

Kruger National Park and Sabi Sand Game Reserve Safari

South Africa

4th to 17th May 2009.

Destinations:

Biyamithi Bush Camp, Kruger National Park.
Lower Sabie Rest Camp, Kruger National Park.
Satara Rest Camp, Kruger National Park.
Talamati Bush Camp, Kruger National Park.
Nkorho Game Lodge, Sabi Sand Game Reserve.
Elephant Plains Game Lodge, Sabi Sand Game Reserve.
Forever Resorts Blyde Canyon.

Participants:

Deanne Dallas; Tricia Frampton-Heldman.

Guide:

Leon Marais.

Photo credits:

Leon Marais.

Summary :

All in all this was a wonderful safari experience, comprising two weeks of early morning and afternoon game drives, with lots of chance for rest and relaxation in between, and numerous evening barbecues under the star-laden African night sky. Two weeks gave us ample time out in the field and we had countless special moments enjoying nature at its best and wildest.

Our good fortune began with a big male Lion lying in the road on the way to Biyamithi Bush Camp, our first camp in the Kruger National Park. Biyamithi is a small, 15 room camp located on the Biyamithi River in the far south of the park. These bush camps give one a unique and exclusive Kruger Park experience, with minimal lights, noise and disturbance of other people. At night the sounds of the bush – a Lion roaring in the distance, or the booming call of a group of Ground Hornbill calling just before dawn – drift into your room untainted by the competing sounds of your neighbour's air-conditioner or parties of people heading back from the restaurant. In the mornings it seems like you have the park to yourselves and many times during our stay at the bush camps in the Kruger (the other being Talamati) the first other people saw would be an hour and a half after leaving the camp. Other highlights of Biyamithi included a pride of five Lions walking in the road early one morning, the herds of Elephants that arrived every day in the late morning to wallow in the mud pool in front of the camp and the herd of no fewer than nine White Rhino viewed one evening from our 'sundowner' spot overlooking the Biyamithi River.

After Biyamithi we moved northwards to Lower Sabie Rest Camp. It is a wonderful camp on the southern bank of the Sabie River, though it was a mild shock to be back in the bigger rest camps after Biyamithi. Nevertheless we enjoyed our stay there, and we had a fantastic

sundowner stop that afternoon at Mlondozi Dam, with Elephants, White Rhino and a herd of several hundred Cape Buffalo visiting the dam to drink before night fall, while the resident Hippo's began to get active in preparation for a night of foraging.

After Lower Sabie we headed north to Satara, in the Knobthorn / Marula savannah of the south-central regions of the park. Here, on the basalt soils, grass growth is prolific and even though it was quite dry there were large herds of Burchell's Zebra and Blue Wildebeest in the area. And although the area is well known for good predator sightings we only managed to record Spotted Hyena in the area and a single Lioness viewed from the Timbavati picnic site. This is not to say however that we didn't enjoy our time in the area, as we had many sightings of interest and beauty as well as two wonderful afternoon sundowner sessions spent at Nsemani Dam.

After Satara we moved on to Talamati Bush Camp, another small and exclusive camp located far off the beaten track. The highlight on the way there, and indeed one of the highlights of the entire trip, was coming across an adult Martial Eagle bathing in a small pool of water right next to the road not three meters away from us (I can't even get any closer to the Bulbuls bathing on my birdbath at home!). Other highlights in the area included a Serval sitting high up in a Marula tree (the first time I've seen this species in a tree), a clan of six Spotted Hyena making their way home after a night of hunting, a Side-striped Jackal hunting rodents and insects in some long grass and a good sighting of the Ground Hornbills that we had been hearing before dawn every morning while having our coffee.

After two wonderful nights at Talamati it was time to head out of the Kruger National Park and into the adjacent Sabi Sand Game Reserve, a 65 000 hectare conservancy that shares an open border with the national park. This means that the animals can move freely between the two protected areas, even though people can't. Our first two nights were spent at Nkorho, and our second two at Elephant Plains. Both were fantastic establishments, with differing strengths and limitations. In terms of what we saw the highlights included four Cheetah just inside the Kruger Park but visible from the boundary road, two wonderful Leopard sightings, a pride of Lions with a Cape Buffalo they had caught literally a quarter of an hour before we arrived, a group of three adult Spotted Hyenas and two pups at a den in a large termite mound and two wonderful White Rhino sightings with us literally in among them as they had their daily afternoon drink-and-wallow session.

For the final night of the tour we stayed at the Blyde River Canyon Resort and took in some of the sights of the Panorama Route in the afternoon before a farewell dinner. Unfortunately we had to leave before dawn, so a lie-in was not possible even on the last morning! So thanks to Deanne and Tricia for joining us on this wonderful tour and, if they enjoyed it at least as much as I did, we can claim that it was a huge success. The following photographs will help to illustrate the highlights of the experience.

Photograph captions (from top left): White Rhino clash, *Sabi Sand Game Reserve*; Natal Francolin, *Talamati Bush Camp*, Hippo 'yawning', *Sweni Bird Hide*, Spotted Hyena pups, *Sabi Sand Game Reserve*; Male Lion, *Biyamithi Bush Camp*; Elephant bull; *Lower Sabie region*; Secretarybird silhouette, *Lower Sabie region*; Red-billed Hornbill, *Biyamithi Bush Camp*; Martial Eagle bathing, *Talamati region*; Male Leopard, *Sabi Sand Game Reserve*; Burchell's Zebra, *Crocodile River region*; Side-striped Jackal hunting, *Talamati region*; Young male Lion, *Sabi Sand Game Reserve*.

