

Safari in overdrive

• **Writer**
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The bloodied remnants of a buffalo's corpse are draped over the branch of a Marula tree like a soaked towel that's been hung out to dry. We're 30 feet from a stretched-out female leopard, her belly rounded by the part consumption of her recent catch. Without warning, she springs up and jumps into the tree as an elephant bull approaches. Spotting its adversary, the elephant rams the tree trunk with his head, flapping his ears to warn the leopard of its presence, then casually saunters off.

We are transfixed at the scene, safely seated in our jeep, vewing this rare altercation unfold between two of Africa's 'big five' – a term introduced by Africa's first European settlers for the five most dangerous animals to hunt on foot: hippo, elephant, leopard, lion and buffalo. We're staying at The Farmstead at Royal Malewane, located within Thornybush, a 14,000-hectare concession of land in the northern part of the Kruger National Park in the Limpopo province of South Africa. As we embark on our first game drive, our ranger, Andre, informs us that our tracker, Lucas, is one of only seven 'master trackers' in the world, who subsequently proves his credentials by supporting Andre to track all of the big five during our stay. After stopping for a sundowner in the bush, we spot an elusive pack of hyenas, with two newly-born cubs gingerly emerging from their den, probably one of their first explorations.

The Farmstead is the latest addition to the Royal Portfolio properties, a collection of striking hotels and lodges located in distinct destinations across South Africa. The Farmstead comprises three farm style suites offering extravagant accommodation, each with a private deck and plunge pool, while the Farmhouse is a four-bedroomed self-contained property sleeping up to eight people, which is available for hire with its own designated staff and ranger.

Each of the properties in the portfolio have been spectacularly designed by the owner, Liz Biden, who has sourced striking artefacts during her travels around the globe, which have been ingeniously integrated into the property, including onate carved wooden doorframes sourced from Zanzibar and a gargantuan serving hatch which was once a counter in a North African bank. Many of the Farmstead's furnishings have been custom-made, with walls adorned with contemporary pieces by notable African artists, including Kudzanai Chiurai and James Jana.

After returning from a morning safari drive, we relish our a la carte breakfast on the deck while watching a dazzle of zebras saunter up to The Farmstead's waterhole for their first drink of the day. We meet with the MD of the Royal Portfolio, Matt Bidden, who explains that The Farmstead has developed a close working relationship with the local Moletele community of approximately 2,000 people, who have leased their land to Royal Malewane, with the Royal Portfolio Foundation providing medical care and childhood development programs. The finest example of African eco-tourism

Rates start from R28,750 / ca. £1,439 per person sharing per night and are fully-inclusive of accommodation, all meals/beverages, 2 daily game drives and bush walks.

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• Main deck fire-pit



• Indoor dining area



• Bedroom