

WATERBERG



WHEN our beaming host Chris Borslap runs through the list of activities on offer at Leobo Lodge I fear my hearing is going fuzzy. A crocodile tug-of-war? Is that really what he said? Borslap is grinning like a young boy who's discovered a great new prank, so I know he's isn't making it up. You usually know what to expect at a game lodge, with sunrise and sundowner game drives and perhaps a guided bushwalk. But Leobo Lodge in the Waterberg doesn't have enough wildlife to make game drives particularly exciting.

GAME FOR ACTION

If you think being in the bush should be just plain fun, this is the place for you, writes **Lesley Stones**

It's also the holiday home for an Englishman who made oodles of money in the technology business, and like most geeks, he's still a boy at heart.

So Leobo is equipped with six quads and an amazing buggy called the Polaris that motors

through rivers and up rocky hillsides like a spider.

There's a shooting range with sniper rifles, fishing, horse riding, and the warmest outdoor heated pool I've ever enjoyed in the bush. There's stargazing too, but not with the usual portable telescope.

This is a whopping industrial-sized version in a round observation tower reached by two flights of ladders. Silver lamé spacesuits straight out of Star Wars are hanging in the library below the tower, so you can dress up as R2D2 before you search for

your old home in the Milky Way.

When I heard about paintball games fought by combatants dangling out of a helicopter I was convinced the redoubtable owner

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WATERBERG

Giant playground in the bush

FROM PAGE 10

Rory Sweet was one of those nerds who made his millions by the age of 14. Or perhaps it's just his four children who keep him childlike.

Crocodile tug-of-war was the craziest of all the options, so I signed up immediately. Mike, the most muscular of our party, was gleefully nominated as the human representative for the man versus-beast-encounter, and the evening was enlivened by "last supper" jokes.

The dinner proved well worth lingering over, prepared by chef Coco Reinharz. His food and wine pairing menu started with tomato, basil and mozzarella wrapped in phyllo pastry, followed by tender duck with orange and ginger sauce, then a rich chocolate cake creation.

I don't remember which wines we matched them with, but they worked superbly.

The next day we pile into a safari vehicle and drove to the hippo pool. Borslap, the manager at Leobo, unwraps a whole chicken, slices it in half, and trusses one chunk firmly with a rope. Then he swings it round and lobs it towards the water. "It's not gone in

far enough," he says, as it plops in the shallows barely a metre from the bank. But before he can haul it out again the rope goes taut. The crocodile has been expecting us, lying in wait in the reeds where the chicken sacrifices are always made.

First the water churns a little, then a lot, as the croc writhes left and right to dislodge the food. Mike steps forward to take the rope and begins pulling gently. No use. He pulls harder, digging his heels in. Gradually cold eyes, a snout and shoulders break through the surface, and the croc, who knows the routine by now, waddles on to the bank towards us, the chicken invisible inside its mouth and only the rope protruding.

I take hold of the rope and get a quick chaff when the croc jerks its head up suddenly. It's remarkably strong, and more than a metre



long. After a couple of minutes the croc snaps through the rope and returns to the water with his prize. Borslap lobs in another chunk of trussed-up chicken and the croc seizes it instantly. This time he puts on a show with the death roll as he tries to wrestle it free.

A firm tug brings him out of the lake again for another photo call. It's fascinating to be so close to such a powerful beast, knowing we're safe because he's more interested in the chicken than the tougher human legs warily staying a little beyond easy snapping distance.

That morning we'd been out on the quads, keeping our eyes out for the smattering of giraffe, zebra, buffalo, buck, hippo and leopard. Most remained elusive, perhaps because of the noise we were making.

We got the Polaris stuck in a rocky river, of course, and I asked Borslap if he and Sweet had fun pushing it to the limits. "Oh, we've gone way beyond that," he laughed.

Sweet bought Leobo Lodge a couple of years ago and has refurbished it beautifully. Its eight chalets stand on the side of an escarpment with private decks looking over the plains. There are enough amenities to make it



Luxurious, quirky decor in the lounge of Leobo Lodge, which was bought by British IT specialist Rory Sweet.

welcoming but not too lavish.

Sweet also built the far more opulent Observatory for his family, which is lavishly over-the-top, but undeniably luxurious. Picture a hippo-skeleton chandelier hanging over a sandstone dining table and a ceiling covered with wildebeest hide and you start to get the idea.

We'd arrived by helicopter, which seems appropriate when your destination is a giant playground.

It took an hour from Grand Central, and our pilot, David of Ultimate Heli, is clearly in tune with Leobo's thrill-seeking ethos.

When the passengers began to debate whether we were really flying at 240km/h David dipped close to a hilltop so we could see how fast the grass rushed by beneath us.

Leobo Lodge charges R3 500 a person a night. For families the Observatory has two luxury bedrooms, a triple bunk room for kids and a separate guest room for a nanny, for R35 000 a night. Prices include all meals and drinks and full use of all the facilities.

For details visit, www.leoboprivatereserve.com, e-mail reservations@fish-i.co.za or call 087 808 1513



Activities at Leobo Lodge include bundu-bashing in a Solaris, above, and tug-of-war with crocodiles, top.

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