



Accessible opulence

Lodge offers opportunity for luxuriant laziness

BRUCE DENNILL

GETTING to Madikwe Safari Lodge via Zeerust – going along the old Ventersdorp road, and through Derby, Koster and Swartruggens – is essentially doing the Jameson Raid in reverse, and hopefully with less angst involved.

It's a slightly longer route, but there's more tar involved, which is useful, particularly in the rainy season. There are more tarred roads within the reserve as well – the long stretch from the Abjaterskop Gate is very welcome – which makes the last part of the journey to your holiday destination (the part when everyone in the car is at their most frazzled) as comfortable as possible.

From Joburg, thanks to frequent potholes throughout the North West province and enthusiastically policed speed limits, it takes about five hours to get to Madikwe Safari

For more info on Madikwe Safari Lodge or to book a stay, go to www.madikwesafarilodge.co.za.

Lodge. Various websites will suggest travel times of anything from two-and-a-half to four hours, but perhaps they send in their writers via helicopter.

The lodge is made up of three separate venues, with the last in the row, Lelapa, catering to families (indeed, the name means "family" in Tswana). It offers a sort of rustic opulence that will delight amateur interior designers, to which you are introduced by guest relations man Solomon, who has a fantastic bass voice but admits to being a terrible singer.

The family suites at the lodge are



magnificent – a separate room for the kids, a king-size (large enough for Henry VIII and *all* his wives) bed for mom and dad and a number of little details, like a small bottle of milk in the minibar for tea and coffee, rather than those annoying cardboard things you have to massacre to get into, that make the place about as home-from-home as possible.

There's a plunge-pool, and you should be given the option to get a net for it so that it can be properly covered when not in use, and terrible accidents can be avoided. The outside deck is lovely too, although at the time of writing, the lodge was still awaiting a certain type of wood to erect a balustrade to keep little ones from falling off the edge.

It's a fantastic place for a rest, with

the bush mere metres away, and with the full magnificence of the Milky Way above you at night, despite the slight glow from Gaberone, just visible on the horizon.

The usual bush lodge formula is, for the most part, embraced at Madikwe Safari Lodge. Should you prefer to rest or read your book over cocktails during the late afternoon, you may be the sole guest remaining at the lodge as everyone else heads out on game drives.

You may not feel it necessary to climb aboard a vehicle to go and see the park's non-human residents, as the walk along the path between the suites and the main lodge (where all meals are eaten and from where all the game drives leave) is often a game-spotting exercise in itself.

During the day, most of the wildlife will be considerably smaller and less threatening than you – wonderfully diverse beetles, butterflies, millipedes and, occasionally, scorpions – but after dark, your unseen companions may be potentially more troublesome, so you will be accompanied by a security guard.

If nothing else, your combined silhouette will look a little more threatening...

One of the most enjoyable lodge standards is the boma dinner, and Madikwe Safari Lodge has a particularly picturesque offering in this regard, which includes a wood-fired pizza oven should you not be in the mood for the more traditional spread.

Most meals are taken in the central dining area, which offers a wonderful view over the plains towards Botswana, and which is unofficially shared with a couple of local families – a brood of starlings in one of the leadwood support pillars and some enterprising bulbuls that have made their nest in one of the trendy chandeliers.

Rest, eat, go out and look for game. Rinse and repeat. A fine formula indeed.



All pictures: BRUCE DENNILL