

volunteer
southern africa

Living with Big Cats Wild Edition Pre Departure Guide



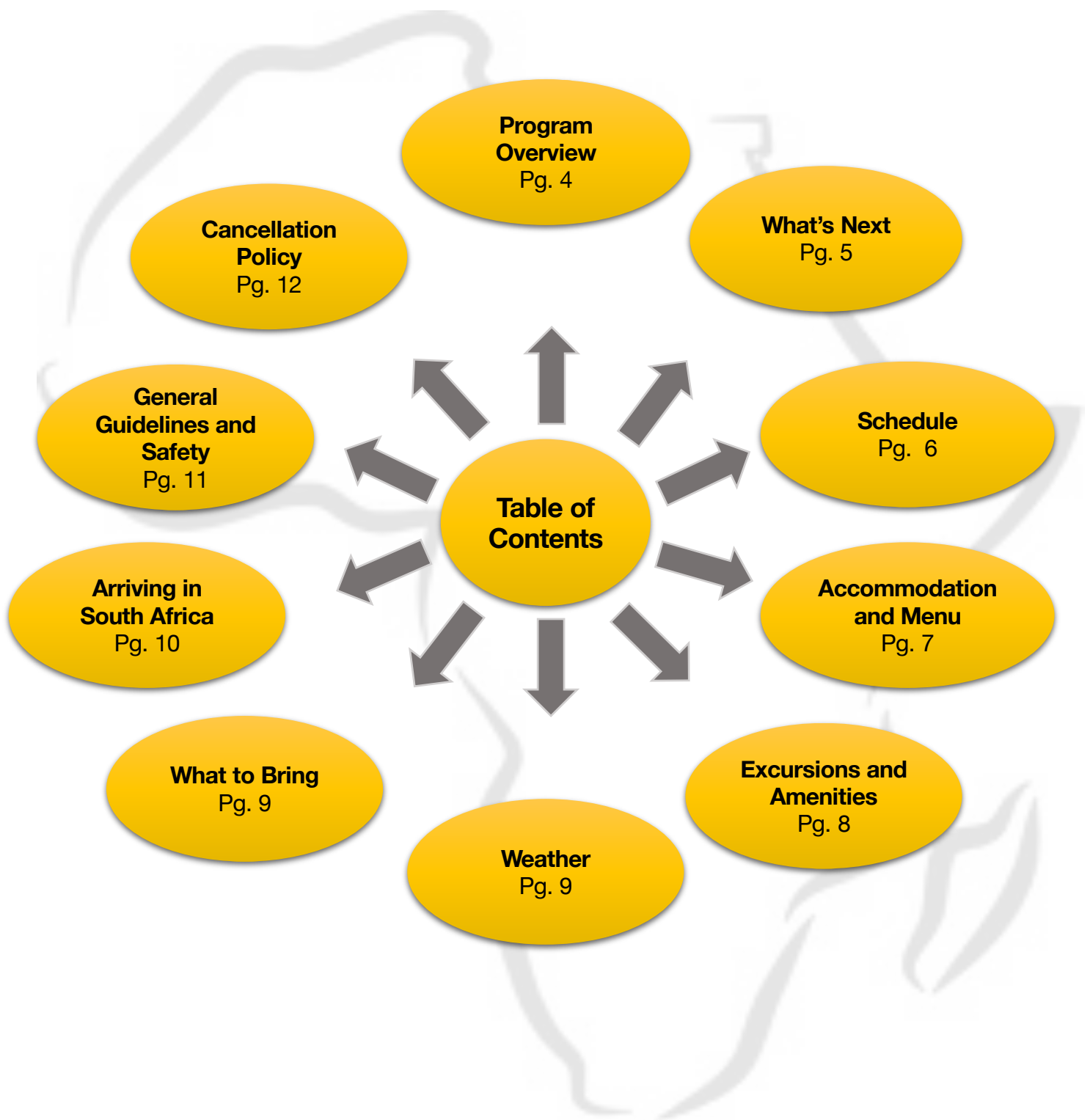
Welcome to the VSA Volunteering Team! We are thrilled to have you join us and are excited to get you started on your journey. This guide is your 'go to' for all the information you need prior to your arrival.

Included you can find information on the **Living with Big Cats Wild Edition** program, next steps, the daily schedule, accommodation and menu, excursions, amenities, weather, what to bring, safety guidelines and most importantly what will happen when you arrive in South Africa!

Our **Living with Big Cats Wild Edition** gives volunteers an authentic African wildlife experience. As a volunteer you will live on a game reserve that boasts thousands of wild animals, including all of the Big 5 – lion, leopard, elephant, rhino and buffalo. You will work alongside game rangers to monitor the animals and complete data collection on a 25,000ha game reserve as well as learn about how the African eco-system works.

Please thoroughly read this guide and if for any reason there are questions after you read through this guide please do not hesitate to contact us!





Living with Big Cats Wild Edition Program Overview

Volunteers will be located at one of the biggest and best wildlife reserves just outside of Hoedspruit - the hub of wildlife in South Africa. While at the program, volunteers will get to experience:

- Fence checking
- Game Drives
- Bush Walks
- Animal tracking and data collection
- Building bird viewing structures for volunteers to use
- Maintenance around the camp area

During your time as a volunteer, you will learn from experienced game rangers and assist in tracking animals through telemetry technology. When the volunteer group is out on game drives, you will be tracking animals and once spotted, you will gather crucial data to share with researchers and students. Animals being tracked include (but not exclusive to) lions, elephants, leopard, spotted hyenas and general game. The work done by our team is vital for accurate management of the animals within the reserve.



Next Steps

STEP ONE - Book Your Flights

Arrival Airport: Eastgate Airport, Hoedspruit (HDS)

Arrival Time: Anytime before 12PM on Monday morning

Once your flight arrives in Hoedspruit, a team member will meet you at the airport to take you to the program.

Departure Airport: Eastgate Airport, Hoedspruit (HDS)

Departure Time: Anytime on Monday.

Our team will ensure that you arrive at the airport in time for your departing flight.



STEP TWO - Vaccinations

Our team recommends that volunteers receive an up to date tetanus shot prior to their arrival.

The Living with Big Cats Wild Edition program is situated in a malaria free area so no additional vaccinations or prescriptions are required.

STEP THREE – Visa's

Over 18?

Be sure to check with the South African Home Affairs

by [clicking here](#) to find out if you need to arrange for a Visa prior to arrival.

If you need to arrange for a Visa, please let us know as soon as possible so we can arrange to send you the proper forms.



Under 18?

If you are travelling as a minor and coming with a parent please review the immigration requirements [here](#). There are several documents that need to be filled out prior to your arrival. Be sure to organize ahead of time to ensure there are no issues when arriving in South Africa.

STEP FOUR – Currency and Spending Money

Our local currency is South African Rand (ZAR) and can be exchanged prior to or upon arrival at the airport.



At our Living with Big Cats Wild Edition program, you may want to bring some extra spending money for excursions, snacks and any souvenirs. Excursions can cost approx. \$100US+ therefore we recommend that volunteers bring approx. \$100US per week they plan on staying at the program.

Volunteers will have an opportunity to go into town and purchase extra snacks and drinks. We recommend having some cash available however most shops accept Visa or MasterCard.

Schedule

	6AM – 10AM	10AM – 3PM	3PM – 7PM	7PM – Late
Monday	Volunteers arrive at the facility and upon arrival they will be welcomed and shown to their accommodation. Once settled in, volunteers are given a full orientation and will learn about the weeks activities.			
Tuesday - Saturday	Morning Activity	Lunch & Data Entering	Afternoon Activity	Dinner & Evening Activities
Sunday	Volunteers are given this day off to relax at the accommodation to swim and relax.			

**Please note that the schedule is subject to change*

Morning and Afternoon Activities include:

- Game Drives
- Animal Tracking
- Bush Walks
- Data Collection
- Maintenance
- Bird Hide Building
- And Many More!

Evening Activities include:

- Volunteer braai
- Bonfire
- And many more!



Accommodation

Volunteers will live in comfortable shared rooms (2-3 people) with communal en suite bathrooms when staying at the main research camp. During the warmer months, volunteers will also have an opportunity to stay in an eco-friendly tented camp when working on the monitoring team.



Menu

Included in this program are 3 meals daily; breakfast, lunch and dinner. If you have any dietary requirements please make us aware prior to your arrival. Volunteers will work together and on a schedule to prepare food daily.

Breakfast may include:

- Cereals
- Oatmeal
- Yogurt and Granola
- Toast with Butter & Jam
- Coffee, Tea, Water and Milk

Lunch and **Dinner** may include:

- Toasted Sandwiches
- Burgers
- Salad
- Vegetables
- Chicken, Pork or Steak dishes
- Pizza
- Pasta



Excursions

Volunteers will have the opportunity to organize and participate in excursions on the weekend. The volunteer leaders can assist in organizing the excursion however they will be at an additional cost to the volunteer. Excursions include:

- Kruger National Park
- Panoramic Route
- Blyde River Canyon Day Trip
- Reptile Center
- Cheetah Sanctuary

Excursions range from \$40US (Panoramic Route) to \$150+US (Kruger National Park day trips). Volunteers can use cash or credit card to pay for excursions.



Amenities

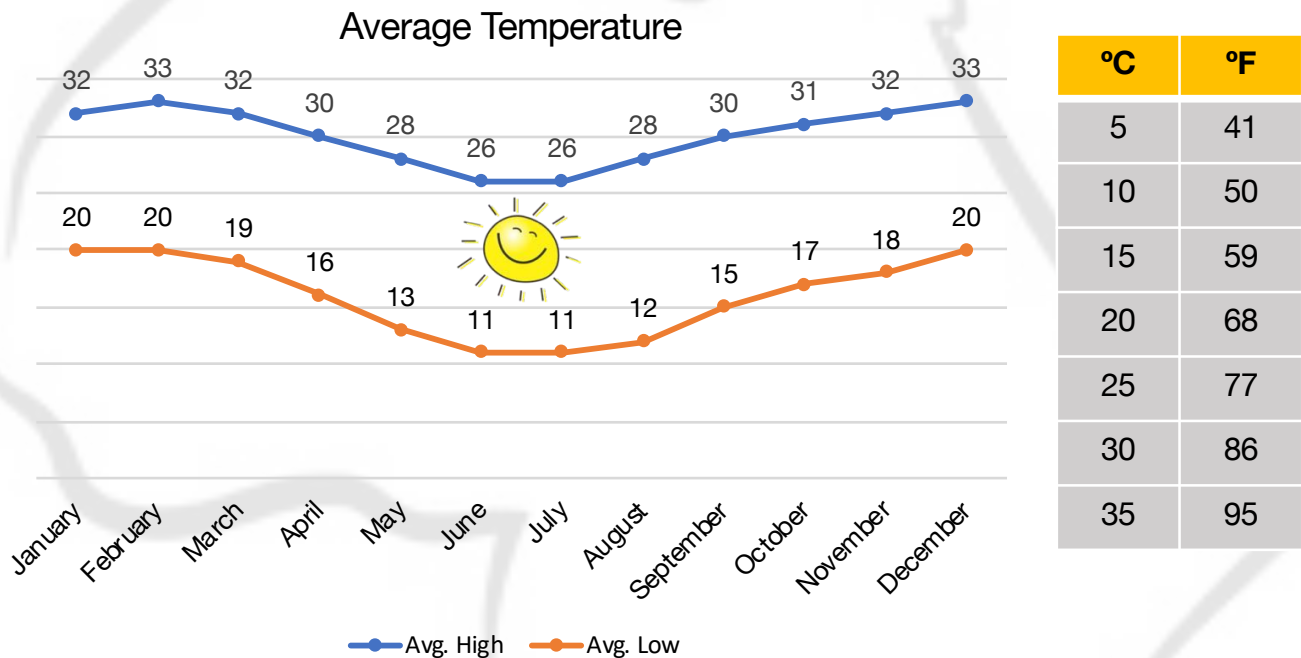
At our Living with Big Cats Wild Edition program we are happy to offer several amenities including:

- 2 Shuttle transfers from Kruger National Airport to the program
- In Country 24 Hour Emergency Support Line
- WIFI 1GB/Week
- Laundry (1 Load/Week)
- Swimming pool



Weather

Make sure you properly prepare for the weather! We like to think it is always sunny in South Africa but the summer months (November – February) can bring some rain and the winter months (May – August) can be chilly at night.



**Please note that all temperatures are in degrees Celsius*

What to Bring

Volunteers will be participating in a variety of activities and will need to pack accordingly, below is a list of items we suggest but volunteers are not limited to;

- Shoes and clothes that can get dirty
- Toiletries (shampoo, soap, toothbrush etc.)
- Towel (this is not supplied by the facility)
- Sunblock and Insect Repellent
- Casual clothes that are appropriate for the time of year
- Sweaters
- Windbreaker or jacket for the winter months
- Swimsuit
- Comfy lounge clothes for the evening

Please note that volunteers are welcomed to bring laptops, cell phones and cameras but do so at their own risk.

Arriving in South Africa

Volunteers will arrive at the Eastgate Airport (HDS) where they will be greeted by a program representative who will be holding a sign that says **Siyafunda**. Once you have met with the program rep, the drive will be approx. 45min to the program.

A few things to remember:

- You will go through South African customs at the Johannesburg airport. When booking your flights please take this into consideration and give yourself enough time between flights.
- We recommend exchanging money prior to your arrival to ensure a smooth transition from the airplane to the shuttle. There will not be an opportunity to exchange money once you leave the airport.
- Upon arrival, a program team member will discuss departure details with the volunteer.
- Please note that multiple volunteers may at different time and only one pick up is arranged therefore you may need to wait for all the volunteers to arrive before being transported to the program.



Eastgate Airport



Eastgate Airport Arrivals

General Guidelines & Safety

DRUGS – Zero Tolerance

We have a zero tolerance policy for any and all drugs. If this rule is broken, you will be removed from the program and the property. There will be no refund for those who are asked to leave due to ignoring or breaking this rule.

Smoking & Drinking

- If/when you do smoke, please dispose of cigarette butts in the garbage bins provided and do not under any circumstances litter cigarette butts – this is a danger to the animals and property.
- A responsible level of drinking during free time is allowed for volunteers over the age of 18 (in South Africa, the legal age for alcohol consumption is 18)
- If you have been drinking alcohol, even if you had only one drink, you will be prohibited from participating in any activities until the alcohol is fully out of your system.

It is important to remember that these are wild animals and you must be aware of your surroundings.

Safety Tips

- Volunteers are expected to conduct themselves in a safe and responsible manner at all times.
- Hitch-hiking is not permitted at any time.
- Never give beggars any money – if you would like to give a donation then please speak with your volunteer leader and they can arrange something for you.
- Travelling alone in the dark is prohibited and dangerous.
- Do not leave your belongings unattended and when travelling around be sure to keep your money and valuables in a safe and secure place.
- South Africa has a very high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. We do not recommend promiscuity and suggest being careful when it comes to situations where exposure to HIV/AIDS may occur.

Important South African Laws

- The legal driving age in South Africa is 18 – you must have a valid driver's license in order to operate a vehicle while here.
- It is illegal to not wear seat belts – this concerns both the driver and all passengers.
- The legal age to purchase alcohol and cigarettes in South Africa is 18.
- It is illegal to drink alcohol in a public space.
- It is illegal to buy, sell, carry, or use drugs, including marijuana.

General Guidelines & Safety

Cancellation Policy

- Should you wish to cancel your volunteer experience (this includes both programs and add on tours), the below table will apply:
 - Cancellations 60 days or more; full refund less the non-refundable deposit.
 - Cancellations 30-59 days; you will forfeit 50% less the non-refundable deposit.
 - Cancellations 8-29 days; you will forfeit 75% less the non-refundable deposit.
 - Cancellations 1-7 days; no refund.

Indemnity Form

Upon arrival all volunteers will need to read, approve and sign an indemnity form.