

# Concessions to comfort

Luxury lodge in the Greater Kruger Park offers an intimate hideaway and connection with nature



**It makes a change** seeing only South Africans at one of the Kruger Park's five-star safari lodges. And what a place to meet them. Hamiltons Tented Camp is an oasis tucked away on the banks of the seasonal N'witwasontso River in the private Mluwati Concession. The 10,000ha concession area borders the northern Sabi Sands and the Manyeleti Game Reserve, and was one of the first private concessions inside the Kruger Park that was developed as an eco-tourism destination.

*For more information  
or to book a stay, go to  
[hamiltonstentedcamp.co.za](http://hamiltonstentedcamp.co.za).*

This is a truly romantic camp, reminiscent of the traditional East African safaris that were made popular through movies such as *Out of Africa*. Named after, and paying homage to, Colonel James Stevenson-Hamilton, whose early vision to conserve this part of the country's natural biodiversity led to the formation of the Kruger National Park, the camp is luxuriously small and intimate. There are just six elevated tented suites, each with a private deck and outdoor shower, with

spectacular views over the N'witwasontso riverbed.

The rooms are lovely and cool inside, with the comforts of modern-day appliances. At the foot of the bed, adorned by retro wall-attached hanging lanterns on both sides, a robust ornamental vintage stowage trunk rests on the teak floorboard. Two pretty Victorian chairs stand guard alongside a low table that boasts a pewter tray with a hurricane lamp and candle and a glass-cut ice bucket.



*The camp buildings blend into the Kruger Park bushveld.*

## Sublime sightings

There is no cellphone reception at the camp – hurray! – nor are there landlines or in-house telephones. Instead, a small portable radio acts as a means to communicate with the reception area. Or you can use a small brass bell that is fitted to the wooden railing by the entrance of the room to attract the staff's attention.

High tea is at 3pm; a sumptuous affair. Guests are invited to enjoy a selection of cakes and pastries before the afternoon game drive that departs at 4pm. With our guide Suiteboy at the wheel, I share the vehicle with a couple from Cape Town. They are self-professed birders but, like me, they're keen to see big cats.

We are not disappointed. Barely an hour later we come across a beautiful, albeit skittish male leopard, drinking

from a small muddy pool of water. He looks up as we stop, a little startled, before turning his back to slink into the tall grass. We can vaguely see his shape moving around, and are excited when he reappears to walk behind our vehicle before vanishing into the shrubbery on the opposite side of the dirt road. We have barely gone 500m when we come across a honey badger with her offspring. The cub appears unsteady on its feet and we watch as the mother repeatedly picks up her young in her mouth and encourages it to walk on its own.

By the time we reach camp it is dark. A profusion of paraffin lamps light up the wooden steps as the game drive vehicle pulls up in front of the entrance, where butlers in full colonial regalia offer returning guests a glass of sherry. At dinner, every table is draped in white damask and bathed in the soft glow of a flickering paraffin lamp. There are crystal tumblers and wine glasses, silver cutlery and a pith helmet for company. No effort is spared, and the presentation of the food parallels any fine dining experience one could hope to find in any city.

## Fast food

A gentle knock on the door at 5am the following morning is the precursor for our morning drive. The pre-dawn light changes quickly, with shafts of salmon-coloured light sifting through the foliage of the vast sausage tree that towers over the main deck. Time for a cup of coffee or two, and we are on our way.

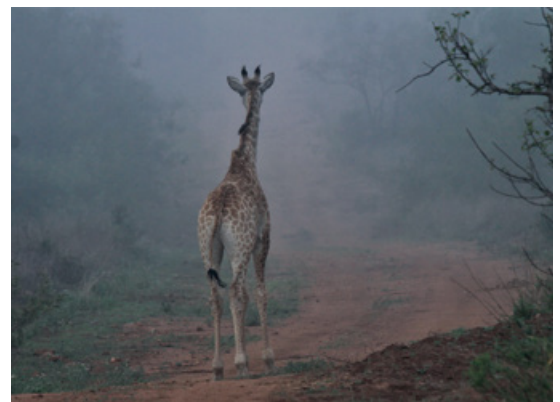


*Being close to nature  
is restorative.*

The melancholy calls of emerald-spotted doves reverberate through the air, interspersed by the more cheery Piet-my-vrou sounds of a red-chested cuckoo. We turn a corner, and gasp. Lions! Right up ahead, on the road. It is the Hamilton Pride. We can't believe our luck.

Back at the camp, it's time for breakfast. The buffet-style feast of croissants, pastries, fresh fruits, cereals, cheese, meat, yoghurts and juices is lavishly spread across the table in the shade of the sausage tree. Feeling sufficiently mellowed, I return to my gorgeous suite from where there is a wonderful view of a large herd of elephants coming down the opposite bank to drink and splash around in the water, followed by a second, and then a third group.

An hour or so later there is a knock on the door. Would I like to see a cheetah? Some 500m from the staff village, in the stifling heat of the day, a lone cheetah has killed an impala. We soon find her, feeding frenziedly on the kill, nervously looking up every few seconds to survey the surrounding bush. Being exceptionally vulnerable to more powerful predators, she knows she has to be extremely vigilant. Vultures are already circling overhead, and within a short period, no

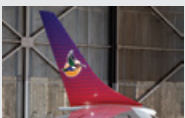


fewer than 50 have descended into the nearby trees. When the cheetah eventually slips away quietly into the nearby bush, the remainder of the carcass is left to a squabbling mass of birds.

Nature in the raw. And, extraordinarily, for all its uncompromising elegance, Hamiltons blends right in. I'm sure James Stevenson-Hamilton, were he still around, would have been delighted.

Text | **Fransje van Riel** Photography | **Supplied and Fransje van Riel**

#### How to get there



Airlink connects  
Johannesburg and Cape  
Town with Hoedspruit.  
For flight schedules,  
go to page 54.  
[www.flyairlink.com](http://www.flyairlink.com)