tourism industry has rallied around our colleagues and partners in this area to alleviate the major impact this has had on the community, people's lives and their livelihood. We support them in their revival and renewal efforts.

A "revival" is also in the process at Royal African Discoveries with the return of several team members after maternity leave and some short sabbaticals. Sanet & Nancy return in July while Johnny made her return earlier. We understand how integral the human element is in our business and relationships with our clients. We continue to give this aspect our highest attention.

Product knowledge and firsthand experience of the products and areas we sell remain integral too. I've just returned from a week in the Lower Zambezi area of Zambia inspecting and experiencing several products. Many of our clients are looking for new destinations and also new safari options for their clients who enjoyed an earlier visit to safari lodges in South Africa. Botswana is often a popular destination but access to the destination is challenging for certain source markets due to an unaccommodating visa scenario (and also prohibitive cost in access). The e-visa option Zambia provides makes the destination more accessible and therefore an alternative for those clients who are looking for a safari experience with a water component in untouched nature.

The Lower Zambezi experience is similar to the Chobe National Park experience due to the Zambezi river component but undoubtedly less touristy and a more untouched wilderness experience. It is not quite the Okavango Delta experience but a very good alternative. The safari lodges offer a wide variety of activities including 4x4 safari drives (both day and night drives), safari walks, canoe trips, boat safaris and fishing (including tiger fishing). Although many people use charter flights to access the area from Livingstone, Lusaka & Mfuwe, the addition of scheduled flights (although not daily) by Proflight Airlines from these destinations during the Lower Zambezi peak season makes the area now a lot more accessible (and affordable).

I managed to visit a broad selection of lodges but we will only include a review of the ones I stayed at. You are welcome to contact me or the team on feedback on the others (these include Old Mondoro, Sausage Tree Camp, Potato Bush Camp, Chiawa Camp, Chongwe River Camp and Chongwe House).

I stayed at Anabezi Camp, Baines' River Camp and Royal Zambezi Lodge. Both Baines and Royal Zambezi are located in the Game Management Area to the west of Lower Zambezi National Park. A short boat ride down the Zambezi River gives you access to the National Park.

Baines is one of the few lodges in the area that is not in the form of tented accommodation. This makes the lodge the ideal option for those who feel uncomfortable with only the protection of a bit of canvas at night while hippos, elephants and the odd predator roam through the camp (all camps in the Lower Zambezi are unfenced and animals often enter the camp areas – this is real Africa!).

Baines has a modern classic feel in understated elegance while remaining inviting and homely. It is bliss to relax on the covered verandas on comfortable couches while staring across the Zambezi after a hot morning on safari. I must admit I had one of the best Lemon Meringues of my life at Baines! My mouth is watering just thinking of it again.

Royal Zambezi is in the traditional safari lodge style. An expansive terrace in front of the dining and lounge area on the edge of the Zambezi offers unobstructed vistas across the river. Although the current tented accommodation under thatched roofs options are comfortable, an extensive rejuvenation and refurbishment project is underway. Currently the classic tents are without private plunge pools but all of these will also have plunge pools when the project is completed. Royal Zambezi is the only lodge in the Lower Zambezi that remains open throughout the year (other lodges close towards the end of November until early April).

Anabezi is located within the Lower Zambezi National Park and is the lodge located the furthest east/downstream of all the commercial lodges. It is accessible through its own airstrip but guests can also be collected at Jeki airstrip for the scheduled flights. When combining the stay with other lodges, a river transfer from the upstream lodges is possible. All tents and the public areas are high above the ground with connecting wooden walkways. Tents are large, spacious, airy and light in an open plan style comprising a lounge, bathroom and bedroom. An outside shower (and second toilet) as well as big deck with plunge pool completes the tented suites. I'll can still vividly remember waking up in the middle of the night from an elephant having a midnight snack on the tree next to my tent! The vegetation in the area is quite different from the area in the western border and a combination with one of the lodges upstream will work very well.

We've included some site inspection feedback on other products visited later in the newsletter. We hope the information from the newsletter will serve you well in selling more of South and Southern Africa.

**Tourism Greetings,
Johan**

SITE INSPECTION REPORT:

The Silo

The opening of The Silo in the heart of the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town has definitely raised the stakes in the ultra-luxury segment of the market. The Silo occupies the six floors above the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (MOCAA) that will open in September.

Similarly to Liz Biden's other properties in the Royal Portfolio, the property is truly unique and can be described as eclectic, quirky, stylish with a twist, bohemian elegance and delightful avant garde.

The stunning views from the double volume floor to ceiling windows however leave the most lasting impression in one's mind. The natural beauty of the Cape Town vistas trumps even the most intriguing design and décor they could have placed in any of the rooms.

Radisson Blu Hotel & Residence Cape Town

The 214 room hotel opened in early April in the city centre of Cape Town. The hotel is a conversion of a building that previously served as an office block. These conversions are often not successful but this is definitely not the case here. The Art Deco design of the building was kept and re-used in the best possible way and makes the reception / lobby area unique. They've managed to make the corridors on all the floors light, airy and spacious which is unusual in older buildings. The rooms, restaurant and other public areas are inviting with a modern, clean and fresh design. They've even managed to add a pool area and terrace bar to this city centre building.

With the **Sun Square Cape Town City Bowl** opening close by in August the area around these hotels will undoubtedly get an invigorating and rejuvenating shot in the arm to breathe a new lease of life into yet another part of Cape Town city centre.

PRODUCT NEWS & UPDATES:

- **&BEYOND** have advised that refurbishments at **PHINDA ROCK LODGE** in Kwa-Zulu Natal are complete. Please contact us for images if you are interested.
- **CAMP JABULANI** in the Limpopo Province has launched a new interactive, evolved elephant experience. Since 1 May 2017 elephant-back safaris have no longer been offered. Contact us for more information.
- **KWANDWE GAME RESERVE** in the Eastern Cape has advised that **Kwandwe Melton Manor** will be closed for refurbishment during August and September 2017. They are however launching Fort House on 1 July 2017 which also has 4 bedrooms and can be booked as an alternative "sole use" option.
- **LONDOLOZI GRANITE and VARTY CAMPS** will both be closed from 12 January 2018 to 24 March 2018 for renovations.
- **MAKALALI GAME RESERVE** will be closed for refurbishment till the beginning of November 2017.
- **TAU GAME LODGE** in the Madikwe Game Reserve, North West, was affected by fire on Friday, June 17. The main lodge burned down; however rooms have not been affected. The lodge is not operational, as the kitchen and reception area have been affected. The lodge is closed until further notice.
- **LION SANDS RIVER LODGE** in the Sabi Sands Game Reserve has burned down. On the 21st of June at 04h00, the public areas at Lion Sands River Lodge burned down. All staff and guests were safe. The lodge will be closed until the 28th of February 2018. The three other Lion Sands Lodges are completely unaffected.
- **THE OYSTER BOX** in Umhlanga, Durban will be doing some renovations from 16 August to 1 September 2017. The main swimming pool will be closed for unavoidable maintenance during this time however the beautiful garden facing swimming pool will be available.
- **THE SPIER HOTEL** in Stellenbosch will be remodeling their restaurant area and wine bar. The remodel is set to take place from July 01 to September 15. The restaurant and wine bar of the hotel will be temporarily unavailable to guests during this time. All other guest areas will remain available, and disruption will be kept to a minimum.
- **LE QUARTIER FRANÇAIS** in Franschhoek, is closed at the moment and will be reopening on the 10th of July 2017. More than just the usual annual 'spring' clean closure, the boutique hotel will be undergoing a complete transformation. All rooms and suites will be upgraded. 15 Rooms, including LQF Villa will undergo a soft refurbishment and returned to inventory on 10 July 2017. A full refurbishment of the Four Quarters Suites will be completed by 1 October 2017 and 5 additional bedrooms (two new Petite Auberge and 3 Petite Garden Suite) available as of 1 December 2017. In addition, the House and Pool Suites will also undergo a full refurbishment and be ready for occupation on 1 December 2017. The addition of a hospitality lounge will tend to the needs of early arrivals and late departures.
The Award-winning restaurant **THE TASTING ROOM** is now closed and will be replaced by La Petite Colombe (scheduled to open in the 1st week of August 2017), to be headed by the celebrated La Colombe team.
- **BABYLONSTOREN** in Paarl in the Western Cape is offering a new activity; the healing tea ceremony. Guests are invited to enjoy their Healing Garden as a quiet space, where they can slow down and blend herbal teas as guided by their gardener Gundula. Guests are seated on the floor of the shaded bamboo structure, where a selection of savoury and sweet confections is served to complement the infusions created by each one. Only fresh, seasonal ingredients are used and great care is taken in the preparation. The farm has also advised their new Winter Wine Tasting opening times for the months of May to August. It will be from 10h00 to 17h00 (not 18h00).
- **PROTEA HOTEL FRANSCHHOEK** will be closed for a refurbishment from until 25 August 2017.
- **ERINVALE ESTATE** in Somerset West will be doing renovations until the 31st of August 2017. The rooms being renovated will be cordoned off.
- **LANZERAC WINE ESTATE** in Stellenbosch is closed due to a fire. Devastated by a fire in the early hours of Sunday morning, 28 May 2017, the heart of the iconic Lanzerac Hotel of Stellenbosch's Jonkershoek Valley

now lies in ashes. The fire affected the following areas: the Hotel Reception, Governors Hall Restaurant, Craven Lounge, Taphuis Bar and all administrative staff offices. No harm was caused to guests or staff, and no damage was caused to the Manor House, guest rooms, wine cellar or vineyards. The most severe damage is to the main operational and guest areas of the Hotel and the infrastructure thereof. The property has made a decision to close the Hotel until the end of winter 2018. The Lanzerac Spa and Lanzerac Tasting Room & Deli is still open for business. These areas were unaffected by the fire and has resumed normal operations.

- **THE WINDSOR HOTEL** in Hermanus is proud to announce that the ground floor rooms are now all renovated. The 2nd floor is scheduled for renovations from May until mid-August 2017 and the 1st floor is scheduled from January to mid-August 2018. Disruption to guests is being kept to a minimum as the entire floor is blocked off and contractors only work between 10h00 until 16h00.
- **CANGO CAVES ZIP LINE** is situated on the Cango Caves Estate. It is a new zip line activity in Oudtshoorn. Please contact us for more information.
- **TSWALU** updates:
 - The Motse will be undergoing renovations from 16th January to 31st May 2019. The focus will be on creating intimate spaces where guests will be able to enjoy their own private Kalahari. During this period The Motse is closed, Tarkuni Homestead will continue to operate.
 - Tswalu now has a helicopter based on the reserve. The Agusta Westland 119 is a versatile single-engine helicopter ideally suited to VIP transport. This Agusta can seat 5 passengers (excluding the pilot). The Agusta will soon be available for private eco-tour helicopter flips, excursions to nearby points of interest and historical landmarks, and a shuttle service to Upington airport.
- **SHAMWARI GAME RESERVE** lodges will undergo substantial refurbishments and upgrades during 2018. The lodges affected will be closed off independently so that there will be no disruption of the guest experience at the operating lodges. Most of the lodges are situated far apart and therefore the closure schedule has been structured to maximise room capacity and have zero effect on the guest experience. The closure schedule is as follow: Sarili Lodge (March and April 2018), Riverdene Lodge (May to the end of September 2018), Eagles Crag Lodge (April to the end of July 2018) and Long Lee Manor (Mid July to mid December 2018).
- **TABLE MOUNTAIN** will be closing for annual maintenance from Monday 24 July to Sunday 6 August 2017. The attraction will re-open, weather permitting, on 7 August 2017.
- **MANOR HOUSE** at Queen Victoria Hotel in Cape Town opened in May 2017. For more details please contact us.
- **SUN SQUARE CITY BOWL CAPE TOWN** is a new Tsogo Sun Hotel complex for Cape Town CBD. The exciting new property, located in the buzzing foodie district of Bree Street, will consist of two products in one complex: A 200-bedroom latest design SunSquare Cape Town City Bowl Hotel and a 300-bedroom new generation StayEasy Cape Town City Bowl Hotel. SunSquare offers various room options, a fitness centre, a rooftop pool, shuttle and transfer services and Tsogo Sun's own dining offer, Vigour & Verve. StayEasy offers comfortable and modern rooms, a fitness centre and a buffet-style restaurant. Banqueting and conference facilities will be on site, as well as a retail area and a 300-space underground parking. The opening of the hotel has been moved up to the 18th of August 2017.
- **SABI RIVER SUN** in Mpumalanga has planned outdoor refurbishments due to take place until 31 August 2017.
- **PEERMONT METCOURT** at Emperor's Palace in Gauteng has introduced new family rooms. Contact us for more information.
- **THE BOTSWANA TOURISM DEVELOPMENT LEVY** that would have been implemented on the 1st of July has been postponed. New date has not been released yet. We will update you accordingly.
- The **UNIVISA** re-launched: The univisa between Zimbabwe and Zambia, which will save visitors time and money, has been welcomed by the tourism sector. The KAZA visa, which means tourists only need to obtain one visa to visit Zimbabwe and Zambia, was re-launched by the Zimbabwean and Zambian governments in a ceremony in Livingstone in December, following a successful pilot program in 2015. The KAZA visa, which costs \$50 and is valid for up to 30 days can be obtained at Harare, Victoria Falls, Lusaka and Livingstone airports, and the Victoria Falls and Kazungula land borders, and is available to visitors from 65 countries.
- **VICTORIA FALLS SAFARI LODGE** in Zimbabwe was temporarily closed for a major re-thatch project on its central building. It is now open for business.

KNYSNA FIRES UPDATE:

- **BLACKWATERS RIVER LODGE** closed due to fire until 01 December 2017.
- **MANTIS PLETTENBERG PARK HOTEL & SPA** was totally destroyed in the fire.
- **KNYSNA HOLLOW** was completely destroyed in the fires that wreaked havoc on the town of Knysna and will not be in operation in the foreseeable future.
- **PHANTOM FOREST ECO RESERVE** closed down due to fire and completely destroyed.
- **KANONKOP HOUSE** suffered mild damage and at this stage it appears to be fairly limited. **Knysna Heights Villa** was unfortunately gutted by the fire. **Simola Heights Villa** was completely unscathed and remains open for business.

SPECIAL OFFERS:

Please note that all special offers are subject to specific terms and conditions which are available on request.

- **ARABELLA HOTEL AND SPA** in the Western Cape is offering a Stay 3 Pay 2 special for the period June to September 2017 (valid for FIT only).
- **BABYLONSTOREN** in Paarl is offering a Stay 4 and Pay 3 nights offer until 31 August 2017.
- **LA CLE DES MONTAGNES** in Franschhoek is offering a Stay 5 Pay 4 Special valid until 30 September 2017.
- **MONT ROCHELLE** in Franschhoek is offering a Stay 4 Pay 3 special valid until 31 August 2017.
- **PARK INN CAPE TOWN FORESHORE** is offering a Stay 3 Pay 2 special valid from until 31 August 2017.
- **PROTEA HOTEL BY MARRIOTT FRANSCHHOEK** is offering a Stay 3 Pay 2 special for the period September to October 2017 (valid for FIT only).
- **THE TAJ CAPE TOWN** is offering a Stay 4 Pay 3 special valid for new FIT bookings until 30 September 2017.
- **THE WESTIN IN CAPE TOWN** is offering a Pay 3/4 Stay 4/5 valid for travel until 31 August 2017.
- **RADISSON RED V&A WATERFRONT** in Cape Town is offering a Stay 3 Pay 2 special valid for travel between 12 September and 31 October 2017.

As always please contact us should you have any questions or if you need more information.

Yours in Tourism,

Johan Groenewald
Managing Director
Royal African Discoveries

Tel: +27 11 394-1660 / Fax: +27 11 394-1797 Website: www.royalafrika.co.za

Physical address: 83 Van Riebeeck Road, Kempton Park, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1630

Postal address: PO Box 12095, Aston Manor, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1630



"Unsubscribe" in the subject line to: newsletter@royalafrika.co.za.