

Kruger National Park



Try to imagine a national park the size of Israel, with huge tracts of acacia, sycamore figs and bushwillow interrupted by open savanna, rushing rivers and the occasional rocky bluff. Now fill it with lion, leopard, elephant, Cape buffalo and black rhino (the Big Five), plus cheetahs, giraffes, hippos and many species of smaller animals, and you'll start to have some notion of what it's like to visit Kruger National Park.

Kruger is one of the world's most famed protected areas – known for its size, history of conservation, diversity of wildlife and ease of access. It's a place where the drama of life and death is played out on a daily basis. One morning you may spot a pride of lions feasting on a recent kill and the next day you might spot a newborn impala struggling to take its first steps.

The park has an extensive network of sealed roads and comfortable camps, but if you prefer to keep it rough, there are also 4WD tracks, and mountain bike and hiking trails. Even when you stick to the tarmac, the sounds and scents of the bush are never more than a few metres away. Additionally, as long as you avoid weekends and school holidays, or stick to areas north of Phalaborwa Gate and along gravel roads, it's easy to travel for an hour or more without seeing another vehicle.

Southern Kruger is the most popular section of the park, with the highest animal concentrations and the easiest access. Further north, mopani takes over as the dominant vegetation here. Kruger is at its best in the far north, around Punda Maria and Pafuri. Here, although animal concentrations are somewhat lower, the bush setting and wilderness atmosphere are all-enveloping.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Exploring Kruger's hidden corners on one of its excellent **wilderness trails** (p471)
- Staying in a remote **bushveld camp** (p483) and falling asleep to the sounds of hippos grunting in a nearby river
- Taking a **night drive** (p472) and spotting the shining yellow eyes of one of the big cats gleaming from the roadside
- Sitting at a **water hole** (p470) at dawn, watching creation come alive
- Pampering yourself with a few nights at a luxurious **private wildlife reserve** (p485) bordering the park

■ AREA: 20,000 SQ KM



HISTORY

The San were the first people to see Kruger's animals, and they have left their mark in rock paintings at numerous sites throughout the park. Prior to the San, various hominid species wandered the lowveld as much as 500,000 years ago. From around AD 500, Nguni peoples had settled in.

The area that is now Kruger first came under protection in 1898, when Paul Kruger (president of the Transvaal Republic and an avid hunter) established the Sabie Game Reserve, between the Sabie and Crocodile Rivers, as a controlled hunting area. In 1902, following the second Anglo-Boer War, James Stevenson Hamilton became the reserve's first warden. Hamilton was also the first to see the tourism potential of wildlife, and to bring a true conservation

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vision to the area. In 1926, Sabie Game Reserve was joined with neighbouring Shingwedzi Game Reserve and various private farms to become Kruger National Park, and in 1927 the park was opened to the public.

Since then, Kruger has become a major research and conservation centre and one of Africa's premier wildlife-watching destinations. In the early '90s, most of the fences came down between Kruger and the private wildlife reserves lining the park's western edge. In 2002, together with Zimbabwe's Gonarezhou National Park and Limpopo National Park in Mozambique, Kruger became part of the giant **Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park** (www.greatlimpopopark.com). The park is still in its earliest stages and has just one border crossing at Giriyyondo, but once better infrastructure is in place, Kruger's wildlife will ultimately have a 35,000-sq-km area in which to roam.

ORIENTATION

Kruger is a long, narrow wedge bordered by Mozambique to the east, Limpopo province to the west and Mpumalanga to the west and south. It averages about 65km across, and is about 350km long. Rimming the park to the west, and sharing the same unfenced terrain, is a chain of private wildlife reserves.

Terrain ranging from the flat to the gently undulating covers the majority of the park, with the Lebombo Mountains rising up to the east along the Mozambique border. Major rivers flowing across Kruger from west to east include the Limpopo, Luvuvhu, Shingwedzi, Letaba, Olifants, Timbavati and Sabie.

There are 10 entry gates (*heks* in Afrikaans). On the park's southern edge are **Malelane** (☎ 013-735 6152) and **Crocodile Bridge** (☎ 013-735 6012). Both are readily accessible from the N4 from Johannesburg (Jo'burg), but if it has been raining then check road conditions as Crocodile Bridge occasionally floods and closes. The **Numbi** (☎ 013-735 5133), **Phabeni** (☎ 013-735 5890) and **Paul Kruger** (☎ 013-735 5107) gates are easily accessed from Hazyview (turn off the N4 at Nelspruit); Paul Kruger Gate is the closest to Skukuza (p482), Kruger's main rest camp. **Orpen** (☎ 013-735 6355), to the west, is convenient if you're coming from the Blyde River area. **Phalaborwa** (☎ 013-735 6509) is nearest

to Polokwane; **Punda Maria** (☎ 013-735 6870) is reached via Makhado (Louis Trichardt); and **Pafuri** (☎ 013-735 6888), in the far north, is accessed from Thohoyandou in the Venda region.

In addition, it is now possible to enter Kruger from Mozambique at the Giriyyondo Gate, which doubles as an international border crossing (visas are available on both sides). Giriyyondo, however, is only accessible with a 4WD vehicle as roads on the Mozambique side have not been upgraded. It is 95km from the Phalaborwa Gate to Giriyyondo and 75km from Giriyyondo to Massingir (Mozambique). When you enter Limpopo National Park (on the Mozambique side) you'll need to pay R50 per vehicle, R50 per adult and R25 per child.

The park is laced with a network of sealed roads (about 700km in total), one of which runs along its entire spine. These, together with more lightly travelled gravel side roads, form a road network of about 1900km.

INFORMATION

Bookings

Accommodation can be booked through **South African National (SAN) Parks central reservations office** (Map pp428-9; ☎ 012-428 9111; www.parks-sa.co.za; 643 Leyds St, Muckleneuk, Pretoria). It's also possible to book directly through Lowveld Tourism (p457) in Nelspruit, Cape Town Tourism (p106) and Tourist Junction (p305) in Durban. All of these local tourism offices have Kruger maps and publications, and they are also sold in the park in the larger rest camps.

Phone bookings are possible with credit card. Written applications for rest camps and wilderness trails can be made up to 13 months in advance. Except in the high season (school holidays, Christmas and Easter) and weekends, bookings are advisable but not essential.

Entry

Day or overnight entry to the park costs R120/60 for adults/children, with significant discounts available for South African citizens and residents, and for South African Development Community (SADC) nationals. The SAN Parks Wild Card (p85) also applies to Kruger.

Bicycles and motorcycles are not permitted to enter the park. During school holidays

JOCK OF THE BUSHVELD

After travelling around the eastern part of South Africa for a while you may start to wonder who was Jock of the Bushveld? His name is often attached to hotels, restaurants, tourist guidebooks and maps. Jock, actually, is South Africa's best-loved canine. He was immortalised in Percy Fitzpatrick's book, *Jock of the Bushveld* (published in 1907) and is still a popular marketing tool. This children's book, which paints a lively picture of the veld, is great to bring along to Kruger National Park if you have kids. In Kruger, you may spot the occasional tribute to the famed pooch – Jock Safari Lodge is named after him and there is a statue commemorating his famous duel with a sable antelope. You can also walk in Jock's paw prints along an 8km trail near Graskop (see p452). Jock's last resting place is something of a mystery. But contrary to what your safari guide might tell you, it is not at Kruger's 'dog graveyard'.

you can stay in the park for a maximum of 10 days, and at any one rest camp for five days (10 days if you're camping). Throughout the year, park authorities restrict the total number of visitors within the park, so in the high season it pays to arrive early if you don't have a booking.

Entry gate opening times vary slightly with the season, and are currently as follows.

Month	Gates/camps open (am)	Gates/camps close (pm)
Jan	4.30/5	6.30
Feb	5.30	6.30
Mar	5.30	6
Apr	6	6
May-Aug	6.30	5.30
Sep	6	6
Oct	6/5.30	6
Nov & Dec	5.30/4.30	6.30

It's an offence to arrive late at a camp and you can be fined for doing so (the camps are fenced). With speed limits of 50km/h on sealed roads and 40km/h on dirt roads (monitored by rangers with radars), it can take a while to travel from camp to camp, especially if you encounter a traffic jam near an interesting animal.

PLANT & ANIMAL DISTRIBUTION

Kruger encompasses a variety of landscapes and ecosystems, with each ecosystem favoured by particular species. Most mammals are distributed throughout the park, but some show a distinct preference for particular regions. The excellent *Find It* booklet, available from the park shops located at some of the bigger camps and at the National Parks office in Pretoria, points out

the most likely places to see all the major animals.

Impalas, buffaloes, Burchell's zebras, blue wildebeests, kudus, waterbucks, baboons, vervet monkeys, cheetahs, leopards and other smaller predators are all widespread. Birdlife is prolific along the rivers and north of the Luvuvhu River.

Rainfall is highest (700mm a year) in the southwestern corner between the Olifants and Crocodile Rivers. The area is thickly wooded and has a variety of trees including acacias, bushwillows and sycamore figs, plus flowering species such as the red-and-orange coral tree. This terrain is particularly favoured by white rhinos and buffaloes, but is less favoured by antelope and, therefore, by predators.

The eastern section of the park, to the south of the Olifants River on the plains around Satara rest camp and south to the Crocodile River, experiences reasonable rainfall (600mm) and has fertile soils. There are expanses of good grazing, with buffalo grass and red grass interspersed with acacia thorn trees (especially knobthorn), leadwood and marula trees. In this region there are large populations of impalas, zebras, wildebeests, giraffes and black rhinos. Joining them are predators, particularly lions, who prey on impalas, zebras and blue wildebeests.

North of the Olifants River the rainfall drops below 500mm and the dominant tree is mopani. This grows widely in the west, among red bushwillow, but has a tougher time on the basalt plains of the northeast, where it tends to be more stunted. The mopani is a favoured food of elephants, which are most common north of Olifants River, and is also eaten by tsessebes, elands, roans and sables.

BY THE NUMBERS

Kruger National Park's population is made up of:

- 34 amphibian species
- 49 fish species
- 116 reptile species
- 147 mammal species
- 380 indigenous tree species
- 507 bird species
- one million human visitors per year

Of the animal species, Kruger registered the following numbers in 2003:

- 200 cheetah
- 1000 leopard
- 1500 lion
- 3800 warthog
- 5000 kudu
- 5000 white rhino
- 9000 giraffe
- 10,500 elephant
- 25,150 buffalo
- 32,000 zebra
- 150,000 impala

Perhaps the most interesting area is in the far north around Punda Maria and Pafuri, which has a higher rainfall (close to 700mm at Punda Maria) than the mopani country. This enables it to support a wider variety of plants (baobabs are particularly noticeable) and greater wildlife concentrations. There is woodland, bushveld, grass plains and, between the Luvuvhu and Limpopo Rivers, a tropical riverine forest.

All of Kruger's rivers have riverine forest along their banks (often with enormous fig trees), which supports populations of bushbucks and nyalas.

Note that even outside the park borders there are still areas that support wildlife. The most prominent among these areas is along the Crocodile River on the southern border. On the banks of the Crocodile in Malelane and Komatipoort you can spot plenty of wildlife, including hippos, elephants and, you guessed it, crocodiles.

ACTIVITIES

Kruger is exceptionally well organised, with a plethora of activities to enhance your wildlife-watching. When planning an itinerary, keep in mind that the closer you can get to the bush, and the more time you can devote to becoming acquainted with its sounds, smells and rhythms, the more rewarding your experience will be. Although it's possible to get a sense for Kruger in a day, the park merits at least four to five days, and ideally at least a week. If the bush really gets into your blood, there's enough here to keep you coming back for a lifetime.

Interspersed with whatever activities you do, allow plenty of time for simply sitting still – preferably by a water hole, river or lake. The silence will soon become filled with nature's symphony, and you'll be able to watch Kruger come to life before you. Even without seeing a single animal, it's an incomparable experience to stand on a rise with Kruger stretching out before you, and savour the indescribable, primeval majesty of having such vast tracts set aside solely to protect earth's natural splendour.

Bush walks and drives can be booked from the gate and camps.

4WD Trails

The longest and most established of Kruger's 4WD trails is the **Lebombo Motorised Eco Trail**, a rough, rugged 500km 4WD route along the eastern boundary of the park, departing from Crocodile Bridge and ending at Pafuri. The trail lasts five days and costs R4940 per vehicle (maximum of four people per vehicle). You'll need to provide your own vehicle, food and drink (it's completely self-catering). Only five vehicles are permitted at a time on the trail (plus the vehicle of the ranger who accompanies you). Book well in advance through central reservations (p468).

There are also four shorter trails, all averaging about four hours, and costing R460 per vehicle plus a R100 refundable deposit. They (and the points where you can reserve them) are: **Northern Plains Adventure Trail** (Shingwedzi camp, p483); **Nonokani Adventure Trail** (Phalaborwa Gate); **Mananga Adventure Trail** (Satara camp, p483); **Madlabantu Adventure Trail** (Pretoriuskop camp, p482). All are closed after rains, and can only be booked on the morning of the day that you want to drive, with a maximum of six ve-

hicles per trail per day. There are no facilities (including ablutions) along any of the trails, so bring whatever you'll need, plus ideally a global positioning system (GPS) handset.

Bird-Watching

There is excellent bird-watching throughout Kruger, with the far north (from Punda Maria Gate up past Pafuri Gate) arguably one of the best birding areas on the continent. There are a handful of hides scattered throughout the park; see the birding pages on the website for **SAN Parks** (www.parks-sa.co.za) for a listing of their locations. Several of the bushveld camps (p483) also have their own hides, and some of the larger camps run bird-watching excursions on request. There is also an annual 24-hour **Birding Big Day** in January. For information on this, and other birding activities in the park, contact **SAN Parks Honorary Rangers** (☎ 012-426 5026).

Bush Walks

Better than the drives are guided morning and afternoon **bush walks** (morning/afternoon per person R220/175), which are possible at all the larger camps, including Satara, Skukuza, Lower Sabie and Pretoriuskop. These are highly popular, and are an excellent way to experience Kruger at close range. All walks are accompanied by armed rangers. The morning walk – when you'll have a better chance of seeing wildlife on the move – is particularly recommended.

Golf

There's a nine-hole **golf course** (☎ 013-735 5611; skukuzagolf@parks-sa.co.za; R75) at Skukuza; bring your own clubs. Tee off times are between 7am and 9.30am Sunday to Friday. Tee times must be booked in advance.

Mountain Biking

There are currently three **mountain-bike trails** (morning/afternoon R315/175) in Kruger, ranging from 12km to 24km. Full-day trails can also be arranged for R650. All are based out of **Olifants** (☎ 013-735 6606) in central Kruger, and should be booked at least several days in advance directly through the camp, or through central reservations (p468).

Tours

At the budget level, the best places to contact are the backpacker lodges in Hazyview

(p455), Nelspruit (p458) and Graskop (p452) all of which can organise tours into Kruger from about R450 per day, plus entry fees and meals. Another good budget option is **African Routes** (p641; ☎ 031-563 5080; www.africanroutes.co.za), which also includes Swaziland and the Drakensberg in its Kruger itineraries.

If you're on a tight schedule, and want to connect directly from Jo'burg or Cape Town, **SA Airlink Tours** (www.airlinktours.com) runs various flight-accommodation packages between Jo'burg and central Kruger.

Other operators include: **Wildlife Safaris** (www.wildlifesaf.co.za), which has four-day panorama tours taking in the Blyde River and Kruger for R4214 per person, including half board; **Bundu Safari Company** (☎ 011-675 0767; www.bundusafaris.co.za), which offers four-day Kruger tours for a minimum of R2900 per person (see p641); and many of the other tour operators listed in the Transport chapter (p641), most of which organise Kruger itineraries.

Wilderness Trails

Kruger's wilderness walking trails are one of the park's highlights, and a major attraction of the Southern African safari experience. They're done in small groups (maximum eight people), guided by knowledgeable armed guides and offer a superb opportunity to get a more intimate sense of the bush than would ever be possible in a vehicle. The walks are not overly strenuous, covering about 20km per day at a modest pace, and are appropriate for anyone who is reasonably fit. The itinerary is determined by the interests of the group, the time of year and the disposition of the wildlife.

Most wilderness trail walks last two days and three nights, with departures on Wednesday and Sunday afternoon. They cost R2240 per person, including accommodation in rustic, pleasant huts, plus food and equipment. Bring your own beer and wine if you'd like a drink. The walks are extremely popular, and should be booked well in advance. No children under 12 are allowed. Make bookings through Central Reservations (p468).

Brief descriptions of Kruger's seven wilderness trails:

Bushman Trail Near the Berg-en-dal rest camp in the southwestern corner of the park, this trail features treks to San rock paintings, plus the chance to see white rhinos, lions and large herds of antelope.

Metsimetsi Trail Midway between Lower Sabie and Satara rest camps on the eastern border of the park, the terrain consists of undulating savanna, ravines and the rocky gorge of the N'watsontso River. Because the river flows year-round, the surrounding area is noted for its abundant wildlife, including elephants and black rhinos.

Napi Trail Running through mixed bushveld, midway between Skukuza and Pretoriuskop rest camps, this area is home to white and black rhinos, lions, leopards, cheetahs, wild dogs, buffaloes and elephants. The trail is known for the opportunities it offers for seeing the Big Five, plus its excellent birding.

Nyalaland Trail In the far north of the park near the Luvuvhu River, in a region of strikingly diverse ecosystems, this trail is most memorable for its beauty and its wilderness ambience, rather than for opportunities to witness the Big Five. Birdlife is prolific and the area is a paradise for ornithologists.

Olifants Trail Based in the eastern part of the park on the Olifants River, its superb riverine setting offers the chance to get close to elephants, hippos, crocodiles and more, and is also known for its birding. Species you may see include fish eagles and the rare Pels fishing owl.

Sweni Trail A highly rewarding trail near Satara rest camp, many lions are attracted to the herds of wildebeests, zebras and buffaloes here – all against a highly evocative backdrop of vast grassy plains.

Woluter Trail Based in southern Kruger near the Bushman Trail, in an area inhabited by lions and white rhinos, the name commemorates legendary father and son rangers, Harry and Henry Woluter. You can find out more about Harry's exploits, including the time when he wrestled a lion, at the Stevenson-Hamilton Museum in Skukuza rest camp.

Wildlife Drives

Dawn (three hours), midmorning (two hours), sunset (three hours) and night (two hours) wildlife drives are available at most rest camps, and offer good chances to maximise your safari experience, especially as you'll have a ranger to point out interesting features. The drives are scheduled to take advantage of the natural rhythms of the wildlife, as many animals – including lions, leopards and rhinos – are at their most active from first light to around 10am, and then again later in the day. The drives are done in 10- or 20-seat vehicles and cost between R100 and R200 per person, depending on the time and vehicle size.

SLEEPING & EATING

Kruger boasts various types of accommodation, all of a high standard. Bookings can be made through central reservations, or at one

of the local tourist offices that take Kruger bookings (see p468 for all contacts).

Most visitors stay in one of the park's 12 rest camps. These offer camping, plus a range of huts, bungalows and cottages and several other styles of accommodation, as well as shops, restaurants and other facilities. Several of the rest camps have satellite camps, which are set some distance away, and are much more rustic, without any facilities.

There are also five bushveld camps in the park (smaller, more remote clusters of self-catering cottages without shops or restaurants) and two bush lodges, which are set in the middle of the wilderness, and must be booked in their entirety by a single group. Finally, there are several private concessions within Kruger offering five-star comfort.

Another possibility is to stay outside the park. For budget travellers, the best places for this are Hazyview (p454), Nelspruit (p457) and Phalaborwa (p508). At the opposite end of the spectrum, there's very luxurious accommodation in many of the private reserves bordering Kruger to the west (p485).

Rest Camps

The larger rest camps are like small towns in the middle of the bush, though they're remarkably unobtrusive considering the facilities they offer and the volume of visitors they host. All rest camps are fenced, attractively laid out and immaculately maintained, and all have electricity. Most also have shops and reasonable restaurants with reasonable prices (meals about R40 to R55), plus shared cooking facilities (sinks, hotplates and braais), public telephones and fuel supplies (petrol and diesel). There are swimming pools at Berg-en-dal, Pretoriuskop (a converted natural rock pool), Lower Sabie, Skukuza, Mopani and Shingwedzi; banks at Skukuza and Letaba; and an ATM at Skukuza. Wildlife drives and bush walks can be arranged at all of the rest camps.

Accommodation in the rest camps varies but usually comprises huts, bungalows and cottages. All are supplied with bedding and towels, and most have air-con or fans. If a kitchen is not part of the accommodation (ie if there is a communal kitchen only), visitors must bring their own cooking and eating utensils.

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Huts (two people around R240 to R285) are rustic and the cheapest option, with shared ablutions and communal cooking facilities. They sleep between two and six people, depending on the camp, and some have fridges.

Bungalows (two people around R475 to R535) are almost always en suite, and range from simple units with communal cooking facilities to more luxurious versions with kitchenettes.

Cottages (up to four people about R895) are the next step up in both comfort and price. They usually have a living room area,

WILDLIFE-WATCHING

It's a game of chance, but thanks to the variety and sheer numbers of animals in Kruger, you have a better probability of spotting wildlife here than anywhere else in the region. Viewing is best in the cooler, drier winter season, when trees lose their leaves and plant growth is sparser, improving visibility. Also at this time animals tend to be concentrated around the dwindling water sources, and there are fewer mosquitoes. However, the landscape is more attractive in summer, with fresh green growth and a plethora of newborn animals.

Whatever time of year you visit, patience and perseverance are vital prerequisites for rewarding wildlife-watching. Drive slowly, stop frequently and disengage the motor. It's amazing how often you first notice one animal, and only after stopping the car realise that there are many others in the vicinity. Even elephants can be well camouflaged when not in motion. Sitting still and staking out a water hole is always rewarding. Rest camps provide maps that have a 'coloured pin system' showing where animals have been spotted in the area that day and on the previous day – a good place to start.

Thanks to Kruger's excellent road system, you can get off the main roads quite easily, and won't need a 4WD for most secondary gravel roads. (If it has been raining heavily, check with rangers at your rest camp for routes that should be avoided.) Sunglasses and binoculars are essential.

Though different animals display varying behaviour at different times of the day (and tend to be more active in the morning and again in the late afternoon and evening), they don't follow rules, so there is always something to be seen. The more you know about the animals (especially their distribution and behaviour) the better your chance of finding them, so it's worth buying one of the detailed books available at the rest camp shops. Some tips:

- Watch for big cats enjoying the breezes from rocky knolls; leopards will often rest high off the ground in tree branches
- Circling vultures and parked cars are two obvious signs of something interesting, as are excited motorists attempting to flag you down
- Warthogs, baboons, zebras, giraffes and many antelope species will happily graze together, so if you see one species, there will often be more close by
- The presence of feeding herbivores does not preclude the possibility of a predator in the vicinity. Look carefully, as predators are expert stalkers and may not be obvious. Many animals do, however, seem to know whether a predator is actually hunting; if it isn't they will be quite relaxed in its presence.
- Antelopes will be nervous and alert if they are aware of a predator on the hunt, but may not immediately flee. They know they can nearly always outrun a predator if they have a sufficient head start, so they maintain a 'flight distance' between themselves and the threat. If the hunter encroaches, the antelope will move, but will try to keep the hunter in sight. If the hunter charges, the antelope will flee, though may not go far.
- Avoid driving too close to the animals, so as not to disturb their natural behaviour. If you do approach, be slow and steady, without sudden movements.
- Avoid frequent stopping and starting of the car engine – if you stop, it's best to stay put for a while. However, bear in mind that engine vibrations may create a problem with camera shake. There are a few designated spots in Kruger where you are permitted to get out of your car.

as well as kitchen and bathroom, and come in several sizes, including multibedroom 'family cottages'.

Some camps also offer the option of staying in safari tents (two people about R240), all of which are furnished, take from two to four people, and have a refrigerator and fan. Most have shared kitchen and ablutions facilities. Several camps – notably Lower Sabie rest camp and Tamboti satellite camp (near Orpen) – also have safari tents with private bathroom and cooking facilities (from R395 to R425 for two people).

For those with tents or caravans, camping (camp sites for one to two people R105) is available at many rest camps; exceptions are in the reviews. The charge per extra person is R36, with a maximum of six extras; booking is not generally necessary. Many tent sites are not equipped with power points.

Facilities for disabled persons are available at Berg-en-dal, Crocodile Bridge, Pretoriuskop, Lower Sabie, Skukuza, Satara, Olifants, Letaba, Mopani, Shingwedzi and Tamboti. The website for **SAN Parks** (www.parks-sa.co.za) has an excellent overview of conditions at each camp for disabled travellers, and is well worth browsing when planning your travels.

Note that bookings for all rest camps should be made through central reservations, or at one of the local tourist offices that take Kruger bookings (see p468); the numbers listed in this section are for specific rest camp information and emergencies only. The camps are listed from south to north – the direction that most visitors travel.

Berg-en-dal (☎ 013-735 6106) A medium-sized camp 12km from Malelane Gate, and one of the most modern, with bungalows and family cottages sleeping up to six people. It's laid out in attractive bush landscape by the Matjulu River, about 5km from a water hole popular with rhinos. There's a visitors centre and nature trails. About 9km away on the southern border of Kruger, is the small and (except for its size) not particularly appealing **Malelane satellite camp**. Other than camping and a few bungalows, there are no facilities. If you want to stay here, you'll need to register at Malelane Gate.

Crocodile Bridge (☎ 013-735 6012) This small camp is near the Crocodile River just in

from Crocodile Bridge Gate, and is a good choice if you've arrived in Kruger too late to drive further into the park. There are crocodile and hippo pools a few kilometres away, and zebras, buffaloes and wildebeests in the surrounding acacia. Accommodation is in bungalows or a safari tent. There is no restaurant, and diesel fuel is not available.

Pretoriuskop (☎ 013-735 5128) This is Kruger's oldest camp, and one of its largest. It's located near Numbi Gate, in higher country than other places in the park, and is thus a bit cooler in summer. Accommodation is in huts, bungalows and several large cottages sleeping between six and nine people. The surrounding country is attractive, with granite outcrops, and is frequented by white rhinos. Hippos can be spotted at nearby Mestel Dam. The camp includes a natural rock swimming pool that is popular with kids.

Lower Sabie (☎ 013-735 6056) This medium-sized camp, about one hour (35km) from Crocodile Bridge Gate, overlooks a dam on the Sabie River that attracts many animals. For sleeping, there's a good selection of huts, safari tents, bungalows and cottages. Camp sites here have individual water taps.

Skukuza (☎ 013-735 4152) On the Sabie River, Skukuza is the main camp in Kruger, with facilities similar to those in a small town. There's a bank with an ATM, an Automobile Association (AA) workshop petrol station, a doctor, a library, the police, a post office, a small museum and a helpful information centre. There's also an extensive range of accommodation, including luxury bungalows and various cottages. Apart from its size, the main drawbacks are the slightly sanitised feel and the camp sites, which are distinctly average.

Orpen (☎ 013-735 6355) Near Orpen Gate, this is a small, attractive camp with a nearby water hole that attracts wildlife. There's no restaurant; cooking facilities are shared and no utensils are provided. Some accommodation doesn't have electricity, so bring a torch (flashlight). There are two satellite camps near Orpen. **Maroela**, 4km northeast, has basic camp sites with power points. The appealing **Tamboti**, 4km east, has nice safari tents, complete with wildlife wandering around outside. Some of the tents have private bathrooms and kitchens, and two have wheelchair access ramps. For both

Maroela and Tamboti, you'll need to check in at Orpen.

Satara (☎ 013-735 6306) East of Orpen Gate, Satara is situated in an area of flat and fertile plains that attracts large numbers of grazing animals. While its setting isn't that appealing (mainly because of the lack of any raised viewpoints), it has the highest lion population in the entire park. About 45km north of Satara near the Olifants River is **Balule satellite camp**, with camping and several rustic three-person huts. There's no electricity (kerosene lanterns are available at the camp, but bring a torch). There's a large freezer and a stove, but otherwise, you'll need to bring everything in with you, including cooking utensils. Although Balule is much closer to Olifants camp (11km further north), check-in must be done through Satara.

Olifants (☎ 013-735 6606) This camp has a fantastic position on the bluff high above the Olifants River and offers spectacular views. From the camp you can see elephants, hippos and many other animals as they come down to the river 100m below. There are no camp sites at Olifants, but it is possible to camp at nearby Balule satellite camp.

Letaba (☎ 013-735 6636) About 20km to the north, Letaba has excellent views over a wide bend of the Letaba River. It's an attractive camp with lots of shade, grassy camp sites and a restaurant. The Elephant Hall museum here focuses on the elephant and includes mounted tusks of the big bulls (Mafunyane, Dzombo, Shingwedzi and Shawu) that have died in the park. There are sections on poaching, the illegal ivory trade, geomorphology and biology, plus descriptions of elephant habits.

Mopani (☎ 013-735 6536) This modern rest camp is on the edge of the Pioneer Dam, 45km north of Letaba. The buildings are all of natural materials and thatch, and the overall impression is highly aesthetic. There are no camp sites, but about 3km away is **Shipandani** – a 'sleepover' hide with mattresses, bed linens, a modest collection of cooking utensils and toilet facilities. It can take up to six people.

Shingwedzi (☎ 013-735 6806) The large Shingwedzi is an old-style place in the northern section of the park, with many huts and cottages arranged in circles and shaded by

tall mopani trees and palms. A restaurant overlooks the Shingwedzi River and there's a swimming pool. There are excellent drives in the vicinity.

Punda Maria (☎ 013-735 6873) The northernmost rest camp, Punda Maria is in sandveld (dry, sandy belt) country by Dimbo Mountain. The camp is a long-established place with an agreeable wilderness ambience. The area's ecology is fascinating and supports a wide range of animals, including lions and elephants.

Bushveld Camps

Bushveld camps are an excellent option if you want more of a wilderness experience than is possible at the rest camps, and are equipped for self-catering. Most are reasonably close to a rest camp where supplies can be bought. All have solar power, so electrical appliances other than lights, fans and fridges cannot be used. Bookings (made through central reservations or at one of the local tourist offices that take Kruger bookings; see p468) are essential. At most of the bushveld camps, it's possible to arrange night drives and bush walks. Accommodation is in cottages, all with private bathroom, most of which sleep up to six people. Prices range from R785 to R855 for four people, plus R185 per additional person. If you are just one person you still pay the unit price for the entire cottage (R785 to R855).

BIYAMITI

On the southern border of Kruger, between Malelane and Crocodile Bridge Gates, Biyamiti is in an easily accessed area known for its lions and other representatives of the Big Five. It accommodates up to 70 people in thatched cottages with a pleasant, semi-pampered feel.

TALAMATI

This lies about 30km southeast of Orpen Gate on the N'waswitsontso River in an exceptionally wildlife-rich area. It has two- and four-person cottages with basic kitchen facilities, plus a more luxurious four-person cottage, and several hides overlooking the nearby water hole.

SHIMUWINI

This camp is on the Letaba River, 50km northeast of Phalaborwa Gate in a riverine

setting that's ideal for bird-watching. It has a bird hide overlooking the dam, and accommodation in two- to six-person cottages.

BATELEUR

If you make it to northern Kruger, it's well-worth staying a few nights here. It's the smallest and nicest of the bushveld camps – rustic but comfortable, with a good setting, a wilderness ambience and a small pan on the edge of the camp, plus two dams nearby that offer some excellent bird-watching. It's in northern Kruger, about 35km southwest of Shingwedzi.

SIRHENI

In a lightly wooded area about 40km northwest of Shingwedzi in Kruger's far north, Sirheni, like Shimuwini, is on a dam. It's an excellent spot for birding, with the added appeal of more of a wilderness atmosphere.

Bush Lodges

Kruger's two bush lodges are set off on their own and must be reserved in their entirety. The idea is to have as remote a bush experience as possible, in the privacy of your own group. There are no facilities other than equipped kitchens, braai areas and bedding; you'll need to bring all supplies in with you. For both lodges, you need to make reservations before arrival, either through central reservations (p468), or at any Kruger gate or rest camp. Neither lodge has electricity, other than solar power for lights and fans.

Boulders (up to 4 people R1665, per additional person R310) About 23km southwest of Mopani rest camp, Boulders takes up to 12 people in six rooms.

Roodewal (up to 4 people R1575, per additional person R310) About 28km northeast of Orpen Gate, Roodewal takes up to 19 people in a cottage and several bungalows.

Private Concessions

Kruger's private concessions are all located in wildlife-rich areas of the park and offer the chance to go on safari while enjoying all the amenities. Accommodation (in luxury tents or lodges) should be booked directly with the relevant concession operator. (There are also links from the SAN Parks website.) Prices start around R4500 per person. They include the following:

Jock Safari Lodge (☎ 013-735 5200; www.jocksafari lodge.com) In southern Kruger, about halfway between Berg-en-dal and Skukuza rest camps.

Lukimbi Safari Lodge (☎ 011-888 3713; www.lukimbi.com) Near the southern border of the park, and just southwest of Biyamiti bushveld camp.

Rhino Post Camp (☎ 011-467 1886; www.zulunet.co.za) Near Skukuza rest camp on the Mutlumvi River.

Singita Lebombo Lodge (☎ 021-683 3424; www.singita.co.za) Part of a world-renowned resort; see p486.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Air

SAAirlink (☎ 011-978 1111; www.sairlink.co.za) has daily flights linking both Jo'burg and Cape Town with Mpumalanga Kruger International Airport (MKIA) near Nelspruit (for Numbi, Malelane and Crocodile Bridge Gates), and with Kruger Park Gateway Airport in Phalaborwa (2km from Phalaborwa Gate). Sample one-way fares and flight times: Jo'burg to Phalaborwa (R1300, one hour); Jo'burg to MKIA (R1200, one hour); Cape Town to MKIA (R2200, 2½ hours). SAAirlink also has daily flights connecting Cape Town with Hoedspruit (for Orpen Gate) via Sun City (R2400, 3¼ hours).

South African Airways (☎ 086-035 9722, 011-978 1111; www.flysaa.com) flies six times weekly between Durban and MKIA (R1400, 1½ hours), while **South African Express** (☎ 011-978 5577; www.saexpress.co.za) flies daily between Jo'burg and Hoedspruit Eastgate Airport (R1300, 1½ hours), with connections to Cape Town. **Nationwide Airlines** (☎ 086-173 7737, 011-327 3000; www.nationwideair.co.za) is another airline to check, with several flights weekly connecting both Cape Town and Jo'burg with MKIA.

Bus & Minibus Taxi

For most visitors, Nelspruit is the most convenient large town near Kruger, and is well served by buses and minibuses taxis to and from Jo'burg (see p460). Numbi Gate is about 50km away, and Malelane Gate about 65km away. Phalaborwa, in the north on the edge of Kruger, is being increasingly promoted as a gateway for northern Kruger. It is served by regular bus services to/from Jo'burg and elsewhere in South Africa (see p509). Hoedspruit is another possible hub, with reasonable bus connections to elsewhere in South Africa (see p510). It's also the most convenient gateway for many of

the private reserves bordering Kruger, and an easy 70km drive from the park's Orpen Gate. From the Venda region in Limpopo province, minibuses taxis run close to the Punda Maria Gate.

Car

Skukuza is 500km from Jo'burg (six hours) and Punda Maria about 620km (eight hours). **Avis** (☎ 013-735 5651; www.avis.co.za) has a branch at Skukuza, and there is car rental from the Nelspruit, Hoedspruit and Phalaborwa airports.

Most visitors drive themselves around the park, and this is the best way to experience Kruger. If you're running low on funds, hiring a car between three or four people for a few days is relatively cheap (see p636).

Driving on the paved roads in Kruger is easy. There is little traffic and everyone drives slowly. But keep an eye out for sudden stops and distracted drivers. There are petrol stations at the biggest camps, but you'll save a little money by filling up before entering the park.

Train

The **Komati** (p643) runs from Jo'burg via Nelspruit to Komatipoort (1st/2nd/economy class R185/130/70), which is about 12km from Kruger's Crocodile Bridge Gate.

PRIVATE WILDLIFE RESERVES

Spreading over a vast lowveld area just west of Kruger is a string of private reserves that offer comparable wildlife-watching to what you'll experience in the park. The main reserves – Sabie Sand, Manyeleti and Timbavati – directly border Kruger (with no fences), and the same Big Five populations that roam the park are also at home here.

There are around 200 lodges and camps in the private reserves and most are pricey – from around R2000 to over R6000 per person sharing, all-inclusive. (Prices listed here are based on the high season rate.)

However, together with the handful of new private concessions operating within the park's boundaries (see opposite), the private reserves offer among Africa's best

opportunities for safari connoisseurs, and are the place to go for those who want to experience the bush in the lap of luxury. Prices tend to be seasonal so it's best to have a look at their websites for the most accurate costs. Note that many of these places like to call themselves 'game reserves'. They're not. They are simply lodges inside of a designated wildlife reserve.

If your budget permits, it's also worth considering the private reserves as a complement to spending a few nights in the park. The rangers have a wealth of knowledge and, because of the personalised safari attention, can train you in the art of wildlife-watching before you head to Kruger for a self-guided trip. The major reserves and a few of their camps are described here. There are many more lodges and dozens of operators handling tours in this area. Hoedspruit has emerged as the gateway to the private lodges.

Note that even if you arrive with your own vehicle, self-drive safaris aren't permitted in any of the private reserves, and most can only be visited with advance booking. In addition to the reserves described here, there are numerous other smaller ones further north and west, including Klaserie, Makalali (which doesn't share any borders with Kruger) and Balule (also no borders with Kruger).

SABIE SAND GAME RESERVE

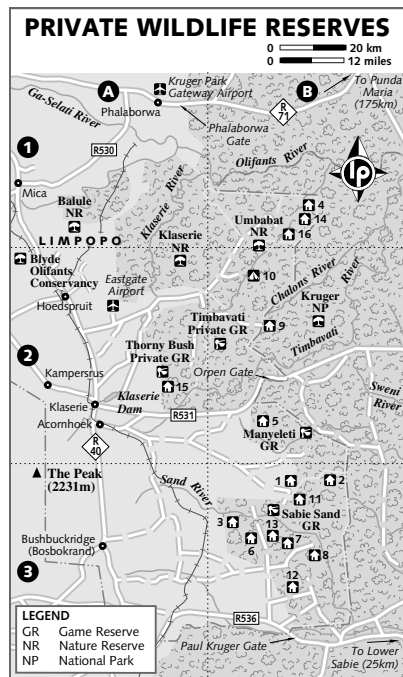
Within the borders of the large **Sabie Sand Game Reserve** (<http://sabi.krugerpark.co.za>) are some of Southern Africa's most luxurious safari lodges and best wildlife-watching on the continent. The area is routinely selected by safari connoisseurs as their destination of choice. As there's no fencing between the various private lodges within the greater Sabie Sand area, all share the same wealth of birds and animals. There's a R50 vehicle fee to enter Sabie Sand.

Nkorho Bush Lodge (☎ 013-735 5367; www.nkorho.com; all-inclusive s/d R2075/3200; 📍) In the northern part of Sabie Sand, this is one of the more moderately priced lodges, with comfortable thatched chalets set around grassy grounds, and a low-key ambience.

Chitwa Chitwa Private Game Lodges (☎ 011-883 1354; www.chitwa.co.za; all-inclusive s/d R2400/3900; 📍 📍) Chitwa Chitwa suffers a bit in the shadows of Londolozzi and Singita, but offers

good value, especially at its beautiful water-side Game Lodge.

Djuma Game Reserve (☎ 013-735 5118; www.djuma.co.za; all-inclusive r from R4200; 🏠) Djuma is notable for its straightforward, good-value accommodation. The most intriguing option here is Vuyatela Lodge, where local culture has been incorporated into every aspect of the building. It's an ideal choice if you're interested in learning about local people as well as the local wildlife.



SLEEPING 🏠 🛏	
Chitwa Chitwa Private Game Lodges.....	1 B3
Djuma Game Reserve.....	2 B3
Exeter Private Game Lodges.....	3 B3
Gomo Gomo.....	4 B1
Honeyguide.....	5 B2
Idube Private Game Reserve.....	6 B3
Londolozi Private Game Reserve.....	7 B3
Mala Mala Game Reserve.....	8 B3
Ngala Lodge.....	9 B2
Ngala Tent Camp.....	10 B2
Nkorho Bush Lodge.....	11 B3
Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve.....	12 B3
Singita Private Game Reserve.....	13 B3
Tanda Tula.....	14 B1
Tangala.....	15 A2
Umlani Bushcamp.....	16 B1

Mala Mala Game Reserve (☎ 011-442 2267; www.malamala.com; all-inclusive r from R6000; 🏠 🛏) Mala Mala competes with Londolozi and Singita for distinction as one of the region's most luxurious reserves, though it's not quite as polished as its two neighbours. Excellent wildlife-viewing compensates, and staff make every effort to ensure you spot the Big Five.

Singita Private Game Reserve (☎ 021-683 3424; www.singita.co.za; all-inclusive r from R7140; 🏠 🛏) Singita has been distinguished by the top-end travel industry as one of the best resorts in Africa, and one of the world's top travel destinations. Its Lebombo Lodge draws most of the attention, with a superb riverine location, an excess of amenities and impeccable service. It's operated as a private concession within Kruger's boundaries, on the park's western edge, southeast of Satara rest camp.

Londolozi Private Game Reserve (☎ 011-809 4300; www.londolozi.com; all-inclusive r from R8000; 🏠 🛏) This exclusive private lodge is operated by CC Africa, and is renowned for its luxury and its leopards. For sleeping, you have your choice of accommodation in one of several camps (most notable is the intimate Tree Camp) or in an equally comfortable lodge – all with excellent settings along the Sand River. Londolozi describes itself as 'unashamedly exclusive' and is the place to go if you want a five-star-plus experience in the bush, combined with excellent wildlife-watching.

Other places to check out include the following:

Idube Private Game Reserve (☎ 011-888 3713; www.idube.com; s/d R3980/5900; 🏠) Nice and comfortable, without the finesse of some of the other places, but with a more manageable price tag.

Exeter Private Game Lodges (☎ 013-735 5140; www.exeter-lodges.com; all-inclusive r from R5600; 🏠 🛏) An upmarket entity managing several lodges in western and southern Sabie Sand, notably the exclusive Leadwood and Dulini lodges.

Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve (☎ 011-483 3939; www.sabisabi.com; all-inclusive r from R8800; 🏠 🛏) Known especially for its lions and for its subterranean and ultraluxurious Earth Lodge.

MANYELETI GAME RESERVE

During the apartheid era, the 23,000-hectare **Manyeleti** (<http://manyeleti.krugerpark.co.za>) was the only wildlife reserve that blacks were permitted to use. Today, it's the least crowded

of the private wildlife reserves, with only a few camps. It is possible to see all the Big Five here, although with somewhat more effort than in Sabie Sands, its neighbour to the south. As compensation, accommodation here is significantly less expensive than in Sabie Sands.

Honeyguide (Khoka Moya; ☎ 015-793 1729; www.honeyguidecamp.com; all-inclusive per person R2300; 🏠) A small place, taking a maximum of 16 people. It's one of the better-value private reserves, with accommodation in rustic cabins raised a bit off the ground on stilts.

TIMBAVATI PRIVATE GAME RESERVE

Timbavati (<http://timbavati.krugerpark.co.za>) was originally known for its white lion population, although it's the yellow versions you'll see today. It's less crowded than Sabie Sand, and its accommodation – while lacking the sumptuous settings of the lodges in Sabie Sand – tends to be more reasonably priced, without forgoing too many amenities. There's a R90 per person conservation fee and R75 vehicle entry fee to pay when entering the reserve.

Gomo Gomo (☎ 012-752 3954; www.gomogomo.co.za; s/d R1290/2580) A more moderately priced place, with rustic chalets and tents.

Umlani Bushcamp (☎ 012-346 4028; www.umlani.co.za; s/d R2950/4500; 🏠) A good place if you

want to immerse yourself in the bush, with no electricity and accommodation in simple but comfortable reed bungalows.

Tanda Tula (☎ 021-794 6500; www.tandatula.co.za; all-inclusive s/d from R4200/7800; 🏠) Timbavati's most luxurious option, with cosy safari tents and a water hole practically at your doorstep. Children under 12 aren't permitted.

Ngala (☎ 011-809 4300; www.ccafrica.com; all-inclusive tent per person sharing R4800, lodge per person sharing R2600-6800; 🏠 🛏) A subdued but luxurious place in a superb location on the border of Kruger, and managed by CC Africa. Accommodation is in your choice of a safari tent or lodge (prices for the lodge vary depending on the season), and comes with all the amenities.

THORNYBUSH PRIVATE GAME RESERVE

Thornybush (<http://thornybush.krugerpark.co.za>) opened in 1977 on 4000 acres of land. It has since expanded to 25,000 acres and is one of the few reserves in the area that is still enclosed by fences. There are 11 lodges on the reserve. It has no gate entrance fees.

Tangala (☎ 015-793 0488; www.tangala.co.za; all-inclusive s/d from R1495/2990; 🏠) This electricity-free camp is beautifully designed and well maintained. Cost-wise it's one of the best deals in the area.

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