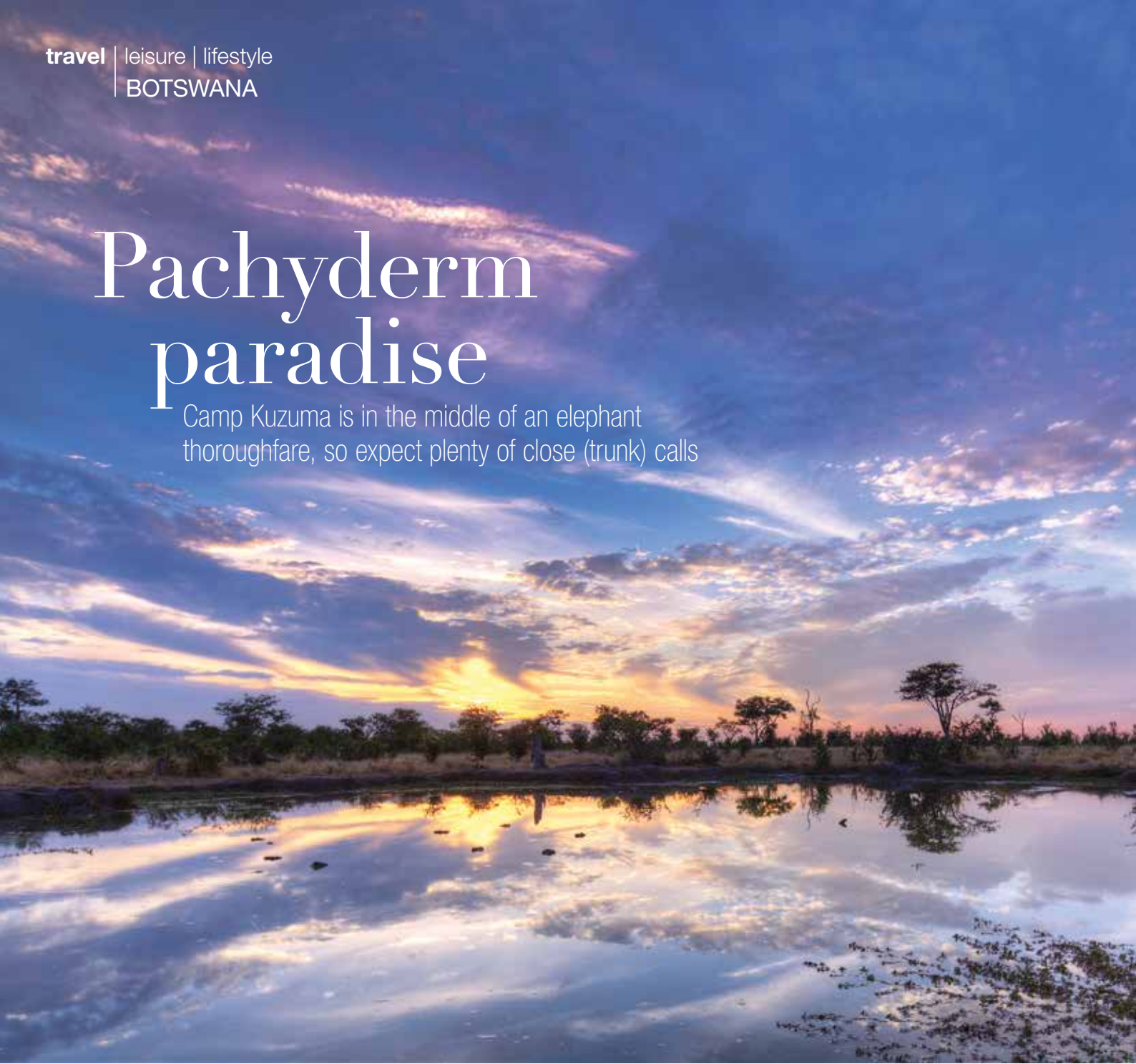


Pachyderm paradise

Camp Kuzuma is in the middle of an elephant thoroughfare, so expect plenty of close (trunk) calls



Camp Kuzuma is a privately-owned luxury bush camp set in the Kazuma Forest Reserve, one of the busiest of elephant corridors, which joins the Chobe National Park and the Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe.

*For more information
go to campkuzuma.com
or call 060 961 8548
or +267 758 61842.*

Game viewing begins immediately en route from Kasane International Airport in Botswana, with 'Wild animals crossing' signs prominently displayed along the highway and our driver frequently coming to a halt to allow just that! It's a stark contrast to the hundreds of trucks snaking for kilometres, as drivers queue patiently to ferry their loads across the Chobe River.

Tourism ranks second on Botswana's GDP, after

diamonds. The unspoilt beauty, zero tolerance to hunting and poaching and the implementation of advanced tourism policies to ensure the country remains one of the most spectacular wildlife havens, have turned the country's economy around.

The hub of Camp Kuzuma is a thatched lounge, dining room and cigar bar linked to the five private suites via an elevated wooden walkway, constructed to preserve the natural plant life and high enough for animals to pass beneath – except for elephants and giraffe.

A wooden deck extends into the land, with a rim flow pool and a sunken fire pit, which all overlook a waterhole just metres away. It is so near you rarely need to leave the comfort of this central area to watch the elephants,



who are frequent visitors throughout the day, and other game up close. During the height of the dry season, 140 elephants have been counted drinking their 180l per day. Ou Baas, the local elephant bull, is also known to visit regularly, although he prefers to sip water from the overflow of the pool.

These gigantic creatures weigh around 120kg at birth. An adult male can weigh up to six tonnes, with a lifespan of 80 years. They eat a whopping 140kg of food a day, only digesting about 40%. Locals jokingly referred to their dung as 'elephant muffins' – a tasty treat for other animals.

There is an EarthCam focused on the drinking hole that was chosen as one of the top 25 in the world for

uniqueness of content, and this is one of the reasons management have a strong co-operation with the organisation Elephants Without Borders to help ensure the creatures' survival.

Although you will not see the Big Five at Camp Kuzuma (rhino are kept in a top secret location), Botswana is home to the largest population of elephants in Africa – over 200,000 – which roam freely along the natural corridors between the neighbouring countries of Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Angola.

They are closely monitored by Elephants Without Borders, the region's leading cross-border research organisation, which focuses on elephant conservation and management. The reported disarming of rangers under a new government policy is a worry – a sanctuary in the Okavango Delta recently experienced a heavy bout of poaching.

Comfort and cuisine

The five luxury tented suites are designed to catch the sunrise over the bushveld. The silence and serenity is deafening – even the elephants move stealthily. The locals are friendly and fiercely proud of their country and the nine staff members at Camp Kuzuma even more so: noble, helpful, smiling, proud, skilled and exceptional.

The suites, with sundecks, have en suite bathrooms with Victorian baths, armchairs to curl up in and a butler's tray with sherry and coffee. The welcome when you return to your haven at night includes a bedtime treat and a hand-written African verse and, in slightly colder weather, a hot water bottle. You hear the roar of

Elephants are a major drawcard for Camp Kuzuma visitors.

How to get there



Airlink connects Johannesburg and Kasane. Go to page 89 for flight schedules.
www.flyairlink.com



Serene corners provide opportunities for reflection.

the lions, the rustle of the nocturnal animals as you look up at the magical starlit sky.

The animals are free to roam in the unfenced bush. The sunrise and sunset game drives, complete with delicious home-baked treats and drinks, offer sightings of giraffe, zebra, baboons, impala, warthogs, elephant, mongoose, hornbills as well as butterflies, beetles and birds, 196 species at last count. Ranger Gary points out trees and plants used by indigenous people to poison the tip of their hunting arrows, as an aphrodisiac or as contraception.

Back at camp the personal pampering continued with carefully prepared meals. Chef Dandy and his team bake fresh bread daily and homemade rusks accompany delicious coffee. Whether you are sitting down to an elegant high tea, a candle-lit dinner or around the boma for a braai under the stars, the cuisine is superb, and the desserts are deliciously decadent.

Gone green

Camp Kuzuma embraces ecotourism and encourages upskilling and mentorship. During our visit, a young German tourism student was on an eight-week learnership programme. Management is also actively

involved in two CSI projects: CK Kids, which supports a children's centre in Kasangula, and CK Green Teens, run in association with the Department of Agriculture and three local lodges, which teaches about food security and sustainability.

The entire camp operates completely off the grid using solar panels. An ecogreen sewerage system recycles all water and kitchen waste.

Camp Kuzuma was voted as one of the seven best boutique lodges by the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA) – an award that celebrates local African experiences and ecotourism.

Besides the on-site activities, there are others close by which can be arranged, such as a day spent in the Chobe National Park and on the Chobe River. Hearing the cry of the fish eagle as you glide along the water watching hippos, crocodiles and elephants dining al fresco is heavenly. We also stopped briefly at a floating restaurant in Namibia for lunch.

On the way out, we spot the snaking queue of trucks as we approach Kasane International again, stopping occasionally for animals crossing.

Text | **Dorria Watt** Photography | **Supplied**