

Swaziland

Embedded between Mozambique and South Africa, the kingdom of Swaziland is one of the smallest countries in Africa. What the country lacks in size it makes up for in its rich culture and heritage, and relaxed ambience. With its laid-back, friendly people and relative lack of racial animosity, it's a complete change of pace from its larger neighbours.

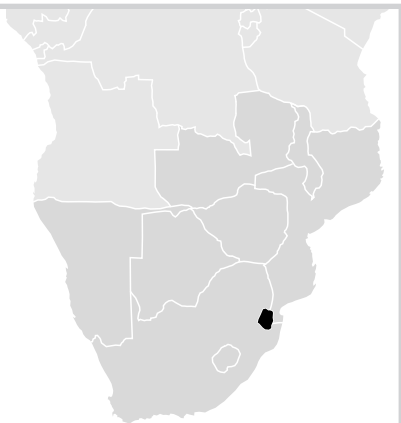
Visitors can enjoy rewarding, delightfully low-key wildlife watching, adrenaline-boosting activities, stunning mountain panoramas and lively traditions. Swaziland also boasts superb walking and high-quality handicrafts.

Overseeing the kingdom is King Mswati III, one of three remaining monarchs in Africa. The monarchy has its critics, but combined with the Swazis' distinguished history of resistance to the Boers, the British and the Zulus, it has fostered a strong sense of national pride, and local culture is flourishing. This is exemplified in its national festivals – the Incwala ceremony and the Umhlanga (Reed) dance (see the boxed text, p593).

The excellent road system makes Swaziland easy to get around. Accommodation includes a decent network of hostels, family-friendly hotels, wilderness lodges to upscale retreats. Many travellers make a flying visit on their way to South Africa's Kruger National Park, but it's well worth lingering here if you can.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 17,364 sq km
- **Capital** Mbabane
- **Country code** ☎ 268
- **Famous for** Monarchy, cultural festivals
- **Languages** Swati, English
- **Money** Lilangeni, plural emalangeni (E)
- **Phrase** *Sawubona/sanibona* (hello)
- **Population** 900,000



HOW MUCH?

- **Traditional dance/cultural group** E120
- **Internet per hour** E25
- **Coffee** E8-15
- **Batik hanging** E75
- **Basket** E40

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L of petrol** E7 (but fluctuates)
- **1L of bottled water** E7
- **Bottle of beer** E8-15
- **Souvenir T-shirt** E80
- **Barbecued maize** E4

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Mkhaya Game Reserve** (p598) See rare black rhinos in the wild.
- **Ezulwini Valley** (p592) and the **Malkerns Valley** (p594) Browse this attractive area's craft shops and royal heartland.
- **Usutu River** (see the boxed text, p594) Shoot wondrous white-water rapids.
- **Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary** (p592) Cycle or meander in the wilderness and relax in its bargain lodges.
- **Off the beaten track** Hike in the superb Malolotja Nature Reserve (p596) and explore the Ngwempisi Gorge (p599), staying in novel huts along the way.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** With only a week at your disposal, a few hours in Mbabane (p589) is plenty. Spend two days poking around the pretty Ezulwini (p592) and Malkerns Valleys (p594), including Lobamba (p592), and make a trip into the relaxing Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary (p592); you'll probably see zebras, giraffes, many antelope species and a variety of birds. To see rare black rhinos in the wild, continue east to the stunning Mkhaya Game Reserve (p598).
- **Two Weeks** Do the one week itinerary, plus view wildlife at the extensive Hlane Royal National Park (p598) and Mlawula Nature Reserve (p598). On your circular route back to Mbabane, drop into Pigg's Peak (p596), an area known for its handi-

crafts, and detour to hike in Malolotja Nature Reserve (p596), an unspoiled wilderness, or visit the fascinating village of Bulembu (p597). You could do this route clockwise, starting in Mbabane and heading north to Malolotja.

- **One month** You can absorb most of Swaziland in this time. Join the previous two itineraries and take extra time for some action: hike in the Ngwempisi Gorge (p599) and shoot the rapids on the Usutu River (p594). If Swaziland is incorporated into your one-month trip through South Africa, it's well worth diverting here for its friendly people, relaxed atmosphere, unique culture, and pretty and accessible wildlife parks and reserves.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Most rain falls in summer, usually in torrential thunderstorms and mostly in the western mountains. Summers on the lowveld are very hot, with temperatures often over 40°C; in the high country the temperatures are lower and in winter it can get cool. Winter nights on the lowveld are sometimes very cold.

The rains usually begin around early December and last until April. May to August are the coolest months, with frosts in June and July.

HISTORY

The area that is now Swaziland has been inhabited for a long time – in eastern Swaziland archaeologists have discovered human remains dating back 110,000 years – but the Swazi people arrived relatively recently.

During the great Bantu migrations into Southern Africa, one group, the Nguni, moved down the east coast. A clan settled in the area near what is now Maputo in Mozambique, and a dynasty was founded by the Dlamini family. (For detailed information on the Bantu migrations, see p33.)

In the mid-18th century increasing pressure from other Nguni clans forced King Ngwane III to lead his people south to lands by the Pongola River, in what is now southern Swaziland. Today, Swazis consider Ngwane III to have been the first king of Swaziland.

Clan encroachment continued, and the next king, Sobhuza I, also came under pressure from the Zulus. He withdrew to the Ezulwini Valley, which remains the centre of