

Bruce Middleton

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To: <bruce@thegremlin.co.za>
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Subject: This Tourism Week. 12 January 2012
Brought to you by [Tembe National Elephant Park](#).

This week:

- [Africa's Biggest Tuskers](#)
- [Fall in love with Responsible Tourism](#)

Best BarefootWishes for open skies, growing arrivals, full beds, and an end to the rhino slaughter in 2012

Fall in love with Responsible Tourism

Those of you who followed This Tourism Week during last year's Indaba may have noticed that the highlight for me was Cape Town's Responsible Tourism in Cities Conference - and that my hero of that event was Ron Mader, the founder of [Planeta.com](#), who said that he thought that South Africa was leading the way when it comes to putting responsible tourism on the ground (watch my interview with him [here](#)).

Following on COP17 in Durban, you can't help but get the feeling that South Africa is beginning to take its green issues seriously, and that it's hungry for information about them. So tourism practitioners will be pleased to learn about Planeta.com's Responsible Tourism Week and its [Responsible Tourism Unconference](#) - 'Fall in love with responsible tourism' - that's slated to take place from February 13 - 17.

But don't panic! It's not THAT kind of expensive gabfest that calls for wasteful exhibition stalls and ridiculous printing bills, and that's filled with unnecessary politicians (wink wink).

No - Planeta.com's Responsible Tourism Week is an annual, week-long online event.

"2012 is the fourth year for Responsible Tourism Week and we expect the conversations to take a great leap forward thanks to inspired participation and Planeta.com's 12th year of online conferencing," said Ron.

"It's a fun, free, five-day mash-up exploring down-to-earth applications of noble concepts including responsible tourism, conscious travel, the local travel movement and ecotourism with effective and inexpensive social media.

"Friends have asked ... but why an unconference?"

"My response: Traditional conferences are overly scripted without opportunities to engage one another. We created the Responsible Tourism Week as an inexpensive way to broaden and deepen conversations about travel and tourism.

"The past three years Responsible Tourism Week has encouraged everyone to show the practical actions of making tourism beneficial to locals and visitors alike. With citizens seizing the day around the world in 2011, we think it's about time that we organize ourselves in travel and tourism," said Ron.

“Who should participate?”

“For travelers, this is an opportunity to see where to go, how to travel and who to meet.

“For travel businesses and local tourism leaders, this is free advertising and an opportunity to learn good practices from around the globe.

“For journalists and other media pros, this is an opportunity to scan beyond the horizon for new stories.

“Another plus: admission is free and there's no jet lag!”

There's a whole heap of links to useful resources regarding Responsible Tourism Week in this [post](#) on This Tourism Week - but if you need more information, please contact Ron Mader editor@planeta.com or visit Planeta.com. (Can't read the funny little square, black and white, boxy things in the images on my [post](#)? These are QR codes, and there's more information [here](#)).

For more about Responsible Tourism Week on the Web, visit

- Wiki <http://planeta.wikispaces.com/rtweek2012>
- Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=135563616538509>
- Slideshare <http://www.slideshare.net/planeta/rtweek2012>
- Twitter @ronmader - using the hashtag #rtweek2012

Africa's Biggest Tuskers

Looking for the largest tuskers in Southern Africa?

According to equine and wildlife surgeon [Dr. Johan Marais](#) - who's published two books on Africa's elephants (Great Tuskers of Africa, and In search of Africa's Great Tuskers) - you'll find them in the unique sand forests and grasslands of the [Tembe National Elephant Park](#).

Situated on the KwaZulu-Natal side of the South Africa / Mozambique Transfrontier Park, Tembe is managed by [Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife](#) and is home to more than 260 of the largest elephant in the world - and to three of the largest tuskers in Southern Africa: Isilo, Mkadebona, and Siqualo. (Isilo, the largest of them all, is thought to be between 45 and 53 years of age, to weigh between 6,500 and 7,000 kilograms, and to stand about 3.2 metres tall. His tusks are estimated to be about 2.5 metres long, and to weigh between 60 and 65 kg).

The pristine wilderness of the reserve boasts the Big Five – elephant, lion, leopard, rhino (black and white) and buffalo – as well many other mammal species (including the tiny Suni, one of the world's smallest antelope), and more than 340 species of birds.

... And you don't even need to go there to see them: just click on the [webcam](#) whenever you need a reality check.

Dr. Marais, who has travelled extensively in Southern, Eastern and Central Africa in search of free-roaming elephants, recently wrote that the species is, “The marquee of African wildlife... with their highly social complexity and intelligent minds have always compelled respect.”

And, he says, tuskers (bulls with tusks that exceed 100 pounds - or 45.45 kg - in weight) play a vital role in their ecology.

But they've been systematically destroyed.

"During the early 1900s, great tuskers were the norm in countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the south-western corner of Ethiopia, southern Sudan and the grassy plains of Tanzania and Kenya."

Elephant bulls reach their breeding prime at about 35 to 40 years of age - but, "Unfortunately this is the same time when they also emerge as hundred-pounders."

Also: "Their ivory grows exponentially at this stage so that it becomes very large over only a short number of years.

"Hunting of these magnificent bulls takes place exactly at this stage, so that few of these bulls are able to pass their genes on to future generations.

"This is exactly the reason why the once numerous hundred-pounders have diminished to less than 40 bulls in the whole of Africa today."

Dr. Marais' concern is that, "Selective destruction of great tuskers by trophy hunters in particular has resulted in the loss of some of the finest great tusk genes in Africa today.

"The best genes for ivory in Africa are currently in Kenya, in Tsavo National Park.

"The second best place in Africa in my opinion for ivory is Tembe Elephant Park. Nowhere else have I seen so many bulls with such good ivory.

"Even in a park like Kruger National Park, the average bull carries much smaller ivory than the average bull in Tembe.

"Tembe definitely features as one of the top reserves in Africa when it comes to conservation of elephants with large ivory. The park has been managed really well and the fact that no hunting or poaching has been permitted has allowed the elephant population to develop a fair number of great tuskers – more than Kruger currently!"

Having said that, Dr. Marais urged Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife to gear its programmes, "Towards protecting these old, magnificent lords of the bush so that their genes may live on in the young bulls that wander across the African savannah."

For visitors, Tembe combines the best of both worlds: an authentic Big Five experience with the personal touch and world class service of a private luxury lodge - at very reasonable rates.

Interestingly, from a responsible tourism point of view, the lodge is co-owned, managed and staffed by the Tembe tribe, under Inkosi (Chief) Tembe.

For more information, visit the [Tembe National Elephant Park](#) - and don't forget to check in on the [webcam](#) - you might even catch a glimpse of Isilo himself: he visits the waterhole daily.

Now go away on holiday - it's in the economy's best interests.

... And in the meantime... have a **GREAT** tourism week!

[Martin Hatchuel](#) - BarefootWriter

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About This Tourism Week

This Tourism Week - a free service brought to you by BarefootClients.co.za - is a personal e-letter and informed commentary on issues affecting South Africa's tourism industry. Please note that the articles in This Tourism Week may only be reproduced with permission (want it? Mail me - martin@thistourismweek.co.za).

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