earthwatch expeditions
by Nat Hab

Explore with Purpose



Protecting South Africa's Rhinos at Risk

Follow Rhinos by Helicopter & Join Wildlife Vets in the Field for Horn Trimming

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Trip Details:

Days
10 Days / May–Oct

Price
From $22936 (+Air)

Protecting South Africa's Rhinos at Risk

Follow Rhinos by Helicopter & Join Wildlife Vets in the Field for Horn Trimming

Spend days in the world of wild rhinos in South Africa's Greater Kruger wilderness, where protecting them from poachers demands constant vigilance. Track individual animals with researchers, observe their behavior and document how they use their habitat, gaining an intimate understanding of their lives. Then join a veterinarian-led horn trimming operation, getting close to a wild rhino while taking action aimed at reducing its value to poachers.

These powerful herbivores help maintain the vegetation other wildlife depends on, making their survival consequential far beyond a single species. Between research outings, explore Greater Kruger's savanna in search of the Big Five. Your safari continues west at Tswalu Kalahari Reserve, where red dunes, open grasslands and rocky hills shelter desert-adapted black rhinos, cheetahs and meerkats. Venture out after dark to search for aardvarks and brown hyenas.

Expedition Highlights

Go Inside Wild Rhino Conservation

Spend sustained time in the field with researchers, learning to read rhino behavior and contribute useful observations. Discover the daily challenges and decisions behind protecting an animal prized by poachers.

Take Part in a Rhino Horn Trimming

Experience the sheer scale of a wild rhino during a veterinary field operation. Participate under professional supervision in a precise procedure with an urgent purpose—reducing the incentive to kill for its horn.

Safari Across Two Distinct South African Wildernesses

Seek lions, leopards, elephants, buffalo and rhinos in Greater Kruger before exploring Tswalu's Kalahari terrain. Desert-adapted species and nocturnal searches extend your safari from Big Five encounters to South Africa's less familiar wildlife.

Research at a Glance



The Research Focus

Understand wild rhino behavior and evaluate how conservation strategies, including horn trimming, can help protect rhinos from poaching in Greater Kruger.



What You'll Do

Track wild rhinos, record behavior and movements and participate in veterinarian-led horn trimming, assisting with approved biological measurements under professional supervision.



Why It Matters

Your observations provide data researchers use to refine protection strategies, balancing rhino welfare, poaching prevention and the survival of wild populations.

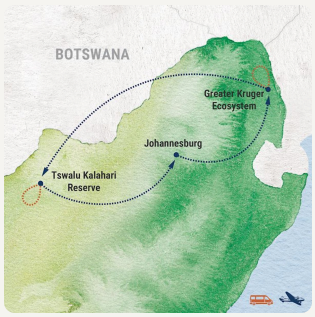


Protecting South Africa's Rhinos at Risk Itinerary

Follow Rhinos by Helicopter & Join Wildlife Vets in the Field for Horn Trimming

Itinerary at a Glance

Day 1	JOHANNESBURG
Day 2	JOHANNESBURG / GREATER KRUGER
Days 3–5	GREATER KRUGER
Day 6	GREATER KRUGER / TSWALU KALAHARI RESERVE
Days 7–8	TSWALU KALAHARI RESERVE
Day 9	TSWALU KALAHARI RESERVE / JOHANNESBURG
Day 10	JOHANNESBURG



Day 1

JOHANNESBURG

Meet Your Fellow Explorers in Johannesburg

- Arrive in Johannesburg and transfer to your hotel
- Meet your Expedition Leader and fellow travelers
- Gather for a welcome dinner and introduction to the expedition

Arrive at Johannesburg's international airport in South Africa's largest city and transfer to your hotel.

This evening, meet your Expedition Leader and fellow travelers over a welcome dinner. Get acquainted and look ahead to ten days exploring two of South Africa's distinct wildlife regions, with extended time observing wild rhinos and participating in their conservation.

An introduction to the research and veterinary work ahead provides context for your encounters in Greater Kruger, where the survival of rhinos depends on sustained protection from poachers.

Day 2

JOHANNESBURG / GREATER KRUGER

Enter the Wildlife Country of Greater Kruger

- Fly to Greater Kruger and arrive at your accommodations
- Meet the local conservation and research team
- Set out on an afternoon game drive in search of the Big Five

Fly to the Greater Kruger region, where wooded savannas and bushveld shelter rhinos, elephants, lions, leopards and buffalo. After arriving at your accommodations, meet the local conservation and research team for an introduction to their work.

This afternoon, head into the bush on your first game drive. Watch for elephants feeding along the tracks, buffalo gathered in open ground and the outline of a leopard concealed in vegetation. Expert local guides interpret the encounters and signs of animal activity along the way.

Over the coming days, you'll devote particular attention to rhinos, spending time with researchers whose observations help inform decisions about their protection.

Days 3–5

GREATER KRUGER

Get to Know Wild Rhinos & Participate in Their Protection

- Spend extended periods observing rhinos with researchers
- Record behavior, movements and habitat use
- Participate in veterinary-led horn trimming and assist with approved measurements

Head into the bush with local guides and conservation professionals to search for wild rhinos. Once an animal is located, there's time to stay and watch it feed, rest or interact with its surroundings. Notice where it chooses to linger, how it responds to another animal and when it moves on.

With researchers' guidance, record these activities along with the animal's location and habitat. Across repeated observations, such details help build a more complete picture of rhino behavior. Your contribution becomes part of that record, supporting investigations into how rhinos use protected landscapes and respond to conservation measures.

During this part of the expedition, participate in a veterinary-led horn trimming operation. The close encounter offers a powerful sense of the animal's size and the expertise required to manage its care. Under professional supervision, assist with approved measurements and biological monitoring as directed by the veterinary team.

Trimming reduces the amount of horn a poacher could obtain, making the rhino a less valuable target. Learn how the procedure complements security and monitoring and discuss the questions researchers are investigating about its potential effects on movement and social behavior. The people making these decisions bring a candid perspective on the demands of protecting rhinos in the wild.

Between research activities, safari outings offer opportunities to encounter Greater Kruger's other wildlife. Evenings at your accommodations provide time to share observations and continue conversations with your small group.

Day 6

GREATER KRUGER / TSWALU KALAHARI RESERVE

Fly West into the Southern Kalahari

- Enjoy a final morning safari in Greater Kruger
- Fly by small aircraft to Tswalu Kalahari Reserve
- Arrive at your accommodations and begin exploring

Rise early for a final game drive in Greater Kruger, searching for elephants, lions, leopards and buffalo, with another opportunity to encounter rhinos in the landscape you've been studying.

Later, fly by small aircraft to Tswalu Kalahari Reserve. Red dunes, open grasslands and rocky foothills introduce a striking change from the Lowveld bushveld.

After arriving at your accommodations, begin exploring this arid southern Kalahari reserve. Desert-adapted black rhinos extend your rhino encounters into a different habitat, while cheetahs, meerkats and elusive nocturnal species offer new possibilities for the days ahead.

Days 7–8

TSWALU KALAHARI RESERVE

Explore the Kalahari on Safari, on Foot & After Dark

- Search for desert-adapted black rhinos, cheetahs, oryx and other wildlife
- Look for aardvarks, brown hyenas and other elusive animals after dark
- Take guided walks, with possible visits to a meerkat colony and protected rock art site

Spend two days exploring Tswalu with an expert guide and tracker. Guided 4x4 drives cross dunes, grasslands and rocky foothills in search of oryx, springbok, giraffes, cheetahs and desert-adapted black rhinos.

Tracks in the sand help direct the search, and each sighting allows time to observe the animal's behavior. Guides explain how wildlife finds food, water and shelter in a region defined by unpredictable rainfall and extremes of temperature.

Conditions and scheduling permitting, visit a habituated meerkat colony. Watching its members emerge from their burrows or gather nearby offers an intimate view of their social interactions.

After dark, venture out for species that often remain concealed during daylight hours. Search for aardvarks, aardwolves, brown hyenas and bat-eared foxes; a pangolin sighting is also possible, though it requires considerable luck. Activity varies with season and temperature, and cooler months may bring daylight encounters with some typically nocturnal animals.

A guided nature walk brings attention to smaller details—animal tracks, native plants and evidence of digging in the sand. If included in the schedule, a protected rock art site adds a human perspective to the landscape, introducing the lives of people who inhabited this country long before it became a reserve.

Day 9

TSWALU KALAHARI RESERVE / JOHANNESBURG

Enjoy a Final Morning at Tswalu

- Take a final wildlife outing as scheduling permits
- Fly by small aircraft to Johannesburg
- Transfer to your hotel for your last evening in South Africa

Enjoy a final morning in the Kalahari, with time for another wildlife experience if the flight schedule allows. Then fly by small aircraft to Johannesburg and transfer to your hotel.

This evening offers time to relax and reflect on the expedition's encounters, from sustained observations of rhinos to the precision of a veterinary operation and searches for the Kalahari's nocturnal wildlife. Conversations with fellow travelers bring together discoveries made across two very different landscapes.

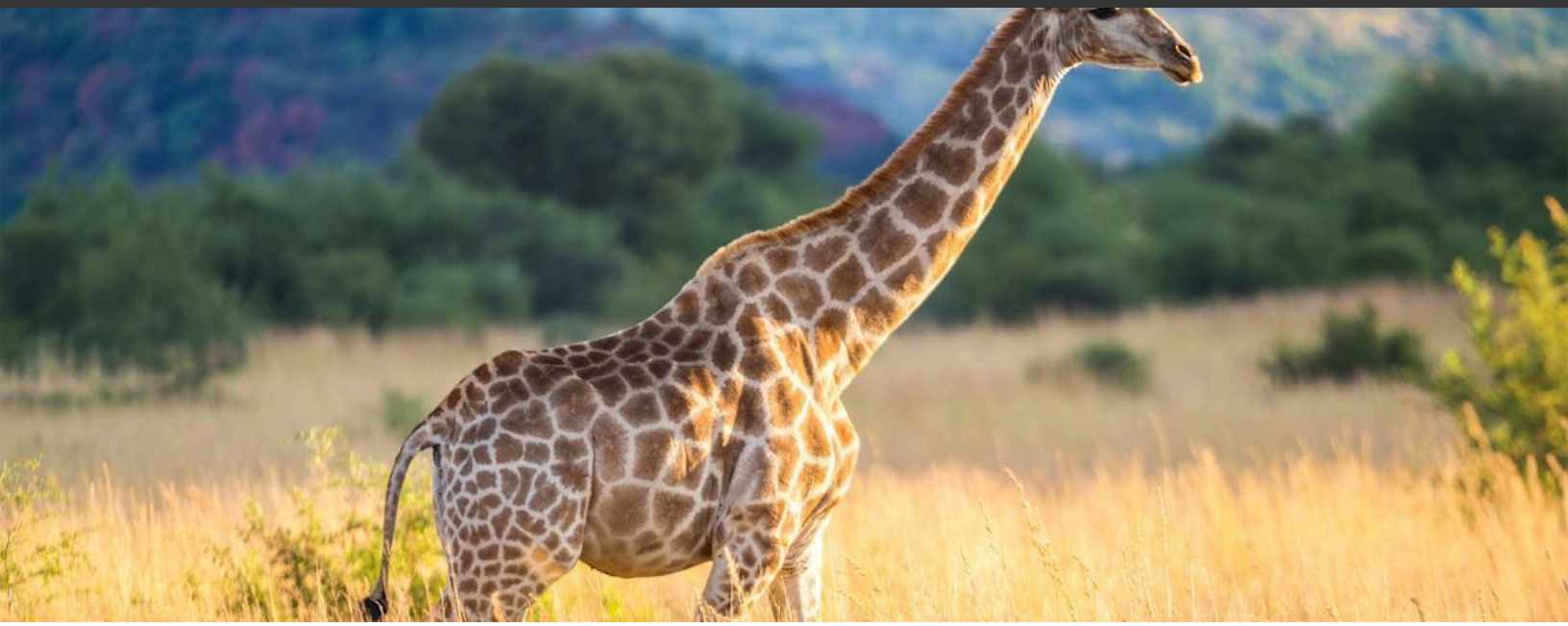
Day 10

JOHANNESBURG

Depart South Africa

- Enjoy breakfast at the hotel
- Transfer to Johannesburg's international airport
- Connect with your flight home

Leave with firsthand experience of wild rhino research and veterinary conservation, having contributed observations and participated in a specialized field operation. Days spent with these animals and the people protecting them give lasting depth to your South African safari. After breakfast, transfer to Johannesburg's international airport for your flight home.



Protecting South Africa's Rhinos at Risk Accommodations

Follow Rhinos by Helicopter & Join Wildlife Vets in the Field for Horn Trimming



Mjejane River Lodge

Overlooking the Crocodile River and Kruger National Park's bushveld, this relaxed safari lodge offers riverside wildlife viewing, an infinity pool and open-air dining beneath the stars.



Tswalu Kalahari

Tswalu Kalahari sits within the largest private game reserve in South Africa, awarding its characterization of unrivaled exclusivity, and its unique menagerie of wildlife not commonly...



City Lodge at O.R. Tambo International Airport

Conveniently based within walking distance to the terminal, the City Lodge Hotel offers travelers a comfortable and convenient layover before or after long international flights to and from Johannesburg.

For detailed descriptions, visit nathab.com/earthwatch-expeditions/south-africa-rhino-conservation-travel/accommodations.

Meet the Scientists

Protecting South Africa's Rhinos at Risk



Ellie Milnes, Ph.D.

Doctor of Veterinary Science

Dr. Ellie Milnes is a wildlife veterinarian and Lecturer in Conservation Medicine at the Royal Veterinary College whose research focuses on the anesthesia of rhinos and other wild hoofed mammals. Much of her field research takes place in Africa, where she studies how wildlife veterinary interventions can be made safer and more effective. Dr. Milnes trained as a veterinarian at the University of Cambridge and completed specialist training in zoological medicine and pathology through Toronto Zoo and the University of Guelph. She is also a National Geographic Explorer and a specialist certified by both the American and European Colleges of Zoological Medicine.

A major focus of her research is wildlife anesthesia. Rhinos must sometimes be darted and immobilized for veterinary treatment, translocation and conservation research, but the powerful drugs involved can affect breathing, circulation and other vital functions. Dr. Milnes studies these physiological responses and compares drug combinations to help develop safer anesthesia protocols. Her work has also investigated health problems in critically endangered eastern black rhinos in Kenya, including cataracts and blindness.

In the field, Dr. Milnes' work has included darting and immobilizing rhinos, conducting physical and eye examinations, using ultrasound and collecting biological samples for further analysis. In Kenya, she used ultrasound to examine the eyes of Alfie, a black rhino born blind, as part of a wider investigation that combined eye examinations with genetic research. By improving the tools and techniques used to study, treat and move these enormous animals, Dr. Milnes is helping make conservation interventions safer while expanding what scientists know about rhino health.

Education

University of Cambridge, Veterinary Medicine (VetMB)
University of Edinburgh, Master of Veterinary Science (MVetSci) in Conservation Medicine
University of Guelph/Toronto Zoo, Residency in Zoological Medicine and Pathology
Doctor of Veterinary Science (DVSc) American College of Zoological Medicine, diplomate
European College of Zoological Medicine, diplomate, Zoo Health Management

Research & Impact

Protecting South Africa's Rhinos at Risk

In South Africa's Greater Kruger wilderness, a rhino sighting is only the beginning. Spend hours observing wild rhinos as they graze, rest and travel through the bush, recording their behavior, movements and habitat use to help researchers understand their lives. Then join a wildlife veterinary team for a planned horn-trimming operation, observing the procedure at close range as specialists carefully monitor the animal and remove the feature that makes it a target for poachers. Few safari experiences offer such an intimate look at these powerful animals and the complex decisions involved in protecting their future.

Research Focus

A rhino's horn can make it a target for poachers, but removing it raises questions that go beyond security. Does horn trimming change an animal's territory or social relationships? What are the potential consequences for its welfare? And how can conservation teams balance immediate protection with the long-term needs of wild populations?

In Greater Kruger, researchers are examining these questions while building a clearer picture of rhino ecology. Their findings can help reserve managers evaluate horn trimming alongside other anti-poaching measures, weighing the benefits of reducing poaching risk against potential effects on individual animals and the wider population.

Conservation Impact

Horn trimming has become an important tool in South Africa's fight against rhino poaching. Research in Greater Kruger has linked horn removal to substantial reductions in poaching, demonstrating its potential when combined with security, wildlife monitoring and other protective measures.

Field research and veterinary expertise help conservation teams refine their approach in five key areas:

- **Poaching prevention:** Horn trimming reduces the incentive to kill rhinos for their horns, complementing patrols and other security measures.
- **Animal welfare:** Veterinary monitoring helps safeguard rhinos during horn-trimming procedures and informs decisions about their care.
- **Behavioral research:** Long-term observations help scientists assess whether horn removal affects rhino movements, territories or social relationships.
- **Habitat management:** Wildlife sightings and location records reveal which areas rhinos use, informing decisions about habitat protection and management.
- **Long-term protection:** Combining field evidence with veterinary and security expertise helps reserve managers evaluate conservation strategies and adapt them as new findings emerge.

Together, these approaches aim to reduce poaching while accounting for the welfare and long-term survival of wild rhino populations.

Your Role in the Research

Set out into Greater Kruger's savanna with local guides and researchers, scanning the bush for rhinos. Once you find one, settle in and watch. Follow its movements, observe how it feeds or rests and record the details of its surroundings. These extended encounters offer something a typical safari rarely does: time to look beyond the initial sighting and understand an individual animal's behavior.

A planned veterinary-led horn trimming brings you close to another side of rhino conservation. If the operation proceeds during your departure, observe how the team prepares, monitors the rhino under veterinary care and carries out the procedure. You may also be invited to assist with approved biological measurements and monitoring.

Together, these experiences reveal the complexity of protecting wild rhinos, from the quiet patience of field observation to the carefully coordinated work of a veterinary team.

Note: Horn-trimming operations depend on veterinary and reserve management needs, weather and animal welfare, so they cannot be guaranteed on every departure.

Life in the Field

Research days in Greater Kruger begin early, when the air is cool and wildlife is active. Travel by 4x4 through grasslands and wooded savanna, watching for rhinos, elephants, lions, leopards and buffalo. Some encounters call for a longer stop, giving you time to follow an animal's behavior rather than simply photograph it and move on.

Field plans follow wildlife movements and the priorities of the research and veterinary teams. One day may be devoted to locating rhinos and documenting their activities. Another may bring the opportunity to participate in a horn-trimming operation. Between outings, return to your safari lodge to rest, compare observations and discuss what you've seen with the people responsible for protecting these animals.

The expedition continues at Tswalu Kalahari Reserve, where red dunes, open grasslands and rocky hills replace Greater Kruger's wooded savanna. Search for desert-adapted black rhinos, cheetahs and meerkats, and venture out after dark for a chance to encounter elusive nocturnal wildlife. The contrast between these two wildernesses offers a memorable look at the different landscapes rhinos inhabit.

Field Conditions

Expect early starts, full research days and time outdoors in South Africa's bush. Travel is primarily by 4x4 safari vehicle on rough tracks, with drives lasting up to two hours at a time and occasional longer journeys. Some activities may involve walking over uneven, grassy or rugged terrain, standing for extended periods and bending or kneeling to assist with approved research tasks.

Research outings may involve walking up to 3–4 miles at a slow pace. Participants should be comfortable carrying personal field equipment, negotiating uneven ground and getting in and out of safari vehicles without assistance.

Winter mornings in Greater Kruger can be cold, particularly on pre-dawn drives, while afternoons may become warm or hot. The itinerary also includes flights aboard small aircraft between wilderness areas. Flexibility is essential, as wildlife movements, weather and veterinary priorities determine how each field day unfolds.

Discovery in the Field

Protecting South Africa's Rhinos at Risk

1 **Take Part in a Veterinary Field Operation**

Experience the scale of a wild rhino at close range during a horn trimming operation. Assist with approved biological measurements under professional supervision, learning how the veterinary team cares for the animal during an intervention designed to discourage poaching.

2 **Follow the Details of a Rhino's Day**

Spend time watching an individual rhino feed, rest and interact with other animals. Record its activities and location, learning how patient observation reveals patterns in daily life and produces data researchers can use to inform its protection.

3 **Investigate Conservation's Difficult Decisions**

Horn trimming can reduce poaching risk, but how might it affect a rhino's movements or social behavior? Explore the questions researchers are investigating and how conservation teams weigh the procedure's benefits against its potential consequences for the animal.

4 **Search Greater Kruger for the Big Five**

Morning and afternoon game drives take you deeper into the bushveld in search of lions, leopards, elephants, buffalo and rhinos. Expert local guides help you interpret encounters, from an animal's behavior to its relationships with the surrounding habitat.

5 **Discover How Wildlife Survives in the Kalahari**

Explore Tswalu's red dunes, open grasslands and rocky foothills for desert-adapted black rhinos, cheetahs, oryx and springbok. Learn how these animals meet the demands of scarce water, unpredictable rainfall and extreme temperatures in this striking southern Kalahari landscape.

6 **Seek Wildlife After Dark**

Venture out when the heat subsides and nocturnal animals emerge to forage. Search for aardvarks, aardwolves, brown hyenas and bat-eared foxes, watching for behavior daylight drives rarely reveal. With considerable luck, a pangolin may also appear.

7 **Read the Kalahari on Foot**

Step onto the sand with a local guide to examine tracks, native plants and signs of life easily overlooked from a vehicle. Conditions and scheduling permitting, visit a habituated meerkat colony for an intimate look at its members' social behavior.

Explore with Purpose

8 **Explore the Landscape's Human History**

A protected rock art site reveals a human history that wildlife sightings alone cannot tell. If conditions and scheduling allow, examine markings left by earlier inhabitants and learn about their connection to the Kalahari landscape you're exploring.

9 **Understand the Fight Against Rhino Poaching**

Meet conservation professionals working to protect South Africa's remaining rhinos. Learn how field monitoring, security operations, veterinary care and horn trimming contribute to a coordinated protection strategy and explore the challenges of safeguarding large wild animals across extensive protected areas.

10 **Gain a Rare Perspective on Wildlife Conservation**

See how conservation decisions are made in the field, where researchers, veterinarians and reserve managers must consider animal welfare, scientific evidence and poaching threats. Return from the expedition with firsthand knowledge of the complexities of protecting rhinos and the people working to secure their future.

Ready to Book? Call an Adventure Specialist at 800-548-7555



Dates & Pricing Summary:

Price
From $22936 (+Air)

Group Size
Limited to 6 Travelers

Protecting South Africa's Rhinos at Risk Dates, Pricing & Info

Follow Rhinos by Helicopter & Join Wildlife Vets in the Field for Horn Trimming

2027 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Prices and dates not confirmed for 2027		
Jul 16 - Jul 25, 2027	**From $26936** +internal air	Natural Habitat Explorers Pricing Available
Aug 14 - Aug 23, 2027	**From $26936** +internal air	
Sep 22 - Oct 1, 2027	**From $26936** +internal air	

2028 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Prices and dates not confirmed for 2028		
May 21 - May 30, 2028	**From $28821** +internal air	
Jun 11 - Jun 20, 2028	**From $28821** +internal air	
Jul 15 - Jul 24, 2028	**From $28821** +internal air	
Aug 20 - Aug 29, 2028	**From $28821** +internal air	
Sep 5 - Sep 14, 2028	**From $28821** +internal air	
Sep 30 - Oct 9, 2028	**From $28821** +internal air	
Oct 22 - Oct 31, 2028	**From $28821** +internal air	

2029 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Prices and dates not confirmed for 2029		
May 21 - May 30, 2029	**From $29521** +internal air	
Jun 11 - Jun 20, 2029	**From $29521** +internal air	
Jul 15 - Jul 24, 2029	**From $29521** +internal air	
Aug 20 - Aug 29, 2029	**From $29521** +internal air	
Sep 5 - Sep 14, 2029	**From $29521** +internal air	
Sep 30 - Oct 9, 2029	**From $29521** +internal air	
Oct 22 - Oct 31, 2029	**From $29521** +internal air	

See https://www.nathab.com/earthwatch-expeditions/south-africa-rhino-conservation-travel/dates-fees for the latest pricing details.

Ready to Book? Call an Adventure Specialist at 800-548-7555

Included

Accommodations, services of Earthwatch Expeditions' professional Expedition Leaders, research staff, equipment and permitting, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on final day, some alcoholic beverages, some gratuities, airport transfers on Day 1 and final day, all activities and entrance fees, all taxes, permits and service fees.

Not Included

Travel to and from the start and end point of your trip, some alcoholic beverages, some gratuities, passport and visa fees (if any), optional activities, items of a personal nature (phone calls, laundry, etc.), airline baggage fees, airport and departure taxes (if any), required medical evacuation insurance, optional travel protection insurance.

Internal air: All light aircraft flights within the itinerary (this will be listed separately on our invoicing).

Mandatory Insurance

Since the areas we travel to are remote and wild (that's why we go there!), we require that all guests have, at minimum, medical evacuation insurance for this program. This is for the safety of all guests. We require that your chosen independent insurance plan includes a minimum of $250,000 in medical evacuation coverage.

To protect your investment and to provide peace of mind while you travel, we also strongly recommend purchasing comprehensive travel insurance. Plans may cover everything from medical treatment to trip cancellations and delays and lost luggage. Please contact our office if you would like more information about the medical evacuation and comprehensive travel insurance policies we offer by calling 800-548-7555.

Getting There & Getting Home

This trip begins and ends in Johannesburg, South Africa. Because this is a long international journey, **we recommend that you arrive at least one night prior to Day 1** to rest from your travels and begin the trip refreshed. For guests who come in early, recommended hotels will be included in your pre-departure materials. You must arrive in Johannesburg by 5 pm on Day 1 in order to attend the 7:00 pm welcome dinner.

You may depart Johannesburg anytime on the final day.

Our Earthwatch Adventures Nat Hab Air Team can best assist with your travel reservations, as our staff is familiar with the specific requirements of this program and can help arrange the most efficient itinerary. Please call us at 800-548-7555. While we offer the best available rates to us on airfare and additional nights' accommodations, you may occasionally find special web rates or lower fares online.



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