

African Explorer

A true horseback safari encompassing two riding destinations: the Waterberg region in South Africa and the undisturbed landscapes of the Mashatu Game Reserve in Botswana.

SOUTH AFRICA
8 DAYS | 7 NIGHTS
6 DAYS RIDING
Intermediate

Spend eight days riding across game rich plains, wetlands and mountain landscapes in South Africa, before heading to Botswana, where you'll explore the Limpopo River floodplains and ride into the heart of the Mashatu Reserve. The African Explorer has earned a global reputation as one of the most accessible and varied riding experiences in Africa. The first few days in South Africa will get you accustomed to the tack and terrain before you head off to Botswana to ride amongst elephants, hyenas and possibly a big cat or two! For those that want to, you can swim with your horse and jump some natural obstacles.

The best time of year to go is so subjective, with each season bringing its own highlights. If you love the heat then September- March are ideal or aim for April to August if you prefer cooler weather. With the heat comes increased chance of rain, but also gorgeous, lush vegetation and plenty of shade and lots of baby animals from November onwards. The coolest months of May-July are excellent riding weather but can be very cold at night in South Africa. Reduced vegetation in the dry winters can make for amazing game viewing. Lots of pros and cons! In the areas that this safari operates in, both South Africa and Botswana, have resident wildlife i.e. the wildlife does not migrate in and out and so superb game viewing does not depend on the time of year or a particular season's rainfall pattern.

Highlights:

- Visit two countries on one safari
- Ride with the Big Five: elephants, lions, cheetahs & leopards
- Six full days in the saddle, covering plains, wetlands, mountains and river floodplains
- Extraordinary bush camps and unforgettable sundowners
- Small groups with a max of 8 riders & locally-raised guides who know the bush inside out
- Wildlife sightings year-round



ITINERARY

Day 1

Guests are personally met at OR Tambo Airport in South Africa by Saddlebag Shuttles who provide the transfer services, and transported directly to Camp Davidson in the Waterberg, where they will enjoy a light lunch overlooking the vastness of the Waterberg plateau. They will then receive a safety briefing and meet their horses. The first ride is a gentle introduction to the reserve and an excellent opportunity for first encounters with species such as zebra, giraffe, wildebeest and kudu. The riding ranges from purposeful walking to easy cantering along sandy tracks and culminates with sundowner drinks on the open plains.

Day 2

The ride this morning is generally quite fast. The route follows the centre of an open valley which is home to species such as sable, reedbuck, red hartebeest, waterbuck and impala. The sandy tracks make for excellent going, and the route crosses open grassland and weaves through dense woodland. Dark red pedigree cattle bred on the property are often encountered on this route. When conditions are suitable, the last stretch of the ride involves splashy canters along the edge of the lake adjacent to Horizon Lodge. This is a great experience, but don't expect to remain dry in the process! The afternoon ride follows past a series of dams where encounters with hippo are likely and returns across the open plains. At this time of day there is often much activity on the plains, with the herds mingling in the soft sunlight and different groups coming and going as they prepare for the night. It is a truly magical experience to be able to ride so close to these wild animals, which have become completely relaxed in the presence of the horses.

ITINERARY

Day 3

An early start is needed for the long ride from Camp Davidson to either Savannah Lodge in the far southwest of the reserve, or Seringa Lodge in the southeast. The first part of the route covers country that riders will now be somewhat familiar with, but soon enters new terrain. In places the bush is thick but after a while the scenery opens to grasslands with sweeping views to the south and west. Riding through this landscape gives riders a sense of the vastness of the African plains. The area boasts a very high concentration of game with herds of over 300 blesbuck, or 80 eland, often sighted. Other species which are home to the plains include red hartebeest, tsessebe and ostrich. There are plentiful zebra, wildebeest, impala and giraffe, and smaller groups of sable, roan and waterbuck. The final stretch to Savannah Lodge is along a wooded stream where kudu and bushbuck are likely to be seen. After a relaxing time around the pool and within the sophisticated lodges, it is time to ride to the southern most areas of the reserve in search of Cape buffalo. These are members of Africa's famous "big five" and deserve their formidable reputation. Riders therefore need to be alert and responsive to the guides' instructions. This area is known for its spectacular sunsets as the sun sets over the distant headlands of the Waterberg escarpment – a fitting end to an eventful and memorable day in the African wilderness.

Day 4

A morning ride from the lodge in search of buffalo before returning to the lodge for lunch and a chance to relax and enjoy this beautiful setting before riding back up to Camp Davidson for a final night in South Africa.

Day 5

An early ride down from Camp Davidson to Horizon Lodge where there's time to quickly freshen up before jumping into the vehicle for the transfer to Botswana, which aims to depart at 9am. You'll arrive at Mashatu in time for lunch before changing into your riding clothes and heading out on your first afternoon ride to experience your new horses before arriving at the newly built Tree camp.

ITINERARY

Day 6

An early wake up call with tea/coffee brought to your tent followed by breakfast around the camp fire. You will make an early start each day to enjoy the freshness of the morning and to maximise game viewing opportunities in the hours the wildlife are most active. Undoubtedly you will come across the large herd of elephant for which the Tuli is renowned as well as many different species of antelope, giraffe, zebra, bat eared fox, jackal, hyena and possibly even lion, leopard, wild dog and cheetah. Depart Tree Camp and explore the centre of the reserve and game rich Pitsane river area before arriving at Two Mashatus camp in time for lunch and a cooling afternoons rest beside the pool. In the afternoon you can either ride or take a game drive to the south-western side of the reserve, which is an area not reached on horseback during this itinerary. It is an area which is rich in game with a resident pride of lion. The highlight of the drive is a sundowner in the ancient landscape of rock formations of the Mmagwa hills, with vast vistas into the setting sun.

Day 7

Full morning ride from Two Mashatus camp. The afternoon brings the chance to choose between a bush walk, afternoon ride or possibly a game drive with Mashatu looking for cats. Return to Two Mashatu camp for your last night in Africa.

Day 8

After a quick breakfast, riders set off on the final ride of the safari. This ride offers sweeping views to the east and south, bathed in early morning light, as it traverses along the edge of a ridge near the centre of the reserve. The path then descends to a game rich area along the Majali River. The deep river pools are the favourite haunt of baboon and impala. Sooner or later the great herds of elephant come past for their daily drink, to play in the water and enjoy a dust bath. The final part of the ride is across open plains with some fast canters to the Stables. Other notable sightings include Kori Bustard, the largest flying birds in Africa, bat eared foxes and ostrich. Once at the Stables it time for a shower and meal on the banks of the great river, and then a short journey to the Limpopo Valley Airfield for the flight to Johannesburg in South Africa.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Level of Riding & Fitness

It is crucially important for the safety and enjoyment of the whole group that riders wishing to book the African Explorer are at least intermediate riders. While the journey is not an endurance test, it does involve long hours in the saddle and, with the possibility of close encounters with elephant and the big cats in Botswana, riders need to be able to control their mounts gently and confidently. You should be able to mount and dismount unaided. Good riding fitness is expected as you'll be spending 4-7 hours in the saddle each day.

Before each safari, every rider will take a short riding test to ensure they are competent enough for the safari and fall into the above guideline. The decision of the manager conducting the test is final. Hard hats are mandatory and the weight limit is 85kg.



Guides & Group Size

The guides have many years of experience in leading safaris and they have grown up in the area. They know the bush like the back of their hand and are qualified by the Botswanan Qualifications Authority.

Maximum number of riders in a group is 8.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

The Horses

The hosts here take great care to match horse to rider based on a guest's riding experience and professed ability. The horses are predominantly boerperds, together with a mixture of warmbloods, Appaloosas and Friesians. They are all well schooled, forward going but calm horses. The horses have been carefully chosen for their temperament, courage, endurance and responsiveness.



Tack & Riding Equipment

The saddles used are South African McClellans. They are designed for the cavalry and ideal for long hours of riding. Small saddlebags are provided.

ACCOMMODATION

Camp Davidson (Day 1-3)

Camp Davidson was modelled on the old 'outspan' camps of E.A. Davidson when he was selling goods across the area from his wagon in the early 1900s. Your hosts have captured the early camp atmosphere in Camp Davidson. Beautiful, decked canvas tents are nestled amongst the sandstone ridges overlooking grassy game filled valleys. Each luxury tent has an ensuite bathroom. The camp is completely run on solar energy and has a small swimming pool.

Bellevue Lodges (Savannah & Seringa) (Day 4)

Savannah Lodge is on the southwestern side of the conservancy, while Seringa Lodge is on the southeastern side. Both lodges are tastefully decorated with a large comfortable living space and dining areas inside and outside. Both have a small pool which overlooks a plain where the wildlife frequent.

Tree Camp (Day 5)

Wrapped around the trunks of a giant mashatu and two ancient leadwood trees, Tree Camp perches several meters up, out of elephant trunk's reach and overlooking the banks of the Majale River and offers spectacular panoramic views of the adjacent cliffs and floodplain opposite where Mashatu's legendary herds roam. Sleeping quarters are five beautiful and spacious canvas roofed areas with four-poster beds, each facing into the spacious dining and resting area. The elevated platform offers a unique camp you will remember for years to come.

Two Mashatus Camp (Day 6 & 7)

This camp is near the Limpopo River but also has a view over open plains to the west. Each safari tent has its own flushing toilet and shower in a private area behind each tent. The central dining area is built on a teak platform using the local building style with a lala palm thatch roof. There is also a small swimming pool so that you can relax with a refreshing dip after your exciting day on horseback safari!



WHAT'S INCLUDED

Price includes:

- 6 full days of riding
- Shorter rides on arrival and departure days
- Shared accommodation
- All meals
- Drinks
- Bush walks
- Sundowners
- Laundry
- All arrangements for duration of holiday
- Services of guides

Price excludes:

- Flights
- Transfers
- Botswana conservation levy (\$20 USD per person per night in Botswana)
- Optional game drive in Botswana approx \$75pp)



FLIGHTS & AIRPORT TRANSFERS

Do NOT book flights until you have received the 'Booking Confirmation Email' from saddletravel.com.

- Arrival airport: Johannesburg (ORT)
 - Arrival time: Before 9.30 on Day 1
 - Departure time: After 20.00 on Day 8
- Extra transfer prices include arrival day road transfer from ORT airport to Camp Davidson, Day 5 transfers from Camp Davidson to Botswana and departure day air transfer (charter flight) from Botswana to Johannesburg. Transfers are strictly at set times.

CLIMATE

May-September (winter, dry season)

Winters are generally mild and dry. Night-time and morning temperatures can be cool, dropping down to 5°C during the coldest times. During the day it's warm with temperatures reaching up to 25°C.

October-April (summer, wet season)

The weather during summer can be very hot with fairly low humidity. Temperatures are at 17°C during the night and can reach 30°C and above during the day. Showers in the afternoon are common, but it rarely rains all day. The main rainy months are from December to February when the temperatures are also the hottest and can reach 40°C during the hottest part of the day.

CURRENCY & TIPPING

Upon arrival there is a \$10 per person per night Conservation Levy payable locally in cash. Please bring the correct amount as there is sometimes a lack of change.

We suggest you don't change too much money as your holiday is fully inclusive. We suggest you bring dollars to avoid inflated exchange rates of the local currency. Other costs, like souvenir shopping and gratuities, can also be done in dollars.

Gratuities are at your discretion and can be paid in £, € or \$. Normally R75 – R150 per person per night is recommended (which is approx. £5 - £10pppn).



WHAT TO BRING

We recommend wearing your riding boots when travelling and carrying one set of riding clothing and your riding hat in your hand luggage, so should your luggage not make it to the destination you'll still be able to ride.

When packing please do bear in mind that a full laundry service is included in the price. They can normally turn laundry around within 24-48 hours. Fresh linen and towels are provided at each camp.

There is a Wi-Fi at the stables on the arrival and departure day of your trail. Phone signal coverage in the area where you are riding is very limited.

There are small solar chargers that can charge most mobile phones and other devices with a USB port at some of the camps. Please note that charging your gadgets may not be possible every night so bringing a power bank is a good idea.

We recommend wearing neutral colours during this safari as the best way to get close to the wildlife is to blend in with your surroundings. Different tones khaki, brown, grey and natural bush green are ideal. Don't bring any bright colours or white as the animals will be able to spot you from afar.

- Your own well-fitted hard hat – Hard hats are mandatory
- Comfortable riding clothes. Wear everything a couple of times before bringing it on safari.
- Short boots and half chaps, ride/walking boots are perfect. Long leather boots are also good but long rubber boots are not advised.
- Riding gloves

- Bumbag
- Light weight long sleeved shirts
- Warm layers
- Light weight coat
- Waterproof clothing (during wet season October – April)
- Casual clothes for evening
- Light weight shoes for evening
- Lip balm
- Sun cream factor 30 or higher
- Swimming costume
- Sun hat
- Camera + spare batteries
- A good head torch
- Power bank
- Books / eReader for when you are relaxing between rides
- Insect repellent & bite cream
- Personal medication

HEALTH

For health and vaccine recommendations, please consult your healthcare provider at least 8 weeks before your trip.

Although Botswana is a Malaria area, the Tuli Block is low risk (especially in the winter months May-October). Chemoprophylaxis (use of anti-malaria drugs) is optional for those that live there as the risk of adverse drug effects outweigh the advantage of the very small chance of acquiring malaria in the Tuli Block. However, it is important to take mosquito preventative measures. If you get flu-like symptoms on your return home do ask your health care provider to exclude the possibility of malaria and tick bite fever.

Country specific information can also be found at National Travel Health Network and Centre website: <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries>

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

You must be in possession of a passport that is valid for at least six months after your return date and has at least 3 blank pages.

For entry requirements to Botswana for UK citizens, please visit the Foreign Travel Advise website: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/botswana/entry-requirements>

Note: You are travelling to Botswana via South Africa so please familiarize yourself with the entry requirements to South Africa. <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/south-africa/entry-requirements>

For any other nationalities, please contact your local embassy to check entry requirements. Having the correct travel documents is entirely your responsibility.

RIDING DECLARATION

"I am an experienced rider and able to mount & dismount unaided. I have a firm seat and I'm confident and in control at all paces over rough terrain (including rising trot, light seat canters and gallops) and have a good level of current riding fitness. I do not suffer from any illness or disability that could prejudice my safety or that of others."

PAYMENT & CANCELLATION TERMS

SaddleTravel.com holidays are confirmed with 20% non-refundable deposit. The full balance is due 56 days before start date.

If you cancel your booking less than 56 days before the start date of your trail we are entitled to receive full payment, less refunds as follows:

- 42 days or more before booking date: 50% refund
- 28 days or more: 30% refund
- less than 28 days before booking date: no refund.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

All saddletravel.com customers are required to take out appropriate travel insurance that covers horse riding and holiday cancellation. Proof of insurance details will be required during the booking process.



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