

# Swaziland

Embedded between Mozambique and South Africa, the kingdom of Swaziland is one of the smallest countries in Africa. What the country lacks in size it makes up for in its rich culture and heritage, and relaxed ambience. With its laid-back, friendly people and relative lack of racial animosity, it's a complete change of pace from its larger neighbours.

Visitors can enjoy rewarding and delightfully low-key wildlife watching, adrenaline-boosting activities, stunning mountain panoramas and lively traditions. Swaziland also boasts superb walking and high-quality handicrafts.

Overseeing the kingdom is King Mswati III, one of three remaining monarchs in Africa. The monarchy has its critics, but combined with the Swazis' distinguished history of resistance to the Boers, the British and the Zulus, it has fostered a strong sense of national pride, and local culture is flourishing. This is exemplified in its national festivals – the Incwala ceremony and the Umhlanga (Reed) dance (see the boxed text, p607).

The excellent road system makes Swaziland easy to get around. Accommodation includes a decent network of hostels, family-friendly hotels and upscale retreats. Many travellers make a flying visit on their way to South Africa's Kruger National Park, but it's well worth lingering here if you can.

## FAST FACTS

- **Area:** 17,364 sq km
- **Capital:** Mbabane
- **Country code:** ☎ 268
- **Famous for:** Monarchy, cultural festivals, high incidence of HIV/AIDS
- **Languages:** Swati, English
- **Money:** Lilangeni, plural emalangeni (E)
- **Phrase:** *Sawubona/sanibona* (hello)
- **Population:** 1.1 million



**HOW MUCH?**

- **Traditional dance/cultural group** US\$6.50
- **Internet per hour** US\$4.50
- **Coffee** US\$0.80-1.70
- **Batik hanging** US\$8
- **Basket** US\$5

**LONELY PLANET INDEX**

- **1L of petrol** US\$0.80
- **1L of bottled water** US\$0.80
- **Bottle of beer** US\$1.10-1.50
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$11
- **Barbecued maize** US\$0.40

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- **Mkhaya Game Reserve** (p612) Seeing rare black rhinos in the wild.
- **Malolotja Nature Reserve** (p610) or **Ngwempisi Gorge** (p613) Hiking in two of Swaziland's most enchanting and unspoilt wilderness areas.
- **Usutu River** (see the boxed text, p608) Shooting wondrous white-water rapids.
- **Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary** (p606) Wandering through a wilderness and relaxing in its comfortable bargain lodges.
- **Off the beaten track** (p611) Camping high on the Lebombo Plateau and overlooking typical Africa from Shewula Mountain Camp.

**ITINERARIES**

- **One Week** With only a week at your disposal, a half-day in **Mbabane** (p603) is plenty. Spend two days poking around the pretty **Ezulwini** (p606) and **Malkerns Valleys** (p608), including **Lobamba** (p606), and make a trip into the relaxing **Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary** (p606); you'll probably see zebras, giraffes, many antelope species and a variety of birds. If you have time and you want to see rare black rhinos in the wild, continue east to the stunning **Mkhaya Game Reserve** (p612).
- **Two Weeks** Do the one week itinerary, plus view wildlife at the extensive **Hlane Royal National Park** (p611) and **Mlawula Nature Reserve** (p612). On your circular route back to Mbabane, drop into **Piggs Peak** (p610),

an area known for its handicrafts, and take a detour to hike in **Malolotja Nature Reserve** (p610), an unspoiled wilderness area, or visit the fascinating ghost village of **Bulembu** (p611). You could do this route clockwise, starting in Mbabane and heading north to Malolotja.

- **One month** You can absorb most of Swaziland in this time. Join the previous two itineraries and take extra time out for some action: hike in the **Ngwempisi Gorge** (p613) and shoot the rapids on the **Usutu River** (p608). If Swaziland is incorporated into your one-month trip through South Africa, it's well worth diverting here for its friendly people, relaxed atmosphere, unique culture, and pretty and accessible wildlife parks and reserves.

**CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO**

Most rain falls in summer, usually in torrential thunderstorms and mostly in the western mountains. Summers on the lowveld are very hot, with temperatures often over 40°C; in the high country the temperatures are lower and in winter it can get cool. Winter nights on the lowveld are sometimes very cold.

The rains usually begin around early December and last until April. May to August are the coolest months, with frosts in June and July.

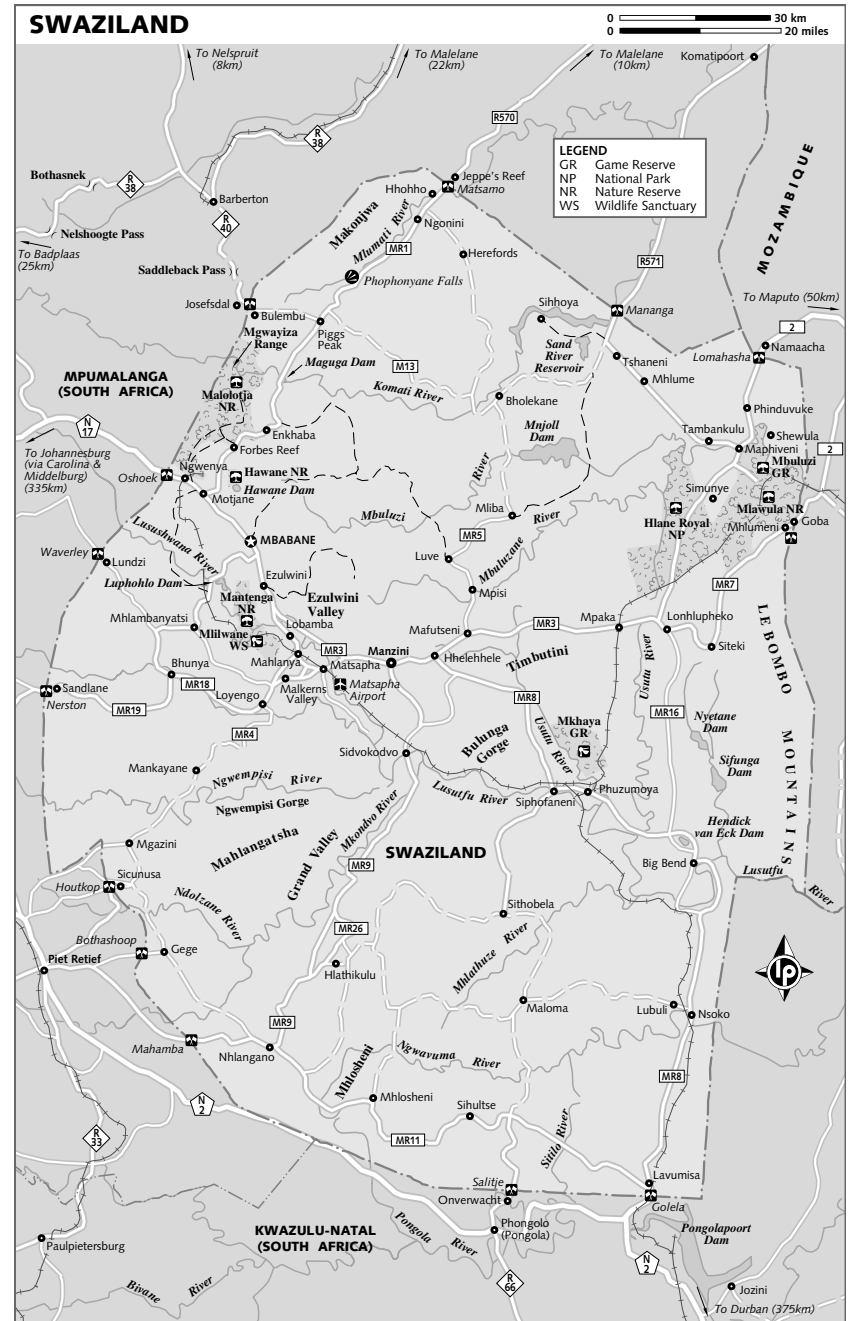
**HISTORY**

The area that is now Swaziland has been inhabited for a long time – in eastern Swaziland archaeologists have discovered human remains dating back 110,000 years – but the Swazi people arrived relatively recently.

During the great Bantu migrations into Southern Africa, one group, the Nguni, moved down the east coast. A clan settled in the area near what is now Maputo in Mozambique, and a dynasty was founded by the Dlamini family. (For detailed information on the Bantu migrations, see p39.)

In the mid-18th century increasing pressure from other Nguni clans forced King Ngwane III to lead his people south to lands by the Pongola River, in what is now southern Swaziland. Today, Swazis consider Ngwane III to have been the first king of Swaziland.

Clan encroachment continued, and the next king, Sobhuza I, also came under pressure from the Zulu. He withdrew to the Ezulwini Valley, which remains the centre of Swazi



royalty and ritual today. Troubles with the Zulu continued, though the next king, Mswazi (or Mswati), managed to unify the whole kingdom and, by the time he died in 1868, a Swazi nation was secure. Mswazi's subjects called themselves people of Mswazi, or Swazis.

### European Interference

During the same period the Zulu were coming under pressure from both the British and the Boers, creating frequent respite for the Swazis. However, from the mid-19th century the arrival of increasing numbers of Europeans brought new problems. Mswazi's successor, Mbandzeni, inherited a kingdom rife with European carpetbaggers – hunters, traders, missionaries and farmers, many of whom leased large expanses of land.

The Boers' South African Republic (ZAR) decided to extend its control to Maputo along with Swaziland, which was in the way. Before this could happen, however, the British annexed the ZAR itself in 1877.

The Pretoria Convention of 1881 guaranteed Swaziland's 'independence', but also defined its borders, and Swaziland lost large chunks of territory. 'Independence' in fact meant that both the British and the Boers had responsibility for administering their various

interests in Swaziland, and the result was chaos. The Boer administration collapsed with the 1899–1902 Anglo-Boer War, and afterwards the British took control of Swaziland as a protectorate.

During this troubled time, King Sobhuza II was only a young child, but Labotsibeni, his mother, acted ably as regent until her son took over in 1921. Throughout the regency and for most of Sobhuza's long reign, the Swazis sought to regain their land, a large portion of which was owned by foreign interests. Labotsibeni encouraged Swazis to buy the land back, and many sought work in the Witwatersrand mines (near Johannesburg) to raise money. By the time of independence in 1968, about two-thirds of the kingdom was again under Swazi control.

### Independence

In 1960 King Sobhuza II proposed the creation of a legislative council, composed of elected Europeans, and a national council formed in accordance with Swazi culture. One of the Swazi political parties formed at this time was the Mbokodvo (Grindstone) National Movement, which pledged to maintain traditional Swazi culture, but also to eschew racial discrimination. When the British finally agreed

to elections in 1964, Mbokodvo won a majority and, at the next elections in 1967, won all the seats. Independence was achieved on 6 September 1968.

The country's constitution was largely the work of the British. In 1973 the king suspended it on the grounds that it did not accord with Swazi culture. Four years later, the parliament reconvened under a new constitution that vested all power in the king. Sobhuza II, then the world's longest-reigning monarch, died in 1982.

The young Mswati III ascended the throne in 1986 and continues to represent and maintain the traditional way of life and to assert his pre-eminence, for better or worse, as absolute monarch (see the boxed text, opposite).

### Swaziland Today

Attempts by unions and (officially illegal) opposition groups to press for democratic change have met with legislation to curb their activities. Yet, despite these political tensions and increasing popular dissatisfaction with recent abuses of royal privilege, it's likely that the king and his advisers will continue to hold the upper hand in Swazi politics for the foreseeable future. Even reformers have called only for modification of the monarchy (demanding a constitutional instead of an absolute monarchy), rather than its complete abandonment.

Putting these constitutional wranglings into sharp perspective is the scourge of AIDS: Swaziland has now surpassed Botswana as the country with the world's highest HIV infection rate in the world (almost 39% for adults between 15 and 49 years of age), and life expectancy has fallen as a result from 58 to 33 years. There are currently more than 200,000 AIDS orphans in the country, and by 2010 one in six people will be a child under 15 who has lost both parents. For more information, see the boxed text, p602.

### THE CULTURE The National Psyche

What Swaziland lacks in size is made up for in its laid-back, friendly people and relative lack of racial animosities. The Swazis' distinguished history of resistance to the Boers, the British and the Zulus – along with the monarchy – has fostered an extraordinary sense of Swazi identity and ethnic pride, integral to their being. A nonconfrontational people,

they dislike embarrassment of any kind; Swazis are as gracious and good-humoured as they are proud of their small but culturally strong kingdom.

That said, there is widespread dissatisfaction with the lack of progress in their country's current socio-economic climate, as well as the perceived disintegration in family life and morals, as reflected in the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS. Swazi critics and women's rights advocates rally against the current system, which stifles individual autonomy and rights, especially those of women. But the patriotic and deeply religious Swazis tend to dislike outsiders meddling in internal political and social affairs and cultural practices. As the symbolic head of the Swazi family, the king is, in general, very highly regarded and disrespected for him as often interpreted as a lack of respect for the identity of the Swazi themselves (see the boxed text, opposite).

### Daily Life

Ancient traditions are vital to and inherent in everyday life – business may be conducted in *emahiya* (traditional Swazi dress, often complemented with a shield and knobkerries) or Western suits – and cultural festivals are followed closely.

As in other parts of Africa, the extended family is integral to a person's life. While polygamy is permitted and exists, it is not always practised. Traditional marriage allows for the husband to take a number of wives, although many Swazis also follow Western marriage conventions, rejecting polygamy but permitting divorce. Marriage arrangements are traditionally initiated by a request to the fathers of the couple by the mothers of the couple.

Many people in rural areas continue to live in the traditional beehive huts, while others, particularly in the cities, live in Western-style houses.

Schooling is not compulsory. The rate of attendance is decreasing due to social circumstances, particularly the effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

### Population

The ancestors of modern-day Swazis were part of the general, gradual migration of Bantu-language speakers from Central Africa who broke from the main group and settled in Mozambique, finally moving in the mid-18th

#### MOVERS & SHAKERS: KING MSWATI III

King Mswati III, Africa's last absolute monarchy, courts both popularity and controversy. The second of 67 sons, King Mswati III was crowned in 1986 when he was 18, and he has since ruled the country with his mother. He has taken 13 wives, including one fiancée (those who've not borne him a child), and has more than 200 siblings.

His actions – most notably his expensive tastes and opulent lifestyle in the face of his country's extreme poverty and high incidence of HIV – have upset critics. His constitution has been strongly criticised for its nonprogressive and authoritarian nature by Swazi critics, foreign governments and human rights groups.

The king has caused royal ripples several times over choosing a wife: in 2001 he married a 17-year-old, two months after imposing a five-year sex ban on the kingdom's teenage females to fight the spread of HIV/AIDS. He ended the ban a year early.

At the 2002 Reed festival, again in keeping with tradition, he chose a young woman, 18-year-old Zena Mahlangu, to become his 10th wife. Zena's mother tried to take the king to court, accusing him of abducting and holding Zena against her will.

Reformers, however, must reckon with the fact that the king is a highly revered figurehead; he is the Ngwenyama (Lion), a descendant of the great kings (and queen mothers) who secured the independence of the Swazi nation. Even pro-democracy advocates seek to maintain a constitutional monarch under a democratic system of government.

Meanwhile, for the king, traditional laws and customs reign supreme. He believes in perpetuating customs important to his country, including polygamy. Indeed, a Swazi king's power and the clan links resulting from his marriages might be seen as the source of Swaziland's relative stability, as well as being the foundation of its continued independence.

### HIV/AIDS & FAMINE

Swaziland has now surpassed Botswana as the country with the highest HIV infection rate in the world – around 39% of the adult population in Swaziland is HIV positive (compared to 3.9% in 1992). According to a survey by the national health ministry, a quarter of Swaziland's population is predicted to be dead from the disease by 2010, and already 200,000 children have lost either one or both parents to the disease.

This situation has a great impact on food insecurity, with poor and vulnerable households not being able to secure work or means to buy food. Overseas food agencies are currently supplying food to individuals and their families, including out-of-school children, pregnant women and orphans. In 2004–05, drought conditions meant that emergency food aid was supplied to around a quarter of the population. The Lebombo Plateau has been particularly hard hit.

century into what became known as Swaziland. Today, Swazis still share a close cultural and linguistic heritage with other Southern African peoples including the Zulu and the Ndebele.

Almost all people here are Swazi. The rest are Zulu, Tsonga (Shangaan) and European. There are also a number of Mozambican refugees, of both African and Portuguese descent. About 5% of Swazis live and work in South Africa.

The population, which was about 85,000 in 1904, today hovers around just over a million people, although the future for many of them looks bleak. The HIV/AIDS pandemic here is almost beyond comprehension – 39% of Swazi adults are thought to be infected – making a horrific reversal of its population statistics in the next couple of decades seem certain.

### RELIGION

Around 70% of the population is Zionist, a mix of Christianity and traditional indigenous worship, with Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Methodists making up the balance. Muslims, Baha'i and Jewish faiths have small followings also.

### ARTS & CRAFTS Music

Traditional music is integral to Swazi festivals and dancing, most prominently the Incwala and Reed festivals. Music and rhythm also play an important role in other festivals, such as harvest and marriage. Traditional instruments include the calabash, kudu horn, rattle and reed flute.

The most prominent jazz musician (formerly lumped under the banner of South African musicians) was Zakes Nkosi, whose career in jazz began in the 1940s.

For more information on music in Southern Africa, see p52.

### Architecture

The architecture of Swaziland ranges from the traditional round beehive hut of the rural areas to the more Western-style house in the suburbs and larger towns. The beehive huts are thatched with dry grass and often surrounded by reed fences.

The traditional *umuti* (homestead) is important to the Swazi social unit. In a polygamous homestead, each wife has her own huts, plus a yard surrounded by reed fences for privacy. Larger homesteads have huts for bachelors' quarters and guest housing. The cattle byre, a circular area enclosed by logs and branches, is central to the traditional homestead. This area has an important ritual and practical significance, reflecting both wealth and prestige. The hut opposite the cattle byre is occupied by the mother of the headman. Nowadays, while many construct square houses from cement blocks and corrugated iron, they still maintain the layout of the traditional homestead.

### Dance

Dance is an integral part of Swazi cultural festivals (see the boxed text, p607).

The Sibhaca dance is a vigorous foot-stamping dance performed by teams of males. The energy and physical nature of this rhythmic dance is awesome. As well as being performed at festivals and formal occasions, it is sometimes performed competitively and occasionally done for fun.

### Handicrafts

Swaziland's handicrafts include jewellery, pottery, weapons and implements. Woven grasswares such as *liqhaga* (grassware 'bottles')

and mats are popular, as are wooden items, ranging from bowls to knobkerries.

### ENVIRONMENT The Land

Swaziland, although tiny, has a wide range of ecological zones, from rainforest in the northwest to savanna scrub in the east.

The western edge of the country is highveld, consisting mainly of short, sharp mountains. There are large plantations of pine and eucalyptus. The mountains dwindle to middleveld into the heavily populated centre of the country. The eastern half is scrubby lowveld, lightly populated, but now home to sugar estates. To the east, the harsh Lebombo Mountains form the border with Mozambique.

### Wildlife

#### ANIMALS

Swaziland has about 121 species of mammals, representing a third of nonmarine mammal species in Southern Africa. These days the larger animals are restricted to the nature reserves and private wildlife reserves dotted around the country. Many species (such as elephants, warthogs, rhinos and lions) have been reintroduced to nature reserves. Mon-gooses and large-spotted genets are common throughout the country, while hyenas and jackals are found in the reserves. Leopards are present, but you'd be lucky to see one.

The most common of the 19 recorded species of bat is the little free-tailed bat, which can be found roosting in houses in the lowveld and middleveld.

#### PLANTS

Although small in size, Swaziland is rich in flora and accounts for 14% of the recorded plant life in Southern Africa. The remoteness of parts of the countryside means there are probably species that have not yet been brought to the attention of botanists. Nature reserves, particularly those administered by the National Trust Commission, help to conserve indigenous plants.

### National Parks

The five main reserves reflect the country's geographical diversity. Easiest to get to is Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary (p606) in the Ezulwini Valley. Hlane Royal National Park (p611) and Mkhaya Game Reserve (p612) are also well worth visiting. These three reserves

are privately run as part of the **Big Game Parks** (Map p606; ☎ 528 3943/4; www.biggame.co.sz).

The booking office of the **National Trust Commission** (Map p606; ☎ 416 1151, 416 1178; www.sntc.org.sz) is run from the reception at the Mantenga Nature Reserve, near Lobamba. **Swazi Trails** (Map p606; ☎ /fax 416 2180; www.swazitrails.co.sz; Mantenga Craft Centre, Ezulwini Valley) in Ezulwini Valley is also a booking agent for the reserves. The National Trust Commission runs Mantenga, Hawane, Malolotja and Mlawula Nature Reserves. Malolotja (p610) is a rugged highlands reserve with some very good hiking trails. Mlawula (p612) is in harsh lowveld country near the Mozambican border.

### Environmental Issues

While the importance of traditional practices and customs provides a strong sense of cultural identity and national cohesiveness, some traditional practices are not kind to the environment. As in Lesotho, the overgrazing of cattle has caused soil erosion. Some items of male traditional attire, such as the *majobo*, which is made from the skin of the grey duiker, have resulted in illegal hunting. The use of and reliance on natural medicinal plants has led to the loss of certain indigenous plants. Poverty is a major cause of land degradation; land-management issues focused on sustainability are simply not on the agendas of individuals struggling to eke out a living or dealing with the impact of HIV/AIDS.

### FOOD & DRINK

Although it's not exactly a gourmet's paradise, you won't eat badly in Swaziland. There's a good range of places to eat in Mbabane and the tourist areas of the Malkerns and Ezulwini Valleys. Portuguese cuisine, including seafood, can be found. In more remote areas, African staples such as stew and pap (also known as *mealie meal*) are common.

## MBABANE

pop 60,000

Mbabane (pronounced mba-baa-nay), the largest town in Swaziland, is pretty nondescript and there isn't that much to see or do here. It's in a pleasant setting in the Dlangeni Hills. These make Mbabane cooler than Manzini, one reason why the British moved their administrative centre here from Manzini in

1902. The adjacent Ezulwini and Malkerns Valleys have plenty of attractions.

## ORIENTATION

Mbabane is a little disjointed. The main street is Gwamile St. Swazi Plaza is off Western Distributor Rd. The Mall, another shopping area, is on Plaza Mall Dr.

## INFORMATION

### Emergency

**Fire** (☎ 404 3333)

**Police station** (☎ 404 2221) The police emergency number is ☎ 999.

**Traumalink 911** (☎ 606 0911) A 24-hour paramedic ambulance service.

### Internet Access

Internet centres are dotted around town including in the Mall and Swazi Plaza. Prices are from US\$3.50 per hour.

## Medical Services

**Mbabane Clinic** (☎ 404 2423; St Michael's Rd)

**Medisun Clinic** (☎ 416 2800) In Ezulwini.

**Impilo Clinic** (☎ 505 7430) In Manzini.

## Money

**First National Bank** (cnr Msunduzi St & West)

**NedBank** (Swazi Plaza)

**Standard Bank** (Swazi Plaza) Has an ATM.

## Tourist Information

**Tourist information office** (☎ 404 2531; www.welcometoswaziland.com; ☎ 9am-4.45pm Mon-Thu, 9am-4pm Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) At the edge of Swazi Plaza. Free publications and brochures on hotels, restaurants and entertainment. These include the tourist bible *What's Happening in Swaziland* and the smaller *What's on in Swaziland*.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Mbabane is becoming unsafe at night, so don't walk around by yourself away from the main streets. Take precautions in the streets even during the day – muggings are on the increase.

## SIGHTS

There's not really much to see in Mbabane. The Ezulwini and Malkerns Valleys are where most people would head for sightseeing, activities and crafts.

However, while in Mbabane it is worth visiting the **Swazi Market** (Msunduzi St), with its neat rows of stalls and colourful handicrafts. Further into the market, fruit and vegetable stalls provide a bustling atmosphere.

## SLEEPING

### Budget

**Grifters** (☎ 404 5342, 617 0218; www.grifterslodge.com; End St; camping per person US\$6, dm US\$10, d with shared bathroom US\$23) This laid-back and likeably scruffy house, within walking distance of the town centre, is a popular hang-out for travellers and aid workers. Self-catering only.

**Thokoza Church Centre** (☎ 404 6681; Polinjane Rd; s/d with shared bathroom US\$17/22, s/d US\$26/29) Fittingly monastic in nature, these small clean rooms might be just the thing to convert you to Mbabane. To get here from Gwamile St, turn onto Mhlonho St, cross the bridge, turn left at the police station and head up Polinjane Rd for about 10 minutes. Take a taxi at night (US\$3 from Swazi Plaza).

### Midrange & Top End

**Cathmar Cottages** (☎ 404 3387; www.swazilodgings.com/cathmar; 167 Likhalo St; r US\$27-44; ☎) Offers self-catering cottages and dolls-house-style cabins, about 3.5km north of Mbabane (off Pine Valley Rd).

**Kapola Guest House** (☎ 404 0906; www.kapola\_eden.co.sz; s/d with breakfast US\$54/89) This comfortable abode's massive porch overlooks greenery. Busy rooms, but busier à la carte chef (meals E26 to E65). It's about 5km from Mbabane just off the MR3; watch for the wall painted with flags.

**Foresters Arms** (☎ 467 4177; www.forestersarms.co.za; r with half board from US\$61) Penelope Keith (from BBC-TV's *To the Manor Born*) would enjoy the cream teas and British-style interiors here. Situated 27km southwest of Mbabane in the hills around Mhlambanyatsi. Cosy rooms and attractive gardens plus a smorgasbord of activities await you.

**Mountain Inn** (☎ 404 2781; www.mountaininn.sz; s/d with breakfast from US\$72/92; ☎) A throwback to the colonial era, complete with stains here and there and great panoramas. The restaurant is open for all meals (mains from US\$6).

## EATING

**4 Ways Chicken** (Gwamile St; mains US\$2; ☎ 7am-6pm) The tastiest hen quarter in Swaziland.

**Indingilizi Gallery & Restaurant** (☎ 404 6213; indingi@realnet.co.sz; 112 Dzelwe St; snacks from US\$3;

☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat) Outdoor gallery café with snacks, decadent desserts and crafts.

**Plaza Tandoori Restaurant** (☎ 404 7599; Swazi Plaza; mains US\$5-12; ☎ lunch & dinner) A miniature eatery with a Taj Mahal atmosphere and great-value curries.

**Finesse** (☎ 404 5936; the Mall; mains US\$10-14; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This fancy French-owned place serves a good range of seafood and meat dishes.

For international food, try **La Casserole** (☎ 404 6426; Gwamile St; mains US\$7-11; ☎ lunch & dinner) and **Mediterranean Restaurant** (☎ 404 3212, Gwamile St; mains US\$7-14; ☎ lunch & dinner).

There's a Shoprite at Swazi Plaza and a Spar at the Mall. For fast food, try the street food vendors at Swazi Market.

## SHOPPING

Swazi Plaza is a large, modern shopping centre with most services and a good range of shops. Nearby, the Mall also has a number of shops and services.

**Indingilizi Gallery & Restaurant** (☎ 404 6213; indingi@realnet.co.sz; 112 Dzelwe St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat) Has a range of contemporary art and collectables from Swaziland and elsewhere in Africa. Exhibitions are held regularly.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Minibus taxis to South Africa (mostly north-bound) leave from the taxi rank near Swazi Plaza; otherwise your best bet is to catch one from Manzini.

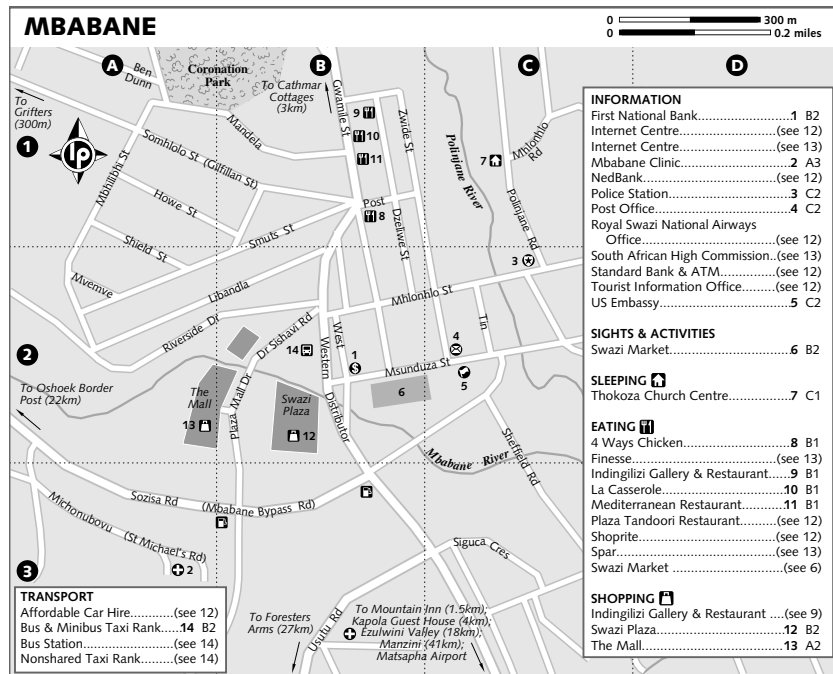
## GETTING AROUND

### To/From the Airport

A taxi from Mbabane to Matsapha airport costs around US\$19. Buses and minibuses from Mbabane to Manzini go past the turn-off to the airport, from where it's a long walk to the terminal.

### Bus & Minibus Taxi

The main bus and minibus taxi rank is near Swazi Plaza. All vehicles heading towards Manzini (US\$1, 35 minutes) or Matsapha pass through the Ezulwini Valley. There are several minibus taxis daily to Piggs Peak (US\$2, one hour), Ngwenya and the Oshoek border post (US\$0.70, 50 minutes), and Malkerns Valley (US\$1, 45 minutes). All vehicles heading towards Manzini and points east pass through



the Ezulwini Valley, although most take the bypass road.

## Taxi

Nonshared taxis congregate near the bus station by Swazi Plaza. Nonshared taxis to the Ezulwini Valley cost at least \$US7, more to the far end of the valley (from \$US14), and still more at night. To Matsapha airport, expect to pay from \$US20.

## AROUND MBABANE Ezulwini Valley

The royal valley begins just outside Mbabane and extends down past Lobamba village, 18km away. Most of the area's attractions are near Lobamba. It's a pretty valley, but it's becoming crowded with hotels and other developments. The **tourist office** (☎ 416 2180; Mantenga Craft Centre), run out of Swazi Trails in the Ezulwini Valley, is useful. The **Medisun Clinic** (☎ 416 2800) is located in Ezulwini.

## LOBAMBA

This is the heart of Swaziland's royal valley. The British-built royal palace, the Embo State

Palace, isn't open to visitors, and you are not allowed to take photos of it. Swazi kings now live in the Lozitha State House about 10km from Lobamba.

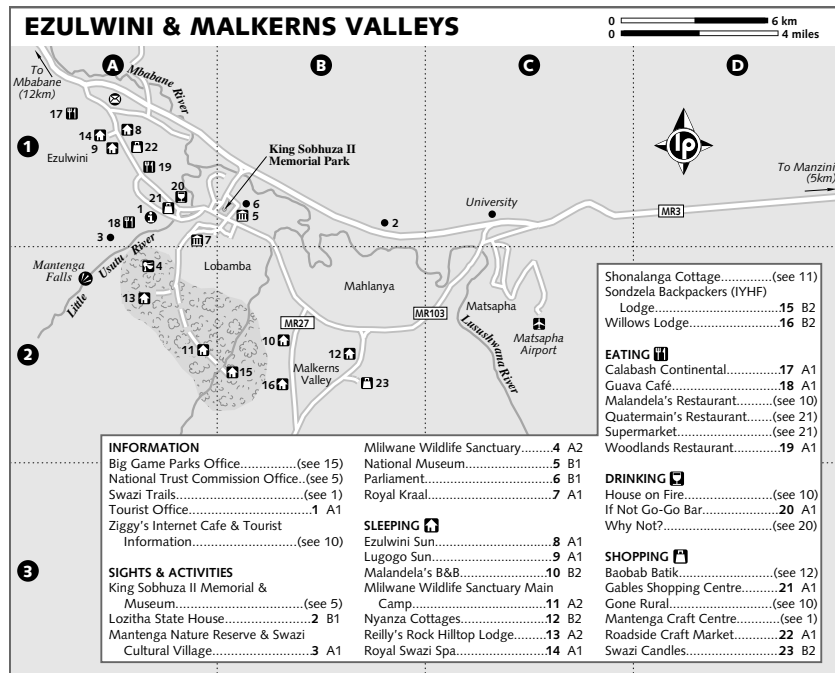
You can see the monarchy in action at the **Royal Kraal** in Lobamba during the Incwala ceremony and the Umhlanga dance (see the boxed text, opposite).

The **National Museum** (adult/child \$US3/1.50) offers some interesting displays on Swazi culture and a traditional beehive village. The **National Trust Commission office** (☎ 416 1151, 416 1178; www.sntc.org.sz), useful for finding information about Mlawula and Malolotja Nature Reserves, is located here. (Note: the booking office is run from the Mantenga Nature Reserve reception office.)

Next to the museum is the **parliament**, which is sometimes open to visitors. Across the road from the museum is a **memorial to King Sobhuza II**, the most revered of Swazi kings, plus a small **museum** devoted to him.

## MLILWANE WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

This beautiful and tranquil **private reserve** (☎ 528 3943; www.biggameparks.org; admission \$US2.50;



## SWAZI CEREMONIES

### Incwala

The Incwala (sometimes Ncwala) is the most sacred Swazi ceremony. During this 'first fruits' ceremony the king gives his people permission to eat the first crops of the new year.

Preparation for the Incwala begins some weeks in advance. *Bemanti* (learned men) journey to the Lebombo Mountains to gather plants, other groups of *bemanti* collect water from Swaziland's rivers and some travel to the Indian Ocean (where the Dlamini clan lived long before the Swazi nation came into being) to skim foam from the waves.

On the night of the full moon, young men all over the kingdom begin a long trek to the Royal Kraal at Lobamba. They arrive at dawn and build a *kraal* (hut village) with branches gathered on their journey. Participants sing songs prohibited during the rest of the year, and the *bemanti* arrive with their plants, water and foam.

On the third day a bull is sacrificed. On the fourth day, the king breaks his retreat and dances before his people. He eats a pumpkin, the sign that Swazis can eat the new year's crops. Soon after, the rains are expected to fall.

### Umhlanga

Not as sacred as the Incwala, the Umhlanga (Reed) dance serves a similar function in drawing the nation together and reminding the people of their relationship to the king. It is something like a week-long debutante ball for marriageable young Swazi women and a showcase of potential wives for the king.

On the sixth day they perform the reed dance and carry their reeds to the queen mother. They repeat the dance the next day. Princesses wear red feathers in their hair.

(6am-5pm) near Lobamba was Swaziland's first protected area, created in the 1950s by conservationist Ted Reilly. Reilly later opened Mkhaya Game Reserve (p612) and supervised the establishment of Hlane Royal National Park (p611). Mlilwane means 'Little Fire', named after the many fires started by lightning strikes in the region.

While it doesn't have the drama or vastness of some of the South African parks, the reserve is easily accessible and worth a visit. Its terrain is dominated by the precipitous Nyonyane (Little Bird) peak, and there are some fine walks in the area. Animals include zebras, giraffes, warthogs, antelope species, crocodiles, hippos and a variety of birds, including black eagles.

Activities are a must here. There's horse rides (\$US14 per hour), mountain biking (\$US7) and game walks (\$US4.50 per person per hour).

## SLEEPING

All accommodation in the sanctuary can be booked (and paid) in advance at the **Big Game Parks office** (☎ 528 3943/4; www.biggameparks.org), near Sondzela Backpackers Lodge. You can make bookings via telephone or email.

## Budget & Midrange

**Sondzela Backpackers (IYHF) Lodge** (☎ 528 3117; www.biggameparks.org; camping per person \$US5.50, dm \$US8, s/d with shared bathroom \$US14/22, rondavel s/d \$US21/28) This self-proclaimed 'Africa's Rolls Royce of Backpacker Hostels' – just south of the main camp – is in need of a slight fine-tuning, but it's great all the same.

**Milwane Wildlife Sanctuary Main Camp** (☎ 528 3943/4; www.biggame.co.sz; camping per person \$US6, dm \$US11, 2-person hut s/d \$US33/47, beehive hut s/d per person \$US31/44, with shared bathroom \$US21/33) This homely camp is set in a scenic wooded location 3.5km from the entry gate, complete with simple thatched huts – including traditional beehive huts.

**Mantenga Nature Reserve** (☎ 416 1151, 416 1178; mantenga@sntc.org.sz; beehive huts per person \$US9, s/d tented chalets with breakfast \$US42/63) Soft 'safari' adventure in delightful tented style and canvas comfort. The restaurant serves good luncheon dishes.

**Shonalanga Cottage** (s/d \$US40/53, per additional person \$US15) This spacious self-catering cottage is near the main camp, and a good choice for families.

## Top End

**Reilly's Rock Hilltop Lodge** (☎ 528 3943/4; www.biggame.co.sz; s/d from \$US122/200) Rock on into this

luxurious and tranquil accommodation. This 'quaintly colonial' dwelling has striking views of the valley and Mdzimba Mountains.

The Sun group's hotels (www.suninternational.com) offer the most opulent accommodation in the country. There's the **Royal Swazi Spa** (☎ 416 5000; s/d US\$263/280; ♿ ♿); the **Lugogo Sun** (☎ 416 4500; s/d US\$169-182; ♿ ♿) in the grounds of the Royal Swazi; and the **Ezulwini Sun** (☎ 416 6500; s/d US\$183/196; ♿ ♿), across the road from the other two. At the Royal Swazi there's a golf course and a casino.

### EATING

**Woodlands Restaurant** (☎ 416 3466; mauriswazi@realnet.co.sz; mains US\$5-17; ♿ lunch & dinner) Good vegetarian options as well as international cuisine on a lovely shady veranda.

**Quatermain's** (☎ 416 3023; mains US\$8-11; ♿ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Mouth-watering culinary journey through Africa.

**Calabash Continental** (☎ 416 1187; mains US\$8-14; ♿ lunch & dinner) Specialises in German and Swiss cuisine.

There's a supermarket in the Gables Shopping Centre, and for light meals, head to **Guava Café** (☎ 416 1343; light meals from US\$4; ♿ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun).

### DRINKING

Several nightspots feature at the Sun hotels. At the Happy Valley Hotel, **Why Not?** (☎ 416 1061; Happy Valley Hotel), a thumping disco, and the **If**

**Not Go-Go Bar** (☎ 416 1061; Happy Valley Hotel; admission US\$4.50) let you let it all hang out.

### SHOPPING

The best crafts are to be found at the **Roadside Craft Market** (☎ sunrise to sunset) opposite the Royal Swazi Spa. The rather tired-looking **Mantenga Craft Centre** (☎ 416 1136; ♿ 8am-5pm) has the usual clutch of tourist-oriented shops. The more modern **Gables Shopping Centre** (☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) has a supermarket and also offers internet and necessities, including an ATM.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

During the day you could get on a Manzini-bound minibus, but make sure the driver knows that you want to alight in the valley, as many aren't keen on stopping.

Nonshared taxis from Mbabane cost US\$8.50 to US\$14, depending on how far down the valley you go.

If you're driving from either Mbabane or Manzini, take the Ezulwini Valley/Lobamba exit off the bypass road to the MR103.

### Malkerns Valley

About 7km south of Lobamba on the MR103 is the turn-off to the fertile Malkerns Valley, known for its arts and crafts outlets, and offering a scenic and fun drive.

There's internet access and tourist information at **Ziggy's Internet Cafe & Tourist Information** (☎ 528 3423; per hr \$6.20; ♿ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) at Mandela's complex.

### GO WILD!

#### Wildlife Drives

For wildlife drives, the Big Game Parks reserves organise good-value tours. Mkhaya offers Land Rover day trips (US\$55, minimum two people, includes lunch). These trips must be pre-booked through **Big Game Parks** (Map p606; ☎ 528 3943/4; www.biggame.co.sz). Set arrival and departure times are 10am and 4pm. Hlane has a two-hour sunrise/sunset drive (US\$20, minimum two people); Mlilwane offers a shorter game drive (US\$16, minimum two people). Check the website www.biggameparks.org for the latest on offer, as these do change.

#### White-Water Rafting

One of Swaziland's highlights is white-water rafting on the **Usutu River**. This largely sluggish river turns to rapids through the narrow Bulungu Gorge near the reserve.

At one stage you'll have to portage a 10m waterfall. The second half of the day is a sedate trip through scenic country with glimpses of the 'flat dogs' (crocodiles) sunning on the riverbanks.

**Swazi Trails** (Map p606; ☎/fax 416 2180; www.swazitrails.co.sz; Mantenga Craft Centre, Ezulwini Valley) offers a full-day trip (per person US\$84, minimum two people), including lunch and all equipment. Trips run from the Ezulwini Valley.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Nyanza Cottages** (Nyanza Horse Trails; ☎ 528 3090; nyanza@africaonline.co.sz; dm US\$9, caravan s/d US\$22/30, d US\$27, cottages per adult E220) A working farm with stables, backpackers dorm and a well-equipped caravan. Signposted next to Baobab Batik.

**Malandela's B&B** (☎ 605 2598, 528 3448; r per person with breakfast US\$25; ♿) Along the MR27, this place offers stylish, ethnic African rooms, a pool and a sculpture garden.

**Willows Lodge** (☎ 602 1284; www.swaziwillows.com; s/d US\$38/55) These self-catering cottages overlook the sugar-cane fields. Set off the MR27 in Malkerns Valley, near Mandela's B&B.

**Malandela's Restaurant** (☎ 528 3115; entrées from US\$2, mains US\$5-9; ♿ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Part of the Mandela's complex, this is one of the best restaurants in the region.

### ENTERTAINMENT

**House on Fire** (☎ 528 2001; houseonfire@africaonline.co.sz) This well-known venue, at the Mandela's complex is a fantastically decorated experimental-performance space – it hosts everything from African theatre to raves.

### SHOPPING

**Gone Rural** (☎ 528 3436; www.goneruralswazi.com; ♿ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun) The place to go for baskets, mats and traditional clay pots.

**Baobab Batik** (☎ 528 3242; www.baobab-batik.com; ♿ 8am-5pm) If you're dye-ing for a hanging there's this place.

**Swazi Candles** (☎ 528 3219; www.swazicandles.com; ♿ 8.30am-5pm) Wax lyrical about the designs here.

### Manzini

Manzini, Swaziland's largest town and the country's industrial centre, was the administrative centre for the squabbling British and Boers from 1890 to 1902. During the Anglo-Boer War a renegade Boer commando burnt it down.

Today Manzini is an active commercial and industrial hub whose small centre is dominated by office blocks and a couple of shopping malls; it feels like a different country from easy-going rural Swaziland. There is a hint of menace – watch out for pickpockets and be careful; the city's crime rate is rising – muggings (some violent) are common.

Manzini's main drawcard is its colourful **market** (cnr Mhlakuvane & Mancishane Sts; ♿ closed Sun). The upper section is packed with handicrafts. Apart from visiting the market, you can hap-

pily move on. The **Impilo Clinic** (☎ 505 7430) is located in Manzini.

### TOURS

Village visits with overnight stays are available through **Woza Nawe** (☎ 604 4102; wozanawe@realnet.co.sz). For about US\$60 you'll have an authentic Swazi experience.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Swaziland Backpackers** (☎ 518 7225; www.swazilandbackpackers.com; camping per person US\$6.50, dm US\$10.30, d with shared bathroom US\$25; ♿ ♿) Formerly a doctor's house, this place operates as efficiently as a surgery but with much more fun – activities, 'jungle' bar and pool. Head 8km west of town along the M103 towards Ezulwini Valley, opposite the Taiwanese Agricultural Mission compound. It's a Baz Bus stop (see p616).

**Tum's George Hotel** (☎ 505 8991; www.tgh.sz; cnr Ngwane & du Toit Sts; s/d with breakfast from US\$85/110; ♿ ♿) Manzini's newest and fanciest hotel caters for the conference crowd, with gym, pool bar and several stylish restaurants.

**Fontana di Trevi Pizzeria** (☎ 505 3608; the Hub, Villiers St; pizza/breakfast from US\$4/3; ♿ breakfast, lunch & dinner) In an African *piazza* – a shopping mall – this place is the best spot to head for a decent coffee, plus pizza, pasta, salads and burgers at good prices.

Takeaways abound in Bhunu Mall and on Ngwane St.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

The main bus and minibus taxi rank is at the northern end of Louw St, where you can also find some nonshared taxis. A minibus taxi up the Ezulwini Valley to Mbabane is US\$1.10 (35 minutes). A nonshared taxi to Matsapha airport costs around US\$7. Minibus taxis to Mozambique leave from the car park next to the 'old' KFC up the hill. Most long-distance taxis (to South Africa and Mozambique) go early in the morning. See p299 and p591 for more info.

## NORTHWESTERN SWAZILAND

Lush hills, plantations and woodlands, streams and waterfalls and plunging ravines are the main features of Swaziland's beautiful north, along with some excellent hiking and accommodation options. Beware the heavy

ments that roll in during the summer months – they can limit visibility to almost zero.

## NGWENYA

Tiny Ngwenya (Crocodile) is 5km east of the Oshoek border crossing on the road to Mbabane. At the **Ngwenya glass factory** (☎ 442 4142; ☎ 7am–5pm Mon–Fri, 8am–4.30pm Sat & Sun) recycled glass is used to create African animals and birds as well as vases and tableware. **Endlotane Studios/Phumulanga Swaziland Tapestries** (☎ 442 4196; ☎ 8am–5pm), which features beautiful tapestries, is 1km further up the road.

Also near here is the **Ngwenya iron ore mine** (admission US\$3.50; ☎ 8am–4pm), dating from around 40,000 BC and one of the world's oldest known mines.

**Hawane Resort** (☎ 627 6714, 442 4744; www.hawane.co.sz; dm US\$12, chalet d with breakfast US\$72, beehives per person US\$17) offers stylish chalets that are a blend of traditional Swazi materials and glass with ethnic African interiors. Backpackers are stabled in a converted barn. It's about 8km up the Pigg's Peak road from the junction of the MR1 and MR3, and 1.5km off the main road.

## MALOTJA NATURE RESERVE

This beautiful middlelevel/highlevel **reserve** (☎ 416 1151, 442 4241; www.sntc.org.sz; adult/child US\$31/1.70; ☎ 6am–6pm) is a true wilderness area, rugged and for the most part unspoiled. The terrain ranges from mountainous and high-altitude grassland to forest and lower-lying bushveld, all with streams and cut by three rivers, including the Komati River.

It's an excellent walking destination, with around 200km of hiking trails, and an ornithologist's paradise, with over 280 species of birds. Wildflowers and rare plants are added attractions; several are found only in this part of Africa.

Hiking trails range from short walks to a week-long jaunt that extends from Ngwenya in the south to the Mgwayiza Range in the north. For all longer walks, you'll have to bring whatever food you'll need, as well as a camp stove, as fires are not permitted outside the base camp. You'll also need to arrange a permit (US\$0.70) with the reserve office at the entrance gate. Wildlife drives can be arranged with advance notice.

Accommodation consists of **camping** (per person at main camp/on trails US\$9/6), either at the well-equipped (but infrequently used) main

site, with ablutions and braai area, or along the overnight trails (no facilities). There are also self-catering wooden **cabins** (per person US\$32, children half price), for six persons. Book through **Swazi Trails** (Map p606; ☎ /fax 416 2180; www.swazitrails.co.sz; Mantenga Craft Centre, Ezulwini Valley) or with the **National Trust Commission** (Map p606; ☎ 416 1151, 416 1178; www.sntc.org.sz), both in Ezulwini Valley.

The entrance gate for Malotja is about 35km northwest of Mbabane, along the Pigg's Peak road (MR1); minibus taxis will drop you here.

## PIGGS PEAK

This small, gritty town is the centre of Swaziland's logging industry and there are huge pine plantations in the area. The town was named after a prospector who found gold here in 1884.

As well as its scenery, including the **Phophonyane Falls** about 8km north of town, this area is known for its handicrafts. Check these out at the Peak Craft Centre just north of Orion Pigg's Peak Hotel & Casino, where you'll find **Ethnic Bound** (☎ 437 3099; ethnicbound@africaonline.co.sz), **Likhweti Kraft** (☎ 437 3127), and **Tintsaba Crafts** (☎ 437 1260; www.tintsaba.com). There are also numerous craft vendors along the road up from Mbabane.

## Sleeping

**Ourpick Phophonyane Lodge & Nature Reserve** (☎ 437 1319; www.phophonyane.co.sz; tents US\$66–94, cottage s/d with breakfast from US\$97/135) This stunning hideaway – in a nature reserve of lush indigenous forest on the Phophonyane River – is one of the best places to stay in Swaziland. Meals are available in the restaurant. Entry to the reserve (to access the lodge) is an additional US\$3/1.50 per adult/child. Day visitors pay US\$4.50/3 per adult/child to enter the reserve. The lodge is about 14km from Pigg's Peak: head northeast (towards the casino), and the signposted turn-off (minibus taxis will drop you here) is about 1.5km before the casino. Continue until you cross a bridge over a waterfall; the turn-off to the lodge is about 500m further, on the right. You can arrange with the lodge to be picked up from Pigg's Peak; a taxi costs about US\$8.50.

**Jabula Guest House** (☎ 437 1052; www.swaziplace.com/jabulaguesthouse; s/d US\$31/52; ☎) Turn right at the Pigg's Peak Clinic sign and then take the first right again. Even its promo-speak is right: 'With so many rights you can't go wrong'.

The best B&B in Pigg's Peak; it has small, neat rooms in a residential setting.

## Getting There & Away

The minibus taxi stand is next to the market at the top end of the main street, with several vehicles daily to Mbabane (US\$2, one hour).

If you're heading east towards Hlane Royal National Park, the roads are mainly dirt and in reasonably rough condition, although a 2WD can handle them if you take it slowly.

The stretch of dirt road running west from Pigg's Peak to Bulembu can be boggy when wet. The road can be rough further towards Barberton (Mpumalanga) in South Africa.

## BULEMBU

An interesting detour from Pigg's Peak is to wind your way 20km through scenic plantation country to the historic town of Bulembu, built in 1936 for the former Havelock asbestos mine. Following its closure, the 10,000 workers left; today there are around 100 residents and no amenities. It's a true-life time warp; thousands of deserted corrugated iron houses and many Art Deco buildings nestle on a pretty hilly landscape, complete with the former cableway. Stunning hikes include the highest mountain in Swaziland, Emlembe Peak (1863m). Note: asbestos dumps exist around the village.

At the time of research, the entire village had just been sold so check ahead to see if there's still accommodation at **Bulembu Lodge** (☎ 437 3888; bulembulodge@realnet.co.sz; r per person from US\$20), the former General Manager's residence, stylish Directors' cottages, or the converted backpackers cottage (per person US\$11).

## WORTH THE TRIP

For a more cultural and rural experience away from the crowds, head to **Shewula Mountain Camp** (☎ 605 1160, 603 1931; shewula@realnet.co.sz; dm/r US\$10/31), a community-owned camp northeast of Simunye in the Lebombo Mountains, 36km by dirt road (15km as the crow flies). As well as amazing views, on offer are guided cultural walks to nearby villages plus nature and bird-watching walks (guided walks per person US\$1.50). You can camp or stay in basic rondavels, with shared ablutions and self-catering facilities. Local meals can also be arranged (breakfast/lunch/dinner US\$3.50/5.50/5.50; must be booked in advance). You can organise a visit through **Swazi Trails** (Map p606; ☎ /fax 416 2180; www.swazitrails.co.sz; Mantenga Craft Centre, Ezulwini Valley) or, if you're arriving via public transport, get a minibus taxi from Simunye to the camp (US\$1.50, one hour).

Several minibus taxis run daily to Simunye (and further north to the junction for Mlawula and Mbuluzi) from Manzini (US\$2.50, one hour). There's also at least one minibus taxi daily to/from Pigg's Peak (US\$4.50, 2½ hours).

# EASTERN SWAZILAND

The hot, northeastern corner of Swaziland is a major sugar-producing area. The arid foothills of the Lebombo Mountains epitomises what most people think of as 'Africa'.

This area's notable parks and reserves are Hlane, Mlawula and Mkhaya. The towns of Tshaneni, Mhlume, Tambankulu and Simunye are the main population centres in the country's northeast.

## SITEKI

Siteki is the fastest route to Mozambique from Manzini through the Mhlumeni–Goba border. It's a nice enough little place and lies above the surrounding lowveld, with wide views, cooler temperatures and a bustling market.

The town was originally named when Mbandzeni (great-grandfather of the present king) gave his frontier troops permission to marry – Siteki means Marrying Place.

**Siteki (Stegi) Hotel** (☎ 343 4126; s/d with half board US\$27/39) harks back to colonial days. It offers no-frills rooms and meals.

The highly recommended **Mabuda Farm** (☎ 343 4124; www.geocities.com/mabudafarm; s/d with breakfast US\$30/60) has cottages fitted out with colonial relics, on a working farm just outside Siteki.

Minibus taxis from Manzini run twice daily (US\$2, one hour). Daily minibus taxis connect Siteki with Big Bend (US\$1.50, one hour) and Simunye (US\$1, 30 minutes).

## HLANE ROYAL NATIONAL PARK

**Hlane Royal National Park** (☎ 528 3943/4; www.biggameparks.org; admission US\$3.50; ☎ 6am–6pm) in the northeast is near the former royal hunting



grounds and offers wonderfully low-key wildlife watching. There are white rhinos and many antelope species. Elephants and lions have been reintroduced. There are guided walking trails (per person US\$4.50), two-hour wildlife day drives (per person US\$18, minimum two), a cultural village tour with dance performances (per person US\$5.50, minimum four) and mountain bike rentals (per hour US\$9). Minibus taxis to Simunye will drop you at the entrance to Hlane (US\$0.70; 7km from Simunye).

**Ndlovu Camp** (camping per person US\$5.50, rondavel s/d from US\$32/45, 8-person cottage per person US\$27) is a pleasant and rustic fenced-off camp, with no electricity, a communal area, and a restaurant.

**Bhubesi Camp** (cottage s/d US\$27/54) has self-contained huts with electricity.

Book for both through the **Big Game Parks office** (Map p606; ☎ 528 3943/4; www.biggame.co.sz).

## MLAWULA NATURE RESERVE

This tranquil **reserve** (☎ 416 1151; www.sntc.org.sz; adult/child E25/12; 🕒 6am-6pm), where the lowveld plains meet the Lebombo Mountains, boasts antelope species and hyenas, and crocodiles plus rewarding birdwatching. You can hire fishing rods for US\$3 and bring your own mountain bike. Check the status of schistosomiasis (bilharzia).

There's tented accommodation at **Sara Camp** (camping per person E150), and **Siphiso camping ground** (camping per person E60). **Mapelepele Cottage** (cottage US\$70) is self-catering and can accommodate four people. Book accommodation through the **National Trust Commission** (Map p606; ☎ 416 1151, 416 1178; www.sntc.org.sz).

## MBULUZI GAME RESERVE

The small and privately owned **Mbuluzi Game Reserve** (☎ 383 8861; mbuluzi@swazi.net; adult/child E20/10) boasts a range of animals, including giraffes, zebras, hippos, antelope species and wildebeests. There have also been over 300 bird species recorded here.

Accommodation here, in some lovely self-catering **lodges** (5-/8-person lodges US\$52/73; 🍷), is more luxurious than at neighbouring Mlawula Nature Reserve. Some lodges have spacious verandas and wooden viewing decks and are set on the Mlawula River. **Camp sites** (camping per person US\$5) are also available near the Mbuluzi River.

The turn-off for Mbuluzi is the same as for Mlawula; the reserve entrance is about 600m from the turn-off on the left.

## MKHAYA GAME RESERVE

This top-notch **private reserve** (☎ 528 3943; www.biggameparks.org), off the Manzini-Big Bend road near the hamlet of Phuzumoya, was established in 1979 to save the pure Nguni breed of cattle from extinction. Its focus expanded to antelopes, elephants, and white and black rhinos. The reserve's name comes from the *mkhaya* (or knobthorn) tree – valued not only for its fruit, from which Swazi brew beer, but also for the insect and bird life it supports.

You can't visit or stay in the reserve without booking in advance, and even then you can't drive in alone; you'll be met at Phuzumoya at a specified pick-up time, usually 10am or 4pm. While day tours can be arranged (E390), it's ideal to stay for at least one night.

**Stone Camp** (all-inclusive s/d with full board US\$143/245) is reminiscent of a 19th-century hunting camp, with accommodation in rustically luxurious stone and thatch cottages surrounded by bush. The price includes wildlife drives, walking safaris, park entry and meals, and is good value compared to many of the private reserves near Kruger National Park in South Africa.

Bookings are made through the **Big Game Parks office** (Map p606; ☎ 528 3943/4; www.biggame.co.sz).

## SIMUNYE

Simunye is a manicured sugar-company town with little of interest for travellers, except as a possible stocking-up point for visiting nearby Hlane Royal National Park, or Mlawula and Mbuluzi Nature Reserves, or a bed if you're caught short.

**Simunye Country Club** (☎ 313 4792; www.visitswazi.com; s/d from US\$43/49, cottage s/d US\$48/80; 🍷 🏊) is a friendly and tranquil spot with small single rooms, modern self-catering cottages and a bar-restaurant. Although it's a club, visitors are welcome and can use the club facilities (swimming pool, golf course, tennis and squash courts).

## BIG BEND

Picturesque Big Bend is a sleepy sugar town on – not surprisingly – a big bend in the Lusutfu River and makes a convenient stop en route to/from KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. It may pay to book accommodation ahead.

The **Bend Inn Hotel** (☎ 363 6855; s/d US\$26/40; 🍷) is on a hill just south of town, with pleasant

views across the river from the restaurant and outdoor bar. It is OK value.

**Lismore Lodge** (☎ 363 6613; d from US\$28) has small, comfortable, good-value doubles. Next door, **LL Restaurant Bar** (☎ 363 6380; mains US\$5-11; 🍷 lunch & dinner) offers great seafood dishes, including calamari, seafood kebabs and seafood curry.

Minibus taxis go daily to Manzini (US\$2, one hour) and to the Lavumisa border post (US\$2.50, one hour).

## SOUTHERN SWAZILAND

In former years, because of its easy access to KwaZulu-Natal, southern Swaziland was frequently visited for its roulette tables, rather than its surroundings. Nowadays many tourists don't gamble on a visit; they think it lacks the north's dramatic scenery. While the entire area is quiet and rural, it's a good place to set off on a bike or on foot to discover the 'real' Swaziland, especially around the Ngwempisi Gorge.

## NGWEMPISI GORGE

The **Ngwempisi Gorge** (☎ 625 6004), 30km south of the Malkerns Valley, is one of the country's few remaining untouched environments with beautiful natural forests and the Ngwempisi River. Adventure-seekers will be thrilled by the Ngwempisi Hiking Trail, a community-run 33km trail in the Ntfungula Hills on the Mankayane-Vlelzizweni road. You can spend two to three days exploring the area and sleep en route in two different huts.

## SWAZILAND DIRECTORY

### ACCOMMODATION

There are few designated camp sites in Swaziland except in many of the national parks and reserves. It's usually possible (and safe) to camp in rural areas, but *always* ask permission from local people.

You'll find hostels in Mbabane, Manzini and Ezulwini Valley. Many of the country's hotels are geared towards South African tourists and are expensive, but there are some good midrange B&B options available.

Prices for accommodation in this chapter are: budget US\$40 and below, midrange US\$40 to US\$100, top end US\$100 and above.

### PRACTICALITIES

- The **Times** (www.times.co.sz), a virtual mouthpiece for royalty and a would-be lurid tabloid, is a fascinating read as much for what it doesn't say as what it does.
- The *Swazi Observer* is a daily publication.
- The electricity supply in Swaziland is 220V. Plugs have three large round pins as used in South Africa.
- Swaziland uses the metric system.

### ACTIVITIES

Small in size, big on action. Swaziland offers some terrific white-water rafting (in the rainy season), horse riding and mountain biking.

Hikers can enjoy the walking trails in several parks, plus the countless ancient walking tracks. Make sure you are well prepared and seek local advice on conditions.

### BOOKS

*The Kingdom of Swaziland*, by D Hugh Gillis, is a history (to independence) of the kingdom seeking to maintain its traditional way of life in the face of an overwhelming European influence.

*All the King's Animals: The Return of Endangered Wildlife to Swaziland*, by Cristina Kessler and Mswati III, is the story of the conservationist Ted Reilly and the successful reintroduction of endangered wildlife into the kingdom.

### BUSINESS HOURS

Offices and shops are usually open 8am to 5pm Monday to Friday. Bank hours are 8.30am to 2.30pm Monday to Friday and some banks, 8.30am to 11.00am on Saturday.

### CHILDREN

Travelling with little 'uns should be hassle-free in Swaziland. Most accommodation options, especially the more upmarket establishments, cater to young visitors. Many hotels have pools and entertainment facilities. Elsewhere, national parks are good to visit with kids. It's best to bring a baby-rucksack – negotiating a pram anywhere in the country would be tricky. It's probably best to stock up on baby food before heading to remote areas.

## CUSTOMS

Customs regulations are similar to those for South Africa (see p583).

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Beware of both schistosomiasis (bilharzia) and malaria. (For more information on how to avoid contracting these potentially deadly diseases, see p768.) Malaria is a risk in the northeast near Mozambique; you'll be at highest risk from November to April. In the late 1990s there was a sturdy eradication programme around this area to eliminate malaria (controversially, in the form of DDT), but it's best to be cautious.

## EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Swaziland Embassies & Consulates

In countries without Swazi representation, contact the UK representative.

**UK** (☎ 020-7630 6611; www.swaziland.org.uk; 20

Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6LB)

**USA** (☎ 202-234 5002; 1712 New Hampshire Ave, NW, Washington DC 20009)

### Embassies & Consulates in Swaziland

**Mozambique** (☎ 404 3700; Princess Dr, Mbabane)

**South Africa** (Map p604; ☎ 404 4651; The Mall, PO Box 2507, Mbabane)

**USA** (Map p604; ☎ 404 6441; http://mbabane.us embassy.gov; 2350 Mbabane Pl, Mbabane ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm Mon & Thu) There are extended hours for emergency services.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Sibhaca dancing competitions are held – ask the Mbabane tourist office for details. The Sun hotels in the Ezulwini Valley sometimes have performances.

The most important cultural events in Swaziland (near Lobamba in the Ezulwini Valley) are the Incwala ceremony, held sometime between late December and early January, and the Umhlanga (Reed) dance held in August or September (see the boxed text, p607). Photography and sound recording is not permitted at the Incwala, but photography is allowed at the Umhlanga dance.

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Swaziland is more conservative than South Africa or some other African countries. Gay sexual relationships are culturally taboo and officially illegal in Swaziland – imprisonment or fines apply. Open displays of affection are

generally frowned upon whatever your gender or orientation.

## HOLIDAYS

Public holidays observed in Swaziland:

**New Year's Day** 1 January

**Easter** (March/April) Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Monday

**King Mswati III's Birthday** 19 April

**National Flag Day** 25 April

**King Sobhuza II's Birthday** 22 July

**Umhlanga (Reed) Dance** August/September

**Somhlolo Day (Independence)** 6 September

**Christmas Day** 25 December

**Boxing Day** 26 December

**Incwala Ceremony** December/January (dates vary each year)

## INTERNET ACCESS

Internet facilities are scarce outside Mbabane and Manzini. A couple of places in Ezulwini and Malkerns Valleys have internet facilities.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Ministry of Tourism** (www.mintour.gov.sz) Best used for details about Swaziland's hotels, restaurants and other facilities.

**Swaziland.com** (www.swazi.com) Slightly chaotic portal to many other Swazi sites.

**Swaziland National Trust Commission** (www.sntc.org.sz) Helpful site with information about Malolotja and Mlawula Nature Reserves as well as Swaziland's cultural heritage.

## LANGUAGE

The official languages are Swati and English, and English is the official written language. For some useful words and phrases in Swati, see p781.

## MAPS

The main tourist information office hands out a free map of Swaziland, which has city plans for Mbabane and Manzini shown on the reverse. The Swaziland Tourism Authority also has hiking maps of most popular hiking spots including Shewula, Mlawula, Sibebe, Mlilwane, Mantenga, Mahamba, Ngwepisi and Malolotja. Topographical maps (1:50,000) are available from the **Ministry of Public Works** (☎ 404 6267; Mhlambanyatsi Rd, Mbabane), although these maps have not been reprinted for years while the office is digitising new data.

## MONEY

The unit of currency is the lilangeni (plural emalangeni – E), which is fixed at a value equal to the South African rand. Rand are accepted everywhere and there's no need to change them. Emalangeni are difficult to change for other currencies outside Swaziland. (For more details on exchange rates, see the Quick Reference page on the inside front cover of this book.)

Only a few ATMs accept international credit or debit cards. The most convenient are at Standard Bank in Swazi Mall, Mbabane and inside the Royal Swazi Spa's casino.

NedBank and First National change cash and travellers cheques. Most banks ask to see the receipt of purchase when cashing travellers cheques.

The normal practice for tipping in rural parts of Swaziland is to round up a bill. In smarter tourist establishments, 5% to 10% is usual.

## PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

Film and photographic accessories are available in Mbabane and Manzini.

Don't take photos of soldiers, police, airports or government buildings. It is prohibited to photograph or sound record the Incwala ceremony. It goes without saying that you should always ask permission before taking a photo of anyone, particularly in tribal villages.

## POST

Post offices are open from 8am to 4pm weekdays, and until 11am Saturday.

## TELEPHONE

Swaziland has a reasonable telephone network. The international country code is ☎ 268; there are no area codes. International calls are most easily made using MTN phone cards. The lowest card value is US\$2 and the highest is US\$8.50. Dial ☎ 00 for international, then the country code and city code.

Mobile-phone services are MTN and **Vodacom** (www.vodacom.co.za). These do not generally reach mountainous regions.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

Swaziland's main **tourist information office** (Map p604; ☎ 404 2531; www.welcometoswaziland.com; Swazi Plaza, Mbabane; ☎ 9am-4.45pm Mon-Thu, 9am-4pm Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) is in Mbabane. The websites of

**Swazi National Trust** (www.sntc.org.sz) and **Big Game Parks** (www.biggame.co.sz) offer useful parks information. The privately run **Swazi Trails** (Map p606; ☎ /fax 416 2180; www.swazitrails.co.sz; Mantenga Craft Centre, Ezulwini Valley) also supplies tourist information.

## VISAS

Most people don't need a visa to visit Swaziland. Those who do can obtain them free of charge at border posts and at the airport. Anyone staying for more than 30 days must apply for an extension of stay. If staying for longer than 60 days you must apply for a temporary residence permit from the **Chief Immigration Officer** (☎ 404 2941; PO Box 372, Mbabane) whose offices are in the Ministry of Home Affairs.

# TRANSPORT IN SWAZILAND

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

This section covers travel between Swaziland and its neighbours, South Africa and Mozambique. (For information on reaching Swaziland from elsewhere on the African continent and from other continents, see p752.)

## Entering Swaziland

Most travellers enter Swaziland overland from South Africa, although it's also possible to fly in from Johannesburg and Mozambique. A passport is required for entering Swaziland and entry is usually hassle-free. No vaccination certificates are required unless you have recently been in a yellow-fever area.

## Air

**Swaziland Airlink** (☎ 518 6155; www.saairlink.co.za) operates out of Matsapha airport, north of Manzini. It flies daily between Swaziland and Johannesburg (one way US\$127).

**Swazi Express Airways** (☎ 518 6840; www.swaziexpress.com) flies four times a week to Durban (US\$63 to US\$175) in South Africa, and twice a week to Maputo (US\$21 to US\$63) and Vilankulo (US\$21 to US\$197) in Mozambique.

### DEPARTURE TAX

A US\$7 departure tax is levied at Matsapha airport.

## Border Crossings

### SOUTH AFRICA

There are 11 South Africa–Swaziland border crossings, including the following:

**Houtkop–Sicunusa** (🚗 8am–6pm)

**Golela–Lavumisa** (🚗 7am–10pm)

**Josefsdal–Bulembu** (🚗 8am–4pm)

**Mahamba** (🚗 7am–10pm)

**Oshoek–Ngwenya** (🚗 7am–10pm)

### To/From Durban & Johannesburg

The **Baz Bus** (📞 in South Africa 021-439 2323; www.bazbus.com) runs from Jo'burg/Pretoria to Durban via Mbabane and Manzini three times a week, returning direct to Jo'burg/Pretoria on alternate days.

Minibus taxis run daily between Jo'burg (Park Station), Mbabane and Manzini (US\$15, four hours) and between Manzini and Durban (US\$17, eight hours). For many routes, you'll need to change minibuses at the border. Most long-distance taxis leave early in the morning.

### MOZAMBIQUE

Swaziland shares two border crossings with Mozambique: **Lomahasha–Namaacha** (🚗 7am–8pm) in the extreme northeast of the country, and **Goba–Mhlumeni** (🚗 7am–6pm).

### To/From Maputo

**Panthera Azul** (📞 in South Africa 27 11 337 7438) has buses three times weekly between Durban and Maputo via Big Bend and Namaacha. An excellent alternative is to take the **Baz Bus** (📞 in South Africa 021-439 2323; www.bazbus.com) to Manzini (see above), from where you can catch a minibus to Maputo (US\$4, 3½ hours). Minibuses depart Maputo daily in the morning for the Namaacha–Lomahasha border crossing (US\$5, 1½ hours) with some continuing on to Manzini (US\$2, 3½ hours). See also p299.

## Bicycle

There are no restrictions on bringing your own bicycle into Swaziland.

## Car & Motorcycle

If you're arriving in Swaziland via car or motorcycle you'll need the vehicle's registration papers, liability insurance and your licence. If carrying any expensive spare parts, such as a gearbox, you'll also need an import waiver, or *carnet de passage en douane*. Border

posts generally don't have petrol stations or repair shops.

## GETTING AROUND

### Bicycle

Swaziland is great for cycling, if a little mountainous. The main towns and heavily travelled Ezulwini Valley are not ideal for leisurely meanders. Minor roads are often unsealed. Both Hlane Royal National Park and Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary offer mountain-bike rentals and trails.

### Bus & Minibus Taxi

There are a few infrequent (but cheap) domestic buses, most of which depart and terminate at the main stop in the centre of Mbabane. Minibuses leave when full; no reservations necessary. These are plentiful, run almost everywhere and stop often. Sample fares include Mbabane to Manzini (US\$1, 35 minutes), Big Bend (US\$1, one hour) and Piggs Peak (US\$2, one hour).

There are also nonshared taxis in some of the larger towns.

### Car & Motorcycle

#### DRIVING LICENCE

A domestic (with photo ID) or international driving license is compulsory.

#### FUEL & SPARE PARTS

Many petrol stations are open 24 hours, and the price of petrol is similar to that of South Africa (see p593). There are Automobile Association (AA) agents in Manzini, Piggs Peak and Mbabane.

#### HIRE

Hiring a car will allow you to cover much of the country in a couple of days. Note: if you have hired your car in South Africa, ensure that you have the written agreement from the rental company to enter Swaziland. There's a US\$1 road tax payable on entry.

Car hire in Swaziland is available from **Avis** (📞 518 6226) and **Imperial** (📞 518 4862/393), both at Matsapha airport. **Affordable Car Hire** (Map p604; 📞 404 9136; affordable@posix.co.sz; Swazi Plaza, Mbabane) can offer competitive rates. You have to be 23 years old to hire cars from most companies.

#### INSURANCE

Insurance for third-party damage and damage to or loss of your vehicle is highly recommended.

## ROAD CONDITIONS & ROAD HAZARDS

Swaziland has good sealed roads and highways. The main one from east to west is the MR3. There are some rough back roads through the bush. The road northwest of Hlane Royal National Park and Piggs Peak is gravel for most of the way. Beware slippery and boggy conditions when wet. The other main dangers are people and animals on the road, plus the odd kamikaze minibus driver.

### ROAD RULES

In Swaziland, vehicles are driven on the left-hand side. Wearing seat belts is compulsory. Always pull over and stop for official motorcades or road stops. The speed limit is 80km/h on the open road and 60km/h in built-up areas.

## Hitching

Hitching is easier here than in South Africa but hitching alone is foolhardy, especially for women. Hitchhikers might wait a long time for a car on back roads, and there's keen competition from locals.

## Tours

**Swazi Trails** (Map p606; 📞/fax 416 2180; www.swazitrails.co.sz; Mantenga Craft Centre, Ezulwini Valley) specialises in one-day or half-day tours around the country, including white-water rafting, cultural tours and hiking.

**Bundu Bus** (📞 in South Africa 011-675 0767; www.bundusafaris.co.za; PO Box 697, Wilgeheuwel, 1735 Gauteng, South Africa) is a South African operator that runs a seven-day South African tour including a day in Swaziland.

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