



# Khaudum National Park

## Khaudum cautionary tales

Besides the obvious wilderness and isolation of Khaudum, this park offers an experience of a different kind; danger, known to Khaudum staff as a 'vein-opener'. To avoid 'vein-openers', you can follow a few simple guidelines or suggestions. Below, in order of importance for Khaudum specifically, stories of true encounters with wildlife will highlight what to and what not to do.

### **Elephant – the most abundant and potentially most lethal animal encountered in park.**

While inspecting waterholes in June 2008, two MET officials found themselves driving at night.

*Do not tempt fate, and by law, do not drive at night.*

At around 21:00, they spotted an elephant breeding herd crossing the track in front of them, barely visible in the dimmed headlamps of the vehicle. They stopped and waited for the herd to cross and clear the road. "It is amazing how these grey giants just melt into the bush, surprising considering their body size. The African elephant is a master of disguise."

*Take your time. Don't only look at the bush next to the road; look beyond, into, over and through them if you can. When in Africa, do like the Africans – be at one with the land.*

A couple of minutes passed while the officials' attention was focused on the herd 80 metres in front of them. Then, suddenly and very unexpectedly, a young bull elephant tore through a bush, ten odd metres from the idling vehicle. "We immediately shifted into reverse, with skyrocketing revolutions demanding every joule of energy from the screaming engine. A 'vein-opener' was at hand. Sand spewed out from beneath our wheels as the vehicle retreated, but it was too late. The bull charged with head lowered and trunk tucked beneath the mouth."

*The Khaudum demands everything from your vehicle. Be sure it is in top condition and always keep it engaged in 4x4, even if the terrain doesn't demand it. You will need all the power and traction your vehicle has to offer when facing a close encounter.*

"Thick loose sand prevented the vehicle from driving away quickly, giving the charging bull enough time to catch up. In what looked like a rehearsed move, the bull scooped up the vehicle with flashing white tusks, lifting the front part clear off the ground. Fortunately by then we already had a fair dose of adrenalin pumping and followed through with the attempt to get away, keeping on the accelerator and moving backwards, albeit only on the two rear wheels."



*Get away, as quickly and as effectively as possible. You can worry about the damage to your vehicle later.*

"After about 40 metres of playing 'push the wheelbarrow' with a six-ton elephant, we realised that being the wheelbarrow was not that much fun. We started beating on the sides of the doors and fired a few warning shots in the air. This was enough to distract the elephant from its rampage and consequently the vehicle was dropped to the ground. The bull walked away in a calm, proud manner whilst we felt the 'vein-opener' tremors shake through our bodies. We were rescued by fellow MET staff the next morning and the broken-down vehicle (with its seized engine) was pulled to camp."

*Elephants are big, and they know it. Should one charge, which will more often than not be a mock charge, the sound of beating metal is the most effective. Beat on the side of your door as a first means of escape, at the same time observing your surroundings for the best getaway. In other words, always keep one eye on the elephant while looking for escape routes with the other eye. Always have a plan. Keep a good distance from elephant herds, especially those with calves.*

### **Spotted hyaena – the most common nocturnal visitors in camps**

Both the Sikeretti and Khaudum camps have resident hyaena packs that have marked the tourist sites as their own. They will inspect their territories during the night

hours and carry away anything that smells like food, often left behind by tourists with good intentions.

*Do not feed the animals. Pack away all utensils, shoes, grills, pots and pans before calling it a night. Dispose of garbage in provided containers.*

Only two human-related incidents have been recorded involving hyaena in the Khaudum National Park. Both incidents, although separate, played off in much the same way. In both cases tourists enjoyed the outdoors a bit too much and ended up in vulnerable sleeping bags on the ground.

*Be responsible. Always remember that you are in the wild and that the wild in you can get you injured, or killed.*

"As is normal in alcohol-induced stupors, pain comes in a delayed form. And this surely was the case when hyaenas saw the opportunity and started to chew on sleeping, unsuspecting tourists. One tourist lost half of his calf whilst the other got a nasty bite in the face. The following morning the guys were presented with a painful reminder of stupidity."

*Hyaenas are known as 'take away' specialists. They bite, rip and run. Be careful. Always sleep in a properly closed tent or bungalow. This 80-kg predator is extremely successful and will take every opportunity presented.*

[www.met.gov.na](http://www.met.gov.na)



## **Environmental Care Code**

**Please adhere to the following:**

- **Be cautious of elephants and keep well away from breeding herds.**
- **For your own safety, travel in the park with a minimum of two 4x4 vehicles.**
- **Remove all your rubbish from the park.**
- **Light fires only in designated camping areas.**
- **Stay on established roads and tracks.**
- **Keep to the rules and regulations listed on your permit.**

**Enjoy the adventure!**

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