

## Why visit the Kruger Park

by Peter Sumner

One of the major reasons to come to Africa is to see wildlife. There can be few thrills in life that equal driving round a corner and encountering a pride of lions strolling along the road in front of you – unless it is an elephant cow with her tiny calf, or maybe a fish eagle performing its haunting call before catching its dinner, or seeing a cheetah outrun an impala, or ..... well, I could go on, because I have witnessed all this and more in the Kruger National Park, South Africa's flagship game reserve.

There are a number of reasons why I believe one should go to Kruger instead of other parks, but I am totally biased. Kruger has been good to me. Every time I have been, since 1956, I have seen lions. Nowadays, I always see elephant, buffalo, giraffe, and a host of other game. On a recent 6 night stay, we saw 32 different mammal species, including 58 lions, with one day's tally being 23. Of course there was one day on which they were hiding, but to be fair, who has it all ALL of the time! The 173 elephants were spread out over all the days and we also saw leopard, cheetah, serval and wild dog. Serval?! What's a serval – the next cat down from a cheetah, nocturnal and a great sighting – it's not only about lions.

Birding is also spectacular. Of the 103 species I was able to identify – others would not sit still long enough – there were 7 different eagles and we ticked off 5 of the big 6, including the largest flying bird in the world, the kori bustard.



Kruger is far more hands-on (and a lot more affordable) than the luxury parks, which drive you to game that has been “tracked”. That is almost like going to a zoo without cages. Organized rides, walks, and other activities are offered in Kruger, but I prefer the self drive option. The thrill of Kruger is finding your own special sightings and staying there as long as you choose to. Of course, there is the risk that they might elude you, but that risk is the same in all wild life facilities.



The best time to visit Kruger is from July to October. This is the end of the dry season and the malaria-carrying mosquitoes are dormant. Surface water has usually dwindled and the animals gravitate to the rivers and waterholes. The predators know this and follow. This increases the chances of spectacular sightings.

You can stay in (acceptably) secure, up-market rest camps, each with its own charm and unique features, at a fraction of the cost of luxury parks. Accommodation is serviced and you will be pleasantly surprised. For campers, there are campsites at most rest camps, allowing for an inexpensive stay, but affording you the same rich experience – and the opportunity to gather “intelligence” while washing up cooking utensils in the communal facilities.

There is an airport close by at White River with scheduled flights and a number of car rental companies in operation. If finances permit, a high clearance vehicle is an advantage, or even a 4x4 if you intend doing trails that some camps offer.

One has to eat, and there are many options to feed your party. There are supermarkets in Nelspruit, White River, Phalaborwa, and Hazyview, from which you can buy almost anything at good prices.

Many rest camps within Kruger have restaurants and shops but one can expect to pay more. Take-aways are also available from camps and tea rooms at Tshokwane, Afsaal and Nkuhlu.

The best viewing times clash with human feeding times at both ends of the day. We have had great success in the past in “getting out there” as the camp gates open. It also clashes with breakfast, so we have an early “cuppa” waiting for the gates to open and then get to a waterhole, picnic site or back to camp at around 9am for breakfast.



Plan routes so that at lunch time you visit picnic spots or camps with food. Traditional dinner is a braai (barbecue) outside your accommodation, or the restaurant if your camp has one.

Various rest camps offer a lot and others little. If you want to avoid the bustle of larger camps for a more private bush experience, without sacrificing comfort, the smaller bush camps offer an attractive option, but they have no shop, restaurant etc.

Having a braai while viewing hyenas patrolling the fence hoping to be invited, is quite an experience, but if you require, and are willing to pay for, lavish cuisine and pampering, maybe the luxury parks are for you, but I would rather spend more days here for better value.

Are you convinced yet? If not, join the Forum and see what veterans have to say, and soon you will be planning your first (of many) trips to the Kruger National Park.

So come on; come to Kruger.

