

Roam Rhulani



By [Brian Berkman](#)

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When Rolf Steiner and Marisa Silva, two Swiss Re executives working out of Sao Paulo, Brazil purchased Rhulani Safari Lodge in the Madikwe Reserve, near the South African border of Botswana, passion, not profit, was their motivation.



"Feel like a cool dip after a long hard day checking out the wildlife, my heart?"

Rolf, Swiss born who still speaks English with a strong Swiss German accent, seems, at first, an unlikely candidate for life, albeit in luxury, in the bush but soon I learn that as a child he and his family journeyed to Kenya and elsewhere in Africa where the wild captured his imagination.

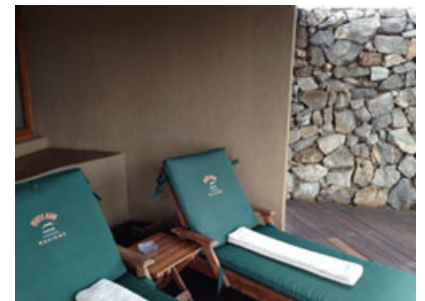
Marisa comes from the Argentine and in their high-level corporate careers they have lived all over the world. I ask why select South Africa as a location to invest. He replies with all the usual things about community engagement and making a positive contribution but then he also talks about South African infrastructure and rule of law giving him investor confidence.

Good agent, great publicity

For someone who assesses risk for a living (he works as an actuary for Swiss Re while she heads their communications) I feel rather proud that they have chosen South Africa and considered us a favourable risk/reward proposition. He goes on to say how impressed he was with the agent who showed him Rhulani along with another lodge in the Madikwe Reserve as well as other lodges elsewhere and that within a week of viewing the properties he felt confident to purchase.

They have kept the management team at Rhulani and worked to build positive and intimate relationships with the staff here and considering they have visited five times since March, (my visit in November coincided with one of theirs) and they have weekly management meetings electronically, they plan to keep a close eye on the project.

Among the changes are telephones in all the rooms and free Wi-Fi in the rooms and throughout the lodge. They have not added TV sets or docking stations to the rooms as yet still believing that people come to the bush to get away from the crackle of wall to wall media but say that guests want to be able to share their experiences and photographs immediately and not wait until returning home to do so.



Relax, you know you can do it.

Intimate, family-friendly

Rhulani is an intimate, family-friendly luxury lodge with the personal space and quality amenities to please the most discerning of travellers. Each room has a plunge pool that while small is wonderfully deep, refreshing, and timber-framed windows and doors that open back entirely to the balcony deck. There is slate and rough stone work but most of the suite is clean-lined with screeded concrete floors and high thatched roofs. There is a Morso wood-burning stove as well as an air conditioning unit so guests will be comfortable no matter the temperature.

The bathroom has twin basins a feature bath as well as an inside and outside shower which is pretty standard at the five-star level. From my experience I think their suites are more spacious than other lodges in a similar price bracket. While we were there they had news of their Best Lodge 2013 award in the area by the Provincial Tourism Board.

When we visited the Madikwe the summer rains had not yet come and following on the previous dry year the ground was



You know you are in Africa, but a luxurious Africa.

dusty and parched. From a game viewing experience this means there is a high concentration of game around the little remaining water which means while viewing is plentiful the environment is bleak.

When it rains...

Just two days after the full moon in November while being teased with one or two drops in the stifling heat before, the heavens opened and shed so much water we were not able to do a game drive on account of the roads being too sodden still the next morning.

Feeling those few drops that then became puddles and finally a deluge just as we had finished our dinner in the boma of roasted Eland fillet almost made me cry. The earth, so hungry for water, rewarded the air with a heady perfume - a touch of clay, a note of herb, must from the nearby elephant dung freshly enlivened all combining with the smoke from the boma fire raised up as an offering to the earth mother like from an ancient temple incense burner.

For that moment I felt connected to the earth's cycle and overwhelmed by the privilege of being outside in the bush at that very moment, my tears competed with the rain on my now hot but happy face.

The wild dogs we saw, our elephant close-encounter the fact their rangers use ear-pieces so guests don't have to listen to the radio noise or their quality, canopied and well equipped game-viewing vehicles seemed less important than just being there.

I drifted to sleep that night not disturbed by the crashing thunder and strobe lightening but soothed by it. I had witnessed mother earth suckle her young and I couldn't be happier.

For more information go to www.Rhulani.com, [@Rhulani_Lodge](https://www.facebook.com/RhulaniLodge), [Rhulani.lodge](https://www.facebook.com/RhulaniLodge) on Facebook or call +27 (0) 11 237 16449.



And at the end of the day, what better than a very comfortable bed.

ABOUT BRIAN BERKMAN

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