

Kruger National Park



Almost as much as Nelson Mandela and the Springboks, Kruger is one of South Africa's national symbols, and for many visitors, it is *the* 'must-see' wildlife destination in the country. Little wonder: in an area the size of Wales, enough elephants wander around to populate a major city, giraffes nibble on acacia trees, hippos wallow in the rivers, leopards prowl through the night and a multitude of birds sing, fly and roost.

Kruger is one of the world's most famed protected areas – known for its size, conservation history, wildlife diversity and ease of access. It's a place where the drama of life and death plays out daily, with up-close, action-packed sightings of wildlife almost guaranteed. One morning you may spot lions feasting on a kill, and the next a newborn impala struggling to take its first steps.

Kruger is also South Africa's most visited park, with over one million visitors annually and an extensive network of sealed roads and comfortable camps. For those who prefer roughing it, there are 4WD tracks and hiking trails. Yet, even when you stick to the tarmac, the sounds and scents of the bush are never far away. And, if you avoid weekends and holidays, or stay in the north and on gravel roads, it's easy to travel for an hour or more without seeing another vehicle.

Southern Kruger is the most popular section, with the highest animal concentrations and easiest access. Further north, mopane (mopani) takes over as the dominant vegetation. This is a favoured food of elephants, and you'll see these creatures in abundance, especially around Letaba. In the far north, around Punda Maria and Pafuri, wildlife concentrations are somewhat lower, but the bush setting is stunning and the wilderness atmosphere all-enveloping.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Setting off into the bush on one of Kruger's excellent **wilderness trails** (p471)
- Sleeping in an **overnight hide** (p476) or **bushveld camp** (p475) and dropping off to the sound of lions roaring in the distance
- Spending time in **northern Kruger** (p469), visiting the ruins of the ancient kingdom of Thulamela, taking in the panorama at Crook's Corner, and appreciating the wilderness
- Exploring **Kruger from south to north** (p467), taking in the changing topography and nature's rhythms
- Pampering yourself with a few nights at a luxurious **private wildlife reserve** (p478)

