



**MAMMAL AND BIRDING TOUR SOUTH AFRICA:
AARDVARK AND OTHER UNUSUAL DENIZENS OF
THE KALAHARI
TOUR-SPECIFIC INFORMATION**



*The Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park is one of the best places to find **Brown Hyena**.*

TOUR OUTLINE

The purpose of this short tour is to highlight the wildlife of the South African Kalahari, with emphasis on seeing some of its secretive mammals. We will also enjoy the array of Kalahari birdlife and large-game-viewing opportunities on offer throughout this tour. Starting in Upington, we will journey to the iconic Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, one of South Africa's largest and best-known game parks where we will be based for four nights. Next, we will head to Marrick Safari Game Farm, a private game farm in the center of South Africa, near the city of Kimberley. Here we will enjoy night drives for such elusive Kalahari mammals as **Aardvark**, **Aardwolf**, **Black-footed Cat** and **Southern African Hedgehog**, and explore the plains and acacia savanna by day for a variety of bird species. After our three-night stay at Marrick, we will head to nearby Kimberley where the tour will end and from where we will fly out.

PACE OF TOUR

This is a relatively short tour, being just over a week long, and only includes two bases of operation: Kgalagadi and Marrick. As a result, the pace of this tour is moderate-to-easy, and not particularly strenuous, with a few long drives (only one major travel day) and no long hikes/walks throughout the tour. We will, however, have relatively early mornings most days (sunrise is at 6:30 at this time of year) to make the most of dawn birding time before the Kalahari heat sets in, and regular evening night drives.

Breakfast and lunch packs will be taken out most mornings for a picnic in the field, to make the most of the prime early morning birding time. These are simple but perfectly adequate. There may also be the odd opportunity for us to have the occasional sit-down breakfast and/or lunch. Dinners will be sit-down meals at our accommodation.

Night drives are a crucial aspect of this tour, as the secretive mammals we target on this tour are mostly nocturnal. We will do one night drive in Kgalagadi and two in Marrick. These night drives are quite long and can feel laborious, especially during the (often lengthy) periods without any mammal/bird sightings. However, it is imperative that we spend these long hours in the field to have a fair chance at finding some of the rarer mammal targets on this tour. Participants should therefore be prepared for this nocturnal endeavor. It can also get very cold on these night drives, so it is important to dress warmly for them.

WALKING AND STYLE OF BIRDING

Most of our mammal watching and birding on this tour is done by vehicle. In the Kgalagadi, we are restricted to our vehicle, except for designated areas (like rest camps and picnic sites). We will go on morning game drives in an open-top safari vehicle with game rangers from the park (pending availability). In the afternoon your guide may take you into the park with the tour van. In Marrick, we will go on two night drives, with the rest of the time either spent driving around in our tour van (including a day trip to Mokala National Park) or a mix of driving and walking around the property. Although there are no long hikes on this tour, we may include the odd afternoon walk around the rest camp/farmhouse where we'll be staying. The walking is considered easy, with only short walks of one mile (1.6 kilometers) envisaged.

LENGTH OF DRIVES

We will have one travel day when we drive from Kgalagadi to Marrick, which is about a six-and-a-half-hour drive (without factoring in stops). The drive from Upington to Kgalagadi on our first day is about two and a half hours, but these are the only long drives done on this tour.

SAFETY

Throughout this tour we spend most of our time in game parks and nature reserves, away from large cities. These areas are popular tourist destinations and are deemed safe. However, please do not leave valuables in the unattended vehicle, particularly when stopping in towns. If you are unsure about the safety of an area, please ask your guide to clarify.

During our time in Kgalagadi, we will not be allowed to alight from our vehicle, except at rest camps, hides and picnic sites, as the park contains potentially dangerous wildlife. It is of utmost importance to adhere to the instruction of the game rangers who will be driving us around. Even while we are in Marrick, where we may walk around in the reserve, it is important to be mindful of the large herbivores roaming the property, and not to get too close to them, as they can be potentially dangerous as well.

HEALTH, PESTS AND DANGEROUS ANIMALS

There is no risk of malaria in western South Africa.

This region is very dry which means there are few pests to worry about. However, in case we walk through areas with long grass or dense bush, we advise wearing long pants and using tick repellent on your legs, socks and shoes as there could be ticks around. Ticks in South Africa fortunately do not carry Lyme disease, but a bite may lead to tick-bite fever. This is, however, a far less threatening disease with generally no long-lasting consequences.

We also advise not touching or petting any stray dogs in rural areas on the off chance that they are carrying rabies; though this is rare in South Africa.

There are also multiple snake and scorpion species that we may encounter on this tour, some of which are dangerous. Although this is by no means a deterrent for visiting and walking about, we advise that you be aware of them. Nonetheless, we will still be lucky to observe (from a safe distance) any snakes or scorpions on this tour.

***Note that dangerous animals (like Lions) and venomous snakes and scorpions etc., are all possible, and these are all discussed in greater detail under the “South Africa General Information” document.**

TRANSPORTATION

We will use a 14-seater minibus as the main tour vehicle, while for the game drives and night drives we will use an open-top safari vehicle, driven by a game ranger. We will follow a seat-rotation policy every day to ensure fair seating to everyone throughout the tour (your guide will explain further at the start of the tour). Our small group size ensures that everyone gets a window.

We will provide airport transfers to participants on the first and final days of the tour, which are included in the tour cost. Should you arrive in South Africa earlier than that or prolong your stay in South Africa after the tour, those transfers would be at your own expense. We will, however, help arrange transfers wherever they may be needed.

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS

There are no domestic flights included on this birding tour, though you will likely need to take domestic flights within South Africa to arrive at Upington at the start, and depart from Kimberley at the end. These are both small airports with limited flights and no international flights. Kindly speak to the Birding Ecotours office about the logistics of this.

ACCOMMODATION

In the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park we stay in a comfortable, 4-star lodge just outside the park entrance. At Marrick we stay in rustic, farm-style chalets on a game farm, that are a little more basic, but still very comfortable. Staying inside or near the park allows us to be in the field at optimal birding times, first thing in the morning and late afternoon.

It is important to note that South African buildings are not heated as effectively as they are in Europe or North America (often not heated at all), so we advise you to bring adequate warm clothing, particularly for sleeping.

ELECTRICITY

Lighting in rooms tends to be low wattage, so you might like to bring a good quality torch/flashlight if you like reading in bed!

It is good practice to bring international adapters, as many establishments are changing their plug outlets to better align with international clients, and this is an aspect we do not have direct control over.

WEATHER

Because this tour never leaves the Kalahari region, the climate across the whole tour should remain relatively constant with minimal fluctuations in temperature. Being a semi-desert habitat, it gets very hot and dry during the day (up to 88°F (31°C)) whilst at night the temperature can plummet to 41°F (5°C). For this reason, we recommend packing for hot and cold conditions, and emphasize packing warm clothes for sleeping. The chalets at Marrick are old and not well-insulated. It will also be of utmost importance to dress warmly for the night drives, as these are lengthy and we will be spending significant time out in the cold, atop open safari vehicles – which are not covered and you are exposed to the cold air directly. Rain is highly unlikely on this tour.

It is also worth remembering to bring a buff or scarf, as winds that blow across the plains can kick up a lot of dust.

WHAT TO BRING: CLOTHING AND OTHER ITEMS

Please see our blog on '[What to bring on a birding tour](#)' which will help you pack for this Kalahari mammal and birding tour.