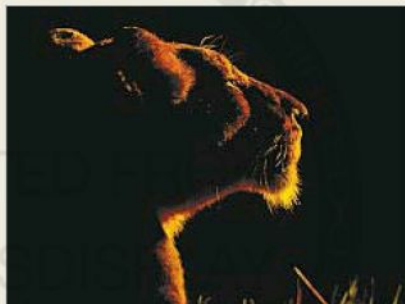


Using just the dull spotlights that trackers use on night drives instead of a flash can produce a dramatic black background.



When shooting wildlife, always make sure the autofocus is on and the image stability is activated.



Photos by Mark Sissons/Special Contributor

Using a quality 200- to 400-mm telephoto lens that is fast enough to keep your image sharp can produce stunning results.

# A picture-perfect safari

On this trip, the guide is also a professional photographer

By MARK SISSONS  
Special Contributor

**S**ABI 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 less than a dozen feet 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, snapping and fighting to rip bloody chunks of flesh from bone.

Tonight, I'm an eyewitness to an awesome display of primal

with every step.

Capturing such visceral wildlife encounters on camera has always been an integral part of the safari experience. Now, private game reserves like Sabi Sabi, adjacent to South Africa's Kruger National Park, offer guests the unique opportunity to have an expert guide them through the intricacies of

nity 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," he adds.

## Go with a pro

The professional photo safari I recently took in Sabi Sabi is tailored to travelers who can afford more expensive pro 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 than haul around expensive, hefty cameras and telephoto lenses with

Schoeman is a great idea if you want *National Geographic*-caliber memories without the expensive gear that goes with them.

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 like 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 postproduction process using Adobe Photoshop Lightroom.

"Most of our guests arrive with basic camera knowledge and are looking for the simple explanations that can sometimes lead to that eureka moment," explains Schoeman one afternoon as we

## When you go

**Getting there:** Sabi Sabi lies 310 miles east of Johannesburg. Charter flights connect the Sabi Sabi Airstrip with Johannesburg's O.R. Tambo International Airport. South African Airlines' regional carrier, Airlink (flyairlink.com), also offers daily scheduled flights from Johannesburg to Nelspruit, a scenic two-hour drive from Sabi Sabi.

**Where to stay:** Situated in the world-renowned 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. Earth Lodge's 13 spacious



brutality and confident that I'll have the stunning pictures to prove it. I have a professional safari photographer assisting me

taking that perfect, once-in-a-lifetime shot.

"Professional photographic safaris offer an incredible opportunity

enough zoom to capture that perfect wildlife picture.

Either way, booking the services of a pro like Sabi Sabi's Andrew

roam the dense terrain of the Sabi Sabi reserve in a Land Cruiser, searching for 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."

### Focus on 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," Schoeman explains. "If you don't have a sharp

suites feature individually designed furniture, a private plunge pool and wooden sculptures by renowned South African artist Geoffrey Armstrong.

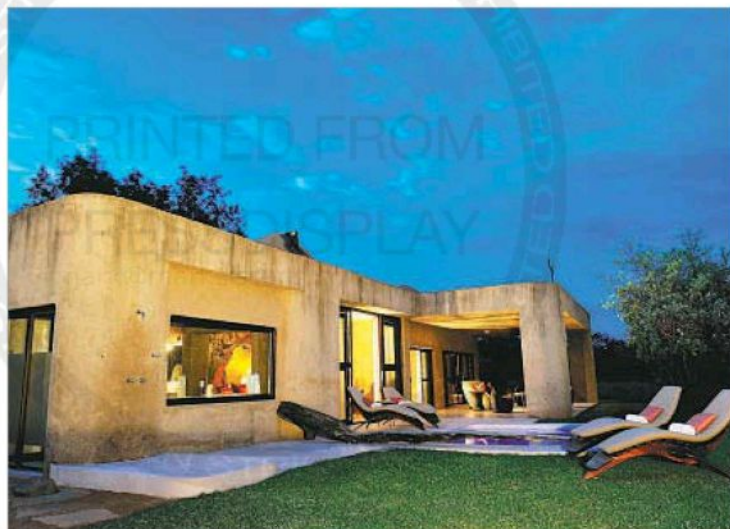
### Booking a Sabi Sabi photo safari:

Sabi Sabi's Professional Photographic Safaris run for one full day; reservations are required. The cost per guest photographer is approximately \$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- to 400-mm f/4 lens or a Canon 70 Mark III or IV with a Canon 300-mm f/2.8 or 500-mm f/4 lens. Additional equipment can be rented upon request.

### Outfitters:

Denver-based Africa Adventure Consultants ([adventuresinafrica.com](http://adventuresinafrica.com); 1-866-778-1089), Seattle-based African Safari Co. ([africansafarico.com](http://africansafarico.com); 1-800-414-3090) and Connecticut's African Portfolio ([onsafari.com](http://onsafari.com); 1-800-700-3677) offer a range of customizable luxury, adventure and family-oriented South African safaris that can include stays in 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 the extensive and extremely helpful online pro wildlife photography guide at [sabisabi.com/photography](http://sabisabi.com/photography).



Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve

**Sabi Sabi Private** Game Reserve has four luxury lodges. Each has a unique theme.

See **GET** Page 4K



# Get pointers from a pro

Continued from Page 6K

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. He said that 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, which is home to the Big 5 — lion, leopard, rhino, buffalo and elephant — as well



Mark Sissons/Special Contributor

**Night photography** requires a steady camera, so carry a beanbag or sturdy tripod.

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.

We get 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- to 400-mm 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 newfound understanding of how best to capture such savage beauty.

Mark Sissons is a freelance writer in Canada.



Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve

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

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