

A father-and-son team tackle legendary  
Route 66 — with a twist **TUESDAY**

The Province

# TRAVEL

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## Picture perfect South Africa

Photo safari with experts ensures  
travellers capture the moment D2-3





The Earth Lodge is home base for guided photographic tours of the private Sabi Sabi game reserve in South Africa. MARK SISSONS/FOR THE PROVINCE

# Shutterbug safari finds focus

South African game lodge offers the gear and guidance you need to take your best shots

**Mark Sissons**  
FOR THE PROVINCE

## SABI SABI, SOUTH AFRICA

The Southern Pride is on the move. In the menacing darkness, a dozen hungry lions circle a large herd of impala.

Chaos erupts in the bush as the big cats launch their attack, taking down a huge ram only a few metres from our Land Cruiser.

Moving in on the action, we position ourselves close enough to capture the ensuing feeding frenzy without disturbing the diners. It's every cat for itself as the pride piles onto the fresh kill like a crazed rugby scrum, snarling, snapping and fighting to devour still beating organs

and rip bloody chunks of flesh from bone.

Tonight, I'm an eyewitness to an awesome display of primal brutality. And confident that I'll have the stunning pictures to prove it because I'm engaging the services of a professional safari photographer to assist me with every step.

Capturing such visceral wildlife encounters on camera has always been an integral part of the safari experience. Now, private game reserves such as Sabi Sabi, adjacent to South Africa's Kruger National Park, offer their guests the unique opportunity to have an expert guide them through the intricacies of taking that perfect, once-in-a-lifetime coffee table book cover shot.

"Professional photographic safaris offer an incredible opportunity to take much better pictures, improving and enhancing your total safari experience," says Zulch Conradie, manager of Sabi Sabi's Earth Lodge.

"It's almost like you're opening the curtains on a whole new subject."

## Go with a pro

The professional photo safari I recently took in Sabi Sabi is tailored to travellers who can afford more expensive pro and "prosumer" SLR cameras but don't know how to most effectively use them in a challenging environment like the African bush. It's also a great option if you'd rather

hire the services and gear of a pro for a day or two on safari than haul around expensive, hefty cameras and telephoto lenses with enough zoom to capture that perfect, once-in-a-lifetime, wildlife picture.

Either way, booking the services of a pro safari photo guide like Sabi Sabi's Andrew Schoeman is a great idea if you want National Geographic-calibre memories.

For a few hundred dollars, this former safari guide turned photographer will accompany lodge guests on game drives, providing expert, hands-on guidance on subjects such as proper framing of your subject, what angles to use and how to use the available light in multiple situations. Then he'll walk you through a

streamlined post-production process using Adobe Photoshop Lightroom to help make them look their best.

"Most of our guests arrive with basic camera knowledge and are looking for the simple explanations that can sometimes lead to that Eureka moment," says Schoeman one afternoon as we roam the dense terrain of the Sabi Sabi reserve in a land cruiser, searching for prime lion, leopard and elephant photo ops.

"You can read about all of the camera functions in a manual," he adds. "But it's not getting processed. There's nothing like having someone there alongside you explaining that if you push this button or turn that dial you get completely different results."



## Key functions

Before embarking on our first game drive together, Schoeman runs through the camera's complex settings, starting with autofocus.

"There are a lot of functions in today's high-end cameras, which can be daunting for a lot of people. But you only need to use very few of them to get good results reading the light in the bush and knowing the best place to select your light when you're photographing certain subjects," he says.

"The real key is getting your subject in focus ... If you don't have a sharp photo, it doesn't matter what you've got. You're going to throw it away."

Schoeman goes on to explain single point focusing, as well as the relationship between shutter speed, aperture and ISO setting—the sensitivity that the digital sensor has to light.

Understanding what combination of these settings works best in various situations while on safari is key.

"We initially determine the guest's skill level and help them tailor camera settings specifically for wildlife," Schoeman explains, noting he often guides accomplished landscape photographers or wedding photographers who are out of their depth in the bush.

## Find the light stuff

Crash course complete, Schoeman and I set off to roam through Sabi Sabi's diverse habitat that is home to the Big 5—lion, leopard, rhino, buffalo and elephant—as well as cheetah, wild dog and some 200 other animal species indigenous to the area.

Soon, we come across a male lion calling in a thundering roar for his brother to join him.

This battle-scarred old warrior looks like he's seen his fair share of predatory turf wars, as does his sibling, who soon appears sporting an equally pocked face, battered body and gnarled mane.

Soon, we're close enough for me to begin shooting with Schoeman's Nikon D3 full-frame SLR camera.

I've fixed it to a stabilizing swinging metal bracket that snugly fits over the Land Cruiser's door frame, supporting my heavy 200-400mm zoom lens.

As Schoeman whispers instructions, I make settings adjustments on the fly until it all begins to make sense and I have my own Eureka moment.

Here I am, photographing Africa's most iconic animal with pro gear and a dozen years of wildlife photography expertise at my exclusive disposal.

All that, and a new-found understanding of how best to capture such savage beauty on my first ever picture perfect safari.



Earth Lodge's Amber Suite features a magnificent carved wooden headboard and deep egg-shaped bath, along with its own steam room, plunge pool, study and kitchen. — SABI SABI PRIVATE GAME RESERVE

## Arriving

Sabi Sabi lies 500 km east of Johannesburg. Charter flights connect the Sabi Sabi Airstrip with Joburg's O.R. Tambo International Airport. South African Airlines' regional carrier, Airlink ([flyairlink.com](http://flyairlink.com)), also offers daily scheduled flights from to Nelspruit, a scenic two-hour drive from Sabi Sabi.

## Sleeping

Situated in the world-renowned 65,000 hectare Sabi Sand Wildtuin in the southern section of the Kruger National Park, Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve is home to four air-conditioned luxury lodges, each with a unique theme. This writer stayed at Earth Lodge. Sculpted into an earthen slope, almost invisible in the landscape, it has been described as the most environmentally sensitive lodge in Africa. Each of Earth Lodge's thirteen spacious suites features individually designed furniture, a private plunge pool and is decorated with wooden sculptures by renowned South African artist Geoffrey Armstrong.

## Booking a Sabi Sabi photo

Sabi Sabi's Professional Photographic Safaris run for one full day and must be pre-booked. The cost per guest photographer is R4500 (about \$560). It includes the services of a pro photo guide, use of a safari vehicle and your choice of a Nikon D700, D3 or D3S with a Nikon 200-400mm f/4 lens or a Canon 70 Mark III or IV with a Canon 300mm f/2.8 or 500mm f/4 lens. Additional equipment can be rented upon request.

## Recommended outfitters

Toronto based Kensington Tours ([kensingtontours.com/](http://kensingtontours.com/) 888.903.2001) and Askari Travel (<http://www.askaritravel.com/> 877.279.1902) both offer customized South African safaris that can include visits to Sabi Sabi.

## More tips

Sabi Sabi has played host to many of the world's top wildlife photographers over the past 30 years. For great tips on getting the most out of your safari, check out their extensive and extremely helpful online pro wildlife photography guide [atsabisabi.com/photography](http://atsabisabi.com/photography).



Most SLR cameras allow you to move your focus sensor square manually for selective focus. — MARK SESSIONS/FOR THE PROVINCE