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Tour Notes

Southern Africa Explorer - Mountains to Coast

Tour Duration – 15 Days

A journey through South Africa, Lesotho, Mozambique and Eswatini



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●○○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●○○ | Culture ●●●●○ | History ●●●○○ | Wildlife ●●●●●

Tour Pace

Moderate

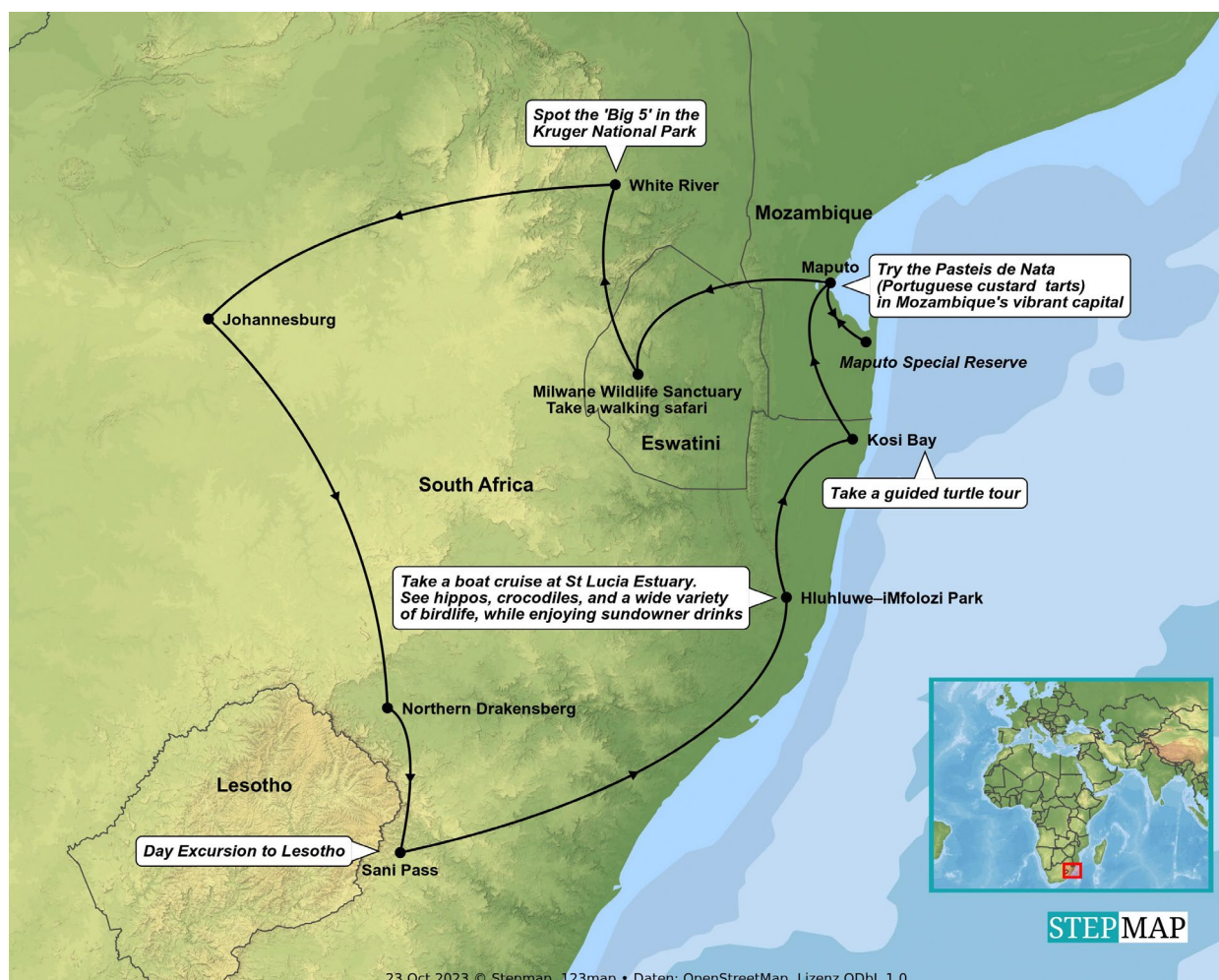
Tour Highlights

- ✓ Explore the majestic peaks of South Africa's Drakensberg mountain range surrounding whilst staying at the comfortable Cavern Resort & Spa
- ✓ Travel into tiny Lesotho via the iconic Sani Pass
- ✓ Enjoy a safari adventure in Hluhluwe–iMfolozi Park, renowned for the chance to spot the 'big 5'
- ✓ Take a scenic boat cruise along the St Lucia Estuary, teeming with hippos and crocodiles
- ✓ Discover Maputo, Mozambique's bustling capital whilst sampling Portuguese-influenced cuisine and exploring historic landmarks
- ✓ Enjoy an experience in Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary, offering walking safaris amidst diverse wildlife and opportunities to engage with local village life
- ✓ Visit the renowned Kruger National Park known for its outstanding biodiversity and world-class game viewing



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Tour Map



Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Mid-range comfortable hotels, lodges, and camps – all with ensuite bathrooms
- Included Meals:** Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary
- Group Size:** Maximum group size is 12
- Start Point:** OR Tambo, Johannesburg International Airport
- End Point:** OR Tambo, Johannesburg International Airport
- Transport:** Minibus or similar depending on group size and safari vehicles
- Country Visited:** South Africa, Lesotho, Mozambique, Eswatini



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Southern Africa Explorer – Mountains to Coast

Embark on an adventure beginning in Johannesburg, from where we will be transported to the Northern Drakensberg. Nestled amidst the peaks of the Drakensberg mountain range, The Cavern Resort & Spa offers a cozy retreat with a rich history of hospitality and community support. Explore the rugged beauty of the Drakensberg with expert-led hikes or indulge in leisurely activities like tennis and horse riding. Or take an optional, breathtaking hot air balloon ride over the scenic landscape. Venture southward to the Midlands Meander, stopping at charming shops and marvelling at Howick Falls. Pay homage to Nelson Mandela at the Capture Site before retiring to our accommodation in Underberg/Himeville. Experience the thrill of crossing from South Africa into Lesotho via the iconic, nearly 3,000m high, Sani Pass and immerse ourselves in the vibrant culture of a traditional Basotho village.

We continue our journey with a safari adventure in Hluhluwe–iMfolozi Park, where we can expect to spot the 'Big 5' (lion, leopard, rhino, elephant, and buffalo). Unwind at Forest Lodge in St Lucia, before indulging in optional snorkeling at Cape Vidal and a scenic boat cruise along the St Lucia Estuary. Journey to Kosi Bay, near the Mozambican border, for relaxation and a chance to witness the remarkable phenomenon of turtle nesting. Alternatively, indulge in snorkeling, birding, or hiking. Cross into Mozambique and soak in the vibrant atmosphere of Maputo, sampling its culinary delights and exploring its historic landmarks. A day trip to the Maputo Special Reserve offers encounters with diverse wildlife amidst pristine natural surroundings. Delve into the cultural tapestry of Maputo or explore the historic neighbourhood of Mafalala before crossing into Eswatini. Nestled in the Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary, immerse yourself in nature and local village life, and take a walking safari.

We return to South Africa from where we stay at a comfortable lodge in the Mpumalanga Lowveld region, our base from which to visit the Kruger National Park, renowned for its rich biodiversity and iconic 'Big 5'. We also journey along the Panorama Route, marvelling at the awe-inspiring sights of Blyde River Canyon and Graskop Gorge before we head back to Johannesburg, cherishing the memories of an unforgettable Southern African odyssey.

Tour Itinerary Notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be necessary to change the guide at one or more points during the tour.



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Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive in Johannesburg and transfer to Northern Drakensberg (driving time approximately 4 hours)

Meet your tour guide and driver at Johannesburg OR Tambo Airport from where our group will be transferred to the Northern Drakensberg, the first stop on our Southern African adventure. Our lodge is surrounded by some impressive peaks of the Drakensberg mountain range all around, which are lush and verdant in the summer rainy season and can be covered in snow in winter. Birdwatching from one of the many communal outdoor areas yields rich rewards, the most commonly spotted species being bush blackcap, fairyfly catcher, Drakensberg prinia, Gurney's sugarbird and half-collared kingfish. Enjoy the meals, activities and warm rural hospitality provided by the Cavern - a family-run hotel that has been an institution in the local area for over 75 years. The Cavern also supports many local charities and community projects, including the local school, and most employees hail from the neighbouring village just across the mountain. Overnight The Cavern Resort & Spa or similar. (D)

Day 2: Northern Drakensberg

Enjoy breakfast at the lodge, followed by the most popular activity in the Drakensberg - hiking. Our expert hiking guide will take us on the hike of the day or, alternatively, there are many other hikes of varying lengths and difficulties available that can be done with the group's tour guide or self-guided.

If you are not much of a hiker, there are many facilities at the lodge that you can enjoy amidst the dramatic natural surroundings including tennis, lawn bowls and a large swimming pool. Fishing and horse riding can also be arranged (not included and payable locally). And for anyone who is keen, we highly recommend a hot air balloon ride this morning, over the farmlands and mountains - a truly incredible experience that is done at sunrise (weather-dependent and payable locally). Overnight The Cavern Resort & Spa or similar. (BLD)

Day 3: Southern Drakensberg (driving time approximately 4 hours)

After breakfast we leave the lodge and head to the southern part of the Drakensberg. The route we will be taking today is part of what is known as the 'Midlands Meander', known for its small, independent shops. We will stop at a few places, including the Piggly Wiggly - a collection of shops and cafes representing many small, local producers of food, crafts, and clothes. We will also stop at Howick Falls to marvel at the impressive 95m-high waterfall and hear the legend of the Howick Falls Monster. We will also pay a visit to the Nelson Mandela Capture Site to walk in the footsteps of Nelson Mandela. It is now a sculpture and visitor centre commemorating the spot where Nelson Mandela was arrested in 1952 for his anti-apartheid activism. We continue to our comfortable accommodation in Underberg / Himeville, in the Southern Drakensberg, and our home for the next two nights. Overnight Himeville Arms Hotel or similar. (B)

Day 4: Excursion to Lesotho via the Sani Pass

Today, we will cross the border from South Africa into Lesotho, the second country of our four country tour. The journey into Lesotho is through the Sani Pass, a famously thrilling drive that can only be completed by 4x4 vehicles, with dramatic mountain scenery and an altitude of 2,876m. After border post formalities, we will experience a drink and lunch at the highest pub in Africa and a visit to a traditional Basotho village. We will have plenty of opportunities to interact with the friendly, local Basotho people, are often dressed in their iconic blanket and conical straw hat outfits. The Basotho pony is an integral part of life for the local population; and we will likely see many of them trekking through the mountains.





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At the end of the day, we will head back down the steep Sani Pass to our accommodation across the border in the Southern Drakensberg. Overnight Himeville Arms Hotel or similar. (BL)

Day 5: Southern Drakensberg to Hluhluwe–iMfolozi Park (driving time approximately 6 hours)

Today we depart early for our journey north-east. We will likely stop at Ballito on the east coast of South Africa for lunch, before heading to Hluhluwe–iMfolozi Park for a guided afternoon game drive by safari vehicle. We will try and spot all of the 'Big 5' animals in their natural habitat plus many more - including buck, crocodiles, hyena, monkeys, and a wide variety of birds. Later we will continue to our accommodation in St Lucia for the night. Overnight Forest Lodge or similar. (B)

Day 6: Hluhluwe–iMfolozi Park

After breakfast, we will go out for an optional snorkelling trip to Cape Vidal - a beach with a long, sandy coastline, warm water, rock pools and reefs, and usually clear and calm waters that is ideal for easy, safe snorkelling. Spot many diverse kinds of fish and maybe even whales and dolphins too. Then in the evening, we will take a boat cruise along the St Lucia Estuary, a hotspot for hippos, crocodiles, and a wide variety of birdlife, while enjoying sundowner drinks. Overnight Forest Lodge or similar. (B)

Day 7: Hluhluwe–iMfolozi Park to Kosi Bay (driving time approximately 4 hours)

After breakfast, we will head the 3hrs or so up the coast to our next destination close to the Mozambican border - Kosi Bay. Relax and enjoy the natural surroundings by the lodge's pool, take a nap, or head the short distance to Kosi Mouth and beach. Later, at around 4.30pm (subject to availability), we will head out on a turtle viewing tour at Bangha Nek Beach. These tours are usually on offer between November and March, and we might have the chance to either see turtles coming out of the sea to lay their eggs on the beach or turtle babies hatching on the beach. An incredible event to witness, this tour usually only ends around midnight. In the event that the turtle viewing is not available, this can be substituted with snorkelling, birding, hiking, cruising the lakes, fishing, or a canoe safari. Overnight Utshwayelo Kosi Mouth Camp or similar. (B)

Day 8: Kosi Bay to Maputo, Mozambique (driving time approximately 2 to 3 hours)

There may be some time to enjoy an optional morning activity like hiking, fishing, a canoe safari, etc. for any early risers (not included and payable locally) before we head to the Kosi Bay border and continue to our third country so far - Mozambique. Once the border crossing formalities are finished, we might be able to stop at the beautiful beach of Ponto de Ouro (road quality and time-permitting), before heading into the city of Maputo for the evening. Our guide may provide a brief orientation tour of Maputo, time-permitting, and take us to a local restaurant for dinner (not included and payable locally). Maputo is a vibrant city, and the Portuguese colonial influences can be seen in some of its popular foods and architecture. Overnight City Lodge Hotel Maputo or similar. (B)

Day 9: Maputo Special Reserve

Today, we will travel by 4x4 vehicle, with a specialist guide for a day trip to the Maputo National Park (which includes the Maputo Special Reserve), located on Maputo Bay and originally created as a safe haven for a group of coastal elephants. The reserve combines lakes, wetlands, swamp forests, grasslands, and mangrove forests with a coastline. According to the latest data, the number of elephants in the reserve is about 400, plus it is well known for its whale-spotting from the coast. There are also plenty of other animals including some more interesting and unusual ones like genets, bushpigs, civets and rare birds. Enjoy a picnic lunch by a lake or lagoon in the reserve and see how many different animals we can spot. After a full day in this wild, protected nature reserve, we will head back to Maputo for the night. Overnight City Lodge Hotel Maputo or similar. (BL)



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Day 10: Maputo to Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary, Eswatini (driving time approximately 4 hours)

This morning, we enjoy a guided city tour of Maputo, which can also be tailored to focus more on food or art and culture, according to the preferences of the group. Or experience a guided walking tour that specifically focuses on the Maputo's downtown area, Baixa de Maputo, which was the epicentre of colonial Maputo, where we can enjoy some traditional Portuguese delicacies including Pastel de Natas. Alternatively, there is also the option to explore another historic neighbourhood inside the city, Mafalala, on foot. Learn more about Mozambique's history and get acquainted with the delicious food and community life, the Mafalala literature, marrabenta (local rhythm), traditional dancing and sports. This tour is run by a local NGO, and they focus on creating economic opportunities for the community's women and youth. After this, we will depart Maputo and make our way towards the border, into Eswatini (formally known as Swaziland) and onwards to Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary where we will be staying for two nights. Our accommodation is in comfortable, but traditional Eswatini beehive huts with en-suite bathrooms. Overnight Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary Rest Camp or similar. (B)

Day 11: Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary

After breakfast there will be a 2.5hr walking safari inside the Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary. Mlilwane is ideal for walking safaris, as it does not have any really dangerous animals but does allow for many opportunities to get up close for animal sightings. Other activities that we can participate in, or in addition to the walking safari, include mountain bike hire for self-guided or guided cycles, horse riding, and a guided walk through the neighbouring village of Esitjeni to see how local people live on a day-to-day basis, including many agricultural activities that you can assist with, e.g. grinding maize, carrying water, washing clothes in the stream, etc. Overnight Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary Rest Camp or similar. (B)

Day 12: Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary to White River, South Africa (driving time approximately 3 to 4 hours)

Today we will head out and, subject to opening times and availability, stop at a few local craft businesses and producers. At Swazi Candles, we can see how the candles are made and at the Ngwenga Glass Factory we can get a fascinating glimpse into glass blowing techniques. The Mantenga Craft Market offers a selection of arts and crafts products made by local artisans available for purchase. We will then head back into South Africa and towards White River close to the Kruger National Park, where we will stay for the next three nights. Overnight Muluwa Lodge or similar. (BD)

Day 13: Kruger National Park

Today, we head to the Kruger National Park, one of the world's biggest conservation areas that is larger than some countries, such as Wales. One of the most famous areas for wild animal viewing, and known for the 'Big 5', there truly is nothing like the wilderness and expansiveness of the Kruger. We meet our guide and safari vehicle at the gate and enjoy a full, thrilling day of animal spotting. Overnight Muluwa Lodge or similar. (BD)

Day 14: Blyde River Canyon and Graskop Gorge

After breakfast we leave for a day trip to view the spectacular sights of the Panorama Route. This includes some opportunities for walks, including at the Blyde River Canyon and Graskop Gorge. Entry fees for the main sights are included, but some may be optional extras available on the day (time-permitting). At the end of the day, we head back to Muluwa Lodge for dinner and our final overnight stay. Overnight Muluwa Lodge or similar. (BD)

Day 15: White River to Johannesburg (driving time approximately 4 hours)

Today, we will depart White River and head back to Johannesburg OR Tambo Airport for our onward departure. (B)



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Tour Inclusions/Exclusions

Inclusions:

All accommodation as per the itinerary
Services of English-speaking guide / tour leader
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)
Travel by private minibus or safari vehicle
All excursions and wildlife viewing safaris and activities as stated in the itinerary
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary

Excluded:

International flights
Airport taxes
Travel Insurance
Drinks
Meals not included in the itinerary
Optional excursions and activities
Visa, if required
Tips – at own discretion

Important Information

Foreign Travel Advice Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). In particular, we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At present there are no warnings against travel to the places that we visit on this tour. Please feel free to contact us should you have any specific concerns or would like to know in detail what measures are being taken to ensure visits remain trouble free and without incident.

It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.

Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore, please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.



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It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at various times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis, please contact us.

Accommodation Rating

On this tour you can expect to stay in excellent quality, comfortable, mid-range comfortable accommodation with private en-suite bathrooms. In general, you will find your hotel has a restaurant and/or bar and in some cases an outdoor swimming pool.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

Food & Drink

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). Please note that lunches may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements, you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs, and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide.

Lunch / Dinner - £7 to £15

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general, you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Bottle of beer £1.50 / Glass of wine £1.50 / Water £1

Tipping – Guide and Drivers

If you feel as if you have received excellent service from our local team, then a tip would be gratefully received but is not mandatory.



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Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: ATMs are available in most towns and cities.

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: Credit and debit cards are widely accepted.

Local Currency: South African Rand, Lesotho Loti (South African Rand also widely accepted), Eswatini Swazi Lilangeni (South African Rand also widely accepted), Mozambican metical.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: South African Rand

Where to Exchange: We would recommend travelling with South African Rand as it is widely accepted. However, if required, your guide will help you changing money.

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive an airport transfer, both on arrival and departure include in the tour price ONLY if arriving and departing on the scheduled tour dates. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time, and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour. If you are not arriving and departing on the scheduled tour dates, then transfers will be at an additional cost.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

Visa Information

At the time of writing British, US and Australian nationals do not require a visa for a short-term tourist visit to South Africa, Lesotho or Eswatini. A visa is required for Mozambique, although this requirement may change, Please contact the authorities (see below) for further details.

As it is the travellers' responsibility to ensure that they meet all entry requirements it is essential that you check the rules and any other conditions at the time of booking and again when making your balance payment. In addition, we would strongly advise that you make a final check around two weeks before your arrival. This is important as requirements can change at short notice. Undiscovered Destinations, when possible, will provide guidance about entry rules, but in the first instance please contact the relevant authorities, including the applicable embassy or consulate for assistance. Contact details can be found by visiting the following websites.

British Nationals - www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

US Nationals - <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html>

Australian Nationals - www.smartraveller.gov.au/



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Other nationals should check the latest requirements with the authorities in their home country, or with the destination's nearest embassy or consulate.

Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to your country.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition, certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively, UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Vaccinations & Protection

There are no compulsory vaccinations required for travel to the destinations covered on this tour. However, it is important that you contact your doctor's surgery or a travel clinic for the most up to date information and advice. Yellow fever vaccination is required for travellers arriving from countries with risk of yellow fever transmission. Please carefully check your vaccination requirements with a health professional at least 2 months prior to departure if possible.

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you are travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, please refer to [Health Travel Pro website](#).

Preparing for your tour

Climate

South Africa, Lesotho, Eswatini, and Mozambique each have diverse climates. South Africa and Lesotho exhibits a range from Mediterranean in the west to subtropical in the east, with varying temperatures and rainfall patterns. Eswatini generally experiences a subtropical climate with hot summers and mild winters, while Mozambique has a tropical climate with distinct wet and dry seasons, including the risk of cyclones along the coast during the wet season.

Although the weather can be variable, we have scheduled this tour to operate in the summer months, when you can expect temperatures of around 22°C to 33°C. Although you can also expect some rainfall and even thundery showers, this is a good time of year to spot wildlife and in particular birds.

Clothing

Casual clothing is recommended and acceptable throughout the places visited on this tour. Natural coloured clothing, such as green and beige, not only keeps you cool but also will not startle wildlife. In the evenings, the temperature may well drop, so a fleece or some similar clothing maybe necessary. It is advisable to bring a lightweight waterproof for the occasional shower.



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Equipment

The first thing on your list should be a first aid kit. Whilst there is no undue cause for alarm, travellers are best advised to travel well-prepared: adequately immunized, with sufficient supplies of prescription drugs, along with a medical kit. Suncream/sunblock is a must. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have. A sun hat and binoculars will come in useful. A torch (flashlight) or head torch is essential as many places are dimly lit at night.

Footwear

Comfortable walking shoes/boots are recommended during the tour a pair of sandals or open shoes/trainers for general travelling.

Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large suitcase/rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Electric current is supplied at 220 volts AC 50Hz and 15 amp, three round-pin wall sockets are used – same as South Africa plug adapters.

Photography

If you wish to photograph a homestead or an individual, please seek permission first. Please be subtle and aware when taking photos. The photographing of the Royal Family, uninformed police, army personnel vehicles or aircraft is prohibited in Eswatini.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour, but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These notes were updated 12 April 2024.