

**SOUTHERN & EAST AFRICAN**

April 7 2026

# **TOURISM UPDATE**

**Safari lodges**

## **Mass tourism is not the only answer**

**Conservation coalition  
stems poaching**

**Minor expands its  
footprint**



# Safari lodges

Safari lodges remain at the heart of South Africa's wildlife tourism, offering unforgettable encounters with nature and memorable experiences both on and off the game drive. Today, lodges are raising the bar in luxury, sustainability and authenticity.

## Mass tourism is not the only answer

■ *Kate Nathan*

IN JANUARY, South Africa's Minister of Tourism, **Patricia de Lille**, used the WEF Summit at Davos to highlight the coming opening of South Africa's first Club Med and to urge international investors to replicate the Club Med model across the country.

Come July, Club Med will open a R2.5 billion (€127.4m) beach and safari resort in KZN, reported to be the most expensive destination-scale tourism venture in the country's history.

On the basis of the confidence shown by Club Med, the South African government is now actively encouraging international tourism operators similar to Club Med to pursue similar large-scale, destination-based developments across the country, according to the Minister.

De Lille said tourism had been identified as a priority sector, along with electricity, transport and mining, capable of lifting GDP growth to at least 3.5% in 2026, 2027 and 2028, and of course creating jobs.

But while mass tourism might have the power to provide jobs in the geographical areas where it operates, it might not be the panacea for South Africa that it appears to be, in the long run.

"Tourism growth in isolation doesn't serve Africa's long-term future if conservation and community inclusion aren't part of the core model. Africa's



Lekkerwater, a beach lodge in the heart of the De Hoop Nature Reserve in the Western Cape. Source: Natural Selection

tourism product is nature – wildlife, landscapes and culture. If tourism grows but sensitive ecosystems are degraded or communities are excluded, the model eventually undermines itself," says **Sean Hough**, Founder of tour operator, Hidden Africa.

"The global tourism playbook is simple: build and scale, in the best location closest to the biggest attraction or with the best view. That's the mass tourism mantra.

"A recent example illustrates the risk of importing this thinking into Africa. A Ritz-Carlton luxury

lodge was built on the Mara River on an ancient wildebeest migration path. Pretty soon, viral

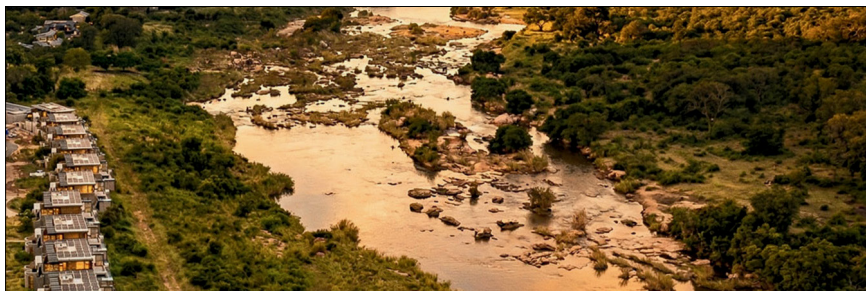
videos appeared of staff shooing wildebeest away from the resort. Really? Researchers suggest that migration patterns have already shifted. Wildebeest migrations are extremely sensitive, which is why conservation scientists recommend buffer zones of six kilometres around migration points or corridors.

"That's what I mean by importing the same playbook – building infrastructure in places that attract tourists without fully accounting for ecological impact.



Sean Hough

*Continued on page 9*



### A new silhouette is taking shape on the Sabie River

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# Elephant Point development leads Legacy safaris

LEGACY Hotels & Resorts continues to invest in both luxury and immersive guest experiences across its safari lodge portfolio, with significant developments under way at key properties.

According to Sales Director **Hara Jackson**, one of the most notable additions is at Elephant Point in the Greater Kruger, set to launch in May.

“At Elephant Point, we are introducing 42 new River Suites, thoughtfully positioned to overlook the Sabie River and surrounding waterholes, offering guests a seamless connection to the natural environment,” she tells *Tourism Update*.



Hara Jackson

“Complementing the suites is a newly developed central hub, which will feature a fine-dining restaurant and bar, an infinity-edge lap pool, a boutique, the Legacy Balance Spa and a curated collection of one-of-a-kind South African art pieces.

“Elephant Point is designed for multi-generational and group travel, featuring spacious private villas with flexible, self-catering or fully serviced options, combined with access to guided safari experiences,” says Jackson.

At Elephant Point, the combination of self-drive flexibility with access to guided private safari experiences is especially popular.

### Tshukudu

At Tshukudu Bush Lodge in Pilanesberg National Park, enhancements are being implemented with a focus on maintaining the property’s intimate setting while refining interiors and upgrading guest amenities.

“The lodge will also see an expansion, increasing its accommodation from ten to twelve chalets, alongside the addition of a brand-new Legacy Balance Spa, further enhancing the sense of exclusivity and indulgence.

“Tshukudu Bush Lodge offers an intimate, elevated safari experience within a private concession, with panoramic views, personalised hosting and exclusivity.”

Game drives remain the cornerstone experience, particularly at Tshukudu Bush Lodge, where guests enjoy Big Five sightings.

“Bush dinners, guided walks and sundowner experiences resonate strongly because they



Elephant Point in the Greater Kruger is introducing 42 new River Suites, set to open in May. Source: Legacy Hotels & Resorts

offer both connection to nature and memorable, shareable moments,” says Jackson.

Legacy is seeing a shift in traveller expectations, with increased demand for personalised, slower-paced travel that incorporates wellness and meaningful engagement with conservation and communities.

“Sustainability is central to our operations. We prioritise local employment, skills development and partnerships with nearby communities,” Jackson says.

Conservation efforts include responsible land use, wildlife protection and eco-conscious lodge operations. Guests can engage through guided

conservation talks, community visits where appropriate and educational experiences that highlight the importance of preserving these ecosystems.

Jackson says that opportunities in the safari space lie in experiential and purpose-driven travel, including conservation tourism, wellness safaris and exclusive-use offerings.

“There is also growing demand for multi-destination itineraries that combine safari with urban and coastal experiences.”

She believes Legacy’s success lies in its ability to offer a variety of safari styles under one portfolio, catering for diverse traveller needs.

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# Shearzone enters Lower Zambezi

SHEARZONE Safaris is expanding its offerings and refurbishing some properties to improve the guest experience.

Nzovu Rundu Luxury Camp is the newest development, opening in July in the Lower Zambezi. This marks a major step in growing the brand beyond Kafue National Park. Some renovations and improvements are taking place at Mozhi Bush Camp as well. Rooms will now have air conditioning, electric geysers and hair dryers.

The operator offers a range of accommodation designed to suit different travel styles, from intimate bush camps to luxury tented lodges, all situated in Zambia.

With a mix of properties and a wide range of activities, Shearzone is able to offer guests fully customised safari experiences, whether the clients want relaxation, adventure or a bit of both.

### Shearzone properties

Bongololo Campsite is a rustic, adventurous camping option in the Kafue National Park, ideal for guests who want a raw and down-to-earth wilderness experience.

Mozhi Bush Camp is a classic safari camp with chalets and a family house, offering an authentic, close-to-nature experience.

Nzovu Rundu Luxury Camp is a high-end tented lodge in the Lower Zambezi with luxury suites, family units and premium amenities like private plunge pools.



Nzovu Rundu Luxury Camp. Source: Shearzone Safaris

What makes these properties stand out is the balance between comfort and authenticity, says Shearzone. "Guests enjoy modern luxury while remaining deeply connected to the surrounding wilderness."

### Seamless

Shearzone properties are designed to blend seamlessly into their environments, using natural materials, open layouts and river-facing structures that make guests feel immersed in the landscape. Camps are positioned in ecologically rich areas like river confluences and channels to maximise wildlife viewing, while their architectural design emphasises minimal environmental impact and harmony with nature. The result is a safari experience that feels authentic, respectful and deeply rooted in place.

### Activities

Guests visiting the properties can expect rich and diverse wildlife sightings, including elephants, hippos, crocodiles and birdlife along rivers and channels, game and predators in areas like the Busanga Plains in Kafue and regular animal activity near water sources, especially in the Lower Zambezi. The locations are specifically chosen for high wildlife density

and natural movement corridors, ensuring consistent sightings.

Some examples of the most popular activities include game drives, a core safari experience, walking safaris (for a more immersive experience), boat cruises and canoeing along the Nkalanga Channel, sundowners and bush dining at the old Mozhi Bush Camp Lodge, stargazing and breakfast at the source of the Moshi River. The activities are popular because they offer different perspectives of the same wilderness, from land, water and on foot.

Shearzone Safaris caters for a wide range of travellers. Families can enjoy family chalets, flexible activities and safe, engaging experiences, while honeymooners and couples can book private decks, and experience romantic settings in secluded locations. Adventure travellers can take part in a range of activities such as walking safaris, canoeing, campers and remote explorations. Those dedicated to luxury travel will enjoy premium amenities, spa experiences and curated itineraries.



A buffalo skull in the wilderness. Source: Shearzone Safaris

  
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# Minor expands its footprint

MINOR Hotels is actively expanding its safari footprint in Africa.

“Key destinations currently in development include Namibia, Botswana and Uganda, which will further strengthen our position within the luxury safari and experiential travel segment,”

**Lindi Mthethwa**, Regional Director of Sales and Marketing for Minor Hotels in Africa, told *Tourism Update*.

Minor’s primary growth markets currently include the US, UK, Germany and broader European markets, which continue to show strong demand for luxury safari and experiential travel offerings.

Mthethwa predicts strong growth from emerging and high-value markets, particularly Asia, Russia, Australia and the Middle East.

“These markets are seeking unique, high-end and experience-driven travel, aligning well with our safari portfolio.”



Lindi Mthethwa

## Stanley & Livingstone

Mthethwa believes Anantara Stanley & Livingstone Victoria Falls Hotel stands out because it is uniquely positioned as the only luxury property within a private reserve in the Victoria Falls area, offering access to a Black rhino conservation

programme, with over 11 rhinos protected within the reserve.

A recent enhancement to the guest offering at the hotel is two newly upgraded Anantara Pool Villas, which provide an elevated level of privacy and exclusivity. A new spa treatment room has also been introduced, further strengthening the wellness component.

Guest experiences centre on exclusivity and proximity to iconic natural wonders.

The most popular experiences include private access to Victoria Falls, which is just minutes from the property; game drives within the private reserve, including sightings of the endangered Black rhino; unique wildlife encounters, such as curated bush experiences; and personalised guiding.

“These experiences are highly sought after due to their combination of exclusivity, accessibility and once-in-a-lifetime appeal,” said Mthethwa.

## Kafue Tented Camp

At Anantara Kafue Tented Camp in Zambia, the focus has been on delivering a new-generation luxury safari concept, with expansive, design-led tented suites elevated above the landscape,



Anantara Kafue Tented Camp offers nine Pool Villas, three Horizon Terrace Suites and a Presidential Villa. Source: Minor Hotels

blending with the natural environment. Here, much of the appeal lies in its untouched wilderness and immersive safari offering.

Key experiences include boat safaris along the Kafue River, offering a different perspective on wildlife viewing; walking safaris, providing a deeper, more intimate connection with nature; seasonal game drives across vast, uncrowded landscapes; and stargazing and riverside dining experiences.

“These are particularly popular as they offer authentic, off-the-beaten-path safari experiences in one of Africa’s least explored parks,” said Mthethwa.

She said Anantara Kafue Tented Camp was one of the few camps in Kafue National Park that delivered a high level of luxury in such a remote

and untouched setting. Its environmental design sets it apart, with suites elevated approximately 3.5m above ground and spanning up to 340sqm, offering views plus plenty of space and privacy.

## Expectations

Minor Hotels is seeing clear shifts in safari travellers’ expectations. These include highly personalised and private experiences; authenticity and meaningful cultural engagement; sustainability and conservation-led travel; wellness integration with safari experiences; and longer stays with multi-destination itineraries.

“Today’s luxury traveller is seeking purpose-driven travel, where experiences go beyond sightseeing to create emotional connection and impact,” said Mthethwa.



Anantara Stanley & Livingstone Victoria Falls Hotel has 11 rhinos protected within a private reserve, with guests able to participate in a Black rhino conservation programme. Source: Minor Hotels

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## Safari lodges

# Refurbished Nambiti Hills welcomes weddings

NAMBITI Hills Lodge in the malaria-free Nambiti Private Game Reserve in KZN has strengthened its offering with a new luxury suite, bringing the total to 11 rooms, including a dedicated Honeymoon Suite.

“The design is contemporary yet warm, with layered textures, open-plan spaces and panoramic views that keep the surrounding landscape at the centre of the experience,” **Julia Bulterman**, Head: Guest Experience at Nambiti Hills Lodge, told *Tourism Update*.



Julia Bulterman

In response to shifting travel preferences, the lodge has refined its wedding offering, meeting a growing demand for intimate, luxury bush celebrations.

“The newly curated package centres on exclusive-use stays, where the lodge becomes a private setting for a two-night celebration, complete with tailored dining, game drives and a seamless, fully supported event experience,” said Bulterman.

The core guest experience is shaped by a balance of game drives and downtime.

Bulterman explains: “Between excursions, guests retreat to the pool overlooking the reserve, quiet lounges

and private spaces designed for rest and reflection or an in-room spa experience – an approach that favours immersion over itinerary.”

As a private reserve, Bulterman believes Nambiti offers a level of flexibility and exclusivity not always possible in larger parks. There are fewer vehicles at sightings and there’s a quieter, more intimate connection to the bush.

“Encounters with cheetah, giraffe, hippo and prolific birdlife unfold naturally, guided by the rhythms of nature rather than by rigid schedules.”

The lodge is easily accessible, just a three-hour drive from Durban and four from Johannesburg.

Beyond the lodge itself, the reserve tells a deeper story of restoration and conservation.

“Now in its 25<sup>th</sup> year, Nambiti Private Game Reserve is widely regarded as one of South Africa’s most ambitious ecological rehabilitation projects. Once a patchwork of cattle farms, the land has been carefully restored through extensive rewilding efforts, including the reintroduction of more than 40 species and the ongoing management of key populations such as lion, rhino, elephant and wild dog,” said Bulterman.

Much of the appeal of Nambiti lies in its ability to cater for a spectrum of safari expectations.

“First-time visitors often arrive in search of the Big Five, while more seasoned travellers gravitate towards slower, more layered experiences, taking in birdlife, flora and the quieter moments between sightings. Increasingly, however, the lodge is also attracting those seeking a pure retreat: a place to disconnect, enjoy thoughtful cuisine and simply exist within nature.”



Nambiti Private Game Reserve is home to elephant, lion, leopard, buffalo and rhino as well as over 40 other animal species. Source: Nambiti Hills

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# Conservation coalition stems poaching

■ Abigail Kent

CONSERVATION is most successful when taking a multipronged approach rather than zoning in on one area, says **Nathan Webb**, General Manager of World Conservation Coalition (WCC).

He was talking to *Tourism Update* at Victoria Falls Safari Lodge (VFSL) at a recent press trip hosted by the lodge.

Smaller organisations can achieve greater impact by collaborating with other organisations that bring different skills and areas of focus.



Nathan Webb

“WCC is the fusing of three organisations with the drive to make a bigger difference across a larger area,” says Webb. The coalition arose from the Victoria Falls Anti-Poaching Unit and now includes the Bejan Trust and Children in the Wilderness.

While VFSL funded the first three anti-poaching scouts, WCC is now backed by 15 full-time scouts, protecting 3 000 sq km landscapes spanning wildlife

areas and national parks in Victoria Falls. As a unified entity, it harnesses law enforcement, community and landscape management in its approach to conservation.

Webb also reports greater success when applying for grants as a unified front on conservation. “Donors want a more holistic, rounded approach to their work.”

Because landscape and water management is important to broader conservation efforts, and the wildlife areas in Victoria Falls are especially reliant on artificial water sources, the coalition manages 52 pumps that deliver approximately 1.5 million litres of water a day into these areas.

## Synergy, support

The success of conservation efforts in Victoria Falls is rooted in a synergy between local business and environmental protection.

“We are blessed in that we are a small area where there are some large players,” says Webb. This culture of corporate responsibility began in 1999 when VFSL became the coalition’s first supporter.

This support represents a pivotal shift where conservation has transitioned from a charity project to a strategic business investment. “Having animals around here helps their business. It’s a win-win situation,” says Webb.

The VFSL’s passion for conservation extends from the



Guide and guest at Victoria Falls Safari Lodge’s Vulture Culture experience. Source: Victoria Falls Safari Lodge

boardrooms to the lodge staff, who actively report sightings of injured or sick animals, ensuring a rapid response from the anti-poaching units.

## Conservation in action

Guests at Victoria Falls Safari Lodge are invited to participate in complimentary educational experiences, with the Vulture Culture Experience serving as a significant draw for international visitors. This initiative highlights the crucial role vultures play in the broader ecosystem, particularly as they face increasing threats from collateral damage. An example of this lies in poisons like cyanide being used to target elephants for ivory.

The knock-on effect is vultures dying after feeding on the poisoned carcasses.

The reach of the Vulture Culture experience extends way beyond the lodge. A visitor remarked on watching the vulture livestream for months leading up to their trip. The livestream has stimulated a great deal of interest, so much so that the viewing infrastructure has undergone upgrades to allow for greater on-site guest viewing capacity.

“Awareness is the biggest thing. The more you can have conservation in your literature, talks and among guests, the more the word is going to get out there. Hopefully it sticks with enough people that it makes a difference,” says Webb.

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# African Sun to refurbish Zim properties

IN THE coming months, several African Sun properties will undergo refurbishments, including upgrades to Troutbeck Resort, Blue Swallow Lodges, Elephant Hills Resort and The Victoria Falls Hotel.

Troutbeck Resort's public areas will be renovated in May, enhancing its tranquil mountain setting. Blue Swallow Lodges are currently being refurbished and Elephant Hills Resort is to have a multimillion-dollar transformation. That property will close in November for an 18-month refurbishment and rebranding programme, with a reopening planned for the second quarter of 2028.

The Victoria Falls Hotel will also have refurbishments designed to enhance guest spaces while preserving its heritage and character.

The refurbishments form part of African Sun's broader portfolio of safari and leisure properties.

From mountain retreats to safari lodges, each property offers something distinct.

What sets African Sun apart is its ability to feel both consistent and personalised. Rooms are thoughtfully appointed and dining menus offer a range of local flavours and international favourites.

Each property is shaped by its surroundings. Architecture and interiors draw from local materials and textures while landscapes are preserved. This respect for the surroundings extends into daily operations, with ongoing sustainability efforts that protect the environment.

In Hwange and at Victoria Falls visitors can participate in game drives, sunset boat cruises and visits to the Falls, which remain a defining highlight of the itineraries.

For those wanting a more immersive experience, African Sun offers a range of specialised activities. Walking safaris, night drives, photography excursions and birding tours allow guests to engage with the landscape in a more meaningful way, always guided by experts in the field.



A sunset river cruise at Elephant Hills. Source: African Sun

## New off-grid lodge for Addo

MANTIS Collection has opened Mantis Hiddn in Addo, an off-grid luxury mountain retreat within an 800 ha private reserve in the Eastern Cape's greater Addo region.

Mantis CEO **Craig Erasmus** said the lodge reflects a shift towards nature-led and wellness-focused travel.

"Mantis Hiddn in Addo marks a return to our Eastern Cape roots where our story began and continues to unfold," said Erasmus. "Hiddn is rewriting the script for wellness, nature-led experiences and sustainable luxury travel. This remote retreat overturns the rule book. Here rituals replace rigid schedules and tick-box activities."

The property comprises 12 suites and two private villas. The Suites (which allow guests older than 12), include en-suite bathrooms, fireplaces and private decks. The Villas, open to all ages, offer infinity pools, expansive decks and a butler service.

The lodge operates off-grid using solar power, supported by water harvesting and recycling systems. Locally sourced materials were used in its construction to reduce environmental impact.

The development includes rewilding efforts and focus on restoring walking trails with experiences centred in nature rather than traditional game drives.

Guest stays are structured around personalised itineraries, developed with an Experience Guide before arrival and continue post-departure.

Wellness is a core part of the offering with physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and environmental dimensions. Experiences include art therapy, botanical treatments, breathwork, meditation and yoga with in-suite fitness with Technogym equipment on request.

Food and beverage is integrated into the experience with menus, co-created by chefs and guests, incorporating locally sourced and foraged ingredients. Dining takes place across indoor and outdoor settings including terraces, bomas and remote bush locations.

Additional experiences include a 1.5-hour helicopter marine photography excursion along the Eastern Cape coastline towards the Gamtoos River Mouth as well as stargazing activities supported by low light pollution in the area.



Infinity pool overlooking the valley at Mantis Hiddn in Addo

# aha rebuilds after floods

REFURBISHMENTS are under way at some aha Hotels & Lodges in its safari portfolio, following severe flood damage earlier this year.

Three lodges currently undergoing complete refurbishment include Thakadu River Camp in Madikwe Game Reserve, and Makalali Main Lodge and Makalali River Lodge near Hoedspruit in Makalali Private Game Reserve. Specific timelines for reopening have not been disclosed.

### Opportunities

Simultaneously, the group is actively assessing new opportunities in key tourism regions across Southern Africa, says **Ruzandri Stoltz**, Marketing Manager.

“While there are ongoing discussions around potential new properties and partnerships, details will be shared once these opportunities are finalised.”

Aha believes in a balance of authenticity and value, says Stoltz.

“Our lodges combine authentic safari experiences with warm South African hospitality and excellent value. Each property offers a distinctive sense of place, complemented by knowledgeable guides and personalised service that allows guests to truly connect with the destination.”

### Wildlife

Stoltz says game drives remain the highlight of any safari stay at aha.

“Guests are drawn to the excitement of encountering Africa’s iconic wildlife in their natural habitat while learning from experienced guides who bring the bush and its ecosystems to life.”



Ruzandri Stoltz

Shifting traveller expectations shape the group’s strategy. In 2026, travellers seek insights, knowledge and understanding of both the environment and the culture of the communities within it.

“Travellers are looking for meaningful and immersive experiences. Sustainability, conservation and cultural authenticity have become key



aha Makalali Main Lodge, located west of the Kruger National Park, offers guests an ethnic-style retreat where they can look forward to spotting the Big Five, as well as cheetah, wild dog, giraffe, zebra and kudu. Source: aha Hotels & Lodges

priorities, with guests wanting to better understand the environments and communities they visit.”

### Community

In response, aha emphasises community upliftment and conservation awareness.

“We prioritise local employment, skills development and partnerships with surrounding communities, ensuring tourism benefits the areas in which we operate.

Guests also gain insight into conservation and environmental stewardship through guided activities and educational experiences during their stay.”

Stoltz believes the safari sector is well positioned for growth: “Opportunities lie in experiential and sustainability-driven travel. As travellers increasingly seek nature-based and purposeful travel experiences, safari destinations are well-positioned to meet this demand.”

## Mass tourism is not the only answer

*Continued from page 2*

“Even culturally we sometimes default to imported ideas of luxury. Food tells a story too. At a recent tourism conference on the top of Table Mountain, the breakfast was champagne and croissants with salmon. Delicious, but what’s the message? That we want to conform to European ideas of luxury? Why not smoked snoek or local trout and bread from a local artisanal baker in town?”

“The mountain-top conference was very much an opportunity to declare boldly that mass market tourism in Africa was ready to scale. What struck me was what wasn’t talked

about. There was no mention of a tourism model specifically for Africa, one that prioritises conservation and community. The talk was of the opportunity to develop the missing middle in Africa – the shortage of large, good-value, mid-range hotel product. The mid-market and delivery conversation is largely transactional – it’s about mass tourism and how to sell more trips, better, faster.

“Tourism in Africa is about the natural world – nobody comes to Africa to look at our ancient buildings or art museums. Every single hotel and lodge operator and every tourism player has a vested interest in Africa’s biodiversity, yet we are losing biodiversity. Shouldn’t we be putting more focus on

the environment and the communities that inhabit it?”

“We must grow tourism sensitively. Lodge owners are well-placed to protect land and communities. There are many opportunities for investment in this sector. Natural Selection does this well, particularly in Namibia, where land is leased from local communities who are invited in as shareholders and who are trained to work at the lodge.

Hough commends Natural Selection for its properties Gwe Gwe (a beach lodge at the northern end of the Eastern Cape) and Lekkerwater (a beach lodge in the heart of the De Hoop Nature Reserve in the Western Cape) as great examples of how tourism

investment can be done with full attention to the environment and the indigenous communities.

“We cannot neglect conservation and local communities. We need to discuss what we want our tourism model to look like, and how to put conservation and community at the centre.

“Looking at the plastic coffee-cup lids in the nature reserve on top of Table Mountain, conservation felt like a minor trend, very far away.

“New entrants to Africa’s tourism industry need to join the conservation conversation, otherwise we could be in a race to the bottom,” says Hough. ■