

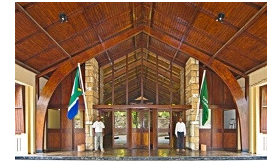
Golden Gate Highlands National Park - Access for the Mobility Impaired

Golden Gate Highlands National Park in the north-eastern Free-State in the rolling foothills of the Maluti Mountains. The park derives its name from the brilliant shades of gold cast by the sun on the park's sandstone cliffs, especially the imposing Brandwag rock, keeping vigil over the main rest camp. The park is 11 600 hectares of unique environment is true highland grassland habitat, providing home to a variety of mammals such black wildebeest, eland, blesbok, oribi, springbok and zebra - and birds, including the rare bearded vulture (lammergeier) and bald ibis. The nearby town of Clarens is relatively accessible to move around and there is a plethora of restaurants, shops and art exhibits for visitors to explore.



Accessible Accommodation: There are 4 rest-camps at Golden Gate and all have accommodation converted for use by guests with mobility challenges. These are: Brandwag Hotel & Chalets; Glen Reenen Camp; Highlands Mountain Retreat; & Basotho Cultural Village.

Brandwag Hotel: The Hotel is closed at the time of writing and due to reopen in December 2009. It is undergoing a major overhaul and from an accessibility perspective 5 rooms for guests with mobility challenges will be provided.



The refurbished hotel will also be equipped with a lift (something that was absent from the original hotel) and accessible public ablutions. The conference facilities, restaurant, tea room, bar and games room will continue to be accessible to guests in wheelchairs.



Brandwag Chalets: The chalets (2 are accessible) are adjacent the hotel and guests have the option of self catering or they can use the restaurant facility at the hotel or eat in nearby Clarens. The parking has sufficient space and there is a shallow ramp at the door.

The interior has a main chamber is open plan with 2 beds, a television, table and chairs, and a kitchen alcove, which is moderately accessible. A second bedroom is down a single step and is just large enough to host a double bed, with no space for wheelchairs



Access to the outside veranda is down a small ridge, but to get to the hotel and restaurant there is a step pathway and the last portion of this is too steep even for strong wheelchair users to go up without assistance

The chalets ablutions are pretty good. The roll-in shower has all the necessary rails, seats and sliding detachable handset – the seat is pure metal, so some padding will be required. The toilet and basin are both well constructed, but unfortunately the basin is just out of reach from the toilet



Glen Reenen Camp is the park's 2nd largest camp and largest self-catering camp. There are 3 types of accessible accommodation at Glen Reenen and an accessible ablution block in the camping section. There is an accessible rondawel that can sleep 4, an accessible longdawel sleeping 2 and an accessible family cottage sleeping 6. Guests first park at reception (right) where the parking is open and spacious and the office is ramped with a suitable wide pathway leading to the entrance.



Accessible Rondawel: The rondawels are accessed via a network of suitable pathways for wheelchair passage. In the open plan bedroom/dining/kitchen chamber there is a double bed and 2 single beds up in a loft.

The rondawel's **kitchen** has a sink with clearance underneath and the rest of the kitchen appliances and equipment is easily reached, while the **braai facilities** in an outside boma are also easily accessed.










The **ablutions** have good accessibility too, although the toilet's grab rail on the adjacent wall is vertical and not horizontal as required. The space on the wall will only permit a mini-grab rail, but this would be more useful to wheelchair users. The roll-in shower is fine, although a seat with a larger surface could have been used.



Accessible Longdawel: The accessible longdawel has a super pathway that runs from the parking area to the entrance of the unit and indeed on to all the other units in the camp. Inside the open plan bedroom/living room/kitchen has 2 single beds and a television which may appeal on a cold winter's night.

The outdoor **braai area** is easily accessible. The unit's **ablutions** are adequate but with some shortcomings. The adjacent wall next to the toilet is too short to all the horizontal part of the rail in the correct position and is diagonal where needed. The basin, while offering good clearance and a push-type mixer is out of reach from someone using the toilet. The roll-in shower has a good sized seat, but the sliding detachable shower and mixer are on the opposite wall, and the grab rail should be on the adjacent wall to the seat.



	<p>Glen Reenen Accessible Family Cottage: This unit accommodates 6 people has 2 bedrooms (one with a double bed, the other 2 singles and a bunk bed) and 2 bathrooms, one of which is equipped with accessible facilities. There is a separate kitchen, braai facilities and a television</p>			
<p>Accessible Camping: Both the ablutions and communal kitchen in Glen Reenen Campsite have paved access ramps. Inside the ablutions the toilet has the appropriate grab rails. The basin, which has lever taps and good clearance underneath is just out of reach for a person using the toilet. The roll-in shower is an open 2-wall design with 2 assisting grab rails, a push-type mixer and a sliding detachable shower. One shortcoming is the size of the fold-down seat, which is smaller than the ideal surface area needed to safely support a person's body mass.</p>				
				
		<p>Highlands Mountain Retreat: This wonderful camp is located high up in the mountains. Guests must check in at Glen Reenen reception before undertaking the drive to the camp. The accessible unit (FT4Z) has ample parking and an easy one level access.</p>		
<p>The unit has 2 bedrooms and 2 en-suite bathrooms. The bedroom with the accessible bathroom has a double bed, the other 2 single beds. There is also a lounge with a TV, furniture and fireplace (much needed in winter).</p>				
		<p>The kitchen is relatively accessible without any clearance below the work surfaces and sink. The outside veranda has a weber barbecue. The view from the veranda is spectacular.</p>		
	<p>The ablutions are relatively accessible. The roll-in shower has a good sized fold-down seat, a well positioned support rail. The taps however are turn taps and the sliding pole for the detachable handset is a little high at its lowest point. The toilet has the required 2 grab rails, but the one on the adjacent wall is positioned the wrong way so that the vertical section that frail people may use to pull themselves into the upright position is at the back of the wall. The basin is also just out of reach for a person using the toilet.</p>			
<p>Basotho Cultural Village is the park's newest camp (opened December 2008) in the eastern portion of the park. There are 2 accessible units (HKD4Z) that can sleep 4 people. The units are self catering and the atmosphere of the camp is aimed at recreating the Basotho lifestyle, architecture and hospitality.</p>				
<p>There is plenty of open parking space on a relatively flat surface which is made from funny hollow square blocks which catch the smaller front wheels of the chair, but the distance to the smooth access ramp into the accessible units is only a couple of metres. The outside section of the units is a smooth, paved, sloped surface. There is a covered seating area and a braai facility.</p>				



Inside the unit is an open plan bedroom, dining and kitchen chamber. There is a double bed of comfortable height for wheelchair users, a set on bunk beds ideal for children, a table and chairs and the kitchen has a fridge, sink, microwave and kettle and all the utensils and crockery are on shelves easily reached by someone in a wheelchair.



The units' **ablutions** contain are split into 2 sections – one with a toilet with grab rails and a wash basin, with good clearance, but just out of reach for a person using the toilet. The other section houses a roll-in shower and a second basin. The shower has a good sized fold-down seat and a grab rail that covers both the opposite and adjacent wall. The sliding, detachable shower is on the opposite wall from the seat.



Accessible Activities at Golden Gate: Because of the mountainous nature of the park some of the activities like the walking trails, pony trekking and abseiling are not really an option for visitors with mobility difficulties. There are 2 drives (Oribi and Blesbok Loops) that one can do from one's vehicle – both for viewing game and breathtaking scenery. On the Oribi Loop is a vulture restaurant where carcasses are laid out for the endangered Cape and Bearded Vultures that call the park home. Currently the site is not very wheelchair friendly, but an accessible underground hide with one-way glass will soon be completed creating a world class and accessible facility. A dinosaur centre paying homage to some of the fossilised remains found in the park is also in the offing. As previously mentioned Clarens is a relatively accessible destination. There is an archery outfit there and they are very receptive to wheelchair-bound guests. A bowling green and tennis courts are available at the Hotel.