

ASSOCIATED PRODUCT

FIRST-HAND FEEDBACK

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SOUTH AFRICA

Jaques Momberg had the opportunity to visit Mashatu Game Reserve in the Tuli Block area of Botswana, and shares his feedback here:

Mashatu Euphorbia is an amazing property, a real 5-Star offering. The décor, layout, main area and villas are wonderfully planned and laid out. There is plenty of space for all guests to have privacy in the main areas or meet up with fellow travellers. The Nest is a wonderful area for early morning coffee or private meals. It is situated on the edge of a cliff overlooking the riverbed in front of the lodge. The villas are very well appointed, and having your own plunge pool is welcome to cool off on warm days. A big selling point at Euphorbia is the “max 4 people per vehicle” policy, which is something that only Euphorbia offers in the area. It gives you an intimate experience with your guide/tracker and more flexibility. The vehicles are comfortable and spacious – I do like the design, whereby they can easily pull the canvas roof off when needed. There is more than enough space and compartments on each vehicle to store your camera equipment, binoculars, jackets, etc. and it has a mini-fridge to keep drinks cold. One does need to be aware that the tracker seat is at the back of the vehicle (behind the last row of seats) and not in front as we are used to, so when the tracker and guide talk to each other – they do talk “over” the guests on the vehicle. Note at Euphorbia they only take children 16 years and older.

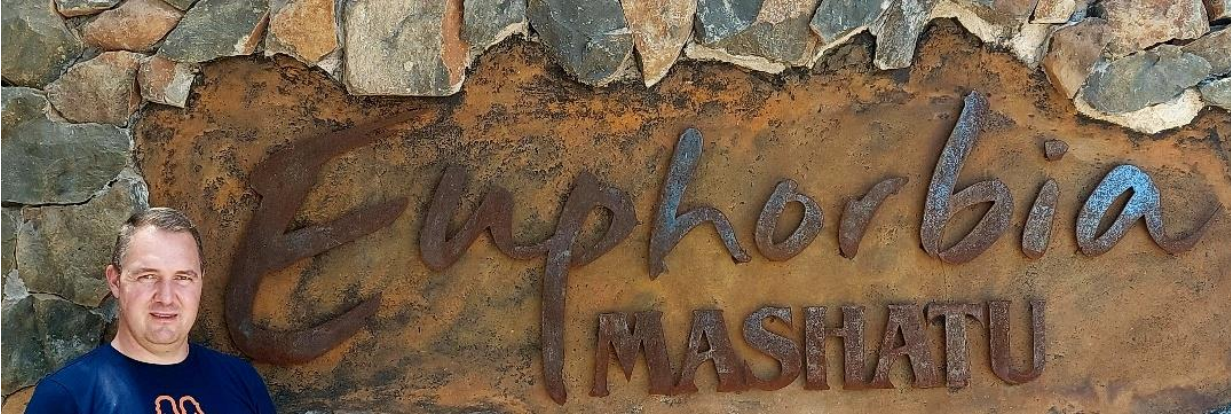
Mashatu Kolokolo Safari Home is a gem of a place on the reserve. Situated far away from all the other lodges it gives you that true private African experience. Perfect for small groups or families as it only has 4 rooms, all en-suite. Beautiful open lawns and a lovely farm-style house. I was really impressed with this property and would highly recommend it for small parties or families. They only have 1 vehicle allocated to Kolokolo Safari Home for max 8 passengers; however, subject to availability, an additional vehicle can be arranged at an extra cost. Kids of all ages are welcome.

Mashatu Lodge is the original lodge. As I walked through the property, I got memory flashbacks of when I was there +/-18 years ago. Not much has changed in terms of lodge and room layout. I do like the addition of the Spa and the beautiful new swimming pool. It was great to see the inter-leading rooms, which can be closed off when required or opened up so that only the family has access from one room to the next – both rooms are exactly the same with a small landing connecting the two rooms. If you need the inter-leading room, you need to request it in order for Mashatu reservations to block it off and to make sure that there are enough vehicles to allocate to families and the rest of the guests in the lodges. Kids of all ages are welcome.

Tuli Safari Lodge was a pleasant surprise. I was very impressed with the tents – spacious, beautiful and comfortable. The grounds around the tents and main area are beautifully maintained, and give you ample space to wander around. The location between the rocks is very unique and the walk up to the stargazing deck is amazing; star viewing here is top class. The luxury chalets are also lovely, with the advantage of having aircon units, but the chalets are not as spacious as the tents. Kids of all ages are welcome.

Mashatu Tented Camp is for the more adventurous traveler. The tents are basic but comfortable, the main area gives you that real “bush adventure” feel and is exactly what this camp offers – an authentic, luxury bush experience. Childrens’ age is 12 years and older.

In general, the food offering at Mashatu was exceptional. They went above and beyond to cater for all dietary requirements, and there was a good variety and quality of food. The guides/trackers are very knowledgeable, showing much passion and dedication. Really enjoyed the drives with Konosi and Albert – they made sure that we were kept busy looking for animals, and when we found them, they gave us enough time to enjoy the sightings.



Our Product Team had the opportunity to visit the new Kateka (a safari & wellness experience) and Ximuwu lodges in the Klaserie Private Nature Reserve in South Africa. Here is their feedback:

Kateka Safari and Wellness Experience is exactly that, and we were very fortunate to be hosted by such an amazing team. Their sense of generosity and attentive hosting was out of this world, from management to waitrons and trackers. The wellness element is incredible, with offerings such as a sauna with a Himalayan salt floor, an ice plunge pool, a rooftop yoga deck where they offer sound therapy amongst others, as well as a full-on F45 gymnasium, facilities not often seen at other properties which are on the wellness trend. Added to this are mindful touches, such as the adult colouring book and pens placed in each room. They go the extra mile with tailor-made nutritional meal planning consultations and signature treatments (to open the chakras) as well as traditional spa menus with “standard” back/neck/shoulder massages.

We were also fortunate to experience a demonstration of their Canine Unit and the poacher/tracker scenario, a real eye-opener to what goes on behind the scenes. An incredible project! They plan to offer this experience to guests, which is sure to leave an impression and unforgettable memories.

The individual suites are spacious and beautiful, and there is a great self-contained 3-bedroomed family villa, with a kitchen and outdoor entertaining areas, private vehicle, etc. The IQ sunblock spritzer was a welcome amenity as not many properties have this in their toolkits. Thinking back on this, the request on personalising the shampoo and conditioners prior to our arrival, should have been a hint as to what was to follow in exceeding expectations on each and every service level. The property's WIFI operated without a hitch and the smart lighting and set up is also on point; nice to see the high tech coming out in new lodges.

The dinner venues were perfect as we were able to enjoy the wide-open vistas at the wine cellar, balanced with a top-notch indoor setting in the main dining area. The table settings were an indication of the delicious dishes to follow in very well thought-out, varied dining locations – whether fireside, on the rooftop, or the outdoor terrace. Vegetarian meals on offer were fantastic, so much to select from. Loved that the barman was creative in his drinks, as he took into consideration that some of us wanted no alcohol but created something that still looked like it was the real deal!

And yet another topper (how many times can this team outdo their own high bar is anyone's guess really ...) was the special cooling towel which we could dip in an ice bucket before departing on our game drive. A thin ice-cold

towel around one's neck keeps one cool even when temperatures are soaring. Thanks to the great competence of our guides and trackers, we had some thrilling encounters during our game drives, one of them being a unique lion sighting by a watering hole. Whilst driving around, the guide was informative about the reserve and the smaller things that you find, which made the drive really interesting. Kateka has 14 500ha of traversing in the Klaserie Private Nature Reserve, and is unfenced and open to the Greater Kruger National Park, allowing animals to roam freely between the reserves. Kateka is most certainly the crown jewel of the Klaserie!



Ximuwu Lodge, also in the Klaserie, was visited by the team on their way back to the Hoedspruit airport.

“Where Wilderness Meets Luxury” – no truer statement! The hands-on approach of an owner-run lodge is very evident and a great selling point. From the chef having leeway to create new dishes, to luxury L’Occitane amenities and the brunch that was prepared for us – a pure taste delight – there is a lot of attention to detail. The hanging pendant lighting at the bedsides, with sparkling teardrop lights that are dimmable for mood value, as well as having practical brighter reading light that is directional, are more examples. The curtains are unique, hand-painted by Cape Town artists. Even the Pilot/Guide accommodation is thoughtfully well-appointed with its own Nespresso, mini fridge, artwork, etc. Each guest suite is styled individually with beautiful art, from wild dogs in one suite, to zebra in the next, and cheetah and giraffe. Repurposing of railway sleepers as part of the build, and using belts as artwork, demonstrated sustainable design elements.

They also offer unique value-adds, that we had not come across at other lodges, such as the sound safari equipment; and mention was made of infra-red spotlighting, and thermal-vision goggles or binoculars on game drives vehicles, which could make a great difference for night drives.

Ximuwu is also one of the best equipped lodges to cater for wheelchair-bound guests. The main areas of the camp, the wooden walkways and even the ramp down to the swimming pool and the hide, are all wheelchair-friendly. The doors to the suites and showers are wide and slide for manoeuvrability, the inset basins and adjustable beds take into account height considerations, the smooth flooring allows for effortless wheeling, while the common area has an easy-reach switch for automatic entry and exit, there are handrails for the toilet, etc. – the facilities for non-ambulant guests cannot be faulted.

Ximuwu Lodge is an exclusive retreat within the Klaserie Private Nature Reserve, part of the vast Greater Kruger National Park, and spans 6 000 ha.



Carel Loubser, Head of Trade & Partnership Marketing, visited Samara Karoo Reserve. Here is his feedback:

Samara is located in the Karoo landscape and is an easy drive from Graaff-Reinet by road. It is one of my favourite lodges in South Africa and is quite unique in its offering as a luxury Karoo lodge. The cheetah sightings are particularly special. The hospitality and food are really good (way too much!), and the local Karoo culture is evident here. With all the different habitats and eco-zones on the property, the difference between the “plains” area and the area on top of the mountain (the mara) allows for easy viewing of cheetahs on the property, as well as the large number of plains game. One can also get closer to the cheetahs on foot. The area’s scenery is amazing and obviously different from the Kruger, etc. in the Lowveld. Samara is perfect for repeat guests or those who want something off the beaten track and a different kind of safari experience. Also great for visitors who want to see cheetah up close, for photographers and local safari goers. Kids are welcome at The Manor House and Karoo Lodge. Their guides are from across South Africa.

Food at the Manor House was excellent and the food at Plains Camp is wholesome farm-style South African food. We unfortunately were not able to see the new Karoo lodge as it had not opened to the trade yet.



BOTSWANA / ZIMBABWE

Sarah Jackson, Terri Lombard and Emily Wallington visited Wilderness and Associated Product camps in Botswana and Zimbabwe. Here is their feedback:

Selinda Camp was our first stop in Botswana. It is located within a quiet private reserve that is only shared with Selinda Explorers. Sarah said for her the view from Selinda was one of her favourites of the whole trip as it overlooked the river, and she loved that each meal was set up in a different place. She also mentioned that on their return from each game drive they were presented with different drinks which they felt was such a thoughtful touch. Terri loved that they all had the use of a Canon camera during their stay. Their guide, Joe, who was very knowledgeable, showed them how to use it and adjusted the settings where necessary. They were treated to some incredible wildlife sightings over the 2-night stay; the sundowner stop, beside wallowing hippos, was a highlight, as was the bush breakfast. There's definitely space to do more with the in-camp food experience but the food was nice and they loved the open kitchen and watching the chefs while they cooked, as well as the wine tasting and food pairing. The rooms are very well appointed with each room having its own private plunge pool, spin bike, yoga mat, free weights, maxi bar with full sized bottles, huge bathrooms with copper bathtubs and a very effective and quiet air conditioning system. The family suite is huge and has 2 bedrooms, its own pool, and separate dining and sitting area. They all felt this property would perfectly suit honeymooners as well as older couples – those looking for a more intimate experience.



Located within the Moremi Game Reserve, **Xigera** offers boating and mokoro activities, morning and afternoon game drives (no walks or night game drives as it's in the Moremi) and a swanky spa with pool and treatment rooms. Xigera also has a meet-and-greet service at Maun Airport with their own WIFI. The sleep-out deck (Boabab Treehouse) is a great option for those who want both indoor and outdoor beds. The rooms are huge and private with separate wardrobe and sitting areas, windows with double glazing so it's very quiet, and air conditioned (scented so smells like a spa). Overall, we found Xigera amazing. Everyone knew our names on arrival. All the staff seemed extremely proud of their job and service. The food was exceptional and high tea and breakfast in particular were exquisite. We had a lion sleeping under our boardwalk and also spotted one from our veranda, which was brilliant.



Mombo and Little Mombo Camp were the highlight of our trip to Botswana. We loved the genuine welcoming and friendly vibe of the team and felt at home from the moment we arrived. Mombo is one of the top luxury lodges in the Delta, with a high level of personalised service, and Little Mombo is excellent for exclusive use, or those looking for a more intimate experience. Both camps are for high-end guests looking for luxury with abundant wildlife. Their Chief's Island location is renowned for excellent game, which is great all year round. Our guide Ant's skill when it came to tracking meant we got to see some great wildlife. There are lots of animals very close to camp; some days we had game viewing from the main area without leaving camp! The tents feature a plunge pool, a very private deck, and air con in the tents. There are two main pools and spa area between the two camps, a gym and a pizza oven. The deck was so comfy during siesta time. We also loved how they adapted the menus to our food preferences. Our Boma night was a lovely celebration of Mombo, and the Botswana feel, and it didn't feel forced or like the team was "putting on a show".



Jao Camp is an architecturally stunning camp, great for those who want a pretty camp, and great for families or couples – families can stay in one of the two colossally spacious two-bedroom villas. They also have specialist guides who can look after children, and the restaurant has a special kids' menu. Our room was exquisite and huge, with two toilets, indoor and outdoor shower, a large deck with a private pool, and localised air conditioning. There is a peaceful Bali-esque spa, a well-equipped gym and the pool is great for Instagram shots. Our guide, Mesh, taught us a little more about what he looks for when tracking and experiencing the thrill of a chase.



Jacana Camp we consider as a sweet-classic safari camp style, a lovely option for those who do not have the budget for Jao and don't need a private pool. Our rooms were all on the ground floor so we didn't have the views but the outside bathroom was a sweet touch. Rooms are accessed by pathways not boardwalks, they are well spaced out, small but comfortable, with basic but big showers, an outdoor bathtub and a small veranda. The main area has a lovely peaceful setting and big deck overlooking the plains which floods – very close to where the mokoro excursions start from.



Kwetsani was a real surprise for all of us, very tasteful rooms which felt very private, and we loved the elevated feel to them – this gives a treehouse style to the camp. Lots of elephants come in to camp hence their elevated walkways. The rooms are stylish with large decks and stunning views, and indoor and outdoor showers. The camp felt very fresh like it was recently refurbished, though it hasn't been.



Chitabe Lediba is suitable to visit all year round, and is a lower price option for those looking for good game and not worried about uber luxury accommodation. The area is renowned for predators and game viewing. The camp is a good option for families and exclusive use. Rooms are basic but comfortable. We enjoyed getting to share dinner with some of the other guests in camp and hear some of their stories. Our guide, Goodman, was full of tales of safaris and former guests' experiences.



Then we went on to Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe.

Linkwasha is positioned on the edge of Hwange National Park's productive Ngamo Plains, an area renowned for some of the best year-round game viewing on Earth. This camp is good for those who want comfort without the bells and whistles of premier camps. We enjoyed the relative simplicity and found it really comfy. The staff were very engaging and kind, guides were super knowledgeable, and the food was one of the best of our trip! I also loved the pizza in the bush we had as a surprise.



Somalisa Camp is the main camp and joins Somalisa Acacia Camp, which is the family-friendly camp. The rooms have huge beds with a dressing area behind them, stylish open-plan bathroom with freestanding toilet, indoor-outdoor shower, and a large deck; no aircon though, only a fan. There is a service hatch at each tent so morning drinks can be delivered without service staff entering the room. Good room amenities, bathrobes, and a hairdryer. Very welcoming staff. Our guide at Somalisa was amazing, an ex-biology teacher who shared lots of interesting facts about the animals we saw. We had lots of elephants come to visit the pool at the main area, also at dinner time. We enjoyed the build-your-own pizza lunch. A great camp for those wanting to stay in Hwange and wanting more luxurious rooms, couples and families who like good service and want to be made to feel special.

We also did a site visit to Somalisa Expedition Camp, which has 1 family tent and 4 other units. They offer communal dining with a fixed menu. They are about to build a swimming pool. A more basic offering for those not as concerned with high-end amenities and offerings.

There is currently no WIFI in the camps apart from the guide tent, which you must be escorted to. The concession is not as big as Linkwasha so places to go can be quite limited though they do also take guests into the national park.

