

# Tinga's terrific (and the treehouse ain't so bad either)

 By [Rod Baker](#)

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Lion Sands Tinga Lodge is right on the Sabie River, so you can enjoy game up close and comfortable or... read on... perhaps *too* up close... (All images: Rod Baker)

With just 18 guests, you are assured of personal service at [Lion Sands Tinga Lodge](#) and what's more, the suites are large and very well equipped - and you even have your own plunge pool. Lodrey Makhukhula, assistant lodge manager, was on hand to greet us upon arrival and gave us a brief run-down of what we could expect to do and see.

Kenneth and George, our ranger and tracker respectively had stayed with us when we went on to Tinga from Lion Sands; this is pretty unique. Usually you will be handed over to a new ranger and tracker, but staying with Kenneth and George ensured we enjoyed really personal attention.



I couldn't help feeling that we on the vehicle were sometimes regarded as potential "meals on wheels".

Both lodges (Lion Sands and Tinga) are part of the Lion Sands Game Reserve and part of [More South Africa](#), owned and managed by the More family and an incredible family of staff who take great pride in ensuring guests will have an experience filled with passion and personality. The company has created a unique collection of incredible special properties in Cape Town, Kruger National Park, Sabi Sand and the Madikwe and, when staying at any one of these, the staff set out to do their utmost to ensure that you will experience something unique and inspiring, leaving you with incredible memories.

We arrived after a morning game drive, which began at Lion Sands River Lodge, and during which we had seen a variety of game. We had also gone for a short walk to get closer to my wife's favourite denizen of the wild, giraffe.

## I'm leaving

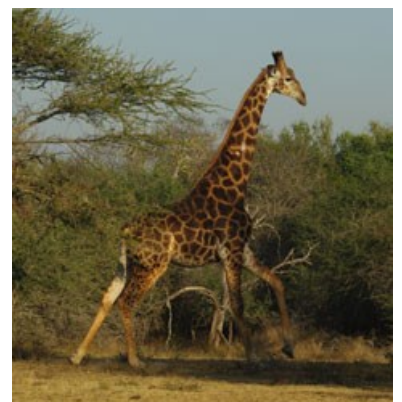
Kenneth, our ranger, led us on an oblique route but the giraffe kept a wary eye on us... strange even though we know them, to see a pair of eyes peering at you over the top of a tree, and the eyes' owner isn't actually *in* the tree, but standing behind it.

They allowed us to get reasonably close and then took off at a graceful gallop that looks deceptively slow but given the giraffe's starlet-like legs, allows the beast to cover the ground at a high rate of knots.

So that was another one off Heather's bucket list.

A while later, a call came in of lions being spotted (the rangers keep in touch with two-way radios and use the vernacular names of the animals when calling in, in part so that visitors will not get their hopes up. Hence, you will hear a report of an "ingwe" rather than a leopard being spotted. Of course, the vernacular names also have a certain romance to them, so why not use them anyway?)

I don't know about you, but when I get up quite close to lions - and leopard, for that matter, I find it quite hard not to think of them looking at me and the rest of us perched on the vehicle and thinking, "Ah, meals on wheels again; I wonder if they'll make a delivery this time".

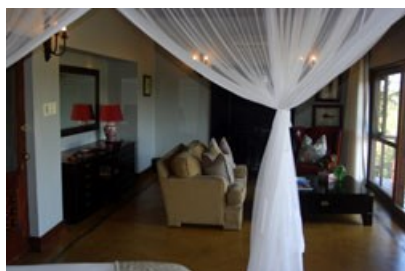


Well, again they were disappointed, or not - as they seemed to be quite happy just ambling along and circling... They had just eaten, judging by the blood on their jowls and paws, but Kenneth said they might in fact have come across a scent of another lion that had marked its territory.

Another one off the bucket list... giraffes are amazingly graceful.

## A bunch of baboons

I was impressed how the rangers respect not only the wildlife but also the environment... They don't get too close to the animals, but nevertheless they gave each other a turn to get their guests as close as is sensible to the action, and it's all done in a very unhurried and courteous manner via radio chat that gives everyone a very good idea of where each one is and on what route. Naturally, what has been spotted is also relayed so all the guests have as good a chance as possible at seeing a variety of wildlife.



Our lounge area at Tinga - luxury at its best.

From there we headed down to the river, and were able to cross hippos off our bucket list along with baboons... yes, we live on the Peninsula - eat your heart out - and we see baboons quite often, but here we saw the youngster fooling around in the trees - a source of great amusement to all of us... The youngsters hung off branches like over-ripe fruit, pulled each other down, chased each other and generally behaved like a bunch of playschool kids - albeit with amazing agility.

While all this was happening the adults sauntered along or sat, looking bored out of their skulls, and gave us the occasional look that seemed to ask: "What the hell are you looking at? They're kids... OK?!"

The one animal we still hoped to see was the buffalo, but thus far, no luck... and we were soon back to Tinga - only to find that *Syncerus caffer* (buffalo to you) had kindly decided to do the right thing and save us the trouble of looking for it... Three were posing on the riverbank bang in front of Tinga's viewing decks.

The shutters went mad.

## Nice shoes...

While this was all going on, a Swiss guest (businessman out on business with his assistant) approached me and asked in a French accent: "Excuse me sir, burt we 'ave been asked if we would like to guh on a game walk. Do you sink zis is safe?"

I replied to the effect that the African bush has its dangers, but the rangers know what they are doing, so just listen to what they say, and obey ANY instruction instantly and without question. I also added, deadpan: "But, if you should get on the wrong side of a lion or leopard and lose a leg, could I have your shoes? They're rather nice." He took a second to catch up and laughed, which was nice.

Now comes the somewhat incongruous bit... A few hours later and they were back and enthusing about what they had seen, having got pretty close to elephants, giraffes and a few other larger species. Then we began lunch...



These buffalo simply turned up right opposite our suite..

After a couple of minutes I happened to glance over and the same guest - still with legs intact - was backing away from their table and not looking too happy. I went over and asked if there was a problem, and was told there was a spider in the small pot plant on the table, and he was seriously afraid of spiders. Don't get me wrong, I quite understand... our younger son Chris fears nothing - other than spiders.

## On our way to Tinyeleti

Anyway, I checked it out and it looked like a pale almost translucent jumping spider, so I coaxed it onto my hand. It stayed for a few seconds and then hopped back on to the plant - so I moved the whole thing to another table, unoccupied.

The Swiss gent's face was quite a picture, but it was quite incongruous to see someone who had braved the wilds, albeit with an experienced and highly capable ranger, getting up close with some potentially dangerous species, but the 8mm spider really got his attention.



I lost count of what we saw.

That night we were to stay in Tinyeleti Treehouse, a much-favoured venue for proposals and after our evening game drive, Kenneth and George dropped us off with strict instructions to keep the main gate firmly closed, and a crash course in operating a two-way radio in case we chickened out or needed help.

Tinga excelled... the picnic dinner they prepared for us was enough for four, the food delicious, the wine was chilled and I was bloody cold - not then, and certainly not in

the four-poster (the duvet was thick and kept us very cosy) but later when I had to "follow order" and get up. Other than that, however, I loved every second of it...

## 'I gotta go'

Well, *almost* every second of it...Tinyeleti Treehouse is down near the river, and as we are talking June here, and while the stars are like a chandelier, and while I might have to get up to lose a little moisture during the night, all the wine and the cold weather seemed to have affected my dearly beloved.

Back home, and in the suite for that matter, there is no need for me to get involved. But in the treehouse...

I must have got up at least five times in all - only once of which was for my own benefit; the others were due to a plaintive but increasingly strident stage whisper from the other side of the cosy duvet, "I NEED YOU TO COME DOWNSTAIRS WITH ME!"

So I did, and do you have *any* idea as to how slowly those stars pass over during the night - and how close those hippos sound in the quiet of the African bush.



Just what one needs for a romantic evening... a Tinyeleti Treehouse dinner under the stars.

One tip: Kenneth provided us with a spotlight, and there are plenty of lanterns for the romantics, but a head-torch is a great help. We each had our own (thanks to our experiences with Eskom) and that frees you up - we could even read in bed.

I told you I'm a romantic at heart!



If you're into birding, the southern yellow billed hornbill is just one species you can see.

Early the next morning we were up and ready to go when Kenneth and George returned, and soon were we back at Tinga - to discover we had missed all the excitement (we're an old married couple and it was too cold for any excitement anyway back at the treehouse). The treehouse experience was great however; I would recommend it to anyone - even if your partner is too chicken to make the loo run alone. I am told that it is a popular venue for marriage proposals - and I can see why.

## Fancy meeting you here

Back to the excitement we had missed... We were told that that night, Tinga had laid on a braai in the boma for the remaining guests - an American family of three and

the two Swiss guys. Apparently the sous chef had gone down to the boma around five or six-ish (it was already dark then), to drop off the cutlery and to light the fires.

She was not alone... She heard a noise, turned and saw a leopard (in the boma itself) stalking a bushbuck (they are all over the place and come right up to your suites). She was apparently quite... er... vocal, not surprisingly, which gave the leopard

as big a skrik as it had given her, so she went one way , the leopard the other, and the cause of all the trouble, the bushbuck, headed of in the third direction.

Quite exciting.

As an aside, we also heard that the younger Swiss guest had an instant love affair with good old SA boerewors and went back about four or five times... Yet one more reason he too plans to be out again next year - this time with wife and children.

Again, a brilliant experience, and very big thanks as well to Kenneth and George, both of them a goldmine of information on not only the wildlife, but everything related to our bush safari experience, and of course, to Lodrey and the Tinga Family who all made us feel special.



And here's a hippo or three.

As was the case with my recounting of the Lion Sands River lodge experience, to describe everything we saw and enjoyed would take a much longer article than this.

The best option is to experience it yourself... Like Lion Sands, Tinga is unforgettable!

(And if you are thinking of proposing to that "someone special" doing so in a treehouse overlooking the river, gazing out at a beautiful sunset, is a hard-to-beat venue; no one has been known to turn down the proposal.

## Specials on now

*Lion Sands Kruger National Park special rates for South Africans this winter:*

14 June 2013 - 18 December 2013

Tinga and Narina Lodges

R3,900 per person per night sharing & R5,850 per person per night single. Again, this is a massive discount... The Tinga and Narina double rate is R7,510 per person sharing and the single is R11,250 per person.

Rate includes luxury accommodation, all meals, teas/coffees, two game drives daily, game drive refreshments and specified safari activities such as bush walks.

Rate excludes all beverages, mini bar, curio shop purchases, spa treatments, telephone, gratuities, Kruger Park entrance fees, flights, transfers, and any additional extras.

Children aged 6 - 15 years, sharing with parents, pay 50% of adult sharing rate

Minimum two-night stay.

Subject to availability.

For more information go to <http://www.lionsands.com/tingalodge.asp> and <http://www.lionsands.com/promotions.asp>.

## ABOUT ROD BAKER

Rod Baker is Content Director at Bizcommunity.com. A journalist since before computers, he worked on a wide range of magazines and, in his youth, rose through the ranks from being a lowly and abused sub-editor, to a high and still abused editor and publisher. He has been editor and publisher of a number of magazines, as well as a newspaper. He has edited many books, and written a number too. Email him at [rod@bizcommunity.com](mailto:rod@bizcommunity.com)

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