

# AFRICAN INSIGHT

EXPERIENCES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE



## ACADEMIC MODULE: 5

### MAPUTALAND COASTAL CONSERVATION AND ECO-TOURISM



# MODULE 5: MAPUTALAND COASTAL CONSERVATION AND ECO-TOURISM



## Introduction

This 2 night module takes place in the Maputaland region of KwaZulu Natal province which is home to the Maputaland Coastal Forest and Marine Reserves. These make up the northernmost section of iSimangaliso Wetland Park which links protected ecosystems as a continuous World Heritage Park stretching 220 km from the Mozambique border southwards to St. Lucia and 5 Kilometres out to sea.

The Maputaland Coastal Forest Reserve is well known for their extensive golden beaches, clear water and the most southern coral reefs off the coast of Africa. With the backdrop of some of the highest vegetated sand dunes in the world, it is not difficult to understand why this area is a marine conservation priority. Seven distinct yet connected ecosystems are home to 100 species of coral, 1200 species of fish, 526 species of birds, not to mention the terrestrial wildlife and botanical diversity – a treasure chest of opportunities for responsible eco-tourism ventures .... or is it?

**We will be based at Kosi Bay in the far north of the Park up against the Mozambique border where there are a number of tourism based products in the area, including numerous community owned camps. We will be staying in one of these near the mouth of the Kosi Bay estuary, in itself a unique system that has been used by man for hundreds of years.**

Charismatic species of conservation relevance include Loggerhead and Leatherback turtles, which from November to March come on the beaches to nest. Humpback whales pass along this coastline between June and November on a migration route between their summer polar feeding grounds in the Antarctic, to the tropical and sub-tropical coastal waters where they breed in the winter.

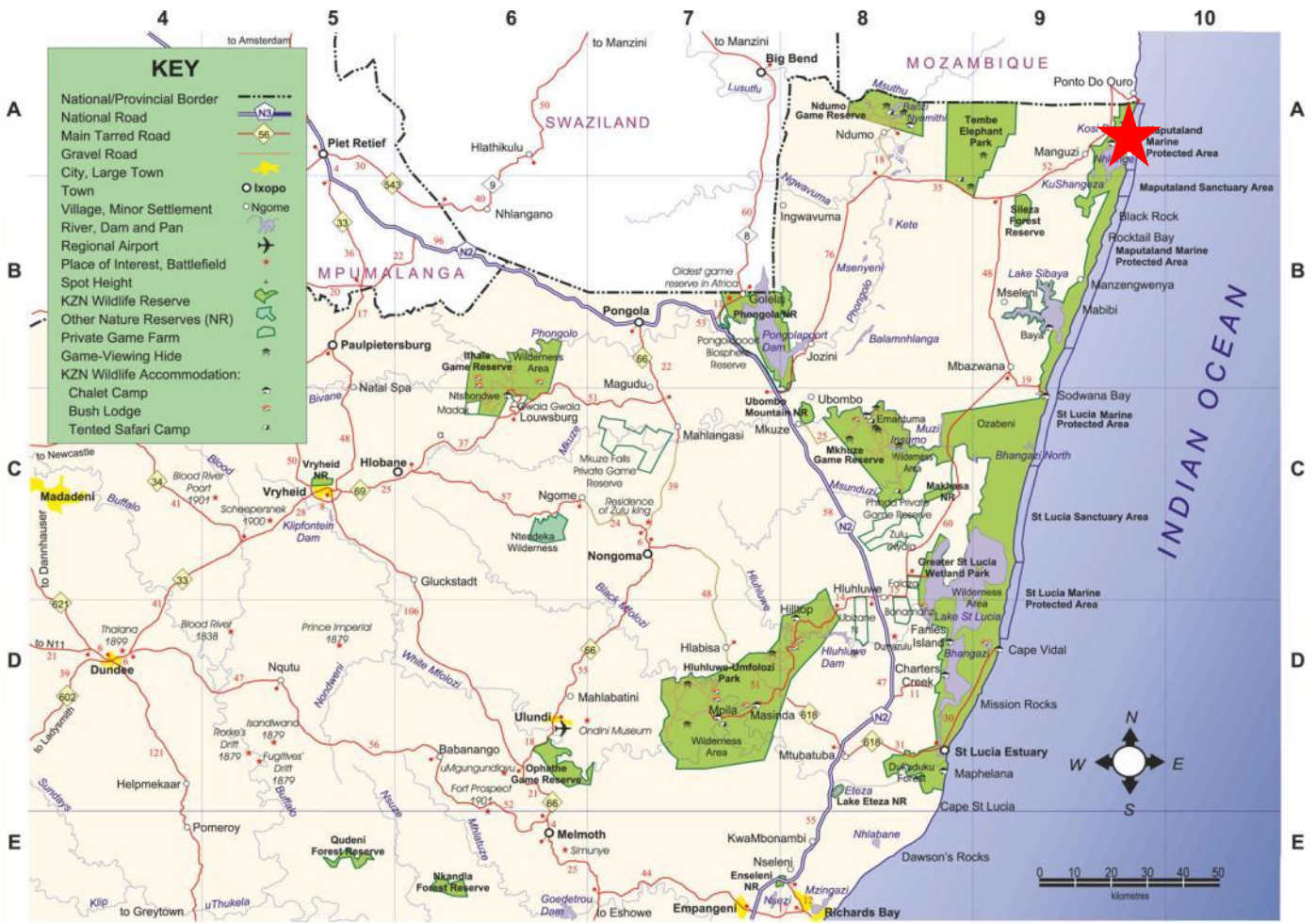
Low tide provides an excellent opportunity for rocky shore studies within the inter-tidal zone. Students experience the extreme physical conditions of the rocky shore and see how the various plants and animals have adapted. Animals and plants to study include sponges, sea anemones, corals, jellyfish, worms, snails, crabs, sea urchins, marine algae and fish. These zones have been harvested as a food source by the local people for hundreds of years.

The Kosi Bay mouth offers several unique educational opportunities such as snorkelling on the reef just inside the estuary. Observing marine life is a great experience where one enters another world inhabited by creatures often very different to those we are familiar with on land. Snorkelling is low tide dependant.





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## Aims and Objectives

To gain an understanding of the dynamics of some of the components of this unique ecosystem, the factors that influence them, what are the current threats and what research, monitoring and management interventions are being undertaken to ensure its integrity and biodiversity. Our programme includes presentations by local experts as well as field studies.

Evaluate some of the principles of responsible eco-tourism and experience some local responsible eco-activities.

## Optional Activities:

The time of year will influence which of the following optional activities can be undertaken.

- **Kayaking:** Support a local responsible tourism activity offered by a community entrepreneur and complies with all the necessary industry health and safety regulations.
- **Turtle Nesting Tours:** This coastline is the only remaining major nesting site in Africa where Loggerhead and Leatherback turtles still lay their eggs. These important breeding grounds have been protected by government wildlife authority for over 40 years. Another opportunity to support local responsible tourism, tours are run nightly from November – March by trained local community guides working for themselves and are only possible at low tide. The beach is vehicle free so participants walk for up to 3 hours.
- **Lake Sibaya:** This water body, the largest and deepest natural fresh water lake in South Africa, is situated inland of the beach behind some of the highest vegetated dunes in the world. It forms part of the southern section of the Maputaland wetland system and is fed solely by underground aquifers. Despite being adjacent to the St Lucia estuarine lake and wetland system it is separated by a distinct east/west watershed. Therefore Lake Sibaya only supports fresh water species, some of which are local endemics.
- Full day game viewing excursion to **Tembe Elephant Park**. Home to leopard, cheetah, wild dog, lion, rhino and buffalo and some of the largest elephant on the African continent. It is also is prime habitat for South Africa's smallest antelope – the Suni.



Standard Includes and Excludes Apply

