

IMBABALA LODGE 4X4 AND QUAD TRACKS

IT'S PLAYTIME!

Ideally suited to family fun holidays and boys' bonding weekends, Imbabala Lodge has something for everyone.

Situated between scenic Muden and Weenen in KwaZulu-Natal, Imbabala Lodge (meaning female bushbuck in Zulu), can accommodate up to thirty people. Specially geared for the family, the lodge boasts two self-catering chalets, a six-roomed farmhouse and two four-bed rondavels. The units are all electrified, comfortable and functional without any unnecessary frills. However thoughtful touches such as tea, coffee and milo in the rooms have been provided. A spotlessly clean toilet and shower with hot water completes the facilities. The lodge complex boasts an atmospheric bar filled with memorabilia and DSTV, a restaurant, swimming pool, and games room and jungle gym for the kids. Meals can be ordered from chief cook and bottle-washer Madelaine Lombard who serves up a mean chicken-a-la-king as well as other mouth-watering dishes.

Owner Allan Hall is passionate about the farm and has made the most of some of the degraded dongas in the area, turning them into a thrilling 4x4 obstacle route. He is also a raconteur of note and there is never a dull moment with him around. Ask him to tell you the story of the Scotsman's gold that had most of the local population digging trenches all over his farm. Not to be missed on the 4x4 trail is the "Widow Maker" and "The Big Dipper" (the latter being my downfall). All the tracks on the farm are negotiable by four-wheel drive vehicle, quad bikes and off-road motor-bikes and rate as a grade 2-3. A moto-X track is also available for the adrenalin junkies, while hunting can be experienced on a nearby farm. The routes were very overgrown while I was there which made navigation interesting, but a map is provided to ease your way. However, don't take an expensive vehicle through if you don't want the paintwork scratched, although Allan assures me that he is working on the road system at the moment. Other damage to your vehicle should not be a problem as Allan is on hand to guide you through any difficult sections.

Game viewing is excellent with blesbok, nyala, zebra, blue wildebeest, duiker and jackal all present on the farm. My favourite though, was the friendly giraffe that comes to drink from the swimming pool each evening, providing guests with excellent photo opportunities. Game viewing from horseback is a popular activity during your stay and there are several mounts for riders of varying expertise. Birdwatching is excellent with many raptors and grassland species to be seen. There are also many 'little brown jobs' to keep the twitchers twitching.

The highlight of a visit to Imbabala Lodge however, must be a guided trail up the scenic Umhlumba Mountain led by Allan in his 660cc Yamaha Rhinos. These golf carts on steroids (as he describes them) can go virtually anywhere, which is a good thing as the route up the mountain and down the other side is definitely not for sissies and involves low range and diff-lock at times. The route includes some seriously steep inclines and declines and boulder-strewn tracks that look almost impassable. The vistas from the top however are breathtaking and the grasslands are strewn with a plethora of multi-coloured flowers during summer, while jackal buzzards and black-shouldered kites soar and flutter overhead. You can see all the way to the Thukela Biosphere Reserve in the west and it would be a great place for sundowners if the road back did not have to be negotiated after dark, which would not be a good idea.

On the way down the other side of Umhlumba there are some serious roll-over points which necessitates someone supporting the vehicle as it passes through the tricky sections. At one stage we even had to reverse down a short decline as the turning angle was so great. But this all adds to the fun of Imbabala.

You eventually come out at the bottom in a boulder-strewn riverbed and must look out for livestock around the tight bends as they love to lie up in the cool stream during the heat of the day. A series of rocky dykes intersect the bed and need some clever manoeuvring to negotiate them. Once through this section it's on to a neighbour's farm for the drive back through a series of gates and on easier terrain.

After a sumptuous braai, we sat outside and Allan tried to point out the various constellations to me while a fiery-necked nightjar called “Good Lord deliver us,” in the distance. Although quite small, Imbabala boasts a diversity of habitats and activities and the down-to-earth staff will put you at your ease and make you feel part of the family. Apparently Allan even dresses up as a sangoma on Christmas Eve, and with his Afrikaans reindeer Donder and Bliksem, dishes out gifts to the children. I am told he bears a remarkable resemblance to Mr Bones. All this is sure to keep you coming back again and again and again...

TRAVEL PLANNER

WHAT IT COSTS

R350,00 per person per day including 3 meals a day and all activities for adults. R250,00 for under thirteens and children under two stay free. There is a R100,00 bike cover charge which covers your whole stay.

WHERE TO BOOK

Phone Madelaine Lombard on (033) 496 1189 or 082 824 4838 or E-mail imbabala@worldonline.co.za. Or visit their website at www.imbabalalodge.co.za

GPS WAYPOINTS

S28° 55.44; E30° 14.71 turnoff from main road between Weenen and Muden.

LIST OF CAPTIONS

1. The dining room at Imbabala Lodge
2. Rocky terrain with Umhlumba Mountain in the background
3. Driving down the river beds
4. Low range is necessary for the Umhlumba Mountain trail
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6. Low range is necessary for the Umhlumba Mountain trail
7. Low range is necessary for the Umhlumba Mountain trail
8. Low range is necessary for the Umhlumba Mountain trail
9. Rocky terrain on the Umhlumba descent
10. Rocky terrain with Umhlumba Mountain in the background
11. Rocky terrain on the Umhlumba descent
12. Low range is necessary for the Umhlumba Mountain trail
13. A giraffe regularly comes to drink from the swimming pool
14. The main lodge building
15. Imbabala Lodge
16. Imbabala Lodge
17. The comfortable interior of one of the rondavels
18. It's a long way down on a very bad road
19. The vista from the top of Umhlumba Mountain
20. The vista from the top of Umhlumba Mountain
21. The grassland is full of wildflowers on top of Umhlumba Mountain
22. It's a long way down on a very bad road
23. The vista from the top of Umhlumba Mountain
24. The vista from the top of Umhlumba Mountain