

ScubaAliwalSodwanaBerg



URF12D: 12-night package – Sodwana Bay + Safari + Aliwal Shoal + Drakensberg

Day 1

You will be met at **Durban Airport** and transferred to your luxury beachfront hotel. Situated on Durban's **Golden Mile**, your hotel overlooks the warm **Indian Ocean** and has its own swimming pool. Relax and unwind in your warm sub-tropical surroundings.

[Alternatively fly directly to Richards Bay, with 2-hour road transfer to Sodwana Bay]

Day 2

Today you will be collected and transferred to **Sodwana Bay Marine National Park** in the Greater St Lucia Wetlands, a scenic 5-hour drive through rural **Zululand**.

Sodwana Bay is South Africa's premier scuba diving location and recognised for its importance in marine conservation as a **World Heritage site**. This southern-most coral reef in the world, which stretches down from Mozambique, may be dived all year round although the best conditions are during the warm summer months (November to May).

Choose between a local dive resort, comprising simple but comfortable log cabins situated in the indigenous coastal forest, or upgrade to a luxury dive lodge situated right on the beach.

Check in, settle in and relax in your remote surroundings, where monkeys and antelope roam free. Once you are settled in bid farewell to your host, who will leave you to enjoy the facilities of your dive resort.

Days 3 to 5

Rise early each morning, to be on the beach by 06h30 when underwater viewing conditions are at their best. From the wide beach, expect an exhilarating surf entry into the clear warm waters of the **Indian Ocean**. Water temperatures average 20-25°C and visibility is excellent at 30-50 ft, as no major rivers flow into the sea at this point

Depending upon prevailing weather conditions, you have a choice of over 20 different dive sites, with the reefs named after their distance from the launch site. Their hard and soft corals, canyons and caves are teeming with a huge variety of sea life, including over 1,200 species of fish, turtles, bottle-nosed dolphins, moray eels, ribbon tail rays, mantas, butterfly fish, angelfish, sharks, migrating whales (April to July), whale sharks (January to February) and much more.

After breakfast there is time for an optional second dive, but as the North-Easter tends to blow after 10h00, all dives should be completed by midday.

Spend the afternoon relaxing by the lodge swimming pool or on the pristine beach, surrounded by the highest naturally vegetated sand dunes in the world. Alternatively enjoy one of the optional activities that can be arranged for you or your non-diving partner, including a late evening marine trail to see the remarkable spectacle of the egg laying and hatching of loggerhead and leatherback turtles (November to January).

Day 6

Today you will be collected and transferred to the famous **Hluhluwe iMfolozi National Park**, a drive of just under 2-hours.

On the way we stop at an authentically reconstructed **Zulu Village** to experience Zulu life and culture, and stop at a self-help project to give you the opportunity of supporting the local community by purchasing one of their handmade products.

Check in to your luxury game lodge situated just outside the park, relax and settle in to your African bushveld surroundings. Then enjoy your first game drive in an **open-top game-viewing vehicle** into the vast **Hluhluwe iMfolozi National Park**, hosted by a lodge ranger.

We hope to see one or more of the Big 5, before relaxing with drinks around the campfire in the Boma and enjoying dinner, which is likely to include several interesting game dishes.

Day 7

Up early today for a **05h30 game drive in an open-top vehicle** into the great **Hluhluwe iMfolozi National Park**, hosted by your lodge ranger. This is one of South Africa's most beautiful game parks and home to all the **Big Five** and the subcontinent's largest population of endangered white and black rhino. We expect to see lion, buffalo, rhino, elephant, giraffe and many other interesting species.

Return to the lodge for a full breakfast at approx 09h30. The remainder of the morning is free to relax at the lodge or enjoy a guided walk on the lodge property with a ranger to view the smaller trees, insects and flora of the region.

In the afternoon return to **Hluhluwe iMfolozi** for a full afternoon of game viewing with your host in his vehicle. Whilst the sun sets over the park, enjoy sundowners in the scenic hills and in the evening dine in the atmosphere that only the African bushveld can provide!

Day 8

Today enjoy a boat ride on the **Lake St Lucia** estuary to see hippos and crocodiles. Part of the Greater St Lucia Wetlands Park, this area has been declared a **World Heritage Site** because of its importance to marine conservation. With over 600 different bird species in the region, including flamingos and pelicans, it also offers one of the greatest bird watching experiences in the world.

Continue to your guesthouse at **Umkomaas** south of **Durban**, a scenic coastal drive of just over 3-hours. Check in, settle in and relax in your warm sub-tropical surroundings within sound of the warm **Indian Ocean**.

Day 9

Aliwal Shoal: Umkomaas

Experienced divers have the option of diving the **Aliwal Shoal**, one of the **top shark dive sites of the world**. Situated on the inner edge of the warm Mozambique current, Aliwal Shoal offers wonderfully diverse reef life, including the annual migration of ragged tooth sharks from June to December. No cages are used and this is a unique opportunity to view these ferocious looking but docile mammals in their natural environment. You will also see schools of pelagic and game fish, manta rays, eels, huge brindle bass, hermit crabs, sponges, starfish, corals, cowries, colourful tropical marine fish and much more. Dolphins and whales can also be spotted in season (July to November) on the boat ride out to the reef, which is situated 3 miles out to sea. There are also 2 wrecks to dive – the "Produce" and the "Nebo".

Each day starts early (around 7 am) with a beach safety briefing, followed by boat launch and first dive, an awe-inspiring and surprisingly safe experience! Return to the beach for breakfast, followed by optional second dive around 11am when dive conditions are best.

Water temperatures average +24°C in summer and rarely drops below 20 °C in winter. Visibility varies from 15 to 120 ft. Depths vary from 20 to 60 ft, with some 100 ft dives for suitable qualified divers.

Protea Banks: Shelly Beach

Very experience divers also have the option of shark diving at **Protea Banks**, which combines well with Aliwal Shoal as these two sites are situated only 1-hour apart by road.

This is an advanced 4-knot mid-water drift dive, suitable only for experienced divers who have done at least 20 dives, with depths varying from 100 to 130 ft. Protea Banks is situated 1-mile offshore and is one of the best shark dive sites in the world. It is home to hammerhead sharks, tiger sharks, zambesi sharks, ragged tooth sharks, threshers, bronze whalers, white tips, coppers, duskies, sand sharks and the occasional great white shark. Also spotted eagle rays, manta rays and large schools of pelagic fish. Water temperatures and visibility are similar to Aliwal Shoal.

Beach Resort Option: Ballito or Umhlanga

Alternatively choose to spend some time relaxing on the beach near **Durban**.

KwaZulu Natal is South Africa's favourite beach holiday destination, with its warm sweeping beaches and reliably good holiday weather all year round. **Ballito** and **Umhlanga** are both popular beach resorts situated on the warm **Indian Ocean**, with everything you need to relax and unwind under sunny blue skies. The long golden beaches are magnificent and restaurants are of an extremely high standard. Wine and beer are also excellent and relatively inexpensive.

Your hotel is splendidly situated right on the beach, with its own swimming pool.

Water sports are nearby, as well as championship golf, horse riding and deep-sea fishing.

The casinos and nightlife of **Durban** are within easy reach, as well as several outstanding shopping malls. All you need for a wonderful beach holiday!

On one day, enjoy an included excursion to **uShaka** – South Africa's newest and most exciting aquarium and entertainment complex situated in the old harbour area, which is being extensively re-developed. Here you have the opportunity of viewing the large indigenous sharks of the Indian Ocean and a wide variety of other sea creatures in a world-class aquarium setting. You also have the opportunity of interacting with dolphins, seals and penguins and the Water World offers fun for all ages. Interesting shops, numerous restaurants and a magnificent private beach with spectacular sweeping views will add more pleasure to your day.

Day 10

This morning we drive 4-hours to the spectacular **uKhahlamba Drakensberg Mountains**, recognised as a World Heritage site for their unspoilt natural beauty and vast collection of San Bushmen rock art paintings.

We pass through **Pietermaritzburg**, with its charming colonial architecture and famous public schools. We also make a short stop at **Howick Falls**, which at 365 feet are the tallest in the country and visit the historic spot where **Nelson Mandela** was captured prior to his imprisonment on Robben Island.

Known locally as the **Barrier of Spears**, the dramatic Drakensberg Mountain range runs right down Southern Africa from the Great Rift Valley. Visit the **Didima Bushman Rock Art Centre** before checking in to your luxury mountain resort.

Once you are settled in bid farewell to your host, who will leave you to enjoy the many facilities of your resort.

Days 11 and 12

The **Drakensberg Mountains** offer superlative scenery and fresh mountain air, making it ideal for walking holidays at any level of fitness. Your hotel will organise guided walks each day – typically one short walk and one long walk, plus a walk to a San Bushmen painting.

The mountains also offer an outstanding location for **bird watching** holidays – particularly raptors, but also sunbirds, waxbills and the numerous other species found in the grasslands, riverine scrub and natural forests.

Resorts in the Central Drakensberg have access to a 9-hole golf course, with an 18-hole championship course nearby.

Your resort also has a swimming pool and caters for the following activities:

- Fly Fishing
- Horse Riding
- Tennis on floodlit courts
- Lawn Bowls
- Badminton
- Mountain Biking
- Table Tennis
- Darts and Pool

Each evening enjoy socialising with other guests over dinner.

Day 13

Return transfer to **Durban Airport**.

[NB: Remember that it is essential that you do not fly within 24 hours of your last dive]

ITINERARY HIGHLIGHTS

DURBAN

- ❑ 1 nights luxury accommodation in Durban, with en-suite facilities
- ❑ English breakfast

SODWANA BAY

- ❑ 4 nights dive lodge accommodation in Sodwana, with en-suite facilities
- ❑ 6 boat dives at Sodwana Bay with dive master, including cylinders and weights
- ❑ English breakfasts daily
- ❑ Dinners daily

[If you upgrade to the luxury dive lodge, two dives are included in your package. Additional dives may be purchased at the lodge]

HLUHLUWE SAFARI

- ❑ 2 nights luxury game lodge accommodation near Hluhluwe, with en-suite facilities
- ❑ 1 open top game drive per day in Hluhluwe iMfolozi National Park
- ❑ 1 guided walk per day with lodge ranger
- ❑ Unlimited additional game drives with host
- ❑ All game park fees and local taxes
- ❑ Lake St Lucia boat ride
- ❑ Zulu Cultural Village
- ❑ English breakfasts daily
- ❑ Dinners daily

ALIWAL SHOAL

- ❑ 2 nights guesthouse accommodation at Umkomaas or Ballito, with en-suite facilities
- ❑ 1 dives at Aliwal Shoal or Protea Banks, including cylinders and weights
- ❑ OR uShaka Marine World visit
- ❑ English breakfasts daily

DRAKENSBERG MOUNTAINS

- ❑ 3 nights luxury accommodation in Drakensberg, with en-suite facilities
- ❑ Didima Rock Art Centre
- ❑ Howick Falls
- ❑ English breakfasts daily
- ❑ Dinners daily

WHAT IS INCLUDED:

All airport and ground transfers in air-conditioned vehicles
Accommodation on a bed and breakfast basis
Activities specified in itinerary, including transfers and entrance charges

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED:

International & domestic flights (quoted separately)
Lunches & dinners (unless specified)
Drinks & refreshments
Tips for porters and restaurants
Telephone calls, laundry & other incidental personal expenditure
Visa fees, in countries where these apply
Airport departure taxes, in countries where these apply
 e.g. Victoria Falls: currently US\$20 per person
 Mozambique: currently US \$10 per person
Please ensure you take the necessary US dollars for this purpose

TIPS

It is not necessary to tip your host. However, if you have received exceptional service and wish to express your gratitude, you may of course do so. In such circumstances, a tip of between £20 and £40 per couple per week would be regarded as normal.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Malaria tablets are recommended for Zululand
All activities are subject to prevailing weather conditions

SARDINE RUN

Each June, although exact times can never be guaranteed for this extraordinary natural phenomenon, a vast shoal of sardines migrates along the Southern African coast. The shoal typically stretches for over 10 miles; is over 2 miles wide and half a mile deep; and is followed by natural predators such as sharks, dolphins, seals, whales, game fish and gannets. If your holiday coincides with this event, you will be offered the opportunity of substituting your booked activities for following the sardine run, subject to availability.

DIVE SITES – SODWANA BAY

All dives are priced to two mile reef, as diving further out is dependant upon weather conditions and cannot be guaranteed. A small supplement (approximately £2 to £5) will be charged locally for dives to the outer reefs.

Quarter Mile Reef

About 12m, loggerhead turtles are frequently seen here. From October to March, ragged tooth sharks come to gestate and manta rays come in summer. A very exciting dive site, but the sea must be calm as it can be affected by surge

Stringer Reef

Comprising Stringer small and large, best dived in calm seas. Lots of rays and juvenile fish

Two-Mile Reef

At an average depth of 12m, this main Sodwana reef extends for 2 km making it ideal for the student diver. Teeming with large shoals of fish, it has a magnificent range of coral, invertebrates and rock formations. It includes Anton's Reef, Chain Reef, Pinnacles, Gullies Caves and Overhangs, Four Buoy, Potholed and Sponge Reefs.

Five-Mile Reef

At 21m, a large delicate pristine flat reef with spectacular plate & stag horn corals. Abundant tropical fish

Seven-Mile Reef

From 17 to 22m this reef is densely populated with multicoloured tropical fish, big moray eels, rays and turtles. Also well known for bottle-nosed dolphin, sharks and passing big game fish. Perhaps the most scenic of all the reefs, it is very popular with divers. Coral heads, canyons and pinnacles can also be seen

Nine-Mile Reef

From 2 to 19m, the most dramatic reef with spectacular caves, overhangs, pinnacles and green coral

Sponge Reef

From 18 to 35m, you can see sponges up to 600 mm high. Due to its depth, this reef is popular with advanced divers

Big Blue

Diving off the continental shelf, which drops off about 5 miles out to sea, at depths of up to 40m

**Remember to bring your open water dive certification with you:
PADI, NAUI, CMAS or equivalent**

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES - please enquire for supplements

SODWANA BAY

Scuba Diving – additional dives (maximum of two dives per day)

Pool Dive – useful refresher course, if you have not dived for over 6-months

Discover Scuba Course – introduction to scuba, including educational session and pool dive, followed by a full assessment and first sea dive the next day (3-hours per lesson - two recommended)

Quad Biking – 1-hour fun ride through the coastal forest and sand dunes

Lake Sibaya Sunset Drive – view hippos, crocodiles and prolific bird life, whilst enjoying a spectacular South African sunset over the lake (2 hrs)

Marine Walking Trail – late evening walk to see the remarkable spectacle of the egg laying and hatching of loggerhead and leatherback turtles (November – January)

Bird Watching – study the endemic South African birds of the Lake St Lucia Wetlands, with over 600 species, the premier bird watching holiday destination in South Africa. Species specific excursions available to a variety of habitats. Viewing is generally best during the breeding season - Sept to early Dec

Rock Fishing – enjoy a wonderful fishing holiday in South Africa, with guide. Catch kingfish, queen fish, kob, shad, stumpnose and pompano

Tiger Fishing – including the opportunity to rent a houseboat on Pongola Lake

Deep Sea Game Fishing – pre-dawn departure for big game fishing holiday some 40 nautical miles out to sea, including all tackle and light lunch. Black and striped marlin are best in the summer months (November to May). Full day (weather permitting).

HLUHLUWE – All Holidays

Night Drive – in an open-top game vehicle, accompanied by a park ranger, to search in the beam of a powerful spotlight for the seldom-viewed nocturnal birds and animals of the park such as nightjars, owls, genet and leopard

Zulu Village – learn about traditional Zulu life and culture, including Zulu dancing and visit to a Sangoma traditional healer

Spa Treatments – treat yourself to some relaxing spa treatments at your lodge

HLUHLUWE – Private Tours only

Lake St Lucia – boat ride to see birds, hippos and crocodiles on the Lucia estuary

Ocean Safari – at St Lucia to view dolphins and whales in season (July to October)

Cheetah & Serval project – visit this interesting conservation project working to save these endangered species

Hluhluwe River – 2-hour boat ride to view game from the river

Bush BBQ – combined with an open-top game drive, to mark a special occasion

Bird Watching – over 600 different bird species, including large flocks of flamingos, pelicans and other water birds can be seen at Lake St Lucia and Mkuze Falls. Hluhluwe also boasts a large population of raptors. Species-specific excursions available to a variety of habitats on request. Viewing is generally best during the breeding season (Sept to early Dec)

Overnight Wilderness Trail – spend 4 nights in a basic tented wilderness camp, with sleeping bags and bush showers, accompanied by an armed ranger and his assistant. Walk up to 6 hours per day. Minimum age 12 years (Note: availability on these basic trails is limited and they need to be booked well in advance)

KWAZULU NATAL BEACHES – All Holidays

DURBAN

Durban City Tour – orientation tour including the City Hall, Harbour, Indian Market, colourful Rickshaw pullers and Botanical Gardens (half day)

uShaka Marine World – enjoy an afternoon of fun at this world-class aquarium and entertainment complex. Sea World contains the most comprehensive collection of sharks in Southern Africa & Wet n Wild water park offers fun for all ages. Interact with dolphins, penguins and seals; certified divers can scuba in main shark tank (half day)

Drakensberg Mountains – travel through Pietermaritzburg and the Natal Midlands to Sani Pass, the highest in South Africa, with spectacular mountain crossing into the kingdom of Lesotho. Passport required (full day)

Hluhluwe Imfolozi Game Reserve – drive 3-hours to South Africa's oldest Big Five game reserve, for a full day of game viewing

Shakaland Cultural Village – travel along the North Coast to Eshowe to visit this authentically reconstructed Zulu Kraal to experience Zulu life and culture

Zulu War Battlefields – famous battlefields of Isandhlwana & Rorkes Drift (full day)

Township Cultural Tour – a fascinating glimpse into bustling life in Kwa-Mashu, including visit to a traditional spaza shop and herbalist

KWAZULU NATAL BEACHES – Private Tours only

Sibaya Kingdom – visit this outstanding entertainment complex at Umhlanga, including the Zulu Fire Cultural Village, the Zulu theatre and Sibaya casino

Golf – 18-holes of championship golf holiday, with shared cart **Golf club hire**

Horse Riding – through the forest and along the beach at Ballito (beginners, intermediate or advanced)

Ocean Safari – seasonal opportunity to take a boat ride on the Indian Ocean in search of whales, dolphins, sharks, turtles and other fascinating sea life (July to November – 1.5 hrs)

Scuba Diving: Aliwal Shoal – for certified divers, including cylinders & weights. Famous for migrating ragged tooth sharks, which are seen from July to November

Deep Sea Game Fishing – pre-dawn departure for big game fishing in the Indian Ocean, including all tackle and light lunch (full day or half day – weather permitting).

Oribi Gorge – situated in a semi-deciduous forest on the South Coast and home to over 250 bird species and numerous small mammals (half day). **Wild Gorge Swing** – adventure seekers can step off a cliff and swing into the depths of Oribi Gorge in a 330 ft arc, the highest swing in the world (full day)

Umgeni Bird Park – home to over 3,000 exotic and indigenous bird species

Durban Botanical Gardens – view the indigenous flora, including the orchid house

Arts & Crafts – shop for beadwork, carvings, pottery and embroidery

Crocodile Farm – for close-up views of these fearsome man-eating reptiles

Cricket, Rugby & Football Matches – subject to fixtures

DRAKENSBERG MOUNTAINS – All Holidays

Walking Trails – daily guided walks in the Drakensberg Mountains

Fly Fishing – for trout in the mountain streams and dams, including all tackle

Horse Riding – enjoy an equestrian holiday in the beautiful Drakensberg Mountains

Spa Treatments – pamper yourself with variety of massage & aromatherapy treatments

Helicopter Ride – an exhilarating way to rapidly scale the mighty Cathedral Peak (weather permitting)

Boer War Battlefields – visit some of the famous sites of the Anglo Boer War, including the infamous Spioenkop battlefield and the Ladysmith Siege Museum (full day)

DRAKENSBERG MOUNTAINS – Private Tours only

Didima San Bushmen Rock Art Centre – dedicated to the rock art of the San Bushmen. With over 550 paintings, the Drakensberg Mountains are home to one of the largest collections of ancient rock art in the world

Golf – 18-holes of championship golf, with shared cart **Golf club hire**

Quad Biking – fun ride through the rolling foothills (1-hour)

Falcon Ridge Birds of Prey Centre – a fascinating display of raptors at 10h00 daily

Drakensberg Boys Choir – attend a performance of this famous boy's choir during school terms (15h30 subject to tour schedules)

Arts & Crafts – visit Ardmore Ceramic Studio to view craftswomen at work on their original pieces sold internationally

Mountain Bike Trails – in the foothills of the mountains (half day or full day)

Vulture Hide – visit Giants Castle to observe these mighty predators in their natural mountain environment (full day)

Sani Pass – visit the Southern Drakensberg and take a 4x4 ride up the highest mountain pass in South Africa into Lesotho. Passport required (full day)

Mont-Aux Sources – dawn departure for spectacular all-day hike to the top of the Mont-Aux-Sources Amphitheatre, with expert guide. You must be fit to undertake this hike and come fully prepared for all mountain conditions (full day – weather permitting)