



Behind the Science Safaris



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Intimate Science based Safaris led by African Conservation Professionals



“This isn't just a safari - it's a journey, with an opportunity to contribute to the protection of KwaZulu-Natal's wildlife.”



Behind the Science Safaris

At BTS, we know a safari is more than just a bucket-list vacation.

It's a once-in-a-lifetime chance to truly connect with nature, to witness majestic wildlife, stand in awe of ancient landscapes, and feel the wild heartbeat of Africa.

But the world is changing.

That's why we're doing safaris differently.

We bring together nature lovers and leading scientists, so your journey not only fulfills a dream, but also contributes to real conservation work.

What makes us different?

- Join scientists in the field
- Help collect data on endangered species
- Learn the stories behind the research
- Support wildlife protection just by being here

You will leave with more than stunning photos. You will leave with a deeper understanding of conservation, a sense of real contribution, and meaningful connections with the scientists working to protect Africa's wildlife for future generations.

Essential travel info

- Malaria-Free
- No Visa Required
- Convenient flight options into Durban, South Africa.



What Will Your Trip Be Like?

Lodging

- 2 nights at a coastal hotel in Ballito
- 2 nights of eco-friendly glamping in St. Lucia
- 2 nights on a guided hiking safari in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park
- 2 nights at a private lodge in Manyoni Game Reserve

Guides

Our experienced regional guides will help you truly connect with KwaZulu-Natal. Along the way, you'll be joined by local scientists and conservationists who will share their ongoing projects and firsthand knowledge of the region's wildlife.

Experiences

- Durban Crowned Eagle Research
- KwaZulu-Natal Amphibian & Reptile Conservation
- St. Lucia Estuary Hippo Observation
- Crocodile Conservation Centre – St. Lucia
- Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Trekking Safari
- Wildlife ACT: Rhino Guardians
- Bayete Zulu Elephant Project

Activity Level

A moderate level of hiking fitness is required. Distances and pacing will be guided and adjusted to suit the group's needs.

Meals

- 8 breakfasts, 7 lunches, and 8 dinners included.
- Featuring locally inspired cuisine.
- One "Discovery Lunch" in the town of St. Lucia will be at your own cost.

Transportation

All ground transport is provided by Behind the Science Safaris, from your arrival at King Shaka International Airport to your return.

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ABOUT US

Behind the Science Safaris was born from a powerful question: millions of people come to Africa each year, but the wildlife they're coming to see is disappearing. How can we translate this obvious interest in wildlife, into something that also helps protect it?

This idea took root in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, where **Dr. Camille Fritsch**, a behavioral ecologist studying *hippopotamus social dynamics*, spent years immersed in the bush, living and working along the region's rivers and reserves. As a Californian in South Africa, he developed a deep appreciation for the complexity and beauty of wild ecosystems in Africa, and witnessed firsthand the chronic underfunding of conservation efforts.



These experiences sparked a vision for a different kind of safari: one that offers meaningful, up-close encounters with nature while directly supporting real conservation work - and the scientists behind it.

What emerged is **Behind the Science Safaris**: a conservation-centered safari that blends the best luxury lodges and gastronomy with immersive access in wildlife research.

“Our trips are designed to give you a meaningful and unforgettable safari experience - one that goes beyond game drives and into the heart of the conservation work happening on the ground.” - Dr. Camille Fritsch

Each safari supports active research projects protecting endangered and often overlooked species — like Crowned Eagles to rhinos and even reptiles. Species face extinction because critical research isn't happening: there simply isn't enough funding to cover researcher salaries and research budgets.

By joining a Behind the Science Safari, you help provide crucial support that allows scientists to continue their essential work studying and protecting animals on the brink. Your visit directly contributes to filling this funding gap and making sure conservation efforts don't stop where they're needed most.

You'll also get to meet the researchers **Behind the Science**, sharing meals, field visits, and conversations that bring their work — and the challenges facing these species — to life. For travelers who want more than just sightseeing, we offer a chance to explore the wild while also becoming part of the story that keeps it alive.

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Behind the Science Safaris

Days 1-2

Arrival: King Shaka Airport

Accommodation: Canelands Beach Club & Spa

Activities: Hiking

Key Species: African Crowned Eagles, Reptiles, Wildebeest, Vervet Monkeys

Arrive and unwind at Canelands Beach Club & Spa, perched above the Indian Ocean in the coastal town of Ballito enjoy your first South African sunset while sipping on local wines.



Meet Dr. Shane McPherson, lead researcher of the **Durban African Crowned Eagle Project**. Over dinner, he'll share stories and insights into his work. These raptors are the most powerful birds on the planet, known to hunt prey many times their size. Remarkably, urban Durban hosts the densest population of Crowned Eagles in the world. Dr. McPherson has spent over a decade studying their behavior, nesting patterns, and resilience in city ecosystems.

Wake up to a chorus of songbirds and monkeys in the coastal forest. After a relaxed breakfast or a sunrise beach walk, we travel to **Tanglewood Nature Reserve** in the Durban suburb, Kloof, for a guided field experience with Dr. McPherson's team.

We'll hike through endangered KwaZulu-Natal Sour Veld and Coastal Rainforest environments, to reach a secluded Crowned Eagle nest site. From an expert-selected vantage point, we'll observe nest activity and help collect key data for the team's long-term breeding study.

Behind the scenes: *The exact nest we'll visit was featured in the acclaimed 2023 PBS series Raptors: Fists Full of Daggers, and is one of 90 nests Shane and his team monitor each year!*

After a catered lunch beneath the lychee and avocado trees, we meet Nick Evans, herpetologist and founder of **KZN Amphibian & Reptile Conservation**. Known from DSTV's *Snake Season*, Nick makes the world of reptiles accessible and exciting.



We can all agree that we know someone scared of snakes. Learn how Nick is changing the narrative on reptiles in Durban, and engaging those most in need, in reptile conservation. You'll return home with new knowledge, including a deeper understanding of the vital roles reptiles play in ecosystems.

** For those less reptile-inclined, this activity can be enjoyed from a respectful distance.*

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Days 3-4

Shuttle: 2.5 hrs from Ballito to St. Lucia

Accommodation: St. Lucia Urban Glamping

Activities: Hiking, Sunset Hippo River Cruise, Big 4 Game Drive, Turtle Nest Survey

Key Species: Birds, Hippos, Zebra, Antelope Wonder.



Traveling up the East Coast into the wild beauty of KwaZulu-Natal, we arrive at St. Lucia, home to **iSimangaliso Wetland Park**, South Africa's first proclaimed UNESCO World Heritage Site. Meaning "the place of miracle and wonder" in isiZulu, iSimangaliso truly lives up to its name with eight interwoven ecosystems, 25,000-year-old coastal forests, and 220 kilometers of untouched shoreline.

Our days here are spent hiking through ancient forests, cruising the estuary at sunset, and exploring savannahs on game drives. With a local guide, we learn how this rare ecosystem supports buffalo, hippos, crocodiles, bull sharks, and over 500 bird species. If we're lucky, we may spot elephants, rhinos, and perhaps even a leopard or hyena.



The town of **St. Lucia**, with its 2,000 human residents and 1,000 hippos, is one of the few places on Earth where hippos roam the streets at night. Hippos, or "Imvubu" in isiZulu, hold a special place in our founder Dr. Camille Fritsch's heart. With over ten years dedicated to pioneering research on hippo behavior and ecology, Dr. Camille's work inspired the creation of BTS Safari's to support conservation projects focused on endangered and often overlooked species in KwaZulu-Natal.



In the evening, we take a night drive to Cape Vidal to join local turtle experts tracking nesting Leatherback and Loggerhead sea turtles. If we're lucky, we may witness hatchlings breaking through the sand and returning to the ocean under a sky full of stars.

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Behind the Science Safaris

Day 5-7

Shuttle: 2 hours to Hluhluwe Reserve

Accommodation: Remote Bush Camp

Activities: Hiking Safari

Key Species: Elephants, Rhinos, Zebra, Giraffe

Leaving St. Lucia, we head to **Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park**, Africa's oldest nature reserve and home to the *Big Five*. Over the next few days, we'll embark on a multi-day hiking safari, getting up close to wildlife on foot - an unforgettable way to reconnect with nature.

We will be guided by Sicelo Mbatha, a world-renowned wilderness guide born just outside the protected area who has been leading groups on foot in Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park for over 30 years! His knowledge of the region, Zulu culture, and human-animal connection will be a truly unique experience.

Through Sicelo's deep knowledge of plants and animals, you'll be drawn into the powerful spiritual bond the Zulu people share with nature. Along the way, we'll learn Zulu



words and folklore and experience something truly unique.

Hiking routes will be tailored to the group's pace and take into account weather, ensuring a rewarding adventure for everyone. We'll spend two nights glamping in comfort under the stars, waking to the songs of over 600 bird species.



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Behind the Science Safaris

Day 7-9

Shuttle: 1.5 hours to King Shaka Airport

Hotel: Leopard Mountain Safari Lodge

Activities: Game Drives, Wildlife ACT Conservation, Elephant Experience

Key Species: Elephants, Rhinos, Lions, Warthogs

Our final days are spent at the beautiful *Leopard Mountain Safari Lodge* in **Manyoni Game Reserve**, where each luxury tent offers sweeping 360° views of the savannah. Between early morning and evening game drives, you can choose to unwind at the spa, take a dip in the pool, or simply soak in the sounds of the bush from your private deck.



You'll join forces with **Wildlife ACT** - winner at the global responsible travel awards. Through hands-on conservation work, you'll learn about their critical effort to protect rhinos from poaching, an unfortunate but ongoing threat in the region. With thousands of rhinos still killed each year for their horn, you'll gain rare insight into the dehorning process, a last-resort method conservationists use to deter poachers. You'll also discover how KwaZulu-Natal wildlife management authority played a key role in bringing white rhinos back from the brink of extinction just over a century ago.

One of our final highlights is a visit to *Bayete Zulu* to meet Rambo and Rachel - two free-roaming elephants who, incredibly, choose to interact with people. You'll hear the heartwarming story of their unique bond, feel their tusks, feed them, and even try (and fail!) to beat them in a water-drinking race. They can gulp 5 gallons in the time it takes you to finish your bottle.



As we head back to Durban, it's time to say farewell - nine unforgettable days after this African adventure began. What started as a group of strangers has become a community connected by shared awes, laughter, stories around campfires, and moments that will live long in our hearts.

You've walked among giants, stood still in silence as the sun rose over the savannah, and witnessed conservation in action. You've learned local traditions, made an important contribution to saving wildlife for the future and hopefully, felt a deeper connection to nature and your place within it.

Hamba Kahle - Go Well. Until next time, and may the spirit of Africa stay with you always.

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Arrivals and Departures:

Your **Behind the Science Safari** begins and ends at King Shaka International Airport (DUR) in Durban, South Africa.

Guests may book flights directly to Durban (DUR). Alternatively, you can fly into O.R. Tambo International Airport (JNB) in Johannesburg, then connect via a domestic flight.

Please wait to purchase your airline tickets until your Behind the Science Safari booking has been officially confirmed.

Airport Codes for Reference:

Durban – King Shaka International Airport: **DUR**

Johannesburg – O.R. Tambo International Airport: **JNB**

Lodging:

Canelands Beach Club & Spa - 2 Nights

Nestled on the shores of Shaka's Rock, the Canelands Beach Club & Spa offers barefoot luxury at its finest. With expansive picture windows, breathtaking ocean views, and direct beach access, it's the perfect place to unwind and soak in the warm, laid-back atmosphere of KwaZulu-Natal's coast.

 *Shaka's Rock, ZAR 4399*

 www.thecanelands.co.za



Urban Glamping St. Lucia - 2 Nights

Stay in luxury glamping tents nestled within the vibrant town of St Lucia and the heart of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park. This unique retreat combines comfort and adventure, offering a serene base from which to explore one of South Africa's most biodiverse regions.

 *St Lucia, ZAR 3936*

 www.urbanglamping.co.za



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HIP Walking Trek - 2 Nights

Venture into the oldest proclaimed nature reserve in Africa, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, spanning 96,000 hectares of pristine wilderness. Spend your nights under the stars, immersed in the sights and sounds of the African bush. With expert guides and safe, comfortable camp setups, this is your chance to walk alongside the iconic Big 5 and connect deeply with the wild.

📍 *Ngolothse, ZAR*

🌐 www.hluhluwegamereserve.com



Leopard Mountain Safari Lodge - 2 Nights

Experience the height of luxury in the heart of the wild. This fully solar, off-grid, 5-star safari lodge is family-run and award-winning, offering an intimate and immersive experience in the 58,000-acre Manyoni Private Game Reserve. Expect breathtaking views, world-class hospitality, and unforgettable wildlife encounters.

📍 *Hluhluwe, Manyoni Game Reserve, ZAR 3860*

🌐 www.leopardmountain.co.za



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Further Adventures:

South Africa is a land of extraordinary diversity, natural beauty, and vibrant culture. We understand that your **Behind the Science Safaris** may just be the beginning of your journey. Whether you're looking to explore majestic landscapes, connect with local communities, or dive deeper into the country's rich history, consider pairing your safari with one of these unforgettable destinations:

Below are a few highly recommended add-ons to complement your Safari and deepen your experience of South Africa.

Cape Town's Table Mountain

No trip to South Africa is complete without a visit to the iconic Table Mountain, towering 3,563 feet above sea level and offering sweeping views of Cape Town, the Atlantic Ocean, and beyond. Located within Table Mountain National Park, this flat-topped natural wonder is best experienced via the rotating Table Mountain Aerial Cableway, which carries visitors to the 2-mile-wide summit in just five minutes.



Travel Tip: Weather conditions at the top can change quickly. High winds or fog often cause delays or temporary closures of the cableway.

Plan a stay of at least two days in Cape Town to maximize your chance of reaching the summit. Don't forget to bring a jacket — it's often much cooler at the top!

Stellenbosch Wine Region

Just 45 km (28 miles) from Cape Town, the Stellenbosch Wine Region is South Africa's second-oldest wine-producing area, first planted in 1679. While Constantia may hold the title of the oldest, Stellenbosch is undoubtedly the most renowned, both for its wines and its stunning setting.



Cradled by the Helderberg, Simonsberg, and Stellenbosch Mountains, and influenced by the cool coastal breezes of nearby False Bay, the region offers the perfect conditions for producing complex, award-winning wines.

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South Africa's Garden Route

Stretching over 200 km, the Garden Route is South Africa's ultimate road trip — a journey through lush national parks, ancient forests, serene lakes, and breathtaking coastal beaches.

Renowned for both its natural beauty and outdoor adventures, this scenic stretch offers something for every kind of traveler. Learn to surf, leap into waterfall-filled canyons, snorkel around shipwrecks, or simply unwind aboard a yacht with a glass of local wine in hand.



Along the way, charming towns like Knysna invite deeper exploration — from forest hikes and lagoon strolls to engaging with the rich culture and history of the region.

Whether you're seeking adrenaline or tranquility, the Garden Route delivers unforgettable experiences at every turn.

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