

Serene and superb Sanbona



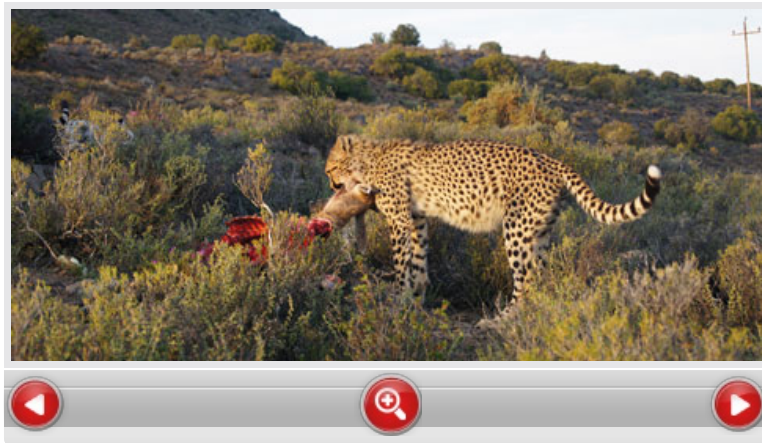
By [Ruth Cooper](#)

17 Sep 2014

It's a still-and-sunny Saturday afternoon, golden light bathes the bush, the smell of Renosterveld fynbos and dust is in the air as we silently approach a wild cheetah family gorged on a recently felled eland. The family (mother and kids) are lethargic stuffed full of the kill and sensibly enjoying an afternoon rest up after their large family lunch.

Cosying up with the cats

As we inch closer, now just a few metres from the pride, my heart rate starts making itself known. Not surprisingly. These are wild cheetahs, four of them to be exact, and who knows if they will be receptive to an unexpected drop in by some foreign guests during their dinner. A metre or so from the pride we stop and crouch down, paying our respects, making sure we are seen as coming in peace. The only cheetah that isn't passed out in a food coma, and who must still be a little peckish, leaves the eland carcass it was listlessly chewing, turns its magnificent black-and-golden head in our direction and saunters towards us. My heartbeat jumps up a few notches. He looks curious, his back hair raised, he walks a few paces towards us... sits down, lies down and eventually slumps down, belly exposed to us.

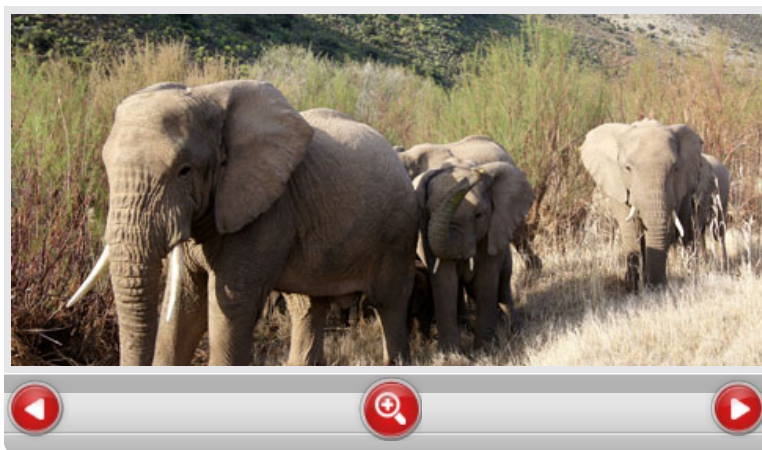


Aww, so cute. I want to stretch over the few feet between us and bury my head in his furry belly as I would with my cats at home. However, common sense and the fact that our game ranger Jannie has whispered to us that we shouldn't move from our current crouched positions keeps me as still as a I can be while trying to snap away as many pics as possible.

I could stay there the rest of the day hanging out with these lovely cats, but Jannie gets a call that another game drive group is on their way and best we should head back to our vehicle. We slowly half get up, staying in a crouched position

for a few feet before straightening up and walking back as my heart rate returns to a decent speed.

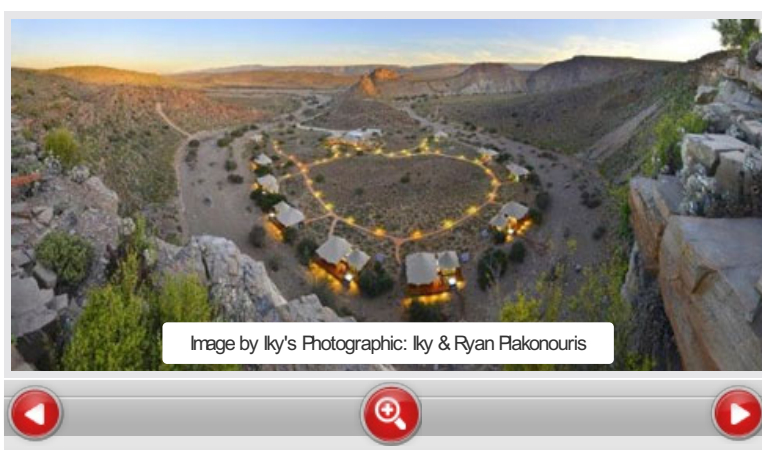
Earlier that day, we literally bumped into a herd of elephant, our rebel ranger, the elephant whisperer and all round Karoo Mowgli, Jannie, seems to have a sixth sense when it comes to finding game and the elephants are his animal of choice. And who can blame him? Such beautiful and majestic creatures. We follow and watch a family of 12 or so for over an hour. Jannie likes to whisper sweet nothings to them - as he says, they recognise his voice and it calms them and in such a tightly-knit group any emotion permeates though the herd, so best be spreading some positive vibes when getting up close and personal with ellies.



Secluded luxury

So where is this magical place in which such close encounters with wildlife can be had? It's the [Shamwari Group's](#) Sabona Wildlife Reserve - emphasis on the word 'reserve' as this private wildlife-viewing spot is more about creating a natural and healthy ecosystem than punting the Big 5 to the tourists. Sandwiched between Montagu and Barrydale it's an easy three-hour drive from Cape Town and a perfect getaway retreat option from city life.

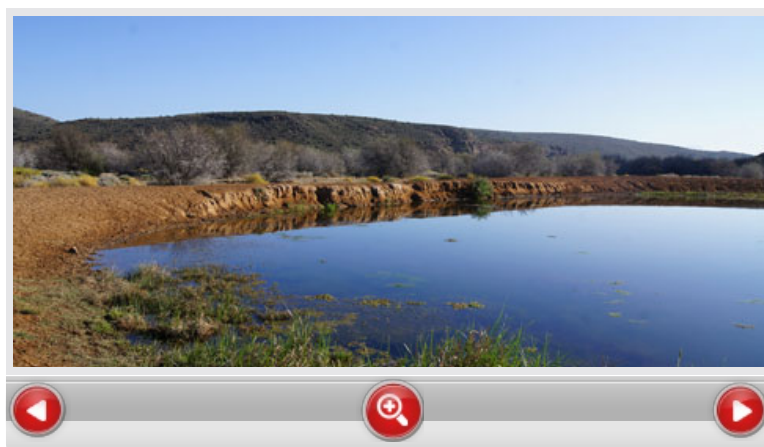
Sanbona offers four accommodation options: the private and peaceful [Tilney Manor](#); the [Gondwana Family Lodge](#); the soon-to-be-launched [Sanbona Explorer Camp](#); and the luxurious and just recently rebuilt and refurbished [Dwyka Tented Lodge](#). We were lucky enough to be treated to the brand spanking new Dwyka, which had just been opened a few days earlier, after being rebuilt from freak flash floods in January this year. The surrounding vegetation still very much shows the signs of the flood damage: trees and brush ripped from their roots and a few metre-wide riverbeds have quadrupled in size; however the tented lodge is even better than new. Nestled under a massive dry ravine the nine semi-tented units are pure glamping luxury.



Combining a mix of built structure and tented ceiling, the rooms are wonderfully earthy and natural yet still luxuriously comfortable and well equipped; including air-con, open-air shower, bath, deck area and Jacuzzi! One would think with all this comfort and beauty you might be hard put to leave the room. However that would be a great shame and practically impossible because a day and a night's stay at Dwyka includes (a roughly four-hour long) game drive in the early morning and again in the afternoon, as well as delicious buffet breakfast and five-star three-course lunch and dinner each day. Then if you have any spare time a trip to the well-equipped and friendly-staffed relaxation retreat spa would be well advised.

It's a wild life

And the scenery is just as well equipped to amaze. The 54000ha reserve boasts hill ranges, flat planes, a damn, currently dry riverbeds, unique rock formations, San art and lush brush areas all offering the possible sightings of the extensive wildlife on offer. During our four private games drives we were lucky enough to see: zebra, baboon, giraffe, rhino, kudu, springbok, lion, a black-backed jackal, elephant, cheetah, and we even let a puff adder hitch a ride with us in our cooler bag; a somewhat nerve-racking experience, especially when off-roading on bumpy terrain. However, this is what makes a visit to Sanbona all that much more special: you encounter wildlife in a natural environment so up close and personal, there's no need for a zoom. Be it hiking on a hill range in the search for elephant, discovering marine fossils or cosying up to a family of cheetah.



It's been just over a week since my weekend at Sanbona and I'm still basking in the afterglow. Unique wildlife experiences, knowledgeable rangers, friendly-and-efficient staff, breathtaking scenery, five-star luxurious accommodation and delicious meals in the most private and dramatic setting makes a stay at the Dwyka Tented Lodge a truly memorable experience. If you have the disposable income I would highly recommend a trip to Sanbona - you'll fall in love with the place, I guarantee.

For more info or to make a booking go to www.sanbona.com

ABOUT RUTH COOPER

- Ruth is the production manager at Bizcommunity. ruth@bizcommunity.com
- #WTMA19: Keith Jenkins on how best to harness influencer marketing in travel - 23 Apr 2019
 - #WTMA18: Championing African women in travel - Q&A with Alessandra Alonso - 14 May 2018
 - #CSIMonth: Samara Game Reserve celebrates 20 years of rehabilitation - 28 Jul 2017
 - Three key learnings from the Stellenbosch Business Tourism Indaba - 19 Jun 2017
 - #WTMA17: Taming the Wild West web of bloggers - 24 Apr 2017

[View my profile and articles...](#)