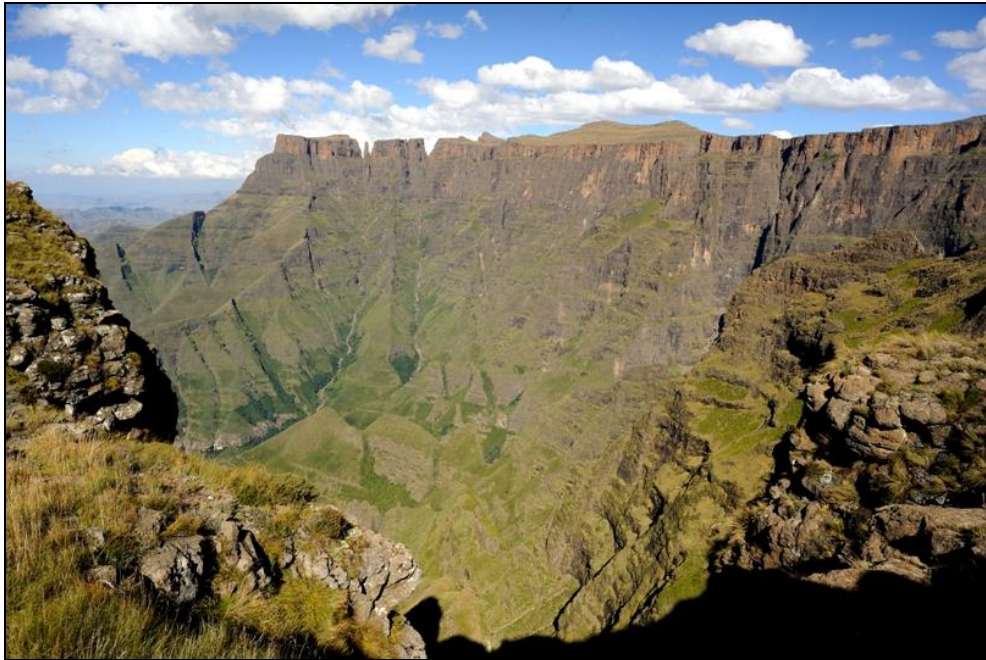


KwaZulu-Natal Explorer I

A self-drive itinerary aimed at Walkers



Amphitheatre Wall from below the Sentinel (photo: Walks in Africa)

Overview

This itinerary is aimed squarely at walkers and takes in some of the major highlights of KwaZulu-Natal, a fascinating and extremely varied province. Sator, the former tourism body in South Africa, used the tag-line “A world in one country” to summarise what South Africa had to offer visitors. We would argue that the same can be said of KwaZulu-Natal - there is tremendous variation in this province, ranging from the 3000m heights of the Drakensberg mountains in the west, through fertile Midlands and the open savannah plains and *bushveld* of Zululand, to a lush, sub-tropical coastline in the east. The key geographical and activity areas can all be linked easily by road, making a self-drive itinerary such as this one a great way to sample the very best of KwaZulu-Natal. There are also some great opportunities for walking, and this itinerary is designed to make the most of what’s on offer.

Flexibility & Budget considerations

Our *KwaZulu-Natal Explorer I* itinerary is aimed at those travelling with a higher end budget and accommodation has been chosen accordingly. The itinerary can also be adapted to suit lower budgets simply by changing the accommodation, but keeping the central walking experiences (Drakensberg, Fugitives’ Trail and Wilderness Trails) the same – see our *KwaZulu Natal Explorer II* itinerary for a lower priced option. This can be found on our website, or ask us to send it to you.

This itinerary is very flexible and can be tailored to fit your particular aims – it is completely tailor-made and although the sequences we’ve outlined fit together logically, you can add experiences in, cut them out, extend to do other things, or turn it on its head completely (note

though that Wilderness Trails in the iMfolozi Reserve start on certain days of the week only). We know KwaZulu-Natal Africa intimately, and can easily adapt the itinerary to suit your interests, budget and time constraints.

Key Experiences and Accommodation

Three Trees at Spion Kop



We don't think it's a good idea to launch straight into a Drakensberg trek immediately after a tiring long-haul flight. We have the perfect solution though – spend 2 nights at a little gem of a lodge located close to the second Boer War battlefield at Spion Kop, located a 1 hour drive from your trekking base. Nestled in shady trees peppered with Aloes, colonial-styled Three Tree Hill Lodge feels like home from home. It has gorgeous views overlooking a game-filled valley in the heart of the Spion Kop Nature Reserve, all the way to the gleaming white battlefield monument at the top of the *Kop* beyond. Enjoy excellent guided walks through the reserve, where you can track rhino, and take the battlefield tour in the company of Simon Blackburn, Three Trees' owner, or one of his co-guides.

Drakensberg Amphitheatre Trek (3 days)



This very accessible guided trek is perfect for those seeking to climb to the top of the Drakensberg without having to camp out in tents, or carry more than a relatively small pack. The central objective of the trek is to summit the top of the Amphitheatre in the Northern Drakensberg, arguably the range's most iconic feature, but the approach and return routes through the lower elevations of the Royal Natal National Park make for beautiful hiking too. You will stay in comfortable chalets at Witsieshoek Mountain Lodge on the middle two nights, with a pre-trek night spent at The Cavern, a friendly, family-run, three-star hotel. This short trek is our biggest seller in the Drakensberg and there are good reasons why.

Zulu War Battlefields & The Fugitives' Trail



You don't need to be a history buff to be completely taken in and moved by the tours of the two major battles on the Zulu War – Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift. The late David Rattray and his wife Nicky were pioneers of Heritage Tourism in South Africa and David's tradition of passionate storytelling is carried on at Fugitives' Drift Lodge by their son Andrew Rattray and his small team of guides. The lodge is a complete one-off, in a beautiful setting overlooking the Buffalo River. The river provides the focal point for the 14km Fugitives' Trail, a scenic and historically important walk which traces the route that the surviving members of the 1st Battalion, 24th Regiment of Foot used to try to escape Isandlwana. This walk will be undertaken on your second day at Fugitives' Drift.

Wilderness Trails in the iMfolozi Reserve



In our view this is one of the best bush walking experiences in South Africa and it is surprisingly good value too. The southern half of the iMfolozi Reserve, part of the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi National Park and home to the “Big 5”, covers approximately 30,000Ha of pristine, rolling wilderness incised by the beautiful White iMfolozi River – there is no man-made infrastructure here whatsoever, not even a vehicle track. Having left your watch and your phone in your car, you start the trail by kicking off your shoes and walking ankle deep across the wide, sandy-bottomed river and spend the next 2 days (or 3, if on an extended trail) discovering the bush and all it contains on foot. Nights are spent in simple dome tents positioned in a shady clearing and in the evening you gather round a fire to reflect on the day’s experiences. The trail is led by two armed rangers, supported by a cook who looks after the camp. A night before the trail is spent in Mpila camp, as luggage for the trail has to be handed in the evening before.

Phinda Private Game Reserve



There are several private game reserves in KwaZulu-Natal, but this is the longest standing as far as reputation goes and is one of the largest. It is also very beautiful, encompassing 7 distinct biomes or habitats. It has fine lodges offering high levels of luxury, and importantly, consistently high standards of guiding and hosting. Although wildlife sightings are never guaranteed you are unlikely to come away from Phinda without having experienced some excellent sightings, not just of big 5 animals. You also have strong chance of sighting predators, something that will have been much less likely at Wilderness Trails (although possible!). Phinda is a notable conservation success and one of the first reserves to return land ownership to local people in a historic land settlement.

Relaxation on the Coast



Thonga Beach Lodge is situated a gorgeous location, in the lush Coastal Forest Reserve that stretches up the comparatively remote Maputaland Coast in north-west KwaZulu-Natal. Thonga exudes a luxury Robinson Crusoe charm and is a place to visit for serious chill-out. Backed by some of the highest coastal dunes in the world, the beach stretches as far as the eye can see to the north, and south to a headland close by, where you can snorkel at low tide. Built from natural wood, local thatch and bamboo, the lodge has been discretely built on the fringe of the forest, which teems with butterflies during the day and trills to the sounds of cicadas at night. Activities include snorkelling, an Open Ocean experience to view spectacular marine life, scuba diving for those qualified, sundowners at Lake Sibaya and bird-watching. Whales are present between May and November, and turtle hatching can be witnessed in the summer.

Outline Itinerary – KwaZulu-Natal Explorer I

- Day 1 (Fri)** Arrive Johannesburg. Drive to Spion Kop (4½ hours). Overnight at Three Tree Hill Lodge (FB)
- Day 2 (Sat)** Spion Kop Tour and guided walk in the Nature Reserve. Overnight at Three Tree Hill Lodge (FB + stated activities)
- Day 3 (Sun)** Drive to the Drakensberg. Overnight at The Cavern Hotel (FB)
- Day 4 (Mon)** Trek to Witsieshoek Mountain Lodge. Overnight in chalets (BL)
- Day 5 (Tue)** Climb to the top of the Amphitheatre and back. Overnight in chalets (BL)
- Day 6 (Wed)** Descend to base through the RNNP. Drive to Zulu War Battlefields. Overnight at Fugitives’ Drift Lodge (FI)
- Day 7 (Thu)** Tours of Isandlwana & Rorke’s Drift. Overnight at Fugitives’ Drift Lodge (FI)
- Day 8 (Fri)** Walk the 14km Fugitives’ Trail. Overnight at Fugitives’ Drift Lodge (FI)
- Day 9 (Sat)** Drive to iMfolozi Reserve (stop *en route* to shop). Overnight Mpila Camp (SC)
- Day 10 (Sun)** Commence a 2-night Imfolozi Wilderness Trail. Overnight in tents (FI)
- Day 11 (Mon)** Enjoy a full day walking in the iMfolozi. Overnight in tents (FI)
- Day 12 (Tue)** Complete trail at midday. Drive to Phinda Reserve. Overnight at Phinda Forest Lodge (FI)
- Day 13 (Wed)** Safari at Phinda. Overnight at Phinda Forest Lodge (FI)
- Day 14 (Thu)** Final morning safari, then drive to the Maputaland coast. Overnight at Thonga Beach Lodge (FB + Included Activities)
- Day 15 (Fri)** Activities and relaxation on the Maputaland Coast. Overnight at Thonga Beach Lodge (FB + Included Activities)
- Day 16 (Sat)** Activities and relaxation on the Maputaland Coast. Overnight at Thonga Beach Lodge (FB + Included Activities)
- Day 17 (Sun)** International departure

END of ITINERARY

Onward travel

Walks in Africa is highly experienced at arranging itineraries across South Africa and the wider Southern Africa Region. We cover Zambia, Botswana, Namibia, Malawi and Zimbabwe.

Johannesburg



The vast majority of our clients fly into and out of Johannesburg and it’s worth considering making a stop-over here. There is more than meets the eye to Johannesburg and there are some interesting and worthwhile things to do. The Saxon Hotel is our top choice in Johannesburg for those on a higher budget. The property covers a whopping 10 acres in one of Johannesburg’s most prestigious residential areas and is a haven of tranquillity, style and absolute discretion. Many important people have stayed here, not to mention Nelson Mandela, who spent 6 months working on his autobiography in what has become the Presidential suite (cavernous!).

Price:

Please refer to our website for up-to-date prices:

<http://www.walksinafrica.co.uk/holidays-in-kwazulu-natal.html>

... or contact us for a tailor-made quote on info@walksinafrica.co.uk

Notes:

1. *The price of some lodges vary seasonally, so a price "from" is quoted. The lowest rates fall between 1st May and 31st July. Rates are still relatively low between 15th April and 1st May, and during August.*
2. *All prices are subject to possible variation in the exchange rate*

Tour Inclusions and Exclusions

Inclusions:

- All accommodation as per the itinerary, on the board basis indicated (B&B – bed and Breakfast; FB – Full Board; SC – Self Catering; FI – fully inclusive of meals and activities)
- Packed lunches on trek
- 3 days professional guiding in the Drakensberg, with accommodation and travel allowance for the guide
- All park entry permits in the Drakensberg
- All transport logistics for the trek

Exclusions:

- All flights
- Car hire
- Dinners at Witsieshoek Mountain Lodge, which are *à la carte*. Please would you be very kind and cover dinners for the guide. Budget for R100 per person per night
- Any meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Gratuities
- Personal travel and medical insurance

Best times for this itinerary

This itinerary can be followed between mid-February and mid-to-late November, when Wilderness Trails are operating. Although it can be undertaken at any time of year, the best time for undertaking the Drakensberg Amphitheatre Slackpackers trek is from early April through to about mid-October.

General Weather Patterns

South Africa's coldest weather occurs between June and September. Although Cape Town and the south coast experience periodic cold fronts, the main inland plateau (the *highveld*) and north western reaches of the country have dry winters - this is the best time of year for game-viewing in the most of the country's game reserves as the lack of water forces wildlife to congregate around water holes, and low vegetation means that it's difficult for animals to hide. The opposite is true of Cape Town and the Garden Route, which have wet winters, and which are usually at their best between November and May. Whale-spotting is best from July to November on the south coast of the Western Cape. For general touring, South Africa is a good destination all year round, with local emphasis changing according to the season.