

THE AMPHITHEATRE HERITAGE HIKE

The Amphitheatre is the most recognisable and dramatically imposing feature of the entire Drakensberg range, a World Heritage Site of outstanding environmental and cultural significance. A mighty wall of basalt rises over 1000 metres from the Tugela valley to the Lesotho plateau nearly 3000 metres above sea level. Part of its aesthetic appeal arises from its near perfect symmetry, extending as a sheer wall of rock some 5 kilometres in length from the Eastern Buttress to the Sentinel Peak in the west- altogether an area of majestic and incomparable beauty providing some of the finest scenery in the world.



*Amphitheatre –
View from Witsieshoek*



*Amphitheatre –
View from the top*

SA ADVENTURE TRAILS: SLACKPACKING TRAILS

For hikers who do not have the equipment or who are not prepared to carry a heavy pack with all their own food and gear, a new concept in "luxury hiking" or "slack-packing" is now available. This aims at making the hike a more enjoyable experience people for people who would like to walk the trail with a guide during the day and stay at comfortable lodges at night .

Services offered on a "luxury hiking trail" are:

- Professional Guiding and Back-Up Support
- 3 nights overnight Accommodation (hotel or lodge)
- Full Catering Facilities (dinner, bed and breakfast and a packed lunch for 3 days)
- Luggage Transfer from Lodge to Lodge
- Pick Up from End Point of Hike.
- Safe Parking of Vehicles during the Hike

We offer a "luxury hiking" for the Amphitheatre Heritage Trail (with all the above services) for private parties of 6 to 10 hikers per group. Departures are organized for the spring and autumn months when the weather is predictable and mostly fine - outside of the summer thunderstorms and cold winters. Groups are welcome to form their own parties or join one of the scheduled hikes planned for March to May, or September to November.

AMPHITHEATRE LUXURY TRAIL – HIKING ITINERARY

The Heritage Guided Hike has been planned to enable walkers of average ability to reach these heights and to be rewarded by awe inspiring, never-to-forgotten views from the top of the escarpment - a feat normally only undertaken by fit and experienced hikers who would normally have to camp overnight. By spending 3 days and 3 nights on the route, staying at conveniently located lodges on the way and using a qualified guide to make decisions on routes and weather conditions, it is possible for anyone who is reasonably fit and unafraid of heights to stand on "top of the world" and experience the same sense of accomplishment as the dedicated hiker.

The Hike has been laid out so that you will walk at a comfortable pace unencumbered by a heavy pack. At the end of the day you will have the chance to relax and recover at a hostel providing hot water, good food and a comfortable bed. Daily distances are ascents are reasonable provided that you take your time, stopping frequently for food and water breaks and to appreciate the magnificent views along the way.

A typical hiking itinerary is :

Day 1 (approx 9km) : After gathering the previous evening at the Sungubala Safari Camp near to the Cavern Berg Hotel in KZN, you will be met by your guide for an early start. The day's hike will commence with a fairly stiff climb via Surprise Ridge and onto Cannibal Cave, a immense overhang in the shadow of the Diamond Spur, once occupied by war-faring tribes and which still have paintings and human remains as evidence of their existence. The route continues along a mountain ridge, Cold Ridge, which bypasses Broome Hill and onto Basotho Gate enjoying wonderful views in all directions. This is a long but comfortable walk which ends at your destination for the night, Witsieshoek Mountain Resort which straddles the divide between KZN, Free State and Lesotho.



Sungubala Lodge – First overnight



Hiking up to Witsieshoek

Day 2 (10-12 km) : This is the most eventful day and you will need to make an early start to get the most out of it ! You will be transported to the beginning of the day's walk just below the towering peak of the Sentinel. After filling in the mountain register, you start your hike along a well maintained path which ascends gradually towards the Witches and the Zig-Zags, taking you to the base of the Sentinel massif. From here, you swing right and follow the contour path below the Western buttresses with the land sloping steeply to the north and east giving you wonderful views of the Malutis and the Witsieshoek plateaux.



The chain ladders are reached after about 3 kilometres, and after negotiating the two sections of rock wall it is only a short scramble up from there to the escarpment where you can spend the better part of the day in exploration.

Here is Africa's highest waterfall, where the headwaters of the Tukhela drops a sheer 614 metres into the gorge below. Another point of interest, some 2 km inland, is the Mont-aux-Sources peak, at 3282 metres the source of 4 important rivers. A 3-4 km walk along the escarpment requiring some ridge climbing will take you the Eastern Buttress and Rainbow Falls and can be undertaken by the fit and eager. With fine weather, a pleasant time can be had for several hours on the summit, but a start must eventually be made on the return trip which retraces your steps back to the hotel at Witsieshoek. Aim to get back by late afternoon.

Up the Chain Ladder



Solitude



Lip of the Tukhela Falls

Day 3 (7km) : This is a easy day's walk with several route variations taking you back down the Mahai River valley to the Royal Natal National Park (RNNP). Along the way you will criss-cross the river several times, passing small waterfalls and pools giving you a chance to go for a dip or to picnic as you should have plenty of time on hand. The vegetation and topography changes dramatically as you descend and you will pass through patches of cool mist-belt forest on the southern facing slopes. At the bottom you will pass by the Trout hatchery, the campsite and the visitor's centre of the RNNP from where arrangements will be made for you to be collected and transferred back to your vehicles at Sungabala. You have the option of a 4th night at this resort or to return home from this point, filled with a sense of achievement for having reached the top of the mighty Drakensberg escarpment!

GENERAL INFORMATION

WHEN TO GO : Although the winter months are more stable, weather conditions can be extremely unpredictable in the berg at any time of the year. Sudden changes can occur bringing thunderstorms, cold, rain and mist which makes for unsafe hiking conditions. Hikers should therefore be prepared for any eventuality and should always carry protective rain gear and warm clothing. An indication of what to expect and bring can be found at www.trails.co.za/kzn/bergfree/take.htm

Because of possible extreme and unsafe hiking conditions at altitude, your guide will be the sole judge and determinant of which routes to take and whether it is safe to hike to the top of the escarpment.

DURATION : 3 days and 3 nights, generally commencing on a Thursday night at Sungabala Camp and completing on Sunday. Option of a 4th night at Sungabala if requested.

GRADE ; Strenuous walking at times, but no technical sections other than the chain ladder. Not recommended for those with a fear of heights.

DISTANCE : 25 to 30 kilometres ascending approx 1200 metres in altitude. Distances determined by the guide and dependent on group's abilities and requirements.

GROUP SIZE : Preference for 6-10 hikers in any one party. Smaller parties may be combined with other groups to reach optimal size. Group size is also subject to availability of accommodation at the mountain lodges.

SCHEDULED DATES : Any time of the year subject to demand and availability of accommodation and tour guides. Best to avoid peak holiday season (Easter, Christmas and long weekends). The autumn and spring months are generally an excellent period for planning hikes in the Drakensberg.

COST : This will depend on group size and whether a local community guide or DEAT registered mountain guide is used. A full quotation will be given on application.

BOOKINGS : Your agent is Paul Colvin of Underberg Hideaways who can be contacted at 033-343 1217 or by email at info@trails.co.za You may also visit the SA Outdoor and Adventure Trails website at www.trails.co.za and complete their online enquiry form.



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