

MY KRUGER EXPERIENCE

What Kruger Teaches You to See



Els, Corné and daughter, Carmen



My name is Corné Meulendijks. I was born in Holland and have lived in the beautiful mountains of Tirol, Austria, together with my wife Els, for more than 30 years. South Africa – and especially the Kruger National Park – has become a very special place in our lives.

In the early years, we visited the Kruger once a year during the European summer holidays with our three children. Nowadays, we are lucky enough to go twice a year, usually for about a month at a time.

Like many visitors, our first focus was the Big Five. That was the goal, the excitement, the “must-see” list. But over time, that changed completely.



Leopard (*Panthera pardus*).



Today, it's often the smaller things that stay with us the longest – the birds, the trees, the light in the early morning, the smell of the bush after rain, and the quiet moments when nothing seems to happen, yet everything is alive.

We've learned that Kruger is not about ticking boxes. It's about slowing down.

“The longer you return to the Kruger, the more you begin to notice: not only the celebrated sightings, but the light, the birdsong, the silence and the life unfolding beyond the road.”

Lion (*Panthera leo*).



African rock python (*Python sebae*).

For us, a perfect Kruger morning starts with no expectations at all. Open the windows, have a cup of coffee, listen to the birds waking up, and just drive slowly to see what the day brings.

When you try too hard to find the Big Five, you often miss everything else around you. The best moments usually come when you least expect them.



Serval (*Leptailurus serval*).



Green-backed heron (*Butorides striata*).

“The best Kruger mornings begin without a checklist. Drive slowly, listen carefully and allow the Park to reveal what might otherwise be missed.”

A green-backed heron fishing patiently at the Biyamiti Weir, a chameleon slowly crossing the road near Punda Maria Camp, an African wildcat that came to say hello at Satara camp or a malachite kingfisher flashing past the Lower Sabie Bridge – these are the kinds of sightings

that can easily make a day unforgettable.

One of our favourite places to stay is Tamboti Tented Camp. It still feels special every time, especially when a genet or honey badger suddenly appears at night like a little surprise visitor.

Hippo's (*Hippopotamus amphibius*) playing.



Honey badgers (*Mellivora capensis*).



Thick-tailed bushbaby (*Otolemur crassicaudatus*).



We also love the S23 Biyamiti Road starting from the weir, and the S52 Red Rocks area near Shingwedzi Camp. These roads always feel full of life and atmosphere.

But even after all these years, the Kruger still knows how to surprise us...

On 8 May 2026, we went on a morning drive with former Crocodile Bridge Head Guide Irving Knight. Our eldest daughter Carmen joined us, which made it extra special.

After two days of heavy rain, things had been very quiet and we hadn't seen much at all. Irving decided to head back from Lower Sabie towards Crocodile Bridge along the S28, and then turned onto the S107 near Ntandanyati Dam. And that's when everything changed.

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A female cheetah suddenly appeared and walked straight towards us. It was clear she wanted to cross the road. Irving positioned the vehicle carefully so that she could pass safely.

She crossed... and behind her came six cubs.

We were already completely blown away, but then something even more special happened. One tiny cub, the smallest of them all, came rushing behind the others, calling out for its mother as if saying: "Wait for me!"

It was one of those moments where nobody in the vehicle really spoke for a while.



Only afterwards did it really sink in what we had seen: a cheetah mother with seven cubs – something incredibly rare.

Later that day, it slowly sank in just how special this sighting really was: a cheetah mother



Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*).

with seven cubs. I immediately felt that this was something worth sharing with fellow bush lovers and Kruger enthusiasts – true Krugerholics – because moments like these are exactly what our bush house name *Khumbula iAfrica* stands for:

"Remember Africa."

A sighting like this truly becomes a memory for life.

And honestly... before we even leave, we're already thinking about the next trip. ■

Corné Meulendijks

Cheetah cubs.



Watch this! Scan the QR code or visit <https://youtu.be/4cGgXVTSBI4> to watch the youngest cheetah cub calling for its mother.

