Wildlife Plus

An essential component of any South African itinerary is a visit to a wildlife area, be it a Big Five game reserve or one of the many smaller national and provincial parks to be found in the country. Your clients will be spoilt for choice when it comes to planning a safari.

Karoo National Park

Pilanesberg Game Reserve

Kruger National Park

Dwesa nature reserve. Image courtesy of Mauritz Preller

Mountain Zebra National Park
Addo Elephant National Park

Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park. Image courtesy of Francisco Lasco

Kosi Bay Nature Reserve, eNkovukeni, KwaZulu-Natal

Kruger National Park

The park has a well-developed infrastructure, including 12 main camps and several smaller bush-camp and lodge options, making it ideal for visitors wishing to go on a self-drive safari.

Organised game drives and guided tours are also available from reserves and lodges located on the outskirts of the park.

The southern region of the Kruger is popular with visitors for its plentiful game, including lions, while the north is known for large herds of elephant and buffalo, sites of archaeological interest and the chance to see some truly majestic baobab trees.

If your clients have an adventurous streak, they should consider booking a walking safari that allows them to experience the bush on foot in the company of armed rangers.

The park lies within a malarial area so advise your clients to take advice from their general practitioner about anti-malarial prophylactics before they leave home.
Travel tip

The park has a well-developed infrastructure, making it ideal for visitors wishing to go on a self-drive safari.

Travel fact

The Kruger National Park covers an area roughly the size of Wales and offers visitors possibly the best value-for-money Big Five experience to be found in Africa.

Big Five attraction

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Pilanesberg Game Reserve

Located in the crater of a long-extinct volcano dating back some 1 300-million years, Pilanesberg’s undulating landscape provides for an interesting mix of bushveld, grassland, rocky outcrops and hills. Aside from the Big Five, visitors should also look out for cheetah and wild dogs.

There are roughly 200km of tourist roads within this park, along with picnic sites and several bird hides, making it a comfortable destination for self-drive visitors. At the centre of Pilanesberg is the Mankwe Dam, a focal point for birdlife with visitor facilities.

There are safari tents, chalets and campsites available at the Bakgatla and Manyane resorts attached to the reserve, as well several five-star lodges within the reserve. Visitors can also do day trips from nearby Sun City.

All the resorts in and around Pilanesberg offer guided game drives. Special experiences are the hot air balloon trips that take place at dawn at the Mankwe Dam and elephant back safaris.

Travel fact

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Travel tip

The Pilanesberg Game Reserve is about a two-hour drive from Johannesburg

Did you know?

The Pilanesberg is located in the crater of a long-extinct volcano

Mountain Zebra National Park

This national park, located in the malaria-free mountains of the Karoo close to the town of Cradock in the Eastern Cape, owes its existence to the animal from which it takes its name.

Mountain zebras (unlike their cousin, the Burchell’s zebra) were once at risk of extinction, hence the establishment of a conservation area back in 1937 to conserve the few remaining animals. In the late 1990s, funds were raised to enlarge the park through the incorporation of surrounding farmland.

Today it is home to about 700 mountain zebra, many antelope species, cheetah, buffalo and a wealth of bird species.

Accommodation in the main camp ranges from self-catering cottages to a well-appointed Victorian guest house and camping. For the more adventurous, there are two mountain huts that can be hired by overnight visitors, but these can only be accessed by 4x4.

In the winter, nights are cold (be prepared for snow on the surrounding mountains) but it is generally sunny during the day. Summers are relatively mild to warm due to the park’s mountainous location.

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What to look out for...

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Travel tip

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Karoo National Park

This park, at the foot of the Nuweveld mountains, showcases the flora and fauna of the Great Karoo, an ancient, dry land that was once a vast sea.

Visitors should look out for plains game like hartebeest, wildebeest, eland and both zebra species (Burchell’s and the rare mountain zebra), and a variety of reptiles. Lions were reintroduced here in 2010 to restore the predator/prey balance and are occasionally seen.

For those with a keen interest in geology, the Karoo National Park is of special interest. Among its attractions is a 400m wheelchair-friendly trail featuring a display of real fossils and containing information about the geology of the area.

There is a low-level electrified fence around the rest camp so that visitors can walk around freely. The park also offers free, guided walks with an armed ranger who can explain more about this unique environment.

Accommodation is in comfortable chalets, excellent camping facilities or an overnight cottage for those who have booked a 4x4 trail.

Travel tip

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Travel tip

This park, at the foot of the Nuweveld mountains, showcases the flora and fauna of the Great Karoo, an ancient, dry land that was once a vast sea. Image courtesy of Cathy Withers-Clarke

Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park

It was here that a game-capture technique was developed through Operation Rhino in the 1960s that helped to save these animals by relocating them to other reserves where their numbers could breed up.

The two areas, Hluhluwe and iMfolozi, were first protected in 1895 and only consolidated into one reserve about a hundred years later. Hluhluwe lies to the north and enjoys a mountainous landscape while iMfolozi to the south is ideal for game viewing with its more open plains.

Aside from the Big Five, the reserve is home to a variety of antelope and is particularly rich in birdlife, with more than 300 species having been recorded here. Other special species include cheetah and wild dogs.

The park is famous for its wilderness trails, guided game drives and guided walks. A range of accommodation is available, from bush camps to luxury lodges. Visitors exploring the Battlefields of KwaZulu-Natal would be well advised to include a night or two in this reserve.

Conservation

A game-capture technique was developed through Operation Rhino in the 1960s that helped to save rhinos by relocating them. Image courtesy of Scott Ramsay

What to look out for...

Aside from the Big Five, the reserve is home to a variety of antelope and is particularly rich in birdlife. Image
Dwesa nature reserve

What to look out for...
Whales and dolphins can be seen from the shore

The park is located on the western side of the Mbashe River, roughly halfway between Kei Mouth and Port St Johns on the southern Wild Coast. Clients travelling to Dwesa will have to negotiate the last 50km on a rough, gravel road for which a 4x4 or high-clearance vehicle is advisable.

This park is of particular interest to birders with its range of habitats from beach and estuary through to open grassland and coastal forest. Whales and dolphins can be seen from the shore and crocodiles have been reintroduced into the river system.

Accommodation is rustic, consisting of a handful of self-catering log cabins and campsites. A local guide is compulsory should your clients wish to explore the forest areas on foot or drive along some of the 4x4 tracks on the coast. Booking ahead for this reserve is essential.

Feature image courtesy of Mauritz Preller
Kosi Bay

Travel tip
Snorkelling within the Kosi Bay mouth is extremely popular, where a reef offers easy access to a beautiful display of tropical fish

This pristine estuary system is famous for the traditional fish traps that are used by the Tonga people here and handed down from one generation to the next.

Among the many birds that can be seen at Kosi Bay are African fish eagles and palm-nut vultures, while there are hippos and crocodiles to be found in the lakes. On the sandy beaches of the coast, loggerhead and leatherback turtles come to lay their eggs each summer.

To witness this spectacle, advise your clients they will have to book a special turtle safari at one of the lodges. This activity takes place at night between November and March.

Among the highlights of this area is snorkelling within the Kosi Bay mouth, where a reef offers easy access to a beautiful display of tropical fish (including the deadly stonefish). Access to the mouth is only by 4x4 or via a 12km hiking trail.

Advise your clients that this is a high-risk malarial area and they should visit their general practitioner regarding anti-malarial prophylactics before leaving home.

Feature image courtesy of jacashgone

Addo Elephant National Park
Did you know?
The elephant population at Addo once consisted of only 16 elephants – today, more than 550 elephants roam free here.

It’s hard to believe that this population once consisted of only 16 elephants – today, more than 550 elephants roam free here.

Both the park and the size of the elephant population have grown substantially over the years. Addo is now the third largest national park in South Africa, stretching from the Zuurberg mountains to the coast and including two offshore island groups.

Addo is now also home to the Big Five with the reintroduction of a small pride of lions, along with spotted hyenas. Other megafauna that call this park home are buffalo, black rhino and leopards.

Accommodation options include several luxury lodges, a main camp and a satellite camp, as well as several bush camps. Due to the park’s accessibility and popularity, advance bookings are essential.

A unique experience is the chance to book a horse trail in a Big Five area. The park also offers game drives and ‘hop-on’ guides for those who wish to be guided in their own vehicle.