

BUDGET NORTH-EASTERN SOUTH AFRICA AND KRUGER

Zaagkuilsdrift – Nylsvley – Soutpanesberg – Kruger (Far North to Central) – Soutpanesberg – Polokwane

BIRDING AND WILDLIFE SAFARI

**01 January 2022 – 01 December 2022
6 Days, 5 Nights**

TRIP GUIDE



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1. Tour Summary

Date: 01 January 2022 – 01 December 2022.
Duration: 6 days, 5 nights.
Price: **ZAR 17,990.00 per person sharing, ZAR 4,450.00 single supplement.**
Price may be subject to change based on factors beyond our control.
Distance: Total driving distance (including around sites) = 1,403km.

Includes:

- Accommodation (may change subject to availability, in which case similar will be found);
- All breakfasts, lunches, dinners, tea and coffee;
- Ground transport – max 7 participants and 1 guide per vehicle;
- Bottled water in vehicles whilst travelling – 3 per person per day;
- Entrance fees;
- Conservation levies;
- Personalized checklists;
- Specialist guide fees – 1 day with Samson Mulaudzi in the Soutpanesberg.

Excludes:

- All airmfares;
- Travel and medical insurance;
- All drinks;
- Optional excursions where applicable;
- Gratuities;
- Items of a personal nature.

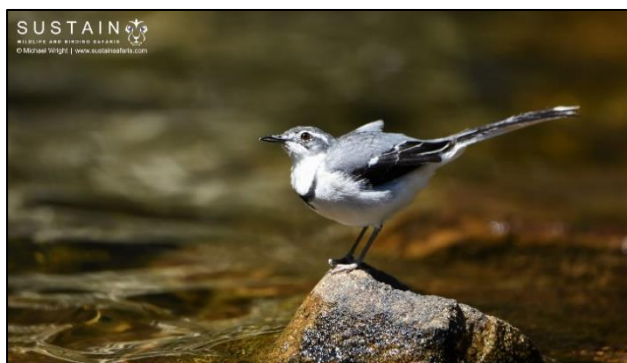
Note:

- Minimum of 4 participants per vehicle required to undertake the trip;
- Tour starts and ends in Johannesburg to depart from OR Tambo International Airport;
- This itinerary is subject to change due to weather conditions at the time and other factors beyond our control;
- The species mentioned in the itinerary represent only some of those we may possibly view on the tour, however, none of these can be guaranteed even though every effort will be made where possible to locate them. A full list of possible species appears on your checklist, although vagrants and rarities may also surprise us.



2. Tour Highlights

- *Group size:* maximum of 7 participants and 1 guide per vehicle.
- *Birding in brief:* Sightings goal of 250+. Excellent variety of birds to be seen, with a good chance of large birds of prey and many special and endemic species.
- *Wildlife in brief:* Sightings goal of 50+ mammals. Excellent variety of mammals, reptiles, amphibians and butterflies to be seen across a wide variety of habitats. Kruger National Park and Mapungubwe National Park especially offer very good chance of the Big 5.
- *Areas visited:* Zaagkuilsdrift, Nylsvley Nature Reserve, Soutpanesberg area, Kruger National Park (Far North to Central), Polokwane Game Reserve.
- *Expected weather conditions:* Subtropical with occasional rain, warm to hot most of the time. Rain is possible, usually in the form of summer convection thunderstorms, and cool wet weather is possible in the event of a cold front moving up from the south.
- *Tour tempo:* medium, optional mid-day breaks (advisable on hot days), no serious walking.
- *Accommodation standards:* medium – private guesthouses and lodges, and public rest camps.
- *Top birds:* Taita Falcon, Dickinson's Kestrel, African Hobby, African Grass-Owl, Pel's Fishing-Owl, Blue-spotted Wood-Dove, Short-clawed Lark, Dwarf Bittern, Slaty Egret, White-backed Night-Heron, Mottled Spinetail, Bohm's Spinetail, Southern Hyliota, Racket-tailed Roller, Grey-headed Parrot, Meyer's Parrot, Meves's Starling, Miombo Blue-eared Starling, Senegal Coucal, Southern Hyliota, Three-banded Courser, Tropical Boubou, African Broadbill, Black-fronted Bush-Shrike, Arnot's Chat, Verreaux's Eagle, Bat Hawk, African Finfoot, Orange Ground-Thrush, Thrush Nightingale, Yellow-billed Oxpecker, White-breasted Cuckoo-shrike, Green Malkoha, Orange-winged Pytilia.
- *Mammal viewing:* Lion, Leopard, Elephant, Black Rhino, White Rhino, Buffalo, Cheetah, African Wild Dog, Brown Hyena, Spotted Hyena, Pangolin, Honey Badger, Hippo, Giraffe, Jameson's Red Rock Hare, Roan, Sable, Sharpe's Grysbok, Eland, Lichtenstein's Hartebeest, Tsessebe, Oribi, Mountain Reedbuck, Klipspringer, African Wild Cat, Yellow Mongoose, Cape Clawless Otter, and other typical savannah and grassland general game, and good chances for uncommon smaller species.
- *Special interests:* birding, wildlife, photography.
- *Specialist guiding:* Samson Mulaudzi will guide the group for a day in the Soutpanesberg region.
- *Add-ons:* this tour can be combined with extensions to Magoebaskloof, Mapungubwe, Gonarezhou National Park (south-eastern Zimbabwe), or with extensions to Wakkerstroom and KwaZulu-Natal.



3. Birding and Wildlife Regions

3.1. Zaagkuilsdrift and Nylsvley

Description:

The 25km Zaagkuilsdrift stretch of gravel road, situated in the beautiful Pienaars River area, connects the town of Pienaars River to the village at Kgomo-Kgomo. It has earned a name for itself amongst local birders as one of the area's best birding spots and, in the latter part of summer, a warbler stakeout of note, boasting about 430 different bird species. The habitat along the route starts with open well grazed grassy plains in the east, followed by a long mosaic stretch of Acacia thornveld, and ends with swampland in the west at the confluence of the Apies, Pienaars and Moretele Rivers. The route therefore offers a variety of bushveld species and dry biome specials, with good waterbirds congregating on the floodplain in the wet season. Most of the land adjacent to the road is privately owned which, for the most part, restricts birding to the immediate vicinity of the road. In addition, although the river is mostly out of view along the route, the good riparian habitat serves as the keystone for much of the birding.

Nylsvley is the largest inland floodplain in South Africa, reaching 16,000 hectares when fully inundated, and floods every 3 to 4 years. 10% of this floodplain is formally conserved as Nylsvley Nature Reserve, and was listed as a RAMSAR site, an internationally important habitat for waterfowl, in July 1998. Nylsvley is one of the top birding spots in southern Africa, with at least 365 species recorded. Over 104 water bird species visit (and 87 breed) during extensive flooding, which only occurs every three or four years. In high rainfall years, it is best to visit in February to May. The floodplain comprises extensive reed beds and grassveld that is adjoined by broadleaved woodland and bushveld that host over 200 other species. Habitats include short grassy plains, reed beds, stands of long rice grass, open water patches, marshes, acacia savanna and broadleaved woodlands.



Target birds:

Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk, Dwarf Bittern, Eurasian Bittern, Little Bittern, Montagu's Harrier, Pallid Harrier, Western Marsh-Harrier, Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, African Grass-Owl, Marsh Owl, Southern White-faced Scops-Owl, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Temminck's Courser, Greater Painted-snipe, Allen's Gallinule, Striped Crane, Spotted Crane, Baillon's Crane, African Crane, Lesser Moorhen, Black-winged Pratincole, Northern Black Korhaan, Southern Pied Babbler, Bennett's Woodpecker, White-backed Mousebird, Thrush Nightingale, Shaft-tailed Whydah, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Red-capped Lark, Common Whitethroat, River Warbler, Olive-tree Warbler, Icterine Warbler, Barred Wren-Warbler, Red-headed Finch, Burnt-necked Eremomela, Great Sparrow, Violet-eared Waxbill, Black-faced Waxbill, Cape Penduline-Tit, Larklike Bunting, Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark, Cut-throat Finch, Yellow Canary, Ashy Tit, Cape Penduline-Tit.

Target mammals:

Roan, Sable, Leopard, Brown Hyena, Eland, Kudu, Tsessebe, Giraffe, Plains Zebra, Blue Wildebeest, Bushpig and many more.

3.2. Soutpansberg

Soutpansberg and Albasini Levubu, Limpopo Province, South Africa

Description:

The Soutpansberg is an enigmatic and beautiful mountain range that extends from east to west across the otherwise flat plains in Limpopo. It is named for the salt pan located at its western end. The area is littered with yellowwood trees, forest fever trees, giant cabbage trees, proteas, ancient tree ferns, and another 500 or so tree species that make this terrain pretty unique and worth protecting. It is also a key area to understanding the early relationships between Khoi, San and Bantu cultures, not least because of the plethora of rock art that litters caves and overhangs in the Soutpansberg. The mountains are noted for their high levels of species endemism and unique ecosystems. They form part of the core area of the UNESCO Vhembe Biosphere Reserve that also includes the northern Kruger National Park and Mapungubwe National Park and Cultural Landscape. Five different biomes are present in the Soutpansberg Protected Area – namely forest, thicket, savannah, grassland and wetland. All the vegetation types that occur here are endemic to Limpopo Province, or the Soutpansberg Mountains alone, and have a relatively limited range, with less than 1% under formal conservation.

North-eastern Venda stretches from Thohoyandou across to the Kruger National Park boundary and up north to the Limpopo valley. The vegetation type that dominates the North-eastern Venda area is Arid Mountain Bushveld and Mopane Woodland. Along all the major rivers one will find Lowveld Riverine Forest with elements of Semi-deciduous Forest. This is also the area where the isolated patch of Miombo (*Brachystegia*) Woodland is found.

Happy-Rest Nature Reserve – Buzzard Mountain Retreat

Buzzard Mountain Retreat is situated on the southern slopes of Happy-Rest Nature Reserve, and the top of the Soutpansberg. The reserve forms part of the greater 20,000 hectare Soutpanesberg Protected Area. Although best known for its many habitat types, it offers a bird list of over 250 species. Birds range from typical bushveld species to a variety of forest birds with habitats varying from sweet mixed bushveld to mistbelt forest and Afromontane grassland.

Muirhead Dams and Reserve

Muirhead Dams and forest is situated along the central Soutpansberg, and is another great place to discover great forest and water birds.

Entabeni Forest

Entabeni Forest is an area of Afromontane mistbelt forest situated in the Entabeni Plantation. The forest is extensive, but only parts of it are easily accessible. The extensive forest boasts really good specials, but only parts of it are easily accessible.



Image : Soutpanesberg Protected Area – <https://www.lovelimpopo.com/>

Luvuvhu River – Springfield Farm

The habitat in this region harbours numerous sought-after riverine forest and water specials.

Target birds:

Mottled Spinetail, Bohm's Spinetail, Arnot's Chat, White-breasted Cuckoo-shrike, Grey Cuckoo-shrike, Bat Hawk, Orange Ground-Thrush, Black-fronted Bush-Shrike, Senegal Coucal, Black Coucal, Blue-spotted Wood-Dove, Collared Pratincole, Caspian Plover, Lemon-breasted Canary, Pink-throated Twinspot, Green Twinspot, Brown Scrub-Robin, Lemon Dove, Forest Buzzard, African Crowned Eagle, Mountain Wagtail, Blue-mantled Crested-Flycatcher, Forest Canary, African Broadbill, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Narina Trogon, White-starred Robin, Knysna Turaco, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, Olive Woodpecker, Buff-spotted Flufftail, Magpie Mannikin, Chorister Robin-Chat, Thrush Nightingale, Dark-capped Yellow-Warbler, African Pygmy-Goose, Lesser Moorhen, White-backed Duck, White-backed Night-Heron, Half-collared Kingfisher, Malachite Sunbird, Gurney's Sugarbird, African Yellow White-eye.

Target mammals:

Eland, Mountain Reedbuck, Bushbuck, Springhare, Samango Monkey, Rock Hyrax, Giant Rat, Red Duiker, Cape Clawless Otter and many more.

3.3. Kruger National Park (Far North, North, and Central)

North-eastern Venda, Limpopo Province, South Africa

Description:

About the Far North Region of the Park

The eastern tip of the Soutpansberg mountains ends near Punda Maria in the Far Northern region of the Kruger National Park. This region of the Kruger extends south from the Limpopo River (the international boundary between Zimbabwe and South Africa) to the Tropic of Capricorn. Habitats in this vast northern section are surprisingly diverse – The area is mostly arid, flat and dominated by Mopane Trees, however, zones with higher localized rainfall give rise to the formation of dense Mopane groves, especially around Punda Maria.

To the north of Punda Maria the impressive vista is broken by craggy sandstone hills and the plentiful, giant Baobab trees. It offers one of the best areas for spotting several rare birds, as it is an unusual ecological mix of sandy alluvial plains and riverine forests. Far removed from the more popular and bustling areas of the Park, this is a haven for the rarer animals, seldom spotted in other areas. The game viewing is most advantageous along the river systems of this region – especially in the Mphongolo/Shingwedzi complex and the Luvuvhu/Limpopo complex.



Image: Garth Kingwill

The low-lying hills around Punda Maria, and the tall Mopane and broad-leaved woodland expanding out from the base of these hills into the damp, low-lying areas holds some great species. One of the most exciting areas in which to bird is up in the north, along the Luvuvhu River, and the Pafuri Picnic Site is one of the best-known birding spots in this area. Certain bird special which are normally only found further north and east can be seen in this area, because of its proximity to the Mozambique coast and the Limpopo River, which acts as a migration corridor. The bridge over the Luvuvhu River is particularly rewarding and Crooks Corner is well worth a visit.

About the North Region of the Park

The Northern Region is the area ranging southward from Capricorn to the Olifants River, bounded in the east by the Lebombo Mountains. This less explored area is made up of sandy expanses, mopane trees and riverine forest. The sparse, isolated hills in the west are rich in pre-historic artefacts. This region is a true wilderness, and gives visitors a feeling of being 'off the beaten track' as it is much quieter than the central and southern regions, with far fewer visitors.

About the Central Region of the Park

The Central Region is by far the most game rich of the four regions and offers some of the best scenery. Although it makes up only 30% of the park's surface area, it accounts for 40% of its total biomass. Bounded by the Sabi River in the south and the Olifants River in the north it is essentially grassland plain, interspersed with river valleys and woodland areas, stretching west to the Lebombo Mountains which form the boundary with Mozambique. In addition, due to its location it is a bit more remote and thus typically holds slightly fewer visitors.

Target birds:

Dickinson's Kestrel, Southern Hylia, Orange-winged Pytilia, Racket-tailed Roller, Grey-headed Parrot, Meyer's Parrot, Brown-headed Parrot, African Finfoot, Ayres's Hawk-Eagle, Eurasian Hobby, Bateleur, Yellow-billed Oxpecker, Grey Penduline Tit, Dusky Indigobird, Village Indigobird, African Golden Oriole, European Golden Oriole, Stierling's Wren-Warbler, Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark, Grey-backed Sparrowlark, Verreaux's Eagle Owl, African Cuckoo Hawk, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Montagu's Harrier, Pallid Harrier, African Scops-Owl, Tropical Boubou, Thrush Nightingale, White-crowned Lapwing, Mosque Swallow, Eastern Nicator, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Gorgeous Bush-Shrike, Meves's Starling, Thick-billed Cuckoo, Three-banded Courser, Corn Crake, African Crake, African Mourning Dove, Broad-billed Roller, Dusky Lark, Southern Ground-Hornbill, Crested Guinea fowl, Bennett's Woodpecker, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Red-billed Helmetshrike, Double-banded Sandgrouse, Kori Bustard, Black-bellied Bustard, Dwarf Bittern, Little Bittern.

Target mammals:

Lion, Leopard, Cheetah, Elephant, White Rhino, Black Rhino, Cape Buffalo, African Wild Dog, Hippo, Spotted Hyena, Brown Hyena, Pangolin, Honey Badger, Roan, Sable, Sharpe's Grysbok, Lichtenstein's Hartebeest Jameson's Red Rock Hare, Eland, Tsessebe, Samango Monkey, Kudu, Nyala, Bushbuck, Giraffe, Red Hartebeest, Mountain Reedbuck, Common Reedbuck and many more.

3.4. Polokwane Game Reserve



Description:

Polokwane Game Reserve is one of the most notable municipal reserves in the country. Unusually large, at 3,200 hectares, it protects a comparatively rare vegetation type and is home to at least 250 bird species and some rare mammal species. It offers an excellent network of roads, but due to the non-dangerous nature of the game, it presents the good option of birding and game viewing on foot, with a 21km-long

trail network route. The habitat is characterised by flatish open broadleaved savanna and grassland, with the odd smattering of trees and shrubs, rocky outcrops, riparian areas and termitaria zones.

Target birds:

Short-clawed Lark, Verreaux's Eagle, Secretarybird, Coqui Francolin, Northern Black Korhaan, Shelly's Francolin, Bushveld Pipit, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Desert Cisticola, Barred Wren-Warbler, Burnt-necked Eremomela, Kalahari Scrub-Robin, Tinkling Cisticola, Black-faced Waxbill.

Target mammals:

Striped Polecat, Aardwolf, Aardvark, Leopard, Brown Hyena, White Rhino, African Hedgehog, Jameson's Red Rock Rabbit, Tsessebe, Sable, Gemsbok, Mountain Reedbuck, Eland, Giraffe, Plains Zebra, Yellow Mongoose, Cape Clawless Otter and many more.



4. Trip Itinerary

Day	Accommodation*	Location	Habitats	Sites	Distance (kms)	Driving Time (hrs)
1	Softwaters Farm Guesthouse (C)	Entabeni Forest	Riverine Forest, Mountain Sour Veld, Arid Mountain Bushveld	Zaagkuilsdrift, Nylsvley, Entabeni Forest	442	4.75
2	Pafuri Border Rest Camp (S/C)	Kruger National Park (Far North)	Limpopo Ridge Bushveld, Soutpanesberg Mountain Bushveld, Makuleke Sandy Bushveld	Thoyandou Botanical Gardens, Punda Maria, Kopperfontein, Pafuri	195	4
3	Pafuri Border Rest Camp (S/C)	Kruger National Park (Far North)	Limpopo Ridge Bushveld, Soutpanesberg Mountain Bushveld, Makuleke Sandy Bushveld	Pafuri, Crooks Corner, Pafuri Gate	65	4
4	Punda Maria Rest Camp (C)	Kruger National Park (North)	Sandveld, Tree Mopane Savanna, Mopane Shrubveld, Alluvial Plains, Mopane/Bushwillow Woodlands, Riverine Bush	Kopperfontein, Dundzwini, Babalala, Punda Maria	75	6
5	Misty Mountain Guesthouse (C)	Eastern Soutpansberg	Riverine Forest, Mountain Sour Veld, Arid Mountain Bushveld	Eastern Soutpansberg	150	3
6	Depart Misty Mountain Guesthouse for OR Tambo International Airport			Polokwane GR. Site stops depend on flight departure times.	440	5

* Accommodation may change subject to availability, in which case similar accommodation will be found.

** Total driving distance (including around sites) = 1,403km.

Note: C = Catered, S/C = Self-catered

5. Accommodation

Note: Accommodation may change subject to availability, in which case similar accommodation will be found.

Day 1: Softwaters Farm Guesthouse

<https://softwaters.wixsite.com/guesthouse>

Softwaters Farm is situated along the Soutpansberg Mountain range, at the foot of the Luondo Mountain. The Guesthouse is situated on the farm and is the ideal place to get some well needed R&R.

Softwaters is a working farm which produces a range of fruit and nuts; Macadmia nuts the main crop is supported by Pecan nuts, Avocados and Litchis. The cropping season normally runs from late February to July. Litchi's are harvested in the middle of summer and over the Christmas holiday "festive" season.

The Guesthouse has been built from the remains of the original farm homestead. The character of the old house has been maintained during its transformation, which has taken 9 years. Please be aware not all the walls are straight and corners square! Rooms are comfortable with direct access to secure private gardens.

Apart from the busy farm and beautiful scenery we have three accommodation units, Ida's Cottage (2 Pax), Mahogany Cottage (2 Pax) and The Main House (4 Pax), which are fully furnished and equipped to make your stay as pleasant as possible.

With over 300 bird species in the area and a few wild animals scattered about walks and bike rides are sure to be very enjoyable. There are a number of other activities that guests are able to indulge in, whilst staying over.



Day 2 and 3: Pafuri Border Rest Camp - Mockford Cottage

<https://pafurirestcamp.com/>

Pafuri Border Camp is one of the Kruger National Park's northern most camps, close to the Limpopo and Luvubu Rivers. As a northern camp, the surroundings are hot and dry, but because of the camps close proximity to the rivers, there are many trees, which makes it a bird haven. The camp is close to Punda

Maria, but its accommodation options are rather different and more luxurious. If you are looking for a place well away from the crowds, Pafuri is the perfect option.

Some of the camp basics that you can expect when you book your stay at Pafuri includes:

- Swimming pool
- A museum
- Reception area

The camp is fully self-catering and there are a number of activities for guest to enjoy, including bush walks, day safaris, sunset walks and night drives, all of which can be arranged at reception.

Mockford House

Mockford House sleeps 8 guests comfortably and it has 4 separate bedrooms, 2 of which have 3 three quarter beds. The bedrooms have their own en-suite bathrooms; 3 of the rooms have a shower and a toilet in the en-suite bathroom while the 4th room has a shower, a bath and a toilet in the en-suite, as well as a fireplace in the room. The house has an additional bathroom, separate from the bedrooms. The house has a full kitchenette, a dining room and a patio with lounge furniture. The Mockford House also has braai facilities.



There are 3 large units at Pafuri, each spaced far enough apart for guests to enjoy utter privacy for the duration of their stay. Guests will have to self-cater and the units have both kitchenettes and braai facilities.

Day 4: Punda Maria Rest Camp – Kruger National Park (Far North)

<https://www.sanparks.org/parks/kruger/camps/punda/>

Punda Maria lies in the northern most part of the Kruger National Park, 8km from Punda Maria Gate. The camp is situated in the Sandveld region that is often described as the botanical garden of the Kruger National Park. There are numerous plant species which occur that are unique to the area. Game species most likely to be sighted include impala, zebra, buffalo, elephant, eland and sable and the area is a bird paradise.

Accommodation at Punda Maria Rest Camp caters to a variety of guest requirements and is well-suited for those guests who are looking for a self-catering bushveld experience. Below are the suitable accommodation options:



Safari Tents

- 7 x 2-bed permanent furnished canvas tents on stilts, fully equipped, with shower, fridge, cooking and braai facilities.

Bungalows

- 18 x 2-bed units, equipped with en-suite ablutions (all with showers), air-conditioning and communal braai area. There are no cooking utensils, crockery or cutlery, but a communal kitchen with scullery and electrical hotplate stoves is available.
- 4 x 3-bed units, equipped with en-suite ablutions (all with showers) and air-conditioning. All have sinks and hotplates with kitchenette and communal braai (barbeque) area.

Day 5: Misty Mountain Guesthouse – Soutpansberg

<https://mistymountainsguesthouse.co.za/>

Misty Mountains Guesthouse is set in the beautiful Soutpansberg Mountains of Limpopo, South Africa. The picturesque backdrop of the mountain and the captivating view of the plantations that stretch into the far distance keep you company during your stay with us.

Each room is decorated with a personal touch to make you feel at home. Book your overnight, corporate or leisure stay at Misty Mountains Guesthouse for an unforgettable experience.

The picturesque backdrop of the mountain and the captivating view of the plantations that stretch into the far distance keep you company during your stay with us.



The original old barn on this property has been converted into spacious rooms opening up onto a verandah stretching the length of this building. The rooms each has 2 single beds that can be joined (per arrangement) into a large king-size bed. The en-suite bathroom is set against the original old stonewall and has a great size shower. Big wooden, stable style doors and high ceilings emphasizes the space in these beautiful, but rustic style rooms. DSTV in each room and tea/coffee facilities in dining room next to your room. Braai facilities available.

Day 6: None

No accommodation required.





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