

# Go Gondwana

 By [Brian Berkman](#)

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If you're used to staying at top-end private game lodges in Kruger's Sabi Sands and paying upwards of R8,000 a night you might be disappointed with Gondwana - a fynbos and big-five reserve in Mossel Bay, in the Cape.



Close enough for you?

If, however, you're a South African, perhaps travelling with a family on budget but who still enjoys five-star accommodation standards and wants to experience wilderness at much, much less, you couldn't be happier.

Phoning reception a second time to inquire when my laundry might be returned to my room, Janice said lions on the path were the reason for the delay. Were my Tiger of Sweden jeans at risk? I wondered, wryly. It was the bush version of "the dog ate my homework-excuse" I thought again, irritated that my packing was delayed. After all,

while most camps say they're unfenced, sightings of predators in the lodge precinct are pretty rare.

## Aahh... perhaps my laundry can wait

Moments later, the loudest lion roar I've ever heard bellowed from what I imagined to be 5mm away. I could feel the vibrations from his ample chest the way one can feel the base at a rock concert.

There are 14 Kwena huts dotted into the countryside like rondavals built on the hill, their thatched domes looking skywards like calabashes. Inside there's a wonderful feeling of space largely as a result of the skylight in the coupela which bathes the room in nature light and sends the stars and moonbeams to your bed at night. Do bring eye shades if you're very light sensitive at night as the star light really is star bright, being so far away from the city's light pollution.

Upscale kraal design is echoed in the light and large, freestanding mirror framed in twigs and branches. Bedside lights, atmospheric but unsuitable for reading, are woven fish traps while the screeded floors and exposed copper pipes in the bathroom hint at a simpler life but with all the luxury required.



If you love flora, you'll like Gondwana.

There's a freestanding fan for cooling and thankfully electric blankets on the beds and a ceramic log-burning fireplace for warmth.

## And behind the bed...

I really liked the bathroom design, built behind the bed, which is at the centre of the room. It has a private toilet and a window and open twin-basin, wonderful rain shower and soaking tub - all in a wet zone that encourages you to splash as much as you like. Timber framed windows slide open for that outside brought inside vibe.

Clothes storage is cleverly built behind the bed's headboard and hidden by curtains while there is a built-in desk and dressing area. A failing here too is not providing sufficiently bright light to read by or, in fact, apply make-up or insert one's contact lenses. While I'm moaning, more and desk-high plugs would allow me to charge the myriad devices we travel with, with ease.

The main lodge - a reception area, bar and restaurant in three free-standing structures is decorated in the same Kraal-chic



Enjoy the view ...

style with Nguni colours and leathers, lights from calabashes, reed baskets and fishing nets, and pan-Afro fabrics and textures. There's a nod to colonial-style game lodges with trophy heads on the wall but these, thankfully, are artfully made ceramic sculptures.

### Natural setting a great appeal

The rim-flow pool has an organic shape and is wedged into the hillside so resemble a watering hole. There's also an outside dining area near the pool where we enjoyed breakfast.

I was disappointed with the game experience as the 11,000ha area is hilly and verdant making long drives necessary to move from one part of the reserve to the other.

The male lion, at least 250kg of caramel beauty-pageant quality mane and chiselled features has obviously never been in a fight with a near rival before. The pride is very strong and while it remains on top of the food chain with no competition Gondwana's zebras and antelopes are an expensive lunch.

We saw plenty birds - Cape Weavers and Darters as well as a hunting buzzard - motionless in midair as it eyes a mouse. The great appeal for me is the natural setting of Gondwana. I can't think of another big-five lodge that has such established fynbos plantings. There are ridges of protea bushes so dense and large they might never before have been cut down and the view from the hill into the Nuaga Valley is like one of those fecund Thomas Baines painting of the early Cape - awash with deep greens.

There is a wonderful events space, Lehele Lodge, perfect for a corporate getaway or wedding and I was surprised at how affordable it was to rent. Other accommodation in the form of fynbos villas is also available.



And at the end of the day, relax by the pool.

George Domestic Airport is only a 45-minute drive from the game reserve (transfers provided) with daily flights from Johannesburg and Cape Town International airports. As a Garden Route game reserve, Gondwana shares the route's idyllic climate, second most moderate in the world according to the media information, and is malaria-free, and is the only reserve in the Southern Cape offering prime year round game viewing of free roaming Big Five animals.

For more information, visit the [Gondwana website](#).

## ABOUT BRIAN BERKMAN

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