

# Biz.Travel Q&A with Lew Rood



By [Brian Berkman](#): contributing editor, travel

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While there may be a better safari experience, many will say there is no dispute that Singita is the bespoke safari product with the best marketing. As [Singita](#)'s public relations and trade relations manager, the softly spoken Lew Rood has had a deft hand in creating arguably the most sought-after safari brand. We met at The Taj Hotel, Cape Town for coffee.



**Other than a proliferation of hotel spas, what do you think is the biggest trend in safari lodges over the last decade?**

Following the 9/11 USA attacks we've noticed an emergence of extended families and friends travelling together. Another trend is that stays are longer than previously and guests want to have an experience beyond fine-dining and game drives. Our guests are very interested in conservation and community and want to interact with our staff team and the broader community. An example is a New York doctor who spent a night and a day helping at a local clinic while staying with us. Guests want to know what happens behind the sisal fence.

We believe that what we do has to be real, and we must make guests aware of the various projects and activities to which we contribute. Guests want to be actually involved with more than just paying. We are fortunate to have Pam Richardson on board with us, who pioneered the Rally to Read project and specialises in fund-raising for rural communities.

At Singita Grumeti guests can visit a residential environmental educational centre which we built for the entire community, not just sons and daughters of staff, while at Singita Kruger we have established a School of Cooking. We assess community youngsters and if they succeed on the programme we can bring them to Commis Chef status. When they qualify we assist them with placements in our own lodges and other properties.

**I was very impressed with the food and wine at Singita Ebony. It may be what sets you ahead of other premium lodges. Would you agree?**

In previous years guests were happy to sit around a fire and braai every night but we've had to raise our game with multi-course tasting menus, paired with fine wines. I think we also differ because of our generosity of spirit. Every wine in our cellar is available to guests at no extra charge, as is a full range of fine South African MCCs. As members of Relais & Chateaux we have to stock French Champagne which is the only beverage for which we bill.

We have Singita Premier Wines in Cape Town which is headed by Francois Rautenbach and have qualified sommeliers at every lodge. As with purchases from our Singita Shop which is in partnership with Cecile and Boyd, we're also able to ship wine successfully for our guests. We find this deepens our guest's experience.

**Many lodges extend no-charge media invitations, yet Singita requires a 10% media fee. At 10% of your single rate per night of R14 844 are there any South African media able to**

## afford to send writers or photographers to your properties, given your far-flung locations?

Yes, there are. The reality is that as small lodges we have very few places available and demand is high. While we absolutely value the publicity we achieve and recognise that first-hand experiences are the best way to be able to promote our product to the media and to the travel trade, it is an economic matter of supply and demand. Rest assured that in 2011 we will be engaging more actively with media here and abroad. Right from the beginning we were launched by a piece in *The New York Times* and *Departures* magazine.

## Is winning awards important?

Awards are important but media exposure is more so. You can't necessarily win an award three years in a row. There are Awards and there are awards. We especially value the *Conde Nast Traveller Awards* and *Travel + Leisure's* is of great importance to us. One also has to be mindful of really good online newsletters like Andrew Harper's and to a lesser extent *The Gallivanter's Guide*. We are very fortunate that Singita that grown into a global brand without us having properties around the world.

## ABOUT BRIAN BERKMAN: CONTRIBUTING EDITOR, TRAVEL

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