

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, however, it makes up for in its rich culture and heritage, and relaxed ambience. With its laid-back, warm and personable people and relative lack of racial animosities, it's a complete change of pace from its larger neighbours.

Visitors can enjoy rewarding and delightfully low-key wildlife-watching, stunning mountain panoramas, adrenaline-boosting activities 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.

The excellent road system makes Swaziland easy to access and navigate. Accommodation includes a decent network of hostels, family-friendly hotels and 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** 17,365 sq km
- **ATMs** In Mbabane and Manzini
- **Borders** Mozambique, South Africa
- **Budget** US\$30 to US\$60 per day
- **Capital** Mbabane
- **Languages** English, Swati
- **Money** Lilangeni; US\$1 = E7.57, €1 = E10.66
- **Population** 900,000
- **Seasons** Wet (October to March), dry (May to August)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 268; international code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC +2
- **Visa** Not required for most nationalities



HOW MUCH?

- **Traditional dance** US\$15
- **Internet per hour** US\$3.30
- **Coffee** US\$1 to US\$2
- **Batik hanging** US\$10
- **Basket** US\$5

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$0.90 (but fluctuates)
- **1L bottled water** US\$0.90
- **Bottle of beer** US\$1 to US\$2
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$10
- **Barbecued maize** US\$0.50

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Mkhaya Game Reserve** (p1076) Spot black rhinos in the wild, one of Africa's great wildlife experiences.
- **Ezulwini and Malkerns Valleys** (p1074) Revel in a royal experience in the regal heartland of Swaziland and splurge on some handicrafts.
- **Usutu River** (p1076) Shoot the rapids or drift down the river through stunning gorges on a white-water rafting trip.
- **Malolotja Nature Reserve** (p1078) Hike in this tantalising area of genuine, unspoilt wilderness.
- **Mililwane Wildlife Sanctuary** (p1074) Cycle or meander in the wilderness and relax in its bargain lodges.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The rainy season, from October to March, sees torrential thunderstorms, especially in the western mountains, and temperatures on the lowveld are very hot, often over 40°C; in the high country the temperatures are lower and in the dry season, May to August, it can get cool. Winter nights on the lowveld are sometimes very cold.

Try to avoid visiting rain-soaked Swaziland during the wet season (December to April). The best time to visit is in May, June or October, but bring something warm.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** A half-day in Mbabane (p1072) is plenty to get your bearings. Spend two

days poking around the pretty Ezulwini and Malkerns Valleys (p1074), including Lobamba (p1074), and make a trip into the relaxing Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary (p1074). If you have time and you want to see rare black rhinos in the wild, continue east to the stunning Mkhaya Game Reserve (p1076).

- **Two Weeks** Do the one-week itinerary, plus view wildlife at the extensive Hlane Royal National Park (p1076) and Mlawula Nature Reserve (p1077). On your circular route back to Mbabane, take a detour to the remote Bulembu, then Piggs Peak (p1077) for its handicrafts, and hike in Malolotja Nature Reserve (p1078), an unspoiled wilderness area.

HISTORY

In eastern Swaziland archaeologists have discovered human remains dating back 110,000 years, but the ancestors of the modern 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 near what is now Maputo in Mozambique, and a dynasty was founded by the Dlamini family. In the mid-18th century, increasing pressure from other Nguni clans forced King Ngwane III to lead his people south to what is now southern Swaziland. The next king, Sobhuza I, withdrew under pressure from the Zulus to the Ezulwini Valley, which today remains the centre of Swazi royalty and ritual. When King Sobhuza I died in 1839, Swaziland was twice its present size. Trouble with the Zulu continued, although the next king, Mswazi (or Mswati), managed to unify the whole kingdom. By the time he died in 1868, the Swazi nation was secure. Mswazi's subjects called themselves Swazis, meaning 'people of Mswazi', and the name stuck.

European Interference

The arrival of increasing numbers of Europeans from the mid-19th century brought new problems. Mswazi's successor, Mbandzeni, inherited a kingdom rife with European carpetbaggers – hunters, traders, missionaries and farmers, many of whom leased large expanses of land.

The Pretoria Convention of 1881 guaranteed Swaziland's 'independence' but also defined its borders, and Swaziland lost large