

ion



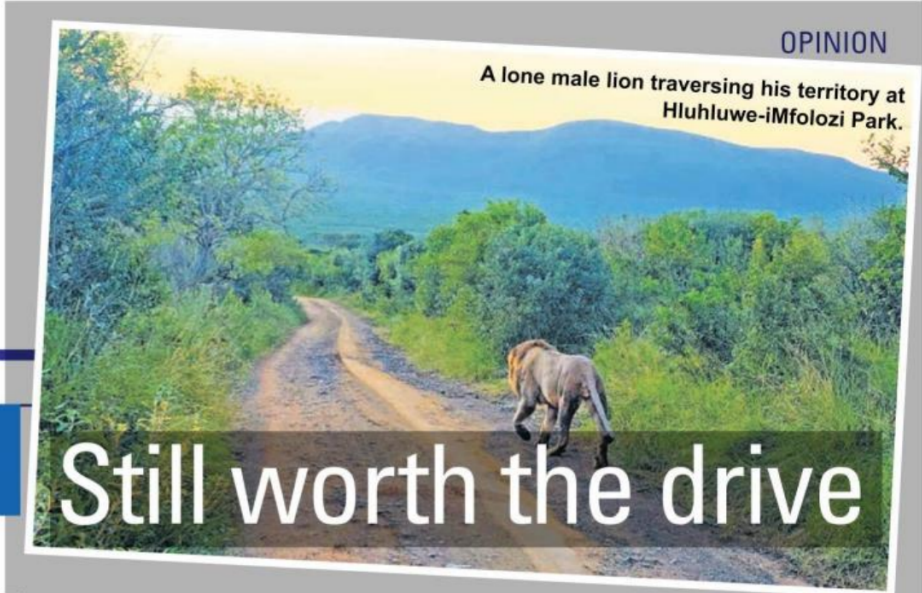
Perspective

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Editor

Last week, with the children on another school holiday, we spontaneously headed to the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park for a night in the bush.

It had been years since our last visit to Hilltop, the Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife accommodation on the Hluhluwe side, and I was pleasantly surprised. While the resort shows some wear and tear (it's the oldest tourist resort in KZN), the experience was delightful. Our rooms were clean and cheerful, the beds comfortable, and one of the trip's highlights - for the children at least - was the buffet breakfast. Included in our room rate, it was a real treat.

This was our youngest's first game drive - she's not quite two - and she handled it like a pro, thrilled to spot her first "bokkies." Another favourite was the stuffed lion exhibit in the Hilltop reception area, which she



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A lone male lion traversing his territory at Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park.

Still worth the drive

greeted with wide-eyed awe. Our first major sighting was a large male lion patrolling his territory - what a moment! The reserve did not disappoint, treating us to rhinos, elephants, buffalo, warthogs and, to our delight, a Gorgeous Bushshrike. I also discovered the KZN Sightings Facebook group, which has a WhatsApp feed sharing live updates from around the reserve. With 96 000 hectares of wilderness for animals to disappear into, it's helpful to tap into the collective eyes of fellow visitors. The downside, of course, is the occasional traffic jam - dozens of vehicles jostling for a glimpse of a sleepy lion in the thicket. Fortunately, most of our sightings were peaceful and private. The baby warthogs were especially sweet, as were the tiny, fluffy francolin chicks. I've stayed on the group even after returning home - it's fascinating to see

the variety and frequency of sightings. As KZN locals, we sometimes overlook the gems in our own backyard, turning instead to the larger Kruger when we would like a wilderness holiday. But we truly have something special right here. The iMfolozi cheetah family has become a favourite with visitors, seeming to put on near-daily shows. Yet it was the sheer diversity that struck me most - from wild dogs, lions and hyenas to an aardvark!, countless birds and shy little creatures waiting to be noticed if you would simply stop and listen. At camp, the relaxed nyalas grazing the short grass near the chalets added to the magic. It was peaceful just to sit and watch them nibble, unbothered by our presence, a gentle reminder of how lucky we are to have such natural beauty so close to home.