



Francesca Syz

LONDOLOZI PRIVATE Game Reserve has a special place in my heart. Before I went there a decade ago, I'd never been to Africa. With its ground-breaking ethic, placing equal importance on land, wildlife and indigenous people, it couldn't have been a better introduction to conservation tourism. Not only was it creating employment, but it was also giving local people the opportunity to learn new skills, which might inspire them to set up their own conservation model one day.

When Nelson Mandela first stayed there on his release from prison in 1990, he would take a stroll through the staff village each morning. Had he walked without pausing, it would have taken just five minutes. But because he would stop and chat to every person he met,

One of the refurbished Granite Suites at Londolozi Private Game Reserve



# Call of the wild

A private reserve in South Africa where Nelson Mandela enjoyed an early taste of freedom

it generally took about two hours. It seems the specialness of this family-run game reserve in the Greater Kruger National Park was not lost on him either.

The Varty family has owned the land on which Londolozi sits since 1926, and it was brothers Dave and John Varty who shifted its axis in 1972, from being somewhere people came to shoot wildlife with a gun into somewhere they came to shoot it with a camera. Today, it's still run by Dave, his wife Shan and their bright, funny, worldly-wise children, Bronwyn and Boyd. Starting life as one small camp on the banks of the Sand River, Londolozi is now five camps, the largest with 10 rooms, the smallest with three. Photographic safaris are still a big part of the offering.

Earlier this year, I returned to stay in one of the refurbished Granite Suites, a three-room camp with the loveliest, loftiest bedrooms, outdoor riverside tubs and a sunken bar area on a terrace. Londolozi was reassuringly as I remembered it: exceptional drivers and guides (thank you, Sersant and Andrea), magical sightings of elephant, leopard, lion, giraffe, hippo and rhino within moments of leaving the compound, the sweetest-smelling air and



otherworldly light at dawn and dusk.

But there was one notable addition: The Healing House at Varty Camp - Londolozi's first spa. Since my last visit, Bronwyn and Boyd had travelled the world to learn the best healing techniques, and trained under Oprah Winfrey's life coach Martha Beck. Consequently, the Healing House is a thoughtful, forward-thinking wellness offering, with an enticing blend of

nature-based experiences. Try a Himalayan-salt sauna and biophony - where recordings of the sounds of nature are played to you through headphones, stimulating a nervous system-repairing state of deep relaxation. Or, on more focused week-long retreats, there are silent game drives to still the mind, and the chance to track wild animals on foot, a thrilling exercise designed to reactivate your inner guidance system.

**Knighton Reeve**

(knightonreeve.co.uk) offers four fully inclusive nights at Londolozi Varty Camp, including international flights, from £4,245 per person, based on two sharing