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# LEADING LIGHTS



**THE PALM BEACH 100**  
THE AREA'S MOST INFLUENTIAL LEADERS



# JOURNEYS

YOUR PASSPORT TO THE MOST FASCINATING CORNERS OF THE GLOBE

## Kissed by the Kalahari

EMBARK ON THE ULTIMATE, LIGHT-FOOTED PRIVATE SAFARI AT LOAPI, A SIX-HOME RETREAT IN THE HEART OF THE MASSIVE, WILDLIFE-RICH TSWALU KALAHARI RESERVE

BY PAUL RUBIO

ANDREW MORGAN

FROM INSET: LUXURY UNDER CANVAS AWAITS IN ONE OF LOAPI'S PRIVATE SAFARI HOMES; AFTERNOON TEA IN A PRIVATE SALA AT LOAPI.

➔ In South Africa's share of the breathtaking transnational Kalahari Desert, Tswalu spans 441 square miles as a private reserve where gold-hued plant life carpets rolling sand dunes against a backdrop of red-clay earth, and elusive species like aardwolf, meerkats, and painted dogs share the spotlight with Big Five icons. The reserve's natural beauty and abundant wildlife stem from decades of conservation efforts led by the late Stephen Boler and the philanthropic Oppenheimer family, which transformed vast farmlands into a sanctuary for the Kalahari's delicate ecosystems.

Today, the resurrected, otherworldly landscapes of Tswalu host a holy grail of rare wildlife encounters reserved for the lucky few. By taking a low-impact, high-value approach to ecotourism with just 16 units across its highly protected Kalahari reserve, Tswalu has fostered an unparalleled experience in light-on-Earth private safari. It has bundled the luxuries of space, sightings, sustainability, authenticity, and creature comforts into a stand-alone bucket list destination.



ANDREW MORGAN



JOURNEYS



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CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: HIGH-DESIGN HOMES AT LOAPI SHOWCASE TRANSITIONAL INDOOR-OUTDOOR SPACES AND CONSTANT VIEWS OF THE KALAHARI; EXPERIENCE HERITAGE NORTHERN CAPE CUISINE AT RESTAURANT KLEIN JAN; MINGLE WITH THE RESIDENT MEERKATS AT TSWALU—AT EYE LEVEL (BOTTOM LEFT).



TSWALU



PAUL RUBIO



ANDREW MORGAN



DOOK

Since 1995, Tswalu has shaped the Kalahari safari narrative, first with accommodations at The Motse lodge and, later, the exclusive-use Tarkuni homestead. In 2023, the reserve introduced Loapi, meaning “the space below the clouds” in Setswana, featuring six eco-chic private safari homes in a section of the reserve famed for its bounty of white rhinos and black-maned lions. Each home, starting at 3,200 square feet, includes a private open-air vehicle, guide, tracker, chef, and homathi (butler), catering to families, groups, and couples seeking a personalized safari adventure—at their own pace.

While traditional Big Five game drives are certainly possible, more often, two half-day activities focus on specific species and habitats, guided by experts who track and study

the reserve’s star residents. (It also helps that a vast team of researchers and ecologists are leading groundbreaking studies into the secret lives of the Kalahari’s greats and can radio in animal whereabouts.) One morning, for example, seek out the reserve’s pack of painted dogs and trail them through their daily hunt. That evening, search for shaggy brown hyenas hiding in the thicket or stalk the dens of rarities like aardvark, aardwolf, and Temminck’s pangolin, waiting for them to emerge and forage.

Another day, encounter white and black rhino via walking and driving safari combos or opt for a helicopter to get a drone-like view of these critically endangered giants. Later, allot ample time to meet and greet the local meerkat families. While these adorable critters often appear on game drives—like a Whac-A-Mole game in real time—the presence of three habituated groups allows for up-close and personal encounters with the television sensations. Find a comfortable spot in the dirt as they groom, squabble, stand guard, dig, and forage alongside you. To be sure, no matter your wildlife objective, opportunistic sightings abound, such that your search for bat-eared foxes could be easily interrupted by cheetahs lurking in the brush or roan antelopes and oryx grazing in the valleys below. Overall, there’s so much to see that, unlike most safari lodges where three nights may suffice, Tswalu merits a minimum of five nights.



TSWALU



PAUL RUBIO

OBSERVE MORE TYPICAL SAFARI GAME LIKE GIRAFFES AND MORE UNCOMMON CREATURES LIKE ROAN ANTELOPES IN TSWALU.

Beyond wildlife encounters, Tswalu offers a deep dive into the Kalahari’s ecology, with knowledgeable rangers and guides sharing insights gained from ongoing research projects and decades of experience. It’s also a chance to luxuriate in one of Earth’s most singular settings, especially given the vistas and amenities at Loapi. It can be a challenge to leave the confines of your high-design, steel-and-canvas domain, where you marvel at the terrain from your open-air dining room, sunken fire pit, or plunge pool, endless pour of fine South African wine in hand. Interiors are unapologetically cozy with plush couches, a wooden fireplace, and reading and sleeping nooks aplenty. Each is an idyllic place to lounge as chef surprises with sublime snacks and meals using regionally sourced ingredients, and homathi delights by catering to your every whim. At Loapi, each meal is beautifully tailored and presented as well as exquisite in taste.

When it seems things can’t get better, Tswalu ups the ante at its experiential Restaurant Klein Jan (one night included in all safari bookings). Here, award-winning chef Jan Hendrik van der Westhuizen crafts multicourse meals blending heritage Northern Cape cuisine with storytelling, set in unique locations across the property. The visual and gastronomic journey begins with light bites outside a 100-year-old farmhouse, followed by soup in a subterranean root cellar, and another half-dozen courses with herbs, plants, and proteins you’ve likely never tried, presented in a modernist, open kitchen nestling the Kalahari sands. Like everything else at Loapi—and Tswalu in general—Klein Jan is an immersive experience celebrating the natural wonders, cultural richness, and secret luxuries of the Kalahari. *(tswalu.com)* ◀◀



SHIMON WATSON IMAGES

CAPE FABULOUS

Tswalu can be reached via regularly scheduled charter services from either Cape Town or Johannesburg, but we highly recommend the former—and not just as a layover. Africa’s worldliest city, Cape Town explodes with restaurant, hotel, and cultural offerings on par with a major European metropolis yet cast over dramatic topographical contrasts of awe-inspiring mountains, lush winelands, and

quaint coastal enclaves. Base yourself at Cape Town’s grande dame, Mount Nelson, a Belmond hotel (*belmond.com*), which celebrated its 125th anniversary earlier in 2024. The history-steeped, 198-key, pink landmark is an exercise in timeless glamour with soothing, understated interiors that focus on high-touch details and, in many cases, face the grandeur of Table Mountain. Enjoy the likes of traditional afternoon tea in the Lounge, sundowners at the Planet Bar, and relaxing



FROM LEFT: MOUNT NELSON, A BELMOND HOTEL IN CAPE TOWN; VINEYARD ON THE CONSTANTIA WINE WALK.

spa treatments at Librisa Spa. Choose from the hotel’s exclusive activities such as an art and architecture walking tour through Cape Town with art historian Kate Crane Briggs or a snorkeling expedition with shark scientist Justin Blake through the Cape kelp forests, the same site where Oscar-winning documentary *My Octopus Teacher* was filmed. Consider complementing your Belmond outings with other local favorites, including the Constantia Wine Walk (*constantiawinewalk.co.za*), a private guided walking tour through three wine farms in the Constantia Valley with founder Matthew Sterne, and an unforgettable sunrise hike over Table Mountain, with luxury tour operator African Lynx (*africanlynxtravel.com*). —P.R.