

Shingwedzi Camp – Access for Guests with Mobility Challenges

Shingwedzi Camp – Nxanatseni Region, Far Northern Kruger National Park

Shingwedzi is in the far northern section of Kruger National Park on the southern bank of the Shingwedzi River. Although the north of the park is predominantly mopane veld or mopane woodland, the rich alluvial deposits along the river are welcome break from this and home to large riverine trees and a diversity of wildlife. The road from the back of the camp and the network of little loops along Kanniedood Dam, (a damming of the river downstream from camp) is renowned as one of the finest locations for wildlife photography in the park. Big cats, primates, elephants, buffalos, hippos, waterbuck and a plethora of aquatic birds are all common and draw repeat visitors back year after year. There are also several hyena dens near camp.



The camp is among the most remote of all the park's camps, being far from any entrance gate – 72km from Punda Maria Gate (2 hours drive) from the north and 137km from Phalaborwa Gate (4 hours drive) from the south, so visitors with mobility challenges who battle with prolonged periods in a vehicle should consider this in their travel plans. There are potential pit stops en route with access to accessible ablutions. Babalala Picnic Site is 41km into the Punda Maria Gate route, while Mopani Camp is 74 km into the Phalaborwa Gate route.



The camp itself has a rustic feel and has a long history and colourful history. In appearance Shingwedzi is the most arid of all the camps, (except along the river front) particularly in winter, but at this time of year the camp is adorned with the striking bloom of the impala lily.



Camp Access – day visitors: On entering the camp there is a day visitor centre immediately on one's left overlooking the river. The parking for this facility is open plan at the side of the entrance road and except when the camp is busy, wheelchair users should find enough space to disembark. There is a wooden walkway bridge that takes visitors to the area and this is accessible enough, but the toilets and wash-up/cooking area have no accessibility adaptations.

Main facilities:

The camp's main complex also has adequate open-plan parking and the entire complex is ramped throughout to provide easy access to reception, shop, restaurant and tables overlooking the adjacent river. There are accessible ablutions in the men's and ladies ablutions



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Accessible Accommodation: Of the 82 accommodation units in the camp, 4 are marked as accessible units (A1, A2, A15, & A16) with the type bungalow and code BD5Z, meaning they each have 5 beds. These 4 units however have baths with grab rails and do not have roll-in showers, which is not ideal and should be changed. The ramps into these units are also steeper than what is prescribed and many wheelchair users will need assistance to use them.









The **parking** for the units is open and spacious and on flat ground, but while the ground is compact and firm in places, there are other parts where it is loose and sandy and this makes travel from the parking to the unit difficult for a person in a wheelchair.








The units, like most Kruger units, are self catering, and once a person is up the ramp and onto the outside veranda there is a combination of good and bad accessible features. The overall space is good, although the table and chairs (which are easily shifted) takes up most of this space. The table (A) has excellent clearance underneath. The sink (B) on the other hand has no clearance so wheelchair users will have to position themselves sideways. The unit's current fridge (C) is too tall for the space provided, so it is positioned below the cupboard where the crockery and glasses are stored. This cupboard is too high to be properly accessible anyway, but the fridge in the way further limits the access for everyone, but for wheelchair users in particular. There is an alternative pantry cupboard (D) which is easily accessed and occupants should move or get staff to move stuff to this location. The hotplates (E) have great clearance. The outdoor braai (barbecue) stand (F) is also easily accessed, but like the route from the parking to the ramp, the soft sand can be a hindrance. Lastly the entrance into the units' bedrooms has a small ridge of a couple of cm which may impair some people in accessing the bedroom chamber.



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	<p>The accessible bungalows at Shingwedzi are family units and sleep 5 people. Three of the units are in the main chamber. There is just sufficient space between the beds for a wheelchair, and the beds can be shifted to make more room. The beds are a little lower than ideal</p>	
<p>The remaining 2 beds are far from accessible and are up a ladder in a loft. They are however perfect for children.</p>		
	<p>The other features of the bedroom chamber are a washbasin which has good clearance underneath, push taps and a well-positioned mirror. The wardrobe is also suitably accessible.</p>	
<p>The units' en suite ablutions are very spacious. The toilet's grab rails are well positioned, but there is no basin or water-supply within reach of the toilet!</p>		
<p>The baths in the 4 units are equipped with grab rails, but these are fixed in an inappropriate position in the centre of the bath and too high up the wall. The narrow rim of the bath towards the back of the tub is also a limiting feature for a person using this as an alternative to the rail during transfer. There is also no detachable hand-held shower set to aid people in the bath.</p>		
 <p>A1's bath</p>	 <p>A2's bath</p>	 <p>Narrow rim of the bath at rear</p>
<p>Other accommodation: The remainder of the bungalows have no accessible adaptations. There are 12 huts which are fairly basic and rely on communal ablutions. There is a unisex accessible ablution with a roll-in shower and grab rails with the toilet in addition to the men's and ladies ablutions. The other communal ablutions servicing the camping sites did not have any accessible ablutions when last I checked, but that was several years ago and things may have changed.</p>		

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<p>Other facilities in camp: The other facilities of note in camp include a swimming pool which has no mechanism to assist wheelchair users to transfer to and from the water. There is also a conference centre (right) that although with no specific adaptation, is all on one level and unintentionally accessible.</p>		
<p>Accessible destinations in proximity of camp: Like most of the park, there aren't too many get out points in the region around Shingwedzi. There are however 2 viewing hides near the camp. The first – Kanniedood Hide – about 5 km southeast of camp - was built at the end of the 1970s before universal access was a specific policy of SANParks. Unfortunately it is accessed by parking under the hide and climbing up a ladder into the hide. Another 35km along the same road is Nyawutsi Hide, which is equipped with a hairpin ramp into its raised platform. Inside there are several breaks in the bench seats to accommodate wheelchair users approaching the viewing slot.</p>		
		
	<p>The only picnic site in close proximity is that at Babalala mentioned in the introduction. It is equipped with a ramp (shown left) which needs to be serviced periodically, particularly after heavy thunderstorms that wash away the gravel at the base of the ramp. Inside the facility there is a toilet with grab rails and a basin. The mirror in the facility is far from accessible and too high for a person in a chair.</p>	