

The Wild, Wild Best AmaKhosi Safari Lodge

Jacqueline Cochrane

Certainly, we're a strange sight. A troop of gumboot-clad safari-soldiers, our nocturnal navigation is made possible only by the yellow glow of our headlamps, and the gentle coruscation of the stars above. Again and again we circumnavigate the pond and its surrounding battlefield of mushy marshland, our clandestine exploration punctuated by sudden splashings-about and cries of discovery.

Perhaps even more peculiar than the appearance of our activity, is the reason for it. We are in search of an army that, despite screaming its presence all around us, proves supremely elusive. We are in search of an army of frogs.

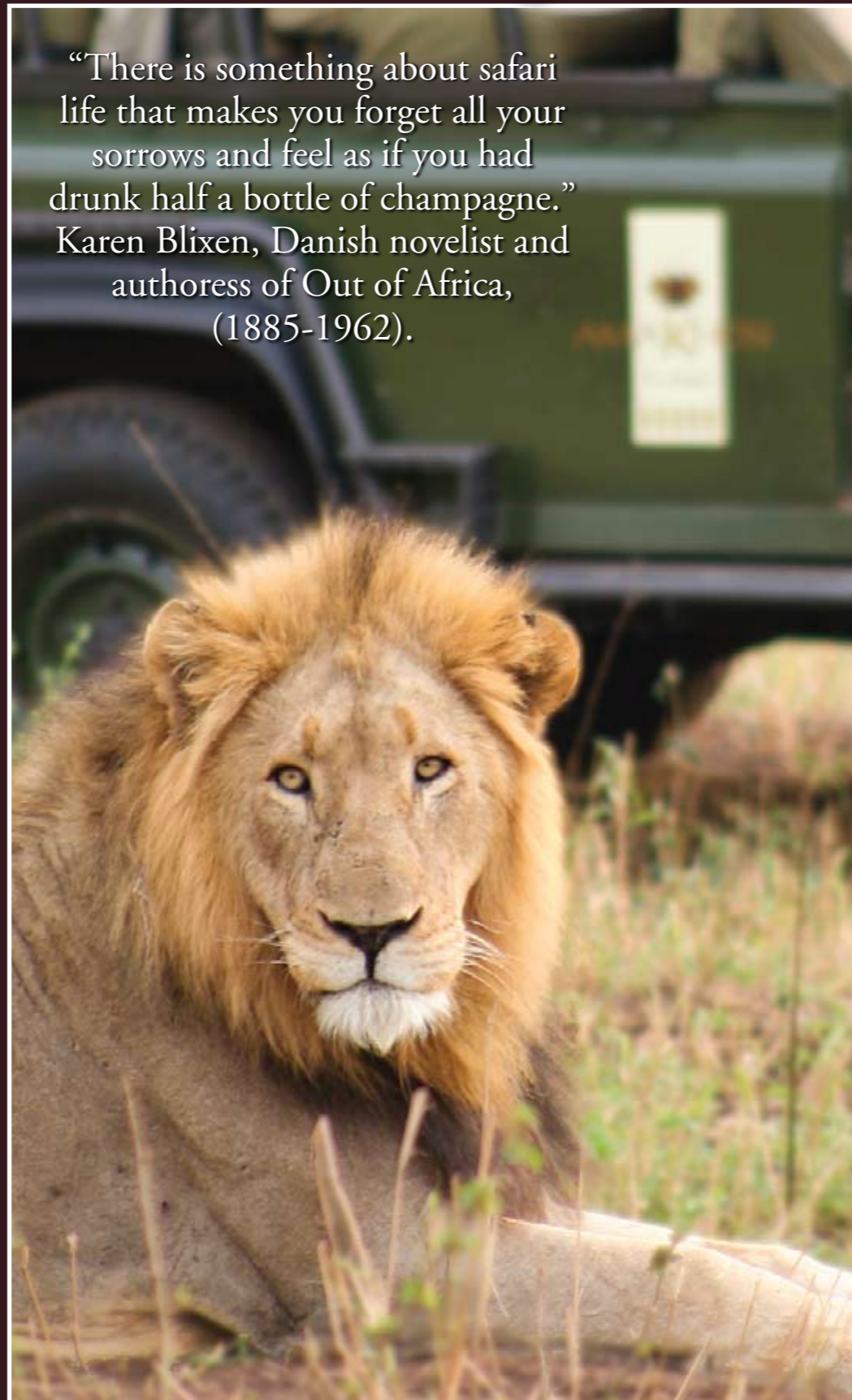
"So, we'll be going on a frogging-safari," I tell my partner prior to visiting AmaKhosi Safari Lodge. He's doubtful; the prospect of a micro-safari fails to rouse much eagerness. "It's all about frogs; a frogging safari, they call it," I continue, with hopeful enthusiasm.

The Lodge is situated in the verdant 12,000-hectare AmaZulu Game Reserve in northern KwaZulu-Natal. Expect a 5.5-hour drive from Johannesburg, and 4 hours from Durban.

Our river-suite is on the banks of the Mkuze River. Large uninterrupted windows allow you to snuggle under crisp sheets, and still feel connected to the wilderness outside. The suites boast a private lounge with a fully stocked mini-bar, and the en-suite bathroom features an ingeniously designed bath pour deux. Honeymoon chalets also have private plunge pools and hammocks.

The next morning, it is still dark when the phone rings with our early morning wake-up call. Although game drives are always unpredictable, I haul myself out of bed with an inkling that this early-morning torment might just be worth it.

"There is something about safari life that makes you forget all your sorrows and feel as if you had drunk half a bottle of champagne."
Karen Blixen, Danish novelist and authoress of *Out of Africa*, (1885-1962).



Our first sighting is a family of warthog. Disarmingly ugly, they eye us suspiciously before scampering off into the thick undergrowth, tails rigid with indignation. Our vehicle obediently purrs its way along and, rounding a corner, an old male giraffe seems astonished to see us. "What odd-looking creatures," he seems to be thinking. After a second's hesitation, he lopes off among the trees as though in slow motion.

It is when we stop for morning tea that our rangerspotsthesleekformofafemalecheetah. Close behind her, tufts of light yellow fur expose her four cubs. We pack up the snacks and soon find them relaxing underneath a clump of leafy shrubs. Seemingly oblivious to us, our knowledgeable game-ranger tells us that their apparent ease is deceptive.

More than 12 hours after, the balmy afternoon had long since vanished into an inky night. We're given gumboots, a frogging checklist, and a plastic bag. Shortly after setting out on our quest, our safari-sergeant shouts an order: "Come! Look what I found!" We all wade eagerly towards him. "Now this little chap," he says, not without a tone of affection, "this is a foam nest frog." We stare in wonderment at the shining creature in his hand. I look at my partner. Illuminated by the dim glow of his headlamp, I see reflected in his face my own childlike excitement.

A few weeks later, discuss the magic of our frogging-safari to friends. "My favourite was the Tinker Reed Frog; bright green and kind of cheeky!" I say. "I preferred the one with red stripes better," my partner quips at our nonplussed companions. "But the cheetah sighting was amazing," I quickly add.

If you're looking for a safari-experience with a twist, AmaKhosi Safari Lodge is bound to exceed to your expectations. And if its comfort, cuisine and convenience you want, they'll ensure you receive service fit for royalty.

W: www.amakhosi.com
T: +27 (0)34 414 1157