

KwaZulu-Natal

South Africa's
KwaZulu-Natal
province deserves
more than a few
days of your
attention



FACT FILE

A two week tour of KwaZulu-Natal including three nights at Rocktail Bay, costs from £1,895 per person based on two people travelling. Alternatively, it can be readily combined with visits to other parts of the country. For further details please call Cate or Melissa on 01869 276 250.



KwaZulu-Natal is slowly but surely becoming a better-known destination, and we've spent a lot of time getting to know it well. Melissa, another of our South Africa Specialists, and myself have recently each spent about five weeks travelling round the province, getting right under its skin. It's also meant that in addition to the well-documented destinations such as the Battlefields, the Drakensberg Mountains and the beaches of Ballito, we've also uncovered some of the hidden gems of the province, and I want to just pick out one or two personal favourites.

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, the body responsible for managing the wildlife of the province, has done sterling work, notably in their key role in helping to save the white rhino from extinction, conservation done largely at Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park. One of their parks is Ithala, a beautiful area in the north of the province. Although smaller than some of the other parks, it has a remarkable diversity of habitat, as it is centred on a deep valley carved through the world's oldest rocks and covers 1,000 metres of elevation within its boundaries. Biodiversity complements the spectacular scenery, and your exploration options include guided drives and self-guided walks. I'd normally suggest visiting Ithala in combination with a private reserve, which will give you a good mix of guided 'Big-Five' game viewing, with the chance to explore and enjoy the Ithala scenery and wildlife under your own steam.

The beaches of KwaZulu-Natal are justly famous, so much so that finding a quiet, unspoilt stretch of beach can be difficult, however, up in the far north is Rocktail Bay, a magical, remote hideaway. Once you've left your car at the entrance to the Maputaland Coastal Forest Reserve, you are taken into the camp by 4x4 along sandy trails through tropical vegetation alive with the sounds of mischievous monkeys and bright birds. The camp accommodation is quite rustic, with wooden-construction tree-houses built into the forest canopy, just back from the beach. Furnishings are comfortable, and the idea is that you are not staying at a luxury lodge with minibars, televisions and internet connections, but getting away from all of this and just enjoying your surroundings. From lying in a hammock to diving on pristine coral, all activity levels are catered for.

The famous battlefields of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift had me hooked on the history of the region, but if you have more than a passing interest in these

things, linger a while and see some of the other great battle sites. Spioenkop was a bloody stalemate of a battle: British troops were pinned down in shallow trenches (the earth was too hard to allow them to dig down much more than about a foot) and raked by Boer fire. Wandering to the summit, normally deserted, it is an extremely melancholic place – my overriding feeling was that this was a desolate and lonely place to die, huddling in a scrape in the earth as artillery fire rained in from all sides. Although not as famous as Isandlwana or Rorke's Drift, I found the story told by my guide just as gripping and the site just as moving.

The one thing I'd say about KwaZulu-Natal is that it shouldn't be rushed. Whilst it is possible to dash in and out to spend a few days at the Battlefields or in the Drakensberg, the province really does have so much more to offer. It is a destination in its own right, and can easily occupy you for two weeks – it is also remarkably diverse, and I hope this article illustrates this and encourages you to come and explore one of South Africa's best kept secrets.

Cate Mackenzie

South Africa Specialist



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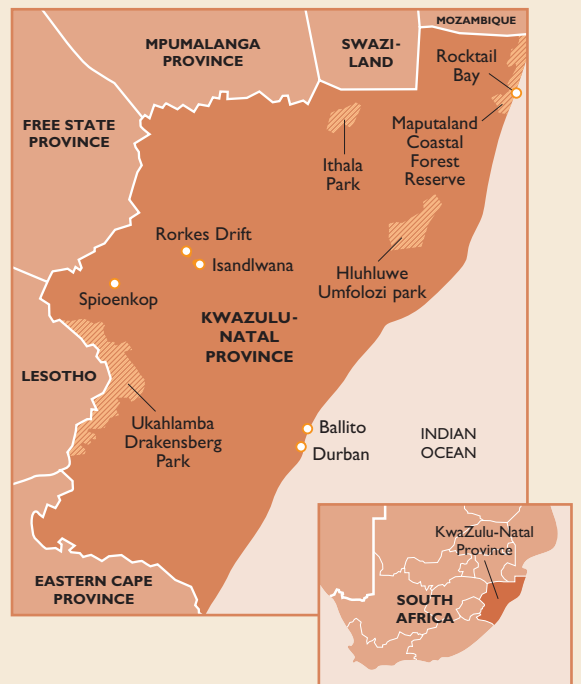
See more images of the fabulous Rocktail Bay at audleytravel.com/rocktail



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- 1 Treehouse at Rocktail Bay
- 2 Spioenkop summit memorials
- 3 White rhinoceros and calf
- 4 Drakensberg mountains