

GAME RESERVES
SOUTH AFRICA

WILD PLAY

Enjoy an intimate safari experience with discreet service, gourmet dining and exceptional hospitality at these game reserves in South Africa

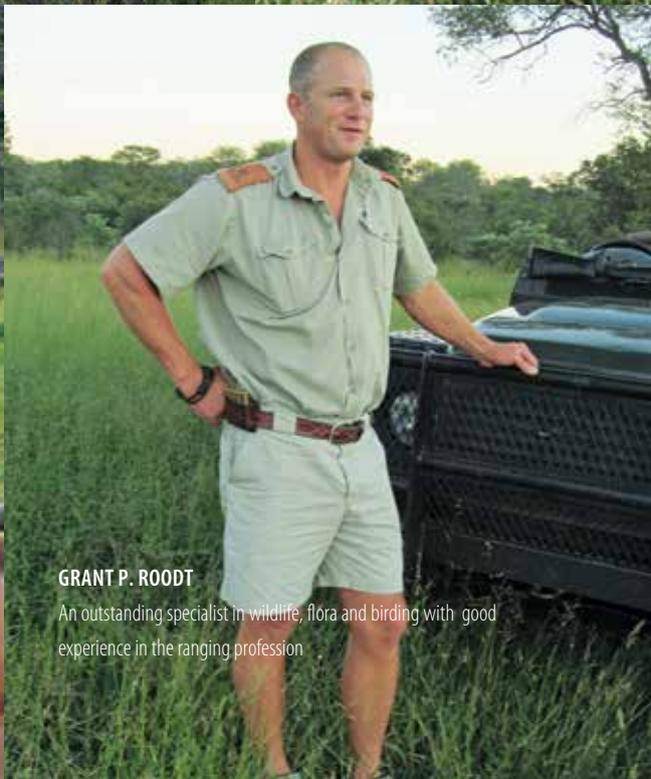
KAMAL GILL

MALA MALA GAME LODGES

Mala Mala is one of South Africa's most reputed game lodges with a luxury element that blends so totally into the environment that it appears as if you are at your natural best. From families to leisure travellers, there are three camps offering lavish accommodation. The MalaMala Main Camp with 18 rooms and Sable Camp with 7 suites are clustered among shady trees and manicured lawns, while the exclusive Rattray's on MalaMala offering 8 'khayas,' or luxury suites, occupies its own elevated site overlooking the Sand River.

An oasis in the middle of the bushveld, the MalaMala Main Camp is designed so you appreciate and enjoy the view of the surrounding wilds. As we entered the camp, a cool breeze kissed our faces and we were greeted by the chirping of birds. Ambling our way deep inside the camp, we were quite pleased to see an occasional antelope or elephant seeking the succulence of greenery. The lounge





GRANT P. ROODT
An outstanding specialist in wildlife, flora and birding with good experience in the ranging profession



inside the camp was impressive and the rooms were an opulent spread of sheer comfort. Other facilities which caught our attention were the fully-stocked wine cellar and the well-appointed safari boutique offering quality clothing, jewellery and artefacts.

The other camp which impressed us was Rattray's on MalaMala. Offering a glimpse of the past, the camp's interior was styled in chic crystal and leather—a treat to the connoisseur of the finer things in life, captured over generations on a land that remains as old as time.

MALAMALA GAME RESERVE

There was a buzz in the air and the mood was exhilarating as we set off for our first afternoon safari. Armed with binoculars and in tow with our ranger

Grant P. Roodt, we were ready for some thrilling wild play. Spread across 33,000 acres, MalaMala shares a 19 km unfenced border with the world-renowned Kruger National Park, and lies strategically sandwiched between the National Park and the Sabi Sand Reserve. The game reserve enjoys a unique advantage of having an abundance of wildlife due to its water resources and location advantage. We were delighted with the knowledge professional rangers like Grant possess regarding the flora and fauna of every sq km of bush. The larger-than-life canvas that South Africa's bushveld presents has to be seen to be believed. The adrenalin high of a lion chasing its prey and the ferocity with which it brings down its kill is difficult to match anywhere in the world. The surprise of the wilds is how one thing

leads to the other. We followed a jackal who seemed to be on a hunt—and found a leopard perched up on a tree with his kill – with the jackal waiting patiently below for the leftovers which would inevitably fall from the tree. It was an unexpected and a rare sighting.

The birdlife is in abundance and rare sightings of exotic birds are a treat for ornithologists. We had two more game drives scheduled the next day before being transferred to our second game reserve at Kirkman Camp.

KIRKMAN CAMP

Kirkman Camp provides a colonial flavour and is a well-known historic camp, originally built in the early 1920s, and celebrates the atmosphere of an early South African lowveld homestead, with



Pictures by Kewal and Kamal Gill

a colonial style and gracious ambience. Its conservation efforts are also well recorded. The wildlife is abundant and on a lucky day you might get a glimpse of the Big Five in a single game drive.

Named after section ranger Harry Kirkman who served Kruger between 1933 and 1958, the camp is situated in the beautiful Sabi Sabi Game Reserve. The moment we stepped inside the lodge, we were hit by a feeling of being transported into the past. Each of the 18 suites is impeccably designed and boasts spectacular views of the unspoilt landscape surrounding the Sand River. All suites also include a private verandah, which gives you a chance to enjoy total privacy. The lodge also has a wonderful rim-flow lodge swimming pool with an amazing view of the Sand River Valley.

KIRKMAN GAME RESERVE

After a lavish lunch and a walking safari, our 4x4 safari vehicles accompanied by ranger Sean Messham took us deep inside the game reserve. The sound of the gushing river and the melodious chirping of birds made the drive a memorable one. Our highly trained ranger and Shangaan tracker took us for an adventure ride where we were thrilled to witness some of South Africa's best game sightings. As night crawled in the game reserve sparkled in the white moonlight. Armed with a handheld spotlight, we managed to spot some fascinating nocturnal creatures such as civet, genet, scrub hare, bush babies and, of course, a sight not to be missed—leopards on the hunt!



SEAN MESSHAM

A photographer and avid writer with a passion for wildlife and learning new things about what wildlife can present