

Jozini Tiger Lodge a 'dream come true'

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THE breathtaking Lake Jozini in KwaZulu-Natal's northern hinterland now boasts a R100 million 4-star hotel dubbed the Jozini Tiger Lodge, managed by burgeoning Durban-based hotel operators, Signature Life Hospitality.

The 60-room lodge, which overlooks the Pongolapoort Dam (also known as Jozini Dam/Lake) in Matutoland near the Swazi and Mozambican borders - had a "soft opening" this week.

It is expected have an official grand opening later this month.

Signature Life boss Alan Vels held a media briefing on the new facility with the owners Alex Shazi and Albert Lourens in Durban last week.

Vels said the Jozini Tiger Lodge was one of the biggest resort developments in northern KZN with the property set to develop into a R500m project over the next five to 10 years.

"The opening of the lodge is only the first phase. There are other plans including the development of sectional-title homes or chalets on the property with panoramic views of the lake," he said.

"Jozini Tiger Lodge is a welcome luxury hospitality offering in the area. It features a standalone restaurant manned by an award-winning chef; a bar; outdoor boma area; wellness centre and conference facilities accommodating up to 160 delegates.

"It is located in one of the most beautiful regions in South Africa, which because of its secluded location is still largely untapped from a tourism development point of view. This is a major investment in the area and has created about 70 job opportunities for mainly local people," said Vels.

The lodge gets its name not only from the lake but also from the mystifying tiger fish in its waters, which makes the lake famous as a "heavenly anglers" retreat.

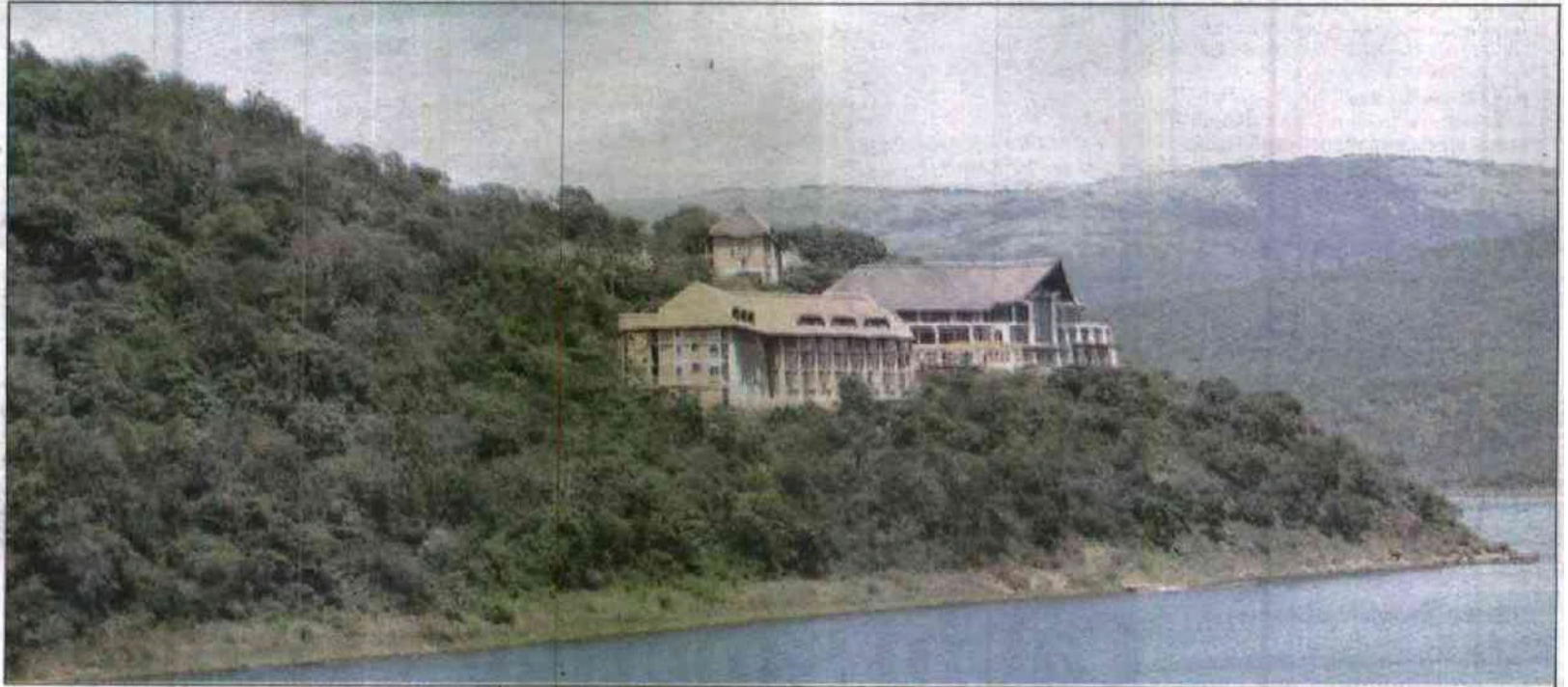
Jozini is a fishing hot spot and is reportedly the most southern place in Africa where tiger fish is found. It even hosts an annual tiger fishing tournament in October, which attracts anglers from around the world.

Set amid the African bush of the acclaimed Pongola game reserve - the thatched-roofed lodge fits into the natural environment along the Lebombo mountain range.

Pongola is touted to be home to the first game reserve in Africa and boasts a variety of wildlife including white rhino, kudu, impala, nyala, wild dog, wildebeest, zebras, buffalo, elephant, giraffe, hippos and crocodile.

The area is also a renowned birdlife paradise.

Shazi - an award-winning entrepreneur and property owner - said he was approached by Lourens to



The Jozini Tiger Lodge - a new R100 million 4-star hotel overlooking Lake Jozini - in northern KwaZulu-Natal - which opened its doors this week.

invest in the Jozini tourism development.

"I came into the project about two years ago and saw it as an exciting venture and opportunity to get into the tourism industry. There are five partners in the project and one key partner is the local community, who have an equal stake in the project," he said.

"We got some financing from the National Empowerment Fund. However, I am a self-made businessman and this project should not be seen as a black empowerment venture, but rather a commercial project with the local community," added Shazi.

"It's a dream come true for us to be opening the Jozini Tiger Lodge. I have other properties in the area,

but this is our most luxurious development to date," said Lourens.

"It is a new tourism property that KZN and the local community can be proud of, which will also attract more upmarket visitors to the area because we have Signature Life operating the establishment.

"The lodge is more than an accommodation facility and will provide game viewing, fishing and watersport activities together with other tourism providers in the area," he said.

Vels said the lodge would also have its own house boat on Jozini Lake. "We want to drive conference and meetings to the area by targeting incentives and business tourism through things like team-building," he said.



A closer view of the lodge showing some of its 60 rooms with balconies boasting panoramic views of the lake.



At a meeting on the Jozini Tiger Lodge development held at the Quarters Hotel in Durban were, from left, Alan Vels, chief executive of Signature Life Hospitality, with the lodge's owners and developers, Alex Shazi and Albert Lourens. PICTURE: TERRY HAYWOOD