

Central Drakensberg Tours

Inkosana Lodge & Trekking, Winterton

Day hikes and walks in the Drakensberg Mountains

There are many great day hikes & walks in the Drakensberg approachable from Inkosana Lodge near Champagne Castle. They include Bushman painting sites.

The Monk's Cowl area is set around the Mpofane river valley, at the base of some of the Drakensberg's most spectacular peaks. Day hiking in the park is done on well-defined and maintained trails, and appeals to a wide variety of fitness and experience levels. A fee of R20 per person per day is levied to hike in the park.

If you're looking for a good, easy walk, try the Hlathikulu forest trail as it winds through indigenous forests and the spectrum of Drakensberg wild flowers. Rest in the mist at the base of the magnificent Nandi's Falls and explore the pools along the Mpofane river.

Another great day hike takes you up past the sandstone rock faces of the valley to the grasslands at the base of Cathkin peak where Rhebuck and Eland graze. Bring your binoculars to focus in on the wide selection of bird life.

For fit hikers, two mountain peaks can be reached on day hikes.

Rock scrambling at the end of a four hour ascent will put you on the top of Sterkhorn (2970 m) -- a stone's throw from mighty Cathkin peak and perched over the Mwhlazini river valley. The views are fantastic and you'll be able to see the Devil's Tooth at the Amphitheater in the north and Giant's Castle in the south.

Even harder is the 10 hour round trip that will take you up to the plateau of Champagne Castle (3337 m), one of the highest mountains in the Drakensberg. Here you can rest at the top of a 1000 m drop and watch rare bearded vultures circle before heading back down Gray's Pass.

Additionally, Inkosana is within short driving distance of other great day hiking regions of the Drakensberg:

- The Cathedral Peak area is defined by a freestanding set of peaks extending from the escarpment, and is a 45 minute drive from Inkosana Lodge. Try the day walk to Rainbow Gorge where the spray from waterfalls form beautiful rainbows. Hardcore hikers can try the day hike to the top of Cathedral Peak (3007 m), one of the best day walks in the Drakensberg.
- The Injasuthi area holds the highest peak in the Drakensberg and is especially notable as having one of the best sites of Bush men rock art in the area. This art can be explored with a guided walk to Battle Cave, which displays a battle scene between two Bushmen tribes. Injasuthi is only 45 minutes by car.
- Royal Natal National Park is 90 minutes north and lies at the northern end of the Drakensberg range, at the base of the Amphitheater. Day hike up the beautiful Tugela river gorge, or drive an additional hour and walk up to and along the top of the escarpment to the Tugela falls, second highest waterfall in Africa!
- Giant's Castle is another great site for Bushman rock art, with the caves only a 1.5 km walk from the entrance gate. Here you'll also find a museum which recreates Bush men life. Serious hikers can reach the top of the Drakensberg escarpment via Langalibalele Pass.

Overnight trails & hikes in the Drakensberg Mountains

There are several factors which make overnight hikes and trails in the Drakensberg Mountains safe and easy to organize - good topographic maps, trails and water.

The Conservation Service provide a good set of topographic maps that are readily available and affordable to overnight hikers. Hiking trails exist even deep into the wilderness areas.

All of the water in the park is safe to drink so you can leave your filters and iodine tablets at home. You may not even need a tent: the formation of the Drakensberg has produced lots of caves (shown on the topo maps) that are ideal for camping on overnight hikes!

The Conservation Service also operates a search and rescue service for overdue hiking parties. Guides are available for the walks in the Monk's Cowl and some other areas.

Having said this, it is important to note that the terrain can be very rugged and overnight hiking strenuous. Route finding and map reading skills are definitely required. Hikers must also be prepared for the possibility of rain showers and cold nights.

Here are a few examples of overnight hiking trips:

- In the Monk's Cowl area, spend a night behind a waterfall while camping in Zulu Cave and continue on to explore the beautiful Didima Gorge. Some of the best San (Bushman) Rock Art can be found nearby in Eland Cave. Or head to the top and spend the night on top of Champagne Castle. Watch the sunrise above the clouds over Cathkin Peak and Kwa Zulu-Natal. Experienced hiking parties can descend via the hectic Ship's Prow Pass.
- Around Cathedral Peak, try the three-day overnight hike - Bell Traverse. Begin with an ascent of Cathedral Peak and overnight in a cave at the base of the neighboring Bell mountain. The second day is spent winding your way through peaks at 3000 m and overnighing in spacious Twins Cave. The final day begins with a short trip up Mlambonjwa Pass to the top of the escarpment with magnificent views into Lesotho. Descend the pass, walking and rock-hopping down the Mlambonjwa river back to the valleys of the Little 'Berg.
- Starting at Giant's Castle entrance, it's a steep ascent to a mountain hut directly below the basalt cliffs of Giant's Castle, and perched on the edge of a mountain lake. On the second day, a fairly easy walk takes you to the base of Langalibalele Pass. Once at the top, view the Carbineers' Graves which date from the English occupation of Natal. Overnight at Bannerman Cave. The third day takes a spectacular high-altitude traverse past Gypaetus Point where the bearded vultures nest. Ascending an enormous valley one reaches the Injasuthi area with the highest points in the Drakensberg. The evening is spent in Injasuthi Cave. On the final day, the traverse concludes with ridge-walking over a 1000 m drop, culminating with the arrival at Leslie's Pass, and a comparatively easy descent to the welcoming river valley. You may overnight in an indigenous forest or at Junction Cave. The final day needs just an easy two hour stroll to the Injasuthi entrance gate.

You may also reach the Highest Peaks of Mafadi and Injusuthi Peak from the Monks Cowl entrance and arrive at the Injusuthi camp on the third day.

These are just a small set of the overnight hiking possibilities. Contact us for specifics on overnight hikes and the unlimited routes and itineraries!

In addition to hiking, 'things to do' in the Drakensberg include horse riding, river rafting, Ardmore Craft Studios, golf, battlefields tours & game reserves.

Horse Riding

Horse riding for different level's of experience can be arranged in the valley. For the more adventurous, a half day ride to view a Bushman Rock Art is arranged by Ushaka Horse Trails. At Spioenkop Game Reserve you may ride among the animals.

River Rafting, Carting and Golf

An excellent opportunity exists for rafting in the Drakensberg region during the summer

months. Four Rivers Rafting runs day trips on the Little Tugela in two man boats on rapids up to Grade 4. Transport is provided from the valley and the day ends with a braai. The same company also runs off-road go-carting and 4x4 rides. Additionally, there are two golf courses close to Inkosana Lodge.

Craft Studios and Shops

The Champagne Valley is home to Ardmore Ceramic Studios, famous for brightly painted ethnic works. Kwa Zulu Weavers feature a wide array of wonderful carpets and tapestries. You may tour their factory and view them at work. Apart from these, there are numerous arts and craft shops of a high standard, like MG Traders and the Thokozisa center.

Drakensberg Boys Choir

This unusual school which neighbors Inkosana Lodge is home for students from all over southern Africa. The school is founded totally on music, and is internationally renowned. There are Wednesday afternoon concerts in term.

Historical Battlefields

Many of the Anglo-Boer and Zulu War battlefields are in this area. By car, it's an hour's drive to Spioenkop, Colenso, and Ladysmith. A little further are the sites of Rorke's Drift, Isandlwana, and Blood River.

Guided tours may be arranged.