



A guide to the:
Amakhala Conservation Project



The Amakhala Conservation Project

Focus: Africa's 'Big 5'
Location: South Africa

Start Dates: Every Monday
Arrival & Starting Point: Port Elizabeth

The Amakhala Conservation Project is situated in South Africa's beautiful Eastern Cape, set against a picturesque backdrop of rolling hills and parched bushveld. The project's grounds stretch across an impressive 7500 hectares and are home to a fantastic array of wildlife species, from the nimble springbok to the lumbering hippo – though the most famous residents of the reserve are the iconic 'Big 5'.

As a volunteer on this project, you will have the opportunity to witness rhinos, elephants and buffalo from within one of South Africa's most idyllic reserves. Game drives across Amakhala will also allow you to catch sight of a number of other spectacular species, including zebras, wildebeest, and many more. Of course, your time here will also be spent aiding important conservation activities, which may include the observation and monitoring of predator species such as cheetahs and leopards. Critically, though, your volunteer experience will help to support the reserve management team in their efforts to provide a safe home for their many animals, and this can be done through a range of activities.

Your participation in tasks such as fence patrols, road maintenance and snare sweeps will not only help the reserve to remain safe from poachers, but will also ensure that the project management team can continue to care for their animals as effectively as possible. Of course, your time here isn't all work and no play: a night spent camping under the stars, as well as an evening at Amakhala's luxury lodge each await you on your adventure, whilst your free time can be spent exploring more of what South Africa has to offer. Finally, time spent with members of the local community will go on to further your experience, as you will soon realise that this project is not just one for the animals: you can also leave a lasting impact on the people of the region, too.

If you would like to make a difference to Africa's conservation efforts whilst making the most of your time on the continent, this exciting volunteer project is certainly a fantastic option for you. Read on to discover more about the Amakhala Conservation Project, and get ready to embark on the trip of a lifetime!



Game Drives



Game drives are a classic part of any African experience, and you will have the opportunity to explore Amakhala's 7500 hectares as you head out onto the reserve in search of wildlife. During each drive, you will learn about the iconic 'Big 5' (rhinos, elephants, buffalo, leopards and lions), amongst an array of other enticing wildlife species, keeping your eyes peeled for any animals as you go! Every few weeks (and depending on the weather), the team may also embark on a night drive - if you happen to be volunteering at this time, you will join them as they head out into the bush in search of animals which only come out at night. Jackals, aardvark and the bat-eared fox are just a few of the animals you're more likely to see after hours, so if you're an avid fan of African's nocturnal wildlife, this is an experience you won't want to miss.

Wildlife Monitoring

Depending on necessity, you maybe invited to take part in a wildlife monitoring activity during your time on the project. Both herbivores and predators are monitored on the reserve, and you will be taught how to use telemetry in order to track the territorial ranges of animals such as lions or cheetahs. The information you gather here will help the reserve management team to make important decisions, such as whether any animals need to be relocated. One instance of this can be found with the cheetahs: since lions have been introduced onto an area of the reserve, an old cheetah population has had to be relocated in order to accommodate a new, 'lion-wise' pack. This was to ensure that competition between both species remains minimal. You may assist the reserve management team in monitoring the general well-being of these big cats, and you may also help to log any sightings and possible kills.



Game Capture

Amakhala's animals may occasionally need to be examined by a vet or relocated to another area of the reserve, and should this happen during your time on the project, you may be invited to assist in this exciting activity. This is a fantastic opportunity to witness the efforts of the reserve management team first-hand, from watching how the animals are darted through to seeing what it takes to safely move a cheetah, antelope or rhino from one part of the reserve to another! Please note that this activity is most frequent throughout the winter months (May-October), though it is not a guaranteed part of your itinerary.



Reserve Maintenance

Much of your time on the project will be spent carrying out a range of maintenance activities, such as erosion control, road maintenance and fence patrols. Each of these tasks are critical to the safe running of the reserve, as well as to the conservation of the animals which reside here. When you're not checking the reserve for snares or burying electrical wires which have been dug up by curious elephants (to name but a couple of examples), you may also assist in the re-seeding of land or the creation of wetlands and watering holes as to provide essential food and water sources for the animals on the reserve.



Alien Plant Control

As an additional form of reserve maintenance, you will help to remove any invasive or foreign plant life found around the reserve. As well as helping to clear roadways for vehicles as they travel from area to area, you will be contributing to the survival of the reserve's indigenous flora. Invasive plant species often out-compete the indigenous plant life, which in turn kills off or limits access to edible plants which would otherwise sustain the herbivores on the land. This also has a negative impact on the ecosystem as a whole, as the herbivores are a food source for Amakhala's predator species. This can be quite a physical task at times, as you'll be required to pull up roots as well as chop away any thick vegetation, so do come prepared!



Community Outreach

The project runs its own craft centre, just off of the main reserve. Here, members of the local community are invited to make and sell their own jewellery, fabrics, clothes and pieces of art, honing their talents and even making money from their creations. You will help to maintain the centre, and may also try your hand at crafting, too!

Elsewhere, you may pay a visit to a local community centre in order to spend time with a number of children who are either orphaned or unsupported by their parents. Your time here can have a major impact on these neglected children, as many of them arrive at the centre with little concept of love or affection. Even though the children may not speak English (their main language is isiXhosa), activities such as sports are universally loved, so be prepared to spend a lot of time running around with your new-found friends!

The community centre also has its own vegetable garden, and you may be invited to assist in planting or tending to the patch alongside the children. This is a great way to educate the kids on healthy eating, and it also ensures that they are receiving the nourishment they need as the same vegetables are used in meals such as soup.



A Night At The Luxury Lodge



If you join the project for two weeks or more, you will be treated to a night at Amakhala's own luxury lodge! The property is tucked away in a valley of indigenous bush and offers plenty of opportunity for wildlife viewing. As well as being a luxurious place to spend the night, the lodge has its own plunge pool which overlooks a watering hole – a great vantage point from which to spot Norman, the reserve's beloved elephant, as he comes to drink at his favourite spot! Additionally, your dinner will be prepared for you whilst at the lodge, so why not take the opportunity to unwind with a delicious meal and a glass of wine?

Please note that volunteers who stay at Amakhala for less than two weeks are still able to book a night at the lodge, though this will be at an additional cost.

Bush Camp & Star Gazing

A night under the stars awaits you as you head out into the bush for an overnight camping experience! Equipped with a sleeping bag, you will join your group around a crackling camp fire, where you will prepare a traditional braai (African barbeque) whilst watching the night sky unravel. As well as keeping your ears open for the sound of nocturnal wildlife, you may also be taught how to navigate the bush by night, using the stars above as a compass to understand your location.



Free Time

Since your volunteering activities take place from Monday to Friday, your weekends are free to explore more of the surrounding area (if you so wish!). A wide list of activities are available to choose from at the volunteer house, but a few examples include a visit to the famous Addo Elephant National Park or the Born Free Big Cat Rescue, located on the neighbouring Shamwari Game Reserve. A visit to Born Free is a particularly worthwhile, as you will have the opportunity to see a number of lions and leopards which have been rescued from zoos, circuses and other captive facilities – a direct contrast to the life that Amakhala's reserve animals have had, and a reminder of how necessary conservation efforts still are today.

If you do wish to go on any excursions, please note that all activities are of your own expense. If you would prefer to spend your weekend at the reserve, however, this is certainly no problem – you are welcome to unwind at the volunteer house or at the onsite pool!



Itinerary

Day 1

Upon arrival into Port Elizabeth Airport, you will be transferred to the project site. Once you have arrived, you will have a welcome orientation and briefing. You will spend the remainder of your day settling in and meeting your fellow volunteers.

Days 2-14

These are your project days. The weekly itinerary takes place from Monday to Friday, with each day beginning around 7am and ending at around 4pm. An example of a daily itinerary can be found below, but please note that this is subject to change.

Your weekends are free to spend at leisure, so why not speak to a member of the project team to learn about excursions and activities in the local area?

Day 15

Unfortunately, today is your final day. Once you have said goodbye to your fellow volunteers and the project team, you will transfer back to the airport for your return flight home, or to continue with your independent travel plans.

A breakdown of a typical day at the project

7:00am

Enjoy a breakfast of your choosing, whether it be cereal, toast or fruit to get you ready for the day ahead!

7:30am

After a morning briefing from the project coordinator, you will head out to take part in your first activity of the day. This could be anything from reserve maintenance through to game capture, so be prepared to get involved!

1:00pm

When the sun is at its peak, you'll break for lunch. We recommend eating a hearty meal, as you'll no doubt be hungry after a full morning's work!

2:00pm

After lunch, you will take part in your second volunteer activity of the day. Whether helping out at the local community centre, heading out on a canoe or even getting ready for a night at the luxury lodge, you're sure to have a fantastic afternoon ahead of you!

4:00pm

If you're not spending the night at the luxury lodge, you'll finish up your afternoon activity before heading back to the volunteer house for dinner. Volunteers cook for themselves on this project, so prepare to show off your culinary skills!

6:30pm

After dinner, your evenings are free for you to spend as you please. Take a dip in the pool, head over to the nearby bush pub for a refreshing drink, or simply head to bed for an early night - the choice is yours.

Accommodation

During your time on the project, you will stay in a 10-bedroom house which overlooks a large garden and is located within walking distance of the local bar and basic shops. Rooms are allocated on a same-sex, twin-share basis, with couples being allocated their own rooms. There are five bathrooms which are to be shared by volunteers; they are each equipped with western-style toilets and showers. A complementary laundry service is provided.

Elsewhere, there is a communal sitting room with a digital-satellite TV. There is also a kitchen and dining area, where you will prepare your own meals throughout the course of the project. The house also has an outdoor seating area with a fire pit and braai (African barbeque), as well as a swimming pool. This is a great place to unwind after a day spent working in the field! Finally, free Wi-Fi is accessible at the house.



Food & Drink

Whilst food is provided for you on this project, you are responsible for preparing your own meals. Generally, volunteers tend to take it in turns to cook dinner for their group, while breakfast and lunch are to be prepared individually. Please note that on some occasions, lunch will need to be packed up and taken out into the field in order to make the most of your time on the reserve. Once every week you will be invited to enjoy a delicious braai; this is a fantastic opportunity to experience a traditional style of cooking!

Drinking water is available from a fresh rain water tank located onsite, while bottled water and snacks can be purchased from the local shops. We advise that you take plenty of food and drink out with you each day, as there may not always be the opportunity to return to the volunteer house (and it is important to keep your energy levels up!). Finally, if you have any dietary requirements, please let us know in advance.



What's Included

- Accommodation
- Food for all meals
- Tea and coffee
- One night at the luxury lodge (if volunteering for two weeks or more)
- English speaking project coordinator
- A donation to the project

Not Included

- Flights
- Vaccinations
- Visas
- Travel insurance
- Transfers (available for an additional cost)

Volunteer Reviews

Graham

"I loved the whole experience from start to finish, especially the joy of seeing so many animals in their natural environment."



Eleanor

"It was the best experience of my life and I would do anything to be back there."



Dolors

"I'll never forget the diversity of the wildlife, our closeness to the white rhinos, or how close the giraffes and nyalas were to our room at the lodge!"





What Next?

Becoming a volunteer on the Amakhala Conservation Project is simple, and you can help make a difference to 'Big 5' conservation efforts in just a few simple steps...



Visit the website to select your start date and how long you would like to volunteer for.



Secure your place online by paying a deposit of £195. You'll have up to 60 days before your start date to pay your remaining balance.

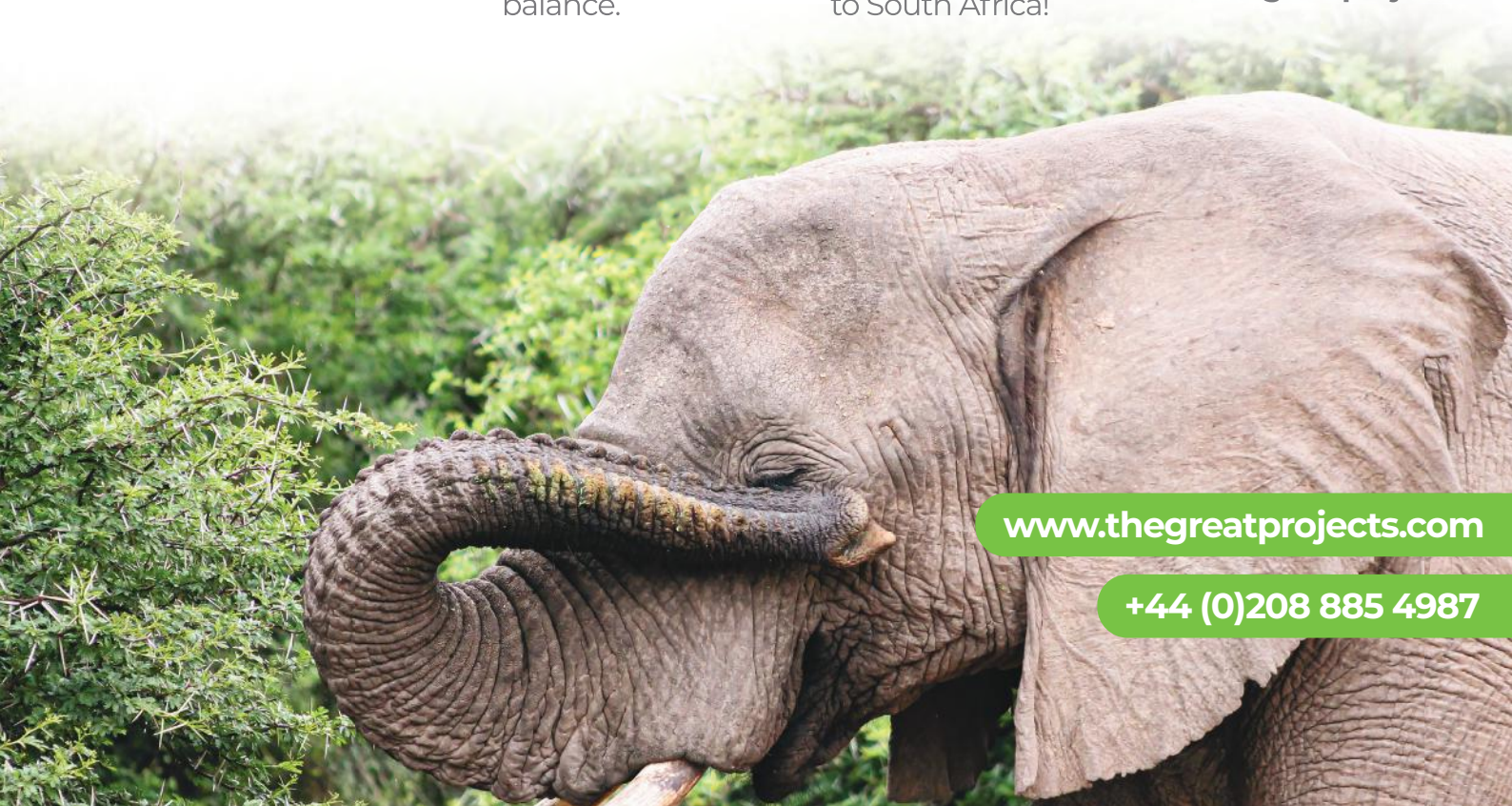


Prepare for your trip and ask your dedicated travel expert any questions before packing your bags and heading off to South Africa!



Finally, have an incredible time and don't forget to send in or tag us in your photos!

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