Southern Cross: Pretoria to Victoria Falls on Rovos Rail

https://www.irtsociety.com/journey/southern-cross/



Overview

The Highlights

- Pretoria city tour

- Travel across the Drakensberg Mountains and Limpopo Province

- Join the Panorama Route with game viewing in Kruger National Park

- Tour Maputo, capital of Mozambique

- Explore the mountainous Kingdom of eSwatini and visit Swazi Candles and Mantenga Cultural Village

- Enjoy a game drive at Kapama Reserve followed by a visit to the Hoedspruit Endangered Species Center

- Stand in awe at the Great Zimbabwe Monument

- Tour Antelope Park and World Heritage Site, Matobo National Park

- Continue to Hwange for game viewing before arriving in Victoria Falls for a walking tour of the village and the thunderous falls

- Northbound travelers end with a sunset cruise on the mighty Zambezi

The Tour

Explore four amazing countries — South Africa, Mozambique, eSwatini, and Zimbabwe — on the new Southern Cross route. This 12-day private rail tour aboard *Rovos Rail* is a marvelous combination of nature, wildlife, culture, and history.

Starting in Pretoria, travel the Panorama Route with visits to multiple national monuments and retrace the steps of gold prospectors from the 1800s. Travel onwards to the world-famous Kruger Park for a game drive. Enjoy a cultural city tour of Maputo, Mozambique.

Itinerary

Day 1 - Pretoria

Around 10am, departure from Rovos's headquarters rail station in Pretoria. Freshen up in your suite before joining fellow travelers in the lounge cars.

The train travels on the eastern line towards the harsh eMalahleni coal-mining area and

Middelburg, known as the “stainless steel capital of Africa.” The Dutch railway building company, NZASM (Nederlandsche Zuid-Afrikaansche Spoorweg- Maatschappij), built the eastern line between Pretoria and
Lourenc

o Marques (Maputo) from 1893 to 1895.

Enjoy lunch in the train's dining cars. While you watch the scenery this afternoon, have tea in the lounge and observation car. Dinner is served in the dining cars.

Day 2 - Panorama Route

Full-day tour of the historical areas Pilgrim’s Rest, Bourke’s Luck Potholes, and Graskop with lunch. The Graskop viewing lift takes visitors 51 meters (167 ft) down the face of the gorge into the forest below where wooden walkways and suspension bridges meander along a 600 meter (0.4 mi) trail through the indigenous forest with an interactive exhibit (with lift). Pilgrim’s Rest is a living museum and declared a National Monument. Gold was discovered in this area in 1873 attracting 1500 prospectors. Today many of the restored miner’s houses serve as shops and restaurants. Bourke’s Luck Potholes are strange deep cylindrical cavities formed by river erosion and floodwater. Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve has the most spectacular viewpoints overlooking South Africa’s Lowveld, so named because it is much lower than the high escarpment along which the Panorama Route runs.

Rejoin the train in Mbombela, then depart for Malelane. Dinner is served in the dining cars.

Day 3 - Kruger National Park

After an early breakfast, embark on a full day of game viewing in Kruger Park followed by lunch. The famous Kruger Park has 2-million hectares with an unrivalled diversity of life forms. It is a world leader in advanced environmental management techniques and home to an impressive number of species, e.g. 336 species of trees, 49 species of fish, 34 species of amphibians, 114 species of reptiles, 507 species of birds, and 147 species of mammals including the Big Five.

After, return to the train. Enjoy tea in the lounge and observation cars. Travel onwards to Maputo where border formalities take place. Dinner is onboard.

Day 4 - Maputo, Mozambique

Enjoy a morning city tour of Maputo, followed by lunch. Capital of Mozambique, Maputo is a city of contrasts offering an exciting mix of cultures. Its architecture is a blend of African, Portuguese, and early Colonial traditions with old Catholic churches side-by-side with mosques, fortresses, Victorian mansions, and other buildings from a bygone era.

Return to the train around 4pm and have tea in the lounge and observation cars. Travel to Mpaka, eSwatini for border formalities. Dinner is served in the dining cars.

Day 5 - eSwatini

The tiny Kingdom of eSwatini (formerly Swaziland) covers only 17,000 km2, most of which is mountainous. For such a small country, it is surprising that it sustains two capital cities: Mbabane is the administrative capital and Lobamba is the royal and legislative capital. In April 2018, Swaziland changed its name to the Kingdom of eSwatini (meaning “place of the Swazi”) and is an absolute monarchy. It is landlocked and borders South Africa and Mozambique.

Following breakfast, disembark at Mpaka for a 90 minute transfer to Swazi Candles and Mantenga Cultural Village. Enjoy lunch at Mantenga Lodge. Travel through the Ezulwini Valley to Swazi Candles where guests are invited to interact with the artisans as they make a variety of candles. Woodcarvings, colorful textiles and superb basketwork are also on display. Mantenga Cultural Village is a living museum of old traditions representing a classical Swazi lifestyle during the 1800s. With the traditional artifacts on display, the village illustrates many facets of the ancient Swazi way of life: social, economic and religious. Mantenga Lodge is nestled in the mountains overlooking ‘Execution Rock.’

Following your visit, return to the train (±75 min transfer) where you'll depart for Hoedspruit where border formalities take place. Enjoy tea in the lounge and observation cars. Dinner is served in the dining cars.

Day 6 - Kapama Reserve & Hoedspruit Endangered Species Centre

A very early morning game drive in Kapama Game Reserve starts your day, followed by a visit to the Hoedspruit Endangered Species Center. Situated in South Africa’s northernmost province of Limpopo and renowned for its prolific and diverse wildlife, Kapama Private Game Reserve is home to over 40 different mammal species including the Big Five, approximately 350 bird species and a myriad smaller species. The Hoedspruit Endangered Species Center is a unique African wildlife facility focusing on conservation and the sustainability of rare, vulnerable and threatened species. Founded on passion, the Center has adopted a holistic approach to its conservation activities such as the educating of surrounding communities, tourism, breeding, rehabilitation and anti-poaching, to name a few.

Return to the train for lunch and travel onwards to Tzaneen and Louis Trichardt. Enjoy tea in the lounge and observation cars. Dinner is served in the dining cars.

Day 7 - Limpopo Province

Enjoy the luxury of the *Rovos Rail* with a full train day as you travel through Limpopo and towards Rutenga in Zimbabwe. Border formalities take place at Rutenga. All meals and tea onboard this day.

Limpopo Province is located in the far north of South Africa and shares borders with three neighboring countries: Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. For this reason, the province is

also known as the gateway to other African countries and also shares provincial borders with Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Northwest. The Limpopo landscape varies from tropical forests, bush and shrubs to semi-desert areas with small trees and bushes and mountains to flat land. Limpopo is divided into five regions, strategically located according to the cultural inhabitants. Capricorn is the central region predominantly occupied by the Bapedi people. Waterberg is the largest region with a majority of Tswana people. Vhembe in the far north is dominated by Vhavenda and Vatsonga. The Mopani region near the Kruger Park is Vatsonga whereas the Sekhukhuni region is dominated by Bapedi and Ndebele. Limpopo is the only province in South Africa with more than two cultural groups staying together in their original habitat in harmony. Other ethnic groups include English and Afrikaans people.

Day 8 - Great Zimbabwe Monument

After breakfast, travel through attractive granite hill country to the Great Zimbabwe Monument, a hugely impressive monument situated on the southeastern edge of the central plateau and the largest precolonial monument south of the Egyptian pyramids. This is a celebrated achievement of the African people and a place where magical fables such as the story of King Solomon’s Mines find their origins amongst the ruins of an ancient city built by the Rozwi people. Discover how these ancient people mined gold and silver, which were ultimately taken out of Africa by Arabic and Portuguese traders.

Enjoy lunch with your tour, then return to the train around 5pm. Travel towards Gweru. Dinner is served in the dining cars.

Day 9 - Antelope Park

Depart around 8am for a full day at Antelope Park with lunch. Set in over 3,000 acres of open savannah grassland, Antelope Park is a unique game reserve and a haven of tranquility welcoming guests and volunteer eco-tourists alike. It is home to the world-famous African Lion and Environmental Research Trust (ALERT) rehabilitation program, which is a multiphase lion conservation initiative. It is Africa’s first genuine program working to ethically re-introduce the offspring of captive-bred African lions back into the wild.

Optional extra activities this day include canoeing, game drives, horseback game viewing, elephant interaction, and bird-watching cruises to name a few (additional fees apply).

Return to the train and depart for Bulawayo. Tea in the lounge and observation cars. Dinner is served in the dining cars.

Day 10 - Matobo National Park

Around 9am, begin your full-day tour of Matobo National Park with lunch. Matobo (or Matopos), meaning ‘bald heads,’ was the name chosen for the area by the Ndebele King, Mzilikazi. He is buried in the Matobo hills just a short distance from the park. It is an apt description of the dramatic hills and granite rocks of this area.

The park is also the site of Cecil John Rhodes' grave at the summit of Malindidzimu – 'hill of benevolent spirits.' He referred to this hill as having a view of the world. You'll visit his grave today as well as accessible bushmen caves, of which there are many hidden amongst the hills.

Late afternoon, return to the train, which then departs for Kennedy.

Enjoy tea in the lounge and observation cars - and dinner onboard tonight.

Day 11 - Hwange National Park

A very early breakfast is served in the dining cars to allow you to start your full-day game drive in Hwange National Park at 6:30 am. Situated in the northwest corner of Zimbabwe, Hwange National Park covers 1,462,000 hectares making it the nation's largest wildlife area. A packed lunch accompanies you as you search the park for animals, multiple bird species, and the well-known lion population.

Late afternoon, return to the train for tea in the lounge and observation cars. During this time, the train departs for Thompson's Junction.

Dinner is served in the dining cars.

Day 12 - Victoria Falls

Arrive at Victoria Falls Station around 10am. Check out of the train and walk to Victoria Falls Hotel with your luggage stored on the train until you return. The little station of Victoria Falls was first reached by railway in June 1904. Old colonial buildings, bougainvillea, and palm trees against the backdrop of the Victoria Falls Hotel form a charming oasis of soft sweetness after the rugged dryness of the landscape.

Enjoy a walking tour of the village and the Falls with lunch. Victoria Falls is one of nature's great revelations on par with the Grand Canyon, Mount Everest, and an erupting volcano. Although just over a mile long (1.7km), the falls are broken up by various small islands, including Livingstone Island. At their deepest, the falls are 354ft/108m deep at Rainbow Falls.

Meet at the hotel for a sunset cruise on the Zambezi River, then transfer back to Victoria Falls Hotel where your beautiful journey ends around 6:30pm.

Reverse itinerary

Day 1 - Victoria Falls

This morning, meet at Victoria Falls Hotel. The little station of Victoria Falls was first reached by railway in June 1904. Old colonial buildings, bougainvillea, and palm trees against the backdrop of the Victoria Falls Hotel form a charming oasis of soft sweetness after the rugged dryness of the landscape.

Your luggage will be taken to the train by Rovos Rail staff while you enjoy a tour of the Falls

followed by lunch. Victoria Falls is one of nature's great revelations on par with the Grand Canyon, Mount Everest, and an erupting volcano. Although just over a mile long (or 1.7km), the falls are broken up by various small islands, including Livingstone Island. At their deepest, the falls are 354ft/108m deep at Rainbow Falls.

Late afternoon reception back at the hotel and then you'll board the *Rovos Rail* on your way to Dete. Dinner served in the train's lovely dining cars.

Day 2 - Hwange National Park

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Late afternoon, return to the train for tea in the lounge and observation cars. During this time, the train departs for Bulawayo.

Dinner is served in the dining cars.

Day 3 - Matobo National Park

Enjoy breakfast before you leave the train. Around 9am, begin your full-day tour of Matobo National Park with lunch. Matobo (or Matopos), meaning 'bald heads,' was the name chosen for the area by the Ndebele King, Mzilikazi. He is buried in the Matobo hills just a short distance from the park. It is an apt description of the dramatic hills and granite rocks of this area.

The park is also the site of Cecil John Rhodes' grave at the summit of Malindidzimu – 'hill of benevolent spirits.' He referred to this hill as having a view of the world. You'll visit his grave today as well as accessible bushmen caves, of which there are many hidden amongst the hills

Late afternoon, return to the train, which then departs for Dabuka.

Enjoy tea in the lounge and observation cars - and dinner onboard tonight.

Day 4 - Antelope Park

Early 6am breakfast today, followed by a full day at Antelope Park with lunch. Set in over 3,000 acres of open savannah grassland, Antelope Park is a unique game reserve and a haven of tranquility welcoming guests and volunteer eco-tourists alike. It is home to the world-famous African Lion and Environmental Research Trust (ALERT) rehabilitation program, which is a multiphase lion conservation initiative. It is Africa's first genuine program working to ethically re-introduce the offspring of captive-bred African lions back into the wild.

Optional extra activities this day include canoeing, game drives, horseback game viewing, elephant interaction, and bird-watching cruises to name a few (additional fees apply).

Return to the train and depart for Bannockburn. Tea in the lounge and observation cars. Dinner is served in the dining cars.

Day 5 - Great Zimbabwe Monument

After breakfast, travel through attractive granite hill country to the Great Zimbabwe Monument, a hugely impressive monument situated on the southeastern edge of the central plateau and the largest precolonial monument south of the Egyptian pyramids. This is a celebrated achievement of the African people and a place where magical fables such as the story of King Solomon's Mines find their origins amongst the ruins of an ancient city built by the Rozwi people. Discover how these ancient people mined gold and silver, which were ultimately taken out of Africa by Arabic and Portuguese traders.

Enjoy lunch with your tour, then return to the train around 5pm. Travel towards Beitbridge for border formalities. Cross the bridge to Messina for South African border formalities. Dinner is served in the dining cars.

Day 6 - Limpopo Province

Enjoy the luxury of Rovos Rail with a full train day as you travel through Limpopo and towards Hoedspruit. All meals and tea onboard this day.

Limpopo Province is located in the far north of South Africa and shares borders with three neighboring countries: Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. For this reason, the province is also known as the gateway to other African countries and also shares provincial borders with Gauteng, Mpumalanga, and Northwest.

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facility focusing on conservation and the sustainability of rare, vulnerable, and threatened species. Founded on passion, the center has adopted a holistic approach to its conservation activities such as the educating of surrounding communities, tourism, breeding, rehabilitation and anti-poaching, to name a few.

Return to the train for lunch and onwards to Mpaka. Enjoy tea in the lounge and observation cars. Dinner is served in the dining cars.

Day 8 – eSwatini

The tiny Kingdom of eSwatini (formerly Swaziland) covers only 17,000 km2, most of which is mountainous. For such a small country, it is surprising that it sustains two capital cities: Mbabane is the administrative capital and Lobamba is the royal and legislative capital. In April 2018, Swaziland changed its name to the Kingdom of eSwatini (meaning “place of the Swazi”) and is an absolute monarchy. It is landlocked and borders South Africa and Mozambique.

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Following your visit, return to the train (±75 min transfer) where you'll depart for Maputo. Enjoy tea in the lounge and observation cars. Dinner is served in the dining cars.

Day 9 - Maputo, Mozambique

Enjoy a morning city tour of Maputo, followed by lunch. Capital of Mozambique, Maputo is a city of contrasts offering an exciting mix of cultures. Its architecture is a blend of African, Portuguese, and early Colonial traditions with old Catholic churches side-by-side with mosques, fortresses, Victorian mansions, and other buildings from a bygone era.

Return to the train and travel to Komatipoort in South Africa for border formalities. Tea in the lounge and observation cars.

Dinner is served in the dining cars en route to Malelane for the overnight stop.

Day 10 - Kruger National Park

After an early breakfast, embark on a full day of game viewing in Kruger Park followed by lunch. The famous Kruger Park has 2-million hectares with an unrivalled diversity of life forms. It is a world leader in advanced environmental management techniques and home to an impressive number of species, e.g. 336 species of trees, 49 species of fish, 34 species of amphibians, 114 species of reptiles, 507 species of birds, and 147 species of mammals including the Big Five.

After, return to the train for travel onwards to Nelspruit. Dinner is onboard.

Day 11 - Panorama Route

Full-day tour of the historical areas Pilgrim's Rest, Bourke's Luck Potholes, and Graskop with lunch. The Graskop viewing lift takes visitors 51 meters (167 ft) down the face of the gorge into the forest below where wooden walkways and suspension bridges meander along a 600 meter (0.4 mi) trail through the indigenous forest with an interactive exhibit (with lift).

Pilgrim's Rest is a living museum and declared a National Monument. Gold was discovered in this area in 1873 attracting 1500 prospectors. Today many of the restored miner's houses serve as shops and restaurants. Bourke's Luck Potholes are strange deep cylindrical cavities formed by river erosion and floodwater. Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve has the most spectacular viewpoints overlooking South Africa's Lowveld, so named because it is much lower than the high escarpment along which the Panorama Route runs.

Return to the train and depart for eMalahleni. Dinner is served in the dining cars.

Day 12 – Pretoria

Through the morning, the train travels on the eastern line towards Middelburg, known as the "stainless steel capital of Africa," and the harsh eMalahleni coal-mining area. The Dutch railway building company, NZASM (Nederlandsche Zuid-Afrikaansche Spoorweg-Maatschappij), built the eastern line between Pretoria and
Lourenc

o Marques (Maputo) from 1893 to 1895.

Lunch is onboard, along with afternoon tea.

Around 6pm, arrive at your journey's end - the Rovos Rail station in Pretoria.

Dates & Prices

2026 Dates

November 19 - November 30

Accommodation	Double	Single	Deposit
Pullman Gold	ZAR 165,000	ZAR 238,000	25%
Deluxe	ZAR 235,000	ZAR 338,000	25%
Royal			
ZAR 313,000	ZAR 626,000	25%	

All prices are per person.
Tour priced in South African Rand (ZAR). For approximate exchange rates, visit http://www.xe.com.

2027 Dates

January 14 - January 25
March 11 - March 24
April 13 - April 24
September 2 - September 13
November 19 - November 30

Accommodation	Double	Single	Deposit
Pullman Gold	ZAR 179,000	ZAR 258,500	25%
Deluxe	ZAR 255,000	ZAR 367,000	25%
Royal			
ZAR 339,500	ZAR 679,000	25%	

All prices are per person.
Tour priced in South African Rand (ZAR). For approximate exchange rates, visit http://www.xe.com.

2028 Dates

January 20 - January 31
February 10 - February 21
March 2 - March 13
April 13 - April 24
August 24 - September 4
September 21 - October 2
October 26 - November 6

Accommodation	Double	Single	Deposit
Pullman Gold	ZAR 194,500	ZAR 280,500	25%
Deluxe	ZAR 276,500	ZAR 398,500	25%
Royal			
ZAR 368,500	ZAR 737,000	25%	

All prices are per person.
Tour priced in South African Rand (ZAR). For approximate exchange rates, visit http://www.xe.com.

More

Please note that this trip is not for everybody; this is an adventure experience.
The track can be very rough. This contributes to delays and can mean missed or truncated outings off the train.

Medical/evacuation insurance is required for this journey. Passport should have six months' validity beyond travel dates. Several visas, yellow fever inoculation, and malaria prevention may be required and/or recommended. Entry into South Africa requires a passport with two blank passport visa pages facing each other.