

SERENDIPITY 4X4 & QUAD TRAILS

A HAPPY CHANCE FIND

That's what the Sri Lankan word for Serendipity means and it certainly is just that. It's a little piece of heaven hidden away from the main N1 from Joburg on the Great North Highway just 15km off the Naboomspruit road. It makes the perfect stop-over point on your way to Botswana or Zim or just as a wonderful weekend getaway a short distance from Gauteng.

Owner Johan Klopper is a nature enthusiast and it shows in all he does and how he has situated the many camps around his property. Each camp, whether it's the restored farmhouse Tierkloof set on the side of a valley overlooking a seasonal waterfall, or the striking Serendipity Hikers Camp located on the side of a cliff with stunning views over Nylsvlei, or maybe even Bundu Tree House cunningly situated over a stream deep in the heart of the indigenous bush, you'll enjoy each one. And then there are his restored container homes. Skilfully crafted from disused ships containers, each one has been lovingly restored with wooden window frames and wide double doors to let in the cool breezes. All are equipped with air conditioners and en-suite bathrooms, while the cooking area is set outside under the trees and makes a fascinating alternative to the other wood and corrugated iron structures on his farm.

My favourite however was the villa. Situated a short distance from Johan's home you enjoy total privacy in two bedrooms, one en suite and one with the most atmospheric reed-enclosed bathroom and toilet with views over the kloofs. All set about with candles and fragrant bath products the shower set in natural rock and corner bath encourages you to linger for longer in its attractive setting. The villa comes with linen provided and delicious and healthy meals can be organised by assistant Wilma, although the villa is fully self-catering and comes microwave, fridge and stove if you want to do your own thing. Each night the bushbabies come to visit, bounding around on the roof and creating quite a din. If you are lucky the resident genet may even pay you a visit. Johan has a salt lick in front of his house, which attracts a wide variety of game such as kudu, bushbuck and klipspringer. Animals are tame on the reserve and waterbuck, impala, zebra and wildebeest are commonly seen. The occasional leopard even puts in an appearance if you are lucky, but it is the small animals that make life so interesting at Serendipity. Tree squirrels flit from bough to bough and the birdlife is prolific with over 125 species recorded so far on the reserve and a family of mocking chats will welcome you at the villa.

There are also two campsites on the property, each site with its own hot and cold ablutions, flush toilets, braai facilities, tap and one electrical point and light. The sites are set apart from each other ensuring maximum privacy while some of the trees in the area are labelled for the botanical enthusiasts. While we were there the *Dombeya's* were in full bloom (known locally as the Spring Bride's tree), and their sprays of snowy blossoms enlivened the parched Waterberg landscape. Johan has a strenuous hiking trail on his property taking hikers through a variety of terrains with overnight facilities at Serendipity, Berg and Tierkloof Camps. You must take your own bedding but mattresses are provided according to the number in your party.

There are two 4x4 trails at Serendipity, both well signposted and maintained with escape routes for the not so brave. They are both natural trails with no man made obstacles. The first one takes about an hour and is a demanding obstacle after obstacle route covering rocky terrain, riverbeds and steep ascents and shale-covered descents. Johan allows only 30 vehicles on his property at any one time so the trails never get overcrowded – and strictly no alcohol as it would be very easy to damage your vehicle on some of the rocky axle twisters. ATV quads are encouraged (although not the racing variety) and the rugged obstacles make for an interesting ride with the wind in your hair and mud up to your knees!

The second trail usually takes about three hours and takes in the stunning Waterberg scenery. It is far less taxing although low range and diff-lock are essential for both trails. While angling the vehicle for a scenic

shot with a farm dam in the background, we found we had no traction and had bogged down in the soft mud. After walking a kay or more Johan eventually got cellphone comms and called for Wilma to bring another vehicle with snatch strap to pull us out. After much hilarity we were extricated and followed the trail through several scenically beautiful river crossings, and even one section where you actually drive down the river as part of the track. This must be very challenging in the rainy season! Then the wheels came off again while negotiating a deep section of reed-covered riverbed. We waded it first and it seemed okay but there must have been a hole that no one noticed. The Isuzu strained and the tyres spun sending mud flying in all directions, but to no avail. We were well and truly stuck. After a hasty lunch we returned to the scene of the crime and eventually pulled the vehicle out – all part of a day's fun 4x4ing!

Serendipity is truly a happy chance find and for those who seek it out they will be rewarded by solitude and a true wilderness experience, deep in the heart of the Waterberg.

TRAVEL PLANNER

WHAT IT COSTS

Rates vary from R60,00 per night per person camping, to R120,00 per person per night at the overnight camps. Serendipity Villa is R200 per person per night. Children are half-price and pre-schoolers – R10,00 per night. Day visitors R200,00 per 4x4 and R150,00 per quad. If you are staying overnight the fee is R250,00 per 4x4 and R100,00 per quad per day. Horseriding costs R100,00 per hour. Bring your own bedding, cutlery and towels for all accommodation except Serendipity Villa

WHERE TO BOOK

Serendipity Trails Tel/Fax: (014) 743 1665, Cell)82 553 3266, E-mail: info@serendipitytrails.co.za, Website: www.serendipitytrails.co.za.

GPS WAYPOINTS

Take the N1 north from Johannesburg and take the R101 Mookgophong (Naboomspruit) offramp, After 3kms turn left onto the R101 to Modimolle . After 12 kms you will see the gate on your right, S24° 37.01; E28° 36.07. Reception is at S24° 36.74; E28° 35.31.

LIST OF CAPTIONS

1. Tierkloof Farmhouse
2. Tierkloof Farmhouse
3. Serendipity Camp
4. Serendipity Camp
5. Zebra Farmhouse – one of the cleverly restored containers
6. Bundu Campsite
7. Some of the rocky patches need careful navigation
8. The swimming hole on the three hour 4x4 trail is popular in summer
9. The stunning scenery of the Waterberg
10. Some of the rocky patches need careful navigation
11. Berg Camp is open to hikers
12. The farm dam where we got stuck in the mud
13. Stuck in the mud
14. Stuck in the mud
15. The vehicle was recovered easily using a snatch strap
16. A precarious descent
17. The interior of Serendipity Villa
18. The interior of Serendipity Villa
19. The enticing reed-enclosed outside bathroom at Serendipity Villa
20. A river crossing on the three hour trail
21. A river crossing on the three hour trail
22. There are many river crossings on the three hour trail
23. At one point you even drive down the river as part of the trail
24. There are many river crossings on the three hour trail
25. There are many river crossings on the three hour trail
26. The river crossing where we came unstuck – or rather stuck!

27. The river crossing where we came unstuck – or rather stuck!
28. Recovery of the submerged vehicle
29. Recovery of the submerged vehicle
30. A steep incline on the taxing one hour trail
31. A steep incline on the taxing one hour trail
32. Some of the rocky patches need careful navigation
33. Some of the rocky patches need careful navigation
34. Some of the rocky patches need careful navigation
35. Some of the rocky patches need careful navigation
36. Some of the rocky patches need careful navigation
37. Some of the rocky patches need careful navigation
38. Some of the rocky patches need careful navigation
39. Some of the rocky patches need careful navigation
40. Some of the rocky patches need careful navigation