

# Bank on it

Riverside lodge delivers fantastic safari experience with each visit

**Sometimes, when you revisit a camp a second time,** the memories don't always match up to your expectations. It has been a full year since I first visited Hamiltons Tented Camp in the private 10,000ha Mluwati Concession in the Kruger National Park. But, as the vehicle pulls up along the N'waswitsontso River frontage and the six luxury tented suites tucked into the foliage emerge on the other bank, I feel my heart swell.

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

As the 4x4 draws to a halt in front of the wooden steps giving access to the main camp, a butler, clad in traditional red fez and a long white garment, steps down, holding a pretty silver tray to offer a deliciously cool, colourful welcome drink.

The interior of the camp is sumptuous, with plush sofas, antique luggage trunks and classic furnishings.

On this visit, the seasonal N'waswitsontso River is abundant in its fluidity, streaming much deeper in the riverbed. Summer rains have been plentiful. The massive sausage tree, such a feature of the main deck, is draped in sparkling green leaves and branches pregnant with fruit. The river also reveals a tell-tale ripple that betrays the submerged presence of a crocodile and a hippo snorting close to the dam wall, not far from where a large herd of elephants are plunging their trunks deep into the refreshing water.

## Kings and clowns

Soon after departing the camp for the first game drive, we encounter the two dominant male lions, Blondie and Madala, the uncrowned kings of the area, lying on top of a flat outcrop of granite rocks. With their manes waving in the breeze, the coalition of brothers

look like they own the place. And, in many ways, they probably do.

Leaving them, we go along the road to find a good spot for sundowners. Guide Victor Nkosi sets up a small table, drapes it with a tablecloth and produces crystal glasses, a chilled bottle of white wine and snacks. With the early evening sky painted with streaks of stunning pink, it is a magical time to relax and feel grateful for the restorative power of nature.

The tranquillity is completely offset by chaos the following morning. The resident troop of baboons, normally seen across the river in a tall stand of jackalberry trees, have crossed onto the lodge side of the river and are dive-bombing the canvas roof of my tent. The ear-piercing screeches and screams of babies and juveniles, interspersed only by the heavy, bellowing barks of the alpha male, are no less than heart-stopping.



No alarm is needed to wake up at 5am! The party on the roof lasts for a while, before the scuffling tapers away into the distant bush.

*Five-star luxury outdoors? Yes, please!*

## Spot on

With the sun peeking above the horizon, Victor heads out of camp to explore the N'waswitsontso road, towards an area where one of the other guides has seen one of the local female leopards up in a riverine tree. We drive to and fro, scanning the branches, and just when we are about to give up, Victor points at a nearby tree. "Leopard!"

At first, there is no sign of the spotted cat. But then, with precise directives, she is revealed. The excitement builds when the beautiful feline starts to stir, and eventually appears to want to move down. With bated breath, we watch her surveying the dry riverbed below, before rousing, stretching and slowly descending to sit at the bottom of the trunk, posing for a few minutes before jumping down into the grass and disappearing from view. It is the Mluwati magic that I have so come to love.

Text and photography | **Fransje van Riel**

## How to get there



*Airlink connects Johannesburg and Cape Town with Skukuza and Hoedspruit. Go to page 35 for schedules. [www.flyairlink.com/flightschedule](http://www.flyairlink.com/flightschedule)*