Tour Code
SA9

ADVENTURESABROAD

SOUTHERN AFRICA

with Botswana Safari Extension

21 days

Created on: 29 Mar, 2024

Day 1 Arrive in Maun - Okavango Delta

Arrive in Maun, Botswana (likely via Johannesburg).* Upon arrival, we will connect with our charter flight to the Okavango Delta and our comfortable lodge in the wilderness.

The Delta is an area of tranquil, lily covered lagoons and narrow channels hemmed in by papyrus reeds, and teeming with animal and bird life. Sometimes called a 'swamp', the Okavango is anything but. Moving, mysterious, placid, gentle and beautiful, from a wide and winding channel it spreads through tiny, almost unnoticeable channels that split into an ever expanding network of increasingly smaller passages. These link a succession of lagoons, islands and islets of various sizes, open grasslands and flooded plains in a mosaic of land and water. Palms and towering trees abound, throwing their shade over crystal pools, forest glades and grassy knolls.

* NOTE: Most convenient connections are via Johannesburg. If your arrival in JNB is later in the day, you may have to arrive a day early and overnight in Jo'burg.

Overnight in the Okavango Delta.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Okavango Delta

We have a full day exploring the waterways of the Okavango Delta. Depending on water levels, we may do our sightseeing either by mokoro canoes or by 4WD vehicles, or a little of both.

The Okavango Delta is unique. It is the largest inland delta in the world; instead of flowing into the sea, the annual flood of fresh water flows inland, spreading over 15 000 sq km of the Kalahari sand in a maze of lagoons and channels. The Okavango Delta is a lush wonderland surrounded by the arid Kalahari Desert and home to many species of antelope, such as Lechwe and Tsessebe. Herds of buffalo, zebra and elephant that number in their thousands pass through annually on their migration routes.

Overnight in the Okavango.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 3 Okavango Delta

We have another full day exploration of the wonders of the delta.

In the lush indigenous forests of the delta and its islands, and along the floodplains spawned by this great marriage of water and sand, more than 400 species of birds flourish. On the mainland and among the islands in the delta, lion, elephant, hyena, wild dog, buffalo, hippo and crocodile congregate with a teeming variety of antelope and other smaller animals -- warthog, mongoose, spotted genets, monkeys, bush babies and tree squirrels.

Fishing, bird watching, game viewing, photography or simple relaxation; indulging in any of these in the Okavango are experiences without parallel.

Overnight in the Okavango.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 4 Okavango Delta - Chobe National Park

This morning we fly to Kasane. On arrival we continue by road the short distance to Chobe National Park.

The original inhabitants of what is now the park were the San people. They were hunter-gatherers who lived by moving from one area to another in search of water, wild fruits and wild animals. In 1967, the area was declared a national park, the first in Botswana.

A major feature of Chobe National Park is its elephant population, which is probably the largest in the world. This population covers most of northern Botswana plus north-western Zimbabwe and is currently estimated at around 100,000 individuals. This elephant population has been built up steadily from a few thousand since the early 1900s, having escaped the massive poaching that decimated other populations elsewhere on the continent during the 1970s and 1980s.

The Chobe elephants are migratory, making seasonal movements of up to 200 kilometres from the Chobe and Linyanti rivers where they concentrate in the dry season, to the pans in the south-east of the park, to which they disperse in the rains.

Overnight at Chobe National Park.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 5 Chobe National Park

The Chobe National Park covers 10,566 sq km and has one of the greatest concentrations of game found on the African continent. This park has an amazing variety of habitats, ranging from floodplains, baobab, and mopane trees and acacia woodlands, to verdant flood grasslands and thickets bordering the Chobe River.

Our safari starts with a cruise on the Chobe River (shade and refreshments available), which takes us close to the waterfowl and wildlife on the river. Large flocks of birds, big pods of hippo and very large crocodiles can be viewed from the safety of your boat.

After lunch we board open (covered) safari vehicles and head off into the park to view some of the elephants, buffalo herds, sable, wildebeest, giraffe, and with luck, some resident lion and hyena.

Overnight in Chobe National Park.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 6 Kasane, Botswana - Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

Today we transfer to Victoria Falls from Kasane, the confluence of the Chobe and Zambezi Rivers and roughly the place where the countries of Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, and Namibia meet, the only place in Africa where four countries do so.

This area has been inhabited for hundreds of thousands of years. The first known name of the falls was "Shongwe," and the current name did not come into being until the Scottish missionary David Livingstone was brought to the falls in 1855 and named them after Queen Victoria. The falls and the nearby town are on the mighty Zambezi River, the fourth longest in Africa, and forming the border with neighbouring Zambia.

NOTE: We don't include dinner tonight as there are a number of choices in the area and past passengers have indicated a preference for some independence in the evening meal plan at Vic Falls.

Overnight in Victoria Falls.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast

Day 7 Victoria Falls Area

Today we have a guided walking tour of Victoria Falls and adjacent national park.

Mosi-oa-Tunya ("The Smoke That Thunders") is one of the most amazing sights in the world: twice as high as Niagara Falls and several times longer. It took thousands of years of erosion for Victoria Falls to appear as and where it does now. During the Jurassic Period (150-200 million years ago), volcanic activity resulted in thick basalt deposits covering large parts of Southern Africa. As the lava cooled and solidified, cracks appeared in the hard basalt crust, which were filled with clay and lime. Erosion and the course of the mighty Zambezi River cut through these softer materials, forming the first of a series of waterfalls.

Our tour is conducted on level paved paths, much of which is shaded by the dense rainforest that exists due to spray from the falls. To walk to the farthest extent, with viewpoints along the way, is about one kilometre, the last part of which is without shade. We encourage you to go right to the dn, as the views are fantastic, including the best look at the famous Victoria Falls Bridge, the brainchild of Cecil Rhodes, part of his grand and unfulfilled Cape to Cairo railway scheme, even though he never visited the falls and died before construction of the bridge began.

The afternoon is yours to enjoy optional activities. You may relax by the pool, do some shopping in the village famous for local artisan crafts, or even go elephant back riding or sightseeing by micro-light aircraft or helicopter. Your guide can help plan your afternoon.

Overnight in Victoria Falls.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe - Fly to Johannesburg, South Africa

Today we fly from Victoria Falls to Johannesburg (flight times are variable).

Overnight in Johannesburg (Sandton).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 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 10 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 11 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 12 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 13 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 14 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 15 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 16 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 17 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 18 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 19 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 20 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 21 Departure

Departure from Cape Town.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast