

Sibuya Game Reserve - A Perfect Safari

Not all South African game reserves have all the desirable qualities that make up the perfect safari: a riverine jungle full of birds and monkeys, grazing land, expansive views and the Big Five, but Sibuya Game Reserve in the Eastern Cape has it all. And it's the only SA reserve where guests are transported to their luxury tented camp by boat.

At top speed it would only take 15 minutes to travel upriver on the Kariega River from Kenton-on-Sea to Sibuya's luxurious River Camp or its more rustic Forest Camp, but at dawdling pace it's a relaxing 45-minute cruise by flat-bottomed boat. This allows guests to relax and take in the breathtaking scenery along the way.

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Most people stay two or three nights at Sibuya – just enough time to find peace and beauty in this stunning private reserve. A wide variety of animals are to be found here: lion, elephant, white rhino, buffalo, giraffe, as well as big and small antelopes and, of course, the elusive leopard. They are not all completely free-roaming, as it could annoy the neighbours if the lions swam the river and went walkabout. The animals are, however, kept in vast, unspoilt tracts of land that closely resemble the wild.

Walking from River Camp to Forest Camp – which involves a steady uphill hike over a large hill – gives an altogether different sense of the wilderness. It was worth every sweltering step to stand at the viewpoint and see the magnificent hairpin-bend river looping its way downstream towards the Indian Ocean.





So fertile is this land that it supports one of the highest densities of wildlife in South Africa, and it is bursting with birdlife like the elusive Narina Trogon and the Knysna Turaco. The river also teems with life, with fish, crabs and prawns to catch – rods are supplied. Guests can also make use of the canoes for some gentle exploring. The river also doubles as the swimming pool, although some guests find it too warm, and if you like to see your feet, you may find it a bit daunting.

There is no big game in the area where guests walk. For big-game viewing you have to take a boat to the other side of the river and start your morning and evening game drive there. The area is malaria-free, and is positioned about 1,5 hours east of Port Elizabeth, making it a perfect culmination to a Garden Route trip.

It's easy to choose which of their two tented camps will better suit you, as it is traditional rustic versus contemporary chic. River Camp has the sophisticated edge with only four en-suite tented rooms with an intimate atmosphere. The bedroom design is a perfect blueprint for a safari room, with canvas walls and ceiling and wood-framed glass doors leading to a deck with a hammock. There is a full bathroom behind a false wall in the middle of the room, with a king-size bed fronting the wall. The design is simple but very elegantly combined with stylish décor in soft aqua blues. The open plan lodge lounge and dining area is welcoming and comfortable with a roaring fire, even in summer to warm away the slight chill of the summer rain. The camp is particularly suitable for families, with a playroom tent and ground-level pathways.

Forest camp has a distinctly rustic feel, with whole-log balcony railings and en-suite bathrooms with half walls and the rest open to the elements. The sense of safari is stronger, and raised wooden walkways snake through a pristine thicket to eight comfortable tents and a shady lounge and dining area decorated in rust and burnt orange.

Sibuya's dedication to green and responsible tourism is evident in their restoration of vast tracts of farmland to its natural state and its low-impact tourism model of limited bed space relative to the reserve's size (3 000 hectares). Other green initiatives like low energy usage, minimal use of plastics, and buying locally produced food, enjoy priority.

Sibuya's published rates start at R2 250 per person sharing, fully inclusive of all meals, wine, beer and soft drinks, guided game drives and boat cruises, plus other activities like fishing, canoeing and walks. Visit www.sibuya.co.za for more information.



*Written By - Carrie Hampton
Photos - www.sibuya.co.za*