



TULI SAFARI 1 ITINERARY

OVERVIEW

The Tuli safari is an epic journey through the ancient and undisturbed landscapes of the Mashatu Game Reserve in Botswana's Northern Tuli Game Reserve. Spread over eight days (seven nights) the safari – literally “journey” in Swahili – entails riding 150 km on horseback through truly spectacular landscapes, with regular sightings of Africa's most charismatic wildlife species. As the wildlife in this area is not seasonal, wonderful game viewing experiences are possible throughout the year.

This combination of exciting encounters on horseback with elephant, giraffe, spotted hyena and often lion, cheetah and leopard, together with the experience of the journey itself, has won the Tuli safari a global reputation as one of the most sought after riding experiences in Africa. The three other ingredients which make the Tuli so special are the quality of the horses, the professionalism of the guides, and the hospitality provided in the three unique and memorable camps used along the way.

RIDING

Riding Level: Advanced intermediate to experienced. Must be able to independently control a horse at all paces. Jumping – ability to jump natural obstacles is a benefit, but not essential as they can be ridden around. Must be able to take a light seat at canter.

Riding Test: 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.

Distance and duration: At least 20–30 km a day. None of the routes are direct from camp to camp. Maximum 5 and half hours in the saddle per day.

Horses: We have a herd of 70 horses in Botswana. The herd is comprised of Boerperd, Thoroughbred, Warmblood and Arab crosses. Each rider will be matched to a horse, as much as possible.

Saddles: We ride in McClellan trail rider saddles. These are specifically designed for long hours in the saddle. They are comfortable for the horses and rider on long distances.

COMMON WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS

Elephant, lion, leopard, hyena, giraffe, hippo, cape buffalo, eland, kudu, impala, waterbuck, blue wildebeest, bushbuck, ostrich, baboon, vervet monkey, warthog, bat-eared foxes and jackal. Occasionally seen are crocodile, brown hyena, serval, duiker, bush pig, steenbuck and reedbuck. These are all beautiful animals and a privilege to observe in their natural environment.

ACCOMMODATION

Two Mashatus Camp

Nestled in the shade of a mashatu tree with two traditionally built lala palm rondavel dining and lounge areas. Accommodation is in big A-frame walk-in tents pitched on teak platforms with en-suite bathrooms. Each tent is private and positioned in the shade of a tree with a small deck area in front on which to relax during the afternoons.

Tree Camp

Wrapped around the trunks of a giant mashatu and two ancient leadwood trees, Tree Camp perches several meters up, out of "trunks reach" overlooking the banks of the Majale River. 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.

The Kgotla

The Kgotla is an old tribal court from a nearby community, which was relocated to the banks of the Motloutse River on the western periphery of Mashatu. The boma is an open-air traditional African enclosure made up of leadwood logs. There is hot running water, beautiful open-air showers and flushing toilets; the perfect combination of necessary comforts and an authentic bush experience. Guests sleep in individual sleeping pods around a large log fire which sits on a hearth in the centre of the boma.

ITINERARY ROUTE

DAY 1 - STABLES TO TWO MASHATU'S CAMP

DAY 2 - TREE CAMP

DAY 3 - KGOTLA

DAY 4 - KGOTLA

DAY 5 - TREE CAMP

DAY 6 - TWO MASHATU'S CAMP

DAY 7 - TWO MASHATU'S CAMP

DAY 8 - BACK TO STABLES / RECEPTION FOR DEPARTURE

Please note: Route may change due to weather or to other logistics

DAY 1 - RIDE TO TWO MASHATUS CAMP

The Tuli Safari starts on a Saturday, following a flight from Lanseria in South Africa to Limpopo Valley Airfield in the Mashatu Game Reserve, Botswana. Guest arrive at Johannesburg International airport and are transferred to Lanseria airport (40 min drive). Guests are received at the Horizon Horseback Mashatu stables where they will enjoy a light lunch on the banks of the Limpopo River, receive a safety briefing and meet their horses.

Horizon takes great care to match horse to rider based on a guest's riding experience and professed ability. However, before embarking on the safari, each guest will be given a simple riding test in order to ensure that they are suitably balanced in the saddle and are able to direct their horse in an independent manner. It is crucially important for the safety and enjoyment of the whole group that riders wishing to book the Tuli Safari 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, riders need to be able to gently and confidently control their mounts.

If at this point a rider is unsure of the suitability of their selected horse, a horse swap is possible. At Horizon Horseback Mashatu, the herd is quite uniform, consisting of well schooled, forward going, but calm horses. They are mostly boerperd, a beautiful, gentle natured South African breed particularly suited to this type of work.

The route on this afternoon is from the Stables to Two Mashatus Camp, a distance of 11km. It follows the Limpopo River floodplains, with good opportunities for those first exciting encounters with elephant, giraffe, zebra, ostrich and wildebeest. The route crosses close to a large wetland area which acts as a magnet for game and there is even a chance to come across bat eared fox, black backed jackal and spotted hyena. It then crosses the Majali River close to its confluence with the Limpopo, a favourite haunt of leopards and a resident pride of lion. Across an open plain the famous Two Mashatus Camp awaits.

DAY 2: TWO MASHATUS TO TREE CAMP

The first full day of riding crosses the game rich areas of the central reserve. Following breakfast at dawn, riders set off first along the Majali and then the Mataboli rivers in a north western arc towards the beautifully appointed Tree Camp. The route typically yields rich encounters with elephant, waterbuck, giraffe, impala, wildebeest and zebra. Signs of the many predators that make these rich riverine environments their home are bountiful, and chance encounters possible. The ride typically takes between four and five hours, and riders start to form a true bond with their individual mounts. The trappings of modern living begin to fall away as the sense of adventure and journey deepens.

Tree Camp will be reached in time for a refreshing shower and lunch. After a welcome rest in the comfort of the camp, nestled in the cooling shade of the majestic Mashatu Tree, a hearty tea will be served. This is followed by a guided bush walk up the Majali River in search of crocodile and other game. Kudu, warthog, klipspringer and eland are all present in the area around the camp, as are elephant, lion and hyena. Waterfowl fly low past the camp and birdsong abounds. This is a truly beautiful place and it is impossible not to immerse oneself in nature and experience the exceptional qualities of Africa's wilderness areas.

DAY 3 - VALLEY OF THE ELEPHANTS - TREE CAMP TO KGOTLA



Waking in Tree Camp is a magical experience. One feels truly alive, surrounded by birdsong as the early morning light filters through the majestic tree's leaves. After a quick breakfast, riders set off on the one of the journey's longest rides – up onto the edge of the mini escarpment and then down, through the Valley of the Elephants and on towards the distant sandstone citadels guarding the Limpopo and Motloutse Rivers.

The first part of the journey is not to be hurried, as the horses wind along well worn elephant paths, past giant baobabs and the occasional shallow watering pan. Soon, however, the country opens up and the horses can start to stretch their legs along soft ground leading to the headwaters of a stream flowing off the ridge and down towards the Limpopo. This is prime elephant country and the guides are always on the lookout, using all their sharpened senses. Once the path leaves the river, the terrain is once again more open and the pace faster. A second river is then joined, which leads directly down to the veterinary control gate on the main road through Mashatu Game Reserve.

The route then follows the road for a short while before heading across flat country towards the intriguing Sacred Rock massif. Here the mopane vegetation is short and it is safe to ride quite fast across the plain. Large herds of zebra, wildebeest and impala habit this area. The guides plot their route using individual mashatu, leadwood and apple-leaf trees as their markers. Soon riders reach the old leadwood enclosure (used in the past as a traditional law court of a Botswana village) known as 'The Kgotla'. This open-air enclosure forms the perfect, secure camp for the night. The camp is not far from the banks of the Motloutse River and, with high concentrations of game living along the river's fertile floodplain, the area is home to large prides of lion and clans of hyena. The sounds of these predators at night provide enduring memories!

In the afternoon, we search for the area's resident lion on a game drive and draw the day's adventures to a close with sundowners at the ancient "Amphitheatre" rocks. Whilst big cat sightings from horseback occasionally happen, Horizon Horseback follows a ride away policy. The best opportunities to approach lion, cheetah, leopard and spotted hyena occur whilst on game drives where the vehicle acts as a natural hide and is largely ignored by the predators. Back at the Kgotla, dinner is enjoyed around a large log fire. The night is spent with a ceiling of stars and Africa's night-time melody to sing you to sleep; a veraciously rare experience which is just about as far away from city life and the modern world as anyone can imagine.

DAY 4: EXPLORING THE MOTLOUTSE - Sandstone Cathedrals

The riding this day is more relaxed and tailored to the group, since a different camp does not need to be reached by nightfall. A particularly interesting route to follow is first along the Motloutse River, stopping at well known elephant drinking holes to watch the herds come and go before winding down towards the impressive Solomon's Wall, a tall dolomite dyke which was breached by the river in ancient times. This is the favourite haunt of troops of baboon, which are always fascinating to watch. The trail then follows the banks of the river, flanked by giant mashatu and leadwood trees, towards the mighty Limpopo. This area is renowned for its dramatic sandstone rock formations, steeped in colour and home to eland, klipspringer and kudu. Some of the oldest civilizations in southern Africa settled in this valley. Archaeological evidence in the area includes middle and late stone age tools, rock art and the legendary Mapungubwe Dynasty. Mapungubwe means "Place of the Jackal" in the Venda language and this dynasty existed around 1220 AD. The Mapungubwe topography itself is ancient and timeless and, combined with marvelous wildlife sightings, makes for an incredible riding experience.

The game drive in the afternoon takes guests to the foot of the impressive Mamagwa massif, a free standing formation which was used by British troops as a defensive position against incursions from the Transvaal Boers at the end of the 19th century. Sundowners are traditionally taken at the far western edge of the massif, with endless views over the wilderness landscape whilst watching the sun slowly slip over the horizon. The drive back to Kgotla in the dark provides more excellent opportunities to spot lion, leopard and hyena.

DAY 5: RIVER TRAILS – KGOTLA TO TREE CAMP

On this day the journey turns northeast and follows a series of river trails on the way back to the centre of the reserve. Life in this arid environment is always concentrated near water, and the ride promises sightings of elephant, zebra, giraffe and wildebeest. The route crosses the watershed and then winds along ancient paths adjacent to a stream flowing north towards the Majali River. At these elevated heights, the sweeping views to the north reveal the true wilderness character of Mashatu Game Reserve. Baobab trees scatter the landscape as they have for centuries, and remarkably two of these giants are found growing directly in the stream itself. This provides an excellent spot for both horses and riders to stop for a rest and a drink.

The remainder of the day's riding is a mixture of elephant trail trekking and canters across relatively open mopane veld. The final stretch is along the Majali River itself, past rocky pools, cliff faces and ribbons of green grass. Encounters with baboon, kudu, klipspringers and crocodile are likely. Tree Camp is finally reached after 4-5 hours of riding.

That afternoon guests leave their horses to a well earned rest and will go either on a guided bush walk or, subject to availability, a game drive with Mashatu Main Camp guides. This opportunity, while provided at an extra cost, should not be missed as the near guaranteed sightings of lion and leopard, and sometimes of cheetah, are legendary. The guides are very knowledgeable about the structure and whereabouts of the various prides and individuals, and failure to find them is very rare indeed.

DAY 6: WORLD'S VIEW – TREE CAMP TO TWO MASHATUS CAMP

With an early departure from Tree Camp, 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 south of the Majali River. The wetland area 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 first across open plains with some fast canters, and then through cool riverine vegetation along the approaches to Two Mashatus Camp. This is the original Tuli Trail camp and is beautifully situated nestled amongst giant mashatu and apple leaf trees close to the banks of the Limpopo River. This area typically boasts the highest density of elephants in the reserve, who sometimes roam through the camp in a gentle yet determined way. It is also excellent for lion and leopard as well as baboon, bushbuck and waterbuck.

Guests sleep in standard safari tents with en suite facilities. After four to five hours in the saddle, this is the perfect place to relax. On hot days the swimming pool at Two Mashatus is particularly welcoming.

DAY 7: OPEN PLAINS – Upriver along the Pitsane River

This the last full day on Mashatu Game Reserve and the riding explores the game rich area along the Majali and Pitsani Rivers. In the north there are open plains . Overall the riding is relaxed, with the guides responding to the herds whilst keeping their eyes peeled for the big cats. In the afternoon there is the option of a bush walk or a shorter ride, maybe to the banks of the Limpopo River where elephants are often seen crossing.

DAY 8: LIMPOPO FAREWELL – Two Mashatus to the Stables

The final ride of the Tuli Safari safari is back to the Stables, following the Limpopo River upstream. The route passes game rich habitat, including a hyena den and a large wetland which can be home to large flocks of waterfowl. 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.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Transfers to and from Johannesburg are by private chartered plane.
- Maximum of 8 guests with a one professional lead guide and one assistant back up guide. If you are on a combination safari with Mountain Bike riders (only a few special trips a year), the two groups separate each morning with their own guides and meet again in time for lunch and normally enjoy all afternoon activities together.
- Rate is inclusive of accommodation, meals, tea/coffee, drinks and laundry. Flights and transfer not included.
- Elephant, lion, leopard, cheetah and hyena country.
- Strictly no under 12's.
- Only a conservation levy (\$20 per night in support of the Northern Tuli Game Reserve (NORTUGRE) conservation initiatives), optional Mashatu game drive tips and curios are payable locally in cash. Hats are mandatory.