

Letaba Bridge Camp, Kruger National Park

Access for Guests with Mobility challenges

Letaba Rest Camp is in the centre of Kruger National Park's land mass, but is considered to be in the Northern Section of the park. It is situated on the southern bank of the river of the same name and is best accessed through the Phalaborwa Gate where there is an accessible ablution, ramped access and suitable parking. The wide stretch of sand, water and vegetation in the river abounds with game and guests can see much from the safety and comfort of the camp, and there is almost always elephant (often right at the camp fence), hippo, antelope and buffalo in view and predator sightings are not infrequent. The camp's resident population of bushbuck, the chattering tree squirrels, the busy birdlife, the grassy lawns and profusion of large trees in camp providing welcome shade are all reasons for Letaba's popularity. From an access perspective, the accessible accommodation needs a little work, but the rest of the camp offers good access, with one or two must see attractions like the Elephant Hall and the pathway along the river.



On arrival at Letaba, one checks in at the **reception building** (shown below left). There is no allocated parking bay for wheelchair users, but plenty of open parking and selecting a suitable place to disembark is usually not a problem. Access into the building is good. There is a **public ablution for wheelchair users** round the back of the reception block.



Most of the camp's **General Facilities** are easily accessed including the **shop, restaurant, cafeteria** and their accompanying deck which overlooks the river. There are no accessible ablutions inside the restaurant, but there is an accessible toilet and roll-in shower immediately east of the cafeteria some 20m away. The **riverside path** leading from the deck along the perimeter fence lends itself to a comfortable ride in a wheelchair and there are several lookout spots that make ideal places to sit, scan and listen. For the most part is on the same level as the camp, but it does descend down to the fence in 2 places and as there are steps this portion of the trail is not suitable for unassisted propulsion





Apart from the riverside pathway, the bricked roads that run throughout the camp make exploring the camp in a wheelchair easy and in places like around the safari tents and the link through to the day visitors' area there are bricked pedestrian walkways that are great. The **swimming pool** area can easily be accessed, but there is no aid for getting between water and wheelchair. The gate is spring-loaded so that it closes at all times and the tension level makes it hard to open from a chair.

As mentioned previously the **Elephant Hall** is a real highlight and with its air-conditioning is just about the coolest place in camp on a hot summer's day. The entire facility is seamlessly accessible to wheelchair users and the opportunity of learning about the biology of elephants and seeing some of the ivory of the parks' great tuskers is an absolute must.




ACCESSIBLE ACCOMMODATION: 6 units (4 bungalows and 2 safari tents) in Letaba are classified as "suitable for mobility challenged guests" on the SANParks reservation system, but all of them have short-comings. There are also several additional units that offer a degree of access but will not be suitable to everyone. There are four 2-bed bungalows in the camp with adapted ablutions intended to make them suitable for mobility impaired guests. Two of these units have baths with grab rails and the other two have roll-in showers. For wheelchair users who can use a bath or toilet without grab rails, all 10 of the 6-bed guest cottages and both guest houses (8 and 10 beds) have ramped access. One of the campsite ablutions has ramped access and a bath and toilet with grab rails. This facility also serves as the ablutions for the accessible safari tents – one 2-bed tent (S20) and one 4-bed tent (S8) have ramps up to their entrance and the network of bricked pathways lends itself to ease of movement.


There is also an additional accessible ablution next to the cafeteria and adjacent a row of huts which can be accessed without much assistance.


The two oldest adapted accessible units are the two **riverside bungalows with baths**. These have an awesome location overlooking the river (see right), and while roll-in-showers are a more appropriate type of accessible ablution, the units are otherwise fairly comfortable to use. They have ample parking space in front of the unit and a shallow ramp up into the unit.



The catering facilities of these bungalows is similarly designed to some of the units in Skukuza and Crocodile Bridge and generally good. The dining table has ample clearance for the legs of a wheelchair user and there is also sufficient clearance underneath the hotplates for cooking purposes. The sink requires one to park sideways and the top cupboard's top shelf will be out of reach. The fridge is easily accessed and like all exposed fridges in the park, it is wise to place a chair in front of it when away from one's unit to prevent raids from monkeys.

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| <p>The braai facilities of the 2 units are fine to an extent, but in one of the units a wheelchair braaier has to negotiate a curb (see right)</p> |  |
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| <p>Another place where a chair can be useful is to prop open the mosquito/fly screen which is spring loaded so that a person can easily propel themselves up the ramp and into the unit. The door itself is not spring loaded and opens inwards and is easily pushed open.</p> |  |
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|  | <p>The bedroom chambers of the riverside bungalows have ample space and the two beds inside are both easily shifted to the desired position if the layout provided is not what is wanted. The bedside lights are within easy reach of a person in/on the bed and the air-conditioner is remote controlled.</p> |
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The unit has a spilt ablution, with the basin in the bedroom chamber adjacent the wardrobe (which is easily accessed). The basin has good clearance and push style taps and the mirror is in a suitable place for use by a person in a chair. In the bathroom, the toilet has grab rails in suitable positions, but the access to a basin or tap within reach of the toilet is not ideal. The bath has a well positioned grab rail to aid transfer, but there is no detachable handset to help with washing, and of course some people do not have the strength to transfer into and out of a bath.

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Of the **roll-in-shower equipped bungalows** in Letaba (units 7 and 71), only one has been used by the writer. They layout of unit 7 is not known.

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|  | <p>At accessible unit 71 (code BD3Z), the parking is not really wide enough especially compared to the riverside bungalows shown above and the entrance ramp is rather steep. A similar problem with the spring loaded fly screen and the spring should either be removed or a way of holding the screen open while a wheelchair user moves in and out of the facility needs to be provided.</p> |
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|  | <p>The kitchen/dining area is enclosed and both the sink and hotplates and the dining table have good clearance underneath (see left). The ramp from the kitchen into the bedroom chamber (right) is a little short and may challenge some wheelchair users to progress unassisted through the sliding door.</p> |  |
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In the bedroom chamber, the bedroom is adequately spacious and all 3 beds can be accessed with ease. The air-conditioner is remote controlled. The wardrobe and shelf space are easy to reach from a wheelchair.



The unit's ablutions have a toilet with suitable grab rails and a basin within reach of a person using the toilet. There is also sufficient clearance underneath the basin and the mirror is in a suitable position.

The roll-in-shower however is a bit of a disaster and hopefully the camp will address the situation soon. The shower is a twin shower with a standard fixed shower from near the ceiling for standing people and a second one with detachable hand-held head on a height adjustable sliding pole, but the fold-down seat that accompanies it is not large enough to support a person with no legs or leg control and to compound this shortcoming there are no grab rails for transfer or support. Using one of the chairs from the kitchen is a solution that wheelchair users using the facility can use in the interim, but not a satisfactory one.



The unit's outdoor veranda has been cemented throughout to make it convenient for wheelchairs to use the braai facilities. The link from the unit's interior to this outside area may challenge some as the turn is quite tricky.

The **accessible safari tents** (the 2-bed one is shown here) have ramped access and the bricked pathways are ideal for ease of movement. The interior is basic but easy to move around in a wheelchair with the beds and cupboard easily negotiated.





The ablutions are communal and shared with the **campsite**. To get there from the safari tents does require the negotiation of a curb with angled bricks (far left) and a small ridge at the entrance (left) to the ablation block (caused by erosion after heavy rains)

Unfortunately no roll-in-shower is available, but a bath with grab rails (without a detachable hand shower and with the rail in a poor position) is available as well as a toilet with grab rails. There is no basin within reach of the toilet which has its own private cubicle. The basins do have sufficient leg clearance, but no push style taps.



Alternate Accessible Ablutions: Bizarrely there is a communal roll-in-shower facility elsewhere in the camp. This little known and used accessible ablation facility next to the cafeteria is actually quite well designed as shown in the images below. The metal shower seat is out of date and could be replaced by one with stretch canvas.



The **Letaba (Mbavala) Day Visitor Centre (DVC)** that adjoins the camp but is intended for use by non-residents of the camp is fairly new and offers fairly good access as the underlying pictures will show. A wide, firm and smooth pathway takes one from the parking area down to the facility. Among the picnic tables some of the paths are a bit gravelly.



The tables are not superbly designed to allow clearance for a wheelchair users legs, but with an angled approach can be used.





ACCESSIBLE ATTRACTIONS CLOSE TO LETABA:

Makhadzi Picnic Site and Steinhecker's Horse Museum (Below) is +-35km from Letaba, and an excellent destination for a morning or afternoon drive. It is on the road to Giriyondo Border Post into Mozambique and the creek just before one gets to the picnic site is an excellent oasis in the rather monotonous mopane woodland that typifies the drive. Hippo should be seen in the creek and there is almost always interesting game in the area (especially the rare tsessebe). There is an accessible toilet here (left) and the museum (centre) is fitted with an access ramp. The picnic site (right) is flat so wheelchair users can move between tables, although the ground is sandy in places, there is a threat of thorns and after heavy rains things can get muddy.



Masorini Archaeological Site is 40km from camp on the Phalaborwa Road, being 11km from Phalaborwa Gate – although the tour of the ruins is on a hillock and not accessible, the display platform can be easily accessed and there are accessible ablutions.



Sable Dam Hide (below) is +- 45km from camp on the Phalaborwa Road is a good destination for wildlife activity and an ideal morning or afternoon drive from camp or a place to stop in transit on entering or leaving the park at Phalaborwa Gate – the hide has a long and steepish ramp to allow wheelchair users to enter the raised platform of the hide and inside it is comfortable to use the viewing slots with mobile benches and a shelf for resting ones elbows on while using binoculars. There is a toilet at the facility that has a ramp and can be entered, although there are no grab rails and insufficient turning space.



Matambeni Hide (not shown) is 14km from camp on the northern bank of the Letaba River – to get to the hide the path descends down a slope and the authorities have used gum poles to counter erosion on the pathway after heavy rains. Unfortunately this makes it inaccessible to wheelchair users without assistance, however if assistance is received the interior has spaces between the benches to accommodate wheelchairs and the viewing slots are appropriate.

Longwe Lookout – 16km from camp and a bare patch of gravel at the top of a hill that provides excellent views of the surrounding veld and nearby river and where visitors are permitted to leave the safety of their vehicles. There are no facilities whatsoever, but there is no impediment to use by a person in a wheelchair.

Check the accessible activities at and around Olifants and Mopani Camps as these are Letaba's closest neighbours and an easy drive from the camp.



The Giriyaondo Border Post is +-45km from Letaba and is the main entrance from the park into Mozambique. The writer has not been there, but is informed that there are ramps into the building and an accessible toilet.