

# NOKA CAMP BY LEPOGO LODGES, SOUTH AFRICA



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Noka Camp by **Lepogo Lodges** is a unique, completely non-profit luxury safari lodge situated in South Africa's Limpopo Province. Offering guests a tranquil experience in a setting truly embedded within its natural surroundings, Lepogo Lodges also offsets the carbon footprint of every single one of its guests. Victoria Noakes finds out more..

Nestled on top of a 100-ft rock face looking down on the Palala River, Noka Camp – the first of two properties to be launched by Lepogo Lodges – is located in the heart of the malaria-free Lapalala Game Reserve, providing an ideal base from which to discover the 50,000 hectares of African wilderness. Accessible by just a short air transfer or a three-hour drive from Johannesburg, the high-end lodge offers one of the most conveniently reachable safari destinations in Africa, where guests can embark on an adventure to spot as many of the 'big five' (elephants, rhinos, buffalo, lions and leopards) as possible.

Promoting not-for-profit conservation tourism, Lepogo Lodges is the first of its kind to offset the carbon footprint of all its guests for the entire duration of their journey – from leaving their home right up until they return. Family-owned and run, the project was born from a desire to create a sustainable conservation legacy in Africa, and all profits made are reinvested into the reserve to protect and support the local wildlife, community and continued conservation efforts. There is also the opportunity for guests to make an impact and get involved with reserve conservation and community engagement.

With the owners passionate about the conservation of cheetah, pangolin and rhino, having been initially attracted to Lapalala as a leading private rhino sanctuary in Africa, Lepogo Lodges is working to establish the reserve as a centre of excellence for the release of wild captured cheetah in conjunction with The Endangered Wildlife Trust. In addition, the family supports the Lapalala Wilderness School's pangolin re-introduction programme.

Noka Camp is made up of five stilted villas, with one villa specially designed for families. The villas are all joined by the main lodge which houses the dining room, bar, lounge area and impressive outdoor terrace offering spectacular views across the African bush. The camp is completely energy self-sufficient, with all energy generated by a 250m solar walkway.

With the help of award-winning Japanese architect Yuji Yamazaki, Noka Camp has been designed with the highest level of luxury in mind whilst maintaining a deep respect and appreciation for the surrounding environment. To ensure the least possible impact is made on the land, the entire property has been built on small concrete pads. The main lodge and villas capitalise on the beautiful panoramic views from every angle with their glass-fronted design, and each villa features a heated plunge pool, sunken bathtub, underfloor heating, outdoor seating area and 'sky bed' so guests can sleep under the African night sky if they wish.

Sarah Ord Interiors took the helm of the interior design direction for the project, and Sarah's signature penchant for colour and eclectic design is apparent in the camp. With a vision to celebrate the natural colours of the reserve, the light-filled interiors take their inspiration from the sprawling horizon of turning leaves on the terracotta-hued cliffs, where the sky and the land collide. In keeping with the theme of sustainability and immersion within the local surroundings, environmentally conscious and South African products, crafts and textiles have been used wherever possible throughout the property.

The talent of one of the community projects which Lepogo Lodges works with – the Montebello Design Centre in Cape Town, where disadvantaged students can learn valuable crafting skills – is showcased within the lodge. In addition, bespoke soft accessories, toys and clothing for the on-site curio shop and custom amenities including hair oil made from the renowned Baobab and Moringa trees have been created by local communities.

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The lodge offers an exquisite dining experience, with first-class chefs headed up by the Heston Blumenthal-trained Thapelo Letsogo having created a delicious menu. Using local produce and homemade honey, beer and gin created on site, Thapelo's African-Asian fusion cuisine draws inspiration from the Asian cooking styles discovered on the spice route of the African coast. Guests can choose to dine on the main veranda, lookout deck or from their own room.

Lepogo Lodges offers guests an unparalleled South African wilderness experience, and Lapalala Wilderness has ensured that there will never be more than three commercial lodges in the whole reserve, promising a tranquil and private escape. A range of activities are available – from game drives, water safaris and tours of iron-age settlements and bushman cliff paintings to yoga and spa treatments in the treetops. What's more, there is an option for guests to experience a 'luxury bush sleep out', to follow in the footsteps of the forefathers of Lapalala.

Lepogo Lodges will be made up of two lodges, with its second property, Melote House, slated to open next year. The new lodge will prove ideal for multi-generational travel, being an exclusive-use property with the capacity for up to 16 guests.