



AFRICAN EXPLORER 2 ITINERARY

OVERVIEW - 3 NIGHTS SOUTH AFRICA & 4 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 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, 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 reedbucklion, leopard, hyena. 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)

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 3)

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 4 & 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.

The Kgotla (Day 5 & 6)

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 – SOUTH AFRICA – CAMP DAVIDSON

DAY 2 – SOUTH AFRICA – CAMP DAVIDSON

DAY 3 – SOUTH AFRICA – BELLEVUE LODGE

DAY 4 – BOTSWANA – TREE CAMP

DAY 5 – BOTSWANA – KGOTLA

DAY 6 – BOTSWANA – KGOTLA

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 - 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 4 am: RETURN RIDE TO SATBLES 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 4 pm: RIDE TO TREE 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 this afternoon is from the Stables to 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 about two 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 is a truly beautiful place where one is enveloped by the exceptional qualities of Africa's wilderness areas.

DAY 5: TREE CAMP TO KGOTLA

Waking in Tree Camp is a magical experience. One feels fully immersed in nature, surrounded by birdsong, and alive to the new day as the early morning light filters through the tree's leaves. After a quick breakfast, riders set off on the journey's first long ride – 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 inhabit 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 fire. The night is spent with a ceiling of stars and Africa's night-time melody to sing you to sleep; a rare experience which is just about as far away from city life and the modern world as anyone can imagine.

DAY 6: KGOTLA - EXPLORING THE MOTLOUTSE

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 7: 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. 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.