

# South Africa - Just Cats!

## Naturetrek Tour itinerary

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### Outline itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	<u>Depart London.</u>
<b>Day 2</b>	<u>Blyde River Canyon.</u>
<b>Day 3/6</b>	<u>Kruger National Park.</u>
<b>Day 7/10</b>	<u>Sabi Sand Game Reserve.</u>
<b>Day 11</b>	<u>Depart Johannesburg.</u>
<b>Day 12</b>	<u>Arrive London.</u>

### Departs

September, October and November

### Focus

Africa's cats, plus other wildlife

### Grading

A traditional African safari. Grade A

### Dates and Prices

Visit [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk) (tour code ZAF06) or see the current Naturetrek brochure

### Highlights

- A tour designed to maximise cat sightings
- 30+ cat sightings enjoyed on past tours!
- 4 nights in Kruger National Park
- 4 nights in Sabi Sand Game Reserve
- Open vehicles in Kruger and Sabi Sand
- Visit Blyde River Canyon, third largest canyon in the world
- Elephant, Giraffe, Wild Dog & other African mammals
- Abundant & colourful birdlife
- Led by expert local naturalist guides



*From top: Lion, Cheetah and Leopard*



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## Itinerary

**NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations may necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.**

## Introduction

Africa is blessed with an unrivalled abundance of mammals and other wildlife. Huge herds of game still roam vast national parks which they share with an equally impressive array of birds, reptiles and other fauna and flora. Even so, there is one family of animals without which no visit to Africa would be complete, the cats. The 'Big Cats', and their smaller relatives, hold a special appeal for many of us. Not only are they beautiful, sleek and powerful animals, but they are also elusive and superb masters of camouflage who shun the limelight and only reveal themselves to the fortunate few. Cats are always going to be a challenge to find, but knowing where to go is half the battle won, and although nothing is guaranteed in the world of wildlife watching, this exciting new tour has been specially designed with cats in mind and offers the very best opportunity of seeing Africa's cats (especially the so-called 'Big Cats' in the wild.

### Day 1

### Depart London

We leave London Heathrow this evening on board a scheduled British Airways flight bound for Johannesburg.

### Day 2

### Blyde River Canyon

On arrival into Johannesburg we will be met by our local guide and depart promptly for the Blyde River Canyon, a five-hour drive from Johannesburg. Enroute we will head up through the Mpumalanga (Sunrise) Province, where the 2,000 metre above sea level altitude creates in an open, grassy habitat and temperate climate. After a lunch stop in the small country town of Graskop we will continue on to our accommodation positioned spectacularly on the edge of the canyon. For those with energy still to spare we will offer an optional walk in the resort grounds (time permitting) to look for birds and enjoy a view of the Blyde River Canyon. Species to be seen include Mocking Cliff-Chat, Cape Rock-Thrush, Southern Double-collared Sunbird, Black-collared Barbet, White-throated Robin-Chat and others, while Klipspringer are sometimes seen in the resort grounds. Vervet Monkeys and Chacma Baboons also roam the area. Finally, there will be time for a well-needed shower and rest, after which we will all meet up and head down to the restaurant for dinner.

### Days 3 & 4

### Lower Sabie, Kruger National Park

This morning we will offer another optional early morning birding and scenic walk before having breakfast and departing for Kruger National Park. Enroute we will stop at the Three Rondavels View Site to have a look at the mighty Blyde River Canyon, the third largest canyon in the world. From there we will drive through some of the famous Panorama Route of the escarpment, with a few stops along the way at scenic view sites such as Wonder View and Lisbon Falls.

We plan to enter Kruger National Park via Phabeni Gate after a snack stop in the town of Hazyview. Depending on the time, we will take a slow game drive through the park to our accommodation at Lower Sabie Rest Camp. The southern region of the park is fairly densely vegetated, with two large river systems (the Sabie and Crocodile Rivers) and numerous rocky outcrops. Prey species such as Impala, Duiker and Warthog are common here and with luck we may find our first cats of the holiday; perhaps a pride of Lions relaxing in the shade of a tree or a Leopard slinking along the bed of the Sabie River. Southern Giraffe, Elephants and Cape Buffalo are also likely along with a wide variety of colourful birds. We have two nights at Lower Sabie Rest Camp, a comfortable, but simple, national park rest camp situated along the Sabie River. At this point in the year, at the end of a long and harsh dry season, the river attracts a wide variety of thirsty herbivores (Impala are especially common) and these form the prey-base for an exciting variety of predators. In particular, this region of Kruger is one of the top spots for finding the ever-elusive Leopard.

The Kruger routine is typified by early morning and late afternoon excursions with a rest in between. On the second night here we will join one of the night drives which offer the opportunity of finding Lions and Leopards after dark, as well as smaller carnivores such as African Civet, White-tailed Mongoose and Small and Large Spotted Genets. Although very elusive, and difficult to observe, our night drives will also give us our best opportunity to look for the smaller cat species such as Caracal, Serval and African Wild Cat (the forerunner of the house cat).

N.B. Please be aware that all night drives are conducted in national park vehicles and escorted by national park safari guides (not your Naturetrek guides). We will likely be joined by other 'non Naturetrek' visitors on these drives. Private vehicles are not permitted out in the park after dark.

## Days 5 & 6

## Satara, Kruger National Park

Following an early morning drive and breakfast we will pack and head north through the park to the open Knobthorn scrub and woodland of the south / central Kruger Park to Satara Rest Camp, our base for the next two nights. Although a long drive it is often rewarding with plenty of game to view and sightings of Lion or even Wild Dog a possibility. We will stop for lunch and refreshment along the way.

The Satara region itself is characterised by relatively open, thorn-scrub country, grassy basalt plains, thickly wooded river beds and groves of Ilala Palms. This region holds the highest densities of Lions in Kruger, due to the large numbers of Blue Wildebeest and Burchell's Zebra attracted here by the lush grazing and open country. Leopards also occur in the area, as do Cheetah, Spotted Hyena and African Wild Dog. We will spend our time here looking for these magnificent animals, and will undoubtedly encounter other species such as Elephant, Cape Buffalo, White Rhinoceros, Waterbuck, Greater Kudu and Southern Giraffe as well as an incredible array of birds. Five species of vulture occur in this part of the park and it is not unknown to find them all on a single carcass of a large animal. The most prolific is White-backed Vulture but others to look out for include the small Hooded Vulture, the enormous Lappet-faced Vulture, the good-looking White-headed Vulture and Cape Vulture, which breeds outside Kruger but comes in to feed.

The routine will be very similar to that of the previous two days and will include a night drive on the second night in search of nocturnal animals and birds such as Honey Badger, South African Crested Porcupine and Verreaux's Eagle Owl. At Satara, we will overnight in simple, but comfortable, thatched rondavels with ensuite shower and toilet.

## Days 7 & 10

## Sabi Sand Game Reserve

We now leave Kruger, via the Orpen Gate, and drive into the adjacent Sabi Sand Game Reserve. This 65,000 hectare private reserve, which is part of the Greater Kruger National Park, offers some of the finest predator-viewing in the world, and is home to all six species of cat found in the eastern regions of the country. Situated in Mpumalanga, South Africa, the Sabi Sand Wildtuin (the word Wildtuin being an Afrikaans word for game reserve) is a huge wildlife sanctuary watered by two perennial rivers. The Sand River flows through the reserve for 50 kilometres (31 miles) from north-west to south-east whilst the Sabie River flows along the southern boundary. The Sabi Sand shares a common 50 kilometre unfenced eastern boundary with Kruger and the animals are free to roam unhindered.

The reserve was established as far back as the 1960's and by the early 1980's the very first private lodges were in operation. This long history of conservation, the large size of the reserve and the ideal habitat are some of the factors in the superb cat-viewing. It was in this reserve that a few individual Leopards first became habituated to safari vehicles, a slow process that took over 10 years, and the result of this hard work is daily close-up encounters with these beautiful creatures. Today there are few places in Africa, or indeed the world, that can rival Sabi Sand for close encounters with this most sought after and beautiful of African cats. Lions and Cheetah are also seen regularly and we hope that time and patience will be rewarded with sightings of the smaller, and more elusive, cat species such as Serval.

Our 4-nights in the Sabi Sand Game Reserve will be divided between two different lodges (usually Elephant Plains, and Nkorho Lodges), giving us plenty of time out in the field, plus time to relax in the beautiful surroundings of these exclusive lodges and enjoy the excellent meals which is part of the appeal of a stay at Sabi Sands.

## Day 11

## In Flight

We should have time this morning for a final game drive. Then, after four nights at Sabi Sand and, we hope, a variety of memorable encounters with cats and other wildlife, we must sadly leave the peace and tranquillity of the 'African Bush' for the hustle and bustle of Johannesburg to catch our return, early evening, flight home.

## Day 12

## Arrive London

We will arrive back at London Heathrow early this morning.

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## Tour grading

Grade A. This is a traditional game viewing tour including morning and afternoon vehicular safaris and gentle wildlife walks around the lodges and camps. Although, you should be prepared for a programme of action-packed mammal-viewing, there is nothing to stop you taking a day, or part of the day, off to relax at camp should you so wish!.

## Guiding

This tour will be guided by a specialist local South African wildlife guide who will meet you on arrival into Johannesburg Airport and accompany the group throughout the tour.

## Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included in the cost of this holiday with the exception of lunches on Days 2 – 7 and Day 11. For the nights at the Blyde River Canyon and Kruger National Park we stay in comfortable (but simple) twin-bedded chalets/rondavels at Lower Sabie and Satara Rest Camps (government run rest camps not private lodges). These rest camps are located in excellent areas for cats and other wildlife. The tour then ends on a high note with four nights split between two private lodges in the wonderful Sabi Sand Game Reserve. All rooms have private facilities throughout.

Since each Sabi Sand lodge only has five rooms, we are only able to offer one single room per group. Single rooms may be reserved on payment of the appropriate supplements outlined on the first page of this itinerary. Alternatively it may be possible to arrange single rooms at Blyde River Canyon and Kruger even if a single is not available for the final few nights in Sabi Sands.

Please also note that it may, on rare occasions, be necessary to change the one or more of the camps and lodges outlined above. You can be assured, however, that any alternate lodge or camp will be of the same standard as the original and all will be in excellent areas for mammals and other wildlife.

## Extra expenses

Please note that the following expenses are excluded from the cost of the holiday and are paid locally. Lunches on Days 2 - 7 and Day 11, drinks, tips, locally paid airport taxes and all items of a personal nature.

## Your transport

In getting from Johannesburg to the Kruger National Park and back we use Toyota Quantum vans. In the Kruger National Park we will use special open-sided safari vehicles, which have a canvas roof but no sides. In the Sabi Sand Game Reserve we will also be in open vehicles, with no sides or roof.

## Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to South Africa. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – [www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/south-africa](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/south-africa) or telephone 0870 6060290 prior to travel.