

KwaZulu-Natal Explorer II

A self-drive itinerary aimed at Walkers



On top of the Amphitheatre

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. Satour, 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 II* itinerary is aimed at those travelling with a low-to-mid-range budget and accommodation has been chosen accordingly. The itinerary can also be adapted to suit higher budgets simply by changing the accommodation, but keeping the central walking experiences (Drakensberg, Fugitives’ Trail and Wilderness Trails) the same – see our *Kwa-Zulu Natal Explorer I* itinerary for a more upmarket, higher-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 intimately, and can easily tailor the itinerary to suit your interests, budget and time constraints.

Key Experiences and Accommodation

Melrose Place Guest Lodge, Johannesburg



We don't think it's a good idea to launch straight into a trek immediately after a tiring long-haul flight, and spending a day and a night in Johannesburg's leafy northern suburbs is a good way to unwind before making the 340km drive to the base of the Northern Drakensberg. Melrose Place is a friendly, well-run establishment, which has evolved from being a small bed and breakfast into a more extensive guest lodge with 30 rooms and a pool, set in pleasant gardens. The guest house feels very comfortable and homely and you'll receive a warm welcome from Sue Truter, the proprietor, and her team of staff - there's good reason why many locals who make frequent visits to Johannesburg keep going back.

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 the hikers hut at Witsieshoek Mountain Lodge on the middle two nights (or comfortable chalets if you feel like upgrading), 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 beautiful 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. For the purposes of keeping costs down, you'll stay at KwaGeorge, a simple cottage on the property, yet take meals at the lodge and join in all the activities offered here.

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 the fire to reflect on each day’s experiences. The trail is led by two armed rangers, supported by a camp cook. A night before the trail is spent in Mpila camp, as luggage for the trail has to be handed in the evening before.

Safari at Leopard Mountain Lodge in the Zululand Rhino Reserve



Leopard Mountain is a great place to round off this tour of KwaZulu-Natal - in a little bit of comfort! We’ve suggested it not only because of its spectacular situation on a hilltop - it commands wonderful views over the Zululand Rhino Reserve - but because you can also do guided bush walks here in lovely terrain. Although the lodge is rated four stars, it offers very good value indeed compared to lodges in better-known, more established reserves (you can tone the price down further by opting for Rhino River Lodge, which also offers walks). However, this up and coming 23,000 hectare private game reserve is rich in game and wildlife and you are likely to see a lot here. It’s located in the very heart of Zululand, 30kms north of the Hluhluwe National Game Reserve.

Outline Itinerary overleaf.....

Itinerary B – for a low budget

- Day 1 (Sun)** Overnight in Johannesburg at Melrose Place Guest Lodge (B&B)
Day 2 (Mon) Drive to the Drakensberg. Overnight at The Cavern Hotel (FB)
Day 3 (Tue) Trek to Witsieshoek Mountain Lodge. Overnight in the Hikers Hut (B&B)
Day 4 (Wed) Climb to the top of the Amphitheatre and back. Overnight in the Hikers Hut (B&B)
Day 5 (Thu) Descend to base through the RNNP. Overnight at The Cavern Hotel (FB)
Day 6 (Fri) Drive to Zulu War Battlefields. Overnight in KwaGeorge Cottage at Fugitives' Drift (FI)
Day 7 (Sat) Tours of Isandlwana & Rorke's Drift. Overnight in KwaGeorge Cottage at Fugitives' Drift (FI)
Day 8 (Sun) Walk the 14km Fugitives' Trail. Overnight in KwaGeorge Cottage at Fugitives' Drift (FI)
Day 9 (Mon) Drive to iMfolozi Reserve (stop *en route* to shop). Overnight Mpila Camp (SC)
Day 10 (Tue) Commence a 3-night Imfolozi Wilderness Trail. Overnight in tents (FI)
Day 11 (Wed) Enjoy a full day walking in the iMfolozi. Overnight in tents (FI)
Day 12 (Thu) Enjoy a second full day walking in the iMfolozi. Overnight in tents (FI)
Day 13 (Fri) Complete trail at midday. Drive to Zululand Rhino Reserve. Overnight at Leopard Mountain Lodge (FI)
Day 14 (Sat) Safari in the Zululand Rhino Reserve. Overnight at Leopard Mountain Lodge (FI)
Day 15 (Sun) International departure

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.

SUGGESTED EXTENSION - Relaxation on the Coast



Kosi Forest Lodge is a pleasant, mid-range camp, which has access to some interesting terrain at the northern extremity of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park, just short of the Mozambique border. The camp is tucked into indigenous forest on the edge of the Kosi Lakes system – it's unpretentious, informal, easy going and rustic - a place to get away from things and listen to the calls of nature. It takes a bit of getting to so you ideally need to come for 3 nights.

The larger lakes can be explored by motor boat, and certain channels can be explored by canoe. The beautiful Raffia Palm Forest offers scope for pleasant but limited walks and birdlife can be good. A full day excursion through the Coastal Dune Forest Reserve to one of the remote beach locations is a must.

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.