

South African safari standoff: White Lion challenges rhinoceros

On a chilly spring morning in the northern reaches of the arid heart of the vast Little Karoo region of South Africa our bucking Land Rover comes to a sudden halt. Around us, a desert landscape of rare succulent plants and low growing green and brown bushes frames itself against a backdrop of hills studded with shimmering quartz, some patches so dazzling they resemble dozens of Hope diamonds.

Our group of five is on a mission. We arose before dawn, eager to begin the morning's game drive and longing to feast eyes on the rare White Lions found in the Sanbona Wildlife Reserve



The White Lion, sometimes called Blonde, has always been rare. Its unusual beauty has captured the imagination of people around the globe. Here in South Africa, the Sanbona Wildlife Reserve has introduced a free-roaming pride of white lions, two males and two females, with the hope of re-establishing the first self sustaining white lion presence in the wild since their near-extinction in the 1970s.

Over his two-way radio, Marco, our guide/driver, has just received word that one is nearby. Our eyes scan the shadows and highlights as Marco inches the vehicle quietly forward.

"There," one of us whispers. "Magnificent," says another. We are within feet of a full-grown blond male, his vanilla mane lightly ruffling in the wind. Resting, but watchful, he crouches beside a tawny female. The click, click of shutter buttons fills the air as our prey, now looking vigilant, senses a predator is near

Minutes pass. We watch and click until Marco turns the key, ready to move on. Our white lion rises and strides purposefully through the waist-high brush along the trail to our right as he travels down hill. Keeping a discreet distance, we follow until he makes tracks across the trail and heads for a clearing to our left. Marco cuts the engine. In the clearing, a lone white rhinoceros grazes. Our lion growls, emitting long, low guttural grumbles from deep within his hairy chest, clearly signaling territorial threats. But the rhino is having none of it. A massive male with a menacing horn, he lumbers his armored bulk toward the lion and the standoff begins

It's a page out of "High Noon" now set in the African savanna. And the actors play their roles to the hilt, as we, their awestruck audience, watch the high-stakes drama unfold. Back and forth, back and forth, they parry. Primal "don't mess with me" lion growls and rhino grunts emanate from the open arena

Then, as if a movie director has suddenly shouted, "Cut!" our lion turns tail and, with a thunderous roar, stalks off-stage as if to say, "Okay, you called my bluff this time, but I'll be back and don't you forget it." Our morning game drive has given us more melodrama than we could possibly have imagined

Sanbona Wildlife Reserve in South Africa's Western Cape is one of three sister reserves making history in the areas of wildlife conservation. About the size of Singapore, the reserve sits at the foot of the towering Warmwaterberg Mountains, Seven recorded rock art sites have been found in the reserve. Dating back more than 3,500 years, the art attests to the spiritual beliefs and lives of the indigenous San people who lived here

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Watch for more articles on Sanbona at this site.

Sanbona Wildlife Reserve is part of [the Mantis Collection](#).

Sanbona contact details: www.sanbona.com

Getting there: Sanbona is a 2.5 hour drive from Cape Town. From the US, South African Airways, a Star Alliance Partner, flies to Cape Town with a stop in Johannesburg. On a flight of this length, one of the best things travelers can do is book a business class seat, if at all possible. South African Airways' superb service ensures passengers arrive in South Africa refreshed and ready for a grand adventure. Check their website, www.flysaa.com, for lowest fares.

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Based in Cape Town, South Africa [Giltedge Travel](#) arranged my travel to Sanbona and other destinations in South Africa. The company offers tailor-made itineraries and packages throughout the continent. Contact them at www.gilt-edge.com



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