

My favourite things

- Seeing the cheetahs, even though they were quite far away because the mother had just had babies.
- The swimming pool at The Manor: we were the first kids ever to swim in it! We played games while the grown-ups had a loooong lunch near the pool.
- One night we had supper under the stars and there was a guy there who knew what they all were and was showing them to us. There was also a telescope so we could see them all better.
- Playing soccer with my friend Max and the guides.

Samara Private Game Reserve Eastern Cape

Theo, nine, and his sister Alice, eight, spent a weekend at Samara Game Lodge with their mum, her friend and two of her children.

First impressions

We flew to PE, then got a Karoo Connections shuttle to the lodge with a man called Johan Sparrus, who told us loads of stories about the Boer War, and the plants and animals. It was a long way but I wasn't bored at all. Samara was brilliant. When we got there they gave each of us a folder with all the animals that we could see there, and we took it with us when we went on the game drives to tick off the animals we saw. Our ranger André knew a lot about all the animals, but it's not just about the animals; it's about conservation and saving plants. We went on drives early in the morning (we had hot chocolate and rusks), and in the afternoon we went for walks while Mom read. I liked it that we slept in the same room as my mum (it was huge!) and they had loads of games and books.

I was excited because I saw a Kori Bustard – they're the biggest birds in the world that can still fly (but only just). There were stacks of meerkats outside our room, which was cool.

Meals etc

My mom loved the food: there were

Top tips for other kids

- Bring a soccer ball, your swimming costume and loads of books and games: there's no cellphone reception and only one TV.
- Take warm clothes and shoes (even when it's hot during the day it's cold on night game drives).
- Bring a hat and sunblock!



THE LODGE AT NIGHT; ALICE LOVES READING, JUST LIKE MOM; THAT'S ME HAVING FUN IN THE POOL.



interesting things like gemsbok fillet and white bean purée, but there was also cool food for kids, like pasta with pesto and chops and chicken. If we didn't like something and asked for something else they made it for us... and they have the best fresh, hot bread rolls. We had supper in a boma one night under the stars, and they put hot water bottles and blankets on all of our chairs so we were warm. And there was a huge fire with sparks going up into the sky.

Making friends

When we went there we were with our friends, but it's a cool place for kids – you can walk and ride and swim – and it would have been good to have other kids there.

If I were in charge...

I would make the game drives a bit shorter – they were four hours long.

And Mum and Dad?

Dad wasn't there but I know he would have liked it because he loves the Karoo. And my mum was very happy because she couldn't use her cellphone, and because she was there with her friend. Also, she kept on saying how peaceful and relaxing it was. And in the afternoons André, our guide, would take

me and Alice and the other kids out for a long walk and my mum would lie around reading. One day she went to the spa and had a massage, which she also really liked... the food was brilliant, and that makes her happy!

The boring bit

Samara (049 891 0558) is a five-star lodge situated in the famous Plains of Camdeboo in the Karoo. Voted one of the 15 best safari experiences in the world by *Harper's Bazaar* last year, it's a three-hour drive from PE airport: we used Karoo Connections (call 049 892 3978; costs range between R1 900 to R3 330, depending on the number of people). The room rates vary from R2 900 to R5 500 per person sharing per night, or eight people could hire the exquisite and private Manor lodge for R25 000 per night. Tariffs include gorgeous accommodation, all meals, local drinks, house wines and sundowners, and two open Land Rover safaris per day. Imported or premium wines are excluded, as is laundry, phone, fax and transfers to and from the airport. Children under 14 pay reduced rates – on a sliding scale from 25% to 50% of full tariff, and can be accommodated in the parents' suite.