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TRUTH IN TRAVEL

JULY 2009

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WHERE TO STAY,
SWIM, EAT, PLAY



The Wild Thing

A new breed of lodges offer an alluring combination of animal spotting and spa-ing. Here's where to take your bikini and binocs



Happy valley: Karkloof Spa, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

MUCH MORE THAN A MERE SPA, SOUTH AFRICA'S KARKLOOF is a remote 8,650-acre private game reserve that makes the most of rural KwaZulu-Natal's drop-dead-gorgeous scenery. On game drives and guided walks, you'll traverse mist-belt forests crisscrossed by tumbling rivers and waterfalls, grassy plains, and dolerite plateaus in your pursuit of white rhino, black rhino, and herds of buffalo, giraffe, zebra, and antelope. The spa's eco-friendly low-impact design and ingenious "living" roofs on which animals graze offer up-close-and-personal wildlife encounters too: Therapists work their magic while warthogs, giraffes, and nyalas munch a few feet away, and even the stroll between the spa and your vil-

la, tucked into the forest, reveals inquisitive monkeys and bush pigs with whippy, aerial-like tails. The traditional Thai massage is the standout treatment here, and the world-class hydrotherapy facilities alone are worth the journey—don't miss the magically lit flotation pool after an African mud wrap in the rhassoul chamber. But if you really need to unwind, Karkloof's X factor is that 1,730 acres of the reserve are fenced (and thus free of potentially dangerous big game) so you can venture off on a whim, without a guide, in complete safety—and you have the spa as your reward after an afternoon careering through the hills on a mountain bike or hiking to the spectacular 340-foot-high Karkloof Falls (27-33-569-1321; karkloofspa.com; doubles, \$452, including meals). —**Jane Broughton**

Five More Safari Spas



Southern Ocean Lodge

KANGAROO ISLAND, AUSTRALIA

Australia's answer to the Galápagos is a 1,700-square-mile island inhabited by ospreys, koalas, and sea lions and in whose waters bottlenose dolphins and southern right whales are spotted. The lodge is a contemporary marvel: 21 suites along a rugged cliff, with terraces, sunken lounges, and floor-to-ceiling windows. The cliff-top spa has treatments by Australian brand Li'Tya; the three-hour Ocean Dreaming combines Aboriginal healing with marine essences, kelp, and sea salts (61-2-9918-4355; southernoceanlodge.com.au; suites, \$1,800–\$3,600).



Azura

BENGUERRA ISLAND, MOZAMBIQUE

Reopening this month after a fire, this 16-villa honeymooners' idyll is the place to see kingfishers and crocodiles in freshwater lakes, plus turtles, humpback whales, and even the rare dugong. The lodge combines driftwood chic with boutique sophistication; the spa has two treatment rooms under jekka thatch, and sunken outdoor showers. African-inspired treatments include a wrap using shea, avocado, and mafura butters infused with tingling peppermint and a massage with marula "miracle oil" (27-767-050-599; azura-retreats.com; villas, \$1,350–\$2,850).



Sasaab

KENYA

The Masai Mara might be unbeatable for seeing animals close up, but for real Kenyan wilderness, go north. From Sasaab, a nine-room lodge eight miles west of the Samburu National Reserve, you can venture forth in search of long-necked gerenuk, Somali ostriches, and Grevy's zebra, plus elephants and big cats, or enjoy mesmerizing views over the Ewaso Nyiro River from your tented room. Brit beauty queen Liz Earle, whose Naturally Active Skincare line uses botanicals from Kenya, opens a spa here in August (254-20-892-234; sasaab.com; doubles, \$1,180, all-inclusive).



Inkaterra Reserva Amazónica

PERU

This ecolodge is in one of the planet's most biodiverse regions. A Canopy Walk offers a window on the world of insects and birds (toucans and trogons), while on nearby Lake Sandoval, guests drift about in dugouts looking for giant otters, caimans, red howler monkeys, and side-necked turtles. The new Ena spa offers the Amazon Purification Treatment, a body mask and lymphatic-drainage massage using a cream derived from the local medicinal cat's claw plant (800-442-5042; inkaterra.com; doubles, \$541–\$645).



Four Seasons Tented Camp Golden Triangle

THAILAND

Guests come to this 15-tent hideaway to see one animal: the elephant. The hillside camp overlooking the Ruak River offers packages that include elephant driving and trekking through the jungle, as well as visits to hill tribes that now cultivate coffee beans instead of opium. Treatments at the open-air spa salas include the Mahout Recovery massage, which uses poultices of camphor, lime, and lemongrass to release lactic acid and soothe aching muscles (66-53-910-200; fourseasons.com; doubles, \$3,984 for two nights, all-inclusive). —**Lisa Johnson**