

Zululand, Mountains and Lesotho (self drive)



This is a journey of discovery through areas that were fiercely fought over and today are incredibly relevant in understanding the complexities of modern South Africa and the people who make up this nation.

Travel through areas of exceptional beauty including the Drakensberg mountains, Golden Gate National Park, and a rare opportunity to drive deep into the mountains of the independent kingdom of Lesotho with its Lord of the Rings scenery. This is a self drive trip - there is an option for a guided version and for a private transfer version..

Tailor Made Trips

The itinerary below is a sample: we specialise in tailoring itineraries to individual needs: this trip can be made longer, shorter, take a different route, be extended (eg to include the Victoria Falls or Mauritius) ... call us for your own tailor made version on 01342 834700.

Day 1:

Depart London on your overnight flight to Johannesburg

Day 2:

Arrive into Johannesburg where you will be met and assisted with the collection of your pre programmed GPS guide, with all properties, restaurants and sights during your stay already loaded.

Set off for Fugitive's Drift, a 3.5 hour journey to the heart of Zululand. It is an area where the escarpment meets thornveld savanna giving gentle mountain scenery and wide open plains: your lodge, Fugitive's Drift overlooks the great Buffalo River and nature reserve lands rich in acacias and aloes. This afternoon relax and meet your genial hosts and fellow travellers around the camp fire.

Day 3:

Set off this morning for the Isandhlwana battlesite, where the mighty British army suffered one of its rare defeats of colonial times to the proud Zulu army, under the brooding Isandhlwana mountain. Your specialist guide will enrapture you with the tale of this encounter, made all the more emotional by the stark white cairns along the field where soldiers in their dozens fell.

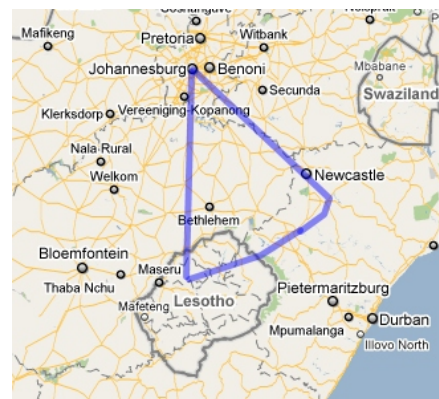
The evocative background to the battle, related en route to the site, sets the picture not only for the areas that you will visit after Fugitive's Drift, but is essential in understanding South Africa today as the political climate is a direct consequence of the events in this and other battles in these wide open fields, and will give you a very deep understanding of cultural differences evident to this day.

Return to the lodge for lunch. You may choose to join an afternoon tour to the Siege of Rorke's Drift, where the aftermath of Isandhlwana played out, or join a walk on the game reserve on which the property is found. Dinner is served at the lodge.

Day 4:

Set off from the lodge this morning and take a less travelled route via Evukheni to your next lodge. The road is well tarred and passes through rural villages, many unchanged since the last century - you will see evidence of traditional dress and perhaps even a sangoma or local healer on your drive. As you pass through Ladysmith, the dramatic panorama of the Drakensberg opens up before you and you arrive at Three Tree Hill, ideally located overlooking the Spioenkop Nature Reserve and mountain to one side and the Drakensberg to the other.

Lunch is served on arrival, before you join your guide for a guided tour to the Battle of Spioenkop, where the British army met the guerrilla war tactics of the Boers in the last century. In a war which gave rise to Afrikaner nationalism and eventually the Apartheid state, it is a defining moment in the shaping of what is South Africa today and its people. Dinner is served at the lodge.



Day 5:

Highly recommended today is a drive from Three Tree Hill to the Drakensberg mountains and in particular the scenic Champagne Valley. With panoramic views stretching 180 degrees, it brings the power of the Drakensberg to life.

The route is home to many authentic artists, and you will be able to stop and pick up good examples of Nguni cow hides, art, textiles and also stop at the world renowned Ardmore studios, a community project which has grown to supply unique one off ceramics to institutions such as Buckingham Palace, the White House and the New York Museum. If possible, plan to be here on a Wednesday or a Saturday, which is when the world renowned Drakensberg Boys Choir along the route is open to the public and stirring performances are held at the school.

Return to Three Tree Hill for overnight.

Day 6:

Set off this morning to make the most of today's memorable drive. You climb the Drakensberg mountains via Oliivershoek Pass, leaving behind Kwa Zulu Natal and entering the Free State, with Sterkfontein dam spread before you (make a stop here at the vulture hide, where rare and endangered vultures feed on cattle brought by farmers).

Follow the road through Golden Gate National Park great sandstone cliffs line your route and sweeping plains

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Alternate with deeply forested gulleys. It is a unique and very distinctive landscape. Arrive at the little town of Clarens in time for lunch. This village has become home for many artists and is charmingly built in sandstone rock around the village green: many of the restaurants here serve typical Afrikaans farm food and organic lamb and beef.

Continue to the nearby border with Lesotho, Africa's most mountainous kingdom and home to the shy, soft spoken Basotho people with their traditional hats, thick blankets and sturdy mountain horses. The kingdom was founded by the revered King Moshoeshoe in 1822, who took refuge in the mountains to escape the marauding Zulu army. Never colonised, it was rather a British Protectorate, to prevent insurgency from the Boers.

The road passes through a busy border town and quickly becomes a gravel road, flanked by dramatic scenery. With scenes straight out of a fantasy world, towering mountains frame wide, clean rivers and open grassed flood plains, with sandstone huts and blanket clad villagers along the slopes. Thirty kilometres further, in the heart of the Tsehlanyane National Park and at the end of the road, lies Maliba Lodge, surrounded by some of the highest peaks in Africa.

Dinner this evening is served in the lodge, often with impromptu Basotho dancing and story telling.

Meal basis: Breakfast and Dinner.

Day 7:

Awake to the splendour of the Maluti Mountains. Join your guide this morning either on a guided walk along the river to the cascades, or saddle up on the strong Basotho horses and head into the valley, where the scenery grows ever more impressive. Return to the lodge for lunch.

This afternoon, join one of the local guides and walk into the nearby village where he will take great pride in introducing you to friends and family and giving you insight into the very simple life that the Basotho people lead made even more challenging in winter when the area is an ice and snow wonderland. Dinner is served at the lodge.

Meal basis: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 8:

A final breakfast before you head out of Lesotho and join the road through the maize and wheat fields of the Free State, before arriving at Johannesburg 4 hours later.

Day 9:

Arrive back in London

Extension Option – Cape Town

If you have more time to spare, why not consider extending your stay with some time in Cape Town – perhaps including a few days in the Winelands or even driving along the stunning Garden Route.

Or consider a safari in one of South Africa's famous National Parks, some time on the beach in Mozambique or Mauritius, or a visit to the magnificent Victoria Falls. Call us on 01342 834700 or email us at info@nativeescapes.com for more information.

General Information

Visas

Visas are NOT required by UK citizens for South Africa. (Note that all nationalities travelling to South Africa must have 2 consecutive blank pages in their passport which lie side by side when the passport is open. Passports must also be valid for at least six months from the date of entry to South Africa. Passengers travelling to South Africa with passports that do not comply with these requirements could be refused entry.

Note: Passport and visa requirements are liable to change at short notice.

Travellers are advised to check their entry requirements with their embassy or consulate.

Health

The World Health Organisation (www.who.int/en/) recommends that all travellers are inoculated against diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and polio as well as for hepatitis B.

Hepatitis A, malaria and typhoid are also recommended by the Centres for Disease Control & Prevention (www.cdc.gov) for travel in South Africa. All travellers should seek advice from their local GP or travel clinic for up to date advice on vaccinations and different malarial options.

Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory for all bookings. Guests on group departures must take their policy documents with them on the trip as the guide will ask to see this at the start. The documentation must state in writing that you are the named policyholder and that the cover is valid for the period of travel. The policy document must also indicate that medical expenses and emergency repatriation cover is included and a 24 hour contact telephone number for the insurance company must be shown on the documentation in case of emergency. Guests unable to provide all this information at the start of the trip will be asked to purchase a policy prior to joining the trip.

Electricity supply

220v, 3pin South African plug. Adaptors are required to charge cameras, etc.

Money

Currency is the South African Rand. There will be ATM's en route for guests to withdraw money.

What to bring

Binoculars, torch, walking shoes, swimming gear, plenty of high factor suncream, sunhat, insect repellent, camera, a day pack. Warm clothing is recommended for evenings, and a waterproof jacket. Lightweight clothing is recommended for the day. Avoid brightly coloured clothing for game viewing.

Tipping

It is normal to tip for good service in bars and restaurants in South Africa. Guests may also consider tipping their guide at their discretion.