

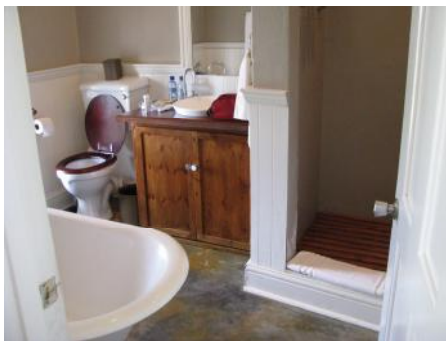
Joanna Price Trip Report to Kirkman's Kamp and Rattray's on MalaMala February 2008

We were met off our flight into Johannesburg by a CC Africa representative who transferred us the Federal Air departures. This is a very comfortable area with a complementary snacks and drinks. Our charter flight was slightly delayed so we had time to enjoy a coffee and snack while watching the planes.



After approximately 1 hour flight we were met on the runway by our Guide, Steph and our tracker, Colin. It was a short drive through beautiful bush to the camp. Wow, it felt good to be in that dry heat surrounded by the smell of the veld.

After checking in and getting a general overview of the camp by Catherine and Patricia, lunch was delivered to our room in a picnic basket by our "butler" Agnes. For the rest of our stay Agnes took superb care of us. After the delicious picnic, it was time for a quick nap and then off on our first game drive.



At this point I would like to say that Kirkman's Kamp has a wonderful peaceful, friendly feel to it. I was most impressed with the service and efficiency of the camp. The food was excellent, fresh and beautifully presented. Drinks were included. All in all exceeded expectations and I highly recommend this property.



Our guide, Steph, had moved from Phinda where she'd been guiding for a couple of years, is the first female guide in the area and wonderfully oblivious to the effect it's seemed to be having on all the other guides – mainly they were very impressed by her. Her love and enthusiasm for the bush was contagious. I know we say this about a lot of guides, but I REALLY mean this when describing Steph. With 4 – 6 people in the vehicle at all times she and Colin made it their mission to accommodate everyone by finding great game (large and small) while keeping things fun and informative. 1st day we saw: water monitor lizard (outside our room – rob was sleeping), Leopard, Impala, buffalo wallowing in a water hole, ele, ground hornbill.



We returned to camp to find a Valentines rose petal bath had been drawn for us – Thanks Agnes!! So a lovely freshen up and then a candle lit dinner on the lawn – the food was delicious and the African sky was a perfect. Rob got huge points for planning such a perfect Valentines – God knows what he's going to do next year, but it'll most likely be a little disappointing. Ag shame.





The following morning, we set out on our first game drive. We saw: Rhino, Impala, waterbuck, giraffe, zebra, warthog, baboon, Tawny eagle, Bateleur (juvenile) and other raptors. We heard the call of the Fish Eagle which put a smile on Rob and my face for the rest of the day. Steph introduced us to Amarula hot chocolate which helped with the smile no end.

We returned to camp for lunch, nap and swim before our afternoon game drive. We saw: wildebeest, 2nd leopard, elephant, waterbuck, elephant, brown snake eagle. Lunch, nap swim at camp and then in the afternoon we saw lion as well as the rest already mentioned.

That evening we had dinner in the boma, which was a fun and relaxed evening. The camp was full that night so we all really got into it. Lots of laughter, wine and good food.

The following day we were transferred to the gate of Rattray's by Steph and Colin. After a fond goodbye we were handed over to Charles Gornal-Jones, the Manager of Rattray's, who drove us through the gate in up to the front door.

Rattray's is beautiful, peaceful and luxurious. We felt pampered and well looked after throughout our stay. After a brief check-in we were walked to our Kayah – wow. There are 8 of these “houses” and are quite spread out so it can be a 5 plus minute walk to your room. There is a golf cart available if you'd prefer not to walk.

The room is beautifully appointed with his and her bathrooms and dressing rooms. His bathroom has a double shower and her's a club-foot tub. All rooms have heated plunge pools, outdoor showers and stunning verandahs that look over the sand river. We saw elephant on the opposite bank a couple of times.

If feel there should be more to say about these accommodations, but the adjectives fail me. Spacious, safari décor, rich, comfortable



After a lovely lunch and nap, we went out on our first gamedrive. As we drove out of camp there was a lovely bull elephant right at the property boundary. It didn't indicate on which game drive I saw what, so during our stay at Rattray's we saw the following:

Wildbeest, Duiker, Impala, Nyala, Bushbuck, Waterbuck, Kudu, Elephant, Zebra, Lion, Leopard, Giraffe, Rhino, Buffalo, Scrub Hare, Tree Squirrel, White Tailed Mongoose, Dwarf Mongoose, Banded Mongoose, Carmine Bee-eater, Tawny Eagle, Wahlberg's Eagle, Martial Eagle, Bronw Snake Eagle, Bateleur, Crested Fracolin, Hoopoe, Grey / Red billed / Yellow Billed / Crowned and Ground Hornbills. Woodland Kingfisher, Grey Lourie and so on.



Dean, our guide is a super guy. He had only been guiding for 6 months but was knowledgeable and fun. Our tracker, had grown up in the area and had an incredible knowledge and understanding of the area and it's game. The reserve is huge. Although we did "bump" into over vehicles, at no time was it crowded. When you stop to view 5 male lions roaring simultaneously, you should share it with a couple of other vehicles!



After freshening up we met at the bar to chat to the other guests and compare game viewing notes. There are some fantastic old photos of the Rattray family and MalaMala's history. I saw the biggest stick insect I've ever seen outside on the bar veranda h – glorious. The food was simple, delicious and as always, we ate far too much. Sleep.

Early morning wake up, coffee and then off we went to track leopard which eluded us for the whole morning! But we managed to see lots of other animals while tracking .

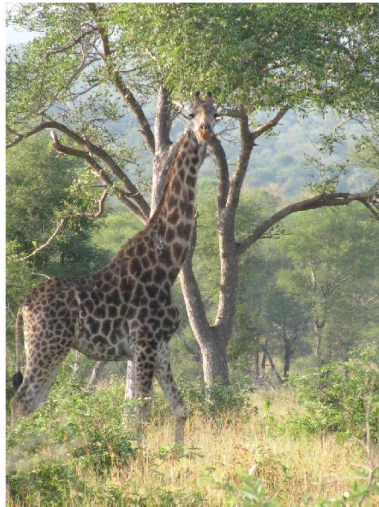
The plunge pool was very welcoming after the morning game drive, more yummy lunch and nap.

All the evening game drives were interrupted with a G&T and a stunning sunset.



Checking out was sad, my only complaint about the whole stay, is that once we'd settled our bar bill, we didn't feel we were able to get a drink – we'd settled our account and did not want to start up a new bill just for a couple of soft drinks. We had an hour to kill between leaving our room and needing to go to the airstrip and a drink on the verandah would have been perfect.

The airstrip is open, there is very little shade. It would have been nice to have somewhere to sit while waiting for our flight. The wait was not long, but was at midday and it was very hot! Also, it took time for the plane to land, passengers and luggage to unload before we could board. A shelter with some simple table, chairs and a coolerbox would go a very long way to rounding off an otherwise perfect stay.



South African and Zimbabwe – December 2005 (Jo Price)

Tsala Tree Lodge was incredible, situated at the edge of the Tsitsikamma forest outside of the town of Plettenberg Bay. The chalets are connected by raised walkways, very private and each has its own plunge pool. The rooms are extremely comfortable with breath taking views over indigenous forest to the sea. We especially liked the sweeping view from the reception and breakfast on the open veranda was lovely. We enjoyed the quiet of the lodge after a day of beach and shopping in close-by Plettenberg Bay.



Our stay at Hunter's Country House, the sister property to Tsala was exactly what you would want from a country lodge; quiet, comfortable, superb food and cozy. It's the kind of place that makes you want to (and lets you) curl up next to an open fire and a good book. Alternatively walking through to beautiful grounds and enjoying the views and atmosphere of a farmstead is equally enjoyable. The service and attention to detail was admirable. Even though we were there in December (peak time) and the lodge welcomes families and young children, it felt private and peaceful.

Makalolo in Hwange National Park, a short flight from Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe was a highlight of our trip. Game viewing on the open plains was great. The game drives were fascinating and Sacha, our guide (and manager of Little Makaolo) ensured our interest was captivated at all times. No detail was too small to note and his enthusiasm for the bush is contagious. This permanent tented camp has a wonderful atmosphere and the staff are warm, welcoming and great at anticipating your every need.

