VOLUNTEER PACK

DAKTARI

Bush School & Wildlife Orphanage

Saving our environment through education

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Welcome dear volunteer,

Congratulations on your decision to volunteer with DAKTARI Bush School & Wildlife Orphanage.

We know that you will have a fantastic time and take away lasting memories, and that volunteering with us will create lasting change.

Travelling to a new country can be a daunting experience, and this pack will ensure you arrive in South Africa ready and prepared for your volunteering placement and adventure.

If you still have questions after you have read this guide then please contact us by email at info@daktaribushschool.org

Our objectives

DAKTARI Bush School & Wildlife Orphanage is a registered non-profit organisation located in the Limpopo Province, close to the town of Hoedspruit in South Africa.

The children of today are going to be nature's future custodians. We focus on our local underprivileged children, and we believe the key to protection of the environment lies in education. It is a sad fact that many of the underprivileged rural schoolchildren have never had the opportunity to see indigenous wildlife, which is their heritage.

The objective of Daktari is to be self-sustainable with the help of paying volunteers and corporate or private donations.

The mission of Daktari is to inspire, motivate, develop and educate underprivileged children to care for the environment through the medium of a wildlife orphanage.

General information

Geography

South Africa occupies the southern most part of the African continent, with the Atlantic and Indian Oceans forming natural borders. Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique are the neighbouring countries, while Lesotho and Swaziland are two land-locked countries within the borders of South Africa. There are 9 provinces in South Africa, as detailed in the map below.

Languages

South Africa has 11 official languages, of which the following are the majority: English, Xhosa, Zulu and Afrikaans. Most of the children at Daktari speak Northern Sotho (also known as sePedi).

Cultural awareness

South Africa is an increasingly modern country with many of its urban areas imitating first world cities anywhere in the world. The country's turbulent history and unique social development have resulted in a very diverse country, where first and third world live right next door to one another.

Even if you have travelled in Africa before, bear in mind that you will experience aspects of daily life that are very different to being at home. Some things do take a lot longer to achieve here than most foreigners are used to. This can cause difficulties, distress and frustrations on both sides if not acknowledged. "Africa time" can be very frustrating for those who are used to a more structured way of life.

Electricity

220/240 volts, three-pin round plugs are in use, UK adaptors are available at most airports.

Time difference?
The time difference is GMT + 02:00 hours.

Telephone
The South Africa country code is +27.

Money
Most retailers in South Africa accept both credit cards and debit cards. Mastercard and Visa are the two most well known cards. Daktari does not have credit cards facilities. There are a few ATM's in Hoedspruit, which usually take all credit cards.

Traveller's cheques can be changed around town, but we don't recommend it because sometimes the banks here charge you to change them, even though you have paid already and it takes a very long time to do the transaction.

You can also change foreign currency at the banks or at the bureau de change in Hoedspruit. We advise you to wait to be with Daktari's team if you need to draw cash at the ATM. Like anywhere in the world, fraud and abuse toward Credit cards have been recorded. Inform your bank that you will be travelling to South Africa and give them your contact details in the country so they can call you if they notice any suspicious transactions. Check your bank account regularly when travelling so you can notice quickly if your credit card has been copied.

The official currency is the Rand. The exchange is approximately:

100 Rand = ± 10 Euro
100 Rand = ± 12 GBP

The volunteer fee includes food, coffee, tea, water and juice at Daktari. You have the option to pay extra for soda or alcoholic drinks.

To give you an idea about costs in Hoedspruit, some examples:

- Meal in restaurant approx. R50
- Water R12
- Beer R12
- Internet cafes R1 per minute

Mobiles

International roaming exists with major networks and there is coverage throughout most of South Africa. We have a cell-phone booster in the office that boosts our signal so you can make and receive phone calls. We recommend purchasing a Vodacom SIM card if you want a local phone. Local SIM cards are very cheap, they only cost around 5 Rand. (They may overcharge in the Johannesburg airport – do not pay more than 1-10 Rand!)

How do I keep in touch with home? Can I use the Internet?

We recommend setting up a Skype account before you arrive, and if possible putting Skype credit into your account. We have computers with headsets and microphones for placing Skype calls, which is much cheaper than any other option for international calls.

We charge R .70 cents per minute to use the internet, computers are available during free time after lunch and in the evenings after office hours.

You can also receive calls on Daktari's phone. (+ 27 82 656 2969) In **emergencies only** you can ask for permission to call out. It costs R 3.50 per minute for a national call. (30 s is also R 3.50) + the normal Telkom international rate. Please note that "World Call" cards do not work on the cell phone – you still have to pay for the local cell phone rate per minute!

The best times to be called are between 09H00 – 09H30, 12H00 – 14H00, or 18H00-20H30.

We are very sorry but at this stage we aren't able to give you the privacy you might need when receiving private phone calls, as the phone only works in the vicinity of the office.

How do I keep safe?

South Africa is not a safe country. However, Daktari is out in the bush and far from other people. It takes one hour to drive to Hoedspruit, and it is a very safe destination. (You should be more concerned about animals like snakes and scorpions!)

If you go anywhere else in South Africa, do not drop your guard. Remember those rules from back home - do not walk alone at night down a dark street, don't accept lifts from strangers, and take care of your belongings.

Although South African people are very friendly, we advise you not to trust anybody and always think about your safety.

Johannesburg Airport

When you arrive in the Johannesburg airport, some people will offer you their service to carry your luggage to the domestic airport, which is in the same building as the international airport. If you do want this service, only accept it from someone with an official airport jacket, as the airport has hired them for this purpose.

They might ask for an excessive payment for this service and you shouldn't give more than R 20 (2 euros or 1.25 GBP)

What's the weather going to be like?

Usually the weather at Daktari is very warm. In the summer it can get up to 45 degrees. In winter it is warm during the day (26 degrees), but nights can be cold (1 degree).

Summer is from October to April and winter is from May to September

Preparations

Flights

The sooner you book your flight the better the price, especially at peak times.

How can I get from Johannesburg to Hoedspruit?

- By plane, see the link http://www.flysaa.com or contact Dian Van Zyl dvanzyl@flysax.com

- Rent a car, contact Robyn Gilbert by email robyn@trophytoyota.com to get a special price (mention you are going to Daktari)

- Shuttle service. You can contact Livingstone Transfers livingstonetransfers@vectorbb.co.za or Ashtons reservations@ashtonstours.com

In general the Public transport is not recommended to overseas visitors.

Arrival day

All arrivals and departures at Daktari are on a Saturday. We pick you up at Hoedspruit airport or in town if it's more convenient for you. If you want to arrive a Friday or a Sunday, Daktari can arrange a private transfer for you (It will cost around R 600). If you can't find a plane to arrive a Saturday, then try to arrive a Friday and spend a night in Hoedspruit. It's always better to sleep in Hoedspruit than in Johannesburg. You can contact Robyn at mailto:robyn@trophytoyota.com for a quotation on transfer and/or accommodation.

Passport

Check if your passport is valid for your trip. You will automatically be given a 3-month tourist visa upon arrival at the Johannesburg Airport. If you need to stay longer with us, you have to apply for a volunteer visa in your home country. You can check this link for more information http://www.southafricahouse.com/Consulate/FVis_vol.htm

Travel insurance

It is very important that you have travel insurance. We will ask for a copy of your insurance policy with their 24h/24h contact details when you arrive at Daktari.

Vaccinations

You do not need any vaccinations, but we recommend taking an anti-malaria treatment. Contact your doctor for advice and/or see website www.malaria.org.za

One month before departure date:

Check your packing list and buy what you need to take with you.

Photocopy important documents, passport, insurance documents etc.

Be sure you have a valid credit card with you so that you can withdraw money from cash machines.

Make sure everyone that you wish to keep in contact with has an e-mail address for you and that they all know your travel plans. You can also give them Daktari's address:

DAKTARI Bush School & Wildlife Orphanage
P.O. Box 1599
Hoedspruit 1380
SOUTH AFRICA
Tel +27 (0)82 656 2969
Web page: www.daktaribushschool.org
Email: info@daktaribushschool.org

PACKING LIST

Don't forget:

- Copy of your passport
- A copy of any prescriptions / your spectacle prescription
- Medical card
- Copy of your insurance
- Your home contact information

Clothing

You should pack for generally warm weather so you will need a hat, sunglasses, and high factor sun lotion. You should also bring a warm fleece jacket, because it can get very cold at night. You will be working with animals or building camps, so please don't bring your best clothes!

- Sandals or flip flops (whatever you are used to)
- Walking shoes or trainers, you'll need these for doing the bushwalks
- At least one pair of long trousers / jeans
- Shorts/skirt
- Long sleeve shirt / t- shirts to protect you at night

You will receive 2 Daktari T-shirt upon arrival, (for a stay of minimum two weeks) which we ask you to wear during the week while the children are here. Laundry will be done 3-4 times a week (for free), so you do not need to bring too much clothing. We request that you wear kaki, beige or brown clothes with your Daktari shirt; jeans are also fine.

Accessories

- Mosquito net for single bed
- Camera you'll want tons of memories and we'd like to see your pictures too
- Bring an extra memory card, USB-stick or external hard-drive to put your pictures on
- A head lamp (highly recommended).
- Books
- Batteries – can be bought locally
- Your mobile phone – you can buy a local SIM-card if you want
- A travel adapter plug - if you have electrical goods
- Music
- Pocket knife

Health

- Personal prescription – bring enough with you
- Painkillers
- Small selection of plasters
- If you have contact lenses, bring extra pairs and enough solution

Personal Hygiene

You can get most of your cheap toiletries in Hoedspruit, however we would advise you to bring enough medicines with you, if you need them.

- Mosquito repellent
- Mosquito bite stick
- Shampoo
- Deodorant
- Sunscreen
- Toothbrush
- Toothpaste
- Scissors – or get a good pen knife
- Razors
- Shaving gel / oil
- Hairbrush
- Female hygiene products

If you have extra room in your suitcase…

We could always use these extra things for the program!

- Whiteboard (Dry-Erase) Markers
- Batteries: AA and AAA or rechargeable batteries
- Sponges for tables/dishes
- Dish-cloths
- Insect repellent
- Sweets
- Mosquito nets
- Soap, shower gel, toothbrush and toothpaste, feminine hygiene products.
- Towels for the children
- Wildlife Magazines or Nature Magazines for the Eco Club children to read and learn from
- Stationary for the Eco Club children
- Any easy educational game
- Any easy puzzles
- Card games
- Any little present that the children will win when we play games, such as :
    - Sample perfume (given usually when you buy perfume)
    - Any cosmetics
    - Any small cosmetic bag or accessories for girls
    - Any hygene stuff like small soap, tooth brush, body lotion etc...
    - Any kitsch toy (it must be cheap as we don't want to give expensive presents)
    - Cheap watches

  We often have more prizes for girls than boys, so be creative for boys!

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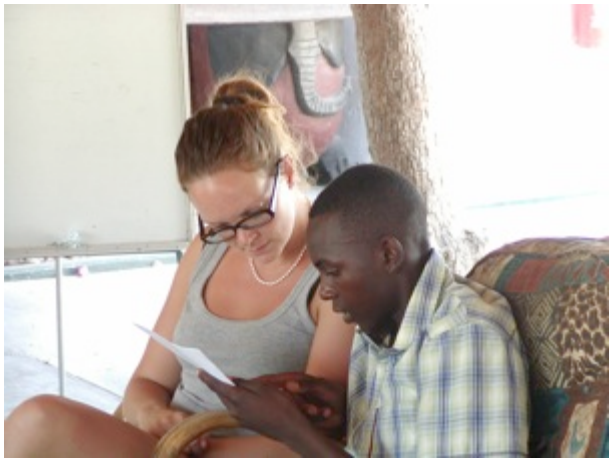
What will I be doing at Daktari?



Each week we invite children from the local underprivileged school or local HIV+/AIDS Orphanage to stay at Daktari. We take between eight-ten at a time, which provides a unique opportunity for them to benefit from a more individual learning experience. As all the children come from underprivileged backgrounds we only charge them a minimal fee of R 20 (2 euros) for their stay.

You will be teaching these children. We believe that education is the only way to a better future, and therefore we have developed an educational program with special focus on the environment and wildlife. We have included lessons in English, Maths, Biology, Geography and also life skills about relationships, substance abuse, safe sex, violence and respecting your environment.

Many of these children have not had the opportunity to learn about wildlife and therefore we encourage interaction with wild animals in order to stimulate a sense of responsibility for their heritage.

A very important aspect of Daktari is the wildlife orphanage. We care for animals that are hurt, orphaned or too tame to be rehabilitated into the wild. We provide them with good facilities, care and love. They also serve as a great education medium for the children who assist in the daily care, cleaning and feeding of these animals.

A Day in the Life of a Daktari Volunteer

When people consider taking part in a volunteer project overseas, many imagine sleeping in the most basic of accommodation and eating next to nothing. Upon arrival at Daktari, you begin to realise that this is not the case! The day starts at 7am with coffee or tea, and then we all go on a dog walk with the children. These kids come from a school in the local village and stay with us at Daktari for five days. During their time here, they learn a variety of lessons that will help them in their future. After the morning dog walk, there are many animal related chores to be done, like cleaning the animal camps and preparing food for some of the animals. These jobs are done by the volunteers and the children, who rotate jobs daily. After these jobs are completed, we have breakfast.

When breakfast is finished we start the daily teaching programme. This consists of two lessons before lunch and two after. One or two volunteers lead each lesson, but many 1-to-1 sessions are included to help the children with subjects that they find most difficult. Once morning lessons are finished, we eat lunch and then the kids like to go swimming. One volunteer is required for 'lifeguard duty' but others can have some free time or swim with the kids is they want to.

After the swimming session, the kids get changed and then afternoon lessons start. Again, these lessons are led by a volunteer but other helpers will be needed in most lessons to give extra assistance to the children who find a subject difficult. When lessons have finished, the children and volunteers take the dogs for another walk and then some children help with the feeding of the animals. All of the meat-eating animals are fed in the afternoons and the children tend to be fascinated by watching them eat! Other children and volunteers use this time to visit the leopard or do enrichment with the animals to help keep their lives interesting.

Before dinner, the volunteers lead social talks with the children. These are informal discussions that address common issues that affect the children in their everyday lives. These include talks about respecting the environment, drug abuse, and safe sex. After the social talk we all eat dinner. Then, after dinner, we play an educational game with the children before they go to bed. We have games like pictionary and maths bingo, which the kids all love to play. The winners from the games win a prize from the prize box. All of the kids win at least one prize during the week and are all very excited to see what they will win! On Wednesday evening we watch The Lion King with the children. It is fun for the kids to watch a movie, and it also brings up issues of conservation and the circle of life, which we discuss Thursday morning after breakfast. Once the game or movie has finished, the kids go to bed. After this, we sometimes play a few games of cards with the other volunteers, socialise, or have an early night, ready to do it all again tomorrow!

Occasionally we have to stop the teaching programme because there is something very important to do or to share with the children such as seeing a lion on the next door farm, saving an animal, helping the vet etc. It is so exciting to get into action!!!

It is tiring but very rewarding to volunteer at Daktari. Although the days are long, it is great to be able to have such an impact on less priveleged children and to make their week as enjoyable as possible. From shy, quiet children on day one, the kids leave feeling confident and ready to get home and tell their family and friends about the amazing time they had at Daktari.

Why is Daktari necessary?

South Africa's large under-privileged population results in overcrowding of schools, where individual classes sometimes exceed 160 children per class. This results in many children not even being able to understand the basics of education.

Continual abuse of the environment is fundamentally caused by people who do not know or understand how essential the environment is for our own survival. Most children throughout the world live in villages, towns, or cities where the indigenous wildlife has for many years been eliminated. Although the wildlife is their heritage, many do not ever have the means or opportunity to even see a giraffe.

Human encroachment has drastically reduced the amount of suitable habitat for wild animals. Many baby animals are hand-raised by caring people, but when the animals reach maturity they usually come to a bad end. These animals either become dangerous, having lost their natural fear of humans, or get killed by coming too close to unfriendly humans. There are very few safe habitats left for these animals. Daktari puts these two things together and uses these orphaned animals to educate children about their environment.

Who benefits?

The children benefit from having a hands-on education supplement. Daktari works with the local schools to work with all of their children in Grade 8 (usually 13-16 year olds). Our educational programme has been built with the local teachers so that we can supplement their work and help on the subjects where the pupils have the most difficulties. Having only a few children at a time, we can really make a difference by giving them personal education and general skills of life to help them in their future.

The orphaned animals benefit from having suitable care and accommodation. Many cases cause sadness, and not all survive. However, knowing that both volunteers and children did their best, and have given them at least a slim chance, makes it easier to bear.

The local community benefits from their children being better educated.

The environment benefits from more people caring and understanding it and its importance in our future.

The nation benefits from having a progressive supplementary education facility, a different tourist attraction, extra job opportunities, and insight into future careers such as eco-tourism, hotel and catering etc. Daktari is unique in its concept.

The international community benefits from being able to participate in a life enriching experience either as a volunteer or traveller.

International organisations benefit by being able to show they care for under-privileged people and the environment by sponsoring groups or projects.

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Background of the South African children

- Rural South African children have been living in villages, usually far from towns. Their facilities are very limited, with few schools and clinics. They have had no electricity in the past, and most of them have to walk considerable distances for water.

- There are large numbers of people living in these rural areas and there is limited funding available to uplift them. The biggest problem is finding funds for these improvements.
- There has been an improvement of roads, schools and clinics for many years, even long before apartheid was abolished, and although slow, progress has been made. The new Government has accelerated this progression of improving their lives, but it will take many years.
- Most villages have schools, clinics and now electricity. Most still have no running water or sanitation available at the houses. The population is rapidly growing, with families having an average of 8 children per household.
- The existing schools are overcrowded, with up to 160 children per class.
- Wild animals in or near the villages have been eliminated for many generations by persistent hunting. Traditionally the men will hunt for food, and the children are brought up to believe that any wild animal should be killed. Many animals are also killed for traditional medicine and beliefs in magic.

These Children's Problems

- Many children have never had the opportunity to see the natural wild animals that are their heritage.
- Because of the large number of people living in the villages, employment, health and education is of a very low standard. There are too many people to be supported by too few.
- Because of the overcrowded classes, the children don't get the education they could in smaller classes. It is hard to stay concentrated in a big crowd, so the children are sometimes 'switched off' during school time. Many have not grasped the very basics of education.
- Because education is poor, many of these children await a future of unemployment.
- Because complacency has been a way of life for generations it is difficult to get the children motivated enough to plan their future.

Why do they need education?

- By educating the children about nature conservation and animal welfare, we can give them the chance to make a difference.
- By educating these children about social behaviour, life skills and communication, we give these children more self-confidence and awareness of the opportunities in life.
- Education enables people to make informed decisions in life.

Why is it so important to take them into the bush?

The environment is their heritage. It is important for our future generations to understand the vital necessity of looking after nature.

- Interaction with the environment is the best tool for education.
- It is easier to learn something and to remember when you see, touch, feel, smell and taste it. By being educated in the bush the children have the opportunity to use all their senses.
- It is easier to inspire compassion and care for animals when they see and interact with them.
- They have no experience of the natural environment and by having this experience they can pass on their knowledge to the next generations.
- The education they receive at Daktari should assist them in obtaining gainful employment either in conservation or tourism.

Background of African Animals

Africa has a huge diversity of wildlife and ecosystems but much of this has been destroyed by human encroachment. Hunting and poaching have also played a big role in the diminishing numbers of animals, and added to this is the continual killing for traditional medicines. The only reason why some animals are alive today is because they are protected in private and national game reserves.

Wildlife in the rural and agricultural areas has been eliminated for many years, and very few have survived or adapted to the cities and farms. Every species has a role to play in the world's eco-system. Removal of any species threatens the survival of others that depend upon it. Eventual destruction of the animals and habit could result in the destruction of humans themselves.

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Orphaned Animals

Most animals are shy and have associated humans with destruction. As a result many animals, although they exist, are rarely seen. Orphaned wild animals have been habituated to humans, and although cannot be released, can be seen and experienced by the children.

Whilst humans care for humans who are maimed or injured, very few care for animals in the same condition. At the orphanage, animals can at least have a life, and at the same time play a role in education.

Orphaned animals also play a role in providing necessary research that will enable us to understand their needs for survival in the wild. This information is freely available to assist those who have wildlife sanctuaries. Orphaned animals instil compassion in people who interact with them. Only by caring will people understand them and look after them.

Help the animals by educating people

If people are educated, they will understand the spiritual and vital importance of our environment. If we can provide education to children, the animals will benefit in the future.

How does Daktari survive?

- Volunteer Projects
- Donations through people who believe in our cause.
- "Sponsor an animal project"
- Sponsorship from corporate companies
- "Virtual Gifts" an alternative gift for those who have it all

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What else can I do around Daktari?

- Game Drives in Big Five game reserve: Between R 200 and R 500 per person
- Hot Air Ballooning: About R 2300 (includes champagne and a breakfast)
- Blyde River Canyon: Can be done by yourself with a hired car. It’s about 1H30 from Daktari. If you leave in the early morning you can spend the whole day looking at the beautiful landscape of the canyon. There are a few places with entrance fee, but it's only around R 30 per person!
- The Snake Park (R 70 per pers)
- Mohololoholo Rehabilitation Centre (R 110 per pers)
- Horse Riding (R 200 four 1H30)
- Elephant Back Safari (R 900 per pers)
- The Kruger National Park (entrance fee per day : R 180 per pers)
- Boat Cruise on the Blyde Canyon Dam : R 90 per pers (about 2 hours)
- Boat Cruise on the Olifant River along the Kruger Park: between R 75 and R 100 per pers... It depend how many people you are the same day.
- Game walk at Tshukudu Game Reserve with a tame young lion, including a nice breakfast: Around R 300 per pers. (it's at about 1h15m from Daktari, you have to be there at 6H30 in the morning, and it needs to be booked)
- White Water Rafting : Around R 950 for the whole day
- Micro Light Flight : Around R 500 for 20 mn

Full information of the local activities around Daktari can be gained on arrival.

RISK ASSESSMENT FOR SOUTH AFRICA

We have a duty of care to all our volunteers and this guide has been developed to ensure that we follow these guidelines.

Essentially, it is necessary to consider and document the hazards, determine the level of risk associated with these hazards, itemize procedures taken to minimize/control the risks, consider the level of risk after instigating control measures, and determine the nature of any further action needed.

Level of Risk: The level of risk is usually categorized as “Low”, “Medium” or “High” in each section.

HEALTH

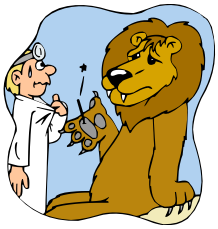
Risk: LOW

Nothing can spoil a holiday more than feeling off-colour, and nothing can dull the pleasure of your holiday memories more than getting ill far from home. There are a number of health issues that you should be aware of, particularly if you're from the northern hemisphere.
However, while there are risks anywhere, South Africa has a relatively salubrious climate and our levels of water treatment, hygiene and such make it a pretty safe destination.

Inoculations

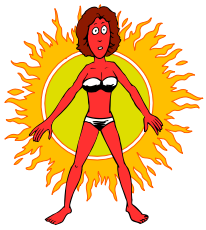
If you're an adult, you won't need any inoculations unless you're travelling from a yellow-fever endemic area (the yellow fever belt of Africa or South America), in which case you will need certification to prove your inoculation status when you arrive in South Africa. It is recommended that you have the required inoculations four to six weeks before you travel to South Africa (a yellow fever inoculation certificate only becomes valid 10 days after inoculation - after which it remains valid for 10 years).
Hepatitis B inoculations are recommended for children up to the age of 12 who have not completed the series of injections as infants. Booster doses for tetanus and measles can also be administered.

Medical facilities



Medical facilities in cities and larger towns are world-class, but you will find that in rural areas the clinics and hospitals deal with primary health needs, and therefore do not offer the range of medical care that the large metropolitan hospitals do. Trained medical caregivers are deployed round the country, so help is never far away. Hoesdpruit has a doctor’s office and a military hospital, and the next private clinic is in Tzaneen, which is about 90 kms from Daktari.

The sun



We have a warm sunny climate and you should wear sunscreen and a hat whenever you are out of doors during the day, particularly between 10am and 4pm, regardless of whether there is cloud cover or not. Even if you have a dark complexion, you can still get sunburned if you are from a cooler climate and have not had much exposure to the sun. Sunglasses are also recommended wear, as the glare of the African sun can be strong.

Do I need to take malaria tablets?

Many of the main tourist areas are malaria-free, so you need not worry at all. However, the Kruger National Park, the Lowveld of Mpumalanga and Limpopo, and the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal do pose a malaria risk in the summer months. Many local people and some travellers do not take malaria prophylaxis, but most health professionals recommend you do. Consult your doctor or a specialist travel clinic for the latest advice concerning malaria prophylaxis, as it changes regularly.
Whether you take oral prophylaxis or not, always use mosquito repellent, wear long pants, closed shoes and light long-sleeved shirts at night, and sleep under a mosquito net in endemic areas (the anopheles mosquito, which carries malaria, operates almost exclusively after dark). It is advisable to avoid malarial areas if you are pregnant.
More information: Netcare Travel Clinics: Malaria (www.travelclinic.co.za)

HIV/Aids

As in other countries, always take precautions when having sex. South Africa has one of the highest rates of HIV in the world.

Other health issues

Bilharzias can be a problem in some of the east-flowing rivers, but it is easily detected and treated if it is caught early. Perhaps it would be a good idea to have a routine test a month or two after you get home - just to reassure yourself. Ticks generally come out in the early spring and may carry tickbite fever, which is easily treated. You should also be aware of hepatitis, for which you can be inoculated.

What happens if a volunteer gets sick?

You will be taken to and checked by an English speaking doctor in Hoedspruit. Based upon his assessment with our project manager a decision will be made as to the next steps to take to ensure the volunteers heath and well being. This may include;

1 Provision of medicine and rest
2 Further medical checks
3 Being admitted to a local hospital
4 In serious cases working with your insurance provider with regards to repatriating the individual.

CLIMATE

RISK: LOW

A subtropical location, moderated by ocean on three sides of the country and the altitude of the interior plateau, account for the warm temperate conditions so typical of South Africa - and so popular with its foreign visitors.
South Africa is famous for its sunshine. It's a relatively dry country, with an average annual rainfall of about 464mm (compared to a world average of about 860mm). While the Western Cape gets most of its rainfall in winter, the rest of the country is generally a summer-rainfall region.
At the same time, temperatures in South Africa tend to be lower than in other countries at similar latitudes - such as Australia - due mainly to greater elevation above sea level.
On the interior plateau the altitude - Johannesburg lies at 1 694 metres - keeps the average summer temperatures below 30 degrees Celsius. In winter, for the same reason, night-time temperatures can drop to freezing point, in some places lower.
South Africa's coastal regions are therefore warmest in winter. There is, however, a striking contrast between temperatures on the country's east and west coasts, due respectively to the warm Agulhas and cold Benguela Currents that sweep the coastlines.
Being in the southern hemisphere, our seasons stand in opposition to those of Europe and North America, so, yes - we spend Christmas on the beach!

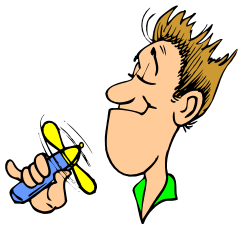
Summer

Over much of South Africa, summer (mid-October to mid-February) is characterised by hot, sunny weather - often with afternoon thunderstorms that clear quickly, leaving a warm, earthy, uniquely African smell in the air.
The Western Cape, with its Mediterranean climate, is the exception, getting its rain in winter.

Autumn

Autumn (fall) in South Africa (mid-February to April) offers in some ways the best weather. Very little rain falls over the whole country, and it is warm but not too hot, getting colder as the season progresses.
In Cape Town, autumn is fantastic, with hot sunny days and warm, balmy nights which many people spend at outdoor cafés.

Winter



Winter in South Africa (May to July) is characterised in the higher-lying areas of the interior plateau by dry, sunny, crisp days and cold nights. So it's a good idea to bring warm clothes.
The hot, humid KwaZulu-Natal coast, as well as the Lowveld (lower-lying areas) of Mpumalanga and Limpopo provinces, offer fantastic winter weather with sunny, warmish days and virtually no wind or rain.
The Western Cape gets most of its rain in winter, with quite a few days of cloudy, rainy weather. However, these are always interspersed with wonderful days to rival the best of a British summer.
The high mountains of the Cape and the Drakensberg in KwaZulu-Natal usually get snow in winter.

Spring

Nowhere in South Africa is spring (August to mid-October) more spectacular than in the Cape provinces. Here the grey winter is forgotten as thousands of small, otherwise insignificant plants cover the plains in an iridescent carpet of flowers.
The journey to see the flowers of the Namaqualand in the Western and Northern Cape is an annual pilgrimage for many South Africans.

Best time of the year to travel?

That depends on what you want to do. The flowers are obviously best in August and September. The best time for game viewing is late spring (September and October). The southern right whales hang around off our coasts from about mid-June to the end of October.
The diving is best in most of the country outside of summer (ie, from April through September), and so is the surfing - but that certainly doesn't limit either activity to those times.
River rafting is better in the Cape at the end of winter, and in KwaZulu-Natal in the height of summer (late November to mid-February). In Mpumalanga and Limpopo, it's less time-dependent.
The "shoulder" seasons - spring and autumn - are best for hiking, as summer can be hot over most of the country. In the Drakensberg, summer thunderstorms are dangerous, while there is a good chance of snow in winter. In the Cape, the winters are wet, so hiking can be a bit hardcore.
If you're a birder, the palaeoarctic migrants arrive around November and the intra-African migrants usually by mid-October.
Of course, if you want to lounge around on the beach, mid-summer is the best time - though everyone else will be there too. And - big bonus - the beaches of northern KwaZulu-Natal are warm and sunny even in midwinter.

Food/Drink/Hygiene

Can I drink the water? RISK: MEDIUM

High-quality tap (faucet) water is available almost everywhere in South Africa, treated so as to be free of harmful micro-organisms, and in any area other than informal or shack settlements, is both palatable and safe to drink straight from the tap. In some areas, the water is mineral-rich, and you may experience a bit of gastric distress for a day or two until you get used to it. Bottled mineral water, both sparkling and still, is readily available in most places.
Drinking water straight from rivers and streams could put you at risk of waterborne diseases - especially downstream of human settlements. The water in mountain streams, however, is usually pure and wonderful. In the Cape, particularly, the water contains humic acid, which stains it the colour of diluted Coca-Cola - this is absolutely harmless, and the water is wonderful. You may also find this colouring in tap water in some areas. It's fine - it just looks a bit weird in the bath.

South African cuisine RISK : LOW

For the more daring diner, South Africa offers culinary challenges from crocodile sirloins to fried caterpillars to sheep heads. All three are reputed to be delicious. For the not-quite so brave, there are myriad indigenous delicacies such as biltong (dried, salted meat), bobotie (a much-improved version of Shepherd's pie) and boerewors (hand-made farm sausages, grilled on an open flame).

Those who prefer to play it altogether safe will find that most eateries offer a familiar global menu - anything from hamburgers to sushi to pad thai to spaghetti bolognaise. And you can drink the water.

South African wine RISK: LOW

South African wines are among the best in the world, and with the top estates located in the scenic Cape, wine tourism represents one of the country's growth industries.

Transportation

RISK: MEDIUM

From OR Tambo International Airport, you will catch another flight to Hoedspruit Eastgate airport. The booking can be made through www.flysaa.com or directly through Dina Van Zyl dvanzyl@flysax.com

There are buses 3 times a week that can be booked, from South Africa, through www.translux.co.za We do not recommend this transportation as the main station is in the centre of JHB and not reputed to be very safe.
You can also contact Livingstone Transfers livingstonetransfers@vectorbb.co.za or Ashtons reservations@ashtonstours.com who have a shuttle service

You can also hire a car at the airport and drive to Hoedspruit. Contact us to get the directions from Johannesburg to Daktari. You can hire a car through Trophy Motors to receive a volunteer rate: reservations@trophytoyota.com

In general the Public transport is not recommended to overseas visitors.

Crime/Security

RISK: MEDIUM

Crime in the Limpopo Province is very low and like anywhere else in the world, can be a problem, but you really need not do much more than take all the usual sensible precautions. Know where you're going before you set off, particularly at night, watch your possessions, don't walk alone in dodgy areas, and lock your doors at night. And, like anywhere else in the world, there are some areas of major cities that are more dodgy than others. It is easy to avoid these and still have a good time.

When walking through areas that are considered risky, avoid wearing visible jewellery or carrying cameras and bags over your shoulder. Keep cell phones (mobile phones) and wallets tucked away where no one can see them. Check beforehand that the areas you plan to visit are safe by asking hotel staff or police. It is not advisable to use local commuter and metro trains as attacks on foreigners have occurred.

Other sensible advice is not to hitchhike, not to accept or carry items for strangers and not follow people or accept invitations from people you don't know.

Carjackings

Those who choose to drive private cars, either borrowed or hired, should be aware that car hijackings do occur, although precautions can be taken to avoid this. Drivers should always be on the alert when they come to a halt at traffic lights or stop streets, as well as when they are arriving at or leaving premises. Doors should be locked at all times, and while the temptation is to keep windows open in sunny weather, they should be kept closed. Plan your travel route beforehand. Make sure that you do not leave valuables in clear view of people on the side of the road. Articles such as cellular phones and handbags, laptops left on seats are favoured targets of smash'n'grab thieves.
When parking at night choose well-lit or security-patrolled parking areas. Street security guards will usually ask whether they can watch over your car and in return should be paid a small fee – anything from 2 Rands upwards.

ATMs and con artists

Watch out for con artists. A favoured target is the automated teller machine (ATM). **Under no circumstances** allow a stranger to assist you in your transaction. Should your card become stuck in the ATM, enter your PIN three times whereupon the machine will retain your card. You can then approach the bank to release it, or call the helpline number that can usually be found at ATMs for assistance. When possible ask Daktari's management to assist you when drawing cash at the ATM.
Check your bank account regularly while travelling to make sure your card hasn't been copied so you can stop further abuse. It is advised to inform your bank that you are travelling to South Africa so they can check on the authorisation request for any debit on your credit card. You should give them your telephone number so they can call you if they have suspicious transactions on your credit card account.

Beware, too, of confidence tricksters who try and persuade you to invest in their schemes, requiring you to disclose confidential banking details.

Lost passports

Should you lose your passport, report the loss as soon as possible to your country's embassy or consulate, and to the local police.
Make sure you bring a copy of your passport for us to have here at Daktari, and/or leave one at home so it can be sent to you.

Working overseas

RISK : LOW

Volunteers are required to take out a travel insurance that will cover them during their volunteer experience travel. A copy of your insurance policy and their contact details will be asked at your arrival.

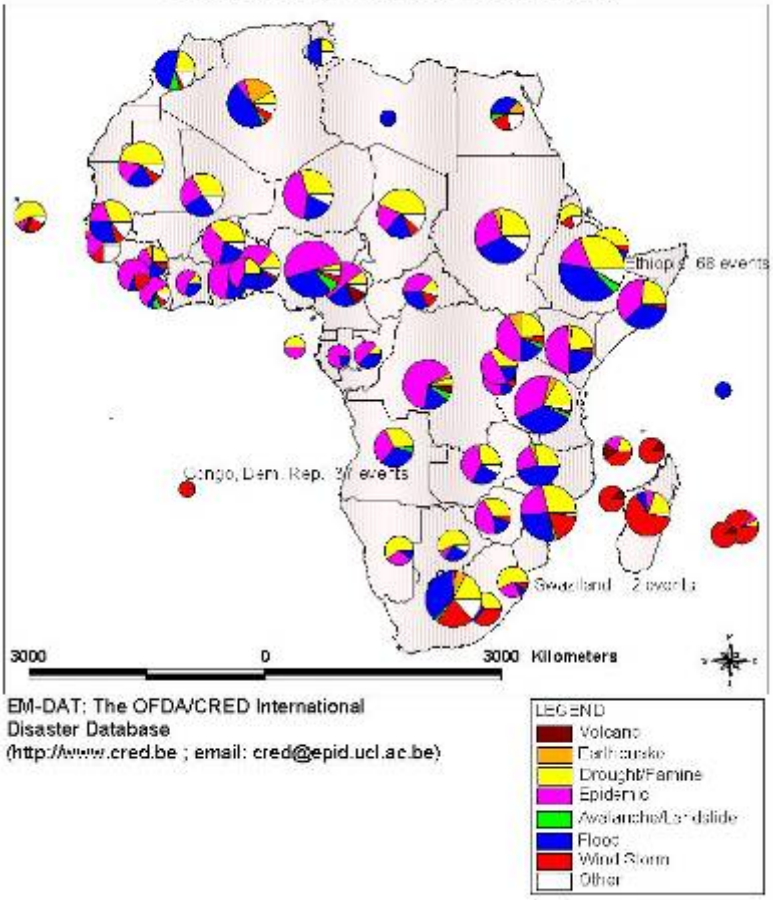
Volunteers should NOT undertake any risky work such as major building, catching snakes or wild animals, and should NEVER walk alone in the bush.

Risk of natural disaster

RISK: LOW

The area does not have a history of natural disasters.

Distribution of natural disasters, by country and type of phenomena, in Africa (1975-2001)



EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database
(http://www.cred.be ; email: cred@epid.ucl.ac.be)

DAKTARI
Bush School & Wildlife Orphanage

Political risk

RISK: LOW

The history of South Africa's electoral politics dates back to the mid-19th century. Historical familiarity with electoral procedures and the development of a strong party system helps to strengthen modern electoral politics.
General elections under universal suffrage have been held without any troubles. Good electoral administration has included a strong commitment to conflict mediation procedures, using the skills generated through trade union-based collective bargaining in earlier decades. Electoral reform to enhance parliamentary accountability constitutes the main policy challenge in this sphere today.

Terrorist / security risk

RISK: LOW

There is no recent threat from internal or external terrorist in the Limpopo Province.

Local Laws / Customs

RISK: LOW

Stay out of jail!

Bear in mind that committing a criminal offence in any foreign country is always more of a problem than doing so at home. You're probably not planning to, but there are a few actions which could land you in one of our not-too-luxurious jails. These include smuggling, bilking, and trading in, or using, recreational drugs – with the exception of tobacco and alcohol. Poaching is probably far from your mind but, just in case you're tempted to "harvest" a rhino horn as a souvenir, remember our game scouts are armed.

Specific Local Laws

The local laws are very similar to those elsewhere in terms of drugs, discrimination, religion etc. (but perhaps not as rigorously enforced in some places)

If a volunteer is arrested we will work with the local consular staff accordingly.

Overall Current Risk Assessment

OVERALL RISK: LOW

Emergency Procedure

In an emergency all volunteers will be evacuated by the safest way, to an area or country that has been assessed as been safe by the embassy of the volunteer's country. They work with the local authorities, local consular staff and colleagues in Hoedspruit to ensure that all volunteers are safe at all times.

Last Updated September 2012