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South Africa Great White Shark Experience

Adventure Relaxation Culture

Trip Name: South Africa Great White Shark Experience **Trip Code:** SAIM **Duration:** From 2 weeks

Trip Highlights

- Have an amazing experience getting up close to these amazing creatures
- Learning all about ecosystems and how to interpret the sharks behaviour
- Being in one of the best places in the world to see Great White Sharks in their natural habitat!

Overview

With the world's shark population becoming increasingly under threat and as a volunteer on this project you will play a pivotal role in observing and protecting these majestic creatures.

This is a very exciting program and not for the faint hearted! You'll be getting up close to Great White Sharks, volunteering on a shark cage diving vessel and working alongside marine biologists conducting research on these fascinating creatures, their environment and other marine wildlife. You might even be lucky enough to help with the tagging and tracking of the sharks. As well as conducting research you'll be helping out with the tourists on the shark cage diving boats by preparing the boats and assisting the crew. If this isn't enough, you'll even have the opportunity to go shark cage diving yourself and experience these incredible predators up close and personal.

The project is based in Kleinbaai in the Western Cape of South Africa, one of the best places in the world to see Great White Sharks in their natural habitat so you're definitely in for an unforgetable experience!

Destination Info

South Africa Great White Shark Experience

Diverse, exhilarating, spectacular, varied – South Africa is a wildlife volunteer destination to write home about. Never far from the news, it's a vast, modern multicultural country, full of contradictions and full of interest. It offers so many opportunities for student travel that it's difficult to summarise.

There's the country itself – offering everything from lush subtropics to deserts, savannah to scrubland, bushveld to stunning coastlines. If your taste is for Africa's big five, this is the one of the very best places on the continent to see them.

Then there are the people and what they've achieved. If your interest lies in modern politics, South Africa should definitely be on your travel shortlist. You'll have the chance to live and volunteer in a country that has accomplished so much in the years since apartheid was dismantled – it's unique in the world.

Itinerary

This is an outstanding opportunity for volunteers to see sharks in their natural environment, either from a boat or a cage, and to learn about the marine wildlife and ecosystems in the area. As a volunteer you'll be getting involved in the work which helps preserve these species and their environment and you'll gain truly exceptional research experience and training. Here's a taste of the types of activities on offer on this programme.

Tagging and Tracking
Tagging and tracking is done throughout the year but is completely weather and funding dependent and cannot be guaranteed as it is a bonus when it happens. When it does happen though all volunteers will get involved. The first white shark tagged in South Africa was in 2009, where 'Sarika' a 4.2m female was spotted in the shallows. For the next two months we manually tracked her on our dedicated research vessel, to within meters of the beach and up to the edge of Dyer Island. Sharks are externally tagged while free swimming and manually tracked using ultrasonic pings from the tag which are picked up by a receiver on the boat. We shadow the sharks' movements up and down the bay. We are investigating the effect of environmental parameters on the localised movements and predatory foraging on prey species. As members of the research team, volunteers assist us in both tagging and tracking expeditions as well as processing the data.

Dorsal fin identification
As a volunteer you will be getting involved and helping the marine biologists with dorsal fin identification which takes place on the daily shark cage diving vessel. Each sharks fin is unique, and with bait and chum, images can be captured of the sharks fin and matched to our database. Such information is crucial to calculate population estimates for great white sharks on a local, national and global scale. Our catalogue dates back to 2007 and is likely the most extensive on the species with a dedicated effort for everyday we work with these animals. Interns will assist with this project by learning photo editing techniques as well as cataloguing.

Predation studies

Predations are monitored mainly in the winter time when the sharks are at their most active and if you are volunteering at this time there might be the chance for you to help out the marine biologists with this.

Geyser Rock is home to a Cape fur seal colony of some 55-60,000 individuals and each year this huge abundance draw white sharks to feed. The predation pressure on the seals is immense, and simply by being in the area the sharks shape the movements of the seals before they even begin to attack. The ecology of fear examines what extent this presence plays in the day to day lives of the seals. By dedicatedly observing and quantifying the seals' movement patterns, we are further understanding the influence of dynamic predators in ecosystems. You will have the opportunity to join Michelle, one of our researchers on surveys around Dyer Island and deep into Shark Alley where seals play the game of predator vs. prey; a game in which you either win or you die!

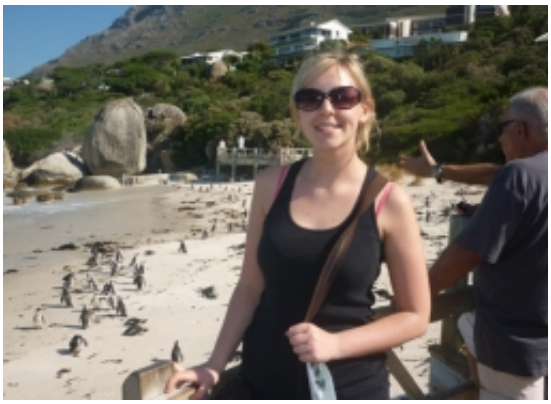
Whale watching and shark cage diving
We run daily shark cage diving trips and whale watching during the months of July to December. As a volunteer you'll be working on these 2 vessels and you'll be conducting research on the sharks and other marine life. We use these trips as unique opportunities to gather data and further our understanding of the wildlife in the bay. Already we have observed wound healing in white sharks, predatory interactions between sharks and dolphin and the long term effect of satellite tagging on the sharks dorsal fins. You will have the opportunity to help gather data from these commercial trips and even help the guides and crew on the water. You will also have the opportunity to jump in yourself and experience these apex predators up close and personal! As these are tourist boats, volunteers will also be getting involved withe tourist duties such as, assisting with dive operations, helping the tourists and preparing and cleaning the boats and wetsuits.

Environmental surveys

Environmental surveys are conducted almost daily, with regular beach walks, beach clean ups, hikes, shark egg case walks and rocky shore ecology. These walks are a great opportunity for volunteers as you can really learn a lot and this work is really hands on. Because we are located between two oceans, the Atlantic and Indian Ocean we see dramatic changes in the environmental parameters on both a seasonal and day to day bases. As warm water from the east (in the Agulhas current) meets cold water from the west (in the cold and upwelling Benguela current) mixing occurs and we have an abundance of nutrients and biodiversity. Changes can dramatically impact the wildlife in the bay from the fish species we observe to the amount of sharks, whales and dolphin we encounter. Alison's PhD hinges on decoding these complex relationships and volunteers will be fully trained in the deployment and interpretation of YSI probes measuring oxygen, salinity and temperature of the water column.

Community projects
We are involved in the community and although we do not have a set schedule for the community projects, if our community needs help, we will go and help no matter what time of the year or what activity. We have a range of community projects that we support and that you can be a part of, from teaching kids from the local schools about the Marine Big 5 (dolphins, whales, seals, sharks and penguins) to cleaning up beaches and assisting the making and deployment of penguin houses and fishing line bins.

South Africa Great White Shark Experience



Situated near Cape Agulhas, the southern tip of Africa, Kleinbaai (Klein Bay) is an extraordinary marine environment. At the centre of the Bay, Dyer Island is the home of about 60,000 Cape Fur Seals attracting one of the densest and most accessible populations of Great White Sharks in the world. The clear waters and relatively small area make shark sightings a daily occurrence throughout the year with a peak in the Southern Hemisphere winter (May-September). Despite their large numbers and the frequent sightings, little research has been conducted on this Great White Shark population.

The organisation is filling this knowledge gap with an intensive programme of research conducted from the cage diving boat, and a dedicated research boat from which our marine biologists study important aspects of shark behaviour. Our work has been presented at international conferences.

The Bay is also a vitally important breeding area for endangered Southern Right Whales which migrate from their feeding grounds in Antarctica to mate and breed here from July-December.

About 800 adult whales are seen annually. Fortunately, boat-based access to these animals is strictly controlled with only a limited number of licences being given to responsible tour operators. Our eco-tourism partner offers some of the best boat-based whale watching in the world.

In addition to Southern Right Whales there are resident populations of Humpback and Bryde's whales as well as large pods of Bottlenose and Common dolphins. Dyer Island has one of the few remaining breeding colonies of the vulnerable African Penguin around the coast of the Cape. The habitat of these charming birds was largely destroyed in the 19th and early 20th centuries when guano was stripped from the islands thus removing the soft ground into which the penguins could burrow. As a result, eggs and chicks are now exposed to predators and the elements. Together with overfishing and marine pollution, this has caused the population to fall by 90% in the last 100 years and it is now at an all-time low.

Step 1: Application
To apply for this project we ask you to either call us or apply online. When you apply we will request information

on your emergency contact details, passport number and your health background and other important information. At this stage a deposit payment of £199 is requested, this deposit is non-refundable, unless your application is declined by our team in South Africa.

Step 2: Acceptance onto the project

Once our team in South Africa have reviewed your application, and accepted you onto the programme for your preferred dates we will contact you to confirm your application has been successful. We recommend you purchase insurance as soon as you secure your placement.

Step 3: Online account details
Once your placement has been secured, we will set up and send you details of your online account login which will take you to your personal Real Gap secure website. Here you can view details of your project, along with info specific to your time in South Africa. This includes; what to expect during your time in South Africa, what to take with you, country and visa information and details such as insurance and where to get necessary vaccinations. Once you have your login details you can go ahead and book flights, to do this please contact your travel advisor who will give you a quote.

In the run up to your project, our expert team will be here to answer any questions you may have and to fully prepare you for your time in South Africa.

On your ‘off-sea’ days, there are dozens of trips and excursions in the area, which is known as one of the most scenic destinations in the world, such as wine tasting, visiting the most Southern point of Africa. Kleinbaai is a quiet village and evenings can be spent in one of the nice pubs or restaurants, but there are no nightclubs or cinemas. Our volunteer co-ordinator can help you arrange activities (at an additional cost) some of which are listed below.

Horse treks

Take up the relaxing opportunity to explore the valley on horseback along rambling trails through the Walker Bay Whale Conservancy. The ride will take you through a private nature reserve along the Klein River and up into the Kleinriviersberg Mountains. They can be for one to four hours and are tailored to suit riders of all abilities.

Quad biking!

This quad biking trail takes you around the historical Robert Stanford Wine Estate through vineyards and thick bush just wide enough for your quad bike to ride through. The trail finishes with a short but steep drop which, with assistance from the guide, riders take on one-by-one. More steep climbs and drops await, head up a waterway and make sure you counter-balance on the impressively sharp angles. If you need even more excitement after your shark encounters then this is a must.

Whale Watching
Join a magical Whale Watching trip and encounter a whale longer and wider than the boat you are on! This huge, gentle and mysterious creature really is a magnificent site. The season for Whale spotting is July to December.

Cape Town

No trip to South Africa is complete without a visit to Cape Town, home of the world famous Table Mountain and one of the most lively cities on the planet. If you are interested in history, you can go to Robben Island, where you can visit the prison where Nelson Mandela was incarcerated. There are also markets, botanical gardens, and cape of good hope, one of the most southerly points in Africa.

Accommodation

You will be situated in Kleinbaai – known as the “White Shark Capital of the World.” This is a small town which offers a wide range of services including well-stocked supermarkets, banks, etc. Kleinbaai is about 30 minutes by road from the larger town of Hermanus which is an important tourist centre and about 2 hours drive from Cape Town. The surrounding area offers easy access to the Cape fynbos – one of the world’s most diverse eco-systems – and a number of tourist attractions and activities.

Accommodation is in a lodge, equipped with 4 chalets that house between 4 and 6 persons per chalet, with own bathroom, kitchen and living areas as well as daily living essentials. The main house will be occupied by volunteer coordinators and a full time janitor so all the needs of the grounds are met. There is also a very spacious living area in the main hall with a pool table, TV, DVD player and wifi, communal indoor braai and kitchen area.

There is also a swimming pool and garden.

Meals

Meals are not included in the cost of the programme. We recommend that you budget between £200 / USD$360 per month on the programme.

What's Included

- All accommodation (including bedding, coffee, tea, cereals, etc.)
- Full orientation and briefing session with the team
- Return Transfers to and from Cape Town
- Internet access at volunteer house
- Boat trips
- 2 T-shirts, 1 cap and 1 jacket (jacket to be returned after programme completion)
- 1 pair of water boots
- Certificate of completion
- Tour of Kleinbaai and surroundings including a Township Tour as well as a visit to the famous Danger Point Lighthouse.

What's Not Included

- Flight ticket
- Medical and travel insurance
- Excess baggage
- Use of telephone
- Food- you will need approximately £200 / US$360 per month)
- We usually suggest a monthly budget of £125-250/ US$215-430 for entertainment and other personal details, excluding your basic food costs.

Is This Trip For You?

All you need is to be enthusiastic, love sharks and marine life and be prepared to have fun in the process and learn about our animals and environment.

Additional Information

You will be met at Cape Town International Airport and transferred to Kleinbaai the following day. There are direct flights from London, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Atlanta, and Dubai. Alternatively, you can transit via Johannesburg which has flights from most major cities in Europe as well as regular connections with the US and other parts of the world including Asia and Latin America.

On arrival you will be fully briefed by a co-ordinator and you will meet the research team who will be available throughout your stay.

Free Time

Our programme is designed to provide you with the opportunity to gain as much experience and knowledge as possible from your time with us. The nature of the sea requires maximum flexibility in scheduling. On “no-sea days” the diverse local environment offers opportunities for field trips to nature reserves, research centres and interaction with local research organisations. There are also lectures available on free days.

Additionally, there is a vibrant social life and opportunities for tourism to local seaside vacation centres. Cape Town is about 2½ hours away by road and most interns will take the opportunity to visit during thier time off.

What to Pack

- Towel
- Personal journal or notebook
- Camera
- Sun hat
- Sun block
- Old clothing that can be worn at sea
- Old shoes for use on the boat (water boots will be
- provided)
- Snorkel/mask and flippers. (We can loan or rent gear
- should you wish)
- Rain jacket
- Warm clothing for evenings/boat.
- Polarized sunglasses
- Necessary dive equipment for cage diving is supplied

Police Check

This trip requires a Police Check to be carried out - please contact us for further information on how to do this.

Support & Advice

Your safety is paramount which is why all our programs have been visited and assessments have been conducted to ensure any major risks have been minimized.

In addition, you will have access to a 24 hour emergency contact number so you can contact one of our staff at any time should you need to. In addition our overseas partners and coordinators are on hand in-country to assist you.

Financial Security

We know that the last thing you want to worry about when you're planning your trip of a lifetime is whether your money is in safe hands. As a leading global gap year provider it's our job to make sure your finances are secure, so when you book with us you can be confident that we do just that.

Real Gap Experience is part of TUI Travel Plc, one of the largest travel organisations in the world, and these days in the travel industry, large means secure.

Insurance

Whether you're traveling for two weeks or two years, trekking the Amazon in Ecuador or on safari in Africa, insurance is an essential part of your adventure and will help you enjoy your travels, secure in the knowledge that you have the protection you need. In fact, everyone traveling with us must have adequate cover before their trip begins.

Of course you are free to buy insurance from any provider, however at Real Gap Experience, we have partnered with World Nomads to offer policies that have been specifically designed to meet the needs of global travel. If you think you're already covered by an existing policy, such as those offered by credit card providers, check the policy wording very carefully to ensure it covers you for your Real Gap Experience.

For more information on travel insurance please contact us to speak to one of our travel advisors.

Money Matters

The currency in South Africa is the Rand (R), which is divided into 100 cents. Coins come in denominations of 1, 2, 5, 10 and 50 cents, and 1, 2 and 5 Rand. Notes come in denominations of 10, 20, 50, 100 and 200 Rand.

US Dollars, Pound Sterling or Euros are the best currencies to bring to change locally. Major credit cards such as Visa or MasterCard are accepted in most towns, cities and petrol stations and ATMs can be found across the country. ATMs in cities are the most likely to give cash advances to cards on the on the Cirrus network.

Meal, Inexpensive Restaurant $7.70
Domestic Beer (0.5 litre draught) $1.85
Coke/Pepsi (0.33 litre bottle) $1.04
Water (0.33 litre bottle) $1.13

(Prices quoted in US Dollar)

Passports and Visas

All nationalities require a full passport that must be valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, if one is necessary, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. The information offered below is to help you with that process. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

For stays of 90 days or less nationals of the European Union, the USA, Australia and New Zealand can obtain a free entry permit on arrival. All other nationalities should consult their nearest South African Embassy or High Commission for details on entry requirements.

Cultural Considerations

Smoking and Drinking

Smoking and drinking is tolerated in South Africa, although smoking has been banned in public areas such as cinemas, bars and airports. You will find that you will be able to get imported beer cheaply in most establishments and there are many tasty local beers too. South Africa is also famous for wines, so you shouldn't miss out on the opportunity to try some local varieties.

However, please respect other volunteers. Drinking is only permissible in moderation and must not impact on your volunteer work during the week. While we want you to have fun in your free time, antisocial behaviour will not be tolerated on the project.

Drugs

It is absolutely forbidden to bring drugs into South Africa. Always keep an eye on your luggage while travelling. Never bring anyone else's luggage through customs. If you get caught there is little chance that you will walk away without punishment. As in most countries, South Africa has very strict rules when it comes to the possession of drugs. All drugs, including 'soft' drugs like marijuana, are illegal. Please do NOT use any illegal substances whilst travelling - it is not worth the risk and is not acceptable at the project.

Greeting

Pleasantries are taken seriously and using 'hello' and 'goodbye' can go a long way to making friends and being

accepted. Please take the time to learn a few local words and show that you are keen to fit in. There is also a big emphasis on shaking hands. The Western way of doing this will be fine, but you are likely to pick up a few local variations!

On The whole, South Africans are easy-going people - any social errors are unlikely to cause offence, so please do not worry!

Vaccinations & Health

Travel health can often be something people forget about before going away, but a little preparation and knowledge can go a long way to help you stay fit and healthy while abroad. The risks to your health whilst travelling will vary depending on your general health and the type of activities you are going to be partaking in and the length of your stay.

Since we are not medically qualified, it is recommended that you consult with your Doctor or a recognised Travel Medical Advisory Service who will assess your particular health risks before recommending vaccines and/or anti-malarial tablets and advising you on what precautions you should take.

Safety

Tourists can be targeted by pickpockets and thieves. Please educate yourself about Africa and South Africa in particular, before you leave, so that you can be alert for all types of situations. General travel safety rules are below.

- Avoid travelling alone, especially at night
- Find out where the unsafe areas are and avoid them
- When travelling keep all-important documents and valuables in a safe place, like an inner hidden pocket or money belt
- Carry only as much cash as you think you will need for the day
- Don’t wear expensive jewellery or watches
- Be wary of people who seem too friendly too fast
- Keep cameras out of sight. Always keep bags and purses in your sight.
- Before swimming, ask how safe the area is

ATM Theft

It is very likely that you will need to withdraw cash at some point during your travels. Please be cautious when withdrawing money from an ATM and ensure that you are vigilant of other people near the ATM, especially those that offer unsolicited assistance if your card is detained. It has been recognised that individuals are operating unlawful withdrawals by placing ‘traps’ in ATMs whereby personal bank cards are being detained, causing the victim to believe their card transaction has not been completed, and leaving their bank card in the ATM which is then later retrieved by the thief.

If your card is confiscated or you are concerned that your card has been tampered with, please report immediately to the bank or cancel your card.

Swimming

If visiting a beach in South Africa it is important that you take note of any information boards that are located on the beach before entering the water. Most beaches also operate a flag system to indicate whether it is safe to swim or not, it is essential that you take note of any advice given and heed any warnings that are in place as there can be the risk of rip tides, strong currents and Shark attack. If you are unsure whether it is safe to swim in the ocean,

speak to the lifeguards or your in-country coordinators.

Language Guide

There are 11 official languages in South Africa; Afrikaans, English, Zulu, Xhosa, IsiNdebele, Northern Sotho, Sesotho, Setswana, SiSwati, Tshivenda, and Xitsonga. There are many other tribal, indigenous languages. However, English is spoken prevalently across the country. In Cape Town, the predominant language is Afrikaans. We suggest you obtain a Lonely Planet or language guide for the destination(s) you are travelling to.

English - *Afrikaans*
Hello - *Hallo*
How are you? - *Hoe gaan dit?*
I'm fine - *Goed dankie*
Thank you (very much) - *Baie dankie*
Please - *Asseblief*
Yes / No - *Ja / Nee*
Goodbye - *Totsiens*

English - *Isi Xhosa*
Hello - *Molo*
How are you? - *Kunjani?*
I'm fine - *Ndiphilile*
Thank you (very much) - *Enkosi*
Please - *nceda*
Yes / No - *Ewe / hayi*
Goodbye - *Hamba kahle (go well)*

Food & Drink

Food in South Africa is delicious. You will be exposed to every different type of meat at every meal, ranging from impala and kudu to ostrich. All can be enjoyed in many different ways, but one of the best ways to taste these meats would be to sample it off a hot braai (barbecue). Be prepared to try something new! It you want to try some more traditional food then go for some Biltong (dried meat) and Boerewors (barbecue sausage).

If you are a vegetarian, do not worry. South Africa is abundant with delicious local vegetables, such as yams and sweet potatoes.

Drinking water from the tap is safe throughout the country, apart from in the more rural areas.

Public Holidays

When planning your trip, you should be aware of the major national holidays celebrated throughout the country. However, although businesses and government offices are closed on public holidays, tourist attractions and shops are almost never closed. The main impact on the tourist of these holidays is the increased competition for travel and accommodation from South African's who use long weekends to get away from the big cities.

To view a list of the public holidays for South Africa, please see the link below:
http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/south-africa/

Weather

Seasons in South Africa are opposite to those in the northern hemisphere. The climate is varied across the country with warm showery summers and cold winters in the Gauteng Province (Highveld), scorching summers and a slightly less chilly outlook for winter in the Durban area (Lowveld) and the Western Cape hit hardest by winter rains. Karoo's desert-like climate means it's hot and ready to explore all year round but if you want to explore the rest of the country Spring (mid-September to November) and autumn (April and May) are ideal almost everywhere.

Time

South Africa is two hours ahead of GMT.

In Africa, time is not a priority like it is in much of the western world – there is a saying that Africa works to 'Africa Time', which basically means you must exercise a lot of patience! If a boat is due to leave at 12pm, don't be surprised if it still hasn't a couple of hours later… keep an open mind, and arrive 'expecting the unexpected'.

Electricity

In South Africa the electric system is 230 Volts and frequency 50 Hertz. If you bring a device that does not accept this Voltage you will need to use an adapter.

Outlets in South Africa generally accept 1 type of plug:

Three round pins arranged in a triangle

Trip Note Disclaimer

The information contained in this trip note has been compiled with great care and is provided in good faith.
Any itinerary featured is correct at time of release. However, our itineraries may change as make improvements that result from travellers' comments, our own research or from time to time as a result of reommended travel advice.

You can rest assured that it is always our goal to provide you with the most rewarding trip and experience ever!

Our Details

If you have any questions about this trip please do not hesitate to contact us and we'll be happy to answer them.

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