

What a Wilderness it is

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CAMP KUZUMA

Nestled somewhere between the Chobe National Park in Botswana and the Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe, the seven luxuriously appointed tents of Camp Kuzuma invite the travel weary into their fold, with the promise of an experience as unique as the land they caress.

Kuzuma may mean “hunter” in the indigenous language of Botswana, Tswana, but the only shooting allowed in the area where Camp Kuzuma is located is with the lens of a camera.

I recently had the pleasure of experiencing the old-world gem first hand, which started with a manageable and hassle-free travel experience into the nearby Kasane airport. After a brief transfer, no longer than an hour, from the local hub to the camp, it was time for a not-so-brief interlude – with the luxury tents having me question the level of comfort in my own home. Victorian bathroom fittings, an earthy cement floor, an outdoor shower and – the central focus – a super-king-sized

four-poster bed. Dressed in crisp white linen and swathed in sheer mosquito nets, the bed looks out over a wooden deck, directly into the surrounding wilderness.

Kuzuma, in the picturesque Kazuma Forest Reserve in Botswana, borders the Chobe National Park, a wondrous landscape called home by no fewer than 50,000 African elephants, hundreds of bird species, wildebeest, buffalo, sable, giraffe, leopard, hyena, and lion. The central part of the lodge overlooks a local watering hole that attracts

all manner of life, particularly in the evenings, as the animals quench their thirst under the cover of the inky African darkness. As I sank deeper into my elegant, freestanding bath, I counted the ways in which I could make the most of the next few days.

On our first full day at the camp, we drove to nearby Kasane for a leisurely private boat cruise along the Chobe River. Here we spotted large crocodiles, hippos, and an abundance of elephant crossing the river and grazing on the far bank, all the while keeping

a watchful eye on the young baby elephants who can hardly walk in the tall grass lining the edge of the river. No game viewing would be complete without the obligatory snacks and drinks provided by the lodge.

Mesmerised by the beautiful sunset at the end of a perfect day, we toasted our sightings while taking in the last rays of the sun, and inhaling the fresh early evening air. All too soon, our day on the river was over and our boat was speeding back towards land again, back to the lodge, and to dinner on the deck.

The next morning, a wake-up call interrupted my dream of elephants surrounding my tent. The morning game drive does take place rather early in this part of the world, but the wildlife is significantly more active and visible in the cooler hours. I had already placated my languid self with the promise of an afternoon nap and a quick dip in the pool, ending with a sundowner session on the deck upon my return.

Perched atop the lumbering Land Rover, we were party to much of what is everyday



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life in the veld. The elephants in the area are plentiful, and while by no means tame, somewhat tolerant of our game-viewing vehicles. Our knowledgeable guide, Gary, certainly managed to make the outing a raw and exciting one for those of us less enlightened. We were early, and lucky enough to spot a few of the usually nocturnal hyena finishing off the remnants of the feast of the previous night below a sky peppered with any number of the 196 bird species in the area.

Upon our return, a sumptuous breakfast served as a fitting segue to a well-earned nap on a deckchair. I could close my eyes and enjoy the gentle sounds of the African bush mid-morning, or turn my head and take in a herd of elephant undergoing a beauty routine of their own - a bathe in the light grey mud of the watering hole. Contemplating how to spend the second half of the day was the only other thing left to do.

Camp Kuzuma is not only about stately safari-inspired luxury. Management here is a staunch proponent of sustainable tourism. The camp operates completely off the grid, drawing its power from solar panels. All grey and kitchen water is recycled by a specialised EcoGreen sewerage system. The Camp also participates in Elephants Without Borders, a conservation programme that works to ensure elephant safety across numerous borders and territories, allowing them to roam and migrate as nature intended. About 200,000 elephants travel the busy corridor between Zimbabwe, Botswana, and neighbouring countries, the massive breeding herds traversing ancient routes that cover thousands of kilometres, and moving through various national parks, private farms, and even small towns.

Our final afternoon game drive delivered another spectacular African sunset, with

sundowners to celebrate our sightings. Dinner on the last evening was served in the magnificent boma, with elephants loitering at the waterhole as our backdrop. While we sampled the gourmet meals enhanced by local influences and African spices, we exchanged stories of our adventures, noted recommendations, and discussed the wonderful service from the staff under the guidance of lodge manager, Jaco. The conversation needed no encouragement, flowing enthusiastically through the warm, still air. We no doubt had more than a few eavesdroppers of the four-legged variety, too.

All told, Camp Kuzuma is not merely an escape, but a delightful, transformative experience where the staff and the camp lives up to its slogan: Once experienced, never forgotten.

For more information, please visit www.campkuzuma.com. ■