

**AFRICAN INSIGHT**  
 holidays that make a difference



# Zululand Conservation Experience



**SOMKHANDA**  
 GAME RESERVE

SHARE LIFE WITH NATURE



## Overview

This hands-on conservation volunteer programme covers 2 unique conservation areas located in the Zululand and Maputaland regions of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa and the seaside village of Ponto Do Oura in Mozambique. This region falls within one of the top 21 Hot Spots for biodiversity on Earth and this unique programme is designed so that participants can make a meaningful contribution to wildlife conservation whilst enjoying a varied and thrilling experience.

After arriving in South Africa we transfer to **Somkhanda Game Reserve** where you have the unique opportunity to contribute to the conservation of endangered and threatened wildlife species by doing practical fieldwork that will make a difference. This is a unique programme which is aimed at adventurous travelers who are looking for a "Science on Safari" experience where they will be actively involved in meaningful wildlife conservation work. You will be working alongside conservationists collecting field data needed to make crucial wildlife management decisions on the game reserve. Although this is not an extreme experience participants will need to be early risers, physically active, capable of climbing on and off the back of vehicles and tracking animals on foot for up to 5-10km through the African bush, possibly spending most of the day in the field.

In addition to the practical work the programme also includes guided ecology bush walks as well as traditional game drives to view wildlife, both during the day and at night. Accommodation on Somkhanda is in very comfortable rooms with private en-suite bathrooms and standard electricity and water supplies.

After Somkhanda we drive over the Lebombo Mountains to the remote **Tembe Elephant Park** where, from our accommodation at Royal Thonga Lodge, we will explore one of South Africa's truly wild Big 5 game reserves. This unique experience compliments the Somkhanda experience with a Big 5 safari experience. This remote park lies on the border between South Africa and Mozambique, where over 250 of the largest elephant in the world roam. Here we will enjoy unlimited safari drives in our own private safari vehicle and guide.

Rounding off the experience we enjoy 3 nights at seaside resort village of Ponto Do Oura in Mozambique for a completely different beach and marine life experience. Ponto Do Oura is renowned for its sandy beaches, coral reefs and opportunities for some of the finest snorkeling and dolphin interactions. All these experiences are booked on arrival and for your own account. Everything in Ponto do Oura is within walking distance of our private guest house accommodation.

Throughout this programme, you will get three meals a day (except for our 4 night stay in Mozambique where lunch is excluded)

In the summer (September- March) it is the rainy season so come prepared to get wet. The temperatures can get very hot during the day and night, however, all sleeping rooms are provided with ceiling fans. At Somkhanda the camp has a lovely refreshing swimming pool. Winter (May – August) is the dry season. The early mornings and evenings can be very chilly so warm jackets are required. Good walking shoes, hats, sun cream, long trousers, water bottles and a pair of binoculars are essentials to get the most out of this experience.

## Somkhanda Game Reserve



Somkhanda is the core of this programme. At 12,000ha in size, it is among the biggest private game reserves in Zululand. It was officially proclaimed a game reserve in 2006. Being ideal habitat for white and black rhino it was identified, by the responsible government conservation agency, as an ideal partner for the national Black Rhino Range Expansion Project and received an introduction to a founder population of this rare and endangered species.

Somkhanda is home to both species of rhino, leopard, buffalo, elephant and a comprehensive range of all the common wildlife that historically occurred in this region. This unique situation affords the opportunity for visitors, in relative safety due to the absence of lion, to get involved in the reserve's wildlife monitoring programmes using scientifically recognized methods.

## Tembe Elephant Park

This 300 km<sup>2</sup> game reserve is home to the full complement of the Big Five – elephant, lion, leopard, black and white rhino and buffalo – as well as over 340 bird species and many other mammal species right down to the tiny Suni, one of the smallest antelope in the world.

The area was once known as 'The Ivory Route' because for many years this ancient route linked the ivory traders of Mozambique and Zululand. It is where the largest elephants in Africa – and the world - roamed. Today, these gentle giants remain and thrive in their ancestral homeland. And this is where you can meet them...face to face.



***This incredible experience combines various components that represent the core values of responsible travel (i) actively contributing to scientific research that will make a difference to conservation (ii) financially supporting wildlife conservation initiatives owned by tribal communities that benefit the community through job creation and other benefits.***

## **PROGRAMME**

### **DAY 1**

Arriving in the late afternoon, you will be given an opportunity to unpack, before departing on an early evening game drive before dinner.

### **DAYS 2 – 7: Wildlife Monitoring & Conservation**

Working in small groups our daily programmes will start with either a bushwalk aimed at providing a broader appreciation and knowledge of the basics of tracking, bird, mammal, insect identification which will enhance the experience or one of the following wildlife conservation projects:

- **Rhino monitoring** - Due to the significance of the species rhino monitoring is an ongoing project on Somkhanda with many of the animals having been fitted with radio tracking devices. Students will accompany the reserve's rhino monitors into the field on their daily routine. Information gathered from rhinos includes general health, associations with other animals and off spring, movement, home range plotting, feeding preferences etc.
- **Camera Trap Surveying** - Students will accompany experienced monitors as they check camera traps, changing batteries, downloading data and sorting through photographs. The objective of the camera trap survey method is to monitor a variety of species and known individual animals to assess their physical condition, the presence of calves and associations between individuals, with a focus on the more elusive black rhino and leopard.
- **Game Population Monitoring** - Estimating game numbers on a reserve like Somkhanda can prove challenging – the roads are very rough and difficult to traverse, the vegetation is dense in many places and the topography is very hilly. In this exercise students will work in pairs stationed in a blind at a waterhole for a predetermined period to count game species as they arrive to drink. Details to be recorded will include the species, age class and sex.

Generally, the projects require a full morning of field work and depending on the programme lunch might be back at the lodge or a picnic out in the reserve. Returning to camp in the afternoon there will be a relaxation period before analysing the data or capturing it on the computer.

Once the work is over there is the opportunity of packing a few cold refreshments into an icebox and heading out into the reserve on a safari or to find a quiet spot to enjoy the sunset.



## **DAYS 8 & 9**

### **Tembe Elephant Park (Royal Thonga Lodge)**

After a scenic 2 hour transfer over the Lebombo Mountains (once home to the well known author of King Solomon's Mines – Ryder Haggard) and into Maputaland, home of the Tembe Elephant Park and other unique wildlife adventure destinations.

From our safari lodge, we spend these two days exploring this truly wild park which is only accessible by 4x4 and offers the greatest diversity of wildlife in KwaZulu Natal including the Big 5, lion, leopard, elephant, rhino and buffalo as well as Africa's smallest antelope the Suni.



### **DAYS 10, 11, 12 & 13: Ponto Do Oura – Mozambique (Gala Gala Eco Lodge)**

It is a relatively short trip to The Mozambique border where we will leave our vehicle and be met on the other side by transport provided by our host. The drive from the border to Ponto Do Oura is an adventure in itself! On arrival, we will meet our host, enjoy a light lunch and settle into our rooms.

For this last section of your trip, you can choose to relax on the beach, book snorkeling and dolphin excursions with your hosts at Gala Gala. It is safe to explore the village's extensive informal market and many souvenir shops by foot, making sure to take reasonable precautions for your personal safety. (included in this package is a Dolphin excursion, snorkeling and a two hour quad bike excursion)



Breakfasts and Dinners are included and will be arranged either at the guesthouse or on occasion at a typical Mozambican Restaurant in town. Lunches are for the guest's own account and can be enjoyed at any of the many unique venues the village has to offer.

### **DAY 14: Return to King Shaka International**

After a very early breakfast, we pack up and depart for the border control to arrive as it opens to make the journey back to OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg/ King Shaka Airport Durban for the return flight home.

#### **COST:**

ZAR 22,245

EUR 1698

#### **INCLUDES:**

- Accommodation on shared basis (Lodge accommodation with en-suite bathroom)
- All Activities as per Itinerary
- Local Guides/facilitators
- Transport
- All meals except lunches in Mozambique and lunches on days 1 & 14.
- All Entrance fees

#### **EXCLUDES:**

- Refreshments
- Additional / optional activities
- Items of a personal nature