

Kruger safari so good



From Travel 1

Solo buffalo are not to be taken lightly; they're usually old, grumpy and aggressive.

The three-night, four-day safari quickly falls into a daily routine.

We rise early for a four-hour walk followed by a three-course breakfast.

We lounge in hammocks in the heat of the day, animal-watch from the main camp with binoculars before high tea of savoury and sweet delights, then a three-hour game drive broken with gin and tonics at sunset.

This is all capped off with a four-course meal and wine before bedtime.

Tracking wild rhino is a daunting task. The male rhino is territorial and will scratch the earth with his back feet to mark his terrain.

Find these marks and estimate how long since it was made by evaluating the moisture of the mud.

Dung middens are also made on border boundaries to ward off other male rhinos.

Place your hand in these to feel the warmth and find out how long since the rhino was last here.

It's possible to see rhino tracks around waterholes, on the sandy ground in the scrub and to find mud samples on bush leaves left by a rhino fresh from a mud bath.

It gets exciting because these mud-laden leaves reveal still-wet mud, meaning the rhino is not far away.

IT GETS positively thrilling when you finally see the animal.

Not one, but two, mother and baby come running from our right, spooked by a sudden movement one of our party made without thinking.

Thankfully, the running rhinos miss us, more eager to get away than to turn and charge.

After tracking elephants one morning for more than an hour we were getting frustrated that these



five-tonne beasts were eluding us, only to look up and see two bull elephants grazing 100m away.

The next two hours were spent on our toes, following these giant beasts and staying downwind so they could not smell us.

We knew they could turn, charge and trample us to the ground in one movement — or simply disappear from sight in seconds.

They did the latter many times.

But not all good things come in big packages. Shudu shows us millipedes, dung beetles and scorpions.

We wander into herds of zebra and hear impala making distress calls to let their mates know we are there.

These calls let lions and leopards know the impala have seen them and the predators usually drop the hunt.

Game drives are equally exciting.

We see lions fat from a fresh buffalo kill, hordes of vultures overhead and

leopard cubs practising their tree-climbing skills.

All this is seen from the safety of our open-topped safari vehicle.

There is no electricity and no mobile-phone reception at Ngala Walking Safari camp.

Firelight, lanterns and candles give a haunting, after-dark beauty and the call of wildlife is an unforgettable soundtrack.

We didn't stumble on any lions on

THE DEAL



Getting there: Thai Airways International flies from Melbourne to Johannesburg.

www.thaiairways.com.au or ph: 1300 651 960. Ngala can arrange flights to the reserve's private airstrip from Johannesburg.

Staying: Conservation Corporation Africa's Ngala Walking Safari from \$270 a person a night, including accommodation, game drives, guided walks, food and alcohol. Book now for the 2008 season, from March-November.

More information: www.ccafrica.com

The king: (main picture) a Kruger Park male lion and his cub.

Spotted: (above left) the camp employs a guard to keep leopards at bay.

foot during our four days. We did run into some solo buffalo, the type you don't want to meet in a bar.

I did what most sane humans would do — I hid with the others, steadfast in our belief the buffalo couldn't see us behind the leafless bush that provided little protection should he decide to make a run for us.

Time passed and so did he. Shudu laughed and we moved on. That's life in the bush.



Five tonnes of trouble: stay downwind of elephants to avoid detection.



Don't mess with them: hippos kill more humans each year than any other animal in Africa.