

KENYA, TANZANIA & SOUTHERN AFRICA

Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Victoria Falls, Botswana & Eswatini

33 days

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Day 1 Arrive in Nairobi

Today we arrive in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya.

Part of Maasai land when the British arrived, this modern capital grew with the development of the railway. Derived from a Maasai word meaning "Cold Water," Nairobi is a pleasant mix of colonial British with modern and traditional African influences.

Overnight in Nairobi.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Nairobi - Ol Pejeta Conservancy

Today we travel from Nairobi, through the "White Highlands," so called because of the large number of Europeans who settled here, northwards to the lower slopes of Mt Kenya, rising to 5199 m (16,728 feet), Africa's second highest peak. Our drive will take us into the Central Highlands, the heartland of the Kikuyu people. This is a very fertile region, well-watered, intensively cultivated, and thickly forested. The land was coveted by the Europeans who began arriving in ever-increasing numbers once the railway through the area was completed. The settlers established coffee and tea plantations on the eastern slopes of Mt Kenya and cultivated wheat on the western slopes.

Our destination is Sweetwaters, a luxury tented camp clustered around a water hole and set in the pristine calm of the private Ol Pejeta Conservancy, a non-profit organization supporting endangered species, tourism and community outreach. Ol Pejeta is East Africa's largest Black Rhino sanctuary, the only place in Kenya to see chimpanzees, and holds some of the highest predator densities in Kenya.

This afternoon we'll enjoy our first game drive within the conservancy.

Overnight at Sweetwaters Camp.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 3 Ol Pejeta Conservancy

Ol Pejeta is a mosaic of grass plains, wooded grassland, acacia woodland and evergreen thicket extending for over 350 square kilometers. The conservancy boasts an astounding variety of animals, including the "Big Five."

We will have morning and afternoon game drives today, as well as a chance to visit the Sweetwaters Chimpanzee Sanctuary -- the only place in Kenya where this highly endangered and remarkably intelligent species can be seen. The facility was initially established to receive and provide lifelong refuge to orphaned and abused chimpanzees from West and Central Africa. Here the chimpanzees are carefully nursed back to health so they can enjoy the rest of their days in the safety of a vast natural enclosure.

Overnight at Sweetwaters Camp.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 4 Ol Pejeta - Great Rift Valley - Lake Nakuru National Park

This morning we travel to Lake Nakuru, a shallow soda lake in the Rift Valley. The Rift Valley was created millions of years ago under the strain of enormous volcanic eruptions which resulted in a giant split in the earth's surface from Syria to Mozambique. Lava flowed into the valley, forming escarpments on either side of the gigantic trough which can be up to 80 km (50 miles) wide, big enough to be visible from

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space. At the lake, depending on the water levels, we may have the opportunity to see flamingos,* in addition to the over 340 species of birds that have been recorded in the Rift Valley!

Lake Nakuru is very shallow and can fluctuate up to five metres (12 feet) each day. When the water is low, you can see a white band of crystallized soda along the shoreline. This is also one of the best places in Kenya to view the rare White Rhino as we explore the park on our afternoon game drive.

* This, and other Rift Valley lakes, have been known in the past for huge numbers of flamingos; however, this can be very "hit and miss" owing to seasonal variations in rainfall and water level, and the increasing frequency of drought. The best we can do is hope for the best!

Overnight in Lake Nakuru National Park.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 5 Lake Nakuru - Maasai Mara National Reserve

Early this morning we depart from Lake Nakuru National Park and continue our journey through the Rift Valley, passing by Lake Naivasha and nearby Mount Longonot, a relatively young volcanic reminder of the Rift's violent past. We arrive at our lodge (via bad road) in the Maasai Mara National Reserve in time for lunch.

The Maasai Mara is a natural extension of the Serengeti eco-system and has an amazing concentration of wildlife. The largest population of lions in Kenya is found here, along with large herds of plains game. The Maasai Mara may also be the best place in Kenya to view cheetah. Later this afternoon we enjoy another game drive.

Time-permitting, we may be able to visit a Maasai village to witness the local way of life and meet its residents. If time does not permit, we will attempt this visit the village on our way back to Nairobi.

Overnight in the Maasai Mara.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 6 Maasai Mara National Reserve

The Maasai Mara National Reserve consists of rolling grassland and is located at the northern end of the Serengeti Plain. Considered the best of Kenya's parks, it is on the pathway of the yearly wildebeest migration, which comes north from Tanzania about the end of June and returns to Tanzania around the end of September. "The Mara" sustains all of the "Big Five" -- lion, elephant, leopard, rhinoceros and buffalo -- as well as an astonishing wealth of herding animals and other wildlife. You can see the stately Maasai men and youth along the road tending their cattle and goats.

We have a full day in the reserve, with morning and afternoon game drives.

In the Mara you will also have an optional opportunity to ascend over the northern Serengeti at daybreak in a hot air balloon (optional expense). From over 300 m (984 feet) above, you will be able to view the vast land and the myriad animals that inhabit the Maasai Mara. Today or tomorrow are the best days to participate in this activity - details sent upon booking.

Overnight in the Maasai Mara National Reserve.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 7 Maasai Mara National Reserve

We enjoy another full day with game viewing in Maasai Mara. Depending on the season and current game locations and viewing conditions, we may divide our day into morning and afternoon drives, or take our lunches with us in order to venture further into the reserve if conditions warrant.

Overnight in the Maasai Mara National Reserve.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 8 Maasai Mara - Nairobi

After breakfast we depart for Nairobi. En route, just outside the capital, we visit the Karen Blixen Museum. Baroness Karen Blixen-Finecke emigrated from Denmark to Kenya in 1918 and, in 1937, wrote under the pseudonym, Isaac Dineson, "Out of Africa." The novel tells the tale of the Baroness's experiences on a Kenyan farm. Her home is now a museum, restored to the style in which she maintained it.

Overnight in Nairobi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Nairobi - Amboseli National Park

Today we travel south from Nairobi to the Amboseli National Park.

Just across the border from Tanzania, this park is situated on the African plain at the foot of snow-capped Mount Kilimanjaro, the continent's tallest mountain at 5894 m (19,300 feet). Here the cone-shaped mountain seems to hover majestically over the shimmering African plains.

The Amboseli National Park is also famous for its large herds of elephants. Here they cover themselves in red dust, giving them an even more imposing appearance. On this afternoon's game drive we hope to view animals grazing on the open plain with Mt Kilimanjaro providing the classic backdrop (weather-permitting).

Overnight in the Amboseli National Park.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 10 Amboseli, Kenya - Lake Manyara National Park, Tanzania

This morning we cross the border into Tanzania at Namanga and travel to Lake Manyara National Park via the town of Arusha, the starting point for the northern safari routes of Tanzania.

Manyara is the smallest of the northern parks in Tanzania (330 sq km, of which two thirds is the actual lake) hosting a wide variety of vegetation, ranging from savannah to ground water forest to riparian habitats. The park is host to thousands of pelicans, ibis and flamingo that can be heard from afar. Other common visitors to this beautiful lake are hippos and the majestic African fish eagle, which can be seen swooping down from its perch to snatch a fish from the still waters of the lake.

After lunch at our lodge we will have an afternoon game drive in the park, located at the base of the Great Rift Valley escarpment and comprising of forest, woodland, grasslands, and swamps. Wildlife interest at Lake Manyara is not confined to bird life only; animals such as buffalo, elephant, giraffe, impala, hippo and a great variety of smaller animals also inhabit the park.

Overnight at Lake Manyara.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 Lake Manyara - Serengeti National Park

This morning we enter the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, a beautiful rolling landscape with periodic views over the Ngorongoro Crater.

Before descending onto the Serengeti Plain, we'll stop at a viewpoint overlooking the crater. The name "Serengeti" derives from a Maasai word meaning "Land-without-end." This is a land of superlatives, both in the vast landscape that surrounds you and the incredible biodiversity it supports. It is here that you have a chance to witness one of the most compelling natural dramas on earth -- the annual migration, a sight unparalleled anywhere in the natural world. Our afternoon game drive provides an excellent introduction to this fantastic landscape and the biodiversity it supports.

Overnight in the Serengeti National Park.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 12 Serengeti National Park

Today we have a full day of game viewing on the Serengeti. We will visit the "kopjes," a series of low, incongruous hills dotting the open landscape that often provide a vantage point for hungry predators contemplating the endless stream of hooved animals parading past them. Depending on the season and the timing of the rains, up to 1.5 million wildebeest and a half a million zebra embark on a single-minded and perilous quest for water and grazing land. Following this spectacle, of course, are the meat-eating opportunists, hoping to capitalize on the physical toll this journey exacts on the desperate grazers. Even outside of "migration" time, large herds are still seen as they bear their young and feed, gaining strength for their annual return to the park's northern reaches. Resident species that do not migrate make for rewarding animal viewing in any season.

It may be possible to take an optional hot-air balloon safari over the plains at daybreak; today is the best day to participate in this activity -- details will be sent upon booking.

Overnight in the Serengeti National Park.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 13 Serengeti - Olduvai Gorge - Ngorongoro Conservation Area

Travelling back to Ngorongoro today we make a stop at Olduvai Gorge, site of the Leakey excavations in the 1960s and 70s that established this region as the prehistoric habitat of some of the earliest species of hominids with some finds dating back 1.8 million years. Experts in the life sciences have argued that the Olduvai contribution to the story of human origins remains unsurpassed by any other prehistoric site in the world. A small museum on site outlines the unique geological and human history of the area.

Called the 'eighth wonder of the world' and stretching across some 8300 sq km, the Ngorongoro Conservation Area boasts a blend of landscapes, wildlife, people and archaeology that is unsurpassed in Africa. The volcanoes, grasslands, waterfalls and mountain forests are home to an abundance of animals and to the Maasai. Ngorongoro Crater is one of the world's greatest natural spectacles and its magical setting and abundant wildlife never fail to enthral visitors.

Overnight in the vicinity of Ngorongoro Conservation Area.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 14 Ngorongoro Conservation Area

Today we enjoy a half-day tour in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area.* After an early breakfast we descend into the crater far below for a game drive in this incredible setting, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We explore the Ngorongoro Crater, 20 km (13 miles) wide and 700 m (2,300 feet) high where we may see the "Big Five" as well as many herbivores like wildebeest, gazelle, zebra and hippopotamus, as well as thousands of flamingos on Lake Magadi.

* In order to reduce congestion and stress on wildlife, the Tanzanian government limits visitors to half-day visits of the crater. Depending on what time "window" we are assigned, our excursion may take place first thing in the morning, or later in the afternoon (both of which are equally advantageous for game viewing, given the relatively mild climate at this altitude).

Overnight in the vicinity of Ngorongoro Conservation Area.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 15 Ngorongoro - Gibb's Farm - Arusha

This morning we descend the Ngorongoro Highlands, retracing our steps back to Arusha via a lunch stop at Gibb's Farm. Founded during German colonial times and still privately owned, Gibb's Farm is now a small hotel perched on the outer slopes of the Ngorongoro Highlands, surrounded by coffee plantations with long views over lush and beautiful agricultural country.

We pass again through the town of Mto Wa Mbu ('Mosquito Creek'), famous for its lively cosmopolitan atmosphere and red bananas, which taste the same as regular bananas but their skins are a startling bright red.

We arrive back in Arusha later this afternoon.

Overnight in Arusha.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 16 Arusha, Tanzania - Johannesburg, South Africa

Today we fly from Arusha to Johannesburg, South Africa.

NOTE: Depending on flight schedules, we may have to travel to Nairobi and fly to Jo'burg from there. Final arrangements will be advised closer to departure.

Overnight in Johannesburg.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Johannesburg, South Africa - Fly to Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

Today we fly from South Africa to Zimbabwe where we will spend three nights next to one of the world's most spectacular natural sights, Victoria Falls.

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

After settling into our hotel, we'll travel by road a short distance to the Zambezi River on which we will enjoy a scenic sunset cruise above the falls. The river here is wide and slow moving; be on the lookout for hippos, elephants, antelope, giraffe and myriad bird species for which the region is famous. After our cruise we will enjoy a lively demonstration of traditional African dancing and drumming before our evening meal.

NOTE: Due to logistical reasons, the order of Victoria Falls area sightseeing activities may vary at the discretion of your Tour Leader.

Overnight at Victoria Falls.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Victoria Falls: Falls Tour & Leisure Time

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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, travel to the Zambian side of the falls or even go sightseeing by micro-light aircraft or helicopter. Your Tour Leader can help plan your afternoon.

Overnight in Victoria Falls.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 19 Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe: Day Trip to Chobe Park, Botswana

Today we make an early morning excursion into Botswana to visit Chobe National Park, located only 1.5 hours by road from Vic Falls. We complete Customs and Immigration formalities and continue with a fifteen-minute drive to the lodge that we will be using as a base for today's activities.

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

Our lunch (included today) is served back at the lodge overlooking the river.

After lunch we board open (covered) safari vehicles and head off into the park to view some of the 70,000 local elephants, buffalo herds, sable, wildebeest, giraffe, and with luck, some resident lion and hyena. We travel back to Zimbabwe, arriving at about 18:00.

Overnight in Victoria Falls (dinner on your own this evening).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 20 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 21 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 22 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 23 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 24 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 25 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 26 Mkuze - Hlulwle-iMfolozi Game Reserve - Fly to Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth)

This morning we leave Mkuze and head to Hlulwle-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

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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 27 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 28 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 29 Oudtshoorn - Swellendam - Cape Town

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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 30 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 31 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 Huguenot 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 32 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

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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 33 Departure

Departure from Cape Town.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast