

# Building the perfect Kruger National Park experience

There is so much to see and do in and around the Kruger National Park.



Image supplied: There is a lot to explore in the Kruger National Park

There are thousands of different experiences to choose from that have been carefully curated by tour specialists to allow individuals or groups to experience great game viewing, bird watching, animal tracking, plant identification, visiting attractions and more. What would the *perfect* Kruger experience look like though?

“That would depend on the individual,” says Sarah Watson, guest relations manager of Kruger Gate Hotel. “While most tour operators build out their itineraries for the best general safari experience, different people like different things and they often want to see more of the region, beyond the Park. To create the perfect experience you would need to build up your own itinerary. This can be very exciting, especially in the Kruger National Park, as there is so much to see across the nearly 20, 000km<sup>2</sup> of the Park, as well as the surrounding Mpumalanga province.”

From God’s Window along the Panorama Route through the gateway towns of Lydenberg and White River, to the Mac Mac Falls which have a rich history rooted in the alluvial gold found there in 1873 - there is something for everyone in and around the Kruger National Park.

Here are some activities to consider when building your own itinerary for the area, as recommended by the team of experts at Kruger Gate Hotel.

## Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve

The Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve is in the Drakensberg escarpment region of eastern Mpumalanga and forms part of the scenic Panorama Route. It is the third largest canyon in the world, covering 29,000ha of exquisite views and waterfalls.

Within the Reserve, you will also be able to see God's Window, called such because of the incredible stretching view across the Kruger National Park towards the Lebombo Mountains.



Along the God's Window route, you will also be able to see Bourke's Luck Potholes, named after Tom Bourke who discovered alluvial gold in the formations created by the swirling river water. The Three Rondavels and Pinnacle Rock are also on this route in the Reserve.

## Things to do in the reserve

From beautiful hikes to white water rafting and kloofing, horse riding to biking, and fly-fishing to hot-air ballooning, there are myriad activities to enjoy in the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve.

### ***Sudwala Caves***

These incredible caves are the oldest known caves in the world, dating back 240 million years. They were formed by natural acid in the groundwater below seeping through fault lines in the dolomite rocks.

In addition to the yawning caverns of dolomite, arid, shale, limestone and other rocks which colour the caves, you will also see fossils dating back 2,000 million years ago, as well as horseshoe bats that live throughout the cave system.





A fascinating Crystal Tour will take you 2,000m into the caves where you will enter the crystal chamber filled with sparkling aragonite crystals. You could also step outside into the Sudwala Butterfly Effect Nature Garden to see some incredible butterfly species, or experience the Unity Labyrinth.

In the surrounding areas, you can also visit the Dinosaur Park, a museum displaying life-size models of prehistoric dinosaurs; the Jane Goodall Institute Chimpanzee Eden which is home to dozens of rescued chimpanzees; or the beautiful Lowveld Botanical Gardens which grows “magically” where the Crocodile and Nels Rivers meet.

### ***Other animal rehabilitation centres***

If you have a soft spot for eco-preservation and animal rescue, you can also visit Moholoholo Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre, which offers guided tours and education programmes on SA’s endangered species - and is also home to lions, leopards, and wild dogs.



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For a beautiful, interactive experience with some of nature’s gentle giants, you can visit Elephant Whispers, situated in the Sandford Conservancy on the banks of the Sabie River in Hazyview. This safe haven for five elephants will connect visitors with these incredible animals, from walking with the herd to memorable experiences engaging with these trusting elephants.

Another option is to visit the Hoedspruit Endangered Species Centre which works to rehabilitate cheetahs, rhinos, leopards, vultures, and other endangered animals. Families can enjoy fun and informative tours as well as specialised excursions.

## **Into the Kruger National Park**

Then of course there’s the Kruger Park itself.

“The Park offers an incredibly diverse array of wildlife experiences, from wilderness and backpacking trails, to game

drives, bird watching, and even golfing experiences,” says Watson. “The Park also borders Mozambique on the east, and Zimbabwe to the north, so you could extend your itinerary to a bush and beach getaway in Mozambique, or include Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe.”

Attractions in the Park that you could include in your itinerary include the archaeological sites of Masorini and Thulamela, sightings of the Big 5 and the Little 5 (Leopard Tortoise, Ant Lion, Rhino Beetle, Buffalo Weaver and the Elephant Shrew), over 507 bird species, 114 reptile species, as well as incredible picnic spots.



“There is so much to see and do in and around the Kruger Park that, to get the most out of your experience, we recommend you enjoy a longer stay and that you build an exciting itinerary over a couple of days,” says Watson.

“Maybe do a reverse Panorama Route, starting at the Echo Caves which date back 3,800 million years ago. Then spend a day or two at Graskop to see God’s Window, Bourke’s Luck Potholes and the other experiences there,” she says.

“Next you can move on to Pilgrim’s Rest, which has great restaurants and pubs - and you may even spot a herd of wild horses! Moving through White River for some golf, you can pass through Nelspruit and on into the Kruger Park. A good ending to your adventure is at the Kruger Gate Hotel, of course, where you can experience morning and sunset game drives, and finish off your itinerary with a good massage at the spa,” Watson concludes.

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