

AFRICA · WILDLIFE · CULTURE · HIKING · ADVENTURE · OFF THE BEATEN PATH



Eswatini

Eswatini is one of Africa's smallest countries and one of the world's last absolute monarchies, with royal ceremonies such as Umhlanga still central to national life. Walk among zebra at Mlilwane, track rhino at Mkhaya and Hlane and hike Malolotja's highveld, then shop for candles in the Malkerns Valley and recycled glass at Ngwenya. It slots easily into a South Africa itinerary.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Eswatini and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 10 December 2025.

 CAPITAL Mbabane	 CURRENCY Swazi lilangeni (SZL) £1 ≈ SZL 21.93	 LANGUAGE siSwati, English	 BEST TIME May-Sep
 DAILY BUDGET £35-£190 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type M 230V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 11h direct to JNB ~£600-£1,150 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+2 standard time

Eswatini packs highveld, middleveld and lowveld into roughly 17,000 km², so the landscape changes fast: misty pine plantations and granite domes around Mbabane and Malolotja in the west, the Ezulwini and Malkerns valleys at the centre, and hot bushveld and sugarcane in the east, where Hlane and Mkhaya hold the big game. Lobamba, in the Ezulwini Valley, is the royal and parliamentary seat and the setting for the great national ceremonies. A common route enters from Kruger National Park to the north, spends two to four nights here, then exits south towards KwaZulu-Natal's iSimangaliso Wetland Park.

Distances are short and roads mostly good, so self-drivers can see a lot in a few days without long transfers. Prices sit below those of comparable South African reserves, and the Big Game Parks' camps at Mlilwane and Hlane offer simple huts as well as lodges. The pace is unhurried and visitors are few outside South African school holidays. What surprises people is how close you can get on foot – walking and cycling among zebra, wildebeest and antelope at Mlilwane – and how openly traditional dress and royal ceremony feature in everyday life.

Top 5 highlights

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WILDLIFE

Hlane Royal National Park

The country's largest protected area, once a royal hunting ground, holds lion, elephant, white rhino and giraffe. Guided drives and walks leave from Ndlovu Camp, where rhino often come down to the waterhole.
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WILDLIFE

Mkhaya Game Reserve

A private reserve in the lowveld where black and white rhino, elephant, buffalo and roan antelope roam. Visits are by prearranged guided drive or overnight stay only, with no self-driving, which keeps encounters quiet and close.

3

WILDLIFE

Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary

Eswatini's oldest protected area, in the Ezulwini Valley, has no big predators, so you can walk, cycle or ride horseback among zebra, wildebeest and impala. Hippos and crocodiles share the rest-camp pond.

4

NATURE

Malolotja Nature Reserve

High grassland and ravines on the north-western border, with multi-day hiking trails, the 89-metre Malolotja Falls and a canopy tour zipping over a forested gorge. Lion Cavern, among the world's oldest known mines, lies at its southern end.

5

CULTURE

Mantenga Cultural Village

A reconstructed 1850s Swazi homestead of beehive huts near Lobamba, with daily performances of traditional song and dance; afterwards, walk to the Mantenga Falls in the surrounding nature reserve.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Mbabane

≈ 61,000 people

The hilly capital is a functional base rather than a sight, but its market, cool highveld air and proximity to Sibebe Rock and Malolotja make it a useful stop.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Manzini

≈ 30,000 people

Eswatini's commercial hub, beside the Matsapha industrial area, is workaday rather than scenic; its large central market, selling crafts and fresh produce, is the main reason to stop.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Nhlangano

≈ 10,000 people

The main town of the Shiselweni south, near the Mahamba border post with South Africa; a quiet, practical stopover with fuel, banks and supermarkets rather than sights.

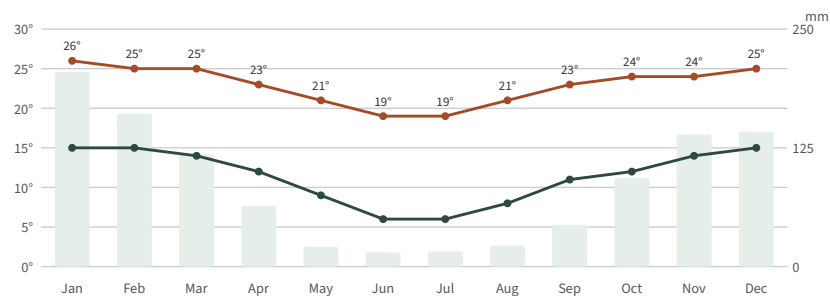
Figures are rounded 2017 census counts for the town areas. Some sources rank Manzini first, counting its peri-urban sprawl and the Matsapha corridor.

When to go to Eswatini

Best time: **May–Sep.**

**Average climate in Mbabane**

— High °C
 — Low °C
 ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jan, Dec	Incwala Eswatini's most sacred ceremony, a kingship and first-fruits ritual timed by the moon around the summer solstice. Some parts are closed, but the main dancing days at Ludzidzini can be watched respectfully.
May	MTN Bushfire A three-day music and arts festival at House on Fire in the Malkerns Valley, usually in late May, mixing southern African and international acts; book tickets and nearby accommodation early.
Aug-Sep	Umhlanga (Reed Dance) Tens of thousands of young women and girls cut reeds and present them to the Queen Mother at Ludzidzini, near Lobamba, in a week-long ceremony that ends in mass singing and dancing.

How much does Eswatini cost?

SHOESTRING £35 per person / day ≈ SZL 767 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £85 per person / day ≈ SZL 1,864 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £190 per person / day ≈ SZL 4,166 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Sishwala Thick maize-meal porridge that is the national staple, served with stewed beef, chicken or vegetable relishes at almost every local meal.	Sidvudvu Porridge of pumpkin cooked together with maize meal, a gently sweet and filling rural favourite.	Emasi Thick, tangy soured milk, eaten on its own or poured over crumbled maize porridge — cooling on hot lowveld afternoons.
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Getting around

Most visitors self-drive, often in a car hired in South Africa — ask the rental company for a cross-border letter. Main roads such as the MR3 are well surfaced, though watch for cattle and pedestrians, and avoid driving after dark. Without a car, minibus taxis (kombis) link towns from the Mbabane and Manzini ranks; there are no passenger trains, and lodges can arrange transfers.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  M 230V — bring a UK-to-M adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Ambulance: 977 Fire: 933 Police: 999 Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +268	TIME ZONE UTC+2 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Varies — bottled or filtered is safer

DRIVING

On the left

TIPPING

Leave about 10% in restaurants, tip safari guides and trackers after a drive, and give car guards a few emalangeni or rand.

ETIQUETTE

Greet people with 'Sawubona' before getting down to business, and show respect for the monarchy — criticising the King in public causes real offence. Dress modestly away from lodges and ask before photographing people or ceremonies.

MAIN AIRPORTS

King Mswati III International Airport (SHO), Sikhuphe; O. R. Tambo International Airport (JNB), Johannesburg — across the border

Visas & entry for Eswatini

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can visit Eswatini without a visa for up to 30 days.

You can apply for a 30-day extension from the Ministry of Home Affairs. If you want to stay longer than 60 days, you must apply for a temporary residence permit.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Hepatitis B

Measles

Rabies

Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

Malaria risk in some areas

- There is a risk of malaria from November to May in the northern and eastern regions of Eswatini bordering Mozambique and South Africa, including all of Lubombo district and the eastern half of Hhohho, Manzini and Shiselweni districts: antimalarial tablets recommended.
- There is a low risk of malaria from June to October in the northern and eastern regions of Eswatini: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.
- There is a very low risk of malaria in the rest of Eswatini: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.

Public holidays in Eswatini

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Sat 26 Dec 2026	Boxing Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Fri 26 Mar 2027	Good Friday
Mon 29 Mar 2027	Easter Monday
Mon 19 Apr 2027	King's Birthday
Sun 25 Apr 2027	National Flag Day
Mon 26 Apr 2027	National Flag Day (observed)
Sat 1 May 2027	Worker's Day
Thu 6 May 2027	Ascension Day
Thu 22 Jul 2027	Birthday of Late King Sobhuza
Mon 6 Sep 2027	Independence Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in siSwati

ENGLISH	SISWATI	SAY IT
Hello	Sawubona	sah-woo-BOH-nah
Thank you	Ngiyabonga	ngee-yah-BONG-gah
Please	Ngiyacela	ngee-yah-(click)EH-lah
Excuse me	Ngiyacolisa	ngee-yah-(click)oh-LEE-sah
How much is this?	Kubita malini loku?	koo-BEE-tah mah-LEE-nee LOH-koo

Know before you go

- The rand is accepted at par everywhere, but emalangenis are not accepted in South Africa — spend or change them before you cross back.
- Border posts keep set hours and some close in the late afternoon; check them before planning a crossing, and allow time for queues at Oshoek on holiday weekends.
- Arrange Umhlanga or Incwala visits through a lodge or guide who can advise on dress, timings and photography rules, as exact dates are announced only shortly beforehand.