

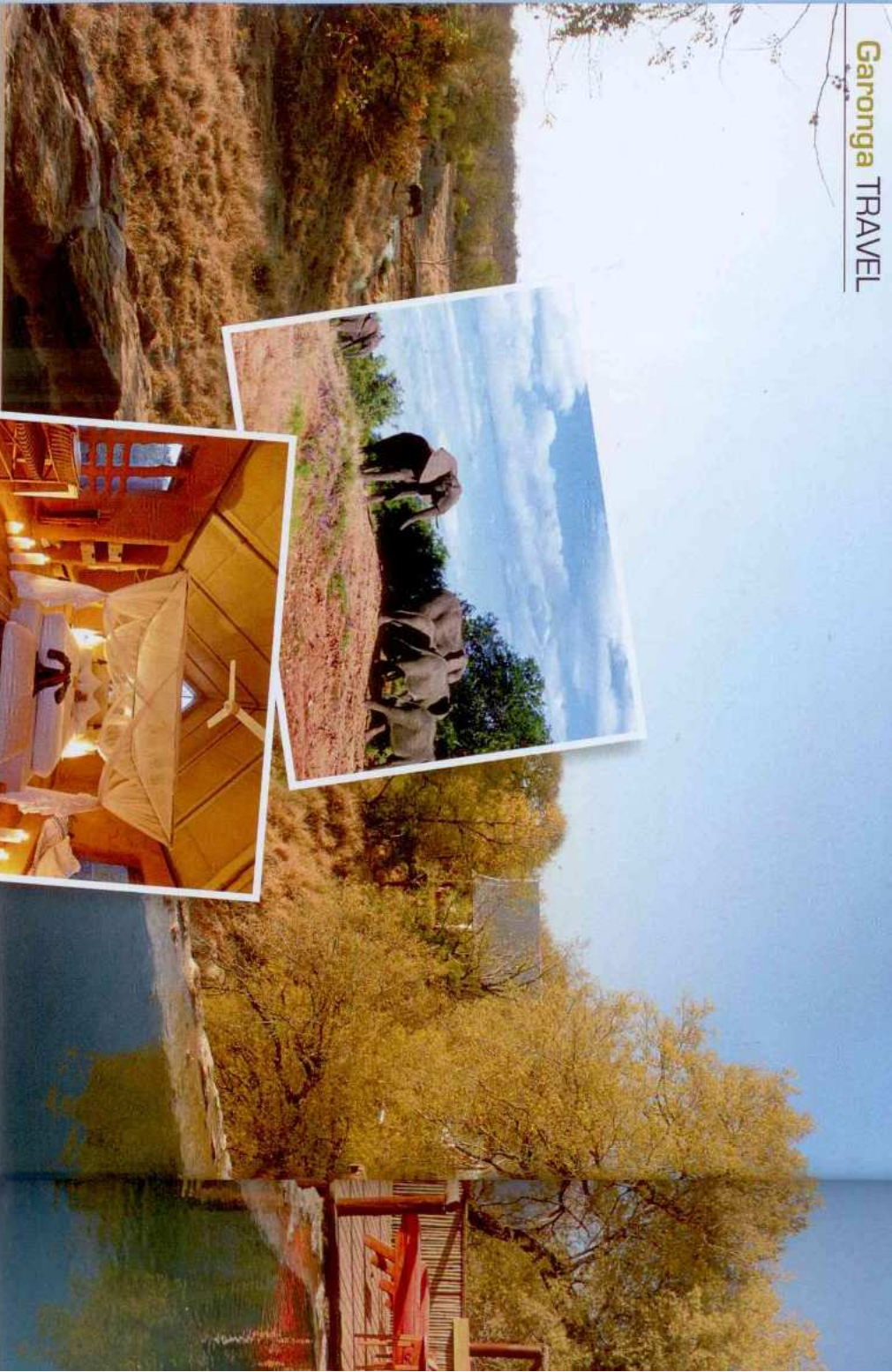
# SAFARI FOR THE SOUL- Garonga

Relax and unwind with massages, spa treatments or even picnics in the tree house. Written by Sara Essop.

We hurtled down the ochre path, the cool wind exhilarating, in our faces. Lawrence, the game ranger, maneuvered the Landrover expertly around the torn-down trees, through dense bushes and around dusty bends. It was evidently the path less traveled. At one point, a wildebeest emerged from the bush and ran across the path in front of us. We missed it by inches, unshaken. We'd already had some rhino run past us. We had a mission. We were in search of the mighty Garonga, the elephant, as named by the Karonga people.

On the two-way radio, Lawrence was sharing information on the elephants' whereabouts with a game ranger from neighboring Makalali, who shared the 26000ha conservancy with Garonga. We felt closer and closer and then suddenly we turned a corner, and there they were. An old male and a young female, enjoying an evening meal. Nearby, we could hear more elephants trumpeting. We sat about 6 meters away in full view of the tusked giants, and watched them, enjoying the tranquility of the scene, while the last embers of the orange African sun faded over the horizon.





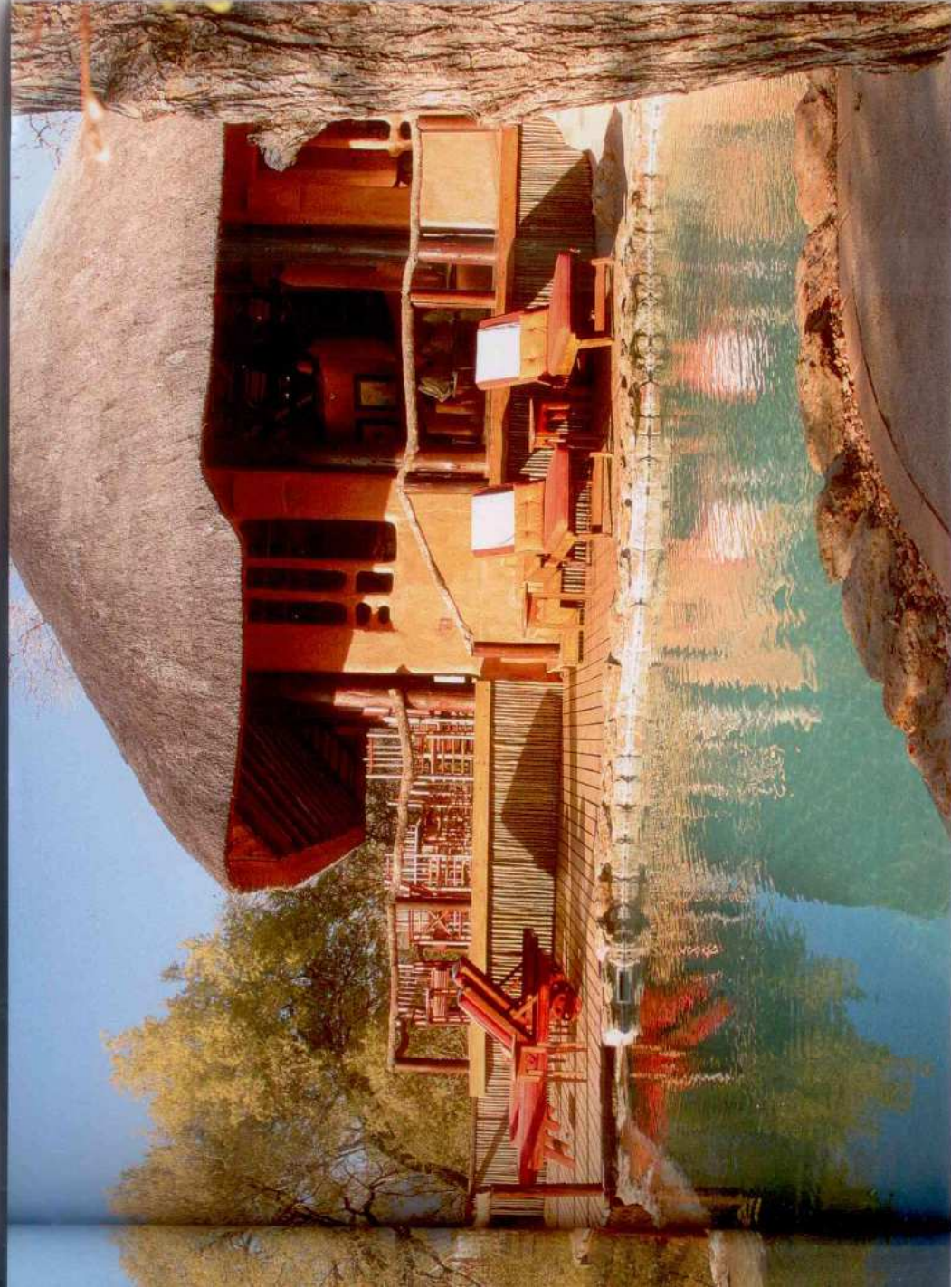
This was our second evening in Garonga. As the knowledgeable game rangers regaled us with interesting tales, they asked us what animals we would prefer to track. Not having seen any elephants for the past three years in the concrete jungle of Johannesburg, we had told Lawrence that we wanted to see the mighty tuskers. He hospitably obliged. This was a characteristic consistent among all the employees at Garonga. Each one was eager to please. Each one also had their own fascinating story to tell, gleaned from an impressive resume which had culminated in them being selected at Garonga.

We had spent a lazy afternoon lounging against cushions in a cozy tree house overlooking the dried riverbed. The picnic lunch spread out for us was just what the doctor ordered for the hot summer day. We could see baboons and warthogs roaming around from the excellent viewpoint. We felt part of their environment, unobtrusive.

Thoughtful staff ensured that we were escorted everywhere, however once we were safe and sound at our destination, we were left alone so as not to impinge on our intimate privacy. One could also have a sleep-out experience for a rich night-time game viewing experience.

Garonga Safari Camp is an exclusive 12 bed camp in the greater Makalali Conservancy situated west of the Kruger National Park. It is a six-hour drive from Johannesburg and a three-hour drive from Nelspruit. It was opened in 1997 by a British gentleman and is targeted mainly at the foreign market. However, it is becoming increasingly popular with locals as well. The luxury tented suites have indoor and outdoor showers and boast their own platform decks with hammocks. The tents look down onto a dry river bed. Small animals drop by regularly and one need not wait for the game drives in order to view game. There is also now a second camp called Little Garonga

(since 2001) not semi-private pa... or on a s... Morning... taken with... One can g... massage t... in the tree... pool. The... there are... cheetah, H... game, inte... after the r... served be... dinner is t... winter eve... guests ca... The lim... any point... receives i... the feelin... the scene



(since 2007) that has a slightly different style (not semi-tented), and can be booked out for private parties of up to 6 adults and 2 children - or on a suite-by-suite basis.

Morning and evening game drives can be taken with the rest of the day at one's leisure. One can get some refreshing sleep, get a massage or other spa treatment, have a picnic in the tree house or swim in the swimming pool. The options are plenty. In terms of game, there are elephants, rhino, lions, leopard, cheetah, hippos and numerous types of plains game, inter alia. A hearty breakfast is served after the morning game drive and high tea is served before the evening drive. A sumptuous dinner is then served after the game drive. On winter evenings, a huge fireplace is lit where guests can gather before dinner.

The limited number of guests allowed at any point in time ensures that each guest receives individualized attention. One gets the feeling that a lot of work happens behind the scenes to make sure that one's stay is

comfortable. From the welcome committee, to the personalized handwritten notes, to the resident massage therapist, every step is taken to make guests feel pampered. Attention to detail is evident. One

evening, on returning to our room we found the room and bathroom bathed in rose petals and tea-light candles. Very thoughtful...and perfect for a romantic sojourn. This is probably one of the reasons why it is such a popular wedding venue.

We were there for two nights only but a minimum stay of three nights is recommended. We felt ultra-special and wanted for nothing. It was the perfect recipe to de-stress and we felt like children again after just having had our first child. It was truly a safari for the soul and we hope to return there again soon. **END**

