



AFRICAN EXPLORER 1 ITINERARY

OVERVIEW - 4 NIGHTS SOUTH AFRICA AND 3 NIGHTS BOTSWANA

The African Explorer is a horseback safari which encompasses Horizon Horseback's two riding destinations, one in the Waterberg region of Limpopo in South Africa and the other in the ancient and undisturbed landscapes of the Mashatu Game Reserve in Botswana. Spread over eight days (seven nights) the safari – literally "journey" in Swahili – entails riding first across the game rich plains, wetlands and mountain landscapes in South Africa, and then, once transferred by road to Botswana, along the Limpopo River floodplains and up into the heart of the Mashatu Reserve, with regular sightings of Africa's most charismatic wildlife species.

This combination of an introduction to riding in Africa with non-dangerous game, followed by encounters on horseback with elephant, spotted hyena and often lion, cheetah and leopard, while experiencing two African countries on one safari, has won the African Explorer a global reputation as one of the most accessible and varied riding experiences in Africa. The three other ingredients which make the African Explorer so special are the quality of the horses, the professionalism of the guides, and the hospitality provided in the three unique and memorable camps, and one luxury lodge, 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 obstacle, a benefit, but not essential as 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 110 Horses in South Africa and 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, zebra, sable, roan, kudu, impala, waterbuck, red hartebeest, nyala, tsessebe, blue wildebeest, blesbuck, bushbuck, ostrich, baboon, vervet monkey, warthog 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. Combined with the wide open spaces, variable topography and excellent going, this makes the Signature Safari an unforgettable riding experience.

ACCOMMODATION

Camp Davidson (Day 1, 2 & 3)

Camp Davidson was modelled on the old 'outspan' camps of E.A. Davidson (great grandfather to one of the founding partners of Horizon Horseback) when he was selling goods across the area from his wagon in the early 1900s. Horizon has 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 as 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.

Two Mashatus Camp (Day 5 & 6)

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 (Day 7)

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.

ITINERARY ROUTE

DAY 1 – SOUTH AFRICA – CAMP DAVIDSON
DAY 2 – SOUTH AFRICA – CAMP DAVIDSON
DAY 3 – SOUTH AFRICA – CAMP DAVIDSON
DAY 4 – SOUTH AFRICA – BELLEVUE LODGE
DAY 5 – BOTSWANA – TWO MASHATUS CAMP
DAY 6 – BOTSWANA – TWO MASHATUS CAMP
DAY 7 – BOTSWANA – TREE CAMP
DAY 8 – BACK TO STABLES / RECEPTION FOR DEPARTURE

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

DAY 1 - CAMP DAVIDSON

Guests are personally met at OR Tambo Airport in South Africa by representatives of our sister company, Saddlebag Shuttles, 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.

Horizon takes 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. 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.

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: CAMP DAVIDSON

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.

DAY 3: CAMP DAVIDSON

Setting off in a westerly direction, this ride tracks past a brown hyena den, skirts past the upper reaches of the Horizon dam before crossing a wide grassy valley. At one point the ride enters into dense woodland, home to shy species such as kudu, bushbuck and Vervet monkeys. Emerging from the woods, the horses have a chance to stretch their legs along open sandy tracks. Finally the ride swings back to the north, through mixed bushveld and fascinating rock formations. Two highlights of this ride are the jumping lanes and the chance for riders to swim their horses bareback in the Horizon dam next to the main lodge. For many guests, this is an exhilarating and unforgettable experience. Once dried off and back in the saddle, the ride climb back up to Camp Davidson is particularly intriguing, as it follows a mountain pass cut through boulders and outcrops. After lunch, enjoy a sundowner ride across the plains on the reserve. We are very fortunate to have a large herd zebra. Over the years, the herd has become quite habituated to the horses and it is now possible to ride really close and experience being part of the zebra herd. A wonderful way to watch the foals frolick.

DAY 4 - BELLEVUE LODGE

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 5 am: RETURN RIDE TO STABLES AND TRANSFER TO BOTSWANA

After an early start, another long ride through game rich country returns riders to the heart of the operation, Horizon Lodge. The route taken is different from that taken on the outward leg, turning this part of the safari into an exciting journey passing through diverse landscapes and ecosystems. Game species typically prefer different habitats, with nyala and bushbuck for instance occupying dense forest-like sections of the reserve while blesbuck and hartebeest stick to the open plains, and waterbuck and reedbuck, unsurprisingly, are normally seen close to streams and other waterways. The route provides excellent opportunities to see giraffe, which is always a highlight. At the Horizon Lodge, guests embark on the road transfer to Mashatu Game Reserve in Botswana with Saddlebag Shuttles.

DAY 5 pm: RIDE TO TWO MASHATUS CAMP

Having crossed the mighty Limpopo River, guests are received at the Horizon Horseback Mashatu Stables where they will enjoy a light lunch, receive a safety briefing, and meet their horses.

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 6 : TWO MASHATUS CAMP - OPEN PLAINS– Along the Pitsane River

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 7: TWO MASHATUS 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. 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, if the group chooses, 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 8: LIMPOPO FAREWELL – Tree Camp to the Stables

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

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Transfer package of 2 x Road Transfers & 1 x Charter Flight as follows:
 - Arrival Day – Shared Road Transfer from ORT International for Camp Davidson
 - Day 5 – Shared Road Transfer from Horizon Lodge to Horizon Botswana, Mashatu
 - Departure Day – Shared Charter Flight Transfer between Horizon Horseback Botswana, Mashatu and Johannesburg
- Maximum of 8 guests with a one professional lead guide and one assistant back up guide.
- Rate is inclusive of accommodation, meals, tea/coffee, drinks and laundry.
- 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 or by card
- Weight limit on request – Guideline – 85kg with some exceptions.
- Hats are mandatory.