

# Swaziland – The Switzerland of Africa

To the delight of her visitors, the tiny Kingdom of Swaziland has eluded mass tourism and remains one of Africa's best kept secrets....dubbed as the cultural heart of Africa, the best place on the planet to view Rhino, and the birthplace of Richard E Grant.



This tiny country, around the size of Wales is one of the smallest in the Southern Hemisphere, landlocked and bordered to the north, south and west by South Africa, and to the east by Mozambique.

Stretching only 200 kilometers from north to south, Swaziland has one of the most well-established and celebrated cultural heritages on the continent. One of only three remaining monarchies left in Africa, the Swazi nation is led by His Majesty King Mswati III, who along with the rest of the 'Dlamini' royal family is the focal point of the country's calendar of traditional and very vibrant festivities.

The Swazis are a friendly, relaxed and easy-going people who love to party and gladly welcome visitors into their cultural celebrations. The Swazi festival calendar is an eclectic mix of both first-class modern and time-honored traditional events.

The tribal rituals and ceremonies such as Incwala, and Umhlanga Reed Dance have captured the imagination of visitors to Swaziland for generations. Swaziland is a nation that revels in the spectacle of music, elaborate costume and dance, and although visitors and spectators are always welcome no concessions are made to tourism, offering guests a truly unique and authentic experience.

The spectacle of costume, dance and music is an awe inspiring sight and often the highlight of any stay in Swaziland, or indeed for those holidaying in South Africa and enjoying a few days in Swaziland as a cultural interlude.



Incwala, held in either December or January on a date chosen by astrologers in conjunction with the

phases of the moon is one of the biggest and most spectacular events in Africa. For the Swazi people it is an important religious ritual, a fertility ceremony designed to both prepare for the coming year and serve as a symbolic renewal of the monarchy, the king leads festivities and in full ceremonial dress joins his warriors in the traditional dance.

In late August or early September it is the Swazi girls who lead celebrations in the Reed Dance, young girls mainly in their teens from every area of the Kingdom gather and pay homage to the Queen Mother. Over 20 000 girls dressed in brightly colored beaded skirts with anklets, bracelets and colorful sashes gather to perform before the Royal Family.

Swaziland is a microcosm of the best Africa has to offer; travelling distances are so short there is more opportunity to spend time relaxing into the pace of the country and enjoying the way of life, beautiful landscapes and wildlife.

The Kingdom has a wide range of ecological zones; the rugged mountainous terrain in the West has earned Swaziland the name 'Switzerland of Africa'. In contrast the landscape to the East is mainly bush savannah and open plains, but rises again with the Lebombo mountains.



Swaziland's largest protected area the Hlane Royal National Park is home to four of the big five; the lion, elephant, rhino and leopard. Wildlife sightings in Swaziland are intimate, up close and personal and visitors may even find they are totally alone in some of the wildlife reserves.

In the Southeast lies unspoilt wilderness and is a haven to endangered species. The Mkhaya Game Reserve is one of the only places in Africa where visitors will spot both black and white rhino; along with other animals including hippo, giraffe, crocodile, blue wildebeest and many more.

The Kingdom's colorful history has bestowed a unique cultural identity on the Swazi people in which they take great pride. Swazi history dates from pre-historic rock art, to Bantu tribal heritage, British rule of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries, and independence since 1968.

Any visit to the country should take in the Phophonyane Falls Nature Reserve located near the old gold rush town of Piggs Peak, the unique Malolotja Nature Reserve and the Ezulwini Valley known as the 'Valley of Heaven' and home to King Mswati III.

The unique blend of ancient customs woven into everyday life can be experienced on a visit to one of the traditional Swazi villages, either on foot or with a guided cycle tour.

With excellent lodges and accommodation located in serene and picturesque locations, the Swazi experience should be firmly on the travel agenda of both seasoned African travelers and first time 'safariers' alike.

For further information on holiday packages to Swaziland contact Sense Africa ([Senseafrica.co.uk/](http://Senseafrica.co.uk/)) and Cox and Kings ([Coxandkings.co.uk/africa/swaziland](http://Coxandkings.co.uk/africa/swaziland))

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