



## Destination Swaziland Trip Itinerary 11 Days

*It's important to note, the daily order of this trip itinerary is likely to change as the announcement of the festival activities usually has very little advanced warning. Every effort will be made to ensure all activities included in the trip itinerary are included in the final program. Closer to departure, any changes to the itinerary will be provided.*

### **Day 1 Mlilwane Nature Reserve**

Collection from Manzini Airport, Swaziland and transfer to Reilly's Rock lodge Mlilwane Nature Reserve

From day one of your Swaziland experience you'll be delighted by the warm welcoming style of the Swazi people and the beauty and magnificence of our first highlight, Mlilwane Nature Reserve.

Mlilwane is the historical home of such rarities as the blue swallow, roan antelope, vaal rhebuck, oribi, blue duiker and blue crane. Other animals that call the park home include: zebra, warthogs, antelope species, crocodiles and hippos.

Our first day is a free day to acclimatize and settle into the Swazi way of life. Wander around the Reilly's rock property in search of the petit Duiker, hike through the reserve on one of the many walking tracks, or simply sit back and enjoy the magnificent views of the Mlilwane reserve from high on the hill.

At dusk we'll meet by the campfire for the official start of our trip and enjoy what the locals call 'sun downers'. Whilst sipping your drink, you'll quickly see why African sunsets are so memorably breathtaking.

Before we enjoy our traditional Swazi meal we'll take the opportunity to feed the friendly thick tailed galigars affectionately known as bushbabies. One touch of their fingers as they delicately take the banana from your hand will certainly bring a lasting smile to your dial.

(Welcome drinks and dinner included)

## **Day 2      Exploration of Mlilwane Nature Reserve**

We rise early with the animals to have our first game drive through the reserve. Learn the art of wildlife spotting as we sneak up nice and close to zebras and wildebeest on the plains, and hippos and crocodiles in the waterholes as we drive in our open air vehicle around the nature reserve.

During morning tea we are joined by Mr Ted Reilly, Swaziland's pioneer conservationist and advisor to the King of Swaziland on all matters pertaining to nature and conservation in the country.

After rescuing the Rhinos from the brink of extinction in the eighties and nineties, a fight he continues to this day, Ted's latest project is restoring the Roan Antelope to Swaziland. Over the next couple of hours, Ted Reilly will be personally guiding our group through the private areas of Mlilwane sanctuary including showcasing the work he is doing in growing the Swaziland population of the highly threatened Roan Antelope.

After lunch at Base Camp in Mlilwane, in the afternoon we set off for a visit to a local village and meet with the chief. Learn first hand the functions performed by the chief, see the traditional homes of the locals and learn how the village sustains itself.

At dusk we set out again in our open air vehicles for some magical views of the reserve and the wildlife who call it home.

(Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner included)

## **Day 3      Mlilwane – Mkhaya**

With plenty of activities at Mlilwane the morning is yours to do with as you please. Trot alongside the wild reserve animals on horse back, take a walk down to the hippo pond, jump on a bike and push your way through the park, or read up on the history of Mlilwane and conservation in Swaziland with the wonderfully documented secrets that adorn the homestead's walls.

The very best Swazi craft market, when the local makers of the crafts come to sell to wholesalers, is early on a Wednesday and Thursday morning. This is a true African experience, not set up for tourists and one we always try to schedule into our itinerary.

After lunch we drive to the fertile, pineapple-growing Malkerns Valley, renowned for its arts and crafts. We visit Swazi Candles where you can see wax being sculpted into animal shapes then veneered with animal print and Batik Baobab - a workshop producing individual art pieces with a batik technique unique to Swaziland. The handmade creations we take you to see including traditional African carvings, woven baskets and curios are so attractive, it's almost impossible to visit without buying something.

Continuing to rub shoulders with the locals, we stop for some Swazi gold in a waterhole of a different kind, before we travel on to our next exciting destination, Mkhaya.

Mkhaya Game Reserve was established in 1979 and is a haven for many endangered species including four of the Big Five. It's home to Tsessebe, elephants and white and black rhinos. It's here one has the best chance in Africa of meeting a black rhino in the wild.

After a late afternoon drive through a small part of the Mkhaya reserve, you'll dine outside to the sounds of Africa before bedding down in your very own, open air stone and thatch rondavel. This unique style accommodation offers the opportunity to really get back to nature - but in luxurious comfort. Complete with hot showers, *large mosquito covered beds with feather pillows*, and lit with beautiful lanterns, you'll close your eyes and be amazed at how deeply you *will* sleep, waking at first light to the smell of freshly brewed coffee (or tea) delivered to your hut.

(Breakfast and Dinner included)

#### **Day 4 & 5 Mkhaya**

After a sunrise and afternoon game drive through Mkhaya you'll be dazzled by how close you've got to the world's largest, rarest and most magnificent creature, the Rhinoceros.

Just how many Rhinos now live at Mkhaya is an impossible secret to get out of Ted Reilly, but please be sure to give it a try as he introduces you to the animals he loves and has dedicated his life to protecting. The numbers of both black and white rhinos at Mkhaya are kept as guarded as the reserve boundaries, to avoid sparking interest with the poachers, who still, despite the protection laws now in place in Swaziland, hunt these rare and magnificent relics from our distant past.

There are not enough hours in the day, or large enough digital memory cards for you to get your fill of the wildlife you will see at Mkhaya. Expect to see families of elephants bathing and playing in water holes, hippos, scores of buffalo, giraffe and so many more fascinating animals with unique and entertaining characteristics. With two serious game park drives included in our trip each day, plus options for additional guided wildlife and birding walks, Mkhaya is a destination that will stay with you forever – perfect for birdwatchers, animal lovers and keen photographers alike.

(Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner included)

## Day 6 & 7 Festival Days

There are two key festivals in Swaziland, around the end of August/early September and the start of the New Year that our trips are timed to coincide with. With both these trips, the order of our itineraries may alter slightly to ensure festival highlights are incorporated as the actual day on which ceremonies are held are largely unpredictable, chosen only after the careful study of the movement of the planets by Swazi astrologers.

Celebrated during December or January every year, the Incwala, or "First Fruits" Ceremony is rich in symbolism and is the most important and sacred of all Swazi ceremonies. During the Incwala, all people, especially male, converge at the Royal Kraal at Ludzidzini for several weeks of traditional dancing and sacred songs and is the annual ritual of kingship. Special branches of the dichrostachys acacia shrub are collected by young men. These are used to build a sacred enclosure where the first fruits of the season will be consumed by the king. Once the king has tasted the first fruits and has reappeared to the people present at the ceremony, everyone can enjoy the new growing season.

The *Umhlanga* or "Reed Dance" is the second most important ceremony as well as one of the most colourful and falls around the end of August/early September each year. The Reed Dance honors iNdlovukazi, the Queen Mother. During this ceremony, thousands of Swazi women do what they've done for centuries - gather reeds from a special area then present them to the Queen in a spectacular dance of pride. The women perform in anklets, bracelets, necklaces, and colorful sashes with streamers, the colors of which denote whether the woman is single, engaged to marry, or married. *Umhlanga*, which attracts young girls from all corners of the country, is seen as an opportunity for the King and suitors to choose new brides. The women's beauty is totally displayed as they dance and perform in one of the largest and rarest traditional celebrations held today. This celebration isn't put on for the tourists, infact there are hardly any tourists to be found. It's vivid, colourful, authentic and a once in a life time experience.

(Breakfast and Dinner included)

***(It's important to note, even a month before a festival event, announcements on date changes have been known to be made. If festival attendance is of critical interest, please consider purchasing airline tickets that have date change flexibility. We will accommodate last minute festival changes into our program where ever possible.)***

## **Day 8 & 9 Festival activities - Hlane**

With time to enjoy festival activities during the day, we move on to Hlane, where you are guaranteed to get as close as you'd ever want to with a pride of wild lions. By now you'll be quite used to being close to wild animals in an open air vehicle, which only adds to the excitement as you seek out these kings of the jungle.

Hlane Royal National Park is held in trust for the nation by the king and is home to the largest herds of game in the kingdom. Hlane, with its adjacent dispersal areas covers 30 000 hectares of Swazi Bushveld, dominated by ancient hardwood vegetation. Hlane is home to lion, elephant and white rhino, with an abundant and diverse bird life, including the highest density of tree nesting vultures in Africa.

At Hlane we'll have three extended open vehicle game drives through the park's flat terrain, weaving between the 1000 year old vegetation and shallow pans which attract great herds of animals. You'll have time to relax or take optional guided walking or biking safaris, and be spoiled for dining choices.

As you listen to the rumbling roars of not so distant lions in the still of the night, you'll know, this is Africa.

(Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner included)

## **Day 10 Hlane - Reilly's Rock**

There's free time at Hlane today for a morning guided game walk or guided birding walk, or for you to sleep in and dream about the amazing experiences you've enjoyed in Swaziland.

On our drive back to Mlilwane, we journey through some striking scenery and stop at a remote village at the foot of a mountain that looks like a basking ngwenya (crocodile). Here we watch artisans practising the age-old craft of glassblowing. Each handmade piece of Ngwenya glass is crafted from recycled glass collected from all corners of the kingdom.

What better way to end the trip and say goodbye than a Traditional dance and celebration, Swazi style where our journey started, Mlilwane.

(Breakfast and Dinner included)

## **Day 11**

Check out and Transfers to Manzini Airport for connecting flights on.

(Breakfast included)