



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: An intimate dinner for two at the Riverside Gazebo perched on the edge of the Umngazi River; aerial view of the Umngazi River Bungalows and Spa; one of the spa baths overlooking the bungalows; the luxury Ntabeni Spa Suite which has panoramic views of the Umngazi River Bungalows and the Wild Coast. It's fit for a king!

CARVIN GOLDSTONE

BREATHLESS IN UMGGAZI

IF THE road to hell is paved with good intentions then the road to paradise was paved with potholes.

The deep, wide, appear-of-nowhere type potholes that set you back a couple of grand, if you hit one.

But I would drive through every pothole a second time round if the paradise at the end of the road was the Umngazi River Bungalows & Spa near Port St Johns in the Eastern Cape.

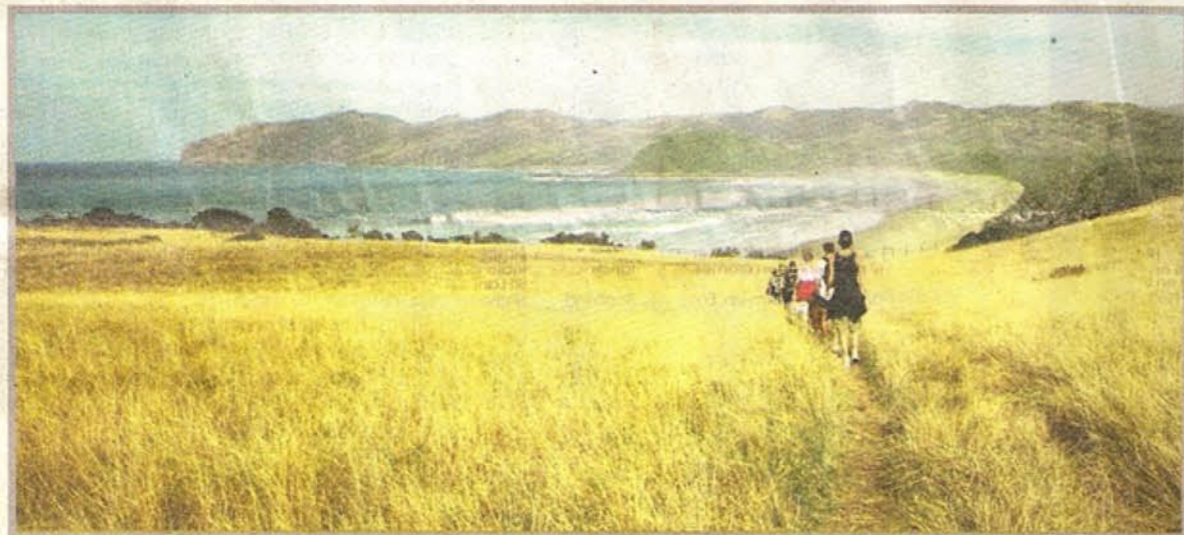
It was at this jewel on the Wild Coast, located along the Umngazi River, where my wife, Latoya, and our three sons, Leon, Clinton and toddler Jakin, spent a relaxing and fun weekend.

Boat cruises, an excursion to view the spectacular sight of blasts of water exploding through the top of a blowhole, hiking trails, bird walks, mangrove swamp walks, trout fishing, dune surfing and various indoor activities are among the things to do on holiday.

When we arrived, we were a tad early but Umngazi has a day house facility so we never felt stranded.

After lunch we were taken to our sea-facing bungalow which also looked on to the white sand dunes which separate the Umngazi River from the Wild Coast.

I had been contemplating the idea of doing some dune surfing. Like its ocean equivalent – which I sucked at – dune surfing proved much



harder than it looked.

But from the time we arrived there, I knew I had found surfing buddies in Leon and Clinton.

After packing up the surfboards we hit the games room where the whole family could enjoy quiet time.

Umngazi is a family spot and the atmosphere encouraged us to relax together.

It's one of those holiday places where you don't feel bad

if your toddler's clothes get dirty from playing in the grass because the other guests' children are usually also covered in dirt.

One of the must-do's for any visitor to Umngazi is the Sundowner Fish Eagle Cruise up the Umngazi River where, if you're fortunate, you will witness the mighty fish eagle in action.

Our tour guide told us that there was a chance we might not see the bird descend but,

after he mimicked several bird calls, the majestic creature swooped down from the horizon to catch the mullet that the guide had thrown into the water to attract him.

Fishing is a big attraction at Umngazi and the lodge offers a service which transports guests to the best fishing spots.

But for many, the most memorable experience at Umngazi may well prove to be the spa on the hillside overlooking the resort.

STUNNING VIEWS: There are several hikes and walks for guests at Umngazi including the forest walk, Port St Johns hike and Mangrove Swamp walk

PICTURES:
SUPPLIED

It includes a Pondo spa experience, a spa bath, a back massage or a mini facial.

Umngazi has a fantastic nanny service which we perhaps didn't take enough advantage of.

However, our fellow lodgers showed us the advantages of a reliable nanny service. It ensures that you are able to enjoy your holiday with a quiet confidence that your children are in good hands.

The nannies are women

who come from the communities surrounding Umngazi. Many travel in dinghies across the Umngazi River to get to work.

The child minders also do a fantastic job of arranging a variety of activities for the children, catering for all ages.

We mainly used the nanny service around meal times – and you will need all your senses to enjoy the delicious cuisine at Umngazi.

On the Sunday evening we were treated to a romantic dinner at the Riverside Gazebo, a glass-framed structure perched on the water's edge.

We enjoyed a four-course meal that included asparagus soup, salmon soufflé, leg of lamb, crème brûlée and a platter made up of South African cheeses.

The morning, afternoon and evening meals were also sumptuous and included crayfish on the Saturday night menu, among other delicacies.

According to some of the employees, the lodge has brought much-needed income to the area with local residents performing many of the duties in and around the lodge.

It is this slick relationship between the owners of Umngazi and the local community which is the secret to the success of the resort.

On leaving, picturesque, was how I best described Umngazi.

Relaxing, was my wife's parting shot.

"Can we come back next weekend," was the children's consensus.

WIN WIN WIN!!!

ONE lucky The Independent on Saturday reader can win a three-night stay for two people at Umngazi River Bungalows. The prize includes three meals, a sunset river cruise and a spa treatment.

Prize is for out of season period only. Competition closes June 9.

The prize cannot be exchanged for cash.

ENTRY FORM

NAME: _____

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RULES

The editor's decision is final
Winners will be contacted by telephone
Employees of Independent Newspapers are not eligible to enter
The winner must be prepared to have their picture taken for publicity in the IOS

UMNGAZI RIVER BUNGALOWS PACKAGE SPECIALS FOR IOS READERS

Ntabeni Spa Suite Package: R3 450 per person
Private Double Honeymoon: R2 640 per person
Private Single Honeymoon Suite package: R2 520 per person.
Emlonyeni (Luxury sea-facing): R2 340 per person.
Sea facing: R2 280 per person
River and garden facing: R2 130 per person

All package specials include three nights accommodation, three meals a day, a bottle of bubbly on ice in room on arrival, Sundowner Fish Eagle cruise, and your choice of the following: Pondo Spa Experience, a spa bath, a back massage or mini facial.

BOOKING GUIDELINES: Only available during June 2009. Spa treatments and specific activities cannot be exchanged and are weather dependent.
Rates subject to change without prior notice.