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Big 5 Research Safari, South Africa

"10/10 It was honestly the best 4 weeks of my life!! So many amazing things happened with the Big 5, from watching elephants fight, watching the cheetah mum and her cubs hunting, and tracking those sneaky leopards through the wild!" **Shayla**



This program is a dream come true for anyone with a love of remote wilderness and a passion for African wildlife. The exciting and important research project takes place in a spectacularly beautiful Big 5 game reserve near world-famous Kruger National Park.

The reserve is home to lion, white rhino, elephant, leopard, cheetah, buffalo, giraffe and plentiful game species including wildebeest, zebra and numerous antelope; all living wild and completely free roaming on thousands of hectares of pristine African bush.

You'll play a central role in every part of the research project including wildlife monitoring expeditions, tracking animals on foot and by vehicle, camera trap placement, photo analysis and even using drone technology. You'll receive expert training on arrival and will then head out twice a day to record animal behaviours. As a member of this pioneering research team, you will learn new skills such as navigation techniques and identification of flora and fauna. You may even have the chance for a sleep out in the bush or a microlight flight over the reserve for wildlife monitoring and anti-poaching patrols. A boutique program, group sizes are limited to a maximum of 11 participants.

Book now with a low \$400 deposit, balance due 3 months before trip. Payment plans available

The logo for 'totally travel' is located in the top left corner. It consists of the word 'totally' in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font inside a yellow speech bubble shape, and the word 'travel' in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font inside a red speech bubble shape below it.A collage of three images is positioned at the top of the page. The left image shows a woman smiling next to an elephant. The middle image shows a woman and a young boy smiling together. The right image shows a person's hands holding a syringe to administer a vaccine to a monkey's mouth.

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Highlights:

- True African safari experience, tracking and viewing animals in the wild
- Big 5 monitoring - lion, leopard, white rhino, elephant, buffalo, also cheetah, hyena++
- Remote, beautiful and pristine, recently established Big 5 reserve on 15,000 hectares
- Voyage of discovery – brand new wildlife monitoring and conservation program
- Getting up close to Africa's amazing wildlife in an active research capacity
- Track animals on foot - ranger-escorted bush walks
- Night drives and exciting sleep-outs under the stars
- Possibility for Microlight flights to assist with anti-poaching patrols

Snapshot

- **Start Dates** : Sundays year round
- **Duration** : 2 weeks or more
- **Pricing:**
 - 2 weeks AU\$2,995
 - 3 weeks AU\$3,895
 - 4 weeks AU\$4,795
 - 6 weeks AU\$6,495
- **Minimum Age** : 18
- **Fly In/Out** : Johannesburg (JNB) or Hoedspruit (HDS)
- **Activities:** Tracking and monitoring of wildlife, recording their feeding behaviour, territorial movements and social patterns. General reserve management activities
- **What's included:** All meals, accommodation, airport transfers and daily activities
- **What's not included in cost:** Flights, optional excursions
- **Accommodation:** 4-share rooms with bathroom. Private double-room ensuite upgrade is available on request.
- **Food:** All meals self-catering on a rostered basis – food ingredients all provided

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Itinerary

Day 1 (Sunday) Transfers are provided from Johannesburg OR Tambo Airport (JNB) every second week, departing at 11am. If you prefer to fly in a day earlier we can arrange a night at the airport hotel or nearby. On alternate weeks we pick up from Hoedspruit Airport (HDS) or you can use alternative transfer options from JNB to reach the reserve.

The drive from JNB to the reserve is around 5 hours, or just 1 hour from HDS. Once at the research base the team will be there to settle you in to your new home and it will be an easy afternoon relaxing in the fantastic setting, meeting the group and getting to know how everything works.

Project life The first morning will start with an induction talk in which the team will explain everything about the project, the reserve and important safety rules. Our experienced field guides and rangers have years of field experience which they are only too happy to share with their eager, passionate team of volunteers. Whilst the wildlife monitoring and conservation program is brand new here in this reserve, since 2005 the team have conducted long-term research programs in other locations in Limpopo.

We are privileged to be able to monitor animals in the wild, observing their behaviour, spatial movements, interactions, reproduction and food preferences. The work we do links ecology with the practical aspects of running a nature reserve, providing a rewarding and educational wildlife experience in one of the most beautiful reserves of South Africa.



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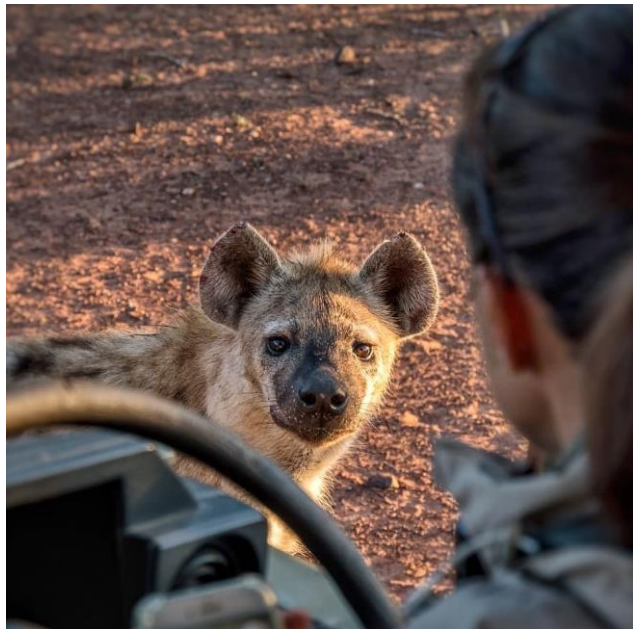
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Our guides will take you out every day on two monitoring drives (Monday-Saturday). Be prepared to spend between 10 and 12 hours in the bush daily !

As wild animals are most active in the early morning you'll usually be up before dawn too ! This is the most beautiful time of day in the African bush so, after a quick coffee, heading off in the 4x4 game vehicle is an absolute pleasure. In the field we observe, collect data and take identification photos of the key species that we monitor (Big 5, hyenas and cheetahs), in particular regarding their behaviours, location and health.



Camera traps are a vital tool in our monitoring efforts. Placed in strategic positions around the reserve, they capture images and videos day and night. Each month we collect thousands of photos which are sorted by our volunteers and then processed by our rangers.

Bush walks are a great way to experience the bush in more depth. Walking allows us to spot animals and suspicious tracks, discover new areas and dens, check existing or install new camera traps while enjoying nature at a very personal level.

We conduct sleep outs to act as a deterrent for poachers. being extra eyes and ears out in the field at night. Sleep outs are conducted in strategic parts of the reserve and provide an amazing opportunity to see nocturnal animals, admire the beautiful African sky and listen to the sounds of the bush, an incredible experience!

If you're lucky, you may have the opportunity to fly in our microlight ! From the air we can patrol vast areas of the reserve and spot many animals and those views !!!!

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Volunteers may also have the opportunity to take part in the exciting experience of game capture, though this is only done as required and for various reasons including darting an individual for medical reasons or replacement of a tracking device. Mass capture is also a way of controlling the excess animal populations.

While out in the field, our work also involves taking care of the eco-systems through reserve management activities such as bush clearing, road restoration, alien plant removal, erosion control, tree wrapping, fence/rubbish removal, game capture and animal darting (on specific occasions, such as monitoring collar replacement).

On Fridays we go to town to replenish the food stock for the week and to have a nice dinner at one of the local restaurants. And Sunday is downtime, when we take a break from activities to recharge our batteries !

Sabrina Colombo



Departure Day (Saturday) At the end of your stay we will take you back to Johannesburg or Hoedspruit (alternate weeks). You may be travelling elsewhere in Africa or you may be heading home - if you're flying from Johannesburg, unless you can get an evening flight we advise spending the night near the airport (we will book for you) and flying on the Sunday.

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Accommodation

Our rustic-style house is large, bright and fully immersed in nature with a large garden. We often have the pleasure of listening to hyenas and jackals at night and in the mornings we can see the sun rising over the mountains. Our garden contains a small plunge pool and a BBQ (braai) area for cooking around the fire on Sunday evenings. There is also a shady pagoda with hammocks for relaxing.

The house is solar powered and the tap water is safe to drink. We have hot running water for showers and wifi for keeping in touch. You can hand wash your laundry or use the machine for a small charge. House cleaning duties are shared on a roster.

Sleeping is in 4-share single-gender rooms. There is one bathroom per room. Bedding is provided, but bring a sleeping bag and a towel. A double room with ensuite upgrade is available for a small surcharge, subject of course to availability.

Meals Food ingredients are provided and you and other volunteers will take turns to prepare meals for the group, following our menu.

Excursions:

This is not a malaria area - we recommend packing insect repellent of course and a mosquito net is also recommended to ensure a peaceful sleep, especially during summer.

There are opportunities available during your stay to partake in additional excursions. We offer guided trips to the Kruger National Park and to the Panorama Route and a dinner at the luxurious Abelana River Lodge.

Kruger National Park is one of the most famous National Parks in the world and it hosts an incredible variety of species. Being so close to this beautiful park, an excursion to this peace of heaven is a must!

Blyde River Canyon, God's Window, the Eco Caves and beautiful Waterfalls are all stops on the Panorama Route!

Excursions are payable locally and per-person prices are determined by the number of volunteers wanting to partake.

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