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I Went on a Fully Accessible African Safari

Recently, I had an experience I never thought possible. I went on an African safari. I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2011 and now require a walker to get around. This limitation seemed to put a safari out of reach. Then, I read an article about Ximuwu Lodge. Ximuwu is set in a private South African game reserve. It was built from the ground up to be 100% accessible. I read that there are no steps, and every table and sink is at wheelchair height. The bathrooms are equipped with roll-in showers with strategically placed grab bars throughout. The staff is trained in accommodating the special needs of people with disabilities. All of the lodge's vehicles have special seating designed to make getting in and out seamless. It all seemed to be too good to be true. I did a little more research, and everything I found supported that Ximuwu was 100% accessible. So, I booked my trip. Traveling for those of us with mobility issues can be a challenge, but with a little planning it can be relatively smooth. So, after a 15-hour flight from New Jersey to Johannesburg and a 1-hour local flight, my companion and I arrived at the Hoedspruit airport. We were greeted at the airport by our guide and escorted to the transfer van, which was equipped with a swing-out seat that allowed me to get in without awkward climbing. At Ximuwu, staff greeted us, showed us to our rooms and told us that we could have lunch whenever we were ready. After the first of many 5-star meals, we boarded a vehicle equipped with an easy-access, slide-out seat and set out on our first bush drive. We travelled on rough roads across hilly terrain for about an hour and then there he was, an enormous male lion. It's impossible to put into words the feeling that overcomes you when you find yourself 10 yards from a lion — no cage of any kind, just you and him! We spent about 2 hours following him around. At one point, he crouched down in the grass and roared. Nothing can prepare you for that. I felt my insides quake. It was an amazing start to our adventure. Our days at Ximuwu offered a variety of options. In addition to amazing breakfasts, lunches and dinners, we had the choice of morning and evening bush drives. There was also an on-site spa, or just hanging out and taking a dip in the pool. Except for one morning, each day we chose the morning and evening bush drives. Bush drives were about 4 hours long. One morning within 30 minutes we were alongside 3 giraffes. They were huge! They didn't seem to mind us and munched away on the upper branches of the surrounding trees. We moved on and, before long, 3 elephants appeared. Then, we spotted a fourth. It was a little baby! Like the giraffes, the elephants seemed unworried by our presence. One surprise about the bush drives was the bathroom situation. There were none. As I am mobility challenged, I did not have the opportunity to head behind a bush to relieve myself. Thankfully, I had planned ahead and, after the first drive, I managed my beverage intake to mitigate the situation.



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I Went on a Fully Accessible African Safari part 2

The bush drives took us alongside lions, elephants, giraffes, zebras, black rhinos, white rhinos, impalas, wild dogs, jackals, wildebeests, warthogs, hyenas and leopards. As we were on their turf, it felt like we were in a reverse zoo. We were in the cage, and they were roaming around. It was surreal. Between morning and evening drives, we would return to the lodge for lunch. September is the end of the dry season in South Africa. Most of the natural water holes had dried up, so the lodge maintains one, 20 yards off the front porch. While eating lunch on the porch, we never knew who might show up for a drink. One day we counted 30 elephants having a drink, the next day it was a dozen zebras. What is most remarkable about all of this is that it was effortless. While I had read that the lodge was built to be accessible, I was amazed that it actually was. At no time did my mobility limitations present a challenge. Whether I was using my walker or the wheelchair I used on site, every possible movement had been anticipated. MS mobility issues present plenty of challenges in daily life, but they did not prevent me from having a once-in-a-lifetime African safari

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Note from Ximuwu:

We were especially proud to learn that Kyle has already booked again for 2026 – a true sign that the experience stays with you.

