

SAVE SIBAYA

Middle of Nowhere, Northern Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This 25-day program is designed for students and nature enthusiasts between the ages of 18 -30 years. It combines social and conservation work with wildlife encounters and cultural interaction. This year the main focus is to build an accurate map of the area and develop an updated species list that will lead to the compilation of an information booklet and a tourist awareness campaign. The objective is to know what animals are living outside of the adjacent National Park, as well as their status, to build a baseline for conservation. This will involve mapping the area and an on going census of the fauna and flora of this unique ecosystem. Volunteers will also have the chance to see the "Big Five", get hands-on experience with conservation, gain an insight on traditional life in Zululand, and have a full "Bush & Beach" experience while learning about the environment of Lake Sibaya.

LOCATION

The base camp is approximately 15 kilometers from Sodwana Bay and Mbazwana in Northern Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa. We are in a remote corner of this wilderness in traditional Zululand, walking distance from some of the most idyllic and isolated beaches in Africa and overlooking Lake Sibaya, South-Africa's largest fresh-water lake, teeming with hippo, crocodile and many other smaller mammal and bird species. Most of this area is declared a UNESCO World Heritage site for its natural beauty and bio-diversity and forms part of the Isimangaliso Wetlands Park. After the Kruger, this is the second largest wilderness area/national park in South Africa and home to over fifty mammal species, including the big five and over 400 bird species. A large part of the park is a marine reserve and offers some of the best scuba diving in the world.

PROGRAM ITINERARY

Week 1:

Volunteers will be met at King Shaka International airport in Durban and transferred to our Lake Sibaya base camp. The first week in Sibaya will begin with a guided walk of the area. Volunteers will learn how to identify edible plants, invasive species, cycads, and wildflowers. Participants will begin to familiarize themselves with the area while identifying species and updating the master species catalog. When available, participants will also be given an introduction to mapping and field data collection. Mornings will be spent in the field and afternoons will be used for research and documenting.



Participants are encouraged to work at their own pace and take initiative with ideas and suggestions.

The first weekend, volunteers will be taken on safari in Mkhuze National Park, where they will begin to learn first-hand about African wildlife and conservation. Guided safari, all meals, and one night accommodation are included. Sunday will be a rest day, and transport to Sodwana Bay will be available for participation in the many activities available.

Week 2:

This week participants will begin cataloging local bird and animal species. There will be a guided walk that will include identifying ground nests, burrows, and animal tracks. Volunteers will continue to explore the area and update the sightings lists and photograph catalog. When available, a world-renowned bird specialist (living locally) will lead the group on a guided walk or drive. One evening will be spent at the lake to enjoy sunset and birdwatching.



The second weekend we will head to St. Lucia, in the heart of the UNESCO world heritage site, where we will enjoy a visit to a Cheetah Rehabilitation Center, a hippo tour by boat in the Isimangaliso Wetlands Park, a visit to a traditional Zulu village and market, and a safari in Hluhluwe National Park. Participants will overnight in St. Lucia, heading back to our base camp by Saturday evening. The trip includes activities and accommodation in St. Lucia, but excludes meals. Sunday will be a rest day and transports to the local beaches will be available.



Week 3:

During the third week participants will begin to catalog nocturnal species at the base camp and during a night drive in the area. Time will be spent mapping the area via the roads and footpaths. Participants are encouraged to take initiative at all time, but particularly by the third week, working on projects of interest in addition to the census and mapping of the area. There will be the opportunity to remove invasive species, participate in beach cleanups, and work at the community center. Mornings will be spent in the field and afternoons will be used for research and documenting.

The final weekend, participants will enjoy time at two of the regions most idyllic beaches – 9 Mile and Mabibi. There will be time for the many activities on offer in Sodwana Bay, including scuba diving, snorkeling, micro-light flights, surfing, fishing, or whale watching. Sunday, volunteers will have the option to participate in an additional safari at one of the nearby National Parks.

Final Days:

The last few days will be spent finalizing work on databases, writing reports, and summarizing work done during the program. Transfer to King Shaka International Airport or a central location in Durban will be provided on the final day of the program. Timing will depend upon flight times; in some cases an overnight in Durban might be required (included in price).



REQUIREMENTS

As a program participant you will be expected to contribute ideas, engage with the other volunteers, and actively partake in activities. During work days (typically Monday through Thursday), a minimum of 5 hours conservation work will be expected. To beat the African heat, field work will typically be done early in the morning, with students returning to the base camp for lunch. The afternoon will be available for writing, data analysis, research, and exploration. Evenings will be left at leisure when other activities are not planned. Students are encouraged to bring GPS units, cameras, and any other field equipment to use during the project. If you have a specialty or interest in a particular field, please let us know!



RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

There is also time for recreation during the Save Sibaya program. Weekend activities, described above, might include a visit to a Cheetah rehabilitation Center, introduction to Zulu culture at a traditional Zulu village, game drives at Mkhuze National Park, Hluhluwe National Park and Tembe Elephant Reserve, a canoe safari on Muzi Pans, or a boat safari in St. Lucia World Heritage Site. During leisure time, our staff are happy to organize various activities offered in and around Sodwana Bay, which include scuba diving, snorkeling, visits to local beaches, restaurants, quad bike tours, micro-light flights, and more. Lake Sibaya is just a short walk from the camp and is ideal for afternoon hikes, picnics or sunset cocktails. All activities are subject to availability, and are flexible based on student interests.

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

At the base camp there are two same-sex dormitories and an area for camping. Bathrooms are basic and shared with hot water showers. A self-catering kitchen, bar, and restaurant are available. Limited internet is available, as the area is remote.



Breakfast, lunch and dinner at the base camp are included, and cater to vegetarians and meat lovers alike. Additional snacks and meals at restaurants outside the base-camp are not included in our package. Coffee, tea, water and juice are available with meals but other refreshments can be obtained at the bar or local liquor store. A typical breakfast consists of cereals, toasts and yogurt followed by a light lunch (sandwiches, fruits and salad), and buffet-style dinners.

TRANSFERS

Airport pick-up and drop-off in Durban is included in the package. Transfers to and from the beach, parks and town will be available throughout the week.

AVAILABILITY

The program will be available from 1 February 2015 and will be on-going. Participants will be picked up at King Shaka International Airport in Durban on the first day of each month, and transferred to Durban on the 25th day of the month. Dates are flexible for groups of four or more.



COST

Total cost for the 25 day period is **\$1,400** per person and includes the following:

- Airport transfers from Durban to Sibaya (4 hours each way)
- Accommodation at the base camp (approximately 21 nights)
- All meals served at the base camp (excluding snacks, restaurant bills, and alcoholic beverages)
- One activity in Sodwana Bay (Scuba dive/snorkel trip/Micro-light flight/quad bike tour/surfing lesson/fishing trip/turtle or whale watching tour), dependent upon availability and season
- Weekend trip to Mkhuze National Park, which includes safari, one night accommodation, and all meals
- Weekend trip to St. Lucia, which includes safari in Hluhluwe National Park, visit to a Cheetah Rehabilitation Center, one night accommodation in St. Lucia, boat safari, and a tour of the Zulu Cultural Village
- One day exploring 9 Mile and Mabibi beaches
- Transfers to Sodwana Bay
- Sunset trip to Lake Sibaya
- An unforgettable experience



Sign up today & help us SAVE SIBAYA!

ABOUT THE SAVE SIBAYA PROJECT

The Save Sibaya Project began as an effort to catalog and conserve the flora and fauna in the Lake Sibaya region. Much of the area forms part of the Isimangaliso Wetlands Park, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site for its natural beauty and bio-diversity, however much of the area remains unprotected. Lake Sibaya, South Africa's largest freshwater lake, is threatened by development, excessive poaching, and reduction of water levels due to regional consumption. The goal of Save Sibaya is to build a comprehensive database of remaining species, create a Sibaya Visitor Guide, and launch a tourist awareness campaign to garner interest in the area. Save Sibaya's social initiatives includes working with the Ezinqeni community to renovate and upgrade the existing community center to host a mobile medical clinic, and for future use as an after-school center and kindergarten. Our hope is that one day soon, sustainable tourism will uplift the community, conserve this precious natural resource, and allow the remaining wildlife to flourish.

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