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28 June 2021

NEWSFLASH

New Level 4 Restrictions for South Africa

South Africa is on Adjusted Alert Level 4, effective from 28 June until 12 July 2021. This alert level will be revised towards the end of the 14-day period – depending on the circumstances at that time. There is no change to entry requirements, only in-country regulations. Please refer to the South African protocol document on the Info Centre for further details, however key changes are the following:

- A curfew is in place between 21:00 and 04:00. Closing time is 20:00. Arriving on a flight or travelling to/from an airport during restricted hours of movement is permissible as long as the traveller has proof of flight in their possession - a valid boarding pass or copy of the airline ticket.
- The sale, dispensing, distribution and transportation of liquor is prohibited.
- Interprovincial travel for leisure to and from Gauteng is prohibited, although travel to and from Gauteng is permitted for persons in transit. Any person who was not at their place of residence or work before the lockdown period, will be permitted, on a once-off basis, to return.
- Travel between other provinces is allowed.
- Gatherings are prohibited.
- Hotels, lodges, bed & breakfasts, guest houses are allowed 50% of capacity of available rooms for accommodation. Dining facilities in the same are permitted for room service and delivery only.
- Restaurants and other in-house dining facilities may only operate for the off-site consumption of food and non-alcoholic beverages – no sit-downs allowed.
- Beaches and parks will be open but gatherings in these areas are not be permitted.
- The 20 land borders which are fully operational, will remain as such and the 33 land borders which were closed, will remain closed.
- Travelling to and from the Republic is allowed, subject to screening for COVID-19 and quarantine or isolation, where necessary; plus observing mask-wearing, sanitising and physical distancing.
- International air travel is restricted to the following airports:
 - OR Tambo International (Johannesburg)
 - King Shaka International (Durban)
 - Cape Town International
 - Lanseria International (Johannesburg)
 - Kruger Mpumalanga International (Nelspruit)

CAMPS & ACTIVITIES

Revised Experience at Abu

We are delighted to let you know that we have moved into the next phase of our elephant conservation programme at Abu Camp. In accordance with our long-held vision to integrate the Abu Herd into wild herds, we have reduced their direct contact with people. The guest experience has been reimaged to concentrate upon the abundant wildlife in the Abu Private Reserve – which includes a great many wild elephants, in addition to other iconic Okavango species, such as lion, leopard, buffalo, giraffe and endangered wild dog – on guided day and night game drives, guided nature walks and seasonally available mekoro and boat excursions.

Accordingly, we no longer offer activities such as meeting and greeting the Abu Herd, nor direct elephant interaction – feeding, touching, and walking with the elephants – at Abu Camp. This is the continuation of a policy that has been in place for several years already, due to presence of young calves in the Abu Herd, and is in the best interests of the elephants' welfare. It will also help the Abu Herd prepare for a fully natural way of life at their own pace. They will now be observed in the same way as – and at similar distances to – fully wild elephants. This also means that the Abu Star Bed experience, which was next to the elephant boma, will be unavailable until a replacement Star Bed has been built in a new location away from Abu Camp.

The Abu Herd are already spending more time in the wild than they have previously, interacting naturally with wild elephants and other species found in this richly diverse part of the Okavango Delta. Over time, with additional measures to reduce human contact, and based on individual health and wellbeing assessments, the elephants will be gently guided to seek greater independence. During this process, the elephant care team will gladly share details of the progress that is being made towards integrating the Abu Herd members into wild herds.

We trust that we can count on your support and that of your clients for this vital step in the conservation process. Their visits will continue to make a significant contribution to both the Abu Herd's current wellbeing, and a new future for these elephants.

Savuti Star Bed

Going forward, our Star Bed experience in the Linyanti will be available as a value-add for guests staying at Savuti Camp. Previously available from DumaTau, the Savuti Star Bed offering will consist of an afternoon drive from camp to the star bed, dinner and overnight at the star bed, a light breakfast followed by a morning boat cruise or game drive, returning to camp late morning. The drive between Savuti Camp and the Savuti Star Bed is about an hour and fifteen minutes one way.

As a reminder, the elevated Savuti Star Bed overlooks the Zibadianja Lagoon and Savute Channel. It accommodates two adults sharing as the norm, but on request, may accommodate a family of four i.e. two adults and two teenagers. It has a double bed with mosquito net under a wooden roof. If two extra single beds are added for the teenagers, they are to the side and also have mosquito nets. There is an open-air dining area, sunken lounge and bathroom with basic facilities (toilet, washbasin with running water). Guests are accompanied by a guide who sleeps nearby.

Water Levels in Botswana

The annual inundation is less than anticipated due to lower than average rainfall in the Delta catchment area of Angola. However local rainfalls in Botswana this past summer were excellent and way above average. It looks like a normal flood year on the ground with slightly different water flow patterns.

- Waters are receding in the north of the Okavango, so boating in the Abu area will likely end in July.
- On The Jao Reserve, we are still doing normal water activities from Jao, Kwetsani, Pelo and Jacana although the water levels are quite low. Tubu is not doing water activities.
- On the Vumbura concession, general water levels are dropping (i.e. during the rains some of the plains and roads were flooded) but water activities continue as normal.
- Mombo is drying nicely and game is excellent. The channels have water for now and it looks as it usually would.
- Vegetation in the Linyanti is thinning out now that we are in winter, while water levels are dropping slowly. The Savuti channel still has water to camp and somewhat beyond, while boating at DumaTau continues as normal on the barge and smaller craft.

Wilderness Lounge in Namibia Re-opens

After closing while Hosea Kutako International Airport (Windhoek) went through a rebuild/refurbishment, the new Wilderness Safaris airport lounge is now open. It is located in the International Arrivals hall to the left of where guests come out, in the left corner before exiting the terminal. The previous lounge was to the right. Very nicely appointed and more spacious than the previous lounge, there are storage facilities and re-packing bags, Wi-Fi, tea/coffee facilities, water and reading material. The dedicated Airport team will assist with arrivals, Meet & Greet services, check-ins or printing RT-PCR tests.

Rhino-Tracking at Damaraland Camp

Taking the effect of the global COVID-19 pandemic and knock-on effect on tourism into account, the decision has been taken to not operate Desert Rhino Camp for the remainder of this year. We have therefore created a new rhino tracking experience at Damaraland Camp, ensuring guests still experience this life-changing adventure over this period. Save the Rhino Trust (SRT) will still benefit from the revenue generated through this move to Damaraland Camp.

No Ballooning on Busanga Plains this year

Due to cost implications, we will unfortunately not be offering ballooning in the Kafue this season – usually available in August, September and October.

WILDERNESS AIR

Indemnity Forms Required for Wilderness Zimbabwe Airstrips

There are specific needs regarding timing, process and requirements for any non-Wilderness Air aircraft flying into our airstrips in Zimbabwe. Wilderness Air must have the completed indemnities at least 3 to 4 working days prior to arrival to arrange the necessary paperwork, and especially for Chikwenya which also involves a landing fee. Please liaise with your Journey Specialist for the relevant documentation and arrangements:

- Any aircraft operators wishing to fly into Linkwasha and Mana West must complete the Ad Hoc Wilderness Airstrip Indemnity in full before a letter of authorisation can be given by Wilderness Safaris. There are no landing fees involved with either Linkwasha or Mana West.
- Any aircraft operators wishing to fly into Chikwenya must complete the separate Chikwenya Airstrip Indemnity in full and pay the appropriate landing and service & development levy (depends on aircraft Maximum All Up Weight) before a letter of authorisation can be given by Wilderness Safaris.

TOURING & TRANSFERS

Road Transfers to/from Zimbabwe

Under the current restrictions, it is possible to fly into Zimbabwe and DEPART BY ROAD through the land borders to Kasane or Livingstone, however, you cannot ENTER Zimbabwe by road at this time. Only returning residents and essential services – including commercial and transit cargo carriers – are allowed to enter the country by road through its land borders.

Kazangula Bridge

The new road bridge between Zambia and Botswana at Kazangula is finally open, replacing the previous ferry. A minimal levy per person will apply for use of the bridge so our rates will be adjusted accordingly, applicable to all new bookings placed from today, 25 June 2021.

COVID-19 UPDATES

COVID-19 Country Protocols, Testing and FAQs

- Please refer to the COVID-19 folder under Wilderness Safaris/WS Product Information on the Info Centre for the latest regarding entry, departure and in-country requirements for South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Rwanda, Zimbabwe and Zambia. Be aware that all information is subject to change, sometimes quite frequently by government and health authorities.
- We have added an Excel spreadsheet – separate tabs for different countries – with information about testing options available in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia.

- Rwanda testing information remains on the Rwanda protocol document as most testing is facilitated by the government – such as the mandatory requirement on arrival and departure – and options are not available for guests to choose from when it comes to testing.
- Be advised that turnaround times for tests may be longer or shorter than noted – this does vary depending on demand at the time.
- Our COVID-19 Operational FAQs document focuses on the most topical queries we have had in recent weeks.

Health Declaration Forms

- Botswana – available on the Info Centre, or on request from your Journey Specialist, please provide your clients with a copy of the Wilderness Air Botswana health declaration form so they can complete it in advance to make the process easier and quicker on the ground. The form only needs to be completed once, and can either be emailed through to your consultant or handed in when guests check-in with Wilderness Air in Botswana.
 1. The date of flight, is the first Wilderness Air flight – in most cases ex Maun or Kasane but may be ex a camp if they are picking up Wilderness Air after other arrangements.
 2. The destination is the first camp they are going to with Wilderness Air – or airport if those are the arrangements that have been booked.
 3. Date of return flight, is the date guests exit the country – or the end of their trip/last arrangement with Wilderness Air.
 4. Return address – is their home address.
- South Africa - the website is currently down for the South African health declaration form that needs to be completed prior to arrival: <https://sa-covid-19-travel.info/>. A hard copy version is available and accepted by authorities – saved on the Info Centre – so this can be shared with travellers for completion prior to departure.

REMINDERS

Private Journey and In-Camp Guides

We still have this great value-add in place, and even better is that the rates remain the same for both 2021 and 2022, with no change from the 2019 rates when we first introduced the offering.

- Private Journey Guides will host guests throughout the journey, whether at Wilderness Safaris camps or properties not owned by Wilderness Safaris. Providing an exclusive experience, it's a wonderful way to enhance a safari.
 - Our camps also have a select team of experienced guides available to pre-book on request, to personally guide guests at their respective camps.
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