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## *Project Big 5 and Community*

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Feel the heartbeat and rhythm of Africa at Project Big 5 and Community, which has quickly become one of the finest tourist destinations in the Eastern Cape wilderness. Project Big 5 and Community is a malaria free premier Game Reserve which is home to the famous Big Five of South Africa.

In addition to the king of the jungle, impressive leopards, magnificent rhinos, graceful elephants and mystic buffalo that make up the big five; a diverse abundance of antelope and other species such as giraffe, warthog and cheetah roam the plains of Project Big 5 and Community which will provide you with everlasting African memories.



Project Big 5 and Community's ethos is one of conservation and community support where volunteers get involved in the local Isipho Multi Purpose Center, Moreson Primary School and Sidbury Primary School and contribute by playing games, educating the children and partaking in several other fun educational activities. Volunteers also get involved with community clean ups and craft projects at the Craft Center.

### **Introduction to Project Big 5 and Community**

Project Big 5 and Community is actively managed as a protected area and successfully ran through a combination of the experienced owners, an exceptional team as well as professional external consultants.

Project Big 5 and Community is located in the Eastern Cape, an approximate one hour drive from Port Elizabeth. The area was once densely populated with wildlife, however diversity changed dramatically after the onset of intense animal hunting. The hunting was followed by farming practices which saw a clash of domestic and wild animal interests, and the systematic eradication of problematic animals. Substantial parts of the area are currently undergoing a transformation back to wildlife and nature-based land usage after two hundred years of various forms of domestic animal and agricultural farming.



Our region has '**Malaria free**' status, and is now nationally and internationally recognised as one of the major safari destinations.

## **Field Conditions**

During your placement, you will be out in the early morning, often straight into the bush to carry out the days' activities. You will be transported in an open land cruiser to and from the reserve. It is advised that you dress warmly as the wind-chill factor can be quite sharp during the early morning and late afternoon drives.



Weather Conditions in the Eastern Cape can vary from one extreme to the next and therefore has gained its name for having four seasons in a day. Expect refreshing mornings and evenings, with warm to hot conditions during the day, this is especially evident in the summer where 35 °C during the day is not an unfamiliar occurrence. Thunderstorms in the late afternoon are an identifying feature of the summer season, lip balm is highly recommended for those dry and windy days as well as a rainjacket for those unexpected rainfalls.

Preparation for bush survival and camping out require a warm sleeping bag and torch along with an optional travel pillow. Anti-tick spray, a penknife and warm sleeping-wear are optional items however they are recommended for a more enjoyable experience.

## **Project Big 5 and Community Volunteer Programme**

Project Big 5 and Community Volunteer Programme form part of the main veins behind the heartbeat of the Reserve Conservation. For those volunteers seeking an experience to explore a corner of Africa and all its inhabitants, Project Big 5 and Community will not disappoint. All aspects of conservation are addressed in your experience, no matter how short your time with us.

Project Big 5 and Community continuously monitoring and managing game throughout the year. As a Volunteer, you will assist behind the scenes of the reserve on various ongoing conservation and community projects.

The main focus for community is the Isipho Multi Purpose Centre for vulnerable children and those affected by HIV AIDS as well as Sidbury School and Moreson Primary School.

## **Projects:**



As a Volunteer, your responsibility is helping to manage all aspects on a game reserve including predators, all other animal species as well as maintenance. The Reserve is strictly hands-off which implies at no point will there be physical touching or 'petting' of the animals but rather monitoring behaviour and checking fence lines etc.

Community support is also an important aspect with regular visits to community projects. The rest of the day is filled with tasks and duties based around the project. You may also have the chance to assist



with many ongoing short and long term projects on the reserve. A list below provides the details of various projects both on going and experienced by past volunteers.

Reserve duties at any one time may change, which means no week at Project Big 5 and Community is the same.

### Community projects:

- Interacting with vulnerable children and children infected and affected by aids
- Interacting with children of Mōreson Primary School
- Assist with educational lessons at Sidbury Primary school
- Assist project Foundation in designated World Days namely Arbour Day, Water Day and World Read Aloud Day

### Ecology projects:

- Predator Tracking and monitoring using telemetry
- Herbivore monitoring
- Predator health and breeding monitoring
- Document the number of herbivore lambing
- Monitor Buffalo feeding behaviour



### Maintenance duties:

- Erosion control
- Fence patrol and maintenance
- Alien plant control
- Bush clearing and Road clearing
- Road maintenance
- Removal and documentation of old farm material on the reserve
- Monitoring and documenting water points on the reserve



### Seasonal & circumstantial based projects:

- Game capture, counts and monitoring
- Guided walks and trails through the reserve
- Nocturnal predator monitoring
- Darting and relocation
- Viewing Amakhala veterinary completing field work on animals
- Boma maintenance



### Future Projects for 2021:

- Providing basic pre-school education at the Isipho Multi Purpose Centre
- Get involved in active sport games at Isipho to aid children's health and fitness
- Assist project Foundation with future projects at Sidbury Primary School
- Assist with maintenance of Isipho Center's building.
- Renovation of the Isipho vegetable plot
- Bi-annual neutering of stray dogs and cats in and around the area.
- Wetland restoration
- Spekboom Project – Replanting spekboom on the Reserve and surrounding community properties

### Fun Activities:

- Bush camping and Star Gazing
- Bush Survival skills with Navigation and Compass Orientation included
- 4-Star Lodge Experience
- Game drives
- Visit Addo Elephant Park
- Visit Born Free Foundation
- Horse riding on the reserve
- Canoeing
- Fishing for exotics
- Volunteer diary for our website
- Rent a vehicle and explore surrounding areas



- Enjoy swimming pool at Volunteer house
- Relax at the local pub and grill by Volunteer house
- Various entertainment (rugby ball, soccer ball, card and boardgames) at housing

### **Detail on certain activities**

#### **Bush Camping**



Camping on Project Big 5 and Community is an experience in itself; setting up nothing but a sleeping bag and fire to cook on for the night. You can watch the beautiful night sky unravel above, hear the vibrant nocturnal life and maybe the lions roaring after a kill. The experience is exhilarating yet relaxing as you braai on an open fire and watch the stars above.

#### **Navigation and Compass Orientation**

This involves volunteers learning how to navigate during the day using signs of the bush and the stars by night. Compass skills are essential when lost in the bush and these useful skills are refined and adapted for the African Bush.

#### **4-Star Lodge Experience**

Volunteers are treated to a 5-star guest experience at the Safari Lodge. The Safari Lodge is tucked away in a valley of indigenous bush; its location is ideal for the best wildlife viewing. This intimate thatched lodge with its unique safari huts offers all the comforts of a graded 5-star lodge and is an undisturbed retreat where you can regenerate your soul and



tune into the sounds of nature. In the evening the haunting sound of the kudu horn will summon you to the fireside to enjoy local cuisine under a magnificent canopy of stars.

#### **Game Drives**

Volunteers will get the chance to view our stunning game while out on the reserve completing their daily activities. The volunteer coordinators are both qualified guides that makes the experience much worth while.



#### **Volunteer Diary at our website**

As part of the Volunteer Programme you may be asked to write a diary account of your week at Project Big 5 and Community which will be published on our website. This will show other interested travellers and potential volunteers just how involved and how diverse the work at the volunteer project can be, but most of all how much fun and

experience you are having in the African Bush.

## **Project objectives**

### **CONSERVATION**

#### **Predator monitoring**

Telemetry is used to track the territorial ranges of the lions and cheetah. This information is used to make management decisions regarding the predators. An upcoming project will be to translocate and habituate a leopard to increase the visible population of these elusive cats.



A new cheetah population has recently been established. With the introduction of lions, the old population had to be replaced with 'lion wise' cheetah to ensure competition between the two species was limited. The Key Objectives with Predator Monitoring is to monitor the general well-being of the predators by logging their sightings, behaviour and possible kills.

#### **Herbivore Monitoring**

Giraffe, Elephant, Rhino and Buffalo are the main consideration for large herbivore monitoring while Blesbok, Impala, Springbok, Red hartebeest, Wildebeest and Duiker are considered small herbivore monitoring. The Key Objectives in Herbivore Monitoring is to identify individuals, create an age chart, create family tree listings, log sightings, monitor territorial ranges, breeding, health, feeding preferences, monitor competition between species and population counts, density per area and censuses.



#### **Darting and relocations:**

Project Big 5 and Community is a fully operational reserve, therefore there may be occasions where you are required to assist with work involving both the vet and the ecologist. Please note that darting and relocations only occur if it is necessary to do so or called upon by the vet and mostly during winter months.

#### **Erosion Control**

South Africa loses 40 to 60 tons of topsoil per hectare of land per year due to erosion. This amounts to 500 million tons of topsoil per annum. Erosion occurs naturally due to wind, water, and drought. It can also be caused due to poor farming management – ploughing incorrectly and overgrazing.

#### **Wetland and Watering Hole Management**

Watering holes are the heart and soul of an ecosystem providing life for all wildlife. This project ascertains that man-made wetlands and watering holes providing an essential source of water to a water deficient landscape is a stable self-supporting ecosystem.

## **Alien Plant Control**

All species of alien plants should be removed, for the following reasons: They often out-compete indigenous flora, thereby forming impenetrable thickets reducing available fodder to grazers and browsers. In addition to this impact on the environment, their presence in the area is unnatural and often not aesthetically pleasing.



## **General Reserve Maintenance**

General reserve maintenance is on going projects, which assist reserve management. They may include: fence patrols checking for snares or faults, filling holes created by aardvark or porcupines, brush-packing closed roads, seeding eroded areas, searching for permanent water sites, clearing old fences and alien vegetation control etc

## **COMMUNITY**

### **Community Up-liftment Projects**

Projects currently running include:

- Vulnerable Children and Isipho Multi Purpose Center
- The Craft Centre
- Vegetable gardening for children
- Assisting Project Foundation with educating school groups



### **Isipho Multi Purpose Center:**

Part of Project Big 5 and Community Volunteer program is to assist and help the Isipho OVC (Orphans and Vulnerable Children) Project by educating and playing with the children at the centre.

Most of the children at the Isipho centre either have no parents or little support from their parents in terms of love and affection. For the volunteers to visit them twice a week and form bonds with them, it offers the children affection and attention which they may not ever see at home. The role of the volunteers is crucial in their upbringing to show that love and compassion do exist and provide some hope to these children. Most of the kids home language is isiXhosa, which could be challenging at times. Innovative sporting games and exercise challenges is a universal language and also assist with personal health and fitness.

Project Big 5 and Community is involved heavily in generating money and donating to the Isipho Centre. The Volunteers also help by assisting the children with their vegetable garden, which helps to provide a balanced diet. Nothing from the vegetable garden goes to waste, either by using cut-offs in soups for the children, or recycling peelings into compost to fertilise the plot.

## **The Craft Centre:**

The Craft Centre is situated just outside the Game Reserve. Once the site of a sheep shearing shed, the building is now used as a craft centre creating and selling crafts made by occupants from the local township. Items include painting, bead-work jewelry, fabrics and clothes. The Volunteers have been helping to convert the property into a sustainable business for local entrepreneurs and talented individuals. There are many ways in which volunteers can assist with this budding business, either by helping paint the property or teach a new skill or craft to those who attend the centre.

An allocated percentage of the sales revenue from the crafts made and sold from the centre is donated to the project Foundation, an umbrella charity under which educational bursaries and the Isipho Charity Trust fall under.

FUN and EXPLORING the area

Each week we will offer **one** of the following three excursions over a 3-week period.

1. Excursion to world-renowned Addo National Elephant Park.
2. Horse Riding Trails / River cruise or canoes
3. Kenton-on-Sea\*\*

\*\* Activity price not included in package price.

## **Lifestyle Information**

### **Accommodation:**

Volunteers are accommodated in a one-storey 10-bedroom house, which overlooks a large garden and within walking distance of the local bar and basic shops. Most of the rooms are twin bedded and 5 bathrooms available.

A communal dining and sitting room with digital satellite TV is central to the house, with well equipped kitchen. A Wi-Fi connection are available at no extra cost but trust that volunteers will not abuse the system by downloading music/movies etc.

The house also has an outside seating area with braai (BBQ) and fire pit for chilly nights and social gatherings as well as a swimming pool.

The electrical sockets in the house are 2 and 3 round- prong and will require international adapters which should be purchased before arrival.

### **Food:**

All meat, fruit and vegetables are provided for the volunteers at the house. Volunteers are responsible for cooking evening meals in the communal surrounding. Breakfast and lunch are to be prepared individually due to the nature of the week varying. Always take enough food and drinks out with you in the vehicle to last the day. Sweet treats and snack food can be purchased at your own expense in Paterson on the way into the Reserve.

PLEASE NOTE: Vegetarian and other dietary requirements can be catered for with prior notification when booking your stay.

## Relaxation Time

The working week will usually comprise of a 5 day week working 8 hours a day (Monday-Friday). Time to start and finish work will depend on the activities of the day and time of year. Evenings and weekends are therefore allocated for your leisure to either relax in the pub or sit in front of an open fire. Alternatively, a wide variety of activities can be booked from the volunteer house. A full list of activities is available at the house and on the volunteer website, which includes car hire companies should you simply like to explore the area for yourself.

## Cost

We take a maximum of 16 volunteers at a time and although a minimum stay is one week, we do recommend 4 – 6 weeks.

Starting days are Mondays.

Rate: R8 500 per week (valid 01.01.2020 – 31.12.2021)

### RATE FREEZE FOR 2021

Rate: R9 000.00 pp per week (valid 01.01.2022 – 31.12.2022)

The rate includes accommodation, food supplies and all activities from Mondays to Fridays. Over weekends you are welcome to make use of the facilities, but all activities/excursions are for your own account.

## Transfers to and from Port Elizabeth

Shared transfer R750.00pp one way (2021) and R825.00pp one way (2022)

(Vehicle depart every Monday at **07:00 from Paterson** and depart again at **14:00 from Port Elizabeth**)

Private transfer R1650.00 pp one way (2021) and R1750.00pp one way (2022)

**It's as simple as that to organize a truly life changing experience.**

