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## EASTERN SOUTH AFRICA HIGHLIGHTS 2025

*Dullstroom - Panorama Route - Kruger National Park*

*9 Days / 8 Nights*

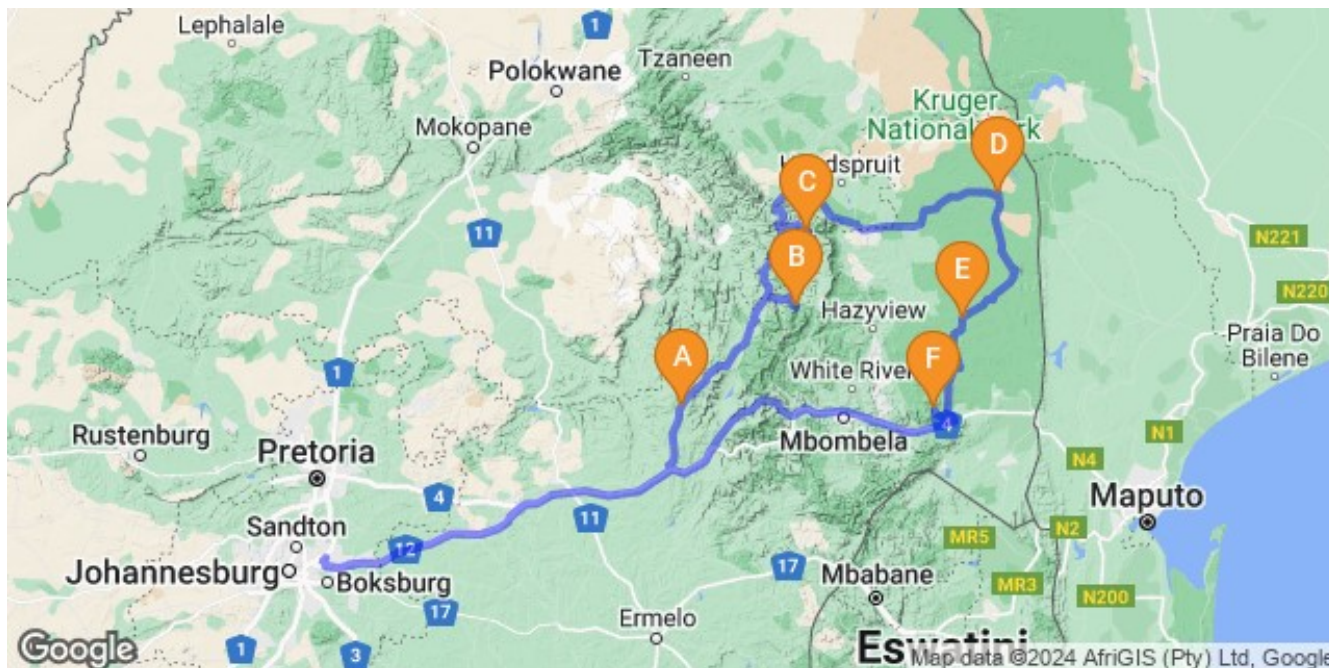
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**06 March 2025 - 14 March 2025**

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## Introduction

This Escarpment and Kruger Park birding safari is a tried-and-tested itinerary. And it always delivers! It covers some of the highlights of our home province of Mpumalanga, 'Place of the Sun Rise'. As Mpumalanga is our 'backyard', we know the area well! Moreover, February is a great time of the year for this tour, when birding is at its best. We aim to see over 300 species of birds and 35 species of mammals on this 9-day birding and wildlife safari. It's guaranteed to deliver a lot of 'bang for your buck'!

## Areas covered

Our '**Escarpment and Kruger Park birding safari**' tour starts in Johannesburg. From there we visit Dullstroom, a small town in the highlands of the Province, where we will spend time birding in the surrounding countryside. After that we move on to Mount Sheba to explore the area's Afro-Montane Forests. Our next stop is the Blyde River Canyon, where the rugged escarpment gives way to the lowlands of Kruger. The Kruger National Park is the highlight of the birding tour, with time spent in three different camps. In conclusion, on the last day we'll have a final morning in Kruger before driving back to Johannesburg to arrive in the late afternoon.

## Accommodation

The accommodation is of a medium-plus standard. It includes a small inn, a hotel, a resort and national park's chalets. Importantly, all accommodations have en-suite facilities, and are clean and comfortable.

## The birding

Diversity is the name of the game! This Escarpment and Kruger Park birding safari covers a wide range of habitats within a relatively small area. These habitats range from the high-altitude grasslands of Dullstroom to the indigenous forest patches of Mount Sheba; the rocky slopes, cliffs and canyons of the Blyde area; and an array of woodland savanna types in the Kruger. As a result, the range of birds to be seen is correspondingly diverse. Our target birds include: Southern Bald Ibis, Secretarybird, Blue Crane, Buff-streaked Chat, Yellow-breasted Pipit, White-throated Robin Chat, Greater Double-collared Sunbird, Cape Batis, Verreaux's Eagle Owl, Kori Bustard, Martial Eagle, Southern Ground Hornbill, Lilac-breasted Roller, Southern Carmine Bee-eater, Scarlet-chested Sunbird and many others.

## The mammals

For non-birders or those with a broad interest there are plenty of mammals and other wildlife to see. For example, these include the classic African big game species such as Elephant, White Rhino, African Buffalo, Lion, Leopard, South African Giraffe and Hippopotamus. In addition, one can expect to see a range of Antelope, plus some smaller species such as various Primates; Honey Badger; Black-backed Jackal; various Mongoose species and others. In addition, there's a range of reptiles, amphibians, butterflies and other insects to be seen.

## Group size

Maximum of 12 participants; 6 participants per vehicle / guide

## Expected weather conditions

Cool to mild in the highlands, hot and humid in the Kruger. Some rain to be expected.

In conclusion, this Escarpment and Kruger Park birding safari is a fantastic way to be introduced to some of South Africa's scenery, birds and animals. It covers a wide range of habitats within a relatively small area, and includes a chance for some fantastic mammal encounters as well. Indeed, this one is hard to beat...

Accommodation	Destination	Start	End	Basis	Duration
The Rose Cottage B&B	Dullstroom	6 Mar	7 Mar	D,B&B	<b>1 Night</b>
Mount Sheba	Panorama Route	7 Mar	8 Mar	D,B&B	<b>1 Night</b>
Blyde Canyon, A Forever Resort	Panorama Route	8 Mar	9 Mar	D,B&B	<b>1 Night</b>
Satara Main Camp	Kruger National Park	9 Mar	11 Mar	D,B&B	<b>2 Nights</b>
Skukuza Rest Camp	Kruger National Park	11 Mar	13 Mar	D,B&B	<b>2 Nights</b>
Berg-en-Dal Main Camp	Kruger National Park	13 Mar	14 Mar	D,B&B	<b>1 Night</b>

## Key

D,B&B: Dinner, Bed and Breakfast

## Price

**ZAR 49 200** per person sharing

**ZAR 7 420** single supplement

## Included

- Accommodation
- All breakfasts and dinners
- Ground transport
- Lawson's insulated water bottle
- Entrance fees
- Personalised checklists
- Specialist guide fees

## Excluded

- All airfares
  - Travel and medical insurance
  - Lunches
  - All drinks
  - Optional excursions where applicable
  - Gratuities
  - Items of a personal nature
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## Day 1: Thursday, 6 March

### The Rose Cottage B&B, Dullstroom

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#### Day Itinerary

**Note:** Participants should overnight on the 24th January 2024 at own cost, or arrive on early morning flights on the 25th January 2024 (07h00 arrival flights). Later arrivals on the 25th may result in additional transfer costs. Please consult us about appropriate flights.

After arrival in Johannesburg we'll drive northwards a short distance to Rietvlei Nature Reserve. This small reserve conserves some Highveld grassland habitat and holds a few bird species which we will not have a chance of seeing on the rest of the itinerary. These include South African Shelduck, Northern Black Korhaan, Greater Kestrel and Chestnut-vented Tit-Babbler, among others. We'll then continue eastwards through Mpumalanga Province. The eastern reaches of the province are dominated by extensive beef and maize farming, with coal mining taking place here and there. The scenery is not too spectacular for the first two hours or so, but will improve as we leave the highway at Belfast and head north-east into the highlands. Before turning off however we will have a few stops to add some water birds to our list. Not far off the highway there are some pans and marshes where we will look for species such as Greater Flamingo, Cape Shoveler, Hottentot and Red-billed Teals, Yellow-billed, White-backed and Maccoa Ducks, Southern Pochard, Black-necked Grebe, Southern Red Bishop and others. Further on we may deviate slightly to check out a South African Cliff Swallow colony before heading on for lunch in Dullstroom, our base for the next two days. The altitudes around Dullstroom vary from 2000 – 2250 metres (6500 feet) above sea level, and the habitat comprises open grasslands and rocky hillsides, while here and there stands of alien trees provide an additional habitat. We will probably arrive in the afternoon some time and if time allows may have a short afternoon activity before getting ready for dinner. Species we will be on the lookout for include Southern Bald Ibis, Cape Longclaw, Ant-eating Chat, Mountain Wheatear, Pied Starling, Steppe Buzzard, Cape Crow, Common Fiscal, Bokmakierie and many others. The Dullstroom area does not hold too many large mammals, though Black Wildebeest, Blesbok, Springbok and other antelope can be seen on farms, having been re-introduced by many landowners. Grey Rhebok, Mountain Reedbuck, Yellow Mongoose, Meerkat and Natal Red Rock Rabbit live under free-ranging conditions and can be seen in the area. We'll then have some time to freshen up before dinner.

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#### Dullstroom

Situated in South Africa's beautiful Mpumalanga Province, the quaint village of Dullstroom is known for its excellent fishing opportunities and fresh country air. Aptly named, Dullstroom ('stroom' meaning stream) enjoys an abundance of water, marking the beginning of the Crocodile River and home to other major tributaries. It serves as a convenient stopover for visitors on the way to the Lowveld and Kruger Park. Dullstroom piques the interest of many

newcomers with its sub-alpine climate, three endangered crane species, abundant wildflowers, rare mammals, great fishing and features the highest railway station in South Africa at over 2000 metres above sea level.

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### **Overnight: The Rose Cottage B&B**

The Rose Cottage B&B is situated 2.5 hours' drive from Johannesburg in the quaint fly-fishing village of Dullstroom.



## **Day 2: Friday, 7 March**

### **Mount Sheba, Panorama Route**

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#### **Day Itinerary**

Today we will head out early on a morning excursion into the Veloren Valei (Lost Valley) Nature Reserve and Ramsar Site high up in the Steenkampsberg Range. Here the altitudes reach the 2250 metre (7380 feet) mark, and birds we will be on the lookout for include Denham's Bustard, Secretarybird, Gurney's Sugarbird, Eastern Long-billed Lark, Yellow-breasted Pipit, Grey-winged Francolin, Sentinel Rock-Thrush and Jackal Buzzard, among others. There's also a chance to see both Blue and Wattled Cranes in the reserve, although the numbers are low and there are many unseen valleys and depressions where they can hide from our view. After the morning excursion we will head back down to town for breakfast, after which we will make our way to Mount Sheba, a hotel situated around two hours' drive away on the edge of the escarpment. Here the warm air rising up from the Lowveld (low-lying plain) to the east brings a lot of moisture and large stands of indigenous forest grow here and there on the slopes. Mount Sheba is situated close to one of the largest remaining forest patches, and this is where our morning's birding will take place. Our temperate forests do not hold as many species as can be found in tropical forests, and yet present many of the inherent challenges of forest birding: reduced visibility, low light levels and secretive birds. Nevertheless, there are some great species to be seen here, such as Narina Trogon, Knysna Turaco, White-starred Robin, Chorister Robin-Chat, Cape Baits, Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler, Olive Woodpecker, Orange Ground-Thrush, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Southern Double-collared Sunbird and many others. We may have time for a brief birding session during the afternoon, after which we'll have time to freshen up before dinner in the hotel restaurant.

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#### **Panorama Route**

Connecting the Lowveld and the Drakensberg, and sandwiched between the Kruger National Park and the Highlands Meander, the historical Panorama Route is a scenic drive in the Mpumalanga Province. The route features sensational views of natural wonders including fascinating rock formations and impressive waterfalls and boasts numerous scenic hiking trails alongside a myriad of fauna and flora. The quaint little town of Graskop serves as the gateway to this wonderful route. Panorama's undoubted highlight is the Blyde River Canyon, one of the world's largest green canyons, filled with lush subtropical vegetation. Some other popular attractions along the route include the spectacular Lisbon, Berlin, and Mac Mac Falls; Bourke's Luck Potholes; the Three Rondavels; and the astonishing

God's Window. Don't miss the world-famous Kruger National Park and the picturesque gold rush town of Pilgrim's Rest, a historic living museum.

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### Overnight: Mount Sheba

Mount Sheba Hotel is situated in the rain forest near the famous town of Pilgrim's Rest in Mpumalanga. Well-appointed rooms, gourmet meals and log fires give a magical feel to Mount Sheba. Walks in the forest are magical, with the rare Samango Monkey and rare bird calls around you.




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### Day 3: Saturday, 8 March

#### Blyde Canyon, A Forever Resort, Panorama Route

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#### Day Itinerary

Today we'll hope to have an early start, heading into the surrounding forest for some pre-breakfast birding, though as the region is often shrouded in mist, we'll have to play it according to the weather conditions at the time. We'll put in quite a bit of effort to try and rack up a decent list of forest birds before breakfast, and if we still have some key species to see we'll have another bash in the forest before packing and departing for the Blyde River Canyon. En-route we'll stop off at a few of the major view sites before checking in to the resort. An afternoon walk in the resort grounds could produce Lazy Cisticola, Greater Double-collared and White-bellied Sunbirds, White-throated Robin-Chat, White-browed Scrub-Robin, Streaky-headed Seed-eater, Alpine Swift, Rock Kestrel and others, and we'll probably see the day out at the resort's Upper View Point, which provides fine views of the lower Blyde River Canyon. We'll then head back to the rooms to freshen up before dinner.

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#### Overnight: Blyde Canyon, A Forever Resort

Forever Resorts Blyde Canyon has commanding views of the Blyde River Canyon, the third largest canyon in the world. It is the ideal base for hiking trails and scenic trips by car to well-known Mpumalanga locations.

Incorporating the third largest canyon in the world and impressive, lush scenery, Blyde River Canyon Reserve (also officially known as Motlatse Canyon Provincial Nature Reserve) offers visitors a remarkable experience. This Mpumalanga Nature Reserve, South Africa is **near Kruger National Park** and covers 29 000 hectares stretching from the misty highlands down to the hotter and drier lowveld at the Blyde Dam.

Blyde River Canyon Reserve is situated against the Greater Drakensberg escarpment and includes natural wonders such as the Bourke's Luck Potholes, the **Three Rondavels, Pinnacle Rock and God's Window**. Many visitors to this region enjoy the visual splendour of combining the Panorama Route with exceptional game viewing in the Kruger National Park to create a spectacular itinerary in Mpumalanga.

These unique geological features are all easily accessible on tarred roads from the **picturesque village of Graskop**. There is ample accommodation throughout the area. Several hiking trails meander through the reserve and cater for all ages and levels of fitness. This Mpumalanga Nature Reserve in South Africa also offers a variety of adventure sports such as **white water rafting and abseiling** as well as quieter activities like fly-fishing.

### Bio Diversity

Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve is one of the few areas of montane grassland in Mpumalanga that still exists. The grasslands consist of more than **1 000 flora species** of which many are endemic (found nowhere else in the world), rare or endangered.

Another **extraordinary inhabitant is the Taita Falcon** which is only found in a few places in the world. Visitors can see a variety of wildlife such as the Klipspringer, Grey Rhebuck, Oribi, Kudu and primates.




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## Day 4-6: Sunday, 9 March to Tuesday, 11 March

### Satara Main Camp, Kruger National Park

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#### Day Itinerary

We'll start the day with a walk in the rocky woodland of the resort grounds. Birding here can be superb and we hope to see Mocking Cliff-Chat, Striped Pipit, Lazy Cisticola, White-throated Robin-Chat, African Firefinch, Sweet Waxbill, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Black-collared Barbet, Black-crowned Tchagra and Golden-breasted Bunting, among others. Our route will take us along the Kadisi Trail, with views of some of the stream's wonderful Tufa geological formations. After breakfast we pack our luggage and depart, perhaps taking in the canyon view site before heading for the edge of the escarpment and dropping down to the Lowveld (the low-lying savanna region of the north-east).

We enter Kruger National Park at Orpen Gate on the western side of the enormous National Park. This is where the going gets really slow, due to the incredible numbers of new bird species to be seen. These could include Green-winged Pytilia, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Yellow and Red-billed Hornbills, Swainson's Spurfowl, Crested Francolin, Senegal and Crowned Lapwings, Magpie Shrike, European, Lilac-breasted and Purple Rollers, Common Scimitarbill and many others. Raptors are plentiful and we could see Gabar Goshawk, Wahlberg's, Tawny and Martial Eagles, Bateleur, Brown Snake-Eagle and several other large raptors. Here in the south-central region of the park the basaltic soils result in good grass growth and a reduced shrub component, and this more open Knobthorn / Marula savannah attracts the grazers such as Burchell's Zebra, Blue Wildebeest, Common Waterbuck and Cape Buffalo. These in turn provide food for Lion prides and Spotted Hyena clans, while the smaller herbivores such as Impala and Warthog are preyed upon by Leopard and Cheetah. Our routine here will comprise morning and afternoon excursions, birding walks in the camp, a rest period and an optional sunset drive.

On our full day we'll start off with a cup of coffee or tea before a long morning drive, returning to camp for brunch at around 10h00. There are various routes to choose from – one can basically head, north, east, south or west from the camp. North is usually the call for the first morning, where the open plains country are a good bet for species such as Common Ostrich, Kori Bustard, Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark, Desert Cisticola and Secretarybird, while the sharp eye may turn up a roosting Verreaux's Eagle Owl in one of the many stands of Leadwood Trees growing along the creeks beds. Vultures are also reasonably common here and one can see all five species gathered together at feeding sites or the Witpens watering trough, where they gather to bathe in large numbers. After breakfast back at camp we'll take it as it comes, perhaps taking a walk in the camp grounds before a bit of siesta and an afternoon recce of one of the other routes in the area. There's also the option of the National Park night drive after an early dinner. This will give participants the chance to encounter the more nocturnal species, including Owls (Barn, Spotted Eagle Owl, Verreaux's Eagle Owl, Pearl-spotted Owl, Southern White-faced Owl all possible) and mammals such as White-tailed Mongoose, African Wild Cat, Serval and Lion and Leopard on the hunt (note that these park drives are very much mammal-focused, as most participants aren't too interested in birds in general, though Owl are usually appreciated by all at least).

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### **Kruger National Park**

Stretching over more than two million hectares, the famous Kruger National Park is one of the world's largest game reserves and a truly remarkable destination. Owing to its exceptional size, visitors are able to experience fantastic diversity – from changing scenery and ecosystems to an impressive array of animals, plant life and birdlife. The park is home to over 130 mammals and over 500 bird species. Visitors can look forward to learning about the area's prehistoric past, enjoying a host of accommodation options, and viewing abundant wildlife including the famed Big Five. The diversity and sheer density of wildlife make Kruger National Park an unforgettable and once-in-a-lifetime experience.

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### **Overnight: Satara Main Camp**

Satara Camp is situated in the open Basalt plains at the northern end of the park's southern sector. The plains attract large numbers of grazers such as Zebra and Wildebeest, which in turn for the prey base for numerous Lion prides and Spotted Hyena clans, and indeed, the Satara region is one of the top game viewing areas of the park. As with all of Kruger's main camps, there's a shop, restaurant and fuel station, while two water holes on the perimeter attract herds of game in the dry season especially.





## Day 6-8: Tuesday, 11 March to Thursday, 13 March

### Skukuza Rest Camp, Kruger National Park

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#### Day Itinerary

After a last morning drive from Satara we'll have breakfast, pack and depart, heading to Skukuza Rest Camp 92 kilometres to the south. Skukuza is the park's headquarters and is situated on the southern bank of the Sabie River. This is a perennial river and one of the largest and most biologically diverse in the park. The habitat here comprises riparian zones, with large trees lining the river banks, and Sabie River Thickets away from the river courses. Birds we will be looking out for in this area include Saddle-billed Stork, Goliath Heron, White-crowned Lapwing, African Finfoot, African Darter, White-browed Robin-Chat, Bearded Scrub-Robin, Collared and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds, African Fish Eagle, Orange-breasted and Grey-headed Busk-Shrikes, Wire-tailed Swallow, Pied and Giant Kingfishers, among many others. The permanent water source here attracts large numbers Impala, one of the main prey items of Leopard, and we will be on the lookout for these and other predators such as Lion, Wild Dog and Spotted Hyena. Elephant and Cape Buffalo are also common in the area, usually heading down to the river as the day heats up. The area is, however, not really suited to large numbers of grazing animals and small herds of browsers such as Kudu and Bushbuck are more common here. We should arrive at the camp in time for lunch and a rest period, after which we will head out on an afternoon drive, or alternatively take a birding walk in the camp grounds.

On our full day we'll have a morning drive, which may involve a drive down to Lower Sabie Rest Camp for breakfast (your guide will discuss the exact plans with you the night before and you can inform him of your preferences – more time in camp relaxing or more time out in the field looking for animals). We'll then have a rest before an afternoon drive or you might like the option of a sunset drive with the park guides, which will give you the opportunity to be out after the public are back in camp.

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#### Overnight: Skukuza Rest Camp

Skukuza Rest Camp, named after the first Warden of the park, Sir James Stevenson-Hamilton (the name, given to him by the local staff, meaning something to the effect of 'he who sweeps clean') is the headquarters and operations center for the entire park. Although it has a reputation for being large and busy, it's generally quiet around the rooms, and the camp itself offers some good birding opportunities. The surrounding area is also rich in wildlife, especially in the dry season when the permanent Sabie River provides a focal point for animal activity. It also features a doctor, a shop, a bank, a post office, a library, a museum, a restaurant and a cafeteria with decks overlooking the river.



## Day 8: Thursday, 13 March

### Berg-en-Dal Main Camp, Kruger National Park

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#### Day Itinerary

Once again, after a morning drive and breakfast, we'll head on to our next camp and the last stop for the tour. Pretoriuskop Rest Camp is situated in the wettest region of the park and is dominated by a veld type known as Pretoriuskop Sourveld. The tall, coarse grasses growing here are not too palatable, so the area does not hold large numbers of grazers, though it is particularly good for White Rhinoceros (or at least used to be before the current poaching epidemic). Birds we will be searching for in this area include Lizard Buzzard, Dark Chanting Goshawk, African Cuckoo-Hawk, Bushveld Pipit, Yellow-throated Petronia, Pale Flycatcher, Retz's and White-crested Helmet-Shrikes, Grey Penduline Tit, Neddicky, Green-capped and Yellow-bellied Eremomelas, among others. We will probably arrive at camp in the afternoon and will have time to settle in before an afternoon drive in the area and a final dinner in the camp's restaurant.

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#### Overnight: Berg-en-Dal Main Camp

Berg en Dal Rest Camp in the Kruger National Park is set within natural bush leaving much of the natural habitat unchanged. The camp is one of the newest camps in the Kruger Park and offers visitors outstanding lodging facilities. Accommodation comprises of modern 6 bed family cottages, 2 and 3 bedded bungalows and 2 guest houses with multiple bedrooms. The more adventurous traveller can make use of one of Berg en Dal's camping sites for caravans and tents, each with a power point and braai (barbecue) stand. The camp's facilities include a restaurant, grocery store, laundromat and petrol station.



## Day 9: Friday, 14 March

### End of Itinerary

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#### Day Itinerary

There will be a final optional activity on the last morning, offering a last chance to see species missed so far. After breakfast we'll meander slowly out of the park and then head back to Johannesburg, a five hour drive away, with a few birding stops en-route as a last effort to up the species count for the tour!