

South Africa tourism

(Publicity)

Ultimate wildlife destination

Take a real journey to get close to South Africa's nature, cultures

Miho Ishihara
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Though some people may only be familiar with South Africa as the host country of the 2010 FIFA World Cup soccer tournament, the country has been fascinating travelers and wildlife enthusiasts for far longer as it is home to several world-renowned national parks.

Despite the images of wilderness safaris, visitors to South Africa might be pleasantly surprised by the cleanliness and modern facilities of the sites along with the local people, with their beautiful smiles and warm hospitality. South Africa is also known as the "rainbow nation" from the country's cultural diversity, with 11 official languages, English being widely used in business.

For any visitor, an especially captivating site is Kruger National Park, where many wild animals live in untamed wilderness.

Kruger National Park

"South Africa has many national and provincial parks, but the Kruger National Park is the largest natural conservation in Africa and the top travel destination," said Johan Noppe, a local tour guide.

Kruger was established in 1898 to protect the wildlife of South Africa's Lowveld region. The park is the world leader in advanced environmental techniques, allowing visitors to explore wildlife in their natural habitat.

Located along South Africa's northeastern border with Mozambique, Kruger has an area of about 2 million hectares, larger than Shikoku, one of Japan's four main islands.

Travelers from all over the world visit Kruger for an opportunity to see the famed Big Five animals: lions, leopards, buffaloes, elephants and rhinoceroses — which were considered the most dangerous animal when they were hunted. Today it is more about taking photos of the Big Five and there are dozens of photo opportunities. Guided game excursions on four-wheel drive, open vehicles are recommended. Most commonly, visitors rise at dawn for the excursion since the animals are more active in the early morning and late afternoon. Visitors should be ready to be simply awed by the breathtaking views of the burning red sunrise and sunset in this natural serenity.

According to Noppe, Kruger is home to an amazing number of species: 336 trees, 49 fish, 34 amphibians, 114 reptiles, 507 birds, and 147 mammals — the highest number of mammal species of any game park in all of Africa.

At first, spotting animals can be difficult since they are hard to see in the bush, but soon visitors will get used to sighting them as guides point out exactly where to look for them. As it is the wild, animals can appear at anytime. An elephant can suddenly walk out of the bush, causing tourists to go wild taking pictures. Among the many sights could be an elephant family crossing a road, hippopotamuses in rivers, rhinos hiding behind trees, a herd of buffaloes, kudus, impalas, zebras, giraffes, birds, vervets with tiny babies, baboons on the roadside or even a rare pride of lions. With luck, there's a good chance a tourist can experience all that in just one day.

A night safari is an exciting and very different experience. As the sunlight fades, it's quite a thrill to board an open vehicle with a searchlight to scan the bush looking for an animal's eye to reflect the light.

After the night safari, "bush braai," or outdoor barbecue, can be enjoyed. The braai is held in the middle of the dark park lit by lanterns and fire under the night sky.

Another way to explore Kruger is to participate in a guided bush walk. An early morning bush walk is led by experienced, armed rangers with only eight people to a group. A bush walk allows visitors to get close and see, touch and smell things that are out of reach from a vehicle. The ranger guides give instructions to always walk in a straight line and directly behind the person in front and never turn one's back to an animal to ensure safety at all times.

During the walk, the group learns about bush culture, plants, insects, spoor, animal bones and even the medicinal use of elephant dung for headaches. Learning the predator-prey ecological system can make visitors realize that they are really in pristine wilderness.

Accommodations at Kruger National Park are either within the premises, or in a neighboring private reserve or nearby town. Different types of accommodations are available, from bush camps and traditional huts to luxury lodges. Various private lodges are also located in Sabi Sands, a private reserve bordering Kruger's southwestern boundary. Umbhaba Lodge in the nearby town of Hazyview also has a private reserve, where guests might run into antelopes at night that have strayed into the grounds.

Kruger National Park can be reached from Johannesburg by air or by car.

Moholoholo Rehab Center

An hour's drive away from Kruger is the Moholoholo Rehabilitation Center, a



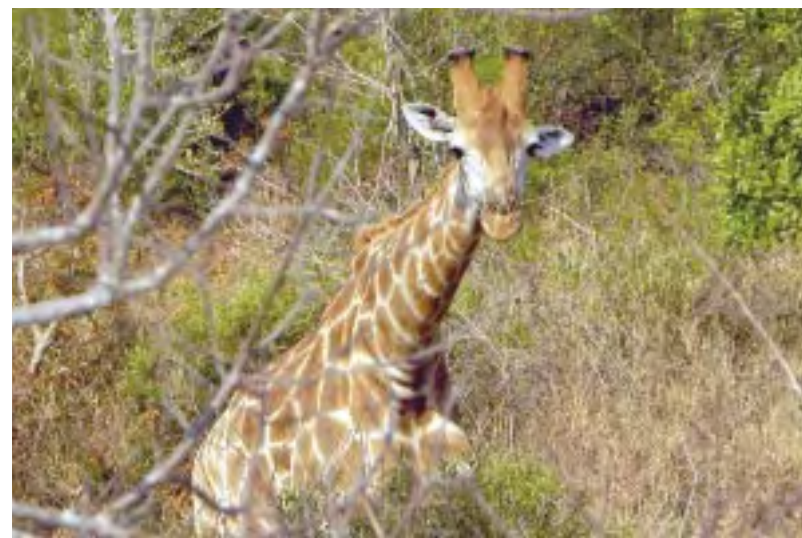
world-renowned facility for injured, poisoned or abandoned wild animals and birds rescued from all over South Africa. This nonprofit center is also an important breeding facility, especially for endangered crowned eagles and servals. The knowledgeable staff explain the importance of preserving wildlife and the environment as well as how Moholoholo rescues animals with the intention to return them to nature.

Moholoholo is home to abandoned lions, leopards, cheetahs, hyenas and many raptors; both children and adults will be thrilled to get such an up-close experience with these wild animals than what is available in the natural wilderness. Only recently, Moholoholo welcomed a rhino calf abandoned by his mother and rescued from a mud pit. Lucky visitors to the center may have the opportunity to pat him.

Panoramic Route

The way back to Johannesburg can be wonderful as well if the Panoramic Route is taken, which passes through the natural splendor of Mpumalanga Province. The Panoramic Route runs through the rugged northern Drakensberg Mountain and passes through the northeastern part of the Great Escarpment, which creates a spectacular view.

The 33-km-long Blyde River Canyon is the world's third-largest canyon after the Grand Canyon in the United States and the Fish River Canyon in Namibia. It is also the world's largest green canyon. The sides of the canyon are sandy orange,



A giraffe pays little attention to reporters disturbing its lunchtime. South Africans say giraffes are one of the most graceful animals.

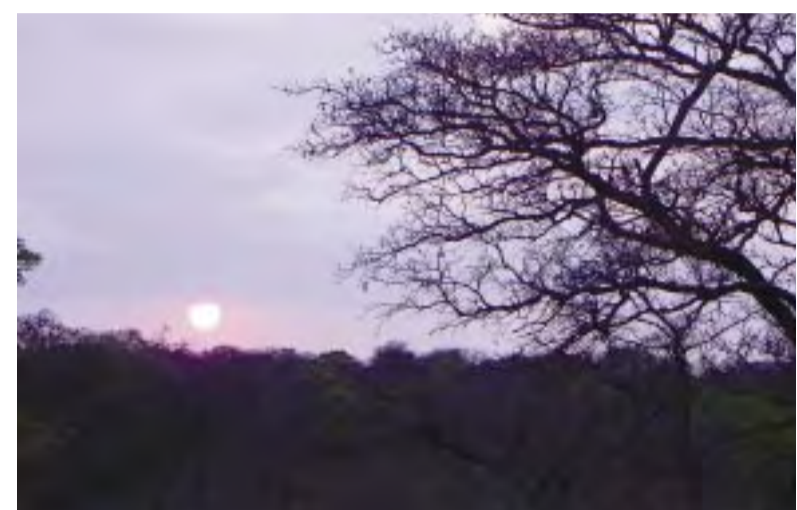


A herd of buffaloes sunbathes alongside a river.



Visitors guided by an experienced ranger in a four-wheel drive, open vehicle prepare to see some wild animals.

RIN ONOZUKA PHOTOS



Dawn at the Kruger National Park is exceptionally beautiful.

but, unlike other canyons, the top is covered with lush verdant vegetation. The canyon starts at Bourke's Luck Potholes and ends at the Three Rondavels — three huge rocks with rounded peaks. Remarkable rock formations created by water erosion can be seen at Bourke's Luck Potholes, where the Blyde and Treur rivers meet. The view from God's Window, where the cliff drops over 700 meters to the Lowveld, seems to disappear beyond the horizon.

Cradle of living culture

If visitors wish to learn something about local African culture, they will be more than satisfied by a visit to the Lesedi Cultural Village.

An hour's drive from Johannesburg, Lesedi showcases five different homesteads of well-known tribes: the Zulu, Xhosa, Pedi, Basotho and Ndebele. The tribal people are dressed in vibrantly colored traditional outfits, some of which are made from animal skins. They live in Lesedi according to their cultural rules. A guide from Lesedi will introduce visitors to all the villages, where everyday tribal activities are represented.

The highlight of the tour is the traditional songs and exhilarating entertainment. Drums beat rhythmically as the men, women and children of Lesedi dance and perform in this fantastic African experience. Guests will also be invited to participate in part of the dance steps, though it is not easy to keep pace with the tribal folks' good sense of rhythm and physical energy.

Around Johannesburg

Located 50 km north of Johannesburg is Pretoria, the administrative capital of South Africa, also known as the "jacaranda city," with more than 70,000 purple jacaranda trees that blossom in spring. The Union Buildings in Pretoria are where President Nelson Mandela's historic inauguration took place in 1994.

The Gold Reef City Theme Park, about 8 km from Johannesburg, was built around 19th-century gold mines and holds underground mine shaft tours.

Soccer City Stadium, where the opening and final matches of the 2010 FIFA World Cup were held, is also a must-see for soccer fans.

D'Oreale Grande Hotel, near Johannesburg's airport, is a luxurious accommodation situated in the Emperor's Palace complex, which has casinos and other leisure facilities.

Exploring wildlife at the Kruger National Park and neighboring areas will be a fascinating and unforgettable experience for families, groups and solo travelers. Visitors are sure to go home with memories and photos that will last a lifetime.

Fly to South Africa with Thai Airways International

Thai Airways International (THAI) operates direct flights from Bangkok to Johannesburg four times a week. From Japan, Johannesburg can be reached by flying THAI from Tokyo (Narita or, from Nov. 1, Haneda), Osaka, Nagoya, or Fukuoka and connecting in Bangkok with a conveniently scheduled transit depending on your choice of flight. The approximate flight time from Bangkok to Johannesburg is 11 hours, using the Boeing 777-200ER aircraft with 30 seats in Royal Silk class (business class) and 262 seats in economy class.

At Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport, THAI's renowned, consecutive award-winning Royal Orchid Lounges are available for premium class passengers. Seven lounges, including a spa facility, are available for international flights and are accessibly located near departure gates.

The Royal Orchid Spa offers complimentary spa treatments for Royal First and Royal Silk passengers. Royal First passengers can receive full-body oil massages and Royal Silk passengers can receive either traditional neck and shoulder massages or meridian foot massages.

Once on board, elegant and attentive flight attendants will greet you with a warm smile and welcome drink for premium-class passengers. While enjoying authentic Thai

curry in newly installed shell seats that recline 170 degrees in Royal Silk class, you will arrive in South Africa stress-free and in comfort.

Flights from Haneda

From Nov. 1, THAI will start operating daily flights between Haneda and Bangkok using Airbus A340-500 aircraft. Passengers flying between the Tokyo area and Bangkok will now have 4 flights per day (three from Narita) to choose from, allowing for a more convenient travel schedule. The fare for the Haneda-Bangkok round trip is from ¥130,000 for Royal Silk business class and from ¥40,000 for economy class (subject to conditions). For more details, please visit THAI's website at www.thaiairways.com



Thai Airways International's new lie-flat shell seats in Royal Silk business class



A lion gets friendly with a Moholoholo Rehabilitation Center staff member.



Locals, such as these vendors in front of Soccer City Stadium in Johannesburg, are notably friendly and welcoming to tourists.



Tours at the Lesedi Cultural Village conclude with a powerful and mesmerizing tribal dance performance.

Fly to Johannesburg – Gateway to Africa

Feel the rhythm of Africa four times weekly with THAI.

Stylish safaris, spectacular scenery, the Big Five wildlife, all set against the vibrant backdrop of Africa. Fly THAI to Johannesburg non-stop four times weekly, conveniently scheduled to allow smooth connections. Indulge in our legendary service and earn Royal Orchid Plus miles as you discover Africa with THAI.



Japan
Bangkok
Johannesburg

Bangkok - Johannesburg

Days	Departure	Arrival	Flight
Mon, Wed, Fri, Sat	01.15	07.30	TG 703

Johannesburg - Bangkok

Days	Departure	Arrival	Flight
Mon, Wed, Fri, Sat	13.40	05.55*	TG 704

*Following day



THAI
Smooth as silk

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER

<http://www.thaiair.co.jp/>

THAI
50
ANNIVERSARY
1960-2010