

**SOUTHERN SKY  
ADVENTURES**  
AFRICA...IN YOUR WILDEST DREAMS.

# STUDENT TRIP KWAZULU-NATAL

17 Days | 16 Nights     **South Africa**

Midlands Meander | Royal Natal National Park | Pongola Game Reserve |  
Tembe Elephant Park | Kosi Bay





# MIDLANDS MEANDER

Situated in the lush hills of KwaZulu Natal, the Midlands Meander snakes through over 80 kilometers of lush subtropical landscape.

This popular tourist route features quaint villages, verdant woodlands, and extensive farmlands covering the lush undulating hills of this spectacularly scenic area.

Visitors can look forward to a wide range of activities including discovering a variety of historic landmarks, family-friendly farms, adventure activities, and browse a large collection of arts and crafts shops selling locally-made goods.

Other popular activities include: treetop canopy tours, cycling, kayaking, hiking, picnicking, fishing, horse riding, wildlife viewing, wine tasting and Zulu cultural experiences.





# ROYAL NATAL NATIONAL PARK

The Royal Natal National Park is home to one of KwaZulu-Natal's most spectacular attractions - The Amphitheatre.

Forming the boundary between South Africa and Lesotho, The Amphitheatre is a striking escarpment topped by a flat plateau.

The Tugela Falls plunge over the edge of the escarpment, plummeting down approximately 1000 meters to the Royal Natal National Park below.

A fantastic network of hiking trails meander through every part of the park, and range in difficulty from the leisurely Fairy Glen walk to the challenging hike up the Crack and down the Mudslide.

Horse riding is another popular activity, as well as trout fishing in the dam, Mahai and Thukela rivers.

There are many picturesque spots perfect for picnicking and swimming. There are also guided climbs against the dramatic rock faces available.





# PONGOLA GAME RESERVE

Situated in northern KwaZulu Natal, 350 kilometers from Durban and resting just outside Swaziland's southern border, Pongola Game Reserve is famous for its breathtaking scenic variety and its array of wonderful leisure activities.

In combination with the reserve's abundance of space, these features create a unique destination. The landscape consists of rugged, towering mountains, expansive water bodies, and wild bushveld.

Some of the main activities include safari cruises, canoe adventures, and excellent bird watching opportunities.

Visitors can track rhino on foot, participate in the elephant tracking program, try to catch tiger fish in Lake Jozini (South Africa's top tiger fishing destination) or view game from a boat on the lake.

The reserve has six private lodges, each equally luxurious, modern, secluded and exclusive.





# TEMBE ELEPHANT PARK

While most of Natal's elephants have been reintroduced from the Kruger National Park, Tembe Elephant Park boasts an indigenous herd that encompasses the biggest elephant specimens in South Africa.

They are the remnants of a free-ranging herd which at one time moved between Mozambique and South Africa. The park is also home to the other four of the 'Big Five' - lion, leopard, buffalo and white and black rhino - as well as the smallest antelope (the suni), 340 bird species and myriad other animals.

The creatures roam through a mosaic of sand forest, woodland, savannah, and swamp. The park is the ancestral home of the Tembe people, many of whom still practice traditional customs.

Visitors to the Tembe Elephant Park Lodge can watch re-enactments of ancient folklore stories told through song and dance by beautiful dancers dressed in traditional Thonga/Zulu regalia.





# KOSI BAY

Situated just north of Durban along South Africa's scenic coast, Kosi Bay lies only two kilometers from the Mozambique border.

It encompasses a pristine lake system consisting of a series of four lakes that form part of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park and eventually drain via a sandy estuary into the Indian Ocean.

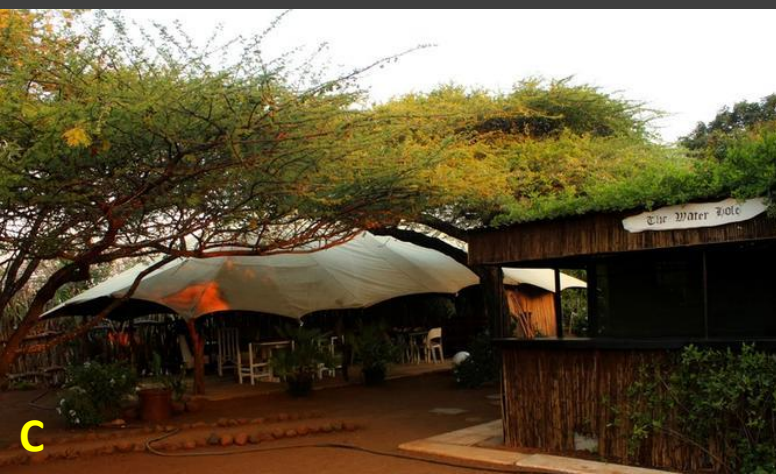
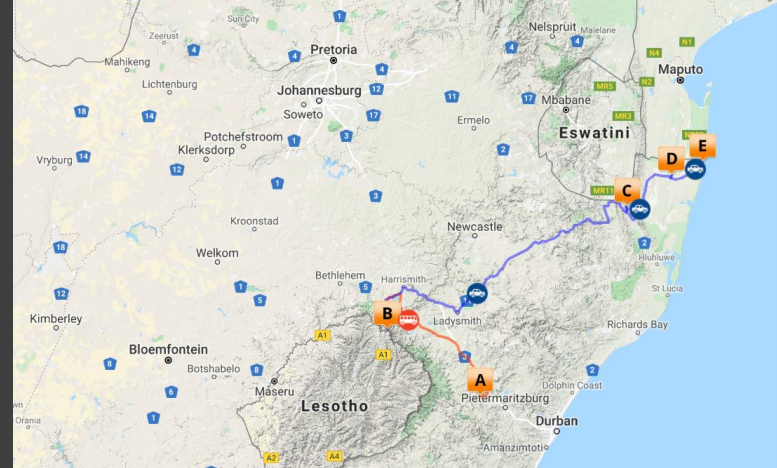
Beachgoers can enjoy a calm, quiet beach and a river mouth with exceptionally clear water home to an abundance of fish species.

Other fauna in the area include duikers, hippopotamuses, crocodiles, bull sharks, loggerhead and leatherback sea turtles – which lay their eggs on the beach – and a diverse bird life.

An interesting fact about Kosi Bay is that it is home to the Kosi Palm, which has the largest leaf of any plant in the floral kingdom.







- A Old Kilgobbin Cottages
- B Drakensberg Amphitheatre
- C White Elephant Research Camp
- D Royal Thonga Safari Lodge
- E Utshwayelo Kosi Mouth Camp





# DAY 1 : MIDLANDS MEANDER

Welcome to South Africa!

Arrival will be at King Shaka International Airport.

You will be met by your driver immediately after passing through customs, baggage claim and once through the arrival doors.

Your transfer to Old Kilgobbin Cottages in the Midlands Meander will be just under 2 hours drive to arrive late afternoon.

Upon arrival the students will have time to unpack, settle in and relax.

Dinner will be served in the barn.

Accommodation will be at Old Kilgobbin Cottages.

Day 1 complete.





# DAY 2 : MIDLANDS MEANDER

Breakfast will be enjoyed after which you will be introduced to Horseplay staff for a **Meet & Greet**.

After breakfast the students will head off for a walk through the Kilgobbin Forest (Mist Belt Forest). A quick stop at the top of the hill at the Boma then walk across the grasslands to where the horses live. This area is declared a nature reserve and natural heritage site.

A mid morning snack of fruit, water and cookies will be enjoyed nearby the horses after which they will be **Introduced to the Herd** and the following topics will be explained:

- Safety.
- Herd dynamics
- Awareness, observation, timing and feel - don't try so hard - intellect is not what you need to be good with horses!
- Trust

You will be given 30 minutes to interact with the horses' space, no halters. Horses are free to choose whether they engage or not. Students can go in as groups or individuals.

HorsePlay sessions are not only for horse-lovers, but for anyone who wants to explore an enriching side of life. Playing with horses gives us an opportunity to discover how to have great relationships with the humans in our lives, be they partners, family or friends. We enter into the world of the Friesian horses, which is magical for humans but just plain horse sense for the equine partners in this experience! As Ray Hunt wrote: "You're not working on the horse, you're working on yourself".

After the horse activity students will be given a pen and notebook and find a spot for **Solitude & Mindfulness**, private space away from each other but close enough to still have a connection with the group. This exercise aims for self reflection and setting intentions for the rest of the trip and for the rest of the year.

Return back to the cottage to enjoy lunch.

During the afternoon the students will embark on creating a **Vision Board** to illustrate the concept of connection between people, horses and the environment they experienced in the morning. Students will be introduced to amazing techniques that makes even the least creative person look like a rockstar artist.

Students will enjoy some **Free Time** in the afternoon.

Supper will be served at Il Postino.





## DAY 3 : MIDLANDS MEANDER

After breakfast the students will meet at the main arena and embark on the following **Morning Activities** before teatime:

Yes/No Communication Game.

Limitation Game with Feet in the Tires.

Follow & Feel Moving Horses.

Break for tea and continue with the morning activities:

Follow a suggestion moving horses.

Obstacle course.

Horse Box Demo.

After lunch the **Afternoon Activities** continues:

Liberty Demonstration.

Chain Equine Facilitated Learning Exercise (EFL).

Safe House EFL Exercise.

A busy and productive day will allow for some **Free Time** after the afternoon activities.

Dinner will be served in the barn followed by watching a **Movie** and just enjoying a quiet evening.





# DAY 4 : ROYAL NATAL NATIONAL PARK

After breakfast students will be transferred to the Royal Natal National Park for an exciting and adventurous 4-day hike.

Upon arrival there will be a **Meet & Greet** with Gustav and the team from Itchyfeet South Africa.

**Hiking Introduction** and **Collecting of Hiking Gear** before the hike commences.

## **Day 1: Hiking route in the Royal Natal National Park.**

The hiking route departs from Monks Cowl, Central Drakensberg. Upon leaving the car park there is a steady ascent all the way to the contour path. Along the way Crystal Falls and the Sphinx will be passed. As the summit of the Little Berg is reached the Breakfast Stream normally provides a comfortable rest and water stop. The junction with the contour path is Blindman's Corner. Moving beyond Blindman's Corner the route is becoming more remote where you need to be well prepared in terms of clothing, equipment and food. Cathkin Peak, Sterkhorn, Amphletts and the Turret are the main High Drakensberg features to be seen. Upon reaching Hlatikhulu Nek the route diverts off the contour path and follows a well defined and used path to Stable Cave. Stable Cave is a long overhang with sleeping spots in various places. You are now in the Culfargie Area of the Central Drakensberg.

Lunch and Dinner will be prepared by the students.

Accommodation will be a **Sleep out**.







# DAY 5 : ROYAL NATAL NATIONAL PARK

Students will prepare breakfast and get ready for day 2 of the hike.

## **Day 2: Hiking route in the Royal Natal National Park.**

From Stable Cave the path descends along the Hospitaalspruit into the valley where the Mhlawazini River flows. This is a remote part of the Little Drakensberg. The path then follows the Mhlawazini River for about five kilometres until it diverts off the main exit path where it enters the Didima Special Conservation area. This is a protected area due to a number of caves with beautiful Bushman paintings in them. Moving into the area a section of the path moves through a beautiful forest with numerous cascades, pools and waterfalls. From here it is quick to Poachers Cave. The Cave is also a long overhang overlooking a deep valley with the Didima River below.

Lunch and Dinner will be prepared by the students.

Accommodation will be a **Sleep out.**







# DAY 6 : ROYAL NATAL NATIONAL PARK

Students will prepare breakfast and get ready for day 3 of the hike.

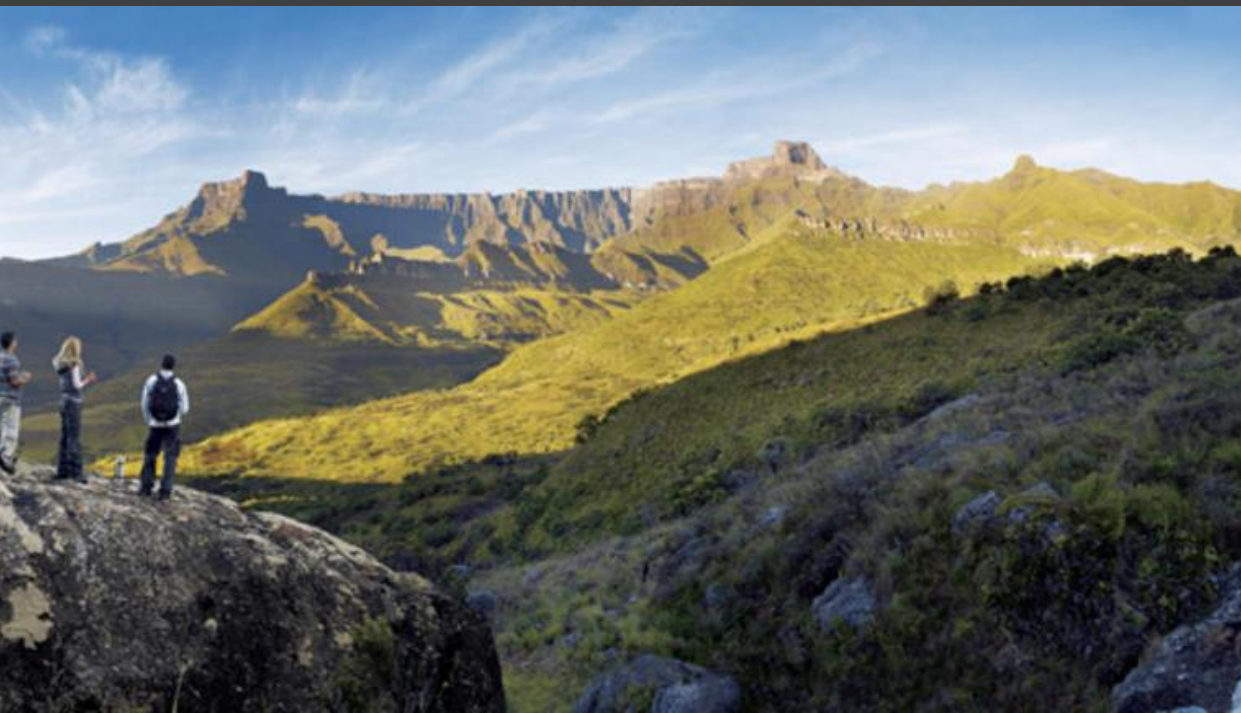
## Day 3: Hiking route in the Royal Natal National Park.

The path climbs further and moves closer the High Drakensberg and Cathedral Peak. After crossing the Didima River a steep climb awaits up Phillip's Folley. Here the scenes of Windsor Castle, Little Saddle, Ndumeni Dome, Thuthumi Pass, Castle Buttress and Cleft Peak are particularly impressive.

When the summit of Phillip's Folley is reached the path connects with an old Natal Parks Board / Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife service road. It eventually join Mikes Pass which was built by an Italian Engineer and named after the designer, Mike de Villiers. It used to be a fun 4x4 drive, today the road is closed to the public vehicles. Atop the pass and Arendsig Car Park are wonderful vistas of the entire Cathedral Range to the north.

Lunch and Dinner will be prepared by the students.

Accommodation will be another **Sleep Out** at The Old Staff Accommodation which is an abandoned ruin.







# DAY 7 : ROYAL NATAL NATIONAL PARK

Students will prepare breakfast and get ready for day 3 of the hike.

## **Day 4: Hiking route in the Royal Natal National Park.**

A straightforward day of walking down Mikes Pass, which descends the summit of the Little Berg. Along the way you will pass the Cabalala Hut of the Mountain Club of South Africa, a popular hut used by hikers, climbers and campers.

About halfway down the path to the abseil site diverts off the pass itself. Once the abseil is done the path reconnects with the pass. Soon after the hike ends at the Education Centre, Cathedral Peak.

Lunch and Dinner will be prepared by the students.

Accommodation will be a **Sleep Out**.







# DAY 8 : PONGOLA GAME RESERVE

After a successful 4-day hike in the beautiful Royal Natal National Park the adventure continues.

Today you will travel to Pongola Game Reserve and spend the afternoon unpacking and settling in.

After dinner there will be an **Orientation and Program Discussion** that will get you excited for what is in store over the next couple of days.

Accommodation will be at base camp: Fly camp.

Enjoy sleeping on a mattress especially after your recent 4-day hike and roughing it.

Accommodation will be at base camp: Fly camp.







# DAY 9 : PONGOLA GAME RESERVE

Enjoy a cold breakfast in the morning before the group activities commences.

## **Group A: Bush Walk: Understanding Local Ecology Part 1 (Soil, Climate and Vegetation).**

This is an educational bushwalk. Understanding the ecology of an area is fundamental to making appropriate decisions with regard to the management of the fauna and flora. This walk introduces the participants to the process of understanding, starting with the geology and looks at the how this influences the soil along with other landscape features and climate to ultimately determine the different vegetation types and ecosystems the support the collective biodiversity of the region.

## **Group B: Telemetry Monitoring.**

In this practical activity the students working in small groups will learn about the use of VHF telemetry and other commonly used remote radio monitoring options. Then they will go out into the reserve in a vehicle and physically track a study animal and harvest data.

After the mid-morning activities the groups will enjoy a cooked breakfast followed by:

## **Group A: Camera Traps & Leopard Monitoring.**

In this practical activity students will learn how camera trap technology works and how it can be used to harvest valuable data that can be used to inform wildlife management decisions. The students will go out into the reserve in a vehicle and check camera trap insitu harvesting the data and on returning to the camp, depending on time they will analyze the data. Using a data set developed for training purposes students will learn how to use “spot-pattern” recognition as a method to identify individual leopards and how this can assist in overall management of the wildlife on the reserve.

## **Group B: Conservation Service Project.**

In this activity students have the opportunity to assist in the overall ongoing conservation management of the game reserve. The project will be contextualized in terms of the overall scope of the project, its aims and ultimate benefit. Currently there are two projects that students are assisting with:

- Eradication of alien invasive prickly pear.
- Control of soil erosion due to past or current human impact.

Break for lunch to be enjoyed at the lodge.

Afternoon activities will be repeated but groups will swap activities.

After dinner Group A will enjoy a **Night Drive** whilst group B relaxes next to the **Camp Fire**.

Many animals are nocturnal and therefore the only opportunity to observe them is to go out after dark on a vehicle with a search light.





# DAY 10 : PONGOLA GAME RESERVE

Enjoy a cold breakfast in the morning before the group activities commences.

## **Group A: Bush Walk: Understanding Local Ecology Part 2 (Biodiversity and Interconnectedness).**

This is an educational walk. Building on from Part 1 this session looks in more depth at the ecological concepts of competition, survival, adaptation, niche determination, succession, colonization, ecosystems and interconnectedness and how these ultimately influence and sustain biodiversity.

## **Group B: Game Count**

In this activity we look at the need and different methods of population census available for different management purposes. Then the students will go out and do a Drive Transect Count. Depending on the time and level of the students on return to base camp we will look at the statistical model used to convert the data to usable information.

After the mid-morning activities the groups will enjoy a cooked breakfast followed by a **Lake Boat Cruise**.

The ultimate objective of this activity is to observe the elephant when they come down to the lake to drink and bathe, using this as an opportunity to learn about elephant conservation and behavior. However, this is very dependent on weather and where the elephants are at the time. Should the primary aim be unachievable then we use the opportunity to focus of finding and learning about hippo, crocodile and waterfowl.

Break for lunch to be enjoyed at the lodge.

Afternoon activities will be repeated but groups will swop activities.

After dinner Group A will relax next to the **Camp Fire** whilst group B will enjoy the **Night Drive**.







# DAY 11 : PONGOLA GAME RESERVE

Enjoy a cold breakfast in the morning before the group activities commences.

## Group A: Wildlife Survival Strategies.

This is a game drive-based activity. In this activity the group will explore the reserve using the opportunity to discuss in depth the different survival strategies that birds and animals have adopted to avoid direct competition with other species and to deal with the climate and geography of region.

## Group B: Bush Skills Activity.

This is a 2-day program which includes a one-night sleepout. The aim of the program is for students to learn a variety of skills from experienced guides that will enhance their knowledge and appreciation of wildlife, conservation and the African bush. The program incorporates unique opportunities for students to engage in practical hands on activities such as:

- Safety in the bush. identification. Tracks and tracking. Basic bush veld ecology. Mammal biology and
- Bird Identification. Tree and plant identification, medicinal and traditional uses. Anti-poaching skills.

After the mid-morning activities the groups will enjoy a cooked breakfast followed by:

## Group A: Conservation Service Project.

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- Eradication of alien invasive prickly pear. Control of soil erosion due to past or current human impact.

## Group B: Camera Traps & Leopard Monitoring.

In this practical activity students will learn how camera trap technology works and how it can be used to harvest valuable data that can be used to inform wildlife management decisions. The students will go out into the reserve in a vehicle and check camera trap insitu harvesting the data and on returning to the camp, depending on time they will analyse the data. Using a data set developed for training purposes students will learn how to use “spot-pattern” recognition as a method to identify individual leopards and how this can assist in overall management of the wildlife on the reserve.

Break for lunch to be enjoyed at the lodge.

## This afternoon both groups will do the Hike to Sleep Out and set up Camp Activity (Sleep out).

For this activity the students will hike to a safe site on the reserve where they will spend one night sleeping out. On arrival at the site they will erect temporary sleeping shelters, gather firewood for a campfire that they will keep going all night. The group will do continuous night watch throughout the night in 1-2-hour shifts. A meal will be prepared on the open fire. There are no shower facilities. Mattresses and bedding will be provided.

Dinner will be enjoyed later in the evening followed by **Night Skies and Night Watch**.

Most students are amazed by the number of stars that are visible at night. This activity gives them a brief introduction to the constellations visible to the naked eye in the southern hemisphere.

Accommodation will be a **Sleep out**.





## DAY 12 : PONGOLA GAME RESERVE

It will be an early wake up call for the groups to **pack up and hike back to base camp** where a warm cooked breakfast await them.

At around midday the groups will depart for the **Village Introduction and Community Service Project**.

After the groups enjoyed a **Traditional Lunch**, they will commence with the **Community Service Project**.

The ideal community service project is one that allows a mixture of hard work on sustainable projects that are meaningful, sustainable, fun and mutually beneficial whilst getting to know the local community. Community service projects provide a unique experience for students to grow and engage in an unfamiliar setting. . Each service project gets approached with an attitude of engagement, open mindedness and mutual respect.

What do we want students to gain from this experience?

- Leadership
- Critical thinking
- Cultural competence
- Effective communication skills
- Community Engagement
- Passion for service

After a full day of community service work, the groups will have time to reflect on the work they've accomplished and the relationships they've formed whilst enjoying a specially prepared **Traditional Dinner** later in the evening.

Accommodation will be at Home stay.







# DAY 13 : PONGOLA GAME RESERVE

Today you get to sleep in and enjoy a **Traditional Breakfast** to get your day started.

After breakfast and **Traditional Lunch** the **Community Service Projects** will commence for the morning and afternoon period.

After a full day of community service work, the groups will have time to reflect on the work they've accomplished and the relationships they've formed whilst enjoying a specially prepared **Traditional Dinner** later in the evening.

Accommodation will be at Home stay.







## DAY 14 : TEMBE ELEPHANT PARK

Today the students get to sleep in for a second time and enjoy a **Traditional Breakfast** to get the day started.

After breakfast, the groups will be transferred to Visit Nyanga (Traditional Healer) and depart for Royal Thonga Safari Lodge.

Accommodation will be at Royal Thonga Safari Lodge.







## DAY 15 : TEMBE ELEPHANT PARK

After checkout the students will depart for Kosi Bay and settle in before enjoying lunch and some free time. The transfer time to Kosi Bay Mouth Camp will be just short of 3 hours.

Later in the afternoon students will enjoy a **Guided Hike**.

The guided hike is with a local community guide who has grown up in the area and it explores some of the hidden treasures of this beautiful area. The route takes in magnificent views of the estuary, beach, fish traps and lakes and meanders down to the estuary through coastal forest and mangroves and along the edge of the lake and back.

Dinner will be served later in the evening with some free time for students to enjoy before another full day awaits them.

Accommodation will be at Utshwayelo Kosi Mouth Camp.







# DAY 16 : KOSI BAY

Students get to sleep in and enjoy a cooked breakfast before embarking on the exciting Three Lakes Boat Cruise Tour.

The **Kosi Bay 3-Lake Boat Cruise** is a definite highlight of a Kosi Bay visit.

The cruise starts at the Lake 3 launching site and traverse across three of the four Kosi Bay Lakes connected by meandering channels. On this 3-hour cruise, you will float through the famous Tonga Fish Traps, experience the diverse bird life of Kosi Bay and some may be surprised by a pod of Hippos. A highlight is also snorkeling in the crisp clear water of one of the channels. Sightings might include the famous Pel's Fishing Owl, Palm Nut Vulture, Flamingos and various Kingfisher species.

After lunch the students will enjoy two afternoon activities:

## **Fish Trap Activity.**

The Thonga people, who have made this land their home for more than 1 000 years, are experts in fish traps and have been constructing these traditional woven traps and palisade fish kraals for over 700 years. A guided tour of the fish traps where a local fisherman will explain the process and you may even be lucky to spear your own fish.

## **Snorkeling.**

One of the only places in the world where you can snorkel on a living reef inside an estuary, fondly known as "the aquarium" because of the abundance of the most amazing marine life and breeding area for reef fish. The rock pools in the ocean also offer a protected area to snorkel during low tide. Visibility always depends on the weather and the tide, but the best time to snorkel here is when clean seawater flows into the estuary just after low tide. The area is generally safe but, that said, it's always advisable to keep your wits about you. Guests are welcome to use their own snorkeling gear or hire gear from the lodge.

The students last dinner on African soil will be enjoyed followed by a Wrap Up Reflection & Feedback Session and then off for a good night's rest.

Accommodation will be at Utshwayelo Kosi Mouth Camp.





## DAY 17 : END OF ITINERARY

Students will enjoy their last morning of sleeping in followed by a cooked breakfast before packing up and departing for the airport.

It is our wish that you leave the African continent with renewed zest for life and friendships that will last a lifetime. May the rhythm of Africa and her stories be forever treasured in all your shared experiences and always be a place you can escape to and one day perhaps call home.

