

Botswana

ELEPHANT & PREDATOR RESEARCH SAFARI

- Join elephant, big cat and wild dog researchers on a wildlife safari like no other in Botswana
- Accompany wildlife experts on specially designed *research* drives to see their work first hand
- Enjoy game drives, bush walks and night safaris in one of Southern Africa's largest private game reserves
- Your participation on these tours helps to support the long term conservation of the regions wildlife



Summary

This pioneering tour accompanies elephant, big cat and wild dog researchers in the wilds of Botswana on specially designed *research* drives to observe their conservation work first hand. They will explain their research as they study and interpret the animal's remarkable behavioural patterns, something not possible on a traditional game drive.

This small group safari is based at the excellent Mashatu Tented Camp from where you can head out on game drives, bush walks and night safaris to learn about the ongoing study of the Central Limpopo River Valley Elephant Research, Northern Tuli Predator Project and the Northern Tuli Wild Dog Project which this trip supports.

Overview



Steppes Discovery is proud to be working in collaboration with these exciting research projects set up to create a scientifically sound, long-term ecological monitoring programme in the area. As a result we can now offer you an unique opportunity to go 'backstage' on wildlife research, to gain an insight into study techniques, tracking elephant, big cats and wild dog for a fascinating 7-day wilderness trip.

Based in a comfortable and authentic tented bush camp, this small group safari explores Masthatu - one of the largest private game reserves in Southern Africa. Not only will you experience the thrill of joining wildlife researchers as they study and track the game, but furthermore, it aims to help fund the ongoing study of the Central Limpopo River Valley Elephant Research and Northern Tuli Predator Project.



As one of our clients who recently commented on their return "This trip has made me realise I'll never want to do a conventional safari again!"

Your experts



Mark Hardon - Central Limpopo River Valley Elephant Research

Mark joined the Central Limpopo River Valley Elephant Research project as a field assistant. He is responsible for collecting field data on the project and focuses on identifying the various herds within the reserve, tracking their movements and observing their feeding habits. Mark has experience in both managing captive wild animals as well as wildlife management and is passionate about sharing his knowledge of the Tuli elephants.



Andrei Snyman - Northern Tuli Predator Project

As well as running the Northern Tuli Predator Project which studies the population dynamics, movements and home range sizes of the Northern Tuli leopard population, Andrei is also looking into the dynamics of the Tuli lion population. With an absolute passion for wildlife, Andrei has been studying lion population dynamics in the Kruger National Park for the past few years and is currently working on his Masters Degree, specializing in lions and leopards.



Craig Jackson - Northern Tuli Wild Dog Project

After the relocation of 18 wild dogs to the Mashatu Reserve, the start of 2008 saw the planning of the Northern Tuli Game Reserve wild dog project. Craig is the principal researcher for the Northern Tuli Wild Dog Project, responsible for monitoring the dogs progress and movements as part of a larger research project.

Please note that given the nature of their work, these researchers may be called away at short notice in which case another member of the research team will accompany the group.

Itinerary



Day 1

Following your early morning arrival in Johannesburg you will be welcomed by your driver and after an opportunity to freshen up at the airport, you begin your drive north-east (6 hours including stops for lunch and photography), to Mashatu Game Reserve, one of the largest private game reserves in southern Africa - a wholly preserved and untainted wilderness in eastern Botswana, at the confluence of the Limpopo and Shashe Rivers ranging from savannah, to riverine forests, marshland, and sandstone outcrops and hope to a huge diversity of game.



You will be staying in the comfortable Mashatu Tented Camp your home for the next 6 nights, which comprises of 8 comfortable twin tents, all with private outdoor en-suite facilities. Meals are served either in the open-sided thatch gazebo or the traditional boma, overlooking a floodlit waterhole and have a wonderfully authentic bush feel about them.

You will then have an introductory game drive in the afternoon as the researchers explain the adventure over the coming few days, when you will search for elephants and big cats, using radio-telemetry equipment. Once you have picked up their trail, you can expect a bumpy ride over rough terrain and if you are lucky enough to come across them, you can observe their fascinating behaviour. The researchers will be on hand to answer any questions you may have and bring you up to date with current research being conducted.



You return to camp in the evening for a delicious dinner which will be served either in the open-air thatched gazebo or in the boma, overlooking a floodlit waterhole, listening out for the nocturnal animals, who may even pay the boma a visit...

Overnight Mashatu Tented Camp on a full board basis.

Days 2



This morning, you are woken before sunrise and after a brief coffee, venture out into the wild on the first of your special research drives. Mashatu has some of the largest free roaming, flourishing elephant population on private land in Southern Africa and this morning you will join the resident elephant specialists and researchers on a morning drive to learn about these amazing creatures.

You will be taught how to identify, as well as age and sex, the different herds which the researchers have come to know so well over the years. Getting up close and personal with these fascinating pachyderms enables you to learn more about their behaviour, their complex social structure and their communication skills. You then return to camp for lunch.



This afternoon you head out again, for your second research drive, joining Andrei Snyman, the predator researcher of the Northern Tuli Game Reserve. His study specializes in the lions and leopards of this area and his team has extensive experience working with large carnivores, covering aspects such as capture, radio tracking, monitoring and census projects. Andrei and his team are currently running the Northern Tuli Predator Project and conduct lion and leopard research projects and in order to subsidise their research, they conduct these interpretive drives where a more detailed insight into the predators of Mashatu is offered.



On these predator research drives he will share with you the extraordinary life of leopards and lions from a researcher's perspective, as you search for these charismatic predators. You can then experience for yourself a few hours in the life of a predator researcher and learn how Andrei aims to better understand these fascinating animals. You then return to camp for dinner

Overnight Mashatu Tented Camp on a full board basis.



Day 3

This morning you will set out on a thrilling bush walk with a fully qualified, armed ranger, where you will learn about the smaller flora and fauna found in the area and the chance to track animals on foot. Walking in the African bushveld is truly fascinating, allowing you to experience the wonders of nature that are sometimes overlooked from the back of a jeep. You will learn to identify tracks of wildlife, but also the complex eco-system that supports the wildlife found here. You then return to the camp for lunch.



In the afternoon, you head out on another ivory drive to search for the elephants of Mashatu. You then return to camp in the evening for dinner.

Day 4

This morning you are woken again before sunrise with coffee and biscuits, before heading out on another predator safari. You could expect to hear the early morning call of the bush shrike, the cooing of the ring necked doves or the alarm calls of the antelope as they might spot a retreating leopard. You then return to camp for lunch.



The afternoon is then taken up by another elephant drive as you learn to become familiar with the movements and behaviour of individual herds. You then return to the camp for dinner round the campfire (listening out for those sounds which you should now know well!)

Day 5

Today you will head out on a traditional game drive, to explore the fascinating wilds of Mashatu, taking its name from the locally-sacrosanct Mashatu tree. As one of the largest private game reserve in southern Africa, Mashatu is a fitting setting for the world's largest land mammal (the elephant) but also provides sanctuary to the world's tallest mammal (the giraffe); the world's largest antelope (the eland); the world's largest bird (the ostrich) and of course, the world's heaviest flying bird (the kori bustard). Add the lion and the conic baobab and you have Africa's Big Seven!



Complementing three members of the Big Five - leopard, lion and elephant - are some of the more surprising species, including the aardwolf, bat-eared fox, African wild cat, honey badger and black-backed jackal. Recently introduced to Mashatu (as part of the Northern Tuli Game Reserve) is the endangered wild dog. Mashatu is also an ornithological paradise, and plays host to more than 350 bird species, including the enchanting lilac-breasted roller, whose plumage features no fewer than seven different shades of blue.

Following lunch, you then head out again with Andrei and his team for a predator research drive, before returning to camp as the sunsets, to discuss the day's events around the campfire.



Day 6

After another early start, you set off on your final ivory drive, when you should now be able to recognise individual elephants.

This afternoon you will set out on a final game drive exploring the area, before heading up to one of the region's most beautiful look out points. Here you can stop for a traditional sundowner and absorb the atmosphere of the bush as the sun sinks into the dusty horizon and the nightjars and hyena's begin to stir. You then return to the camp to enjoy a farewell dinner with the research team and your fellow travellers, looking back over your wildlife adventures.



Day 7

This morning, after an early morning breakfast, you will bid farewell to the Mashatu team as you are transferred back to Johannesburg, in time for your connecting flight, stopping en-route for lunch (not included). Please note that we are able to offer numerous wildlife extensions from here.

Dates

DATES 2012

22nd to 28th July
19th to 25th August
09th to 15th September
07th to 13th October

DATES 2013

21st to 27th July
18th to 24th August
08th to 14th September
06th to 12th October

Main tour cost

2012 - From £1,795 per person in twin share room throughout *excluding all international flights*

2013 - From £1,995 per person in twin share room throughout *excluding all international flights*

Single supplements

If you are happy to share accommodation with a fellow traveller of the same sex then you will not be charged a single supplement for your holiday. This is of course dependent on there being another same sex traveller on the trip who is also wanting to share. If we cannot find a partner with whom you can share then unfortunately we will be left with no choice but to pass on the single supplement, imposed by the properties we are using. We will endeavour to keep this supplement to a minimum. Naturally should you wish to have a single room then this is possible by simply opting to pay the single supplement as per the itinerary.

The cost of a single supplement is £595 per person.

Includes

All accommodation, all meals throughout (except for lunch on Days 1 and 7), all road transfers, all vehicles and expertise throughout, conservation and park fees and all wildlife activities shown in private game vehicles.

Excludes

All flights, travel insurance, drinks, laundry, gratuities, items of a personal nature. Cable car crossing if Limpopo River is flowing (BWP35 per person per crossing).

Flights

We are happy to book the international flights for you should you wish as we hold a full ATOL license. should you choose to book these direct, please note the group flight schedule which you would need to base your flights on:

Arriving Johannesburg at 06.55 on Day 1 (subject to flight schedule changes)

Departing Johannesburg at 20.15 on Day 9 (subject to flight schedule changes)

Due to the transfers to and from Johannesburg, it is imperative that your arrival and departure coincides with these timings.

IMPORTANT NOTE

Please bear in mind that the details shown above are only a guideline and given the adventurous nature of the tour and the area in which the tour takes place, the itinerary can and will change at short notice. Whilst you will cover all the activities shown above, the order in which they take place may vary, depending on a number of factors on the day. We do ask that you approach the trip with this in mind and that you travel with a flexible attitude and sense of humour. We must also stress that, whilst you have a very good chance of seeing a wide range of wildlife, sightings can never be guaranteed as the animals are wild and an encounter with any animal in its natural habitat is a privilege and not a right. Spotting them takes patience, skill and a lot of luck!

Important information

Travelling from outside the UK

We are happy to quote you in US Dollars for the tour including return flights to Johannesburg. However, owing to currency fluctuations, we will quote you at the time of your enquiry using the current exchange rate and base this on current flight availability. Please do contact us for a costing.

Vaccinations and Visas

All visitors must be in possession of a valid passport with at least six months left before expiry. Visas are currently not required for entry into South Africa and Botswana for all UK, Commonwealth and US citizens. We recommend inoculations for: Typhoid, Tetanus and Hepatitis A. If you are a regular traveller abroad we would recommend that you are up to date on all childhood inoculations and vaccinations including polio. Malaria is endemic in Botswana and expert advice is therefore essential. Please consult a medical practitioner or call MASTA on 09068 224100 (premium rate call) at least one month before you travel.

Please note that everyone arriving in South Africa must have TWO blank pages side by side for their South African visa - this policy is strictly enforced and you will be denied entry if you do not have the required space. Your passport must also be valid for 6 months from your date of departure and you must have an up-to-date yellow fever certificate (given that you are entering Botswana from South Africa).

Health and Fitness

A reasonable level of fitness will allow you to fully appreciate this safari and the small amount of walking involved. We also suggest taking a small personal medical kit.

Essential items that you will need

On receipt of a booking form and deposit we do send out a very detailed trip dossier including a suggested kit and equipment list.

Weather

This programme is set during the dry autumn / winter period when the transition from summer to winter is notable and the early mornings and evenings are cold, with clear, warm days. Leopards become less elusive as the vegetation cover thins and the game begins to congregate near water. June and July is mid winter, with crisp days and VERY cold mornings and evenings, but the game viewing is very good as the waterholes continue to dry up, concentrating the animals around the remaining water sources. African Wild Dogs tend to den around the month of June, providing a possibility of seeing wild dog pups (provided they have denned in an accessible site!). August and September is very dry but the days are warm and predators have a field day as water is scarce and their prey has no choice but to come to the open for what little water there is. Elephants spend hours wallowing and drinking and trying to find shade. By October temperatures begin to increase steadily, bringing with it the occasional tropical thunderstorm when predators as do the elephants moving from waterhole to waterhole, where they wallow and drink for hours. The light at this time of year is particularly good for photography.

However, please bear in mind the above is only a guideline and weather patterns can be erratic, so rain should be expected at any time.

Our commitment



An unavoidable consequence of travel is the emission of carbon dioxide into the high atmosphere and while Steppes Discovery takes measures to reduce the carbon footprint of its holidays, regrettably it is not yet possible to make them carbon neutral. If you are able to, we suggest you consider offsetting the carbon emission of your long haul flight by using Rainforest Concern's Forest Credits scheme. Details can be found at www.forestcredits.org.uk

Rainforests have a central role to play in the slowing of climate change and yet we are removing forests from the planet at a faster rate than they can grow back. Rainforest Concern supports projects that look to preserve the forests that we have. Rather than replanting new ones, working to safeguard biodiversity and local communities and in so doing mitigate climate change.



Mashatu Game Reserve initiated a research programme which incorporates scientists into the operation to study aspects important to the protection and conservation of the area. The research programme is ongoing and currently consists of the Central Limpopo River Valley Elephant Research, Northern Tuli Predator Project and the Northern Tuli Wild Dog Project.

Our travel partners, accommodation, service providers and ground agents are all carefully chosen to ensure their commitment to the environment, most being quality, family owned businesses - reflecting the unique character of the places, the abiding hospitality of its people and the remarkable spirit of its wilderness.

Now come along and see for yourself. With us it won't cost the earth!

Want to discuss this trip?

Please call Chris on ++ 44 (0) 1285 643 333 for more details or drop him an email (chris@steppesdiscovery.co.uk) to make a booking.



Having travelled extensively in East, South and Central Africa, Chris has developed a passion and understanding for this wild and captivating continent. From the endless plains of the Serengeti, the wilds of the southern parks and the primates of west, he will be more than happy to share his enthusiasm for this fascinating part of the world.

He has also been lucky enough to spend time with the elephants and predators on this particular tour in Mashatu and will be happy to discuss his meetings with wild dogs and cheetah's as well as the elephant families he met.
