

Your passport to adventure

Wildlife & Waterfalls

Country(ies): South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe

Tour type: Overland

Transport: Overland expedition vehicle & 4x4 safari

jeeps

Group size: Min: 4 | Max: 20

Days: 14 days

Start Location: Johannesburg, South Africa

End Location: Johannesburg, South Africa

Meals: Breakfasts - 13, Lunches - 13, Dinners - 11

Highlights:

Victoria Falls, Kalahari Desert, Okavango Delta, Chobe National Park, Makgadikgadi Pans, Hwange & Matopos National Parks, Great Zimbabwe, Tshipise hot springs



Itinerary

Day 1: Johannesburg to Palapye

We start our tour early this morning in Johannesburg, as we travel through the North-West Province until we reach the Botswana border. After completing border formalities we'll carry on through the Trans-Kalahari highway until we reach our overnight accommodation.

As we depart Johannesburg first thing this morning you will need to book at least one night's pre-tour accommodation.

Route: Johannesburg to Palapye

Facilities - Camping: 2024: Campsite with shared ablutions, 2025: Two per room with en-suite

bathroom

Facilities - Accommodated: Rooms with en-suite bathrooms

OVERNIGHT: Cresta Palapye

MEALS: Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS:

Day 2: Palapye to Maun

Today we head north through the stark yet striking landscapes of the Central Kalahari desert towards the gateway of the Okavango Delta . Along the way, you'll pass by several smaller towns and villages, offering glimpses into everyday life in Botswana . A notable point of interest on our route is the Orapa Diamond Mine, an imposing testament to Botswana's mineral wealth. This mine, which is a collaborative venture between De Beers and the Botswana government, is counted among the world's most extensive diamond mines. It serves as a critical economic pillar, contributing considerably to Botswana's GDP and export earnings . Beyond Orapa, our journey skirts the southern end of the Makgadikgadi Pans N ational P ark before reaching our overnight destination in Maun, so keep an eye out for an array of wildlife that moves between the watering holes

Route: Palapye to Maun

Facilities - Camping: 2024: Campsite with shared ablutions, 2025: Two per room with en-suite

bathroom

Facilities - Accommodated: Rooms with en-suite bathrooms

OVERNIGHT: Sedia Hotel / campsite **MEALS:** Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

EXTRAS:

Day 3: Okavango Delta - Khwai Conservation Area

You will be separated from the truck for the next 2 nights and it is therefore important that you pack/gather your personal belongings which you may need, before we depart for Maun today as there is limited time in Maun for re-packing and storing. Please pack lightly and only take what you need for the following two nights. Today we make our way towards the Okavango Delta. Early risers will have the opportunity to go on an optional scenic flight over the Delta (time and weather permitting). After your optional flight, you will be collected from Maun and will be transferred to the Khwai Conservation area in smaller safari type vehicles. Our guide will prepare us on what to expect for our mokoro excursion into the Okavango Delta

Route: Maun to Khwai Conservation area

Optional activity: Scenic Flight over Okavango Delta

Included Highlight: Sunset Mokoro Excursion

Facilities - Camping: Campsite with shared ablutions

Facilities - Accommodated: Two per permanent tent with en - suite bathroom

OVERNIGHT: Khwai Tented Camp **MEALS:** Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

EXTRAS:

Day 4: Okavango Delta - Moremi Game Reserve

At first light, you will be picked up from the hotel for our drive to the South gate to enter Moremi Game Reserve. As we journey through the Okavango Delta ecosystem of channels and lagoons, sightings of different bird and animal populations will become more frequent.

The game viewing routes may vary according to the professional guides, particularly when high floods are experienced as certain routes may be closed.

Included Highlight: Moremi Game Reserve full day excursion

Facilities - Camping: Campsite with shared ablutions

Facilities - Accommodated: Two per permanent tent with en - suite bathroom

OVERNIGHT: Khwai Tented Camp **MEALS:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS:

Day 5: Nata

Today, our journey will take us across the Northern stretch of the Makgadikgadi Pans where we can view beautiful examples of the iconic Baobab tree. We are also afforded the opportunity to enjoy a guided afternoon excursion to the Pans and Nata sanctuary to appreciate the stunning views and have an unforgettable sundowner.

Route: Khwai to Nata

Optional Activity: Makgadikgadi Salt Pans (Nata Sanctuary)

Facilities - Camping: Campsite with shared ablutions

Facilities - Accommodated: Rooms with en-suite bathrooms

OVERNIGHT: Elephant Sands

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS:

Day 6: Chobe National Park

We journey from Kalahari sands of Nata to Kasane and arrive in time for lunch and a quick siesta before we head out in the af ternoon to explore the Chobe National Park from the river, enjoying a leisurely boat cruise which allows us an up close and personal experience with the many elephants that frequent the river in the afternoons

Route: Nata to Kasane

Included Highlight: Chobe National Park Boat Cruise Optional Activity: Chobe National Park Game Drive Facilities - Camping: Campsite with shared ablutions

Facilities - Accommodated: Rooms with en-suite bathrooms

OVERNIGHT: Thebe River Safaris **MEALS:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS:

Day 7: Kasane to Victoria Falls

This morning we travel across the border, a short distance to Victoria Falls, after an unforgettable time at Chobe National Park. Upon arrival to Victoria Falls, you will have the opportunity to book some exciting optional activities. Victoria Falls offers a wide selection of activities to suit both adrenaline junkies and the more relaxed traveller. Choose from craft markets or a delicious High Tea at the Victoria Falls Hotel.

Route: Kasane to Victoria Falls

Optional Activity: Visit to the Victoria Falls, Bungee Jump, Gorge Swing, Sunset Cruise,

Helicopter Flights, Boma Dinner Experience

Facilities - Accommodated: Two per Room with En-suite Bathroom

Facilities - Camping: 2024: Campsite (pre-erected dome tent with camper beds) with Shared

Ablution, 2025: Two per room with en-suite bathroom

OVERNIGHT: Shearwater Explorers Village

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch

EXTRAS:

Day 8: Victoria Falls

With the many activities on offer in Victoria Falls, today is the perfect day for the adventure that most suits your style. Whether rafting the mighty Zambezi River or enjoying a scenic flight over the falls below, this is your day to enjoy the many attractions on offer in Victoria Falls.

Today is completely up to you to choose the perfect activities that suit your individual style. From rafting in the great Zambezi River to a scenic flight over the falls below, Victoria Falls offers a myriad of exciting activities to make this day unforgettable.

Optional Activity: Visit to the Victoria Falls, Bungee Jump, Gorge Swing, Sunset Cruise, Helicopter Flights, Boma Dinner Experience

Facilities - Accommodated: Two per Room with En-suite Bathroom

Facilities - Camping: Campsite (pre-erected dome tent with camper beds) with Shared Ablutions

OVERNIGHT: Shearwater Explorers Village

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 9: Victoria Falls to Hwange National Park

This morning we leave the rumble and adventure of Victoria Falls behind us as we make the journey south to Hwange National Park. Hwange is the largest of Zimbabwe's national parks and offers excellent opportunities for viewing the diversity of wildlife that calls the park home.

This morning we head south to Hwange National Park, leaving behind the bustle of Victoria Falls. As the largest of Zimbabwe's national parks, Hwange National Park offers exciting opportunities to view the diverse wildlife residing in the park.

Route: Victoria Falls to Hwange National Park

Optional Activity: Victoria Falls National Park Entry, Hwange Sundowner Drive

Facilities - Camping: Campsite with shared ablutions

Facilities - Accommodated: Rooms with en-suite bathrooms

OVERNIGHT: Hwange Main Camp **MEALS:** Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

EXTRAS:

Day 10: Hwange National Park

Hwange National Park is home to the Big Five as well as a wide range of plains, game and birdlife. The guests who purchased the activity package will be picked up from the accommodation in the morning and will enjoy the day on a game drive in 4x4 vehicles through Hwange to catch some sightings of wildlife.

Route: Hwange National Park Included Highlight: Full day Hwange National Park game drive

Facilities - Camping: Campsite with shared ablutions

Facilities - Accommodated: Rooms with en-suite bathrooms

OVERNIGHT: Hwange Main Camp **MEALS:** Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

EXTRAS:

Day 11: Matopos National Park

This morning we journey south towards the second largest city in Zimbabwe, Bulawayo. Our afternoon shall be spent with a local guide, exploring the beautiful Matopos National Park. As a recognized UNESCO World Heritage Site, the park includes an intensive protection zone where Black and White Rhinoceros reside. We then return to Bulawayo and our overnight accommodation.

Route: Hwange National Park to Bulawayo to Matopos National Park Included

Highlight: Afternoon game drive in Matopos National Park **Facilities - Camping**: Two per room with en-suite bathroom **Facilities - Accommodated**: Rooms with en-suite bathrooms

OVERNIGHT: Banff Lodge

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS:

Day 12: Great Zimbabwe Ruins

Our journey today takes us to Masvingo and the Great Zimbabwe Ruins. This afternoon we will enjoy a guided walking tour of this historic site. Dating back to the Late Iron Age, this UNESCO World Heritage Site was once the capital of the Kingdom of Zimbabwe. We take time this afternoon to marvel at the intricate stonework and experience the heritage of this monument to early Zimbabwean civilization.

Today our adventure takes us to Masvingo and the Great Zimbabwe Ruins where we can enjoy a guided walking tour of the historic site. Once the capital of the Kingdom of Zimbabwe, this World Heritage Site dates to the late Iron Age. This afternoon we take the time to admire the intricate stonework and experience the heritage of this monument to early Zimbabwean Civilization.

Route: (Bulawayo) Matopos National Park to Great Zimbabwe Ruins (Masvingo)

Included Highlight: Highlight Visit to the Great Zimbabwe Ruins

Facilities - Camping: Campsite with shared ablutions

Facilities - Accommodated: Rooms with en-suite bathrooms

OVERNIGHT: Norma Jeans Lake View Resort

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS:

Day 13: Tshipise

Leaving the sites of Zimbabwe behind we cross the Limpopo River and enter South Africa this afternoon. Our overnight stop allows us an opportunity to end the day with a swim in the hot springs of Tshipise.

Departing from the magical and ancient ruins of Zimbabwe, we cross over the Limpopo River to enter back into South Africa in the afternoon. We stop overnight which allows us the exciting opportunity to swim in the hot springs of Tshipise.

Route: Great Zimbabwe Ruins (Masvingo) to Tshipise

Included Highlight: Tshipise Hot Springs

Facilities - Camping: Campsite with shared ablutions

Facilities - Accommodated: Rooms with en-suite bathrooms

OVERNIGHT: Forever Tshipise Resort

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS:

Day 14: Johannesburg

This morning we take the highway south to Johannesburg, we arrive at Belvedere Estate in the late afternoon and all travellers are invited to join us for a traditional meal tonight. This can be booked with your guide on the day before arrival. Many great tales are shared, and tonight is for celebrating the many wonders of African travel.

This morning we head south back to Johannesburg, arriving in the late afternoon. Tonight, we celebrate together and share stories about the unique and magical aspects of African travel.

Route: Tshipise to Johannesburg

Facilities - Camping & Accommodated: Rooms with en-suite bathrooms

OVERNIGHT: Own Arrangements / Post tour accommodation can be booked

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch

EXTRAS:

Included:

- 13 night's accommodation either camping or in hotels/lodges/guesthouses
- All transport using our 25-seat expedition vehicle
- All 'included highlights' as mentioned in the itinerary
- 2 truck crew (driver/guide plus assistant/cook)
- Local guides for sightseeing tours and activities as per the itinerary
- Meals: 14 breakfasts, 14 lunches and 14 dinners

Excluded:

- International Flights (available on request)
- Visa fees if required
- Optional activities (see itinerary)
- Travel Insurance (compulsory, available on request)
- Meals not indicated in the itinerary
- Drinks, snacks and other personal expenses (e.g. laundry)
- Tips for guides & drivers
- Entrance fees and activities not mentioned above
- Any other items not mentioned above

Options

Our tours are designed to include all that you need to enjoy a really special time in the destination you're visiting. However, we do also offer some extra options to complement the tour and add some additional sightseeing or activities, or some extra time at either end of the tour.

All accommodation based options (e.g. Single supplements, extra nights, cruise upgrades) should be booked and paid for in advance so that we can make the appropriate arrangements. Other options may either be booked and paid for in advance or while you are on the tour, though we recommend booking in advance to ensure there are no issues with availability.

Many options are priced the same throughout the year, but some may incur single or high season supplements - full details are given on the tour reservation form or on request.

Single room supplement accommodated (SAOVWW)

Min numbers: 1

This option books a single room in all the accommodation throughout the tour. Room shares are not available on this tour, so if you are single traveller then you will need to add this option to your booking.

Note: The price shown is a low season price. Slightly higher prices may apply during high and peak seasons - the exact price for your dates will be shown on the online booking form and is always available on request.

Extra day in Johannesburg - pre-tour

Min numbers: 1

This option adds an extra day to the start of your tour, staying in the same hotel as the main tour itself (subject to availability). Airport transfers are not included, but are available as an additional option. Prices shown are per person and based on two people sharing.

Note: Single room and peak season supplements apply.

Extra day in Johannesburg - post-tour

Min numbers: 1

This option adds an extra day to the start of your tour, staying in the same hotel as the main tour itself (subject to availability). Airport transfers are not included, but are available as an additional option. Prices shown are per person and based on two people sharing.

Note: Single room and peak season supplements apply.

Options available while on tour (NAOVNB | SAOVOC | SAOVWW)

Min numbers: 1

These options are availabile while you are on the tour from local activity providers who your booking will be with. Prices are given as a guide and are subject to change.

Botswana

- Maun
 - 1hr Scenic Delta Flight (min 4) | \$80 to \$200
- Chobe NP
 - Game Drive | BWP400 to BWP600

Zimbabwe

- Victoria Falls
 - Bungee Jump | \$150 to \$170
 - Helicopter Flight over the Falls (min 3) | \$160 to \$180
 - Full day White Water Rafting (High water) | \$150 to \$170
 - Zambezi Sunset Cruise (inc transfers) | \$40 to \$70

Single room supplement camping (SAOVWW)

Min numbers: 1

This option provides single travellers with a single room in the hotels/guesthouses used during the tour as well as a private single tent. Single travellers happy to share a same-sex twin room and tent do not need to pay the supplement.

1. Accommodation

We provide two options for the accommodation on this Overland tour, both available on the trip. Each option stays in the same place each night, just using a different level of accommodation. On some nights both options will use the same rooms or tents - please see the itinerary for details.

Camping: As the name suggests, the majority of your time will be spent camping. We include easily erected tents and camping mattresses; all you need to bring is a sleeping bag & towel (and pillow if you need one). Some nights spent in towns and cities may be spent in hotel or lodge rooms instead of camping - please see the itinerary for details. Prices are based on 2 sharing so if you are travelling as a single passenger you should expect to share a tent with another traveller of the same sex. During hotel stays, all couples will be given a private double room. Friends booking together will also share a room. Triple rooms are not generally available.

Accommodated: This level is designed to bridge the gap between a basic camping tour and an expensive lodge holiday. So, we use good quality hotels, lodges and camps rated at the local 2 to 4-star level, with the majority of rooms en-suite. In some places more basic properties with separate bathrooms, or permanent safari tents may be used. We aim always to use accommodation that is in keeping with the local area so there is a good variety. Local star ratings may vary slightly from international standards. Accommodation is based on twin or double rooms, chalets, bungalows or safari tents. All couples will be given a private double room. Friends booking together will also share a room.

Please check the Single Room Supplement option for details on room sharing options and charges for solo travellers on this tour.

Note - Accommodation providers are subject to change without notice. The properties listed are our preferred options, but sometimes due to availability or other issues with the property, we may substitute another property of similar standards.

2. Transport

This tour is run in conjunction with our local partners in South Africa. You will travel in one of their specially designed overland trucks throughout this tour, giving you a great vantage point from which to enjoy the scenery and incredible wildlife. Our professional and knowledgeable local guides will help to make your experience unforgettable and fun. The maximum number of people on this tour is 20 (the trucks have 25 seats)

The vehicles we use are amongst some of the finest on the road. However, do not forget the nature of an adventure tour. This is not a bus trip. Nor do we provide up-market tours. These are still tours aimed at the adventurous traveller. Though the vehicles are comfortable with large windows and great visibility, there are no onboard toilets or air-conditioning.

Each expedition vehicle is fitted with the following:

- Freezers to keep food fresh in the African heat.
- Individual seats with seat belts and ample leg-room
- Overhead luggage racks.
- Lockers for your backpacks (~35 cm square, 80cm deep)
- A safe for your valuables.
- A well-stocked first aid kit is on hand for emergencies.
- Reading material (fiction & field guides), games and recreational gear to keep you well entertained.
- I-pod/MP3 points
- Charging facilities for cameras, batteries etc
- PA System
- Kitchen and stove
- Water tank
- Cooler boxes
- Table for food preparation

Hand-dishwashing facilities

Partaking in an adventure tour in Africa involves covering hundreds if not thousands of kilometres in a truck, and our tours are as much about this journey as they are about the destinations we visit. Use your time in the truck to talk to your fellow travellers, play card games, have a drink, walk around, take note of the world passing by your window and make the most of this unique opportunity to step out of your comfort zone.

Some roads you travel on will be smooth and easy while others could take up to an hour to cover 1 kilometre (though this is very rare on this route unless there has been extreme recent weather). There is just no telling what could happen with road, rainfall, traffic and other conditions that may exist that will either increase or decrease the amount of time you spend on the road so take your watch off, put your iPad away, turn off your phone and just relax. An average driving day could take anything from 4-5 up to the whole day. We will stop for shopping, bathroom breaks, photo stops, activities and a whole lot more. However, if you are looking to only experience specific destinations and are not interested in the journey, perhaps overland adventures are not for you.

Some game safaris are carried out using 4x4 jeeps/safari vehicles - see your tour itinerary for details. These may be open-roofed or enclosed. You must not leave the vehicle or lean out through windows without express permission from the guide.

3. Group Size/Tour Leaders/Guides

We are committed to being a small group operator, as we feel this gives everyone in the group the best chance to get to know their fellow travellers and to hear and make the most of their guide. So, the expedition vehicles we use on our South & East Africa overland adventure tours have a maximum of 25 seats and on this tour will carry a maximum of 20 travellers.

In South & East Africa we provide fully trained, local English-speaking tour leaders, drivers and crew for all our tours. This tour will feature 2 crew – a driver, and tour leader. Between them they will help with the cooking, washing up, clearing away, cleaning of the truck etc. You may assist with this if you wish, and a limited amount of help is expected and appreciated (eg. Washing your own plates & cutlery) but you are not obliged to do any more than that unless you wish to. The tour leaders are not specialist licensed guides however, but during the tour we may also use a variety of local guides for activities and tours included in the itinerary.

4. Locally Available Options

On all our Overland tours we strive to strike a balance between including plenty of meals, tours and activities and being accessible and affordable.

The main tour price covers all your accommodation, transport, most meals and a range of tours and activities. In addition, there are further **Locally Available Options** on this tour. These have been chosen to give you more of a taste of what is available in the region and sometimes to offer an adrenaline rush during a relatively sedate tour. All these local options are offered and operated by professional local activity providers and Encounters Travel is not responsible for your booking or time while taking any of these options. Prices for these options may be given on our website, but please bear in mind that are given as a guide only and may very seasonally and can change from time to time. Availability is subject to seasonal daylight hours and our time-keeping that day.

Please check the Options section for more information and prices.

5. Destination Guides

Victoria Falls

Victoria Falls is undoubtedly one of Africa's most beautiful treasures. They border Zimbabwe and Zambia and are the region's most visited tourist hotspot. The falls are by no means the world's biggest waterfall, however ,at 1700 m wide and 108 m high their length and the vast volume of water which find its way to the falls via the Zambezi river makes them one of the most spectacular. David Livingstone, the Scottish explorer, is believed to have been

the first European to view the Victoria Falls and wrote: "It has never been seen before by European eyes, but scenes so wonderful must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight". The older, indigenous name of Mosioa-Tunya ('the Smoke that Thunders') is the name in official use in Zambia, and the falls spray water into the air which can be seen for miles, including in the surrounding game reserves and national parks. Due to its immense power and size, the waterfall is surrounded by a rich mythology. The local Tonga people of the Zambezi believe that a river god, Nyaminyami, resides in the water in the form of an immense snake. When the Kariba Dam was built in the 1950s, the Zambezi River flooded three times, causing many deaths and much destruction. The local people believe Nyaminyami caused the terrible floods in his anger at the construction.

The unusual form of Victoria Falls enables virtually the whole width of the falls to be viewed face-on, at the same level as the top, from as close as 60 metres, because the whole Zambezi River drops into a deep, narrow slot like chasm, connected to a long series of gorges. Few other waterfalls allow such a close approach on foot. The falls are formed as the full width of the river plummets in a single vertical drop into a chasm 60–120 m wide, carved by its waters along a fracture zone in the basalt plateau. The depth of the chasm, called the First Gorge, varies from 80 m at its western end to 108 m in the centre. The only outlet to the First Gorge is a 110 m-wide gap about two-thirds of the way across the width of the falls from the western end, through which the whole volume of

the river pours into the Victoria Falls gorges.

There are two islands on the crest of the falls that are large enough to divide the curtain of water even at full flood: Boaruka Island (or Cataract Island) near the western bank and Livingstone Island near the middle. At less than full flood, additional islets divide the curtain of water into separate parallel streams. The main streams are named, in order from Zimbabwe (west) to Zambia (east): Leaping Water (called Devil's Cataract by some), Main Falls, Rainbow Falls (the highest) and the Eastern Cataract.

While staying here, guests can also embark on bush safaris – on foot, horseback or in a vehicle, embark on a Zambezi cruise along the waters before the falls, or try some exciting white water rafting. While on these Victoria Falls safaris guests will have the chance to see crocodiles, hippos and other African wildlife.

Hwange National Park

Hwange National Park, the largest park in Zimbabwe, is one of Africa's finest havens for wildlife and is home to Africa's Big 5 large concentrations of zebra and giraffe. Elephant make up the largest proportion of the biomass, and are so prolific that culling has been periodically considered. It is also home to many predators and endangered species – lion are sighted frequently, while leopard and rhino are seen less often. It is also the only protected area where gemsbok and brown hyena occur in reasonable numbers. The population of wild dog to be found in Hwange is thought to be of one of the largest surviving groups in Africa today. The birdlife is varied and up to 400 species can be spotted, making the area a birder's paradise, especially in the wet season. The park, covering just over 14 600 square km, is situated on the main road between Bulawayo and the world famous Victoria Falls. The landscape varies from sparse woodland to savannah grasslands and granite outcrops. An interesting feature of the area is its fossil dunes – ancient sand dunes held together by vegetation.

Matopos National Park

Less than an hour's drive from Bulawayo, this park is set in a sea of fascinating granite rock formations. It is the oldest in Zimbabwe, established in 1926 as Rhodes Motopos National Park, a bequest from Cecile John Rhodes, who founded Rhodesia in 1890, inaugurating 9 decades of colonial rule. The beautiful rocks are said to be his favourite place, and he was buried there. The jumble of granite domes more importantly has a deep significance for the ancestral people. Other historical sites can be found here, the most fascinating being the rock paintings left by the San bushman who lived in these hills about 2 000 years ago, and various archaeological sites dating back to the Stone Age.

A large section of Matopos National Park is fenced to contain wild game including some of the more beautiful larger antelope (kudu, sable and eland) as well as black and white rhinoceros. The park boasts the largest concentration of black eagles and leopard in an area of its size in the world. The Motobo Hills, with their distinct rock formations, were formed 2000 million years ago with granite being forced to the earth's surface and weathered into fantastic shapes such as the famous balancing rocks, known as Mother and Child Kopje. Here, you'll find over 200 tree species, 100 grass species, 175 birds and 88 mammals. It's important to wear long trousers and closed shoes while visiting as there are also 39 types of snakes. Walking tours, canoeing, game viewing, drives and picnics are among the most popular activities, however you can also go boating here, fishing and horse-riding. Spend an evening soaking in the tranquil atmosphere and listening to the sounds of the surrounding wildlife.

Great Zimbabwe Ruins

The Great Zimbabwe Ruins in Masvingo are sub-Saharan Africa's most important and largest stone ruins. Designated a World Heritage Site in 1986, the ancient and long-abandoned city of high-walled granite structures

were built out of millions of stones balanced perfectly on top of one another without the aid of mortar. Hence the name 'dzimba dzembabwe' or 'houses of stone'. It is not known exactly when the walled city was built, but it is believed to be around the 11th century, when the local people were becoming increasingly influential – controlling gold and ivory trade with the Swahili, Portuguese and Arabs who were sailing down the Mozambique coast. As the Great Zimbabwe people flourished, they built an empire whose huge stone buildings eventually spread over 500 square km. It is thought that as many as 18,000 people lived here during its heyday. It was the seat of political power and was a true force to be reckoned with; a formidable African palace, perhaps the largest during its time in Southern Africa.

By the 15th century, Great Zimbabwe was in decline due to overpopulation and political discord. When the Portuguese arrived in the 16th century in search of rumoured cities built of gold, Great Zimbabwe had already fallen into ruin.

There have been many theories as to who was responsible for building the magnificent monuments; some believed that Great Zimbabwe was built by Phoenicians or Arabs. It wasn't until 1929 that archaeologist Gertrude Caton-Thompson proved that Great Zimbabwe was built by black Africans. Nowadays, various tribes in the region claim that Great Zimbabwe was built by their ancestors. Archaeologists generally believe that the Lemba tribe is responsible.

Great Zimbabwe gave modern Zimbabwe its name as well as its national emblem - an eagle carved from soapstone, many of which were found at the ruins.

Kruger National Park

Established in 1898 to protect the wildlife of the South African Lowveld, this national park of nearly 2 million hectares is the largest in South Africa and unrivalled in the diversity of its wildlife. Approximately 145 mammal species including the 'Big Five', a list of over 500 bird species, some of which are not to be found elsewhere in South Africa, and 336 tree species occur in the park. When the first tourist cars visited the park in 1927, they made their own camps in thorn-bush enclosures and had to carry weapons to protect themselves from predators. During the Second World War the park was closed to the public, and reopened in 1946 under new management. Today it is one of the most famous safari destinations in the world with all the facilities that one would expect from a world class holiday destination, but it has retained the untamed, unspoilt environment where you can experience Africa just as you imagined it.

Panorama Route

The Panorama route in Mpumalanga follows the edge of Blyde River Canyon, and includes some breathtaking views of the Three Rondavels, Bourke's Luck Potholes and the Pinnacle. Blyde River Canyon is the third largest canyon in the world, and got its name in 1840 ('blyde' meaning 'joyful') from the Voortrekkers who passed through on their way to Lorenzo Marques (now Mozambique). It is one of the most spectacular canyons in Africa and its cliffs rise between 600 m-800 m from the riverbed. Possibly the best view in the whole of the Blyde River Canyon is of the "Three Rondavels - three huge rock spirals rising out of the far wall of the canyon. Their tops appear to have a hut-like rounded roof. They are named after the Swazi Chief Maripi's wives - from the lowest to the highest, they are Magabolle, Mogoladikwe and Maserote.

Where the Blyde River and the Treur River meet, water erosion has formed one of the most remarkable geological phenomena in the country, known as 'Bourke's Luck Potholes'. Over thousands of years, surreal cylindrical rock sculptures created by whirling water have formed a series of dark pools which contrast artfully with the streaked white and yellow lichen covered rocks. Following the road and the Treur River south, there are further viewpoints; Wonder View, God's Window and the Pinnacle.

Johannesburg

Johannesburg is the largest and most populated city in South Africa, its business hub, and the second largest city in Africa after Cairo. Gold was discovered in the mineral-rich Witwatersrand in 1886 by an Australian prospector, George Harrison. This discovery started a major gold rush as fortune hunters came to the area from all over the world. A huge labour force of contract workers sprang up to work in the mines and within three years Johannesburg became the largest settlement in South Africa. It is now the economic and financial core of the country, and although mining is no longer practiced within the city bounds, the headquarters of most of the mining companies can be found here.

Everything here is faster than anywhere else in Africa, something this city has prided itself on ever since the gold rush.. The streets of Johannesburg boast a rich historical background while its suburbs are home to some of the savviest businessmen in Africa. However, it's not all about business in this economic terrain and Johannesburg offers a wealth of sights for visitors including the beautiful Kruger National Park, Emmerentia Dam and the Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden. It's also close to the world renowned Sun City, the popular Gold Reef City and the Blyde River Canyon. Most visitors embark on tours to Johannesburg to take in the sites of the townships. Soweto in particular offers fantastic opportunities for township tours as well as a glimpse into South Africa's

history. The Apartheid Museum is also part of these tours and delves visitors to Johannesburg into South Africa's past. Johannesburg's Sandton is also the sight of the best shopping ground in South Africa with shopping malls offering all the latest and hottest haute couture and labels seen on the world's catwalks. Johannesburg is also known as the world's largest human-made forest, with over 10 million trees planted throughout the city.
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Note: Please <u>download an up-to-date copy</u> of these tour notes shortly before you travel as itineraries and information does change from time to time.