

TRANQUIL ZYDRANDT 4X4 WEEKEND

If you can't even drive with your Pajero or Fortuner on a game reserve's roads – then you know it's BAD!

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A few weeks ago, I requested a special Sunday breakfast – chocolate croissants and the Afrikaans Sunday newspaper, Rapport. With chocolate crumbs all over the duvet, both cats stretched out lazily, I paged through the mostly gossip-and-terror news, until I grabbed the Travel section.

An article on a tented camp in the Waterberge, Limpopo – Zyndrandt, caught my attention. Saving the contact and website details on my computer, we decided to try it out with friends, Johannes and Ina May. The weekend of 27 February to 1 March suited everyone.

Zyndrandt is part of the Shakila Nature Reserve (www.shakila.co.za/bushcamp.html - 014 717 1783 - Lilly). In-between Bela-Bela (Warmbaths) and Modimolle (Nylstroom).

There are different accommodation options – *The Lerato, Kiepersol & Aloa Luxury Safari Tents* feature three bedrooms each, equipped with either double beds and/or single beds. Each tent sleeps 6-8 guests comfortably. All have full bathroom and shower amenities (*although some are outside on the deck*), large equipped kitchen, braai lapa and Jacuzzi's. Lerato tent boasts the possibility to erect an additional "chopper" tent which will allow for a total of 12 guests to be accommodated.

The Panorama & Rotsvy Luxury Safari Tents feature one room with double bed and one room with four single beds. Each unit has full bathroom and shower amenities (*some outside on the deck*), large equipped kitchen, braai lapas, Jacuzzi's. The two tents respectively sleep 6-8 guests comfortably. At Panorama one additional "chopper" tent can be erected, if required, which will allow for a total of 8 guests to be accommodated.

And then our choice, the 4x4 Luxury Tents – only 3 of them, sleeping 2 in each tent. The price – R330 per night per couple.

Hein and I decided to start our weekend a day earlier, on the Thursday, 26th February.

While Hein was attending a meeting, I packed our queen-size duvet cover, Hein's 10-year guaranteed pillow, food, books, small lamps, medicines, drinks and clothes. Also the comfy camp chairs, beach umbrella, plastic square table and black potjie (cast iron pot) for potjiekos (outside casserole).

Everything packed and ready, we left after 12. Biltong slices and Chilli biltong sticks our lunch.

Traffic was a breeze and we stopped in Bela-Bela to refuel. A very jovial black man with deep dimples asked if he could wash our windscreen. It wasn't that dirty, so we said no. The guy looked through Hein's open window through the windscreen and his words were: "I'm dubious about that statement." Well, who can resist such an offer? After thoroughly cleaning the windscreen, he looked again through Hein's window to the windscreen and said: "It has now been rejuvenated!" We just laughed and gave him a tip.

Arriving at Zyndrandt's gates, Lilly was waiting for us. Friendly and chatty, she looked at our Pajero in complete approval and led us to the camp on her quad bike. The roads were in a bad state – apparently they had quite a few cloudbursts and the sand has been swept away. She advised us strongly against trying any of the 4x4 trails.

Tent no 1 was ours for the weekend. Tent no 2 & 3 seems less private, although they are quite a few metres apart. A neat gravel path leads to the tent through rocks and succulents. The sleeping tent is big enough for the 2 ¾ beds, 2 bedside tables with 1 lamp, a metal clothes frame to hang our clothes and a metal shelf for your bags.



The en-suite bathroom is adjacent to the sleeping tent, the walls built with sandbags covered with concrete. Shower, toilet, basin, mirror and bath mats made it more than sufficient.



A lovely biggish sundeck overlooks the valley. Well-stocked but tiny kitchen with canvas walls and roof completed the picture.

With no space in the Pajero for braai wood, Hein drove back to the main gate for some. By the time he got back, I have unpacked everything

and was busy stacking the Castles in the fridge and my frozen drinks in the freezer. At our liquor store they sell pouches of 'frozen drinks'. In 3 flavours – Margarita, Pina Colada and Strawberry Daiquiri. You shake each pouch and freeze it for 8 hours.

Always keen to test a mattress, we napped until we were waken at 6.30pm by the security guard, Mishka. Driving around on a quad bike, he turned up every night at every tent, checking to see if everything and everyone is A-OK.



Cellphone reception is very erratic – you would have a signal and without moving at all, the next moment it's gone.

Lemon-and-herb marinated chicken pieces were our dinner – the fire was lit, I made a 'salad' of canned green peas, canned kernel corn, canned, washed kidney beans, tomato and cheese cubes. The fireplace is quite unique – built alongside the deck and the canvas wall of the kitchen, it proved quite handy – although we always kept a jug of water nearby.

Being a day early, we were the only ones in that area. Such a tranquil feeling.

After dinner, the dishes were quickly washed and then I opened my book. At a braai the previous weekend, I mentioned a book about the Namibia desert. Utah, a friend of Johannes & Ina told me then about a very interesting book, called **Mutant Message Down Under**. When I mentioned it to Amanda, a Tai Chi friend, she borrowed me the book for the weekend.

Written by **Marlo Morgan, Mutant Message Down Under** is how she as a 50-something woman working as an accupuncturist in the United States, were invited to Australia for a project. While there, she started a small project with Aborigine youngsters, teaching them some skills, helping them to sell and opened up trust funds for them. When she received a call, praising her and inviting her to an 'award ceremony' for her good work with the Aborigine youths, she was fetched in a 4x4, driven to a spot where they burned her diamond watch, drivers' license, rings and money – and took her on a 'walkabout' for 3 months. A spiritual journey teaching her how the Aborigines survive in the desert. Absolutely spell-bounding.

Friday morning we woke around 6. Had an aromatic cup of coffee (yip, our trusted Uno coffee machine traveled with) and then the fire was lit again for breakfast. Whenever some of my Tai Chi friends read this (especially Irene), they commented on us always eating ... While Hein opened a Castle, I tried a Pina Colada. Straight out of the freezer, we had to 'soften' it and even then, I had to 'drink-eat' it with a teaspoon. Yum!

Tomato relish for the hotdog buns and boerewors were ravished while we inhaled the fresh air, bush sounds and said *thank you* for being alive.

A quick shower, zipped up the tent and we decided to explore the riverside. A young buck with huge ears was the only game I saw. Driving through car-scratching bushes, we stopped when we saw huge pools of water in the road. With no-one in sight, I 'chickened out' and suggested we don't attempt it. Reversing back through the car-scratching bushes again, we drove off to Modimolle/Nylstroom - for a very good reason...

Halfway there, Hein stopped at a 'padstal' (road shop) for a Coke - there were only 2 in the fridge, but at least they were cold.

Saturday morning, 08.35am an important Sharks rugby game was played. The guys were keen to watch, so a suitable pub has to be located. Modimolle is not too small - all your normal shops, plus a few tea gardens. The *Buiteklub* was suggested for the rugby game - although it advertised the games next to their front door, Hein asked the bar lady to make sure. She would 'sms' us.

Back at the tent, we lounged around and had a short nap. Our friends were soon to arrive.

Helping them carry their bags and cooler boxes to tent no 2, I noticed that their kitchen area is almost twice our size, their sundeck was a bit smaller and 2 trees obscure most of their view, although it does provide more shade during the day.

The guys cracked some cold ones and learning from experience, I've taken out another Pina Colada and a Margarita for Ina and myself. Out of the freezer into the fridge for an hour, it turns into liquid sludge - drinkable with a straw. The Margarita was ok, but not great.

Johannes & Ina were on dinner duty. A very quaint concept - tiny, individual stir fries. Almost like a fondue set, but each couple have a set of 2 burners and 2 tiny pans. (They saw it in Holland, bought it and lugged it along the rest of their Europe holiday.) Each person fry their own dinner, according to his/her taste.



Shrimps,

'bockwurst', steak, chicken and veggies sliced up with cooked rice and noodles - we ate for Modimolle and beyond!



Watches were set for the next morning - and we retired to bed.

Saturday morning we were up early, had a nice cup of coffee. Hein and Johannes were armed with Sharks t-shirts, a Sharks cap and a few 'cold ones' for the road - they left 7.30 am. Ina and I opted to stay and read.

Although the bar lady of *Buiteklub* didn't send a 'sms', Hein drove their first. And found it closed. They drove around, stopped at 5 other pubs - all closed. By that time they were a bit frantic - the game started at 08.35 am. Finally they found a lodge and were seated just in time. The crowd grew steadily and each and every 'newcomer' walked around and shook everyone's hand. The game (so they said) was nailbiting, but the Sharks came out tops.

Armed with chocolate milk and Yogi sips for us women, the men arrived around 11. Zebras were spotted at the main gate, but no other game at all. A fire was promptly lit for lunch. More boerewors with rolls and a yummy tomato relish I prepared. It was threatening to rain but our lunch was secure.

With rain as background music, we read in bed - had a nap and awoke at 4pm, with only a misty rain remaining. Our turn for dinner - potjiekos (outside casserole in a cast iron pot).

With the black pot 'sheltering' the charcoal between its legs, the misty rain was fresh and cooling. Starting with onions, tomatoes were added – lamb knuckles, 2 marrow bones - then baby potatoes and cubed sweet-potato (in their skins). Carrots, fresh broad beans, mushrooms and topped off with halved baby cabbages. Although I forgot to soak the samp the Friday night, only soaking it since 10am the Saturday morning, it was cooked to perfection. A wonderful 'soaker-upper' for the potjiekos.

Again and again we searched the pot – another piece of meat, a mushroom, some more sauce...

An early night was called – Johannes & Ina both wanted to read – and I quickly washed the dishes and the potjie. We sat in the dark, watching the stars and I sipped my last frozen drink, a Margarita.

Halfway through the night, Hein awoke with a muffled cry – something bit him on his arm. We searched all over, didn't see anything and after some Zambuk ointment and plaster, we snuggled back under the duvets. It was pouring outside – luckily the tents were waterproof.

Although Hein's arm showed a small red dot and was swollen a bit, it didn't look too serious.



The rain had stopped, although the evidence stayed for a while.

Most of the stuff was packed and then we lit the fire for the last time – for breakfast.

Yip, you guessed it – boerewors. With lovely braai sandwiches – Johannes, Ina and Hein had tomato, onion and cheese on theirs. Mine was pulped banana, homemade apricot jam and cheese. Double yum!

Packing up, checking underneath the beds – and we were on our way – back home.

Although exploring the reserve, watching game and walking is not an option – Zynrandt is purely to refuel your inner self. A peaceful remedy for our busy lives.

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