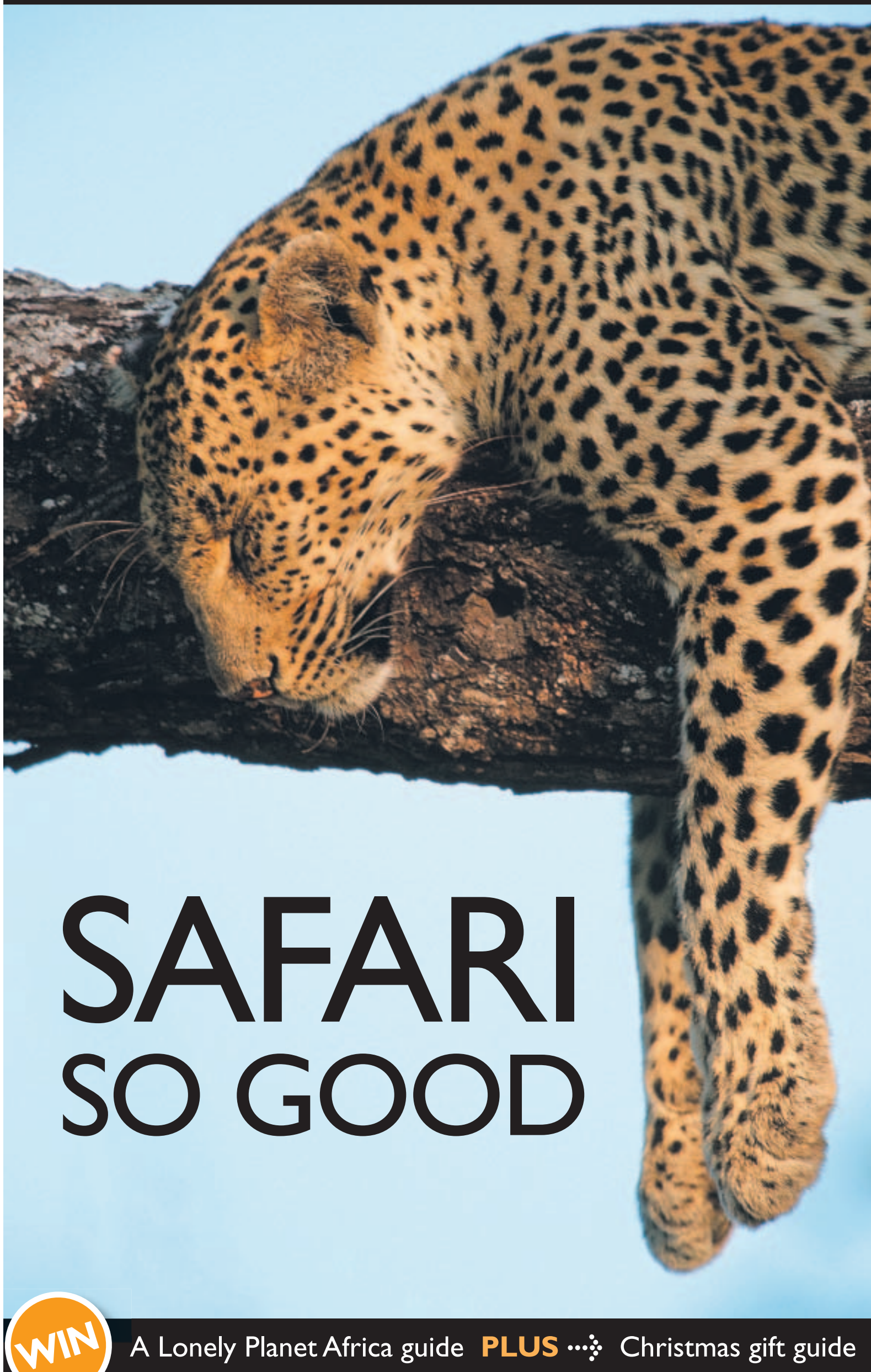


TRAVEL

HERALD SUN FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2007

- DARWIN IN THE GREEN
- LONDON'S EAST END
- DUBAI'S SHOPPING FESTIVAL



SAFARI SO GOOD

Rachael Oakes-Ash avoids joining the feast on a walking safari in Kruger National Park

IN THE bush of South Africa one is either predator or prey. The daytime beauty of red earth, white sands, lush green forests and burnt grey scrub turn after sundown into the killing fields, literally.

The night hours are the fast-food hours of the bush, when lions stalk wildebeest, leopards take on young zebra and the jackals and vultures wait for leftovers.

The rest just hide and hope for the best.

It's a harsh place to be taking a walk, which is why I'm glad I have a ranger with a gun.

Mark Shaw — Shudu or Lucky, to his friends — is guiding me and four others through the bushland of the Sabi Sands region on the border of the Kruger National Park in South Africa.

We are looking for any sign of rhino or elephant, two critters too big to hide, or so I thought.

We have been awake since 5am, when we were called from our slumber with hot coffee and fresh biscuits baked on an open fire by Elneck, our resident chef.

A leopard has left clear imprints around our four canvas tents where we have flush toilets and private bucket showers filled with warm water heated on Elneck's fire and filled by Kenneth, our resident security guard.

I am told Kenneth is employed to keep the leopards at bay.

He may want to consider alternative career options because it's clear one leopard has been through camp and I am thrilled, though disappointed that I slept through his stealthy sashay.

My fellow campers tell me I even slept through lions roaring from the other side of the river bed.

I blame the plush beds more suited to a five-star hotel than a canvas canopy.

There is an art to bushwalking in Africa with one simple rule.

Stay alive.

One wrong turn and you could walk into a pride of lions or encounter the animal that kills more humans each year than any other — the hippo.

If that's not enough to keep us following the footsteps of Shudu and his local tracker, Andrew, then the idea that we might stumble on an angry buffalo will.

Continued Travel 5

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