

Bushmans Kloof - for a quiet walk on the wild side

By Chris Moerdyk: @chrismoerdyk

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My interest in the Bushmans Kloof Wilderness Reserve and Wellness Retreat, in the stark Cederberg Mountains of the Western Cape, was sparked by a combination of cynicism and curiosity. (Images and captions: Rod Baker)



A haven from the maddening crowd... Bushmans Kloof - the 'Best Hotel in the World'.

I was curious to find out how some place in the back and beyond had actually managed to be named 'Best Hotel in the World' in the 2009 US *Travel & Leisure* World's Best Awards readers' survey.

Moreover, I am just naturally cynical about anyone who talks about "wellness."

It sounds to me like a word contrived by manic marketers in search of the holy grail of hyperbole in an effort to make feeling really nice about things feel even nicer.

I have to admit though, that my curiosity was elegantly satisfied and my cynicism completely misplaced.

As a consequence I have now slashed my left wrist in penitence and have taken a blood-oath to look first and think later when it comes to claims involving the global magnificence of South Africa wildlife hostleries.

In short, Bushmans Kloof is well deserving of its 'Best Hotel in the World' trophy, because it actually *is* the best hotel in the world. If only from the point of view that any other place would find it pretty much impossible to beat. And, believe it or not, I have revised my thinking on the word "wellness" because after an hour and a half in their spa I did actually feel nicer than I was feeling before I went in. Moreover, before I went in I was feeling exceptionally nice.

'An extraordinary haven'

The Bushmans Kloof publicity material talks about it being "a place of ancient and untamed beauty unlike any other. An extraordinary haven, nestled at the foothills of the Cederberg Mountains - the ideal wilderness getaway to escape, restore and relax. A reserve that is a natural playground for those who want to reconnect with themselves and the essence of life, with wide open plains, mystical rock formations, crystal-clear water falls, and an abundance of flora and fauna. Where guests can discover the wonders of nature, choose from a vast range of outdoor activities, or do absolutely nothing but inhale the beauty, and succumb to the peace, quiet and tranquillity."



Who are you looking at?

[click to enlarge](#)

Sounds gushy doesn't it? Typical PR hype? A sales pitch wrapped in syrupy innuendo designed to open wallets and provoke the hurling about of platinum credit cards with gay abandon.

I have to admit again, that even the gushiest of gushy guff does not do this place justice. However, I don't believe that even the most remarkable settings and out of this world facilities are enough to win a best hotel in the world title.

I have a theory about why Bushman's Kloof won the award. And it is exactly the reverse of why most of the five star hotels I have frequented in Johannesburg do not deserve to be called five star - let alone best in the world.



Comfortable, and cosy.

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Where everybody knows your name

People. That's what makes the difference between feeling nice about something and being enveloped in a self-indulgent cloud of wellness.

The people at Bushmans Kloof are clearly well trained as they are very convincing that when they ask you how they are, that they really and truly want to know *how you are!* And if you respond to their: "Good morning Sir, how are you," with a 30-minute breakdown of your state of health including every surgical procedure and trip to the dentist made in the past 10 years, they would, I am sure, continue to listen with the sort of rapt attention a spaniel manages to conjure up when you are anywhere in the vicinity of food.



Are you game for a drive?

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My experience of Johannesburg's five star establishments is that their staff is just going through the motions. They're polite and subservient - but, only because they *have to* and not because they *want to*. That's the difference.

Every single staff member treats you as though you are just the most important person in their lives.



The photographer (when he was at the hotel some months prior to the writer's visit) managed to get on nodding terms with an agama.

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They do not appear know what "no" means. Even if you ask for the impossible, they will manage to make you feel that it has been delivered up to you on a silver salver, even if it hasn't.

The resident comedian

What impressed me was that on arrival my car was whisked away and put out of sight. I don't know where the heck it went. For all the time we were there we never saw a car. It was wonderful. Even though I love my car. I got it back all beautifully cleaned.

Accommodation is better than five-star. Very homely, extremely comfortable. The food was excellent. I am going to stop right there because it is pointless for me to even start to try to describe the fare, the restaurants and having breakfast overlooking a paradise of green lawns and lily-bedecked water in the company of the funniest of all fauna - the yellow-billed duck. It's like watching Michael McIntyre with feathers.

Bushmans Kloof isn't a big five reserve. Which is always good in my book because that means you can go for as walk without being eaten. And what a place to walk.

Marvellous scenery and every now and then one comes across some quite remarkable San rock paintings. There are no less than 130 San art sites on the property that bellow you to immerse yourself in a 1000-year-old culture.



Take a step back in time...

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Are you game for a drive?

The "game" drives are excellent and the guides impressive in their depth of knowledge. And patient as well. We spent a wonderful hour watching a dormouse playing tag with a Cape cobra. Scuttling in and out of a maze of underground tunnels with the cobra in hot pursuit. Popping down and appearing again 20m away.

The cobra eventually gave up, took a bow, folded its hood, and slid away leaving a pretty shagged-out dormouse doing what I am convinced was victorious air pump.



... and another...

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I could go on and on about this wonderful place. Talk about all the other awards it has won - the 2010 'Travel & Leisure Best Service Hotel in Africa and the Middle East', as well as the Condé Nast *Traveller* magazine, UK Readers' Travel Awards not to mention being 'Global Winner of Wildlife Conservations Programs' in the Condé Nast Traveller World Savers Awards in 2009 and the coveted 'Relais & Châteaux Environment Trophy' in 2007.

But I won't, because I have the feeling you might think that I am starting to exaggerate.
I'm not. I promise.



Here's looking at you... Over millennia, the river running past the hotel has carved and cut the rock into a labyrinth of tunnels, caves and weird shapes. These holes look like the orbital sockets of a huge skull 3m wide.

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Bushmans Kloof

Bushmans Kloof is part of the Red Carnation Hotel Collection in South Africa, alongside sister properties, The Twelve Apostles Hotel and Spa in Cape Town, and the Oyster Box Hotel in Umhlanga Rocks (KwaZulu-Natal)

Distance from Cape Town: 270km; three hours by road from Cape Town or 45 minutes by air.

Owners: The Tollman Trust

Lodge management team: Graham (GM) and Ronel Kennedy

Reservations: Tel: +27 (0) 21 481 1860; fax: +27 (0) 21 481 1870; email: info@bushmanskloof.co.za. Website: www.bushmanskloof.co.za.

- 18 533 acres (7500 hectares) of pure wilderness with 5 dams;
- Malaria-free;
- 7 luxury rooms, 7 deluxe rooms, 1 suite and 1 supreme suite;
- Diverse and flexible dining options in magnificent locations;
- Newly launched Spa featuring indoor and outdoor spa treatments;
- Outdoor Spa gazebo;
- 4 swimming pools (1 heated);
- Choice of outdoor activities: guided rock art walks; nature drives; mountain biking; canoeing; rock climbing; hiking; swimming in rock pools; fishing; archery;
- Flower and herb gardens;
- Sanctuary for many indigenous, and some highly endangered species: 35 species of mammals (including the endangered Cape Mountain Zebra), 150 bird species and more than 755 plant species are found in the reserve, including rooibos;
- Custodian to more than 130 ancient Bushmen rock art sites, dating back to the Later Stone Age;
- Heritage Centre & medicinal herb garden.

ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK: @CHRISMOERDYK

Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on moerdykc@gmail.com and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).

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