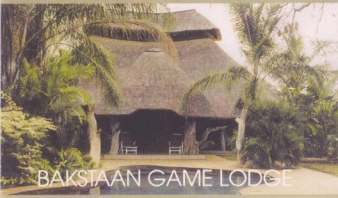


HUNTING DESTINATIONS - OUR ROVING EDITOR REPORTS



BAKSTAAN GAME LODGE

If you have hunted in the bushveld north of the Soutpansberg you will be familiar with the magic of this vast, timeless land. If this is your first visit, prepare yourself for feeling like an explorer in age-old Africa. Ancient baobabs patiently guard the bushy plains, their stubby branches thrusting out from tortuous trunks that may bear the scars of elephants and honey hunters long gone. The presence of these giants indicates that you are now in the tropics, an area that is still the heartland of hunting in South Africa.

The black ribbon of the N1, the country's longest highway, runs north from Louis Trichardt to Messina, beyond which it ends at the Beit Bridge border post to Zimbabwe. Halfway between these two towns the property of Bakstaan Game Lodge butts onto the road and stretches over 2 000 hectares to the east. A short distance from the gate a giant baobab once stood by the roadside. This was the well-known "halfway tree" that provided the weary traveller with shade for a break from his dusty and wearisome journey. A younger tree stands in its place now and a weathered sign proclaims the date of its planting as 8-1-1951.

Despite the traffic that whizzes past now, that tree and the old sign still capture the feeling of the timeless bushveld that awaits the hunter at Bakstaan. Take the dirt road at the turn-off and 1½ km further the lodge with its thatched roofs appears like an oasis in the woodland landscape.

This is really 2 lodges in 1, harmoniously built around a 1 000-year-old gnarled baobab and softened by a lush tropical garden where the call of the lourie echoes. The section for fully catered guests consists of a luxury lapa and 2 large 3-bed roadavels with 2 air-conditioned bedrooms, a sitting room, bathroom and luggage store each. The lapa opens onto the swimming pool on one side and contains

a bar, kitchen and lounge and dining areas.

The self-catered side features another (slightly smaller) lapa with an equipped kitchen that fronts onto a campfire enclosure. The two 3-bed roadavels that provide accommodation here are also air-conditioned and each has a bathroom en suite. The layout of the buildings allows spillover bookings from either facility to be accommodated in the other if it is not occupied at the time.

The property has been dedicated to game for about 12 years and was taken over by a Danish investor 2½ years ago. The new hand at the helm is Paul Coetzee, assisted by his wife Tania. Paul hails from this province and his roots are steeped in hunting. Besides his Master's degree in livestock and meat technology, he also qualified as a PH and completed an advanced PH course. The game at Bakstaan have certainly found a friend in this courteous man through his conservation orientated management approach. The lucky visitor therefore stands a chance of spotting leopard or cheetah here, unlike on some other properties where they are persecuted.

Hunting is strictly by fair-chase walk and stalk, each hunter being accompanied by a uniformed guide with a 2-way radio for keeping in touch with base. The vegetation is typical baobab/mopane bushveld, in most parts not too dense and the style of hunting is not tiring. The terrain is predominantly flat and not physically demanding either. These factors make this address suitable for elderly hunters, amongst others.

Game numbers are adequate and the animals are not unduly skittish. In fact, they are likely to become even less so through Paul's gentle approach. I did not see any truly impressive trophies during my visit, but both the trophy hunter and the biltong hunter are catered for, along with the bowman for whom hides are available.



MESSINA



Lodge manager Paul Coetzee in the main lapa where catered guests take their meals and relax.

LOCATION

400km from Pretoria and about 50km from both Louis Trichardt and Messina. Situated in the baobab conservation area of the Far North.

TARIFFS

Fully catered

Daily fees (in US\$):

One prof. hunter per hunter	\$220
One prof. hunter per two hunters	\$180
Non-hunting guest	\$120

Fees include: hunting or game viewing vehicle, accommodation, swimming pool, fully-equipped kitchen and lapa, guides, skimmers, cleaning staff, firewood, linen and towels.

Catered fees include meals, snacks, soft drinks and laundry service. Coping and meat processing extra.

CONTACT

Tel & Fax: (015) 534-2321

Cell: 082 715 1869

E-mail: bakstaan@impopa.co.za

Website: www.bakstaan.com

HUNTING

Year-round, but most practical in the cooler months of April through to August. Minimum calibres: small game .243, larger game .270.

Trophy hunting (representative adult males, and in the case of gemsbuck and zebra, females too):

All prices quoted in US\$:

Greater Kudu	900
Cape Eland	1,300
Nyala	1,600
Waterbuck	1,400
Gemsbok	850
Impola	220
Warthog	220
Giraffe	1,700
Zebra (Burchell's)	750
Steenbok	300
Duker	250
Blesbok	350
Blue Wildebeest	750

All prices include VAT.



Smiley the guide. Hunters hunt on foot, accompanied by guides who have radio contact with base.



The self-catering lapa with its complete enclosure. A security fence separates it from the bush.

Given Paul's background, it is no surprise that a full meat processing service is offered. Hunters can have their buck processed into various products such as salami, pâté or cananossi at additional cost. Alternatively they may request that their venison be cut into biltong and sausage portions overnight and vacuum-packed while still wet so they can dry it at home. A new, larger facility has just been built to provide a more professional service in this regard.

This solution to dealing with venison should be welcomed by hunters. So too the fact that no minimum booking applies at Bakstaan. One, two or more – all are welcome and there are no conditions regarding the minimum duration of a hunt. Even so, it would be short-sighted to book for too short a period since you will only put yourself and your guide under undue pressure.

I can recommend this place as a comfortable and ethical hunting destination for most. Hardcore hunters may find the lodge and its garden surroundings a little too cushioned, but it is a very suitable destination for families and hunters who see their hunt as a holiday also. The climate is mild in winter and the lodge has a quiet and relaxing atmosphere. Furnishings and amenities are of a good standard and DSTV is available. The hot springs at the Aventura resort of Tshipise are closeby and the Pafuri gate to the Kruger National Park is 120km away, should you wish to include these attractions in your travel plans. The property also has its own landing strip for guests who wish to fly in.

The proximity of the lodge to the busy N1, although not disturbing, may detract from the feeling of being in the heart of nature, but the animals at the waterhole right next to the lodge and the timelessness of the grand old baobabs will soon slow your pace. A relaxing place this, with good hunting too.

Herman Jonker



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