



STORY **JULIA UNGER**
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Thula Thula (meaning peace and tranquillity in isiZulu) is a privately-owned 4500-hectare luxury safari destination in the heart of Zululand, a mere two hours from Durban.

This malaria-free wildlife sanctuary was once home to the late bestselling author and passionate conservationist Lawrence Anthony, whose untimely death saw his French wife, Françoise Malby-Anthony, catapulted into the driving seat to steer his conservation projects, two luxury lodges and conference centre.

Françoise keeps a watchful eye on the infamous herd of seven “troublesome, rogue” elephants, who, together with their matriarch Nana, still roam the reserve.

In his second book, *The Elephant Whisperer*, Lawrence describes how he rescued the elephants and, over time, managed to create a special and trusting bond with them. At the time of Lawrence’s passing on March 7, 2012, these once-violent animals made their way through the bush for 12 hours to reach the home Françoise and Lawrence shared. There, they formed their own elephant guard of honour and visibly mourned the man who saved them from being shot. They stood for two days and, in their own way, said goodbye to the man they loved. It remains an enigma how they knew that he had passed away.

1. One of Africa’s gentle giants – a privileged sighting.
2. The Thula Thula elephants gained an international following through Lawrence Anthony’s bestselling books.
3. Lawrence shared a special bond with Nana, the herd’s matriarch.
4. Françoise Malby-Anthony keeps Lawrence’s legacy alive.

Into the WILD

A trip to Thula Thula gets visitors up close with the infamous elephant herd immortalised in Lawrence Anthony’s bestselling books. But that’s not all... From French cuisine to cutting-edge conservation, this is a destination with so much to give.



“It’s hard to really relax, but I unwind when I am with my dogs or watching our special wildlife in their natural habitat,” says Françoise. “I always think that we humans have a lot to learn from animals. My motto in life is ‘stay positive, be patient and persevere’ – et Voila!”

Despite the many challenges she faces on a daily basis, Françoise is the eternal optimist and thinks that there are no problems, only solutions. She avoids negative or pessimistic people and considers herself to be a true African woman. Her main focus on the reserve is to assist the anti-poaching and habitat expansion programs.

“Two weeks after Lawrence passed, one of our orphan rhinos, Thabo, was shot by poachers. Since then, security has been a major issue for us, and the need to increase the safekeeping of our rhinos and all of our other precious wildlife is one of our main priorities.”

As the Thula Thula elephant herd is now at maximum capacity, a number of solutions have been suggested to deal with this situation. One plan that has been implemented is the reversible Male Elephant Contraception Program, which allows for controlled breeding. This operation began in September 2012, but it does not appear to have had the desired effect. Questions still remain as to how continued contraception might influence such a highly sociable species.

“The second solution is to extend the land and incorporate it into a community-driven project, which will not only support our conservation

5. Thula Thula is a haven for these endangered creatures.

6. Suite Royale at Thulu Thula Lodge is bush luxury at its best.



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effort, but also create employment and improve education for the local communities,” Françoise says.

Thanks to the local community, Thula Thula will hopefully soon incorporate an extra 3 500-hectares of land to expand the elephants’ habitat. However, US\$350 000 still needs to be raised for 35km of secure fencing, as well as for roads, improved security and equipment, guard training, vehicles, conservation and land management. The list seems endless.

Françoise and her team aim to raise these funds from public donations. Anyone can sponsor an acre of the extended Thula Thula land for US\$50, buy a metre of fencing for US\$100 or even “Adopt a Thula Thula Elephant” for a mere US\$25 per month. In exchange, donors will receive a certificate recognising their contribution to the conservation of African wildlife. They will have symbolically purchased a small piece of Africa and saved a life.

Whatever aid is given to fund this elephant habitat extension will allow the herd to continue growing safely and remain united within their own family environment.

Although Françoise has bravely taken up the baton where Lawrence left off, she has managed to put her own uniquely French stamp on the hospitality side of the business. Ironically, Thula Thula has become renowned for its French Cuisine, as well as for its wildlife.

“The biggest decision I ever made was to leave my great

LITTLE BLACK BOOK

While you’re at Thula Thula, take advantage of these great add-ons:

- photography workshop with Thula Thula’s in-house photographer, Kim McLeod
- therapeutic massage
- visit to the local rural Zulu village, where guests can consult the Sangoma
- a cruise on the St Lucia Estuary to view hippos and crocodiles
- a Champagne picnic lunch in the bush
- French cooking classes

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7 AND 8. The Luxury Tented Camp offers spacious accommodation for the whole family.
 9. Game drives provide memorable encounters.

job, great friends and great life in Paris 29 years ago to come and live in Africa,” Françoise explains. “So, I brought a little bit of France with me and am training young Zulu ladies from the local community to cook the very best French cuisine. It is so rewarding to see how proud they are of their achievements and for them to receive compliments from both local and international guests. The secret, I always tell them, is to do things with love and passion. And, this is what they do.”

Visitors to Thula Thula will enjoy viewings of a wide variety of game, including the infamous elephants, as well as buffalo, rhino, leopard, giraffe, hyena, crocodile, zebra, wildebeest, kudu, nyala and a spectacular variety of other indigenous species, great and small. Over 350 bird species, including raptors, make for exceptional sightings and a morning chorus that has to be experienced.

“My late husband has been an incredible inspiration to me and, together with my amazing and dedicated Thula Thula Team, I am determined to carry on his work and look after his beloved animals,” Françoise concludes.