



## Living in luxury

Richard Asher puts his feet up at some top lodges in Mpumalanga's Sabi Sand Reserve



Photo: Duma Vuyarela Lodge

**T**hey say you should save the best for last, but it simply does not seem right to leave *Leopard Hills* to the end of this story. If ever there is a place where I do not belong, luscious *Leopard Hills* is it. But that is for all the right reasons.

Like many of the game lodges within Sabi Sand, *Leopard Hills* is a place for the rich and famous to escape. Kevin Pieterse is the perfect example. The South African-born England cricketer recently chose *Leopard Hills* as the place to lick his wounds after his side was hammered in the final Test against South Africa.

Fellow cricketer Sir Ian Botham is also a regular at this über-secluded lodge, which happens to boast a well-stocked bar area.

A place for scruffy journalists this is not, but I would never say no to another night at *Leopard Hills*. Sure, you are called a string of nasty things by jealous friends when they see the photograph, but there is a certain satisfaction in that.

I was still wearing khaki shorts on a daily basis when I last did the private game lodge thing, and I completely had forgotten how much of a different experience it is from visiting Kruger National Park in your own vehicle... doing it the Sabi Sand way doesn't even compare.

Yes, you will pay plentiful bucks for many of the Sabi lodges, but if you have only one chance to visit the wild animals of Africa, it is worth emptying the piggy bank.

The major reason for coughing up is that your game-spotting potential is several

times better in a reserve such as Sabi Sand. For a start, you have access to all the same animals as adjacent Kruger, because there is no fence between the reserves.

But it is the fact that you are driven around by experienced rangers that really gives you an edge on the Kruger hordes.

These guys may have limited areas in which they are allowed to drive, but boy, do they cover them well. The rangers in a given area share information with each other via radio, so you effectively have a few vehicles combing the bush and spotting game on your behalf.

Our sightings in three days included wild dog, caracal, lion, leopard (with two kills), elephant, rhino, giraffe, buffalo and a cheetah climbing a tree (which is rather rare).

# Likweti

LODGE & SANCTUARY

## Mpumalanga's newest "morning star"

### The Wildlife Sanctuary

Situated in Mpumalanga on 2 800ha of pristine, malaria free, African bush, Likweti Lodge & Sanctuary boasts an incredible diversity of fauna and flora. A tranquil bush experience is guaranteed when visiting Likweti with game drives offering sightings of not only leopard, rhino and Cape buffalo but also the elusive sable and majestic eland.

Over 300 birds call the Sanctuary home, including the not-often-seen African Finfoot, making Likweti a birder's paradise for both experienced and aspiring birders.

Horse back and walking safaris are available for the more adventurous guests while star-gazing is conducted on clear evenings.

### Likweti Lodge

The luxurious Likweti Lodge, the jewel of the reserve, is located on a high hillock allowing guests to enjoy breathtaking views. Coupled with 5-star accommodation, delectable cuisine and outstanding personalised service, a visit to Likweti Lodge will not disappoint.

### Weddings & Conferences

Likweti offers a bush wedding and conference venue like no other. A choice of scenic outdoor wedding ceremony venues allows nature to be your witness when exchanging wedding vows while the views from the thatched reception room will mesmerise your guests.

Tranquil surroundings together with modern conference facilities will ensure optimum results from any conference or strategic planning session.

### Out and About

The world renown Kruger National Park is a mere 30 min drive from Likweti with the many scenic splendours of the Panorama route - God's Window, Blyde River Canyon and Three Rondawels - an enjoyable day trip by car.

### Location

Located on the R538, Likweti Lodge & Sanctuary is a 25 min drive from Nelspruit, the capital of Mpumalanga, an easy 4 \_ hour drive from Johannesburg and Pretoria and less than 3km from Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport.

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The other big thing is that they are allowed to go off-roading, and have the hefty vehicles to do so. So if there is a pack of wild dogs feasting on a *bamba* (that is ranger speak for "kill") 200 metres off the gravel road, you will find yourself bumping and crashing through the bushes to a front-row position. Try doing that with your Citi Golf in Kruger and not only will you be locked up, but you will have four punctures and severe shock absorber damage to fix upon your release.

So how does a place like *Leopard Hills* fit in? Sabi Sand is divided into many smaller properties such as *Leopard Hills* Private Game Reserve and *Djuma* Private Game Reserve. Typically, the lodges themselves lie within these areas, and that lodge's rangers will have the run of their "mini reserve" and probably some adjacent areas, too.

Sabi Sand's reserves are geared entirely toward game-drive-with-ranger wildlife viewing, and most visitors do not bring their own cars at all. This is the ideal way to visit somewhere such as *Leopard Hills* or *Djuma*, with options including charter flights direct to the lodges or transfers from Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport in Nelspruit and Eastgate Airport in Hoedspruit.

Such things were not in our budget, however, so we rocked up at the multi-star lodges in an embarrassingly mud-caked Fiat Palio. A word of warning if you are going to drive yourself in the summer rainy season – your car could take some serious abuse.

Our maroon Fiat was particularly unhappy with the last stretch of sandy road leading up to Gowrie Gate, which is the entry point for our first port of call, *Djuma*.

Once or twice we feared getting stuck, and one of the routes was flooded completely. So bring a 4x4 if you can.

Once inside Sabi Sand, the road is better maintained, and the stress of rally-style approach to driving is non-existent once you get to *Djuma*.

*Bush Lodge*, one of the two main lodges at *Djuma*, was the ideal place to let all that stress melt away. Quiet and unpretentious, *Bush Lodge* was the most economical option in the reserve we sampled and the only place we ran into any South African guests. At R3 300 per person per night for one of the eight huts, it is a little more affordable than *Leopard Hills* or *Djuma's* other major lodge, *Vuyatela*.

*Bush Lodge* is good value as long as you are not attached to having an overly spacious hut. You get much of the same comforts, facilities and frills as you would get at *Vuyatela* and *Leopard Hills*, but you

## Mbombela Local Municipality



# Land of diversity

Mbombela is filled with so many discoveries for the curious traveller

*Together in Partnership, building a model African City of Excellence.*

Mbombela is situated within the Lowveld region of the Mpumalanga Province. Urban areas in Mbombela include Nelspruit, White River, Hazyview, Kanyamazane, Matsulu, Kabowkeni and the Nsikazi area. These mainly include peri-urban and rural areas in the north and the formal areas of Kabokweni, Msogwaba and Daantjie, Kanyamazane, Tekwane, and Matsulu in the South.

The famous Kruger National Park borders the Mbombela area of jurisdiction to the northeast.

As the regional service hub for southeastern Mpumalanga, Swaziland and southern Mozambique, Mbombela Local Municipality is the municipality in the heart of Mpumalanga.

The sophistication of Mbombela's economy, infrastructure, modern living amenities, medical facilities, private and public schools, combined with a moderate climate and some of the most beautiful scenery in South Africa – including game parks a mere hour away – contributes to Mbombela being a prime place to live or do business.

Mbombela is politically stable and offers clear and consistent economic policies that are complemented by an investor-friendly climate. The excellent infrastructure includes an international airport, extensive railway links to Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Swaziland and the rest of South Africa.

The Maputo Corridor, a first-world transport axis between Gauteng and the deep-sea port of Maputo in Mozambique, is a major transport route that runs through Mbombela.

In addition, Mbombela offers support, business, educational and financial services.

Manufacturing, trade, catering, government, finance, real estate, transport, communication and agriculture comprise the key sectors of the economy. Internationally renowned companies and representatives of European manufacturers have invested in Mbombela.

The labour force consists of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled people.

The region is favoured by industries such as furniture makers, manganese processors, growers of tropical and subtropical crops, paper and pulp manufacturers, as well as service providers in the secondary and tertiary sector.

One of the largest banana farming and export areas in South Africa is found in the northern parts of the area. Other crops include tobacco, avocado pears, sugar cane, oranges, lemons, tangerines and macadamia nuts.

**Nelspruit**  
Nelspruit traditionally has been viewed as a

sleepy agricultural town, but its declaration as the capital city of Mpumalanga in 1995 and bold initiatives from the local authorities have allowed it to blossom into a thriving economy. Nelspruit has become not only a major service centre for the Lowveld area but for Mozambique and Swaziland as well, creating momentum in attracting investment. Exploring cross-border business opportunities for the benefit of Mpumalanga and neighbours Mozambique and Swaziland is also a growing trend by alert entrepreneurs.

As the provincial government is seated in Nelspruit, the area is home to many public servants. There are plans to locate a divisional seat of the Supreme Court in Nelspruit, which would attract many more professionals.

Real estate is booming, with a number of residential developments under way.

Higher education institutions include a technikon campus, colleges, business and computer schools, as well as an agricultural college. Over the long term, the creation of a university in the area – which would be recognised as the intellectual capital of environmental management and tourism – is a distinct possibility.

Tourism is recognised widely to be one of the growth industries of the future. Nelspruit is positioning itself to become a tourism destination by showcasing its own attractions. More than 17% of foreign tourists who enter the country visit the Kruger National Park and other private game reserves and lodges in Mbombela.

Mbombela strives to become the eco and adventure capital of the world, and activities currently available include:

- Adventure: Bridge swinging, skyway trails, bungee jumping, canoeing, river rafting, 4x4 trails, hiking, mountain climbing, rock climbing, caving, paintball shooting, elephant rides, and rafting.
- Eco adventure: Bird-watching, hiking, angling, quad biking, fly fishing, hunting, and beautiful scenery.

Some of the tourism attractions that can be visited include:

- **Nelspruit**
- Lowveld National Botanical Gardens, host to the second largest collection of cycads in the world; and if you are lucky, a hippo can roam on the lawns of the gardens.
- The Sudwala Caves and Dinosaur Park just outside Nelspruit which are the oldest known caves in the world.
- JGI Chimpanzee Eden: Responsible for the rehabilitation of Chimpanzees
- Shopping mecca
- Host city for various national and regional festivals: arts, culture, sport.

### Kaapschehoop

- The endangered blue swallow is feared to be the bird most likely to become extinct next in South Africa.
- Strange (unique) rock formations.
- Wild horses: one of the few remaining herds of wild horses in South Africa.

### Hazyview

Name is derived from the haze that envelops the Panoramas on a hot summer's day.

- Shangaan Cultural Centre.
- Adventure and eco activities.
- Elephant experiences.

### White River

Comes from the Swazi expression "emanzimhlope" or "white waters".

- Car museum.
- Arts and craft centre.

### Challenges

A serious social challenge stems from the fact that Mbombela consists of 'two worlds': the urbanised world and the deep rural world, which is very underdeveloped, lacking the most basic infrastructure.

Key strategies include: Meeting basic needs; and alleviating poverty by ensuring that indigent residents have access to free lifeline basic services and food security through the implementation of co-ordinated urban-peri urban renewal and sustainable integrated rural nodes in Mbombela.

### Social transformation

To contribute to the development of caring communities that promote and protect the rights and needs of children, women, people with disabilities and elderly persons, with particular focus on the rural poor.

### Economic transformation

To promote the equitable creation and distribution of wealth in Mbombela.

### Safety and security

To contribute to the creation of communities where residents and visitors can work, live and play without threat to themselves or their property.

### Good governance

To ensure sustainable and representative governance through the efficient, effective and sustainable utilisation of resources in consultation with the residents of Mbombela.

### Economic development

The municipality's Development Facilitation Unit actively pursues its mandate to promote economic development and production, together with investment and job creation. The unit currently is reviewing the municipality's investment incentives to align with those on offer by the National Government.





are essentially living in a hotel room rather than a small house.

The staff at *Bush Lodge* were the friendliest, most attentive and best-informed we came across, and the game drive as good as any.

Our ranger had a stern examination from the pair of avid birders in our vehicle – he probably does not get much practice at that – but he reeled off the names of shrikes, starlings, bustards and rollers without breaking into a sweat.

*Vuyatela* is just down the road, but it is a step up in terms of luxury. At R4 200 per person per night, its eight rooms offer a great deal of space amid a modern design theme that is a little unusual for a lodge in this part of the world. I am talking about quirks such as the massive fish tank and coke-bottle chandelier in the restaurant, plus the colourful works of art in the rooms themselves.

The layout and furnishing of the suites may not be to everyone's taste, however. The minibar and study is in a separate room across the (admittedly very inviting) veranda, for example, which means another door you have to latch against marauding monkeys, and that also could pose a problem when the rain tips down as only it can in this part of the world.

*Vuyatela's* suites give onto pristine bush and are isolated almost entirely from each other. With outdoor showers and private pools on the deck, this is true honeymoon territory.

Room 1 is the prize location, with its view of the waterhole, although if you would rather not have bathing buffalo eyeing you, then pick another room!

Our last stop, then, was the envy-inducing *Leopard Hills*. At R7 550 per person per night, it is little wonder that this was the highlight. It takes privacy to a new level, and its hillside location means some rooms with panoramic views over the bushy landscape.

Room 8 may be a popular choice because it overlooks the waterhole – as does the main restaurant building – but you could luck in at any of the eight suites.

The villas at the far end of the camp may not have the towering views, but their topography allows for incidents such as elephants drinking out of swimming pools – as recently happened outside Room 5...

The level of opulence at *Leopard Hills* probably is best summed up by its lounge, which is used as a meeting point ahead of the evening game drive. It is an indulgent glimpse into a decadent world of draw-



# BLUE MOUNTAIN Lodge



Forever Resorts Blue Mountain Lodge is set in 200 hectares of indigenous bush located in the most picturesque area of Mpumalanga near the Kruger National Park. Escape to the peace and quiet of this majestic, secret haven where you will discover absolute serenity and tranquility. The five star Blue Mountain Lodge is famed for its individually themed rooms, award winning gourmet cuisine and exceptional service. Blue Mountain Lodge is a sought after retreat for many celebrities, offering them a chance to ultimate relaxation and absolute privacy.

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Boasting winner of the AA Most Fabulous Food Award, it promises to offer an extraordinary culinary experience complimented by service excellence and a setting of true elegance and style



## EMAKHAZENI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

Towns which fall under Emakhazeni include Emakhazeni (Belfast), Dullstroom, Entokozweni (Machadodorp) and Emgwenya (Waterval Boven). Belfast is the main gateway to the picturesque Highlands Meander and is situated 2000m above sea level and the warm Lowveld areas. Renowned for its surrounding breathtaking scenery and unique flora & fauna, it imbues a sense of relaxation and rejuvenation.



Linkie Mohlala  
Executive Mayor



Oscar Nkosi  
Municipal Manager

Emakhazeni provides the perfect base from which to explore and enjoy the beauty of the indigenous landscape and is ideally situated for a day trip to Kruger National Park, Blyde River Canyon (Burks Luck Potholes, three Rondavels) or a stop over in Mozambique or Swaziland. Within Emakhazeni you have a number of towns all offering their own unique charm and hospitality.

Emakhazeni boasts no less than 1100 beds in a wide range of accommodation, including hotels, self catering, B&Bs, farms, guesthouses, backpackers and lodges.

Emakhazeni is within driving distance from no less than six 2010 World Cup stadiums, including Rustenburg, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Polokwane. Nelspruit (Mbombela).



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ing rooms and butlers, crammed with vast sofas, curios, books and several telescopes.

Drinking afternoon tea always has been a ritual for me, but doing so in the Leopard Hills lounge felt like a brand-new, thoroughly English and completely over-the-top experience.

A final word of warning to anyone planning a stay at Leopard Hills: leaving this place is extremely difficult. You may experience a difficult period of re-adjustment to the real world. And unless you move in exceedingly high places, do not show off your photos and still expect respect!

**Contacts**

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# Everyone should experience the magic of Timamoon at least once.

**W**hile driving up to Timamoon through a rain forest with a dense canopy of trees and over a wooden bridge across the flowing waters of the Sabie river, you will realise that a very special place awaits you.



exclusively to you will make you feel that you are alone in this heavenly place. The day ends perfectly with an aromatherapy massage in the privacy of your own lodge.

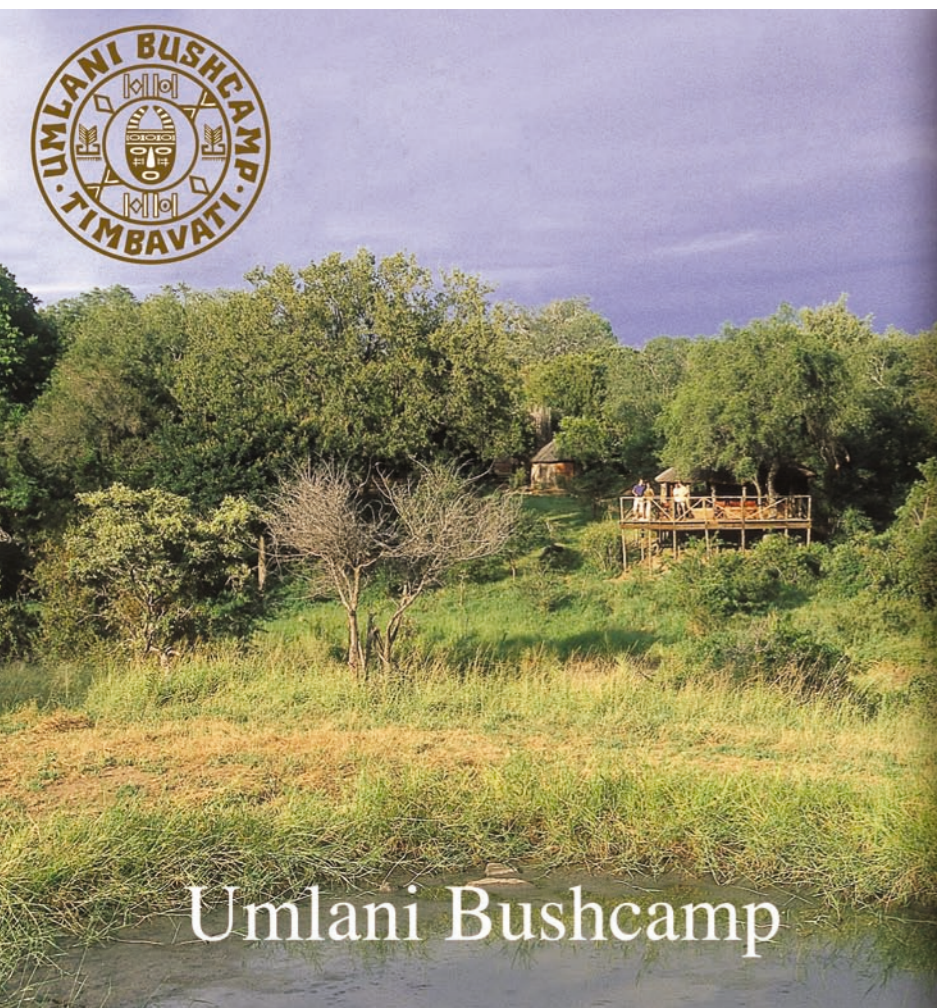
Dinner at night is an intimate affair with delectable candlelit meals alongside a small pond. If you can tear yourself away from this heavenly hideout, there are activities such as horse riding, hot air ballooning, river rafting and aerial cabling. Timamoon is also only a 40-minute drive from the Kruger National Park and Blyde River Canyon.

It is not surprising that Timamoon is fast becoming popular with couples from all over the world who are looking for a more private and exotic destination. So if Timamoon sounds like your sort of hideaway to celebrate romance - pack your bags, grab your love, and allow Timamoon to seduce your senses.

There is a mythical atmosphere of intimacy and tranquility about Timamoon that makes it arguably one of the most romantic destinations on the planet.

Each individually styled lodge has been created to offer a perfect sensuous experience with private pools, divinely decadent luxurious four-poster Indian beds and candlelit bubble baths large enough to share.

Spending a quiet day lounging on the day bed alongside your pool with gorgeous views that belong



Umlani Bushcamp, a rustic yet exclusive lodge, accommodates 16 guests in cosy en-suite reed and thatch rondavels. Early morning and evening game drives are in open four wheel drive vehicles accompanied by experienced rangers and trackers. A traversing area of more than 10 000 hectares with over 40 mammal and 350 bird species, makes for an exceptional wildlife experience. Umlani makes the whole event personalised and specialises in escorted walks into this unspoiled wilderness. Umlani, meaning Place of Rest, was established in 1990 by Marco and Marie-Louise Schiess, in the central section of the Timbavati Nature Reserve, which is part of the greater Kruger National Park. The aim of Umlani is to offer our guests a true African adventure and long lasting memories.

For more information, contact:  
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## Umlani Bushcamp



# TIMAMOOON

Timamoon is a sexy hideaway between Sabie and the Kruger National Park. Luxurious and seductive Moroccan/Zanzibar-style lodges have mosquito net-draped four-poster beds, fireplaces and baths to float away in. Dip into your own private pool with views of magical forests and mountains. Dine on exotic foods in a candle-lit restaurant built on stilts.

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timamoonlodge@icon.co.za  
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*The most seductive lodge on the planet*