

Samara hatches a big game plan

BY SARAH BILLIMORE

SAMARA Private Game Reserve has plenty to offer in the way of bush charm, luxury accommodation and game viewing but plans are afoot to expand the reserve and its species list extensively in the coming months, affording visitors front-row seats to the development of what

is planned to become one of South Africa's most complete wildlife experiences.

Already covering more than 28,000 hectares, the reserve is located near Graaff Reinet and just three hours from the Port Elizabeth airport. In recent years, land destroyed by early farming practices has been resuscitated and native cheetah re-

introduced, another reason why customers will not find the Big Five roaming freely there yet.

While the infrastructure at Samara is well-established and varied lodgings fur-

initative, are also intended to feed the herd of elephants tipped for introduction in the coming months; one in a number of first steps toward the reserve owners Sarah and Mark Tompkins' end goal of re-establishing wildlife migrations that disappeared from the Camdeboo region many years ago.

In the meantime, varied game, including giraffe, zebra, rhino and black wildebeest, eland, kudu and gemsbok, aardvark, vervet monkeys and meerkats, among others, can be easily spotted on frequently-operated game drives or even from the front patio of guest accommodations.

It is a getaway that provides an opportunity for travellers to sidle up close to nature or to dine under a star-lit Karoo sky; its accessibility ensuring visitor numbers will only grow.

Samara may not be the



▲ The main homestead at the Karoo Lodge houses three Lodge Suites, a communal living room, bar and dining area, a swimming pool and children's centre. Its wide veranda is the perfect spot for laid-back game viewing as wildlife often wander into the main lodge's surrounds.



▲ Guests may catch a glimpse of Sibella, Samara's star attraction, on foot.

nished with luxury, Afro-inspired furnishings, there are other signs of bigger tourist draw-cards to come.

Spekboom, abundant in part due to a guest-planting



▲ Three Karoo Suites are available. Each en-suite cottage is air-conditioned and has an outdoor shower and a fireplace.

typical game park but does have limitless potential and big aspirations being put into action. Commercially, the plan is to generate high levels of repeat visitors, local and foreign, intent on experiencing its new and varied developments.

*Samara is promoting a special for South African residents, valid until December 15. Customers book the lowest-priced suite and qualify for a free upgrade (subject to availability) and receive a free bottle of sparkling wine and a 15-minute Khoi-san head massage.



▲ The Manor House can be booked for up to eight guests. An infinity pool is available for their exclusive use.



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What the operators say

TIR asks Wendy Wu Tours Business Development Manager, Alet Steyn, what Cambodia has to offer customers looking to spend their year-end break in Asia.

Why Cambodia? It is a unique destination and home to one of the most amazing sites, the temples of Angkor. It has unspoilt beaches, pristine forests and beautiful colonial cities like Phnom Penh, Battambang and Kep. We are seeing greater interest in Cambodia. Travellers are also looking for an Asian destination offering something different from the norm.

Must-see highlights? One of the most breathtaking sites is the temples of Angkor in Siem Reap. The Ta Prohm Temple is the most atmospheric ruin at Angkor. Unlike the other monuments of Angkor, it has been left to be swallowed by the jungle. Phnom Penh is home to the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes and the Killing Fields.

Most popular itinerary? Classic Cambodia: A five-day, land-only tour from R7,400 pps with four-star accommodation. Visits Phnom Penh and Siem Reap and includes a Mekong River Cruise and visits to Banteay Srei and Banteay Samre, Prasat Kravan. Tours between August and February include a boat trip on Tonle Sap, visiting floating fishing villages. Touring during March to

July includes a visit to the National Silk Centre in Puok.

General information

Cambodia has a tropical climate with the wet season from May to October. Dry season is between November and April. The dry season can be extremely hot, especially during April, with temperatures reaching 40°C and with very high humidity. The ideal period to travel is between November to March; although day temperatures can still be high, the nights become cooler.

The local currency is the Riel (KHR) but the US dollar is used in all transactions, with Riel only used as change for less than one US dollar. It is recommended that travellers take small denominations of US\$20 or less, as some of the locals do not accept notes above that.

There are only a few currency exchange locations in Cambodia.

Cameras are not allowed in some sight-seeing spots, particularly temples and pagodas.

Visas are obtainable upon arrival at the airport. Visitors need two colour passport photos and approximately US\$20-25 in cash.



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