



## Swinging safari

FOR THE TRAVELLING GOLFER (AND THEIR FAMILY) WHO APPRECIATES IMMACULATE COURSES, IMPECCABLE HOTELS, SHINING SEASCAPES AND THE OCCASIONAL SAFARI DRIVE, SOUTH AFRICA IS HARD TO BEAT, SAYS *Peter Swain*.

IF AFRICAN WILDLIFE SAFARI DEVO-tees traditionally look for the Big Five, then modern golfers visiting the continent search out the Big Seven, namely elephant, lion, leopard, buffalo and rhinoceros, plus superlative wines and world-class courses.

With a shared language and similar sporting heritage, South Africans and Australians have much in common. Both cultures enjoy the great outdoors and the finer things in life, and share a sense of adventure. Take, for instance, the Fairmont Zimbali, an easy 20-minute drive from the new King Shaka International Airport, 50 kilometres north of Durban. Set along KwaZulu-Natal's dazzling

Dolphin Coast, the destination has two sumptuous hotels and an outstanding Tom Weiskopf championship course.

The 7,134-yard layout is threaded through the gently rolling hills of a tropical conservation reserve. Safeguarding the environment is a priority, so the rough is kept long, putting a premium on accurate approach play. Elevated tees and wide fairways invite ambitious driving, with the wind and steamy heat adding spice to the round. Unusually for Africa, it's a cart-only course.

Hunkered down under the forest canopy, overlooking the course and the Indian Ocean, the 76-room Fair-

mont Zimbali Lodge has something of a colonial, *Out of Africa* feel to it. With fish eagles soaring overhead, bush-buck and vervet monkeys scampering through the lush grounds, it's an old-school wood-panelled oasis of sophistication.

If the Lodge is a classic Rolls-Royce, then the Zimbali Resort just down the road is a Ferrari – modern, sleek and very well equipped. Opened in 2010, right on the beach, this is a contemporary 154-room marvel with a palatial spa, five pools, tennis and squash courts, nine restaurants and bars, and a good choice of rooms. The most exclusive Penthouse and Presidential suites have

multiple bedrooms, kitchen with butler's pantry, study, dining room, media room, and living room designed for entertaining. Terraces with dramatic ocean views are perfect for dining al fresco, or socialising over sundowners.

Both hotels have easy access to the shoreline and excellent provisions for a host of watersports. There are four other courses including the very fine Durban Country Club nearby, making Zimbali an ideal base for an extended golf break. The Lodge is probably better suited to travellers hankering after a traditional, romantic African experience, while the Resort is ideal for families. >>



LUXE LINKS  
The 17<sup>th</sup> hole of the  
Montagu Course at  
Fancourt.

On a larger scale, and with even more attractions, Sun City is also a winner. Two hours north of Johannesburg, the Sun International destination has four hotels, including the flat-out five-star Palace of the Lost City, and two exemplary Gary Player 18-hole courses. The nearby Pilanesberg National Park, several casinos, luxurious spas, a steam railway and vast water park – the Valley of the Waves – make for a unique package.

The Gary Player Country Club course, so the great man himself says, “is a sleeping giant. The lush fairways are in pristine condition, but the bush on both sides will just

*Mid- and high-handicappers will find the 6,683-yard resort set up a more relaxing round – except when they’re playing over the dozen or so Nile crocodiles in the pond guarding the green on the short 13<sup>th</sup>.*

eat you up if you don’t treat each hole with respect.” The standout hole is probably the ninth, a par-five, with the approach over water onto an island green – a regular crowd-pleaser at the annual Nedbank Golf Challenge, once known as the Sun City Million. Since 1981, the invitational event has been won by the likes of Ernie Els, Seve Ballesteros, Lee Westwood and Robert Allenby, and is still a high-

light of the South African golfing calendar. The GPCC has a variety of tees so players of all standards can enjoy its taxing design, but wherever you play from it’s a tough test of golf. The Lost City course, by the same designer, is altogether more forgiving. Mid- and high-handicappers will find the 6,683-yard resort set up a more relaxing round – except when they’re playing over the dozen or so Nile crocodiles in the

pond guarding the green on the short 13<sup>th</sup>.

Under clear blue African skies, the Big Five plus a few crocs can be tracked down nearby in their natural habitat on malaria-free safaris – particularly appealing for parents. Day or night, modes of transport vary from jeep to elephant, quad bike or even hot air balloon.

The 335-room Palace of the Lost City is the upmarket offering,

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The swimming pool at Zimbali Lodge. OPPOSITE PAGE Clockwise from top left: Zimbali Resort penthouse suite; Vinum bar at Zimbali Resort; Lobby at Sun City; Ninth hole of the Gary Player Course at Sun City.



with the Cascades not far behind, while the Sun City Hotel and family-oriented Cabanas are good value for money. The casinos have lost some of their 1980s Sin City aura, with the whole resort now aimed more at families, but there is still sophisticated late-night cabaret-style entertainment to be enjoyed in what is probably Africa’s most varied resort.

Down on the Garden Route, the scenic stretch of coastline on the continent’s southern tip between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, Fancourt is home to yet another Gary Player masterpiece. The older parkland Montagu and Outeniqua

courses are good, but the Links, completed in the year 2000, is an absolute gem. It has already hosted the Presidents Cup between the US and International Teams, as well as the South African Open and the Volvo Golf Champions event, with the authoritative *Golf Digest* rating it the best course in Africa.

Purists might balk at the use of the word “links”, because mountains of soil have been moved to create this 7,578-yard work of art, but no golfer could possibly complain about the extraordinary conditioning and sublime design. Running between towering dunes, with wetlands in play on several holes,

it’s unquestionably a modern must-play classic. As this is an exclusive private club, the only players on the three courses other than members are guests staying at the 115-room Fancourt Hotel or the 150 year old 18-suite Manor House. Service and amenities in both are impeccable, and the local wines world-class, so it was no surprise when, in 2012, CNN Travel named Fancourt the ninth best golf resort in the world, up there with Pebble Beach and St Andrews.

In recent years, South African golfers have taken on the world and won. Now their golf resorts are following suit.

#### WHERE TO STAY

**Fairmont Zimbali Lodge**  
Rooms are priced from ZAR2,299 (about A\$242) per night plus taxes.  
[fairmont.com/zimbali-lodge](http://fairmont.com/zimbali-lodge)

**Fairmont Zimbali Resort**  
Rooms are priced from ZAR2,999 (about A\$315) per night and suites from ZAR4,199 (about A\$441) per night plus taxes.  
[fairmont.com/zimbali-resort](http://fairmont.com/zimbali-resort)

**Palace of the Lost City**  
Rooms are priced from ZAR2,272 (about A\$239) per night and suites from ZAR4,588 (about A\$482) per night.  
[sun-city-south-africa.com/palace-of-the-lost-city](http://sun-city-south-africa.com/palace-of-the-lost-city)

**Fancourt Hotel**  
Rooms are priced from ZAR3,455 (about A\$363) per night and suites from ZAR4,535 (about A\$476) per night.

**Manor House**  
Suites are priced from ZAR6,000 (about A\$630) per night.  
[fancourt.co.za](http://fancourt.co.za)

#### GETTING THERE

South African Airways flies direct to Johannesburg, South Africa from Sydney and Perth daily. Return economy fares are priced from A\$1,478 and business class fares from A\$4,834. Flight time is 11-14 hours.  
[flysaa.com](http://flysaa.com)

