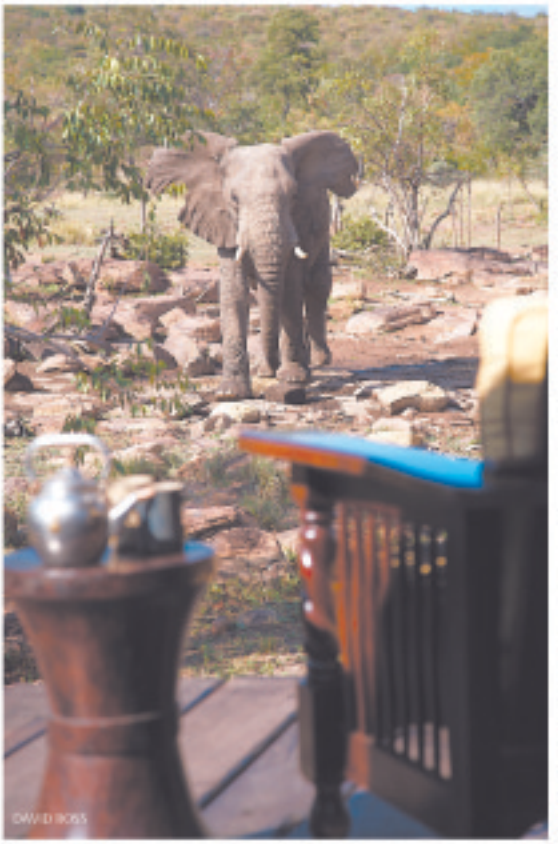
Together alone

Privacy and pampering need not be exclusive



BRUCE DEMPELL

THE Welgevonden Private Game Reserve is an awkward distance from Joburg by car.

The three-hour drive requires you to take a break to refresh yourself, but then the short remaining distance (from Nylstroom onwards is particularly beautiful) makes the delay seem unnecessary.

Once you're on the property, though, your frustrations evaporate. You need to park at the gate, where your vehicle is watched by security guards, and continue the drive to one of the many private lodges and camps on the property in one of their 4x4s.

As the gate is left behind, you enter a landscape that – looking in every direction – seems untouched by human hands (apart from the narrow dusty road).

It's all a bit H Rider Haggard, and for the average city dweller, it's an instant tonic.

Adding a bit of spice is garrulous guide Glenn, who has an anecdote for every topic guests come up with, as well as a huge knowledge of and very obvious passion for the bush.

Arriving at Malwesti Safari Lodge is something of a surprise. From the road, it's necessary to get within 100 metres of the place before you actually see it.

Your vehicle pulls in under a thatched roof and friendly staff materialise to shake hands, carry bags, show you the way to your room and measure you for a dinner jacket. Okay, that last one's not true, but you do feel pampered...

The topography of the place means the five units (the lodge only sleeps 10, ensuring privacy, peace and quiet) are spread out – getting to two of the units requires crossing a swinging suspension bridge.

The lodge's centrepiece is the dining, bar and poolside common area, which features a wonderful view down a green valley, studded with the malwesti trees from which the lodge takes its name.

Be warned. One visit to the dining table may put the rest of your planned activities in danger. The chef, Elizabeth, was recruited from a nearby township, but any snooty, Michelin-starred bias is wildly misplaced, as the food she creates is probably the best I've ever sampled at such a resort.

If you can pull yourself away from the kitchen, though, ensure you make yourself available for a couple of game drives.

Glenn and his colleague Jacques, like all rangers, pride themselves on getting their clients the most exciting sightings, and they're happy to hop out of the car and plunge into the bush to follow tracks.

Small touches like their using inner-ear headphones instead of squawking walkie-talkies ensure a peaceful experience for guests.

Once the day is over, retire to a magnificently appointed room, waving to the dassies that share your verandah and the kudu bull standing statue-still in the bushes a few metres away.

It's a great way to spend a day.

Snip

Guests can spend a day with a resident elephant researcher, who's conducting a study in the behaviour of an elephant population in order to determine the dynamics of elephant relationships.

For more info or to book, visit www.malwesti.com.