South Africa

Falcons and Big Cats



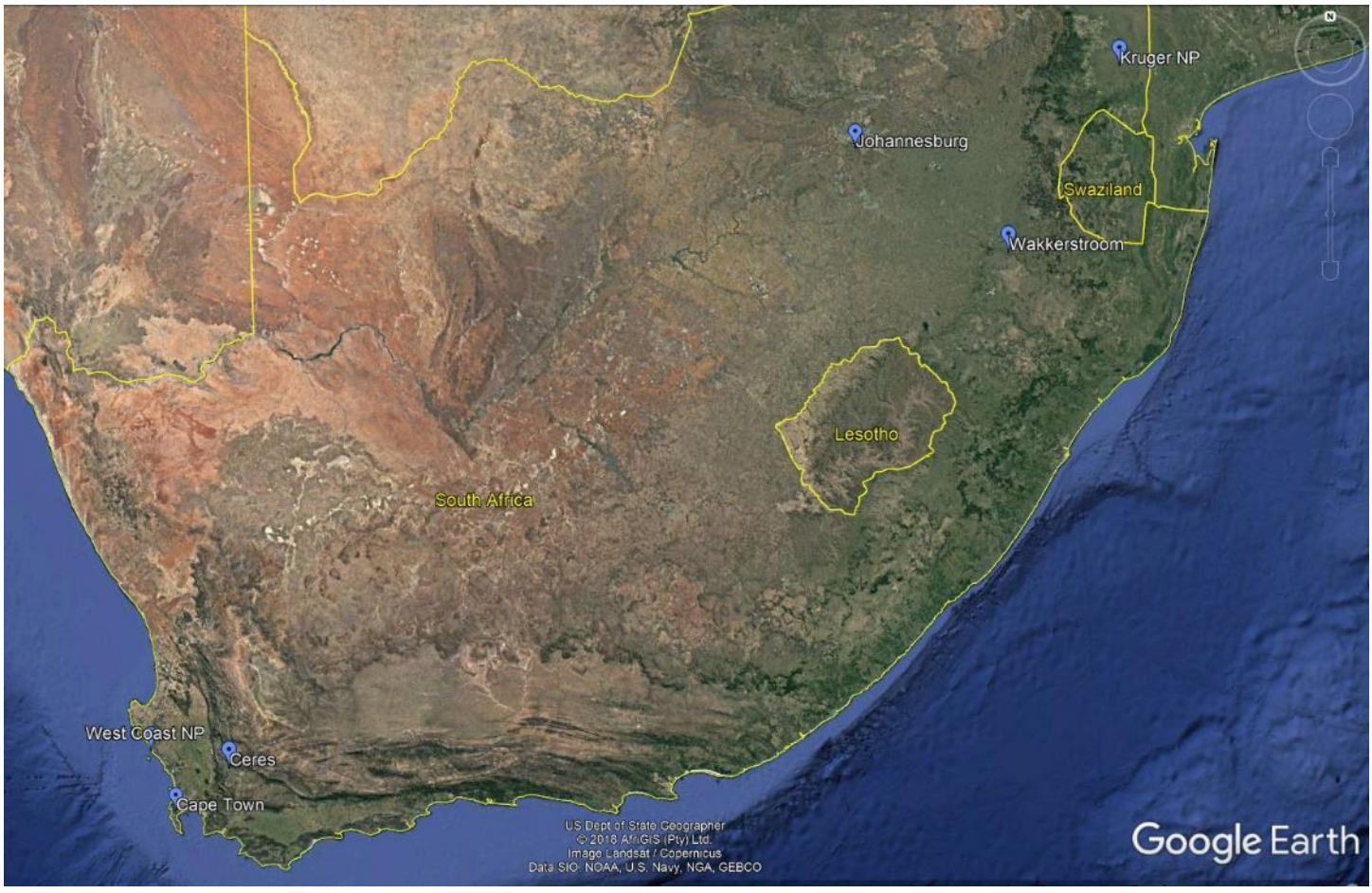
Amur Falcon by Clayton Burne

South Africa is quite simply one of the most pleasurable countries in which to travel, offering fantastic birding, exceptional wildlife viewing, and breath-taking photographic opportunities, along with world-class infrastructure. Besides the many endemic bird species, including two near-endemic bird families: Rockjumpers and Sugarbirds, we will focus on finding large numbers of migratory Amur Falcons and Lesser Kestrels in the country's highland grasslands. South Africa's other birdlife includes a rich seabird assemblage and vast numbers of more widespread, yet no less spectacular, African birds. Add to this the full big game experience (with excellent chances for finding Africa's "Big Five" – Lion, Leopard, Buffalo, Rhino and Elephant and much besides), rich botanical heritage, fine food and wines, friendly people and the scenic splendour of Africa's most varied country and one of the world's 17 megadiverse nations, and it's not hard to see why South Africa is an exceptionally popular destination!

For our Falcons and Big Cats safari experience, we have selected the two most productive and diverse regions of South Africa, the Cape Peninsula in the southwest and the vast Kruger National Park in the northeast of the country. In addition, we will spend two nights in the birding hamlet of Wakkerstroom, home to numerous endemic highland species as well large numbers of overwintering Amur Falcons.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Cape Town**
Day 2	**Cape Peninsula**
Day 3	**Cape Town to Ceres via West Coast National Park**
Day 4	**Ceres & Tanqua Karoo**
Day 5	**Ceres to Cape Town, flight to Johannesburg & transfer to Wakkerstroom**
Day 6	**Wakkerstroom**
Day 7	**Wakkerstroom to Kruger National Park**
Days 8 & 9	**Central Kruger National Park**
Days 10 & 11	**Southern Kruger National Park**
Day 12	**Kruger National Park to Mbombela & depart**



Birding sites in detail

This itinerary covers different seasons. Please note the below notations:

* **Summer migrants occurring between late October and early April.**
^ **Species that undergo distinct plumage changes, best viewed between November and March.**



Rock Kestrel by Adam Riley

Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens. Arguably the most beautiful set of gardens on the continent. This is an excellent site for Cape Spurfowl, Forest Canary, Cape Bulbul, Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk, Cape Batis, Cape Sugarbird, Orange-breasted and Southern Double-collared Sunbirds and further chances for the delightful little Swee Waxbill. The dramatic backdrop of Table Mountain, coupled with the great birding, makes this a very memorable stop.

Cape of Good Hope National Park. This wonderful park showcases the most south-western point of the continent and is very popular amongst birders and general tourists alike. Here we should find the impressive Cape Grassbird, Bokmakierie and Cape Siskin. We will explore the network of roads to less visited parts of the reserve, visiting secluded coves and searching for the elusive (Cape) Mountain Zebra and (Bontebok) Blesbok antelope. In addition, we should see Common Eland and Chacma Baboon.

Hottentots-Holland Mountains. The area of attractive Cape Fold mountains is a key area to search for one of South Africa's finest endemics, the handsome Cape Rockjumper. Though strikingly plumaged and conspicuous by their vocalizations, these charismatic birds possess an incredible ability to disappear amongst the boulders and we may have to be patient if we wish to enjoy prolonged sightings of these elusive creatures. Rock outcrops here also support Ground Woodpecker, White-necked Raven and Cape Rock Thrush, whilst the thick mountain fynbos is the favoured habitat of Cape Siskin and the smart, endemic Victorin's Warbler. If we are very lucky, we may flush Hottentot Buttonquail underfoot or stumble upon a Cape Eagle-Owl at its daytime roost.

Betty's Bay. We will visit the famous African Penguin colony at Stony Point. Here we will enjoy the spectacle of hundreds of penguins waddling about on the beach and rocks at extremely close range, which makes for superb photographic opportunities. We will also keep a lookout for the endemic African Oystercatcher along the adjacent rocky shoreline, and scan through the masses of nesting cormorants for all four species of South African coastal cormorants: Crowned, Bank, Cape and White-breasted.



Peregrine Falcon by Keith Valentine

Harold Porter Botanical Gardens. A smaller version of Kirstenbosch, these beautifully appointed gardens



Cape Rockjumper by Clayton Burne

support a wealth of fynbos specialties like Orange-breasted Sunbird, Cape Sugarbird and Cape Siskin and is a particularly good site to see the skulking, endemic Victorin's Warbler. We are also likely to encounter a range of other noteworthy and eye-catching species like Cape and Brimstone Canaries, Karoo Prinia, Swee Waxbill, Cape Batis, Bar-throated Apalis, Southern Double-collared Sunbird, Cape Robin-Chat, African Dusky and Fiscal Flycatchers, Olive Thrush and Sombre Greenbul.

Strandfontein Water Works. The network of settling ponds here usually supports large numbers of waterbirds of many different varieties and we are likely to encounter good numbers of Cape Shoveler, Cape Teal, Southern Pochard and Red-knobbed Coot, as well as Greater and Lesser Flamingos, Common Moorhen, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Black-necked and Great Crested Grebes, Hartlaub's and Kelp Gulls, Greater Crested Tern, Grey and Black-headed Herons, Yellow-billed Duck and Red-billed Teal. If we are fortunate and depending upon the water levels of the pans, we may also find small numbers of Maccoa Duck, Blue-billed Teal and South African Shelduck. The surrounding reedbeds harbour Lesser Swamp Warbler as well as Levaillant's Cisticola.

West Coast National Park. West Coast National Park which is host to the globally important wetland sites of the Berg River estuary and Langebaan Lagoon. Our quest will be dedicated mainly to locating larks. We will stop along the way to search for Cape Clapper Lark, a localised species that favours coastal vegetation called 'strandveld', which is stunted by the salty air from the icy Atlantic.

Large numbers of waders spend the northern winter here and we will scan for Red Knot*, Bar-tailed Godwit*, Ruddy Turnstone*, Grey Plover*, Terek Sandpiper*, Greater Sand Plover* and Eurasian Curlew*, as well as Kittlitz's and the localised Chestnut-banded Plovers. In addition to the shorebirds, these areas also support large numbers of Greater and Lesser Flamingos, South African Shelduck, Cape Shoveler and numerous other waterfowl. The surrounding strandveld is home to Southern Black Korhaan, Grey-winged Francolin, Grey Tit, Cape Penduline Tit, Karoo Lark, Capped Wheatear, Fiscal Flycatcher and the magnificent Black Harrier, surely one of the world's most attractive raptors.



Blue Cranes by Adam Riley



Blue Korhaan by Glen Valentine

Tanqua Karoo. Just a short drive from the village of Ceres is the semi-arid, central plateau of South Africa known as the Karoo; a land of endless vistas and spectacular sunsets, renowned for its endemic larks, chats and canaries. Our first stop is likely to be at Karoopoort, a narrow canyon that forms the gateway to the Succulent Karoo. Birds inhabiting the arid, rocky slopes and acacia-filled watercourses of this area include White-backed Mousebird, Acacia Pied Barbet, Mountain Wheatear, Layard's and Chestnut-vented Warblers, the dainty Fairy Flycatcher and Pririt Batis, whilst the adjacent reedbeds are home to the endemic Namaqua Warbler. One of the area's most charismatic birds is the highly localised Cinnamon-breasted Warbler. Though fairly vocal, this species is highly elusive and seeing it in its habitat of jumbled boulders and rocky scree will require a combination of patience and perseverance.

Continuing northwards onto the open flats of the Karoo, we will watch the roadsides carefully for Karoo and Spike-heeled Larks, Tractrac, Sickle-winged and Karoo Chats, the elusive Karoo Eremomela, Rufous-eared Warbler and Yellow and White-throated Canaries. Pale Chanting Goshawk and Rock Kestrel perch conspicuously on any vantage points and, if we are lucky, we may find Booted Eagle or Lanner Falcon. We will also stop to listen for the distinctive flight calls of Namaqua Sandgrouse as well as look for the cryptically coloured Karoo Korhaan. If very fortunate, we may even see the nomadic Ludwig's Bustard striding through the desolate plains.

Ceres area. The surrounding protea-clad mountain slopes support the endemic, range-restricted Protea Canary. We'll spend some time at key positions listening for its distinctive call. The moist gullies here also hold a few other endemics such as the skulking Victorin's Warbler, Cape Grassbird, Cape Sugarbird and Bokmakierie.

Wakkerstroom. The grasslands and hills surrounding the small town of Wakkerstroom are a centre for avian endemism and are critical for the survival of several range-restricted species. We will make a full exploration of the grasslands and a highly productive marsh at the edge of town.

The marsh is a haven for waterbirds and offers the chance of several uncommon or localised species. Purple Heron, South African Shelduck, Cape Shoveler, African Swamphen, South African Cliff Swallow, Levaillant's Cisticola and Cape Weaver are all regular, and we should also find African Snipe and the elusive African Rail. Rarely recorded species seen here on our previous trips include the secretive Baillon's Crake, Red-chested Flufftail and even Western Marsh* and Montagu's* Harriers.



Lesser Kestrel by Rob Williams

Driving along the network of dirt roads radiating out from Wakkerstroom, we will explore the grasslands, rocky outcrops and gorges of this unique area in search of some of the countries most threatened and range-



Southern Bald Ibis by Adam Riley

restricted endemics, along with numerous other widespread but no less exciting species. These include Southern Bald Ibis, Blue Korhaan, White-bellied Bustard, Jackal Buzzard, the rare and localised Botha's and Rudd's Larks (the latter considered one of the world's most endangered larks), Pink-billed, Eastern Long-billed and Eastern Clapper Larks, Ground Woodpecker, Ant-eating and Buff-streaked Chats, Sentinel Rock Thrush, African Rock and Yellow-breasted^ Pipits, Cape Longclaw, Pied Starling, the spectacular Long-tailed Widowbird^, Yellow-crowned Bishop^, Quailfinch and Cape Canary. Red-winged Francolin is fairly common in the moist grasslands and we may find them feeding at the roadside or sunning themselves at dawn. Small mammals occurring in the grasslands include Yellow Mongoose and the rare Cape Fox. One of the more interesting denizens of these grasslands is the curious Suricate, or Meerkat, immortalized in Disney's 'Lion King'. We have a good chance of finding family groups of these unusual yet delightful animals.

Wakkerstroom is justly famous as one of the best places in the world to see Amur Falcon (November to March only) on their wintering grounds. Having safely navigated their way from eastern Russia and northern China, the majority of the world's population ends up in south-eastern Africa. We can expect hundreds, if not thousands of these small falcons hawking over fields throughout the high-altitude grassland area. It is at dusk though, that the few tall trees in and around Wakkerstroom come alive, with up to 10 000 Amur Falcons and roughly 1 000 Lesser Kestrels* heading in to roost for the night.



Lion by Adam Riley



Lanner Falcon by Adam Riley

Kruger National Park. The Greater Kruger conservation area incorporates vast areas of adjacent Mozambique and Zimbabwe and forms one of the largest reserves on earth. It is also one of Africa's most diverse parks, protecting a huge variety of wildlife. We'll visit a number of sites and camps in the central and southern part of the park.

The central part of the park is dominated by open grassy plains and sparsely vegetated woodlands. The birding and game viewing in this region is excellent with many bird species attending mixed flocks, particularly in acacia dominated woodland. In fact, the acacia savanna that dominates most of the Kruger National Park contains one of the highest densities of birds of any habitat type in the world! This, coupled with the immense variety of game that we will endeavour to see, ensures a truly unforgettable African experience.

We will bird the rich bushveld and grasslands of the park, which are particularly productive for a number of special species. These include Kori Bustard – the world's heaviest flying bird, the magnificent Martial Eagle, Bateleur, Marabou Stork and the impressive Secretarybird, one of the world's great avian gems. Further specialties that we will search for in the woodland areas include the lovely Orange-breasted and Grey-headed Bushshrikes, African Grey Hornbill, Southern White-crowned and Magpie Shrikes, Red-billed Oxpecker riding on the backs of big game, Bennett's Woodpecker, African Hoopoe, Red-billed Buffalo Weaver, Burchell's Starling, Mourning Collared Dove, Brown-headed Parrot, Red-crested Korhaan, Southern Black Tit, miniscule Grey Penduline Tit, noisy Green Wood Hoopoe, Common Scimitarbill, Greater and Lesser Honeyguides, Acacia Pied Barbet, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Sabota Lark, Mosque Swallow, Black Cuckooshrike, Kurrichane and Groundscraper Thrushes, eye-catching White-throated Robin-Chat, melodic White-browed Scrub Robin, Burnt-necked and Yellow-bellied Eremomelas, Stierling's Wren-Warbler, Black-crowned and Brown-crowned Tchagras, Brubru, dazzling Violet-backed Starling* and Golden-breasted Bunting.

The sweet grasses in the Satara area are also excellent for large herds of grazing mammals such as Common Wildebeest, Plains Zebra and Impala. These huge herds in turn support a healthy population of predators and Satara is particularly well known for this. In fact, we have an excellent chance of finding Lion, Leopard, Cheetah, Spotted Hyena and the very scarce and highly threatened African Wild (Painted) Dog in this area. High densities of other game include Southern Giraffe, Greater Kudu, Klipspringer, Bushbuck, Warthog, Chacma Baboon, Vervet and Dwarf Mongoose, to name just a few.



Verreaux's Eagle-Owls by Glen Valentine

Aside from the many mammals, we'll be seeking Black-bellied Bustard, Crested and the rare



Young Cheetah by Glen Valentine

Shelley's and Coqui Francolins, Swainson's and Natal Spurfowls, Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark, European* and Purple Rollers, Yellow-throated Longclaw and with luck, the erratic and nomadic Temminck's Courser and Senegal Lapwing. Summer visitors to these grasslands also include the scarce Pallid* and Montagu's* Harriers, while rocky outcrops might yield Mocking Cliff Chat, Red-winged Starling and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting. In the late afternoon pairs of boldly patterned and crepuscular Double-banded Sandgrouse come to the edges of the road to feed, before making their way down to watering holes at dusk to drink.

The denser bushveld, woodlands and gallery forest of the southern section of the park are host to one of the most mouth-watering species that we hope to find, the majestic Southern Ground Hornbill that is often seen striding around in small groups. We will certainly be treated to many encounters with the gaudy Lilac-breasted Roller. Raptors are numerous throughout the reserve and we will no doubt enjoy sightings of the striking Bateleur as well as Tawny* and Wahlberg's* Eagles, Hooded, White-headed, White-backed and huge Lappet-faced Vultures, and the handsome African Fish Eagle, while other possibilities include Shikra, Lizard Buzzard, Gabar and Dark Chanting Goshawks, the scarce but extremely attractive African Cuckoo-Hawk, Black-chested and Brown Snake Eagles, Lesser Spotted*, Steppe*, Crowned and Booted Eagles, African Hawk-Eagle, African Harrier Hawk and Amur Falcon*.

This area is also famous for regular sightings of the rare African Wild Dog, while we stand an excellent chance of finding the endangered White Rhinoceros and with exceptional luck, its rarer cousin, the Black Rhinoceros. It is also arguably the best area in the park to see the crepuscular Leopard, certainly one of the world's best-looking cats! In addition, we should encounter Lion, Spotted Hyena, Black-backed Jackal, large herds of African Elephant lounging in the Sabi River, herds of African Buffalo, Waterbuck, the beautiful Bushbuck and pods of



African Wild Dog Pups by Greg de Klerk



Leopard by Greg de Klerk

Hippopotami. The persistent troops of playful Chacma Baboon and Vervet will keep us entertained during the heat of the day.

Scouring the riverine woodland and thickets along the Sabi River, we hope to encounter Bennett's, Golden-tailed, Bearded and Cardinal Woodpeckers, Ashy Flycatcher, gorgeous White-browed and Red-capped Robin-Chats, Terrestrial Brownbul, Yellow-bellied and Sombre Greenbuls, African, Jameson's and Red-billed Firefinches, superb Green-winged Pytilia, Red-faced Cisticola and Southern Boubou. The large riparian trees lining the rivers provide perfect nesting sites for weavers, which are extremely well represented in the park and include Southern^ and Lesser Masked^, Village^, Spectacled and Thick-billed. We should also find African Green Pigeon with its lovely, mournful, liquid call, the tiny Little Sparrowhawk, African Goshawk, gaudy Purple-crested Turaco, Red-headed Weaver^, Black-headed Oriole, the showy African Paradise Flycatcher*, Arrow-marked Babbler, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Green-backed Camaroptera, iridescent Collared, Marico, White-bellied, Amethyst and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds, and the vocal Black-collared and Crested Barbets.

Noisy flocks of White-crested Helmetshrike are regularly encountered and we will also be on the lookout for the much rarer Retz's Helmetshrike along with its seldom-seen host, the rare and much sought-after Thick-billed Cuckoo*.

The park's numerous large rivers and wetlands harbour a number of exciting water-associated birds and we will be on the lookout for the massive Goliath Heron, stately and severely threatened Saddle-billed Stork as well as the more common Woolly-necked and Yellow-billed Storks, African Spoonbill, the unique and monotypic Hamerkop, Wire-tailed and Grey-rumped Swallows, White-crowed Lapwing and if we are lucky, the rare African Finfoot or unpredictable Greater Painted-snipe.



Eurasian Hobby by Clayton Burne

**There will be opportunities for optional sunset drives. Success on these sunset drives here varies greatly, but the list of possibilities is rather impressive and includes a good number of owls and nightjars, as well as Bronze-winged Courser, both Common and Central African Large-spotted Genets, Southern Lesser and Thick-tailed Greater Galagos, White-tailed Mongoose, African Savannah Hare, the incomparable Cape Porcupine, African Wild Cat, African Civet, Serval and Spotted Hyena – besides the Big 5!

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Undemanding, perfectly suited for all birding / wildlife interest levels and most mobility capabilities.
Birding Ease		Undemanding, most species provide good visuals. A small number of scarce / tricky species.
Accommodation		Good to comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Walking and hiking quite limited. Mostly over flattish ground, some areas are uneven with rock/stone. Lodge gardens.
Vehicles / Roads		Comfortable vehicle. Closed minibus vehicle in the Cape & Wakkerstroom, changing to typical Africa open safari vehicle in Kruger.
Photography		Very good to excellent.
Annoyances		Potential for malaria (low risk).

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

This tour is made available through our Tailor-made tours department. To explore this offering further for pricing, precise day to day itinerary, inclusions & exclusions, or to tailor the tour to your personal requirements, please contact our Tailor-made team on tailormade@rockjumper.com

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- Exiting the vehicle is prohibited in all areas and parks that contain dangerous animals.
- Much of our time is spent in vehicles, as we must cover long distances to get to the best areas for birds and animals. The more luggage you pack the less room there is in the vehicle, so it is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg for check in luggage and 8kg for hand luggage.
- Crime is problematic in certain areas of South Africa. Exercise caution as you would for any big city where crime exists. Do not unnecessarily flaunt cash and valuables and do not leave valuables exposed in the vehicle.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour departs from Cape Town in the late morning of day 1, kindly arrive the prior day. The tour concludes around mid-morning of day 12 in Mbombela.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Cape Town International Airport, Cape Town (IATA: CPT) and Upington Airport (IATA: UTN) are the main ports of entry and exit for this tour. Upington has frequent flights to Cape Town or Johannesburg International Airports.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.