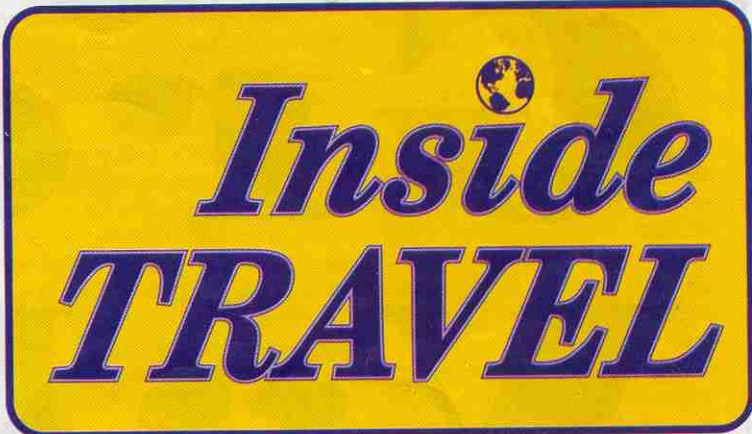




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CONSERVATION TOURISM AT ITS BEST

When the Minister of Environmental Affairs of Mpumalanga Province, Mr. David Mkhwanazi, opened the Marthly Environmental Educational Centre at Mala Mala, he said that this was the first time that a private landowner had been willing to share a part of its property, free of charge, with educational groups. With reference to its critical role in empowering the peoples of his province he suggested that because the Marthly camp lies within of the oldest and most successful tourist attractions in South Africa, it makes the camp an ideal setting for discussions around issues of the role and development of afro-tourism in the Province. At the opening ceremony, Mala Mala's Michael Rattray also announced an annual, Mala Mala bursary which will enable selected students to attend a tertiary educational institution to major in one of the natural sciences. Mala Mala is deeply committed to conservation and this



flurry of activity around the Marthly Centre is not the product of a new, 'born again' conservationist but rather the natural progression of conservation action by South Africa's most respected and historically committed conservationist, Michael Rattray. Let's look at the Rattray properties that have enhanced this country's eco-environment and brought happiness and the

ultimate bush experience to so many conservation tourists.

MALA MALA

When guests arrive at Mala Mala, they are given a booklet that allows for the tracking and recording of mammals, birds and trees that can be found at the reserve. The opening paragraph says, 'Welcome . . . to Africa's most famous private game reserve. You have probably chosen Mala Mala because of its

world wide reputation for excellence and incomparable game viewing. It is our aim to ensure that you thoroughly enjoy this wildlife paradise'. And they do. Taking the 'Big 5' as an example, in 1994, guests at Mala Mala could have seen every member of the 'Big 5' on 283 days; Elephant on 353 days; Leopard on 339 days; Lion on 350 days; Buffalo on 321 days and in the case of Rhinoceros, there were in excess of 2 100 individual sightings in the year. This is not by chance, but because of the consistent and dedicated application of sound and very often, innovative conservation practices by reserve owner, Michael Rattray.

Mala Mala was initially a cattle ranch but its ranching activities were abandoned in the early 1930's because of a losing battle with lions, disease and drought. Until 1960, it was a private shooting box until its purchase by the Rattray family in 1964, who subsequently doubled the size of the game reserve, making it the largest block of privately owned Big Game land in South Africa. What the Rattrays have

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proved with Mala Mala is that not all land can produce crops and food as some would have us believe, but can be sensibly and scientifically utilised for tourism, for instance, through game farming, and Mala Mala is today's most visible and successful example of this philosophy in Africa. Its popular image as a playground for 'fat cat' conservation tourists camouflages the reality of the fact that it is a tribute to sound conservation methodology and management rather than a lucky location of 5 star accommodation in the middle of an animal farm. Mala Mala has earned its spurs as the finest private game reserve in Africa.

KIRKMAN'S KAMP

Located in the southern division of the Mala Mala game reserve, Kirkman's offers a return to the bushveld in the style of yesteryear. The property, Toulon, on which this Kamp stands is bordered on two sides by the Kruger National Park and shares a long history with the development of this world famous game reserve. The Rattrays set about restoring the homestead to its original, 20's elegance and named the Kamp after one of South Africa's foremost conservationists, W. Harry Kirkman. At Kirkman's Kamp there are never more than 20 guests, thus ensuring the finest of personalised service. It is superb and very popular.

HARRY'S

The camp with a difference, offers a return to the wilds. Situated in the southern division of the vast Mala Mala Game Reserve, it is the smallest and most intimate of the three camps in the reserve. Never more than 16 guests, wonderfully relaxed and very informal, the emphasis is on outdoor living with breakfast and lunch served at a shaded table on the river bank and dinner in the traditional reed enclosed Boma. Great for families and smaller conference and executive board meetings. Harry's has it all - just that much closer to nature.

MASHATU

Located in Botswana, Mashatu is by far the largest privately owned game reserve in Southern Africa, comprising 90 000 acres of diverse habitat types, the

reserve supports a variety of mammal, reptile, bird and insect species. The migratory, territorial, feeding and drinking needs of each indigenous species is adequately met throughout the year through the most scientific ecological management programmes, thus enabling the visitor to gain a consistent game viewing experience. It is magnificent and supports an elephant population of more than 700. The main camp has a capacity for 30 guests in super luxury. There is also a superb, dedicated conference centre. Mashatu also has a tent camp for 14 guests close to the main camp which offers an unforgettable, 'back-to-nature' bush experience. Conference and incentive groups can use both facilities to cater for their numbers. Mashatu is magnificent.

MOUNT ANDERSON RANCH

Five years ago, Mount Anderson Ranch was seriously threatened by soil erosion and overgrazing. Today it has been transformed back to its original pristine condition, complete with a thriving eco-system - a shining example of what one man can do for conservation. In 1990, Michael Rattray acquired 18000 acres in the Drakensberg near Lydenburg; land that enclosed the sources of four rivers but destroyed by overgrazing, soil erosion and the damage of exotic wattle trees that sucked up whatever water was left in the wetlands. He removed the livestock, fixed the erosion and chopped out all exotic vegetation. The rivers soon returned to their natural state with year round flow and natural, high altitude vegetation is flourishing once again. Two of the four river systems were developed with weirs and Trout was introduced. The conservation success of the Mount Anderson projects has been beneficial to farmers and industry downstream, far beyond the borders of the property. A Trout Lodge for a maximum of 6 paying guests has been built and will contribute to the financing of the massive project. For Michael Rattray, the restoration of Mount Anderson Ranch is the realisation of a long cherished dream. His experience and success in conservation, which has been recog-

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nised world-wide, culminated when, after years of lobbying, the fence between Sabi Sands and the Kruger National Park was removed to allow animals a greater migratory territory. Rattray believes conservation should help to pay for itself, and follows the principle that 'Fewer people paying more cuts down on human impact'. It is a principle that has proved its weight in all of Africa's most successful tourist industries. Mount Anderson Ranch proves that private enterprise and a concern for ecology can be beneficial to owners, neighbours and the entire country. The success of Mala Mala and its various camps and Mashatu bear similar testimony. 'We are using tourism to feed the nation,' says Rattray. And he should know. 