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International Tourism and Changes in the South African Tourism Product in the 1990s: Accomodation and tourist amenities in the Kruger National Park

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ACCOMMODATION IN THE 1990s
GEAR, Privatization, and International Tourism

3. INTRODUCTION: POLICY

Like any other entities in South Africa in the transition to democracy just before 1994, the key question facing tourism was: What role for tourism in the national economy? It is prudent, therefore, to start this chapter by talking about the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) in 1994. The preamble to this report first congratulates the country for having "just succeeded in a major political transformation", then moves to emphasize the need for a broader social and economic transformation. The RDP, therefore, became the Nelson Mandela administration's seal of commitment to the redress of past economic and social imbalances at the same time ensuring a path of "high and sustainable growth" (*RDP* Preamble). The Reconstruction and Development Programme, therefore, was "an integrated, coherent socio-economic policy framework … to mobilise all our people and our country's resources toward the final eradication of the results of apartheid" and which represented "vision for fundamental transformation of South Africa" (RDP 1.1). RDP identified tourism as "an engine of growth, capable of dynamising and rejuvenating other sectors of the economy" (**W**hite **P**aper on **T**ourism 1996:14), and which could provide the much needed revenue and employment creation (WPT 1996: 18). The tourism sector, therefore, was targeted as a key contributor to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), emphasizing government's commitment to the industry and the innovation of a new growth-oriented policy (RDP 3.14).

3.1 TOURISM DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Under RDP, general tourism policies served as a framework defining *national tourism goals*, objectives, priorities and actions in the destination area. The goals were:

- **Economic**, that is, to maximize tourism and recreation's contribution to economic prosperity, and to deliver foreign exchange earnings, employment

creation and income generation, regional economic development and boosting government revenues (Wahab 1997:133).

- **Market development**, focusing on better immigration procedures, a better destination image, and broadening the market for national tourism products
- **Government oriented goals**, among which were streamlining and coordination of tourism and recreation-related activities, educating policymakers on tourism, and creating an enabling regulatory framework for the same at national, regional and local levels (Wahab 1997: 133-4).

All these elements became the foundation and inspiration to the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism's National Tourism Policy (*WPT* 1996). Policy formulation for such a diverse sector like tourism demanded weighing a variety of alternatives yielding often contradicting possibilities because of the diverse political, economic, social and environmental stakeholders involved (Dieke 2000:10). In line with recommendations on the need for tourism policies enshrined in The Lome IV Convention (*Lome IV Convention* 1996), key questions in the framing of the national policies were: What product, how should it be marketed, to what market, and with what effects? (Lickorish and Jenkins, 1997: cited in Dieke 2000: 10).

The objective of the tourism sector was situated within the diversification of the country's economic base, to enhance per capita gross national product (GNP) and gross domestic product (GDP), and/while simultaneously seeking to "minimize leakages because of imports of materials to support tourism activity" (Dieke 2000: 9). In 1994, tourism's estimated value was just 2% of GDP, rising 2% in 1995 when global tourism clocked up 10.9% of the world economy's GDP. Run-away margins of 10.5% of GDP (US), 13.4% (Europe), 12.3% (UK) and 31.5% (the Caribbean) illustrated the tough task ahead despite that tourism employed 480,000 people directly and indirectly and was the fourth largest earner of foreign exchange in South Africa. Policymakers were sure the industry could easily triple its GDP contribution to 10%, raking in R40 billion per annum and creating 2 million jobs. This projection was premised on the country's diverse resource base and attractiveness – accessible wildlife, an impressive variety of scenery, unspoiled wilderness areas, diverse rural and township cultures, the sunny, hot climate, and so on. These endowments would be "driven by science, technology, information and innovation" to compete in the global market (WPT 1996: 23). The national policy set five key targets:

- To increase tourism's GDP contribution to 8% by 2000 and 10% by 2005

- To sustain a 15% increase in visitor arrivals over the next ten years
- To create 1 million additional jobs in tourism by 2005
- To increase foreign exchange earnings of tourism, from approximately R10 billion in 1996 to R40 billion per annum in 2005
- To welcome 2 million overseas visitors and 4 million visitors from Africa by 2000 (WPT1996: 27)

After drafting the policy framework for tourism development and promotion, the DEAT drew up the development strategy – an action plan to operationalise national policy objectives for the 1998-2000 period, and which fell within government's macro-economic strategy, the Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). Aptly titled *Tourism in Gear,* the action plan's key deliverable was to increase foreign exchange earnings by boosting overseas visitorship to 2 million and that of Africa to 4 million by 2000. A crucial thrust of GEAR was private sector participation in tourism development; it also made tourism the priority sector for attention. A "brisk expansion of private sector capital formation" would come about if "a stable environment conducive to confidence" was created that would ensure "a profitable surge in private sector investment". *Tourism in Gear* therefore prioritised infrastructural development and service delivery in the country's economic sectors and regions (Tourism in *GEAR* 1998-2000: 2).

3.2 KRUGER NATIONAL PARK IN THE GEAR PERIOD

If tourism would succeed, then national parks and game reserves presented the greatest asset. In this section, it is shown how National Parks policy was restructured to achieve RDP goals, with Kruger pretty much the major focus. The national parliament would, on its own or through the NPB, deal with international treaties, national policy formulation, law enforcement, and all other major management activities (Custos January 1994: 7). Those protected areas which qualified as national parks like Kruger were to be managed by the NPB, which would be competent to delegate, "if it so wished, certain aspects of the management of a national park to a regional government"; otherwise "the national control of national parks such as Kruger *should remain inviolable*" (*Custos* January 1994: 7). The board would not relinquish its custody of "the pride and joy of all South Africans" and its coordination of the various stakeholders. NPB would be apolitical, financially independent, business oriented, and

committed to equal opportunity (*Custos* January 1994:10). These were business principles in the spirit of much of the new South Africa.

In Kruger, the biggest challenge was how to harmonise an expansionist GEAR policy with a park management plan that discouraged spatial expansion of infrastructure. Unlike in other parks where there was still potential for further developments, Kruger had "already almost reached its maximum tourist carrying capacity within the NPB's conservation philosophy and the Parks Board master plan" (*Custos* January 1994:29). Whereas NPB reiterated its commitment to the RDP ((NPBAR 1994/95), it went ahead to design its own plan to operationalise social and economic development, that is, human resource development and improvement of workers' living conditions, as well as stimulating entrepreneurial activities within the Park. The most important step NPB took was a business decision to invite private sector participation and outsourcing in-park enterprises like shops, smaller rest camps and filling stations it previously operated (Havenga 1996: 8). This rendered the 1986 park management plan inconsistent with the new thrust; a new plan was drawn up in 1997 consistent with the aggressive business thrust of GEAR. The most critical shortcoming of the 1986 plan was that it was drafted when tourism development did not command as much attention and detail as it was accorded after 1994, especially the issue of commercialisation within national parks (Braack 1997b: 3-4).

The 1997 Kruger Park plan stemmed from a need to revise the 1986 mission statement's emphasis on biodiversity conservation, which tended to regard tourism development as ancillary and sometimes even disruptive of nature (Joubert 1986 in Braack1997b: 6). A workshop to redraft the park plan agreed that this sticking point must be addressed in line with the new thinking, to go beyond biodiversity conservation, so that it need not be the sole purpose of the park. The proposed mission statement kept its biodiversity, but endorsed the new business tone of the national policy, that is,

> To maintain biodiversity in all its natural facets and fluxes and to provide human benefits in keeping with the mission of the South African National Parks in a manner which detracts as little as possible from the wilderness qualities of the Kruger National Park (Braack 1997b: 2).

After being sent out to stakeholders, this proposed mission statement was then amended to:

> To maintain biodiversity in all its natural facets and fluxes and to provide human benefits in keeping with the mission of the South African National Parks in a manner which detracts as little as possible from the wilderness qualities of the Kruger National Park, recognising that the need to provide general human benefits must be balanced with the specific needs of the historically-deprived neighbouring communities in line with established Reconstruction and Development Programme principles. (Braack 1997b: 8).

The revised statement reflected a Kruger National Park not only concerned with its internal fate but of those outside the park, perhaps a realization of struggles in the park-people relationship. These dynamics are outside the scope of this report, which considers next the "fluxes" and "human benefits" accorded by tourism business.

3.3 RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITY ZONATION

Consultants Freek Venter, Leo Braack, Flip Nel, Wouter Jordaan, Ferdie Gerber and Harry Biggs noted that the previous zoning system set apart large *untouched zones* to be conserved "for their own sake" must be revised. They noted further that no more than 3% of Kruger was directly disturbed by human infrastructure (camps, roads, dams, bridges etc). They concluded that, as such, "there is no area in the KNP in which any component of biodiversity (composition, structure, function) is significantly affected by tourism activities at current or reasonably projected future levels of use" (Venter et al 1997:114). These experts threw out the argument for keeping humans off certain areas to maintain *wilderness qualities* because, they said, tourists came into Kruger to experience its variety of *wilderness qualities*, such that zonation must enable rather than debilitate people's access to the *wilderness qualities*. This argument addresses a critical question: of what good was wilderness if no one saw it? After all, the objective of marketing was to increase arrivals to the park, and such increased volume could be accommodated only through opening up more wilderness areas (Venter et al 1997:114).

A new zonation system was adopted by NPB that would offer recreational opportunities in different degrees of wilderness against a background of a Kruger Park management policy that contended the park had almost reached tourist carrying capacity. The major zones now were:

Pristine wilderness areas: These were smaller and more numerous than previous ones, and allowed for small groups to foot-hike overnight in self-carried tents, provided they remained on a strictly "no-trace-left" camping ethic. Other future possibilities were horse/camel/elephant trails and river-boating.

Primitive wilderness areas: These PWAs were similar to the pristine areas but with "signs of human impact visible on occasion", because several groups were permitted simultaneously (high volume tourism perhaps), who would sleep in portable tents or small permanent camps on the edge of the zone.

Semi-primitive general visitor areas: This zone presented a range of 4-wheel drive routes, one-way rustic roads, tented small camps for low-volume camping, as well as guided birdwatching, nature courses, and guided walks.

Limited access motorised general visitor areas: Comprising gravelled roads and a small camp, these Private or Bushveld camps were proposed along the Mala Mala/Londolozi concept to meet market demands.

General access motorised visitor areas: These would continue being the traditional gameviewing routes comprising "sophisticated" roads, picnic sites and viewing-points accessible by sedan cars, buses and public open-vehicles.

High-density development areas: These were zoned for rest-camps, staff villages, and rangers' posts, and to offer a broader range of entertainment facilities than before.

Edutainment Centres. Available at few selected sites along the park borders to service communities adjoining Kruger, these centres combined opportunities for entertainment with environmental education (Venter et al 1997:115).

The new zonation centralised the importance of tourism to the sustainable, financially viable management of Kruger. It was up to the NPB and Kruger management to make plans accommodating increased tourist arrivals without upsetting the ecological balance/wilderness qualities that attracted the tourists. In rezoning Kruger for tourism development, the new plan entailed a revision of the NPB masterplan of 1994 discouraging new property development within the park (Venter et al: 116). Kruger's success would be measured by the extent to which it developed tourist accommodation to meet GEAR's tourism targets, while also staying true to its biodiversity objectives, as the Kruger Park plan demanded. To be complete and 'modern', the accommodation would be serviced by such infrastructure as roads, bridges, picnic sites, sewerage works, refuse dumps, etc. (Venter et al 1997:232). So

rather than limiting capacity, the park authorities met the demands of GEAR by increasing facilities – as listed above – but restricting daily visitors to the park in the first four zones above.

With specific reference to accommodation, the 1997 park plan zoned camps into special types that extended the variety of opportunities and experiences visitors could savour. These were:

F1 Nomadic: Designed for guided tours and having no sanitary infrastructure (the tourists carrying a small spade to dig toilet holes); otherwise the tourists carried all supplies and necessities.

F2 Rustic: This camp had no electricity, but was serviced by septic tanks, bore-holes and pumps. Tourists could be escorted or unescorted, and the camp could be shifted periodically (e.g. every three years) to recover the well-trodden area.

F3 bushveld and private camps: This permanent infrastructure for residence only (and no day visitors) had electricity but no shops, restaurants, filling stations etc.

F4 small luxury lodges (of the Mala Mala/Londolozi type): These would have shops, restaurants, bars, swimming pools, more staff-to-visitor ratio than at 'standard' camps, and package tours.

F5 rest camps: These high density, unrestricted access camps – the traditional camps discussed in chapter 2 – were now well-served by restaurants, shops, filling stations and other services. Since no major changes took place in the 1990s, they are not discussed further.

The brief outline of zones and accommodation types is meant to argue that the strain on carrying capacity could be devolved by increasing the range of tourist activities, so that accommodation could be, for example, mobile, activity-based, and privatised. This element of privatization is the subject of the final sections. What follows is a discussion on strained carrying capacity (which is representative of higher volumes of tourism traffic). This strain is also symptomatic of a vigorous and successful marketing campaign.

3.4 MARKETING: THE LANGUAGE OF SELLING AFTER 1994

The above section has been concerned to show the supply aspect of tourism development; this section focuses on the pulling of the tourists to the destination and argues that the kind of demand for which expansion of infrastructure was being

planned was market/demand-driven. Post-1994 marketing lay emphasis on increasing foreign currency earnings from tourism and, as such, directed itself to global marketing especially in the wealthy markets. SATOUR's commitment to the RDP goals would fall under an international tourism committee formed in 1994, which wasted no time in launching the *Explore South Africa 1995* campaign in April to internationally sell the country back onto the international map. SATOUR also hosted a travel workshop in Durban in June attended by a record number of journalists (SATBAR 1994: 6). In the overseas branches, SATOUR experienced problems trying to convince supporters of apartheid to visit a country now ruled by a black president. Needless to say, in areas like Europe, the international campaign was a resounding success that netted the board countless coveted awards, including Best African Tourism Board. In Italy, SATOUR received the Most Effective Tourism Office award (SATBAR 1994: 13). One of the cogs in SATOUR's marketing toolkit was to sell South Africa as a conference destination in order to tap the high spending rate of delegates – that is, 2 to 5 times as much as an average tourist (SATBAR 1994: 23). SATOUR capitalized on the *allure* of South Africa – a country attracting renewed world interest, Africa's latest democracy, and a symbol of the possibilities of reconciliation – of the rainbow nation. Within the destination mix (Bennett: 2000), the marketing of tourism within the vibe of the rainbow nation shows the importance of the political context; image alone was a good marketing point for tourism.

After exhaustive studies on international tourism and travel markets, SATOUR went further to draft an ambitious growth strategy in 2002 to direct the industry towards fulfilling its GNP targets. According to Cheryl Carolus, SATOUR's CEO, what the board needed was "to grow foreign tourist arrivals and their spend, length of stay and regional distribution throughout the country and throughout the year" (SA Tourism 2002: Foreword). The result of this growth strategy was *selective marketing*, because it was a waste of money to commit equal resources to all the 100-plus markets. In targeting the high volume spender, the language of marketing also had to change to dialogue with this consumer's needs. The product, therefore, must be stirred by SATOUR's "intelligence of their behaviour instead of putting product marketing out and hope that people will visit" (SA Tourism 2002: Foreword). This market-driven strategy demanded closer and more vigorous liaison globally, to tap those markets promising further growth, and not just increasing the number of arrivals with no eye to sustainability. SATOUR set itself to reach a tourism arrival growth rate of 15% per year

by 2010; this 2002 forecast was meant to reverse the drop in the compound growth rate from the 1994-2000 rate of 8% to just 0.4 % after 1998. (SA Tourism 2002:7).

The starting point towards a new marketing strategy was a restructuring of the source-market portfolio. In 2002, 21 countries supplied 90% of arrivals, five of which were neighbouring countries delivering over 60% of total visitors. The trend pointed to these five delivering fewer tourists in 2002 than the previous year. SATOUR's argument was that to meet job and GDP growth targets, and not just arrivals, "tourism spends" would be a critical measure of success. The challenge was to examine the portfolio of source markets "on the basis of tourism receipts", that is, money actually spent rather than just people arriving. In terms of tourism spend, therefore, marketing priorities would be:

- UK, Germany, and the Netherlands: these markets needed to be defended and grown
- US and Japan: these were deemed "major investment targets" offering the greatest market, with the US in pole position
- China, Sweden, Italy, Canada, France and Australia: these markets required further growth, while China was a potentially big market to be explored

SATOUR's initiatives to reposition the South Africa Tourism Brand in global tourism were channelled through the International Marketing Council with a view to re-defining and refining rapidly SATOUR's brand in "customer-focused" ways that ensured "alignment between who we are as a destination, and the needs and desires of the key audiences" (Tourism Growth Strategy 2002:26). The language of marketing would be a mirror-image of what the tourist would find when they arrived. SATOUR identified four flagship brands:

The *Luxury in Africa* audience: The marketing innovation directed at these traditional markets was meant to offer more *value-for-luxury* that encouraged repeat visits.

The *Value for Money in Africa* audience: Attractive competitive packages were needed to grow this middle class customer base that dominated the "visiting friends and relatives" (VFR) segments.

The *Africa as Hip* audience: For this "younger, unencumbered but very worldly and demanding segment of young professionals", a package was required that offered "different experiences, adventure with luxury, lots of entertainment and culture, authentic experiences, but all at cost-competitive prices".

The *South Africa for Business and Entertainment* audience: Targeted primarily at Europe and North America, this audience needed to be assured that South Africa was now a developed world class destination for conferences and exhibitions.

Combining the discussion on policy, zonation, and branding, therefore, it seems that there were limits to the existing NPB-run rest camps and other facilities to partake the ambitious targets set out in GEAR. It is argued that the sheer enormity of this task entailed the privatisation that accelerated after 1994 discussed below. The section that follows is based on a *Kruger Special* feature edition of *Getaway* magazine in August 2004 reflecting both market and supply views on "the new Kruger of private concessions", which, it is argued here, sang by and large to the tune of international tourism.

3.5 THE PRIVATISATION OF KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

Jock Safari Lodge: After a visit to this camp July 2004, Peter Frost, the famous *Getaway* magazine travel-writer, remarked that, somehow, the Thai *salas*, exotic soaps, and outdoor plunge pools did not sound like Kruger Park, but rather, "part of *the new Kruger of private concessions*". Frost noted further that the seven private concessions in Kruger are primed specifically to "overseas visitors with fat wallets and thin wives" (Frost: 2004: 100). He was sure that for a local tourist, it would take some saving to visit Jock. The camp's pricing structure was matched by a well-manicured service, not least the lodge's head guide, Brad Gilmore, who personified "what a field guide should be: knowledgeable without being arrogant, interested as well as interesting, smart and sensitive to his surroundings and guests" (Frost 2004). Frost was referring to a "full-house" element associated with Jock – combining both accommodation and tourist activities beyond the lodge. The Jock concession, Frost tells us, is part of Adrian Gardiner's Mantis Shamwari stable, covering a 6.000 hectare tract of land in south-central Kruger between Pretoriuskop and Lower Sabie.

Situated at the Mitomeni-Biyamiti river confluence, this lodge blended the natural surroundings with its rough leadwood log guardtrails, roof supports, and stairs (Frost: 2004) – showing that the logs and thatch were acquiring status as symbols of African hospitality. The overseas tourist would *feel his/her presence in Africa* once in

these surroundings, to be quickly jerked to the alluring modernity of spa treatments at the wellness centre at 'Pilgrim's Rest'. This presence in Africa's pristine wilderness with the state-of-the art a drive or a few footsteps away, shared the same arena with the distant past. The figure of Sir Percy Fitzpatrick and his brave dog, discussed in the earlier chapter, were evident to the tourist who could not miss the three trek wagons placed strategically near the dining room. If by some anomaly the tourist missed those, perhaps not the various prints from his book and a statue of Jock facing an angry sable antelope.

As Frost continues with much poetry, the suites "necklace away" from the main camp along both rivers' banks, each with its own patio, plunge pool, outside shower and what the lodge calls a *sala*, "a Thai inspired deck on stilts that protrudes out over the water-when there is water" (Frost 2004:101). In 2004, the 12 air conditioned suites were said by Frost to be full value for the R3 250 per person per night fully inclusive. In them the guest found basins, gowns, cavernous baths, and a comfy lounge area, but might feel let down by the absence of Fitzpatrick's books, and perhaps the beds - two short singles pushed together. That might be quickly forgiven during the outdoor activities in Jock's exclusive rights concession along existing roads and its access to larger Kruger. The lodge was also allowed night drives and game walks, even if Jock's vehicles were restricted to designated roads as any other tourist vehicles. The favourite with tourists was the top of the large granite ridge named Flat Rock where, drink in hand, the tourist would watch the sun go down over the far escarpment. As a tourist himself, Frost found this moment "soul-warming", more so for an overseas visitor "who suddenly realizes they don't actually live in the centre of the universe, that it was here, among the ancient rocks and jackalberries of the Lowveld that human life began" (Frost 2004:101).

Lukimbi Safari Lodge: Justin Fox noted after visiting Lukimbi "there is a side to the Kruger Park that most visitors never see". These are the little pockets located at the end of a few no-entry roads, upmarket, private lodges "catering to those who want more than a rondavel and the pleasure of their own company round a smoky braai" (Fox 2004: 109). Fox's words mean more than he intended: the private concessions were not just about private capital investment but also hideouts for tourist privacy. Lukimbi, built on the 15.000 hectare Lwakahle concession near Malelane, was given in 2000 to a consortium comprising Humphrey Borkum and the Marais and Kernick families, owners of Idube Lodge in Sabi Sands. The concession had

very few friends at first: many wondered if it was worth it carving out prime game areas for private operators. The environmentalists worried such private lodges would fall outside some park regulations like off-the-road drives and night drives (Fox 2004). In the end, the financial spin-offs have hushed up the critics: the companies pay "stiff licence fees", "donate" half their revenue to the park, and must stick religiously to environmental and empowerment criteria. Kruger is now reaping significant amounts of rands in funds it needs for environmental management. As Fox observed, Lukimbi has done well on the empowerment front: it gave 15% ownership to 20 families working at Idube Lodge, which will increase to 50% at the end of the 20-year concession. Empowerment as such ensures staff members a direct interest in seeing to Lukimbi's success. (Fox 2004:109).

Fox describes Lukimbi's 'safari baroque' architecture as "a little confused at times", but there is no mistaking the suites forming a horseshoe around the Lwakahle River bend, conjoined by a raised wooded walkaway. Despite the 'confused' architecture that he finds a letdown, Fox quickly acknowledges the décor - ochre walls, Dogon doors, tapestry-covered sofas, ostrich egg-shell decorations, and some fine wood carvings – as "generally in excellent taste". The highlight of the interior design is a giant oval bathtub "with evocative views"; the beds are sheltered in walk-in mosquito nets. Fox found the cuisine - "impeccably prepared" by Chef Leonardo Burckard – to be full of surprises, including its distinct hint of Thai flavours. The elegant interior is matched by an outdoor swimming pool, gym and library with internet terminal, and a health spa. For those wishing to raise their spirits after a hard day chasing after game, then the well-stocked wine cellar offers an exciting detour. All these pleasures come at a minimum R3 500 per person per night sharing, which includes all meals and game drive activities, but not drinks. (Fox 2004:109).

For those coming for conferences, Lukimbi has an on-hand consultant to plot the arrangements; such *indabas* are hosted in the fully equipped 40-seater conference room, equipped with full audio-visual equipment, big screen, and full conference packs. Those wishing to wed and go on honeymoon within Kruger will find the chapel "charming", the reception room breathtaking, and the tailored menus, flowers, and accommodation memorable. The honeymoon package is total - a luxury suite with king-size bed, a private dinner, private pool, game drives and walks. A trip to a *sangoma* is on the cards should the newly-wed wish their future to be foretold, to know if this blissful wedding is a foretaste of a life happily ever after. Helicopter

flights to areas of scenic beauty within and outside the park are available, as well as picnics, bush breakfasts and dinner, game drives and walks, wildlife talks, massage and beauty therapy. Meanwhile, the young and restless can watch television or videos (www.lukimbi.co.za).

Below is a picture of Lukimbi chapel where couples can book for a special wedding

(www.lukimbi.co.za)

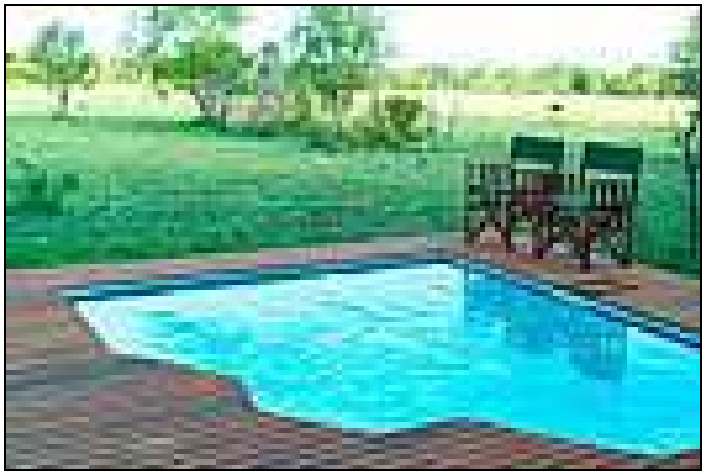


Rhino Post Safari Lodge, Plains Camp, and Sleep-out Camp: Since the other details about the concession are similar to the above camps, it is enough to point out that this Rhino Walking Safaris-owned 12 000 hectare wilderness has a 15 kilometre open western boundary with the Sabie and Sabi Sands private game reserve. The tourism group has 3 lodges, namely Rhino Post Safari, Plains Camp, and Sleep-out Camp; Rhino Post is located on the banks of the Mutlumuvi River, and specialises in walking safaris (Dreyer August 2004: 98). Plains Camp comprises four luxurious tents overlooking the Timbitene Plain and waterhole in ways that combine luxury and vista. They are not exactly "tents" in the strict sense of the word, but are structures with dark wooden floors, "inviting beds" and a deck (Dreyer August 2004: 99). Sleep-out Camp is built in tall jackalberry trees overlooking a water hole, and guests are dropped off some ninety minutes away to walk to the camp in the setting sun. The four up-the-tree platforms are serviced by a shared toilet and shower, and inside the pioneer style hold-all metal trunk the guest will find a nylon mesh tent, a -5°C sleeping bag, mattress, sheet, pillow, and other necessities. Ilze Dreyer of *Getaway* spent the evening looking up at the shelter of stars and listening to Tim Ray, "a walking encyclopaedia on Kruger, weave entrancing tales. With the charged sounds

and heady smells of the bush, I closed my eyes and snuggled into my sleeping bag", she says (Dreyer August 2004: 99). This luxury came at a cost of R1 860 per person per night sharing, while the Rhino Post cost R2 500 and Sleep-out Camp R2 650.

Shown below is Rhino Post's sparkling swimming pool

(www.privatelodges.krugerpark.co.za)



Hamilton's Tented Camp: This camp on the Mluwati concession comprises 6 luxury tents overlooking the Ngwenyeni Dam, each offering "private luxuries" like the romantic slipper bath and an outdoor shower dam-side. The activity and service menu ranged from game drives, bush walks, and bird watching in the hide overlooking the waterhole, to the swimming pool and butler service. To guard against the menace of freely roaming animals within camp, under-eight children could only be allowed in special circumstances, for example if clients were booked in for a party or if the kids paid the adult fee and were accommodated separately (www.krugerpark.co.za).

Mluwati Concession (Imbali Safari lodge): The tourism concept of Mluwati Concession, which is behind Hamilton's and in more evidence at Imbali, is that of romantic safaris; the two operate on one *modus operandi*. Imbali is a 12-luxurious suite camp, all *en- suite* bathrooms with shower and antique baths, mosquito netted, air conditioned and ceiling fanned, and serviced by fully licensed bar, tea and coffee. The activity profile includes game drives, bush walks and bird watching (www.krugerpark.co.za).

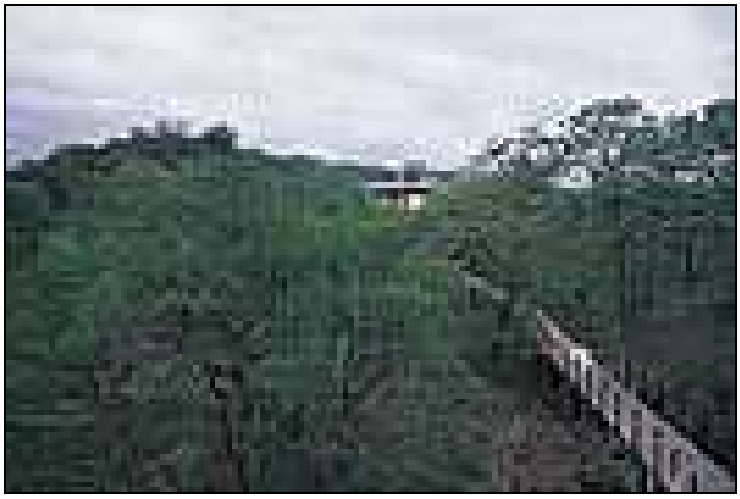
Singita Lebombo Game Lodge: Built on the Nwanetsi concession, Singita is advertised as a showcase of "both African and English styles", a blend of indigenous timber and exotic glass units strategically constructed to launch the guest's eye towards the animals roaming outside. That is, of course, if one is not relaxing in the

bush spa, or going through the African Trading Store's range of "Africa's finest and most exclusive clothing, artworks and decorative ware", or, perhaps, enjoying the guided bush walks and game drives (www.Krugerpark.co.za).

Matikiti Tented Safari Camp: Built on a concession between Satara and Orpen Gate, and taking advantage of its remoteness from main tourist areas, Matikiti's 50.000 hectare space is marketed as prime game drive and guided walk country, whose guests are accommodated in 8 furnished camping tents. Every one of the tents is solar-powered and has a chemical toilet and showers (www.krugerpark.co.za).

The Outpost Lodge: This 12 stand-alone en suite room lodge overlooking the Luvuvhu/Pafuri River utilizes its location in the "most remote north" as an expression of its exquisite privacy and uniqueness. Here on the Makuleke concession, in an area once closed to tourists and a subject of much parks-people conflict, lies a stepping stone into not just "undisturbed wildlife" but also African culture if one visits Makuleke village, or takes a river safari on the Pafuri in The Outpost's flat bottomed boat to picnic at historic Crooks Corner. Designed by the Italian-born architect Enrico Daffonchio using "simple clean lines and combining elements of steel and canvas, the unashamedly contemporary design of The Outpost Lodge emphasizes its beautiful surrounds but blends and preserves the wilderness that is its home" (www.krugerpark.co.za). Like its private concession siblings, The Outpost is a site where integration of natural and human environments of the tourist destination has effectively adopted "local architectural styles and scales, local designers and workers at all levels" and used local materials (Prosser 1994: 34).

Shown below is the secluded Outpost Lodge (www.privatelodges.kruger.co.za)



Tinga Game Lodge: Also referred to as Narina or Legends Lodges, Tinga is a combination of two lodges of similar style and facilities, each taking in 18 guests in its 9 en suite units. These units have bathroom and shower, large outdoor showers, private swimming pools, a fireplace, a mini bar and a fridge, a mini safe and full air conditioner. The business executive is well-catered in the boardroom facilities with an 8-20 guest capacity and facilities for laptop use (www.krugerpark.co.za). Kruger's strategy of providing varied accommodation for a diverse clientele (cf. Laws 1995: 107) – some coming for short breaks, others business conferences, themed holidays and so on – is met by Tinga's concept, which targets "first class business executives" in groups of 8-20 (www.krugerpark.co.za).

Several key points emerge from this brief survey. First, it can be argued that this large, expensive range of accommodation could not have been achievable in the normal rest camp system; private investment not only supplied finance, but brought on board specialists in hospitality, whose core business is tourism. From being a by-product of conservation, tourism was now a core specialised industry within the park. Finally, privatisation not only improved the range of market-driven supply; more importantly, it integrated accommodation into a bundle of other services supplied by individual camps themselves, enabling accommodation to be sold as part of a wider package within the holiday.

The new private lodges are unique in that they have become an attraction. Whereas Bennett (2000) classifies accommodation as that facility which makes people comfortable when they go for game viewing, the empirical data above shows the private lodges as both part of and an attraction in themselves, to a point where accommodation and game viewing alternate statuses as main and ancillary attractions. Compared to the old types, the new lodges come with specialised facilities. An example is Lukimbi Lodge, where relaxing and enjoying the facilities can be the key motivation of visiting, with game viewing as an ancillary activity. Those who go for a wedding ceremony and reception will have game viewing as perhaps their last and least important activity. It must be noted that having adopted this unique style, the lodge developers have done that on the principles of the old styles. Some "essentials" have been retained; as a rule, the "pervasive absence" of televisions in most of the units, for example, "enhances the general silence" long associated with the place (Ndebele 1998: 120).

These lodges have been designed specifically to attract international tourists and wealthy South Africans (mostly white), largely on the imperatives of the tourism policy targets on international arrivals. Because Africa has many "big five" places Kruger's private lodges have striven to be unique; accommodation has been central to this image. In the words of Bunn, however, the set up of these private lodges has aroused a nostalgia typical of the 1930s among many white South Africans when Kruger was a "restorative space" where senses "maimed by the war" and "industrial work regimes of mining and manufacture" could find rehabilitation to normalcy through nature (Bunn 2003:208). The opening up of park space to visitors of all races, and its propensity to diminish this sense of "retreat" from the huff and puff of daily "crowded" life, seems to reincarnate the expensive private reserve as the last sanctuary for the tormented white soul. It is no wonder, therefore, that among those whites of this inclination, Kruger is now a crowded space, Bunn seems to suggest.

Pushing this trajectory further may lead one to question the very logic of "privatization" as a form of "smart racialization". This is the sense one gets not only from Bunn's evocative article, but also from Ndebele, who after looking critically at the siting of these private lodges and their exquisite location "far from the madding crowd" (i.e. 'crowded' main camps) posed the question: "Doesn't the game lodge represent the ultimate 'leisuring' of colonial history?" (Ndebele 1998:119) Ndebele saw the style and costing of the lodges as being meant for wealthy South Africans (mostly whites), continuing a white South African colonial tradition of aloofness from other races that the secluded space allowed. If the colonials were convalescing away the stress caused of anti-apartheid irritations, this breed of post-colonial whites needs this "insular" space far from the irritations of black governance (Ndebele1998: 120). As Ndebele continues, money affords not just privilege but power to access and monopolise spaces that political context has liberalised; the private lodge, in excluding those without the money, becomes a self-regulating space of racial segregation "by other means". Here too, new camaraderie can be established, new patronages built and old ones resuscitated or perpetuated afresh, in a space that Ndebele sees as "promis(ing) isolation (and) unobtrusive personalized care" around the camp fire and pre-dinner drinks (Ndebele 1998:119).

This is a radical critique that implicates a black government in a paradoxically racist scheme. The onus of its rejection or qualification would need to deal with the demographics of visitorship figures, the spaces tourists of different races court, and

the suggestion of ideal models for non-racialization. While the argument seems persuasive, it does not accord with the possibility of complete reversal so soon after independence, even as it makes a solid critique of racism as class. It is contentious whether the lodges cater for local or overseas clients, even if the dominant racial groups might be white. Further, this persistent racial dynamic might also be distilled through a rigorous research into "timeshare" schemes, which exposed whites to affordable holiday ownerships well before many nonwhites got wind of them. For this reason, any claims as definitive as Ndebele's might need to go beyond the surface of colonial behaviour patterns. Whatever the rewards of that debate, this research has identified the material qualities of the lodges themselves as intersections of national policy and overseas demand while not directly addressing moral and social justice issues Ndebele prioritises.

Staying within the report's perview, therefore, it is useful to bring into the conversation Massyn and Koch's (2001) discussion of the "African safari lodge" as "a high-value, low volume lodge offering tourists a combination of game viewing experiences with comfortable levels of hospitality, cuisine and accommodation" (Massyn and Koch 2001: 2). Not all architectural styles are new; in fact the post 1994 private lodges took after those developed after 1930 and that surround the park, namely Sabi Sands Game Reserve's original upmarket lodges, and from which the idea of rustic camps and thatched rondawels was "imported" into the park. Mala Mala and Londolozi have a similar genealogy. All were motivated by the need to accommodate visitors who were "keen to experience close encounters with wildlife in areas considered remote and wild" (Massyn and Koch 2001: 3). Yet as we have seen in the kinds of specialization, one could contend that the copy-book could be torn apart or coloured to accommodate new innovations that were market-determined. In this sense, the adoption of the Londolozi/Sabi Sands idea was a marketing strategy that Adams and McShane (1996 in Massyn and Koch (2001) map on a wider scale within the Southern African region, and which grew in intensity to capture the imagination of a mythical Africa among the overseas tourist the RDP was targeting. As is it, the idea itself was imported into the park by investors who had been "old hands" at this sort of tourism for a long time. This segment was an attempt, therefore, to capture their move into Kruger, a space hitherto keeping out this sort of tourism enterprise.

3.6 COSTING ACCOMMODATION

Ndebele's take on pricing as a kind of "new racism" has pushed this research to consider closely the issue of cost. In the few examples cited, it is true that the cost of private accommodation was much higher than the rest camps. For some time NPB has dismissed claims that accommodation costs are ballooning beyond affordable levels in Kruger, arguing that, rather, it is the choice that has widened to suit all kinds of pockets. This variety puts the onus on aspiring visitors to budget carefully to suit their pockets, means of transport and food costs; because private accommodation is a bouquet of services, it cannot be compared with accommodation-only costs that, on the surface, might appear cheaper (*Custos* January 1994:29). The coming of private game lodges in 2000 widened the gulf in pricing policy, such that while NPB rest camps have remained cheapest and suitable to different pocket levels, the private lodge has tended to be pegged at very high levels. For example, in the rest camps, camping for 6 people costs R100; bungalows cost between R420 for 2-3 beds and R850 for 4 beds (including 1 double bed); family cottages R850 for 6 beds maximum (including 1 double bed); guest houses are the peak of the cost list at between R1 500 for up to 8 beds (2 double beds, 2 single and double sleeper couch) and R1 700 for 8 beds (2 double beds) (South African National Parks: tariffs from 1 November 2004 to 31 October 2005).

At face-value, the private accommodation costs seem much higher than the rest camps. However, the comparison needs to be a value-for-money and 'brand' market comparison: the discussion in the preceding section illustrates an upmarket target-market which, though patronised and capable of meeting overseas tastes, could also be accessed through "special packages for South Africans only and those from SADC countries". These products are mainly sold in a variety of packages promoted through travel companies. One example of a special was Jock of the Bushveld's August 2004 package of 2 nights from R3 765 per person sharing, including return airfares ex Johannesburg, 2 nights weekend accommodation inclusive of all meals and local drinks, 2 game activities and bush walks daily, and 2 days car hire with standard insurance and 200 km free daily (Sure Travel 2004: 6). In July, Sure Travel was advertising an Imbali Safari Lodge getaway package of 2 nights from R4 009 per person sharing inclusive of return airfares ex Johannesburg, 2 nights weekend accommodation with all meals, 2 game drive activities and 2 days car hire with standard insurance and 200 km free daily (Sure Travel 2004:8). Sure Travel was also selling a winter offer that

was not as fully packaged – a R1 425 per person per night sharing accommodation, with 3 meals and 2 game drives (Sure Travel 2004: 8). Harvey World Travel had a sizzling offer at Tinga Private Lodge – a July package from R4 550 per person for 2 nights accommodation, all meals plus local drinks, and 2 game drives per day. These packages were exclusive to South African and SADC nationals to encourage them to access the so-called *overseas market* lodges (Harvey World Travel 2004: 8).

3.7 CONCLUSION

What this chapter tried to demonstrate is the intersection of national government policy with what has been happening in Kruger Park; in other words, the ways in which the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism has not only operationalised the RDP into a National Tourism Policy but also to spatialise it within Kruger itself. The chapter talked about the dialogue between conservation, economics, and politics that made tourism what Richter (1989, cited in Dieke 2000: 4) calls "a chosen policy". This dialogue of park estate speaks to an important theme on the privatization and commodification of nature, illustrated in this chapter through the lens of accommodation. National policy has provided the "macrocosm" within which smaller scale policies can work, and like in a concentric circle where national policy might be the outer circle, accommodation sites are smaller circles governed by GEAR and SATOUR's growth strategies.

Yet the picture is not so straightforward. The delegation of duties to regional and park authorities allows them to develop their own development and management plans, not only 'breaking down' and implementing at local levels, but also compromising and 'feeding back' important inputs to top-level policy framing. This is no simple "handing down" of policy but rather, a mutual dual-direction power dynamic. It would, in future studies, be interesting to push further how national and park-level policies were informed by the business and conservation environment traditionally associated with national parks. Here one would think of International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF), and so on. How do they come into the policy equation, given their support for biodiversity conservation? Is the privatization and commercialization of the park a good thing or a bad thing for them, and why should we care?

This dimension is relevant in the context of a marked shift in the government's role in tourism development since 1994, which Dieke attributes to "the move towards

the free market liberalism- a trend that is global and also supported by several international donor agencies" (Dieke 2000: 11). As chapters 1 and 2 show, the South African government has taken a leading role in making tourism a foreign currency spinner. This has changed the face of Kruger, where the government has retracted its earlier role as the driver and provider of accommodation in the rest camps and taken up an "enabling or facilitating role" (Dieke 2000: 11). While this is a belt-tightening move to limit financial expenditure, and which is evidenced by the tendency towards stagnation in the late-1980s, at least in the accommodation sector, privatization has allowed those with enough resources and new ideas to flourish (Jenkins 1994 cited in Dieke 2000). Perhaps because the focus in this report is more on tourism, and the concern is, therefore, on entrepreneurship rather than biodiversity, the role of the conservation NGOs does not occupy any space in the report. Yet possibilities exist to pursue the dialogues between NGO-conservation vs. corporate sector-ecotourism developments within the park itself.

Wrapping up the chapter, we have also seen how the era of just building structure and advertising them for "whoever is interested" had passed, to be replaced by a much more robust blending of "the peculiar appeal" endowed by the local endowments and the actual tastes of the tourists. The idea of marketing, therefore, shifted from being an end-of-the-chain activity engaged in by salespersons, to being the hallmark of a more integrated, systemic thread tailoring the structures, services, and advertising of the destination. This new thrust came after a diagnosis of prevailing end-product marketing strategies, the studying, understanding and predicting of consumer behaviour and attitudes, and the effecting of the necessary enabling environment not only in the accommodation sites, but also the overall context within which they operated. This was not a task government could accomplish with taxpayers' money; in spite of the liberal economic approaches adopted by the new government, the civil service was not the right constituency to handle this business strategy. Private concessions were the specialists in hospitality, they had the money; if their activities were well-regulated through a set of national policy guidelines that recognized Kruger's biodiversity role, then the government would be content to sit back with a checklist in hand, ticking off tourism and conservation policy objectives.