

BOOT

Kruger's wilderness trails are hugely popular so booking well ahead will give the most choice. Each of the seven trails offers something different in terms of location and what you might see.

Which one is right for you?

By Hlengiwe Magagula

When you're deep in the bush, like here on the Olifants Wilderness Trail, it's vital to follow the guide's instructions.

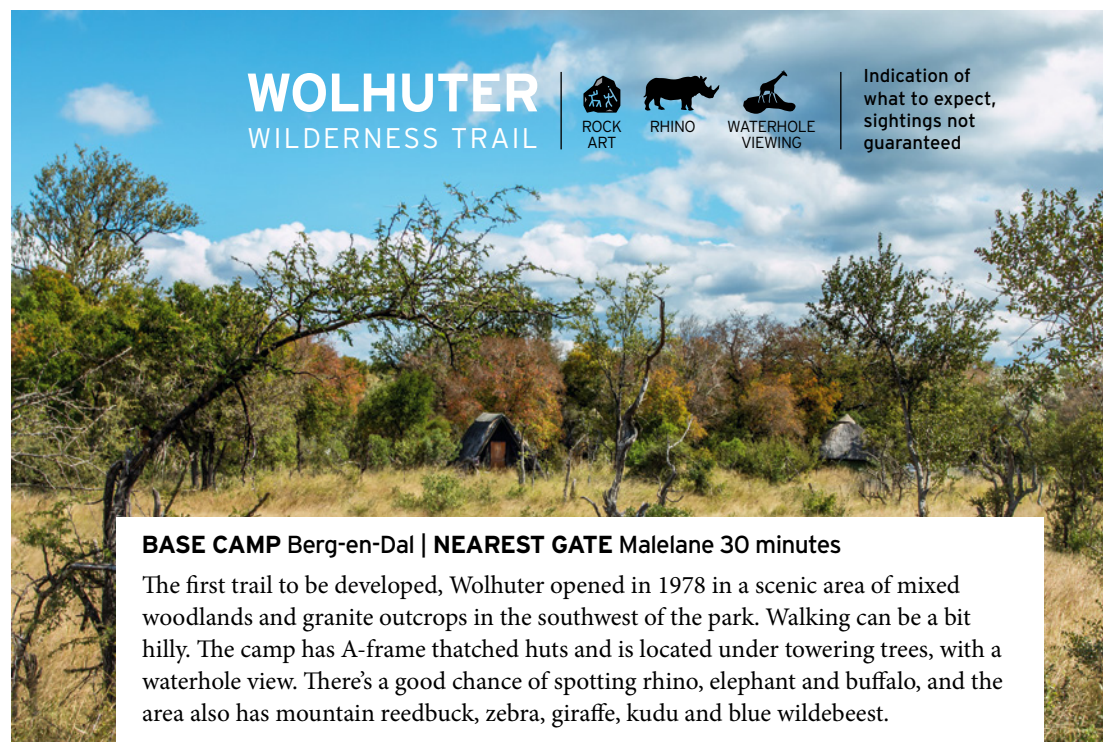
© STEPHEN CUMMIE

CAMP

It's not hard to see why visitors love the SANParks Wilderness Trails in the Kruger National Park. They offer a perfect balance of proximity to nature and camp comforts. Apart from your little group you won't see another human for three days, as you enjoy bush walks twice a day. There's no roughing it either, as you return to a fixed camp with proper beds and sheets, showers and cooked meals. Each location is accessed by restricted roads, so guests also get the chance for private game viewing on the access drives, like a private safari. With seven sterling trails to choose from, you're spoilt for choice. ▶

Evenings are for swapping stories around the campfire, with the Wolhuter Trail's towering trees as the backdrop.

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WOLHUTER WILDERNESS TRAIL



Indication of
what to expect,
sightings not
guaranteed

BASE CAMP Berg-en-Dal | NEAREST GATE Malelane 30 minutes

The first trail to be developed, Wolhuter opened in 1978 in a scenic area of mixed woodlands and granite outcrops in the southwest of the park. Walking can be a bit hilly. The camp has A-frame thatched huts and is located under towering trees, with a waterhole view. There's a good chance of spotting rhino, elephant and buffalo, and the area also has mountain reedbuck, zebra, giraffe, kudu and blue wildebeest.

"This camp is located under large trees and overlooks a very active watering hole: worth coming just for access to that!" Miriam L on TripAdvisor

"Having done most of the wilderness trails in the park, I was expecting more of the same. But I was positively surprised. The setting next to the waterhole provides for day- (and night) long interest, with elephant, rhino and buffalo being regular visitors. The lion at night was an unexpected bonus." 657axelv on TripAdvisor



BARRY TANNER



OLIFANTS WILDERNESS TRAIL

Above: A highlight is walking along the scenic Olifants River. Opposite top: Wolhuter's trails camp is sheltered by trees.

BASE CAMP Letaba | NEAREST GATE Phalaborwa 2 hours

This trail is based at a beautiful camp overlooking the deep valley of the Olifants River, close to the border with Mozambique. As there is always some water in the rivers here, there's often great concentrations of animals when it is dry in central Kruger. The walks take in an interesting mix of forested valleys and open plains. Huts are thatched A-frame with shared ablutions. After a renovation this summer, the camp will be looking its best.

Right: Seeing elephant on foot is an unforgettable experience. Opposite bottom: Walking quietly in single file is the way to get close to animals.



"We walked the confluence of the Olifants and Letaba rivers - breathtaking views and the walk on the last afternoon, just gorgeous to watch the sun set over the Olifants River." SerushiaN on TripAdvisor

"Sundowners were in breathtaking locations each evening and we always came back to a delicious and hot dinner." Madeline B, UK, on TripAdvisor

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BUSHMANS WILDERNESS TRAIL



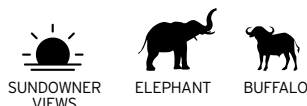
BASE CAMP Berg-en-Dal | **NEAREST GATE** Malelane 30 minutes

In hilly terrain similar to Wolhuter, the highlight of this trail is the rock art, plus the good chance of seeing rhino. The walking is on animal tracks in mountain bushveld with great views. The camp is in a beautiful location, nestled among granite hills, with thatched A-frame huts.

"Our first trail in the Kruger National Park and we loved every minute. The camp is situated in thick bush, surrounded by several rocky outcrops and overlooking a waterhole regularly visited by elephant, zebra and other general game." JaredM1189 on TripAdvisor

"Bushmans Trail has a very big chance for the relatively close sighting of rhinos. In addition, the landscape with the rocky ridges (called koppies) is famous and gives good vantage points." Rajang, Switzerland, on TripAdvisor

MATHIKITHI WILDERNESS TRAIL



BASE CAMP Satara | **NEAREST GATE** Orpen 2 hours

Located on the banks of N'wanetsi stream, southwest of Satara Rest Camp, this trail replaced the Metsi-Metsi Trail. The accommodation is tented with wooden decking. It's named after a sandstone koppie, 500 m from camp, which is perfect for sunset views. The area has a high concentration of elephants.

"It's an amazing fly camp situated in a fantastic area, though very, very dry, being far away from any permanent water sources. Like Sweni, great conditions for walking in the bush, but Mathikithi way more beautiful!" Lowveldlover on sanparks.org forum



Above: Look for hippos in the Sweni River. Opposite: A rhino sighting could be in store on the Bushmans Trail.

SWENI WILDERNESS TRAIL



BASE CAMP Satara | **NEAREST GATE** Orpen 2 hours

Sweni Trail is based near Satara in central Kruger amid grassy plains and thorny savanna. Here it's harder for the wildlife to hide than in the thicker bush to the south, so it's possible to tick off quite a few species. The area is known for its big cats. Watch the animals come to drink at the camp's waterhole while enjoying a cold one yourself. Flat terrain suits those averse to hill walks. Accommodation is in thatched A-frame huts.

"The camp is really rustic, but that's what we came for, wilderness. It is most beautifully situated in a loop of the Sweni River, from the boma overlooking a beautiful piece of savanna with a nearly constant flow of animal herds coming to drink or take a mud bath." Feuerspatz, Germany, on TripAdvisor

Right: Sweni's thatched A-frame huts may be rustic, but the setting is gorgeous.



NAPI WILDERNESS TRAIL



COMFORT



RHINO



LION

BASE CAMP Pretoriuskop | **NEAREST GATE** Numbi 20 minutes

The terrain here is less hilly than the other trails in the south of the park. It's a good area to approach rhino, and even lion. Accommodation is in canvas tents on wooden decks and it is the only wilderness trail camp that has en-suite facilities. The camp got a full makeover last year.

"You definitely can't go wrong with the Napi Trail; the camp is lovely, and the accommodations are the most 'luxurious' of all the Wilderness Trails."

Joe James, USA, sanparks.org forum

"Worth going on this trail, just for the lovely, secluded, rustic but comfortable tents, overlooking the Biyamiti River."

M-LO, UK, on TripAdvisor



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The scenery of the Nyalaland Trail is especially dramatic.

NYALALAND WILDERNESS TRAIL



BIRDING



RIVER
SCENERY



REMOVEDNESS

BASE CAMP Punda Maria | **NEAREST GATE** Punda Maria 10 minutes

The only trail in the far north, with rocky mopane savanna and lovely baobab trees. It is a good area for birding and you'll likely also see elephants, buffalo and nyala. Walks are guided along the Luvuvhu River, the most pristine in the park. The camp has tented accommodation on decks.

"Located at a simply sublime bend in the river where the wildlife is up close and personal and the sunsets come with the insistent grunts of hippos and calls of hyena and the sunrises with mellifluous birdsong."

Frazierb6 on TripAdvisor

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Sightings savvy Animal sightings on wilderness trails are varied and there are no guarantees that you will spot certain species. Best advice: keep your eyes peeled.

Meet & greet Wilderness trails meet at their base camp at 15h00. It is recommended you stay in the base rest camp the night before. Your vehicle will stay at base camp so you can leave big cases in the car and just bring what you need for the three days.

Walk tall There are two actual walking days. On the first afternoon you travel by vehicle to the camp, with stops to see wildlife. And the reverse on the morning of the fourth day, with the return to base camp before lunch. The main walk is in the morning. Afternoon walks are shorter and typically end in a good spot to admire the sunset. Expect an early morning call and to leave camp at first light. It's usual to drive from the camp to the starting point.

Critter comforts All camps are fenced and have communal dining and boma areas. As well as two guides, the camp has a manager/cook. Each accommodation unit has two proper beds with bedding and mosquito nets. There's no electricity, just solar power for room lighting. In the evening you will dine and relax by the light of a bonfire and lanterns. Most camps have shared ablutions and all have flush toilets. In some cases warm showers are prepared by heating water over a fire. Gas-powered fridges are available for the drinks you bring along, and there's always a good spot nearby to walk or drive for a sundowner.

For more information to help plan a wilderness trail, including our suggestions for a pack list, go to wildcard.co.za/what-to-know-before-booking-kruger-wilderness-trail.

JOE JAMES

TRIP PLANNER

Cost R10 088 for two people for three nights. The price includes transport, accommodation, food and water. It does not include additional drinks and tips.

When to go The best time to walk in Kruger is the drier and cooler season from April to September, when you can expect day time temperatures in the 20s. There are usually low season rates during the hotter months from 1 November to 28 February.

Bookings SANParks Central Reservations 012-428-9111, www.sanparks.org



The Kruger National Park is five to six hours' drive from Gauteng.