



# Spirited AWAY

Phantom Forest Eco Reserve

Phantom Forest Eco Reserve is discreetly tucked within a pristine tract of forest on the banks of the Knysna Estuary. It is characterised by a human footprint so delicate that it compliments, rather than detracts from its wilderness surroundings.

Phantom Forest's "eco-sense" and sensitivity has earned them several accolades: "Africa's Best Eco Tourism Destination" in 2007, a nomination for "World's Leading Green Resort" in 2008, and more recently, a 2009 nomination for "Africa's Leading Green Hotel" from the World Travel Awards.

The reserve was built a little more than a decade ago, before sustainable development was even a buzz-word.

Ecological consideration was seldom a factor in Knysna's burgeoning expansion. From the very beginning, the owners of Phantom Forest became leaders in eco-tourism; their fingers set firmly on a conservation pulse. Their actions have always been guided by a profound respect for the environment and they knew then, as they do now, that they are custodians of a precious vestige of Knysna's Afromontane forest heritage.

Peppered along a series of wooden walkways are 14



elevated tree suites, each constructed according to green building principles. The organic architectural character of the Phantom Forest is inspired by this natural realm and blends seamlessly with it. Not a single mature tree was removed to make way for these suites; instead, each was adapted to the "design" of the forest.

Where the exterior of the suites are almost rudimentary in nature, the interiors are by contrast luxurious. Decorated with African inspired decor; certain suites incorporate colonial touches; with natural textures of subtle creams, earthy tones and black. Others depict North African chic and include lavish, brightly coloured silks with white cotton percale linen, offset by beautiful hand-embroidered textiles.

The Eyrie, the reserve's social hub, is where guests are treated to sweeping views of Knysna's remarkable landscape. The charming lounge is a whimsical mix of contemporary African artefacts, such as hand carved and painted furniture, beaded animals and woven baskets. This is where guests embark on the Phantom Forest's legendary culinary journey. After selecting from a six-course menu, guests are escorted to the Forest Boma for an unhurried feast of sensory indulgence.

The menu, which changes nightly, includes contemporary adaptations to international and local fare and uses the best seasonal, locally sourced ingredients. Diners have a choice between four starters, four mains and four desserts – each so mouth-watering that making a decision is no easy feat.

If you prefer an evening with a more exotic slant, then book a table at the reserve's other restaurant, The Chutzpah, a Moroccan inspired creation that pays tribute to North African cuisine. The blend of fiery flavours, tangerines, dates, Turkish delight, hookah pipes, mosaic, and illuminated ornate screens all make for an unforgettable dining experience.

Culinary delights aside; the reserve possesses countless other qualities. There is a soul-stirring walking trail that winds through a verdant tract of indigenous forest with its towering



and majestic trees. Guests can also enjoy a range of signature spa treatments at the Body Boma, where indigenous flora-inspired products are used in all the therapies.

The to-do list is endless, but many simply opt to relax on the private deck of their tree suite to bask in the unpolluted breath of the forest. ■

