



A guide to the:
Rhino & Elephant Equestrian Project



The Rhino & Elephant Equestrian Project

Focus: Elephants & Rhinos on Horseback

Location: Zimbabwe

Start Dates: Set Dates - Please Enquire

Arrival & Starting Point: Harare

The Rhino and Elephant Conservation Project has been a favoured programme by many of our dedicated volunteers. The project is located in a beautiful setting, surrounded by iconic wildlife, and steeped in a rich history which surrounds you instantly when you step foot on the reserve.

Starting as a small patch of land acquired by Norman Travers in the 1950s, the story of this conservancy evolved rapidly throughout the decades and continues to strengthen its impressive conservation story every year. From cattle, maize and tobacco farms in the beginning to the introduction of game in the 1970s, Travers paved the way for the integration of farming, ranching and wildlife management. In just a short ten years, the land blossomed from humble farmlands into a 10,000-acre game park. Then, during the height of the poaching crisis, the Travers family opened their conservancy to seven orphaned black rhinos in 1985, marking the beginning of their namesake.



Volunteers have long been welcomed by and into the Travers family to aid the conservation of many beautiful animals, each thriving in their own familial structures. In both the traditional programme and this horseback edition, volunteers help observe and track black and white rhinos, undertake game counts, feed and walk elephants and work with the community, to name but a few activities.

Offering a new, closer experience, the Rhino & Elephant Equestrian Project is a chance to experience the ever-unfolding horizon as you storm Zimbabwe by horseback, all while working to protect the endemic wildlife that calls the reserve home. On horseback three hours per day, five days a week, you will form bonds with not only the horses that journey with you but your fellow volunteers as you all become extended members of the Travers family.

As an experienced rider, you'll join an intimate group led by the matriarch herself, Judy Travers. You'll soak in the valuable knowledge as you search for specific herds or new mothers, round up cattle for weekly dipping and locate missing animals, and assist the anti-poaching unit in snare sweeps. Become part of the herd and find yourself running amongst the zebras or giraffes, getting closer to wildlife than ever before. So join us and live out your equestrian dreams, all while learning what wild in Africa really means.

To partake in this equestrian project, you'll need to be a confident, experienced rider. Please note, the horses cannot carry in excess of 80kg, there is no galloping on the reserve and they cannot be taken out unaccompanied by staff.

Horse Riding



This equestrian programme offers all the incredible activities that the Rhino and Elephant Conservation Project has, though many will be undertaken on horseback. On game counts, you'll find yourself closer than ever before as the horses will allow you to integrate gently into the reserve herds, be that rhino, zebra, giraffe or wildebeest. Volunteers are able to record the data on herd sizes and health as they walk among them. Five days a week, you'll head out for roughly 3-4 hours per day and participate in game counts, anti-poaching snare sweeps, herd monitoring, fence patrols, and even take part in rounding up the cattle for the weekly dipping session. Your small riding group will experience parts of the reserve not reachable by vehicle and offer you a chance to bond with your horses as a group and immerse yourself in the history and magic of the conservancy.

Rhino Observation

The success of the project's rhino breeding programme and their commitment to safeguarding their wildlife has meant a small white rhino herd can roam the reserve as they please. The project hopes to release a handful of rhinos back into the wild, so they encourage them to move freely to practise natural behaviours such as grazing, browsing and socialising. The rhinos are fitted with trackers so that the anti-poaching team can locate them whenever necessary. As a volunteer, you will use telemetry to help locate the rhinos and monitor them, and once found, you'll observe the herds behavioural and feeding patterns concerning their health. All data collected adds to a body of knowledge the team can share with reserves across the country. So, not only will the observations draw these rhinos closer to their release, but may also contribute to the potential release of endangered rhinos across the continent.



Elephant Care

Unlike the rhinos on the reserve, the elephants are sadly unsuitable for release. Having been rescued, they would not survive in the wild without the care provided by this project. As a volunteer, you'll walk or ride alongside them and their handlers, providing vital enrichment and observing them as you go. While spending time in their presence, you'll monitor the elephants' behaviour, learning to identify patterns and relationships between each elephant and get a real understanding of each of their personalities. As the elephants are cared for, the maintenance of their bomas (enclosures) is highly important, and volunteers help to clean out bomas and make any repairs necessary.



Breakfast With Elephants

A much-favoured activity among volunteers is found one early morning, where you'll venture out onto the reserve to have a breakfast to rival all others. The project team will bring along all the equipment needed to make a delicious cooked breakfast on the go. You'll then get to enjoy an al fresco meal in the company of your fellow volunteers, and the gentle giants loved from around the world. Once you have finished eating and the dishes are packed away, you'll journey back through the bush with these incredible animals at your side; It's truly a morning start unlike any other!



Weapons Training

Working with any anti-poaching unit in any aspect is both thrilling and educational, but on this project, you'll get stuck right in the action as you take part in weapons training! During this activity, you will take part in drills and exercises the anti-poaching unit regularly practice to keep the threat of poaching at bay. You'll be encouraged to try your hand at target practice using a paintballing gun, and you best bring your A-game - it's likely to turn into a competition.



Carnivore Feeding

This project flits between the serenity of walking among elephants and rhinos and the high-adrenaline world of weapons training and carnivore feeding. During Carnivore Feeding, you'll come face to face with some of Africa's most impressive beasts as you help feed the reserve's lions and crocodiles!



Community Outreach



The project has partnered with a local school forming a 'conservation club', which aims to educate local children on the local wildlife and the environment. From offering your support with the conservation club and literacy programme to taking part in sports or games with the younger children, your time at the local school will be a meaningful inclusion in your community outreach. (Please note that this is not a guaranteed part of your itinerary and only happens within term times).

Occasionally, the team will hold a cultural evening, where you'll welcome members of the local community into the volunteer house for an evening of entertainment. Typically, a local meal is prepared, and traditional dancing takes place for you to join in! This is a fascinating and fun way to learn about the Shona culture; and exchange traditions and pastimes from all walks of life in one evening.



Itinerary

Day 1

You'll arrive at Harare International Airport, welcomed by a project representative. Once the rest of the arrivals are met, you will transfer to the project site together. Upon arrival, you'll be able to spend some time settling in and getting to know your fellow volunteers.

Day 2 -14

Let the excitement begin! These are your project days which will see you adventuring around the reserve on foot, by vehicle or by horse. An example of a daily itinerary can be found below, though please note this is only an example and is subject to change depending on the project needs.

Day 15

Bon Voyage! Sadly, your time here has come to an end, but you'll have left your mark here and undoubtedly, the memories you'll leave with, will have in turn marked you. Today, you'll head back to the airport for your return flight home or to commence your onward travel plans.

Example Daily Breakdown

6:00am

It's a bright and early start with time to grab a tea or coffee before being briefed about the day's activities ahead!

6:30am

Time for your first task of the day! You'll likely find yourself atop of your horse, riding in search of the free-roaming rhinos and perhaps finding yourself among herds of giraffes or zebras along the way.

9:00am

After working up an appetite, you'll have time to enjoy breakfast and get yourself ready for the next activity. Your favourite breakfast on this project will definitely be the one in the company of elephants!

10:00am

The second activity of the day may see you sweeping the reserve for snares with the anti-poaching unit, tackling alien plant species or lending a hand at the local school.

12:30pm

Lunchtime! Enjoy a long lunch break with time to relax before heading back out for more conservation efforts!

2:00pm

After lunch you could be feeding the resident carnivores or perhaps joining the anti-poaching unit in target practice using paint-ball guns! On this project, you're sure to end the working day with a fun-filled activity.

5:00pm

Before heading back to clean up for dinner, you'll walk the resident elephants back to their bomas for the night.

7:00pm

Time for dinner! After a great meal with your fellow volunteers the evening is at your leisure, though on some nights you'll be invited to join sundowners, night drives or even a cultural evening at the volunteer house!

Accommodation

Your time on the project will see you accommodated in a beautiful thatched house on the reserve. You will be living alongside up to 3 other volunteers from the equestrian project alongside up to 12 volunteers from the Rhino and Elephant Conservation Project. The 2 groups, split across five large bedrooms, are typically shared on a same-sex basis, though families or couples may be accommodated together, depending on availability.

Within the house, there are 2 main bathrooms, each with western-style toilets and hot showers, and outside you will find a solar-powered shower block. The volunteer accommodation is complete with a large swimming pool and grass area to relax and unwind in your free time. Finally, there is a beautiful lake formed by a large dam situated near the volunteer house. Occasionally, volunteers have taken a small boat out to soak up the serenity of this peaceful location.



Food & Drink

You'll receive three meals per day at the project; these will be prepared for you by the resident cooks. Meals served at the volunteer house will be available on a self-serve, buffet-styles basis. On some days, packed lunches will be made and taken with you into the field, allowing you to make the most of your conservation experience. On Sundays, the project cooks do not work, so you will need to prepare your own meals for the day.



Vegetarian and vegan options are available, though the project will need prior notice well in advance of your joining. If you have any specific dietary requirements (such as gluten, wheat or dairy intolerance), you will be required to bring your own specialist foods along with you, though the cooks will still be happy to prepare your meals. Finally, the drinking water is free and safe for drinking, and there is a small, onsite bar offering soft and alcoholic drink options and snacks at an additional fee.

What's Included

- Accommodation
- Three meals per day
- Transfers to and from the airport
- A laundry service
- English-speaking project coordinator
- A donation to the project

Not Included

- Flights
- Visas
- Travel insurance
- Alcoholic beverages and snacks

Volunteer Reviews

Lizzie

I was living out my childhood dream of being a cowgirl, and I looked to the right to see a group of giraffe running alongside us, I realised then how lucky I was to be here.



Helen

Aside from riding, the activities are absolutely life changing. Getting to feed elephants and rhinos, teaching children and playing football with locals... I cannot explain how much you need to do this trip.



Sher

I could not wipe that smile off my face! Horseback riding through vast areas of virgin bush, across the plains, it was a spectacular landscape!





What Next?

Becoming a volunteer on the Rhino & Elephant Equestrian Project is simple, and you can help make a difference to wildlife 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 Zimbabwe!



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

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