



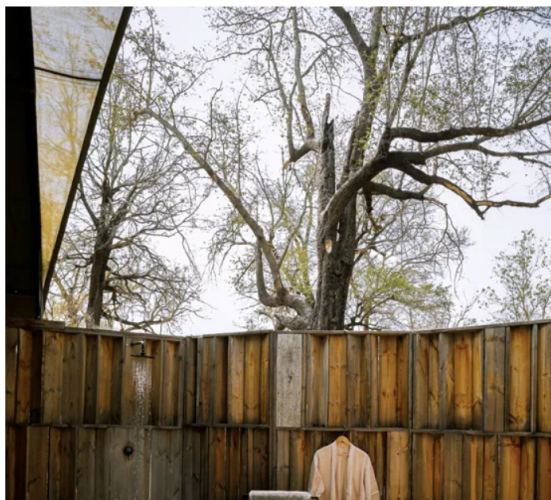
Pachyderms on parade

By **Helène Ramackers**
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 4 minutes

Luxury Tented Camp brings together human visitors and the wild beauties of the bush

While **old-fashioned camping** holds little to no allure for many travellers, glamping is sure to tick all the creature comfort boxes. The Oxford dictionary definition – ‘a form of camping involving accommodation and facilities more luxurious than those associated with traditional camping’ – is an understatement when staying at Machaba Safaris’s Kiri Camp on the western fringes of the Okavango Delta.

Here is the clincher from that definition – ‘glamping is likely to satisfy any city slicker seeking a little refuge in nature – without foregoing any of life’s luxuries’.



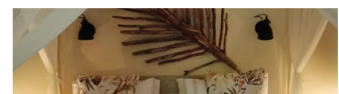
SKUKUZA, TRAVEL

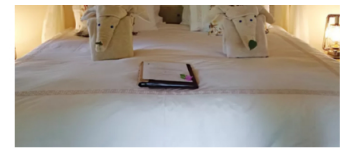
HEAVEN ON EARTH



MADAGASCAR, TRAVEL

ABLE TO BREATHE





HOEDSPRUIT, TRAVEL

MEMORIES MADE MAGNIFICENT

At just over two years old, the camp is still in its infancy relative to some of its competition, but it works like a well-oiled machine. Set in a 12,000ha private concession, the camp is an eco-luxe lodge that hosts a maximum of 24 guests in 10 contemporary 'tents'. The only part of the structure is the exterior, though, as the interiors are dreamy spaces with a large bedroom, several seating places, an indoor and outdoor shower, as well as a freestanding outdoor bath.

Giant jackalberry trees frame the way to a memorable stay with jaw-dropping vistas over the floodplains and the seasonal Kiri channel.

Playing favourites

Following the spoiling of a delectable high tea, we depart on our afternoon game drive. Guide Nthobatsang, better known as Tops, heads in an easterly direction and almost straightaway, his favourite animals appear, as if on cue.

"Ah, my bush flowers!" he exclaims, pointing to a large herd of impalas in the distance. "I love them. They are such reliable friends. They are always there for me; they raise the alarm to tell me where the cats are, and they are innocent-looking and really pretty."

Point taken. They are doe-eyed, and those lashes – no mascara needed there.



Much to Tops's horror, we find two impalas that have become meals for both leopard and wild dogs, and he pauses to "pass my condolences on to the family."

Whenever he sees something moving in the bush that he cannot quite identify, he will look through his binoculars and when it's a non-sighting, he calls it "another ALT – animal-looking thing." His sense of humour is contagious.

Sitting under the shade of a tree, he finds Mosasankegi – translated from Setswana, it means 'Wonder Girl'. This striking lioness with golden eyes has a fascinating story, which Tops is keen to share.

"She wasn't behaving like normal lions do," he says. "She lost her family while she was still young. She hunts at midday, unlike other lions. Alone since she was 18 months old, it's a year later, and she has grown up enough and is able to fend for herself, hunting baboons, warthogs, and zebras."

Gathering place



In front of the lodge and between some of the tents, herds of elephants make their way to the watering hole that seems to be a favourite place to quench their thirst.

Pandemonium erupts when different 'families' meet, with loud trumpeting and low-frequency rumbles. Moving past the tents, it is a bit of a downward slope to the water, and the majority of them break into a fast trot before either slamming on brakes on the shore or wading into the water with a noisy whooshing sound.

As a female and her tiny calf arrive at the waterhole, the calf gets separated from its mom, but there is no big concern as it gently interacts with other elephants a little larger than itself. Steering clear of the very big ones, it eventually gets reunited with its mother, much to the relief of both.

It is fascinating being privy to the verbal and non-verbal communication between these gentle giants. It turns into a splash-splash kind of affair, and once they have immersed themselves in mud, with some rolling around in it to make the most of the cooling effects of the natural sunscreen, they indulge in a post-bath dust sprinkling.

On the first morning's game drive, Tops goes in search of lions. Not too far from the lodge, he discovers fresh tracks in the sand. A soft female voice is suddenly audible over the two-way radio. Knowing that there are no female guides at Kiri Camp, interest is immediately piqued.

Tops explains that the female voice is that of Princess, one of the waitrons, and she just saw either a cheetah or a leopard right in front of the lodge, so we're making our way back to the starting point of our game drive.

Picking up his binoculars, Tops scans the area and gets very excited when he discovers that it is indeed a leopard!

He is beautiful, young, shy, and skittish when we find him on the side of a termite mound. He wants to run away, but his need to drink water overtakes his yearning to make a dash for it.

An elephant is also making strides towards the watering hole and with a scene straight out of David and Goliath, we wonder if one of them will give way. But they make a plan, with both lapping up the water on opposite sides of the waterhole.

David, aka the leopard, is keeping a close eye on Goliath the elephant, and once he has had his fill, the cat hotfoots it out of the area.

Goliath seems rather perturbed by his new friend's sudden departure, as though he was attempting to teach him the finer etiquette of taking in water without wasting a single drop.

Text and photography | **Heléne Ramackers**

For more information or to book a stay, go to machabasafaris.com.

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