

Lawson's Birding, Wildlife & Custom Safaris

Escarpment and Kruger National Park Voyager

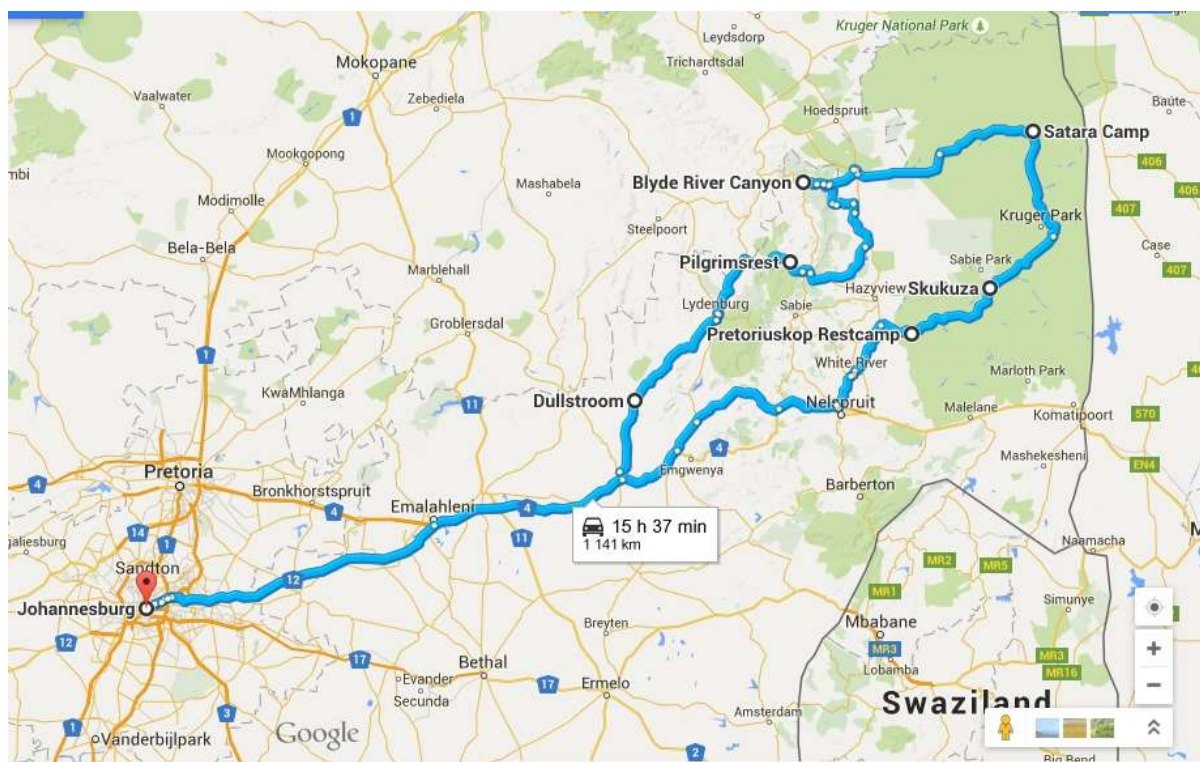
From the Highlands to the savannah; an
experience in South Africa's incredible diversity



Introduction

One of nine of South Africa's provinces, Mpumalanga – meaning 'Sunrise' – is one of the three Eastern provinces, where South Africa's overall biodiversity peaks. Factors in this great diversity include a wide altitudinal variation and an array of habitat types and climatic zones, from the temperate highlands to the sub-tropical lowlands and savannah. Mpumalanga is thus an ideal venue for a concise birding tour, with most destinations relatively close together, and constant change in habitats, scenery, fauna and flora as one progresses. Our itinerary starts off in Johannesburg, with an easy drive eastwards to the highland town of Dullstroom for our first stop, where we will spend time birding in the high altitude grasslands. From there we stop in at Mount Sheba for a morning of Afro-Montane forest birding before reaching the wonderfully scenic Blyde River Canyon, where various habitats converge at the edge of the northern Drakensberg Escarpment. From there we enter the world-famous Kruger National Park for the highlight of the tour – four nights of awesome birding and big game viewing, with the time divided between three different rest camps (depending on availability). From the Southern Kruger it's an easy drive back to Johannesburg in time for evening departure flights, wrapping up a tried and tested itinerary that's hard to beat in many respects. For those struggling to choose between the savannah country of the north-east and the Western Cape, why not combine the two itineraries to make a comprehensive 2-week package?

Map Reference



Daily Itinerary

Dates: This tour runs throughout the year. See 'Best Time to Visit' below for further information.

Day 1: Dullstroom

We'll meet at O.R Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg and drive to Rietvlei Nature Reserve for a morning of birding. A few species can be seen here which don't occur further east on the rest of the itinerary, such as Spike-heeled Lark, Northern Black Korhaan and Greater Kestrel. After a picnic lunch (we'll stop en-route for participants to buy provisions as lunches are excluded on this trip) and some more birding we'll make our way to Dullstroom, a small town in the Mpumalanga highlands, with one or two birding stops en-route to put some waterbirds such as Cape Shoveler, Maccoa Duck, Southern Pochard and others on the list before arriving at our accommodation in the late afternoon.

Day 2: Dullstroom

Today we have the highlight of the highlands: a morning excursion up into the 2000 meter-plus Verlorenvlei Nature Reserve in the Steenkampsberg Range to look for endemics such as Yellow-breasted Pipit (summer only), Buff-streaked Chat, Mountain Wheatear, Malachite Sunbird and Sentinel Rock-Thrush and large birds such as Denham's Bustard, Jackal Buzzard, Cape Vulture and Secretarybird. Mammals to be seen here include Blesbok, Oribi, Steenbok and perhaps even Meerkat. Later in the morning we'll head back to town for a breakfast and in the afternoon we'll have another vehicular excursion into the surrounding countryside to look for species such as Grey Crowned Crane and Southern Bald Ibis before coming back to town in the late afternoon for time to freshen up before dinner. The town has some excellent restaurants, so this is bound to be the culinary highlight of the tour.

Day 3: Blyde River Canyon

We'll leave Dullstroom very early in the morning and drive through to a lovely old hotel on the edge of the escarpment, where we explore a patch of rare montane mist-belt forest, looking for species such as Cape Batis, Blue-mantled Crested-Flycatcher, Narina Trogon, Orange Ground-Thrush, Knysna Turaco, White-starred Robin, Yellow-throated Woodland-Warbler and others. We'll then have a scrumptious breakfast at the hotel before some more birding and departure for our next destination. We'll drive via scenic back roads to the Blyde River Canyon, third largest canyon in the world, and after settling in will take a walk up to the

canyon view point, where we'll scan for raptors such as Rock Kestrel, Lanner Falcon, Black Sparrowhawk and possibly Verreaux's Eagle while watching the setting sun turn the iron-oxide stained cliffs a brilliant shade of orange. We'll then have some time to get ready for dinner in the resort's restaurant.

Days 4 - 5: Satara, Kruger National Park

After a lovely morning birding walk in the resort grounds, where we'll also view the spectacular Tufa formations along the Kadisi Stream, we'll have breakfast and depart for Kruger National Park. We'll enter the park via Orpen Gate and spend the rest of the day birding our way to camp, with the sheer number of new species making for a slow journey through to the camp. New species will include a range of Bee-eaters, Rollers, Hornbills, Barbets, Starlings and Raptors and many more. We'll arrive in camp and settle in, with a short afternoon drive if time allows. The following morning we'll explore the region via the network of roads before breakfast, and in the afternoon, after some time in camp, we'll head out into other areas of the park. There's also a chance for a night drive as an optional extra. Species we'll be looking out for in the Satara region include Southern Ground Hornbill, Kori Bustard, Southern White-crowned Shrike, Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark, Temminck's Courser, Red-crested Korhaan and many others. The Satara region carries a relatively high density of bulk grazers such as Burchell's Zebra, Blue Wildebeest, Cape Buffalo and Common Waterbuck, and these in turn support numerous Lion prides and Spotted Hyena clans, while the smaller herbivores such as Warthog and Impala support Leopard and Cheetah, and we'll hope to have some sightings of these exciting predators during our time here.

Days 6 - 7: Skukuza, Kruger National Park

After a morning excursion we'll leave Satara and head south into bushier country on our way to our next rest-camp, birding as we go. Skukuza Rest Camp is situated on the southern bank of the Sabie River, where the habitat is much more vegetated than that of the central plains of Satara. It's a fairly long drive, with plenty to see along the route, and after checking in at Skukuza we'll have time to unwind before an optional afternoon activity, such as walk in the camp or a short afternoon drive along the Sabie River. Birds we'll look out for here include Purple-crested Turaco, Trumpeter Hornbill, African Fish Eagle, African Green Pigeon, White-crowned Lapwing and others. The relative abundance of water here results in a large Impala population, which in turn supports predators such as Wild Dog and Leopard, and these will be high on our wish list for our time here. The next day will give us more opportunity to explore this rich region of the park, with early morning and afternoon game drives and some time to relax in between.

Day 8: Pretoriuskop, Kruger National Park

For our final night we head further south to our last stop on the tour, Pretoriuskop rest Camp. The south of the park, dominated by large granite outcrops, comprises a Broad-leaf vegetation type, which holds a range of bird species which are not common in other parts of the park, while the camp gardens are one of the best places to see Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Purple-crested Turaco and Brown-headed Parrot. Other species we'll be looking out for include Dark-chanting Goshawk, Lizard Buzzard, Bushveld Pipit, Croaking Cisticola, Yellow-throated Longclaw and many others. Mammals can be relatively scarce here during the wet season, but we'll nevertheless be on the lookout for species such as White Rhino, Elephant, Lion and Wild Dog.

Day 9: Departure

There will be a final optional activity on the last morning, offering a last chance to see species missed so far. After breakfast we'll meander slowly out of the park and then head back to Johannesburg, a five hour drive away (or to the closer KMIA Airport for flights to Cape Town).



Tour in brief

Best time to visit: September and early October are when things begin to 'hot up' as far as bird activity goes, and all migrants have arrived by late-November. Birding is excellent through to March and April, but begins to quieten down in May. Winters are cooler and drier, and the birding can still be good, although the species count will be lower due to the absence of the migrants. This can be offset by the superior mammal viewing of winter and spring.

Expected weather conditions: warm to very hot in summer, possible afternoon thunder-storms or extended drizzle. Mild to hot dry during winter, though evenings and early mornings can be cool (it can get very cold on the Escarpment in winter).

Tour tempo: medium to medium-plus, optional mid-day breaks on non-travelling days (advisable in the hotter areas).

Accommodation standards: medium: lodges, guest houses and National Park's rest-camps.

Birding in brief: excellent variety, three major habitats included, tops for endemics.

Top birds: Southern Bald Ibis, Denham's Bustard, Gurney's Sugarbird, Jackal Buzzard, Knysna Turaco, Cape Vulture, African Scops-Owl, Southern Ground-Hornbill, Martial Eagle, Malachite Kingfisher, Southern White-crowned Shrike.

Mammal viewing: excellent, especially in the Kruger National Park.

Other wildlife and attractions: the Drakensberg Escarpment and the Kruger National Park.

Add-ons: this tour can be combined with our Western Cape or KwaZulu-Natal Voyager birding tours, or Victoria Falls.

Note: *The exact itinerary will depend on availability, but will still include 2 nights in Dullstroom, 1 in Blyde and 5 in the Kruger National Park.*

Tour Costs

(Please contact us for prices for groups larger than 6)

November 2018 - October 2019

2 participants	R 49 395 per person sharing
3 participants	R 40 900 per person sharing
4 participants	R 34 870 per person sharing
5 participants	R 31 100 per person sharing
6 participants	R 28 270 per person sharing
Single Supplement	R 5 800

Includes

- Accommodation
- All breakfasts and dinners
- Ground transport
- Bottled water in the Lawson's vehicle whilst travelling
- Entrance fees
- Personalised checklists
- Specialist guide fees

Excludes

- All airfares and associated airport costs
- Travel and medical insurance
- Lunches
- All drinks
- Optional excursions where applicable
- Gratuities
- Items of a personal nature

Notes

- The exact camps and other accommodation establishments we use will be dependent on availability at the time of booking.
- This itinerary is subject to change due to weather conditions at the time and other factors beyond our control.
- Birds and mammals mentioned on this itinerary do not represent all that can be seen. A full list of possibles appears on your checklist.

