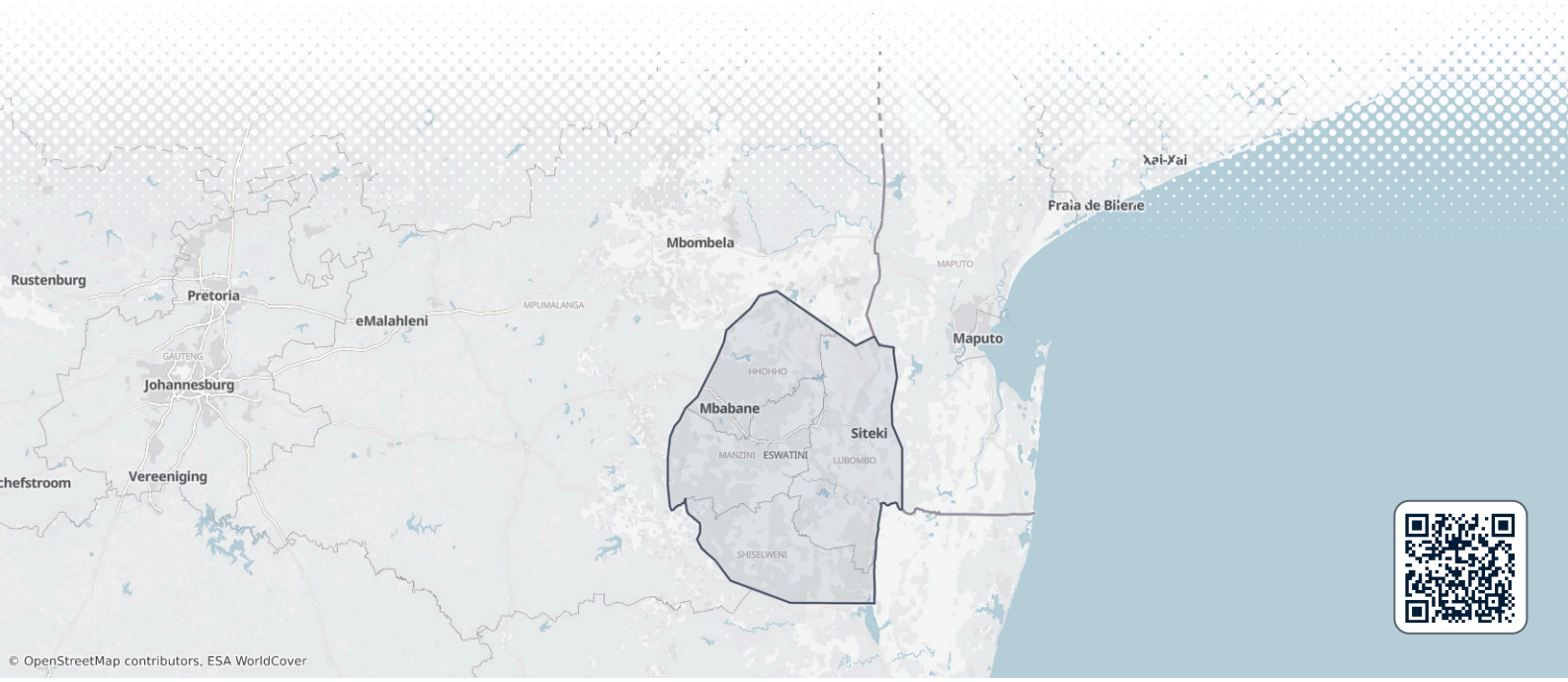


Eswatini

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Eswatini is a small, **landlocked** kingdom between South Africa and Mozambique. You can drive across it in about three hours, yet it packs in cool green highlands in the west, the fertile Ezulwini and Malkerns valleys in the middle, and hot, dry lowveld bush in the east. It is one of the last absolute monarchies in the world, and Swazi tradition is still a visible part of daily life. Big national ceremonies, such as the Umhlanga (Reed Dance) in late August or early September, draw thousands of participants.

The country suits travellers who want easy wildlife viewing, hiking and craft shopping without long distances. Many visitors add it to a trip through Kruger National Park or KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Hlane and Mkhaya are good for big game, including rhino. Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary is ideal for walking, cycling and horse riding among zebra and antelope. The official tourism site is Eswatini Tourism Authority.

Money & payments

The local currency is pegged one-to-one to the South African rand, and rand notes and coins are accepted everywhere in Eswatini. The reverse is not true: emalangeni are hard to exchange outside the country, so spend them or swap them for rand before you leave.

Currency

CURRENCY	1 SZL	1 SZL
SZL	**0.0544 EUR**	**0.0611 USD**
	1 EUR = 18.37 SZL	1 USD = 16.362 SZL

Cards accepted in major venues

- **ATMs** are found in Mbabane, Manzini, Ezulwini and larger towns, but they are scarce in the countryside. Withdraw cash before heading to the eastern reserves or the far north.
- **Cash** is still needed for minibus taxis, craft markets, roadside stalls and small village shops.
- **Budget travellers** staying in backpacker lodges or rest camps and using minibuses can manage on roughly E600–900 a day. A mid-range trip with a rental car, lodge rooms and restaurant meals is closer to E2,000–3,500 a day per person.

Typical costs

Rough prices in touristic areas, per person

Hotel (double room, per night) mid-range lodge or hotel, double room	1,200 – 2,500 SZL €65 – €136
Dinner (mid-range restaurant) mid-range restaurant, dinner for two	300 – 600 SZL €16 – €33
Inexpensive meal	70 – 150 SZL €4 – €8
Local beer	25 – 45 SZL €1 – €2
Coffee	30 – 45 SZL €2 – €2
Water bottled water, 1.5 l	12 – 20 SZL €1 – €1
Transit ticket minibus taxi between towns	15 – 40 SZL €1 – €2

Tipping

Tipping follows the South African pattern. Service charges are rarely added to the bill.

- **Restaurants**: about 10 % is normal for table service; more for very good service.
- **Safari and hiking guides, game-drive rangers and trackers**: a tip at the end of the activity is expected. Lodges often have a shared tip box for staff.
- **Fuel stations**: attendants fill your tank and clean the windscreen; a few emalangeni is a common thank-you.
- **Minibus taxis**: no tip.

Restaurant about 10 %	Expected
Tour guide at the end of a tour or game drive	Expected
Hotel staff tip box at lodges	Optional
Taxi round up (private taxis only)	Optional
Bar small change	Optional

Electricity

Most sockets are the large three-round-pin type also used in South Africa. Some newer buildings also have smaller two-pin or three-pin sockets. Most European, UK and US plugs need an adapter, so buy one before you travel or at a South African airport.

ELECTRICITY



Type C

ELECTRICITY



Type M

ELECTRICITY



Type N

230 V · 50 Hz

Language

English and siSwati are the official languages. English is used in government, business, hotels and on road signs, so visitors rarely have trouble communicating. In rural areas older people may speak mainly siSwati. A greeting in siSwati is always appreciated and often starts a friendly conversation.

Useful phrases

Hello	Sawubona
Thank you	Ngiyabonga
Please	Ngicela
Yes	Yebo
No	Cha
Goodbye	Sala kahle

Staying connected

- **SIM cards**: MTN Eswatini and Eswatini Mobile sell prepaid SIM cards and data bundles in Mbabane, Manzini and shopping centres. Roaming on a South African SIM works but is expensive.
- **Coverage**: mobile signal is good in towns and along the main roads, but patchy in the mountains and inside some game reserves. Download offline maps before you go.

Safety & emergencies

Most visits to Eswatini are trouble-free, and people are generally friendly and helpful. Petty theft and pickpocketing are the main risks, especially around bus ranks and in the centres of Mbabane and Manzini after dark. Keep valuables out of sight and avoid walking at night.

- **Protests**: demonstrations happen from time to time and security forces have used force to break them up. Avoid all gatherings and follow local news.
- **Roads**: accidents are the biggest real danger. **Do not drive after dark**: stray cattle, unlit vehicles and pedestrians make night driving hazardous.
- **Wildlife**: in reserves with big game, stay in your vehicle unless a guide says otherwise, and keep to camp rules after sunset.
- **Weather**: violent thunderstorms and flash floods are common from November to April, especially in the highlands.

Emergency numbers

POLICE	AMBULANCE	FIRE BRIGADE
999	977	933

Health

- **Malaria**: malaria occurs in most areas outside Mbabane and the highlands, especially in the eastern lowveld around Hlane and Mkhaya. See a travel clinic about tablets and use insect repellent after dusk.
- **Tap water**: treated tap water in the main towns is usually safe, but many travellers stick to bottled or filtered water, especially in rural areas.
- **Bilharzia**: do not swim or wade in rivers, lakes or dams.
- **HIV**: Eswatini has one of the highest HIV rates in the world, so take the usual precautions.
- **Medical care**: pharmacies are found in all larger towns, but medicines can run short. Serious cases are usually transferred to hospitals in South Africa, so take out travel insurance that covers medical evacuation. Hospitals may ask for proof of insurance or payment before treatment.
- **Vaccinations**: check routine vaccines before you travel. You need a yellow fever certificate if you arrive from, or have transited through, a country with yellow fever risk.

Visas & entry

Citizens of many countries, including the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia, most EU countries and Eswatini's southern African neighbours, can visit without a visa for up to 30 days. Other nationalities can apply online through the Eswatini eVisa portal or at an Eswatini embassy.

- **Passport**: make sure it is valid for at least six months beyond your stay and have at least two blank pages. If you also travel through South Africa, keep extra blank pages for South African stamps.
- **Entry stamp**: check that your passport is stamped with the correct date at the border. A wrong stamp can lead to a ban on re-entering the country for up to a year.
- **Border posts**: most road crossings are not open 24 hours. Check opening times before you leave and allow time for queues.

> Visa and entry requirements change frequently. Verify current requirements with the official immigration authority or your country's embassy before travel.

Etiquette

Swazi culture places high value on respect, especially towards elders and the royal family.

- **Greetings**: always greet people before asking a question, even in a shop. A handshake is common; many people support the right forearm with the left hand as a sign of respect.
- **Dress**: dress modestly in towns and villages. Beachwear belongs at the pool or lodge only.
- **Photography**: ask before photographing people. Do not photograph royal residences, police, military sites or officials. At ceremonies such as the Umhlanga, follow the rules announced by the organisers.
- **Politics**: avoid public discussion of local politics or the monarchy, including on social media.
- **Bargaining**: light bargaining is acceptable at craft markets, but prices at craft shops and centres are fixed.
- **Same-sex relationships**: same-sex sexual activity is illegal. Public displays of affection by any couple are uncommon.

Holidays & opening hours

On public holidays banks and government offices close, and many shops keep reduced hours. Transport is busier just before and after major holidays, and border posts get long queues around Easter and Christmas.

Public holidays

Jan 1	New Year's Day
Apr 19	King's Birthday
Apr 25	National Flag Day
May 1	Workers' Day
Sep 6	Independence Day
Dec 25	Christmas Day
Dec 26	St. Stephen's Day
movable — May	Ascension Day
movable — Mar/Apr	Easter Monday
movable — Mar/Apr	Good Friday

Most shops open from about 8:00 to 17:00 on weekdays and close early on Saturday afternoon. Many small shops close on Sunday, but supermarkets in shopping centres usually open. Large royal ceremonies, such as the Umhlanga Reed Dance and the Incwala, can also close roads and offices on the main days.

Getting around

Distances are short: most places are within two or three hours' drive of each other. There is no passenger rail service.

- **By car**: a rental car is by far the easiest way to see the reserves and the countryside. Most visitors rent in South Africa and drive in; check that the rental company allows cross-border travel and gives you the right papers. Eswatini **drives on the left**, like South Africa.
- **By minibus taxi (kombi)**: shared minibuses link all towns from the main bus ranks in Mbabane and Manzini. They are cheap and frequent, but often crowded and driven fast. Pay the driver or conductor in cash.
- **By coach**: airport coaches run between Johannesburg and Mbabane; this is the safest public-transport option into the country.
- **By air**: there are no domestic flights. King Mswati III International Airport, east of Manzini, has flights to Johannesburg and a few other southern African cities.
- **Private taxis**: available in the main towns. Agree the fare before you get in.

Driving

- **Documents**: carry your national driving licence; some visitors, including UK licence holders, must also carry an International Driving Permit.
- **Key rules**: the drink-driving limit is 50 mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood, and police run random roadside checks. Seat belts are compulsory.
- **Road conditions**: the main highway linking the Ngwenya/Oshoek border, Mbabane, Manzini and the airport is in good condition. Minor roads can have deep potholes and poor markings, and gravel roads in the reserves become slippery after rain.
- **Hazards**: cattle, goats and people on the road are common. Slow trucks on the hills make overtaking risky. Avoid driving at night.
- **Road fund levy**: vehicles not registered in Eswatini pay a one-off levy at the border; South African rand are accepted.
- **Fuel**: stations are attended, and staff will fill the tank for you. Cards are accepted in towns, but carry cash for rural stations. Fill up before heading into the eastern lowveld.
- **Parking**: free or cheap in most places. In Mbabane and Manzini, use guarded car parks at shopping centres and do not leave valuables in the car.
- **Electric vehicles**: public charging is almost non-existent; plan an EV trip only with careful range planning and hotel charging.

URBAN	RURAL	PETROL	DIESEL
60 km/h	80 km/h	Unleaded 93, Unleaded 95	Diesel

Drive on the left

No motorway vignette needed

No road tolls or vignette. Vehicles not registered in Eswatini pay a one-off road fund levy at the border (E150 for cars, E80 for motorcycles; South African rand accepted).

Food & drink

Everyday Swazi food is simple and filling. Maize porridge is the staple, usually eaten with stewed meat, vegetables or beans. Breakfast is often soft porridge or bread and tea. Lunch is the main meal for many families, and dinner is usually eaten early.

Look for sishwala, a thick maize porridge, and emasi, a thick soured milk often eaten with it. Grilled meat from roadside braai stands, often called shisa nyama, is popular at weekends. Markets sell seasonal fruit such as pineapples, avocados and litchis. In towns and tourist areas, restaurants serve familiar South African and international food.

For drinks, try the local Sibebe lager. In late summer, villages brew buganu, a traditional marula fruit beer. Rooibos tea and fresh fruit juice are widely available.

What to eat & drink

BREAKFAST

Soft maize porridge
Thin maize porridge eaten for breakfast, often with sugar and milk.

LUNCH

Shisa nyama
Meat grilled over coals at roadside stands and markets.

DRINKS

Buganu · buganu
Traditional marula fruit beer brewed in late summer.

Sibebe lager
The local beer.

SIGNATURE DISHES

Sishwala · sishwala
Thick maize porridge, the everyday staple, served with meat or vegetables.

Emasi · emasi
Thick soured milk, often eaten with maize porridge.

Eswatini – Plan Your Trip
Turn the places from this guide into a real itinerary, with smart routing, time estimates, and everything you need for a perfect trip.
3M+ downloads · 4.6 stars · 15 years of trip planning
App Store · Google Play
Scan to download the app

Where to explore

The country is small, so most trips combine several of these areas in a few days.

Towns and valleys

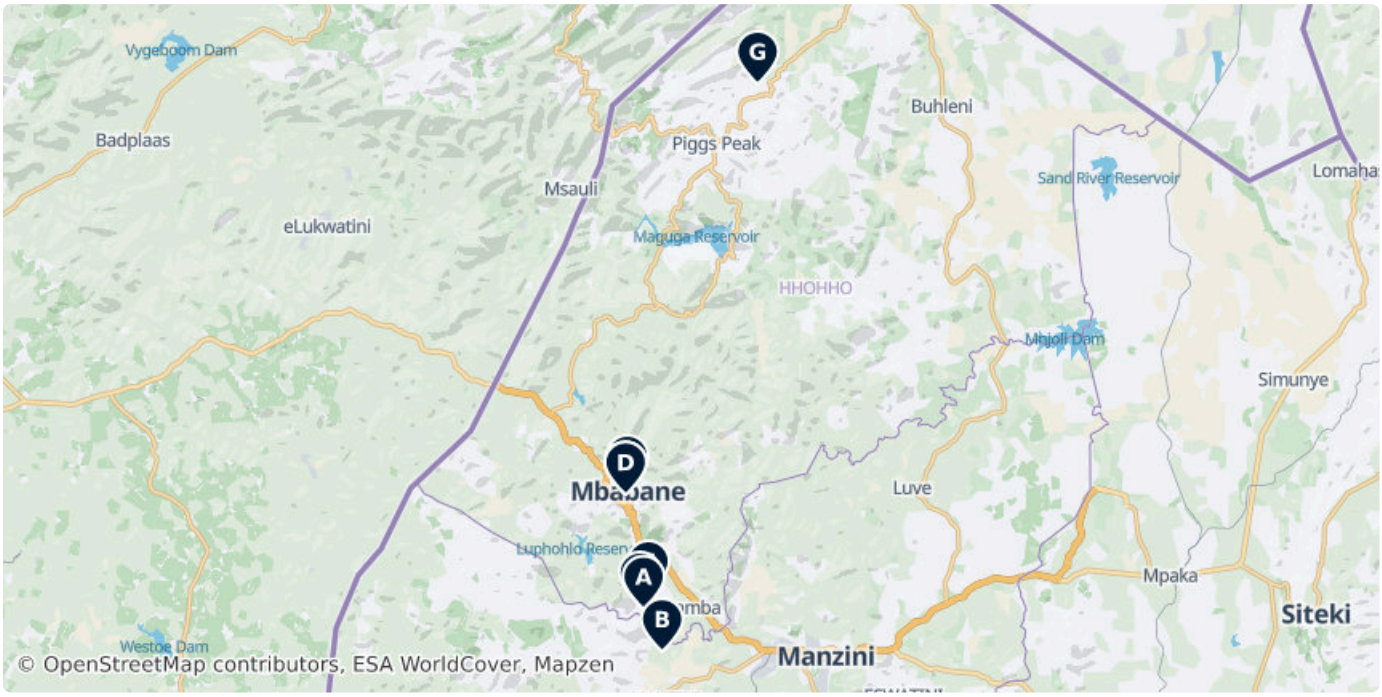
- **Mbabane**: the capital, set in the western highlands close to the main border crossing with South Africa. Sibebe Rock, a huge granite dome for hiking, is just outside town.
- **Ezulwini Valley and Lobamba**: the cultural and royal heart of the country, with the parliament, Swaziland National Museum and many lodges and craft shops. Swazi Cultural Village and Mantenga Falls are in the Mantenga Nature Reserve here.
- **Malkerns Valley**: farmland south of Ezulwini, known for craft centres, candle and textile workshops, and weekend music events.
- **Manzini**: the largest town and commercial centre, with a busy market and the main bus rank.

Parks and reserves

- **Close to the capital**: Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary is the easiest reserve to reach, with walking, cycling and horse-riding trails.
- **Eastern lowveld**: Hlane Royal National Park is the largest single conservation area and has lions, elephants and rhino. Mkhaya Game Reserve is best known for black and white rhino and is visited only on pre-booked guided trips.
- **North-west highlands**: Malolotja Nature Reserve has high grassland, waterfalls and long hiking trails. Near Piggs Peak, Phophonyane Falls tumbles over some of the oldest rocks on Earth. On the way, stop at Ngwenya Glass, a workshop making glass from recycled bottles.

Eswatini's Absolute Must-Sees

Eswatini offers a blend of cultural heritage and natural diversity. This collection features the Swazi Cultural Village, a living museum with 19th-century beehive huts, and the Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary, the country's oldest conservation area. Natural landmarks include the 30-meter Matenga Falls and the ancient granite formations of Phophonyane Falls. For panoramic views, Sheba's Summit overlooks the Ezulwini Valley, while the Swazi Plaza and Indingilizi Art & Craft Gallery provide central hubs for retail and local contemporary art in Mbabane.





A Swazi Cultural Village

A living museum in the Mantenga Nature Reserve featuring a 19th-century replica village with traditional beehive huts and daily Sibhaca dance performances.

(Unnamed Road), Swaziland (-26.44666, 31.16304)



B Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary

Eswatini's oldest conservation area located in the Ezulwini Valley, home to hippos, zebras, and various antelope species, with trails for walking and cycling.

Hippo Trail, Manzini Region, Eswatini (-26.49108, 31.18459)

biggameparks.org/properties/mlilwane-wildlife-sanctuary

C Matenga Falls

A 30-meter-high waterfall situated within the Mantenga Nature Reserve, accessible via a short forest trail.

(-26.44244, 31.15879)

D Swazi Plaza

A central shopping and commercial hub in Mbabane featuring a variety of retail stores, banks, and restaurants.

(-26.32772, 31.14207)

E Swazi Plaza

Major retail complex in the capital city of Mbabane, serving as a primary destination for shopping and local services.

(-26.32765, 31.14173)

F Sheba’s summit - 1171m

A peak on Nyonyane Mountain offering panoramic views across the Ezulwini Valley and the surrounding wildlife sanctuary.

(-26.43068, 31.16870)

G Phophonyane Falls

A series of cascades and pools located near Pigg's Peak, set within a lush nature reserve featuring some of the world's oldest granite formations.

(-25.89868, 31.29583)

H Indingilizi Art & Craft Gallery

Indingilizi Gallery is an art gallery in Mbabane, Eswatini, established in 1982.

Msakato Street, Mbabane, Swaziland (-26.32061, 31.14428)

swaziplace.com/indinglizi/

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