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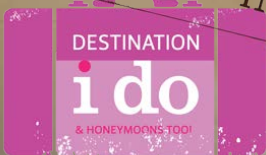
# ROAR OF *romance*

Words by Stacey Marcus

After my recent trip to South Africa, I have officially named Mother Nature the best wedding planner on the planet. Who needs LED lights and an amped-up sound system when you can tie the knot under a canopy of stars and be serenaded by a symphony of African dwarf frogs and a choir of songbirds? Although it may seem like a wild idea, getting married or honeymooning in South Africa offers couples an opportunity to celebrate their union in a natural setting surrounded by endless miles of breathtaking landscape where the big five (elephant, lion, rhinoceroses, buffalo and leopard) roam free and romance blossoms beautifully like the South African protea.

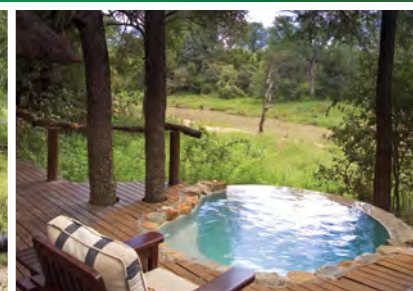
Photo courtesy of: &Beyond Dulini Lodge

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“Our most memorable moment on safari was our wedding on the river,” says Andrew Davies and Rebecca Hammond of the United Kingdom who recently got married at andBeyond’s Phinda’s Mountain Lodge in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. “The day was perfect and even the weather behaved itself. We got married to the sound of birds at sunset and it is a day we will never forget – unique and perfect in every way.”

Couples can tie the knot in an African boma illuminated by flickering fires and warm lanterns, enjoy a bush banquet deep in the dense forest, or ride on a river boat gliding past hippos (maybe a crocodile or two) and clusters of indigenous birds. While most weddings on the reserves are intimate, Phinda’s collection of six lodges can accommodate up to 122 guests. The Rock Lodge, with only six suites, was incredibly romantic and where I enjoyed complete seclusion in my adobe suite with its own private plunge pool and outdoor shower. The glass chalet at the Forest Lodge was furnished with Zulu artifacts and a most romantic spot for afternoon canoodling and monkey spotting.

While the unique ceremony and luxury accommodations will be most memorable, perhaps the best reason to get married in South Africa is to experience a safari together. I can’t think of a more romantic afternoon than riding around in a Jeep in search

of wildlife. Imagine sitting in front of a herd of elephants enjoying an afternoon drink at a waterhole, or witnessing a pride of lions laze in the afternoon shade of an umbrella thorn acacia.

Yes, it is a long distance from the United States, but the South African Airways flight went quickly with my own TV and plenty of food and beverage. “Our morning, non-stop flight from New York JFK to Johannesburg, South Africa, is the fastest way to fly and gets you there in about 15 hours,” says Gregg Truman, Vice President of Marketing, North America, for South African Airways. “Once in South Africa and its surrounding countries and islands, you’ll have the vacation or honeymoon of a lifetime, with awe-inspiring experiences you won’t soon forget and which are hard to replicate anywhere else.”

On one of my last drives in Phinda, the ranger Marc Lindsay-Rea stopped the Jeep and told me to look around. As the sun was setting and the frogs and birds were gearing up for their afternoon concert, he told me to close my eyes and record the sounds and feelings I was experiencing. I can’t think of the exact words to describe the kaleidoscope of emotions I felt, but perhaps it was love, pure and simple. I can’t think of a better way to launch a love story. Kudos to Mother Nature!