Tour Code
SA1

ADVENTURESABROAD

SOUTH AFRICA

with Eswatini (Swaziland)

14 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Johannesburg

Arrive in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Johannesburg is South Africa's financial centre and largest city. This "Place of Gold", as the Sotho word for Gauteng Province suggests, harbours the gold fields of South Africa. No one could have imagined the repercussions when an unemployed miner found a stone bearing traces of gold in 1886. This seemingly insignificant event led to the discovery of the world's richest natural treasure trove. People flocked to the area from all ends of the earth and the open pastoral landscape changed almost overnight. Today in the "New South Africa," Johannesburg continues as the country's -- indeed the entire region's -- economic powerhouse and is evolving into a very vibrant cultural melting pot.

Overnight in Johannesburg (Sandton).

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Johannesburg & Soweto

This morning we have a tour of the city of Soweto.

Soweto unto itself is actually one of the largest cities in Africa with an estimated population of two million. It also has one of the most dubious histories of any city in Africa, as it was the site of some of the more infamous events during the struggle against apartheid. The name "Soweto" simply stands for South Western Township, due to its location outside Johannesburg. It was here that thousands of black workers were forced to live in order to provide labour for the gold mines.

We will see the good, the bad, and the ugly of Soweto -- from affluent neighbourhoods to shanty towns, one of the world's largest hospital, Baragwanath; and the former homes of Soweto's Nobel Laureates, Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela. We also visit the Hector Pietersen memorial where we will learn of the 1976 Soweto Uprising.

A compelling highlight of our day is our visit to the extraordinarily powerful Apartheid Museum, an obligatory stop for visitors and residents alike. The large blown-up photographs, metal cages and numerous monitors with continuous replays of apartheid scenes will make you feel that you were in the townships in the 70s and 80s, dodging police bullets or teargas canisters, or marching with thousands of school children.

We'll also be able to have a panoramic view of central Johannesburg before circling back around to Sandton and our hotel.

Overnight in Johannesburg (Sandton).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Johannesburg - the 'Panoramic Route' - Hazyview

From Jo'burg we head off through the vast wilderness of Mpumalanga (formerly the Eastern Transvaal), the "Land of the Rising Mist". Along the way we travel from the vast grasslands of the High Veld, with its huge farms and ranches, down to the drier Low Veld region characterized by rocky hills and acacia scrub forest. This is an expansive landscape of mountains, valleys, rivers, waterfalls, primal forests, and colourful flora. Steeped in a history of pioneers and fortune-seekers, we will pass many Gold Rush towns and farming communities en route. Lydenburg ("town of suffering") established by Voortrekkers in 1849 lies at the bottom of Long Tom pass. This pass, named after the big gun used by the Afrikaners during the Anglo Boer War, is one of the most scenically dramatic in the country. It links Sabie on the escarpment with Lydenburg on the Drakensberg plateau.

A highlight of our sightseeing today is the spectacular Blyde River Canyon. This great escarpment is the kind of place where brochures and guide books run out of original adjectives to describe the fresh mountain scenery and magnificent panoramic views. The Blyde River Canyon is one of the most spectacular in Africa and its cliffs rise between 600-800 m (2,000-2,640 feet) from the river bed. At the "Three Rondavels

viewpoint" is an unforgettable view of three huge rock spirals rising out of the far wall of the canyon. Their tops appear to have a hut-like rounded roof.

We also stop at the nearby Bourke's Luck Potholes, the result of decades of swirling eddies of water where the Treur River meets the Blyde River. The tumult has caused extensive water erosion over time; the result is a series of cylindrical rock sculptures that look as though they would be more comfortable on the moon.

From here we continue to Hazyview near Kruger National Park.

Overnight in Hazyview.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Kruger National Park

Early this morning we enter South Africa's largest game reserve, Kruger National Park, named after Paul Kruger, the first to initiate the setting aside of this area as a reserve in the 1890s. Here we transfer to open safari vehicles and make a full-day excursion through the southern sector of this fascinating and beautiful park.

The Kruger Park is an enormous area of flat veld, broken by rivers and comprised of mixed vegetation and terrain. The park, officially founded in 1926, supports more species of wildlife than any other African reserve -- over 137 mammal species, 49 fish species, 112 reptile species, and nearly 500 bird species! With some luck we may see and photograph lion, leopard, cheetah, elephant, zebra and many other wonderful African animals.

We return to Hazyview in the late afternoon.

Overnight in Hazyview.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Hazyview, South Africa - Mbabane, Eswatini (Swaziland)

We travel south today and enter the Kingdom of Eswatini (formerly Swaziland), an independent country completely landlocked by South Africa and Mozambique, and smaller than Kruger Park! Naturally fortified by beautiful mountains, Eswatini remains one of the last kingdoms in Africa, a continent once dominated by colonialism. The pace of life here is relaxed and the lifestyle traditional; we will see rural people working their farms and tending their herds as we make our way to the vicinity of Mbabane, the capital city.

Before arriving at our hotel, we'll visit Ngwenya Glass, a glassblowing institution that got its start as a Swedish aid initiative in the 1980's. All of the glass art is made from 100% recycled glass and they support a number of conservation programmes locally.

Overnight in/near Mbabane.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Mbabane, Eswatini - Mkuze Game Reserve, South Africa

This morning we depart our hotel and travel south, descending onto the Swazi Lowveld (lowlands), similar in climate and vegetation of the lowveld region we experienced in South Africa and Kruger Park in previous days. Before leaving the kingdom, we'll visit Swazi Candles, a candle making manufacturer both of both traditional parafin wax as well as 100% organic soya candle tea lights. The colourful, handmade product range also features wax encased LED lights, pure vegetable glycerine soaps, and marula oil bodybalm. Guests are invited to interact with the artisans as they work their magic.

We'll then travel through sugar cane plantations and the bustling commercial centre of Manzini, before crossing the border back into South Africa and the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Our destination is Mkuze Game Reserve, which boast an exceptional variety of natural habitats: from the Eastern slopes of the Lebombo Mountains along its eastern boundary, to broad stretches of acacia savannah, swamps and a variety of woodlands and riverine forest. A rare type of sand forest also occurs in the reserve. It is renowned among ornithologists, with more than 420 different bird species on record. The Mkuze River curves along the game reserve's northern and eastern borders with a stretch of fig forest along its banks. Fish eagles swoop over the pans, snatching prey spotted from their perches in the fever trees.

Mkuze is overlooked by Ghost Mountain, previously a historic battle field. This mountain is said to be the tombs of the previous chiefs of the mountain and, according to legend, it has been the scene of a number of bloody fights. With its dramatic silhouette, in the shape of an old woman or witch head, it is not difficult to understand why the mountain is said to be haunted and to be the theatre of paranormal activities.

Overnight at Mkuze.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Mkuze - Hluluwle-iMfolozi Game Reserve - Fly to Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth)

This morning we leave Mkuze and head to Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park, the oldest proclaimed nature reserve in Africa. The park is known for its rich wildlife and conservation efforts; this is the only state-run park in KwaZulu-Natal where all of the "big five" wild animals can be found (elephant, rhino, lion, buffalo and leopard).

We continue by road to Durban, the 'Garden City' of South Africa. This area was opened up to white settlement by the Voortrekkers in the early 19th century, though the Portuguese were navigating the coast here as early as the late 15th century. Vasco da Gama was the first European to sail along this coast, giving it the name Natal to commemorate his Christmas Day arrival. In 1899 the British and the Boers went to war, but under reconciliation in 1910 formed the Union of South Africa with an agreement signed in what is now Durban's modern-day Main Post Office.

Flight time permitting, we may be able to drive through Durban for a quick look before heading to the airport for our flight to Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth)** South Africa's fifth largest city and the third largest port.

* Occasionally, due to ever-changing flight schedules, we may spend this night in Durban and take the early flight to Gqeberha tomorrow morning.

** In 2019, the Eastern Cape Geographical Names Committee recommended that Port Elizabeth be renamed Gqeberha, after the Xhosa and Southern Khoe name for the Baakens River that flows through the city. The pronunciation can be a bit tricky, as the "Q" represents a "click" sound with the tongue, then 'be' (like bare), and finally 'gha' (similar to the 'G' in Afrikaans + a short 'ah'). If it's easier, the town is also colloquially referred to as "PE."

Overnight in Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Gqeberha - 'The Garden Route' - Knysna OR George

This morning we travel along the world-famous 'Garden Route' toward Knysna. This route is parallel to the ocean and features lakes, mountains, beaches, and steep cliffs. This part of the garden route reminds one of the Oregon Coast (USA) with its sand dunes and great surf beaches. We'll make a lunch stop at Storm's River Mouth in the Tsitsikamma National Park, located on the shores of the Indian Ocean. You will have time to walk a short section of the famed Otter Trail, widely regarded as one of the finest in the world, stretching 41 km (25 mi - 5 days) from Storms River Mouth to Nature's Valley.

We continue to Knysna, a charming coastal town with tremendous water and mountain views and a laid-back lifestyle. The town was founded in 1817 by George Rex, reputed to be an illegitimate son of King George III. Known for its picturesque lagoon, the town was first established as a timber port. Today, Knysna is proud of its riviera atmosphere with many sidewalk cafes and shops.

Depending on limited accommodation availability in Knysna, we may overnight here in Knysna or continue a little further down the road to the town of George.

Overnight in Knysna or George.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Knysna OR George - Mossel Bay - Oudtshoorn

This morning we travel down the coast to Mossel Bay. Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias arrived here on February 3, 1488, thus proving to his sponsors that Africa had a southern tip; making it theoretically possible to sail from Europe to India. Our destination is the Dias Museum Complex, which marks the spot of the historical landing of Bartolomeu Dias. The 500 year old Post Office Tree, a national monument, can still be seen at the site, now harbouring a post box shaped as a shoe.

We then head inland and over the Outeniqua Mountains to the Little Karoo (Klein Karoo), a semi-arid yet fertile valley or depression surrounded by formidable mountain ranges. This is the ostrich capital of South Africa with thousands of these unusual birds dotting fields throughout the area. At the turn of the century ostrich feathers were in such demand that the fashion conscious paid a premium and feathered the nests of the barons who built magnificent mansions known as "Feather Palaces." This fine architecture can still be seen around the sedate and pleasant town of Oudtshoorn (pronounced 'Oats-horn'), our final destination.

Today we'll tour one of the ostrich "show farms" in the area before continuing to Oudtshoorn where we finish our day.

Overnight in Oudtshoorn.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Oudtshoorn - Swellendam - Cape Town

From Oudtshoorn we travel through the Huis River Pass with its spectacular rock formations and the little farming town of Ladismith, named after the Spanish wife of British Cape Governor Sir Harry Smith. We cross our second mountain range of the day to arrive in the town of Swellendam, the third oldest colonial town in South Africa, established in 1745. The town has several buildings built in the charming Cape Dutch style, with characteristic whitewashed walls and black thatched roofs.

We then pass through a vast wheat growing and sheep farming area on our way to Cape Town.* In the late afternoon we cross the Hottentots Holland Mountains (our third range for the day), the centre of South Africa's apple growing region, to arrive in Cape Town, one of the world's most isolated and beautiful cities.

At some point during our time in Cape Town (weather dependent and may move elsewhere in our program), we will take a gondola trip to the top of Table Mountain, a sandstone plateau rising up above the city. The top is approximately 3km wide and at its highest point, Maclear's Beacon, rises to 1085m/3,580 ft. Over the centuries it has become one of South Africa's most famous landmarks. The steep cliffs and rocky outcrops of the mountain play home to a number of animals and approximately 1,470 species of plants -- more than the entire British Isles!

Overnight in Cape Town.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Cape Town: Robben Island & City Tour

This morning we travel by boat to Robben Island for a guided tour of this historic site, formerly an infamous prison and today a museum. Our entire excursion will last about 3.5 hours and include a visit to the maximum security section where Apartheid era freedom fighters, including Nelson Mandela, were incarcerated. Robben Island provides a poignant reminder of how far South Africa has come since the dark days of apartheid and is a must-see for anyone heading to the Cape.

We'll also have a 'panoramic' look at the city centre of Cape Town, where we will see Parliament, City Hall, and the colourful Bo-Kaap area.

Overnight in Cape Town.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 The Cape Winelands

This morning we travel the short distance to Stellenbosch, South Africa's second oldest colonial settlement. After a little spin around the town, we'll park in the centre of town and allow some time for some independent, on-foot exploration. You will notice some of the finest examples of traditional Cape Dutch architecture along the town's famous oak-lined streets.

We continue to one of the area's many wineries for a cellar tour and tasting. The Cape vineyards were originated at Constantia by Jan van Riebeeck in 1685 and were advanced in 1688 by Hugenot refugees who brought their vine seedlings and skills with them from France. The Cape's different soils and climatic variations allow a wide variety of wines to be pressed. Along our route today we will see several wine estates with their delightful Cape Dutch houses, thatched roofs and decorative gables.

Today we include lunch at one of the area's wine estates. After lunch we'll continue our scenic drive through the area before heading back to Cape Town for dinner on your own. If weather permits, we'll attempt to head up Table Mountain upon return to the City Bowl.

Overnight in Cape Town.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 13 Cape Town: the Cape Peninsula

Today we have the quintessential full-day tour of the Cape Town area: The Cape Peninsula.

Our tour takes us south along the Atlantic Seaboard where we have spectacular views of some of Cape Town's most affluent neighbourhoods and spectacular mountain and coastal scenery. We have a brief photo stop just before Camp's Bay, a pretty surf-side suburban community featuring the classic view of the town with the 'Twelve Apostles' peaks as a backdrop.

We continue south along a seaside-hugging route, through the town of Hout Bay and the famous Chapman's Peak Drive, one of the most spectacular marine drives anywhere in the world. The 9km route, with its 114 curves, skirts the rocky coastline of Chapman's Peak, the 593m high southerly extension of Constantia Berg.

Our next stop is the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve and Cape Point. The reserve is a wildflower, bird, and animal paradise on 77 sq km (30 sq miles) of the Cape Peninsula. The reserve is also home to eland, springbok, bontebok, baboon, and zebra. Within the reserve are Cape Point and the Cape of Good Hope, the most southwesterly point on the African continent.

After a break for lunch and free time at Cape Point, we head north again, stopping briefly at the Cape of Good Hope, before continuing back up the Indian Ocean side of the peninsula, passing through Simonstown, founded by the Dutch in 1741 as a naval depot and named for Simon van der Stel, governor of Cape Colony from 1679 to 1697. Today Simonstown is famous for its distinctly English architecture and atmosphere, and the southernmost train station on the continent. Depending on the season, we may stop at Boulders Beach to view a colony of South African penguins.

We complete our loop around the peninsula, past the well-watered eastern slopes of Table Mountain, Constantia, Bishop's Court and the campuses of the University of Cape Town. Here we pay a visit to the National Botanical Gardens of Kirstenbosch, with over 4,000 species of indigenous plants (2,600 are endemic to the Cape Peninsula). The garden's history dates back to the 1660s, when the first Dutch settlers arrived in the Cape. Governor Jan van Riebeeck planted a barrier of Wild Almonds to protect settlers' cattle from the original inhabitants of the area -- and part of this hedge is still in the garden!

Overnight in Cape Town.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Departure

Departure from Cape Town.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast