

Zimbali, where special attention is the norm

 By [Brian Berkman](#)

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When the F&B director and chef de cuisine ask to meet you to discuss your dietary concerns, you can expect something special. Still, while I'm used to receiving special attention because of my role as a writer about hotels, travel destinations and my special interest in low-carb eating, what happened at Fairmont Zimbali Resort was beyond my expectation and yet was simply part of their Fairmont Presidents Club's Lifestyle Cuisine Plus programme.



Enjoy! (Image: Fairmont Hotels & Resorts)

The 154-key Fairmont Zimbali Resort and 76-key Fairmont Zimbali Lodge are located on one of three coastal forest estates in the world - a 700-hectare protected tropical paradise. Tucked between two World Unesco Heritage Sites in KwaZulu-Natal's Ballito, it is about 15-minutes from King Shaka International Airport and 30 minutes from Durban.

Called the Dolphin Coast, the Indian Ocean stretches out for as far as the eye can see and you will, as we did, see whales in the surf.

Life's tough in paradise

Accommodations on the Zimbali Estate are at the Fairmont Zimbali Lodge, a plantation-style mansion with rich timbers and colonial references and the newer Fairmont Zimbali Resort, the larger of the two and contemporary in design. Light and space are the hallmarks of the public areas and rooms. We stayed in the resort in one of their vast, sixth-floor suites overlooking the cascading pools and sea beyond. It was hard work to focus on replying to emails, despite a fast and easy-to-connect-to Wi-Fi, with such a sublime view.

If you aren't already a member of Fairmont Hotels & Resorts' guest recognition programme, Fairmont President's Club, sign-up before you arrive or during your check-in. It is the most value-rich loyalty programme I've yet encountered and is free to join. Aside from free Wi-Fi, their FIT offering includes free use of Reebok shoes and complimentary socks during your stay, use of BMW mountain bikes plus much else.

Not only have Fairmont chefs been trained to prepare a vast array of special dietary and allergy-specific meals but they are also equipped with Nutritionist Pro™, Axya Systems' recipe analysis software, to help customise dishes and menus to fit with guests' nutritional requirements.

Meals for all, whatever your tastes

Many hotels have marketing positions as ways of differentiating themselves from their competition. However, as early as 2011, Fairmont began a programme to offer a wide range of special diets, Banting being the most recently added proficiency. They understand that many guests, especially those staying while on business, elect not to have three heavy meals a day but always want something delicious. We're not just talking about "lighter" options with less fat but the skill, willingness and readiness to provide menus for as complex issues as hypertension, gluten intolerance, people who are vegan and vegetarian, who follow a macrobiotic diet and now, too, for those of us following a low-carb high fat diet. Every dish they prepared for me scored high in presentation and attention-to-detail care when it came to sourcing special oils. This was not merely a low-carb offering but a creative expression of everything the Real Meal Revolution believes in.



Fancy a round? (Image: Fairmont Hotels & Resorts)

The Zimbali Estate is a very high-end residential estate with the most stringent access control I have yet experienced. At the



Wall-to-wall comfort and luxury. (Image: Fairmont Hotels & Resorts)

matter of course.

Facilities at Fairmont Zimbali Lodge include the Thandi Restaurant, a North Indian meets African dining experience where we tasted our first ever carb-free naan bread and a legendary Butter Chicken. Order their Thali to experience the flavours and textures of six different dishes.

Join the BM brigade to the beach

We took the resort's BMW bicycles down to the lodge one day and cooled ourselves at their swimming pool before heading to the tennis courts. Sporty types will love the squash courts as well as the Tom Weiskopf-designed 18-hole golf course.



Whatever your dietary requirements, nothing is too much trouble. (Image: Fairmont Hotels & Resorts)

We loved walking around the estate, especially early in the morning when bird activity was at a peak. There are also many small antelope like rhebok on the estate as well as vervet monkeys that keep the staff in the outside dining areas on their toes.

Fairmont Zimbali Lodge and Fairmont Zimbali Resort are the first Fairmont properties in South Africa. Fairmont Hotels & Resorts focus on one-of-a-kind properties and service to match. With more than 65 hotels globally, and many more in development, landmark hotels in the Fairmont collection include The Plaza in New York, London's The Savoy, Fairmont Peace Hotel in Shanghai and Quebec City's Fairmont Le Château Frontenac. Fairmont is owned by FRHI Hotels & Resorts, a leading global hotel company with over 110 hotels under the Fairmont, Raffles, and Swissôtel brands. The company also manages Fairmont, Raffles and Swissôtel branded luxury private residence clubs, whole-ownership residences and serviced residences properties.

For more information go to [Zimbali Resort](#) or [Zimbali Lodge](#)

gatehouse you won't simply be asked to sign a register but to present your ID book, passport or driver's licence which is then scanned along with the vehicle's licence.

'Can you keep a secret? Well, so can I'

While eating the most fabulous pizza made carb-free on a cauliflower base in the Resort's poolside Ayoba Mexican outlet, we spied an African head of state also lunching. That's how they roll at Zimbali. We pressed our waiter for details of the VIP's business here but he answered: "if another guest asked who you were and what you were doing here, I won't tell them either" with the kind of tact and tight-lippedness you'd expect from a property that hosts high-rollers as a



Fancy a dip? (Image: Fairmont Hotels & Resorts)

The 10-treatment room Willow Stream Spa is based at the Resort. We had a superb couple's massage in a spa suite that had its own steam-room shower. There are also shower and steam facilities in the spa's changing rooms which are available to guests using the adjacent gym.

There are five swimming pools at the resort and a Y-Univers Kids Club. Guests are welcome to use facilities and charge things to their room accounts at both the resort and lodge. There are also shuttles and a snazzy Zimbali BMW limo to ferry guests around the property.

Birds, bokke ... and some monkeying around



That ocean looks big... and there's more underneath! (Image: Fairmont Hotels & Resorts)

ABOUT BRIAN BERKMAN

Brian Berkman can be contacted on 083-441-8765 or email Brian@BrianBerkman.com.

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