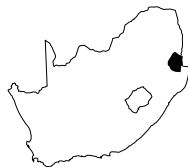


Swaziland



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 animosities, it's a complete change of pace from its larger neighbours.

During apartheid, Swaziland was known primarily for its casinos and nightclubs – forbidden pleasures in apartheid-era South Africa. Since the dismantling of apartheid this reputation has faded fast and the country's true attractions have come to the fore. Visitors can enjoy rewarding and delightfully low-key wildlife-watching, adrenaline-boosting activities such as rafting, taking in stunning mountain panoramas and a lively traditional culture. Swaziland also boasts superb walking and an excellent selection of high-quality handicrafts.

Overseeing all this is King Mswati III, one of three remaining monarchs in Africa. The monarchy has its critics, but combined with the Swazis' history of resistance to the Boers, the British and the Zulus, it has fostered a sense of national pride, and local culture is flourishing.

The excellent road system makes Swaziland easy to access and navigate. There's accommodation to suit every taste, ranging from a decent network of hostels to family-friendly hotels and upscale retreats. Many travellers make a flying visit on their way to Kruger National Park, but it's well worth lingering at least a week. If you come during one of the national festivals, notably the Incwala ceremony or the Umhlanga (Reed) dance (see the boxed text, p583), you can have a tantalising taste of the culture for which Swaziland is so renowned.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Watching wildlife, including rare black rhinos in the wild, at the excellent **Mkhaya Game Reserve** (p594)
- Hiking in **Malolotja Nature Reserve** (p590) or **Ngwempisi Gorge** (p595), two of Swaziland's most enchanting wilderness areas
- Browsing the craft shops and royal heartland of the **Ezulwini Valley** (p582) and the **Malkerns Valley** (p587)
- Shooting white-water rapids on the **Usutu River** (see the boxed text, p595)
- Walking around **Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary** (p586) and relaxing in its comfortable bargain lodges
- Exploring the ghost town of **Bulembu** (p592) in the country's northwest



■ POPULATION: 1.1 MILLION

■ AREA: 17,364 SQ KM

HISTORY The Beginnings of a Nation

The area that is now Swaziland has been inhabited for millennia, and human-like remains possibly dating back as far as 100,000 years have been discovered around the Lebombo Mountains in eastern Swaziland. However, today's Swazis trace their ancestors to much more recent arrivals. By around AD 500, various Nguni groups had made their way to the region as part of the great Bantu migrations (p32). One of these groups settled in the area around present-day Maputo (Mozambique), eventually founding the Dlamini dynasty. In the mid-18th century, in response to increasing pressure from other clans in the area, the Dlamini king, Ngwane III, led his people southwest to the Pongola River, in present-day southern Swaziland and northern KwaZulu-Natal. This became the first Swazi heartland, and today, Swazis consider Ngwane III to have been their first king.

It was Ngwane's successor, Sobhuza I, who established a base in the Ezulwini Valley, which still remains the centre of Swazi royalty and ritual. Following Sobhuza I on the throne was the renowned King Mswazi (or Mswati), after whom the Swazi take their name. Despite considerable pressure from the neighbouring Zulu, Mswazi succeeded in unifying the whole kingdom. He also extended Swazi territory northwards as far as Hhohho, in what is now north-western Swaziland, largely in response to continued Zulu incursions on Swazi territory to the south. By the time he died in 1868, the foundations of the young Swazi nation were secure.

From the mid-19th century, Swaziland began to attract increasing numbers of European farmers in search of land for their cattle, as well as hunters, traders and missionaries. Mswazi's successor, Mbandzeni, inherited a kingdom rife with European carpetbaggers, and proved much weaker at reining them in than Mswazi. Under Mbandzeni, increasing amounts of the kingdom's land were alienated through leases granted to Europeans, with bribes for the king featuring heavily in some of the deals.

Over the next decades, the Swazis saw their territory whittled away as the British and Boers jostled for power in the area.

In 1902, following the second Anglo-Boer War (p37), the Boers withdrew and the British took control of Swaziland as a protectorate.

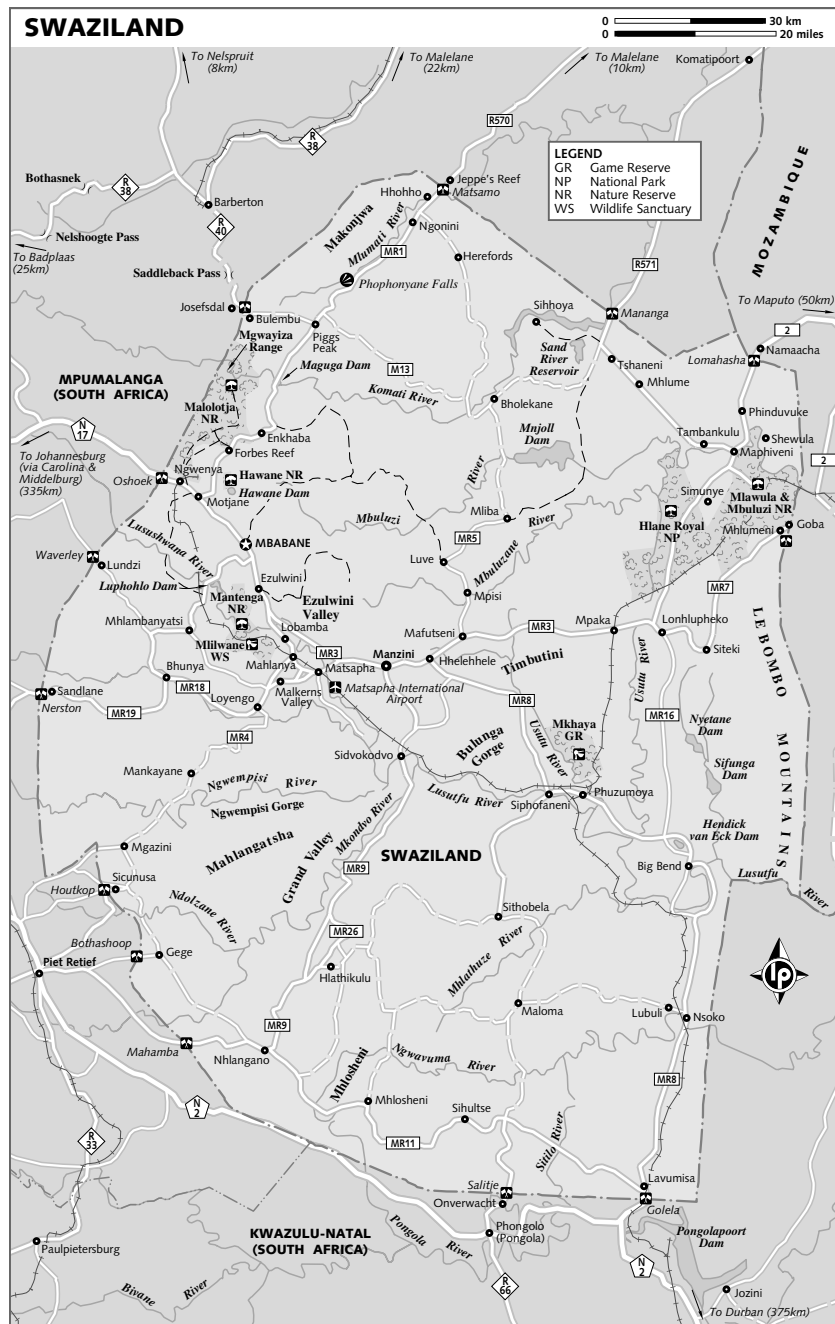
Struggle for Independence

Swazi history in the early 20th century centred around the ongoing struggle for independence. Under the leadership of King Sobhuza II (guided by the capable hands of his mother acting as regent while Sobhuza was a child), the Swazis succeeded in regaining much of their original territory. This was done in part by direct purchase and in part by British government decree. By the time of independence in 1968, about two-thirds of the kingdom was again under Swazi control. This was a major development, as Swazi kings are considered to hold the kingdom in trust for their subjects, and land ownership is thus more than just a political and economic issue. Having a large proportion of the country owned by foreigners threatened the credibility of the monarchy and the viability of Swazi culture. It was also during this time that many Swazis began seeking work as migrant labourers in the Witwatersrand mines of South Africa, in part to raise money to buy back their lands.

In 1960 King Sobhuza II proposed the creation of a Legislative Council, to be composed of Europeans elected along European lines, 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 while eschewing racial discrimination. When the British finally agreed to elections in 1964, Mbokodvo won a majority. At the next elections, in 1967, it won all the seats. Independence was finally achieved – the culmination of a long and remarkably nonviolent path – on 6 September 1968, 66 years after the start of the British protectorate.

The first Swazi constitution was largely a British creation, and in 1973 the king suspended it on the grounds that it did not accord with Swazi culture. Four years later parliament reconvened under a new constitution vesting all power in the king.

Sobhuza II died in 1982, at that time the world's longest-reigning monarch. Most



THE PILLAR OF POLYGAMY

When King Sobhuza II died, at age 83, he left about 120 official wives, with unofficial estimates putting the number of his wives and mistresses at more than double this number. The current King Mswati III has 13 wives. The king was the centre of controversy in 2001 when he married a 17-year-old, two months after imposing a five-year sex ban on the kingdom's teenage females. The 'forced' chastity was imposed to fight the spread of HIV/AIDS. He ended the ban a year early.

Despite this proliferation of spouses among prominent figures, formal polygamy is declining in Swaziland. One of the main reasons for this is that it has become too expensive: each time a man marries, he must pay *lobola* (bride price – usually cattle) to the family of his fiancé. This has led to an increase in the number of 'informal' affairs.

significant among his accomplishments was his success in ensuring the continued existence of his country and culture, under threat since his father's reign. He is still referred to as 'the late king'. In 1986 the young Mswati III ascended the throne, where he continues today to represent and maintain the traditional Swazi way of life, and to assert his pre-eminence, for better and often worse, as absolute monarch.

Current Events

Swaziland is run by King Mswati III and a small core of advisers (Council of Ministers). Most Swazis seem happy with (or perhaps apathetic to) their political system, and focus instead on ensuring that their culture survives in the face of modernisation. However, there is an undercurrent of political dissent, and the movement for democratic change has slowly gained momentum over the past decade. In 1996 the king appointed a constitutional review commission, and in 2003 a new constitution was finally unveiled – though it was promptly dismissed by reform-minded Swazis as doing little more than preserving the status quo.

Opposition parties are officially banned, but several exist. The main ones are People's United Democratic Movement (Pudemo) and Swaziland Youth Congress (Swayoco), both of which enjoy only limited support. In addition, the trade union movement has long been agitating for change, though there is a royal ban on its meetings. 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 call 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 (see boxed text, p578).

CLIMATE

Most of Swaziland enjoys a climate similar to that of South Africa's eastern lowveld, with rainy, steamy summers and agreeably cooler winters. Between December and February, temperatures occasionally exceed 40°C and torrential thunderstorms are common. May to August are the coolest months. In the higher-lying areas of the west, winters bring cool, crisp nights and sometimes even frost.

NATIONAL PARKS & RESERVES

Swaziland has five main reserves, reflecting the tiny country's impressively diverse topography. Easiest to get to is Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary (p586) in the Ezulwini Valley, which is privately run by **Big Game Parks** (☎ 528 3944; www.biggameparks.org), based at Mlilwane. Also under the same jurisdiction, and both well worth visiting, are the excellent Mkhaya Game Reserve (p594), with black rhinos and many other animals, and Hlane Royal National Park (p593).

In the northwestern highlands is the beautiful Malolotja Nature Reserve (p590), known for its hiking trails. It, together with Mlawula Nature Reserve (p593) in the eastern lowveld and tiny Mantenga Nature Reserve (p583) in the Ezulwini Valley, is run by the **National Trust Commission** (☎ 416 1151,

HIV/AIDS

Swaziland has now surpassed Botswana as the country with the world's 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, one-quarter of Swaziland's population is predicted to be dead from the disease by 2010, and already over 60,000 children have lost either one or both parents to the disease.

There are many possible reasons for this: more Swazis work in South Africa (primarily in the mining, sugar and timber industries) than in Swaziland, and these populations – including the wives or girlfriends they have left behind – are particularly at risk. Other reasons include cultural practices such as widow inheritance (where a widow has been entrusted to her brother-in-law in her husband's absence). In some cases, the decline in polygamy has led to more 'informal' relations outside the marriage. Other contributing factors include the legal lack of equality for women, the accessibility of the country and good road system (useful trucking routes), and the stigma attached to AIDS, which hinders the flow of communication and hampers prevention efforts.

416 1178; www.sntc.org.sz), with its head office at the National Museum in Lobamba (Ezulwini Valley) and a bookings representative at the Ezulwini Valley **tourist information office** (☎ 404 2531; www.welcometoswaziland.com).

LANGUAGE

The official languages are Swati and English, and English is the official written language. For information on Swati, see the Language chapter (p651).

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Street crime in Mbabane is rising, so take common-sense precautions, especially at night. There has been an increase in attacks on tourists and locals in Manzini – do not flaunt valuables and be vigilant at all times.

Schistosomiasis (bilharzia) and malaria are both present in Swaziland; see p648 and p647 for information on avoiding these diseases.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

There are flights into Swaziland (Matasapha International Airport) from Johannesburg (Jo'burg) and Durban in South Africa and from Maputo in Mozambique; see p625.

Swazi Express Airways (☎ 518 6840; www.swaziexpress.com), together with its sister company, Steffen Air Charters, operates charter flights within the kingdom and around the region.

Most travellers enter Swaziland overland. For details of border posts, see p628. For bus connections, see p630 and for informa-

tion on driving around Swaziland, including car hire, see p635.

Once in Swaziland, there is a good network of minibuses covering the country. There are private taxis in Mbabane, the Ezulwini Valley and Manzini. See the Getting Around sections of these areas for details.

MBABANE

pop 60,000

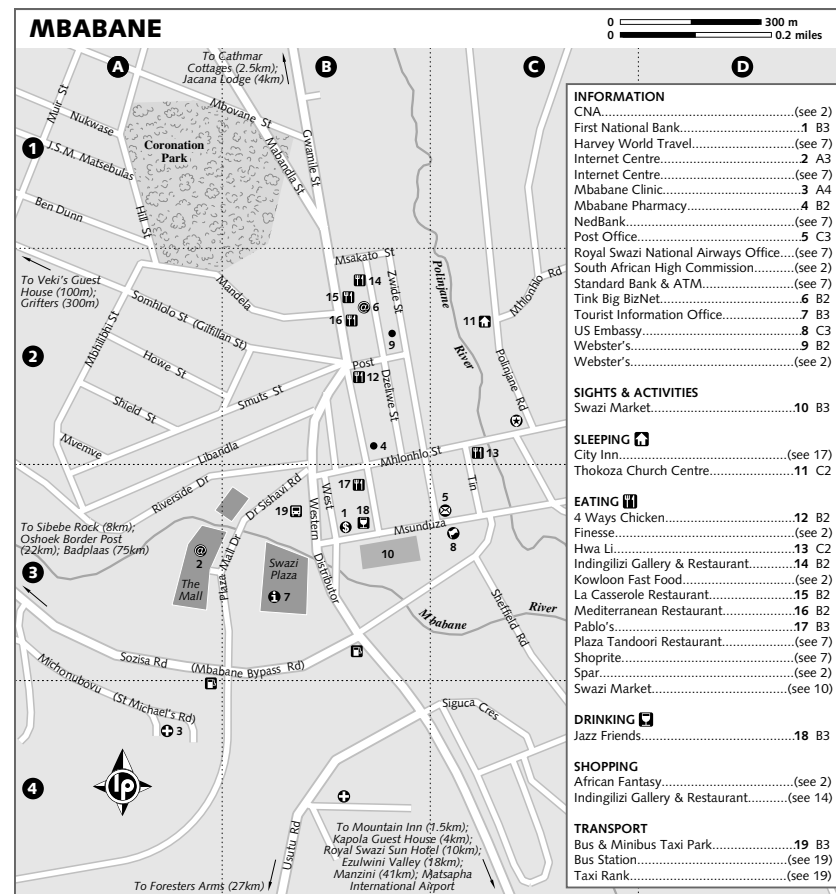
Swaziland's capital and second-largest city, Mbabane (pronounced mm-bah-bahn), may sound grand, but it's not. However, though plain, it's a relaxed and functional place in a lovely setting in the Dlangeni Hills, and is a good place to get things done. There's a handful of OK restaurants, accommodation options and a busy market, but the adjacent Ezulwini Valley has most of the attractions. Mbabane is growing fast and has recently seen a surge in commercial development, making it a sharp contrast to the surrounding rural areas.

During the colonial era, the British originally had their base in Manzini, but moved it in 1902 to Mbabane to take advantage of the cooler climate in the hills.

Orientation

Street names in Mbabane have been changed over recent years and seem to have finally been captured on official maps. Occasionally, people will still refer to the old name (or both).

The main street is Gwamile St, which runs roughly north-south through the town centre. Just off its southern end is Swazi



INFORMATION	
CNA.....	(see 2)
First National Bank.....	1 B3
Harvey World Travel.....	(see 7)
Internet Centre.....	2 A3
Internet Centre.....	(see 7)
Mbabane Clinic.....	3 A4
Mbabane Pharmacy.....	4 B2
NedBank.....	(see 7)
Post Office.....	5 C3
Royal Swazi National Airways Office.....	(see 7)
South African High Commission.....	(see 2)
Standard Bank & ATM.....	(see 7)
Tink Big BizNet.....	6 B2
Tourist Information Office.....	7 B3
US Embassy.....	8 C3
Webster's.....	9 B2
Webster's.....	(see 2)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Swazi Market.....	10 B3

SLEEPING	
City Inn.....	(see 17)
Thokoza Church Centre.....	11 C2

EATING	
4 Ways Chicken.....	12 B2
Finesse.....	(see 2)
Hwa Li.....	13 C2
Indinglizi Gallery & Restaurant.....	14 B2
Kowloon Fast Food.....	(see 2)
La Casserole Restaurant.....	15 B2
Mediterranean Restaurant.....	16 B2
Pablo's.....	17 B3
Plaza Tandoori Restaurant.....	(see 7)
Shogri.....	(see 2)
Spar.....	(see 2)
Swazi Market.....	(see 10)

DRINKING	
Jazz Friends.....	18 B3

SHOPPING	
African Fantasy.....	(see 2)
Indinglizi Gallery & Restaurant.....	(see 14)

TRANSPORT	
Bus & Minibus Taxi Park.....	19 B3
Bus Station.....	(see 19)
Taxi Rank.....	(see 19)

Plaza, a large shopping mall with the tourist information office, banks and ATMs, an Internet centre and a good range of shops. Just across the street is Mbabane's other main shopping centre, the Mall.

The city's central commercial area is easily negotiated on foot. Away from here, the streets become green and residential as they wind over the hills, and a car is handy if you'll be staying in any outlying B&Bs.

MAPS

The **tourist information office** (☎ 404 2531; www.welcometoswaziland.com; ☎ 9am-4.45pm Mon-Thu, 9am-4pm Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) has a free map with Mbabane, Manzini and Swaziland on one side, and information on the reverse.

Information BOOKSHOPS

CNA (Swazi Plaza) A good option.

Webster's (120 Dzelilwe St) The best-stocked bookshop in Mbabane.

EMERGENCY

Fire (☎ 404 3333)

Police (☎ 404 2221, 999)

INTERNET ACCESS

There are Internet centres at Swazi Post, located upstairs at Swazi Plaza, and in the Mall, near Spar. Internet access starts from E25 per hour.

Tink Big BizNet (109 Dzelilwe St) The most cutting-edge Internet joint in Swaziland.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Mbabane Clinic (☎ 404 2423; St Michael's Rd) For emergencies try this clinic in the southwest corner of town just off the bypass road.

Mbabane Pharmacy (☎ 404 2817; Gwamile St) In the town centre and well stocked.

MONEY

ATMs that accept international cards are at the Standard Bank and Nedbank in Swazi Plaza, and at the Royal Swazi Sun Hotel outside Mbabane in the nearby Ezulwini Valley.

First National Bank (Msunduzi St) Changes cash and travellers cheques, and has an ATM that accepts most credit cards.

Nedbank (Swazi Plaza) Changes cash and travellers cheques.

Standard Bank (Swazi Plaza) Use the machine marked 'international transactions'. Standard Bank also changes cash and travellers cheques (bring your purchase agreement for travellers cheques).

POST

Post office (Msunduzi St) There's poste restante here, though it's not particularly reliable. You can also make international (though not reverse-charge) calls here.

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. In addition to maps and brochures, you can pick up copies of various free publications with the latest on hotels, restaurants and entertainment. These include the tourist Bibles – *What's Happening in Swaziland* and the smaller *What's on in Swaziland*.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Harvey World Travel (☎ 404 1538; www.harvey.world.co.za; Swazi Plaza) Can assist with flight bookings and other travel arrangements.

Royal Swazi National Airways Office (Swazi Plaza) Helpful with booking regional flights.

Sights & Activities

Walking around the town centre, shopping and taking care of errands is the main activity in Mbabane for most travellers. The **Swazi Market** is sometimes worth a browse, with good but pricey crafts and fresh produce.

About 8km northeast of Mbabane is **Sibebe Rock**, a massive granite dome hulking over the surrounding countryside. Much of the rock is completely sheer, and dan-

gerous if you should fall, but it's a good adrenalin charge if you're reasonably fit and relish looking down steep rock-faces.

Swazi Trails (☎ 416 2180; www.swazitrails.co.sz) in Ezulwini Valley takes nontechnical climbs up the rock.

Tours

Many of the tour operators listed on p641 include short detours into Swaziland in their itineraries. Once in Swaziland, the main operator is the very keyed-in **Swazi Trails** (☎ 416 2180; www.swazitrails.co.sz), based in the Mantenga Craft Centre in Ezulwini Valley, which can organise rafting, hikes and tours to wherever you'd like to go.

For a taste of rural Swazi life, a good contact is Myxo who is based at Tum's George Hotel tourist office in Manzini – see p588 for details.

Sleeping

Mbabane is a bit short on decent budget accommodation, but if you can pay a bit more, it is a better place to overnight than nearby Manzini, which has limited appeal.

BUDGET

Gritfers (☎ 404 5342, 617 0218; www.gritferslodge.com; End St; camp sites per person E45, dm E75, d with shared bathroom E165) This laid-back and likeably scruffy house, within walking distance of the town centre, is a popular hang-out for travellers and aid workers. New A-frame dorms have lifted the standard, as have the friendly owners, who can organise travel matters. It's self-catering only and located off Somhlolo Rd.

Thokoza Church Centre (☎ 404 6681; Polinjane Rd; s/d with shared bathroom E125/160, s/d E190/210) Fittingly monastic in nature, these small clean rooms might be just the thing to convert you to Mbabane. Inexpensive meals can be arranged. To get here from Gwamile St on foot, turn onto Mhlonhlo St, cross the bridge at the bottom of the hill, turn left at the police station and head up Polinjane Rd for about 10 minutes. Take a taxi at night (E20 from Swazi Plaza).

Veki's Guest House (☎ 404 8485; www.swazilodgings.com/cathmar; 233 Gilfillan St; s/d E220/300) Fairly overpriced and nondescript house with a slightly hippy feel, this place comes recommended by expat Swazis. There are seven rooms with DSTV and meals on request.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Cathmar Cottages (☎ 404 3387; www.swazilodgings.com/cathmar; 167 Lukhalo St; r from E200-320; 📞) Various self-catering cottages and dolls-house-style cabins dotted around a quiet residential garden on a hill overlooking Sibebe Rock, about 3.5km north of the town centre (off Pine Valley Rd). All have TV and minifridge, and range from OK to pleasant. Meals are also available.

City Inn (☎ 404 2406; cityinn@realnet.co.sz; Gwamile St; s/d incl breakfast E300/390) The red carpet and olive green bathrooms in the city's most central hotel – and Mbabane institution – are the most colourful part of a rather shabby stay. Ask for a room in the newer west wing.

Jacana Lodge (☎ 405 0277; www.jacanalodge.co.sz; s/d incl breakfast from E350/490; 📞) Another good-value B&B (under new management since March 2005), this bright, spotless place is in a quiet hilltop location about 5km from the centre. There's a family room with its own balcony and massive bathroom, and a tiny pool. Staff can also organise reasonably priced tours of Swaziland.

Kapola Guest House (☎ 404 0906; www.kapola_.edn.co.sz; s/d incl breakfast E390/650) Lay back like a local lizard and overlook the greenery from the massive porch of this comfortable abode. The rooms – complete with shells, plants and paraphernalia – are busier than the chef who prepares à la carte 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; s & d with half board from E445) Penelope Keith (from BBC-TV's *To the Manor Born*) would be right at home here. But it's not just the cream teas and British-style interiors that make this Swaziland's 'Country Estate'. Situated 27km southwest of Mbabane in the hills around Mhlambanyatsi (Watering Place of the Buffaloes), it makes an excellent alternative to sleeping in the city. There are cosy rooms and attractive gardens plus a smorgasbord of activities (trout fishing, horse riding and water sports on the nearby Lumphohlo Dam). Gourmands can gracefully gorge at the large and popular Sunday lunch buffet (reservations are recommended). To top it all off, the owner knows all there is to know about Swaziland. Follow the MR19 from Mbabane. If you're leaving Swaziland

from here, you can continue southwest along the MR19 and exit via the Nerston border post near Sandlane.

Mountain Inn (☎ 404 2781; www.mountaininn.sz; s/d incl breakfast from E525/670; 📞) This inn is a throwback to the colonial era, complete with stains here and there. The rooms are supplemented by its luxurious genteel ambience, pool, library, lawn and panoramas looking over the valley from the inviting restaurant (mains from E45), open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Eating

Pablo's (☎ 404 2406; Gwamile St; burgers from E12, breakfast from E20; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Smell that grease – just the place for the beefy burger and fatty fries.

4 Ways Chicken (Gwamile St; mains E13; ☎ 7am-6pm) It ain't nothin' fancy, but at these prices this is the tastiest hen quarter in Swaziland.

Plaza Tandoori Restaurant (☎ 404 7599; Swazi Plaza; mains E32-85; ☎ lunch & dinner) It's not the size of the Taj Mahal, but it's certainly got the atmosphere. As well as great-value curries, the usual grills and burgers add a touch of the international.

eDladleni (☎ 404 5743; Manzini/Mbabane Hwy; mains E40-80; ☎ lunch & dinner) Out there on its own, this self-proclaimed 'Queen of Swazi food fit for a King' lives up to its name. It's got the best vegetarian options around. It's about 6km from Mbabane off the main highway.

Indingiliz Gallery & Restaurant (☎ 404 6213; indingi@realnet.co.sz; 112 Dzelilwe St; snacks from E22, light meals from E22-45; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat) This small outdoor café offers quiches, salads and similar fare, plus decadent desserts and craft shopping at the adjoining gallery.

Hwa Li (☎ 404 5986; Dhlani'ubeka House, Mhlonhlo St; mains from E35; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) A good spot for spring rolls, chow mein and spicy soups.

La Casserole Restaurant (☎ 404 6426; Gwamile St; mains E49-80; ☎ lunch & dinner) It's got a French name, but this long-standing friendly place serves German and international cuisine, including pizzas. It also offers a few vegetarian dishes, plus a good wine selection.

Mediterranean Restaurant (☎ 404 3212, Gwamile St; mains E49-100; ☎ lunch & dinner) The bland atmosphere is forgotten thanks to the spicy Indian curries and tasty Portuguese morsels on offer.

Finesse (☎ 404 5936; the Mall; mains E69-100; 🍴 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This French-owned place offers a fancier setting under a covered terrace, and serves a good range of seafood and meat dishes, many with an Indian Ocean flavour.

There's a Shoprite at Swazi Plaza and a Spar at the Mall. For fast food, try the street food vendors at **Swazi Market** (Msunduzi St); or Kowloon Fast Food in the Mall.

Drinking

Most people head to the Ezulwini Valley for nightlife (see p585). In Mbabane, try **Plaza Bar** (Swazi Plaza), a popular local boozy haunt. **Jazz Friends** (Gwamile St) is another local hang-out.

Shopping

Indingilizi Gallery & Restaurant (☎ 404 6213; indin.gi@realnet.co.sz; 112 Dzelilwe St; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat) This gallery has an idiosyncratic collection that's pricey but well worth a look. There is traditional craft, including some interesting old pieces, and excellent art and craftwork by contemporary Swazi artists.

African Fantasy (☎ 404 0205; Shop 11, the Mall) African Fantasy offers a great selection of locally made T-shirts and cards; it also has a branch at Mantenga Craft Centre (p585) and the Gables Shopping Centre (p585).

Getting There & Around

The main bus and minibus taxi park is just behind Swazi Plaza. Minibus taxis leave for Jo'burg early in the morning; otherwise your best bet is to catch one from Manzini. See p622 for more information on connections to/from South Africa and Mozambique.

There are several minibus taxis daily to Piggs Peak (E12.50, one hour), Ngwenya and the Oshoek border post (E5, 50 minutes), and Malkerns Valley (E7, 45 minutes). All vehicles heading towards Manzini (E7, 35 minutes) and points east pass through the Ezulwini Valley, although most take the bypass road.

Nonshared taxis congregate just outside the transport park behind Swazi Plaza. At night, you can also usually find a taxi near the City Inn. Nonshared taxis to the Ezulwini Valley cost from E50, more to the far end of the valley (from E100), and still more

if hired at night. To Matsapha International Airport, expect to pay from E140.

EZULWINI VALLEY

The Ezulwini Valley, or Valley of Heaven as the region is called, is Swaziland's royal heartland and tourism centre. It begins just outside Mbabane and extends down past Lobamba, 18km away. For most of Swazi history, it has been home to the Swazi royal family. It's possible to whiz through on the MR3 bypass road, but to see the sights and lush countryside, you'll need to take the old MR103. Don't let the tacky-hotel-strip atmosphere along some sections deter you: just in from the road is some beautiful woodland scenery, with brilliant orange flame trees, flowering jacarandas and views over the surrounding mountains. There's a good selection of places to stay here and some of the best craft shopping in Southern Africa.

Information

There are ATMs at the Gables Shopping Centre.

Big Game Parks (☎ 528 3943; www.biggameparks.org) Accessed through the Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary. Contact it for accommodation in Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary, Mkhaya Game Reserve and Hlane Royal National Park.

Friendly Whistle Internet Cafe (per half hr E38; 🕒 8.30am-6.30pm) In the Gables Shopping Centre, opposite the Happy Valley Motel.

National Trust Commission (☎ 416 1151, 416 1178; www.sntc.org.sz) Headquarters of the Mlawula, Malolotja and Mantenga Nature Reserves, it's based at the National Museum in Lobamba.

Swazi Trails (☎ 416 2180; www.swazitrails.co.sz) Tourist information is available here, based at the Mantenga Craft Centre. It also takes bookings for Malolotja, Mlawula and Mantenga Nature Reserves and organises a plethora of activities, trails and tours all over the kingdom.

Lobamba

Lobamba is the heart of Swaziland's Royal Valley – a position it has held since the early days of the Swazi monarchy. The royal Embo State Palace was built by the British – in grand proportions, as it had to house the entire royal clan (Sobhuza II had 600 children). It isn't open to visitors, and photos aren't allowed. Swazi kings now live in **Lozitha State House**, about 10km from Lobamba.

To see the monarchy in action, head to the **Royal Kraal** (Eludzidzini Royal Residence) during the Incwala ceremony or the

SWAZI CEREMONIES

Incwala

Incwala (also known as Ncwala) is the most sacred ceremony of the Swazi people. It is a 'first fruits' ceremony, where the king gives permission for his people to eat the first crops of the new year. Preparation for the Incwala begins some weeks in advance, according to the cycle of the moon. *Bemanti* (learned men) journey to the Lebombo Mountains to gather plants; other *bemanti* collect water from Swaziland's rivers and some travel across the mountains to the Indian Ocean to skim foam from the waves. Meanwhile, the king goes into retreat.

On the night of the full moon, young men all over the kingdom harvest branches of the *lusekwane*, a small tree, and begin a long hike to the Royal Kraal at Lobamba. They arrive at dawn, and use their branches to build a kraal. If a branch has wilted, it is seen as a sign that the young man bearing it has had illicit sex. Songs prohibited during the rest of the year are sung, and the *bemanti* arrive with their plants, water and foam.

On the third day of the ceremony a bull is sacrificed. On the fourth day, to the pleadings of all the regiments of Swaziland, the king comes out of his retreat and dances before his people. He eats a pumpkin, the sign that Swazis can eat the new year's crops. Two days later there's a ritual burning of all the items used in the ceremony, after which the rains are expected to fall.

Umhlanga (Reed) Dance

Though 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 weeklong debutante ball for marriageable young Swazi women, who journey from all over the kingdom to help repair the queen mother's home at Lobamba.

After arriving at Lobamba, they spend a day resting, then set off in search of reeds, some not returning until the fourth night. On the sixth day the reed dance is performed as they carry their reeds to the queen mother. The dance is repeated the next day. Those carrying torches (flashlights) have searched for reeds by night; those with red feathers in their hair are princesses.

As the Swazi queen mother must not be of the royal clan, the reed dance is also a showcase of potential wives for the king. As with the Incwala, there are signs that identify the unchaste – an incentive to avoid premarital sex.

Umhlanga (Reed) dance (see the boxed text, above). It's next to Lozitha State House. Just north of here, towards the main road, is **Somhlolo National Stadium**, which hosts sports events (mainly soccer) and important state occasions, such as coronations.

The nearby **National Museum** (adult/child E20/10; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) has some interesting displays of Swazi culture, as well as a traditional beehive village and cattle enclosure.

Next to the museum is the **parliament**, which is sometimes open to visitors; if you want to visit, wear neat clothes and use the side entrance. Across the road from the museum is a **memorial** to King Sobhuza II, the most revered of Swazi kings. A ticket to both the museum and memorial costs adult/child E25/15.

About 3km from Mantenga Lodge is **Mantenga Nature Reserve** (adult/child E45/11; 🕒 7am-6pm). The ticket cost covers entrance to the

reserve's **Swazi Cultural Village**. This 'living' cultural village has authentic beehive huts and cultural displays, and it's possible to take guided tours and watch the **sibhaca dance** (🕒 11.15am & 3.15pm). Next door, the pleasant restaurant, set in a lush rainforest (watch out for thieving monkeys), provides relief from the heat. Nearby, and part of the reserve, are **Mantenga Falls**, which you can visit on guided walks.

For personal pampering, head to the Royal Valley's own **hot mineral springs** (☎ 416 1164; adult/child E5/2; 🕒 6am-10pm), also known as the Cuddle Puddle. In the same complex is the **Swazi Spa Health & Beauty Studio** (☎ 416 1164; 🕒 10am-6pm), with an aromatherapy steam tube, oxygen multistep and a Jacuzzi.

SLEEPING

There's no accommodation in Lobamba village itself, but there are plenty of options in the immediate vicinity.

EZULWINI & MALKERNS VALLEYS

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Budget

For more budget options in the Lobamba area, see Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary (p586).

Legends Backpackers Lodge (☎ 416 1870; legends@mailfly.com; camp sites per person E50, dm E75, d with shared bathroom E190; 📶) This place is now legendary for the wrong reasons: it looks as shabby and worn-out as the adventurers who've just spun out on an activity organised by Swazi Trails, the lodge's sister-company. And, like those who've overindulged at the lodge's inhouse *shebeen* (drinking establishment), it's in need of a good pick-me-up. But hey, it's a bed.

Midrange

There are several good midrange accommodation options available.

Mantenga Nature Reserve (☎ 416 1151, 416 1178; mnr@africaonline.co.sz; beehive huts per person E60, s/d tented chalets incl breakfast E305/460) Soft 'safari' adventure in tented style and canvas comfort: these delightful shelters, set in lush bushland, have small porches and creative separate outdoor showers. You can also stay in traditional beehive huts at the Cultural

Village, and there is a restaurant serving a good selection of luncheon dishes from noodles to steaks.

Happy Valley Motel (☎ 416 1061; happyvalley@africaonline.co.sz; r incl breakfast E370; 📶 📶) This place boasts multipersonalities: the bland-looking outer hides a fun side (pizzeria, steakhouse and bar); generous side (mid-week discounts are available, and children under 12 stay for free); and an outright raunchy aspect – the If Not Go-Go Bar and Why Not Disco (entries are free for guests). It's along the MR103, opposite the turn-off for Mantenga Lodge.

Mantenga Lodge (☎ 416 1049; reservations@mantengalodge.com; s/d incl breakfast from E380/500; 📶 📶) A safe, peaceful and predictable option, the unassuming rooms are set in a lush wooded area about 1.5km off the main road. The restaurant's dining patio overlooks the hills and stands of flame and jacaranda trees. Take the signposted turn-off for the Mantenga Craft Centre; the hotel is 500m further along this road.

Timbali Lodge & Country Park (☎ 416 2632; www.visitswazi.com; s/d incl breakfast from E400/500; 📶 📶)

This moderately upscale place, at the western end of the valley, has modern, self-catering white-coloured cottages set in pleasant, grassy and secluded grounds.

Top End

Top-end lodging is dominated by the Sun chain, which has three properties here, all clustered along the MR3 about 6km north-west of Lobamba and about 3km from Mbabane. Rates are always changing, so inquire in advance. All offer weekend specials at some times of the year for about half-price and all have restaurants.

Lugogo Sun Hotel (☎ 416 4500; www.suninternation.com; s/d E1205/1300; 📶 📶) The largest and slightly more low-key of the Swazi Suns, it's bright and light and popular with ankle-biters – there's Kamp Kwena for children. It is on the same grounds as the Royal Swazi Sun.

Ezulwini Sun Hotel (☎ 416 6500; www.suninternation.com; s/d E1330/1425; 📶 📶) This two-storey pink palace is less ostentatious than its sister hotels directly across the road. It has a more apartment-like feel, with the usual international hotel features, including pools and tennis courts.

Royal Swazi Sun (☎ 416 5000; www.suninternation.com; s/d E1910/2025; 📶 📶) As fancy as its name suggests, and the most luxurious of the three Sun hotels, this OTT place flaunts a golf course, tennis courts, Internet café, a casino and the necessary ATM.

EATING

Guava Café (☎ 416 1343; light meals from E30; 📶 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) A chic eatery at Guava Gallery, just before Swazi Cultural Village, with salads, soups and lunch fare.

Bella Vista Pizzeria (☎ 416 1061; pizza from E32; 📶 lunch & dinner) Bella Vista is at Happy Valley Motel along the MR103, and does a brisk local business.

Diagonally opposite Bella Vista is the Gables Shopping Centre, with a Pick 'n' Pay and several good restaurants. **Kanimambo** (☎ 416 3549; mains E57-100; 📶 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) has Mozambican chefs and specialises in Mozambican seafood and *piri-piri* (hot pepper) meat dishes, and **Great Taipei** (☎ 416 2300; mains from E45; 📶 lunch & dinner) is the place to go for chop suey and other Chinese dishes.

Quatermain's (☎ 416 3023; mains E58-80; 📶 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Based on the name of the

author of *King Solomon's Mines*, this eatery's dishes represent a journey through Africa – the menu features an interpretation of places relating to the source of the food. It offers everything from savoury pancakes to massive steaks.

Calabash Continental (☎ 416 1187; mains E60-100; 📶 lunch & dinner) German and Austrian-Swiss cuisine are the incongruous highlights at this popular and long-standing place. It's at the upper end of Ezulwini Valley, and is easily accessible from Mbabane.

Woodlands Restaurant (☎ 416 3466; 📶 lunch & dinner) After you've shopped till you've dropped at the Ezulwini craft market, head next door to the lovely outside setting and shady veranda of this recently opened eatery. There are good vegetarian options as well as international cuisine, including *eisbein* (pork knuckles).

ENTERTAINMENT

Why Not? (☎ 416 1061; Happy Valley Hotel; admission E30) The name says it all. If you want to let it all hang out (or see others doing so) head here for a big night. Also here is the dimly lit and somewhat tawdry If Not Go-Go Bar (entry to Why Not? includes If Not). Bands play regularly (E40).

There are also several nightspots at the Sun hotels, including **Beer Garden** (☎ 416 6500; Ezulwini Sun Hotel), with live music and meals; **Sportsman's Bar** (☎ 416 1550; Lugogo Sun Hotel), with a pub night on Wednesday; and **Winner's Action Bar** (Royal Swazi Sun Hotel), with live music on Friday.

Also check out what's playing at **House on Fire** (☎ 528 2001; houseonfire@africaonline.co.sz), in Malkerns Valley.

SHOPPING

The Ezulwini Valley, together with the nearby Malkerns Valley, offers some of the best craft shopping in the region, with a wide selection, high quality and reasonable prices.

Mantenga Craft Centre (☎ 416 1136) This rather tired-looking craft centre is on the access road leading to Mantenga Lodge, with numerous shops featuring everything from weaving and tapestries to candles, woodcarvings and T-shirts.

Guava Gallery (☎ 416 1343; 📶 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) A chic boutique with various local crafts.

The well-stocked roadside craft market along the M103 just south of the Ezulwini Sun Hotel sells a large range of local carvings, weavings and artefacts.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Nonshared taxis from Mbabane cost E60 to E100, depending on how far down the valley you go. For a pick-up from the Ezulwini Valley, you'll have to call a Mbabane-based taxi service.

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

If you're driving from either Mbabane or Manzini, take the Ezulwini Valley/Lobamba exit off the bypass road. This puts you on the MR103, from where everything is well signposted.

Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary

This beautiful and tranquil **private reserve** (☎ 528 3943; www.biggameparks.org; admission E25; ☎ 6am-5pm) near Lobamba was Swaziland's first protected area, created by conservationist Ted Reilly on his family farm in the 1950s. Reilly later opened Mkhaya Game Reserve and supervised the establishment of Hlane Royal National Park. 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 bigger South African parks, the reserve is easily accessible and well worth a visit. Its terrain is dominated by the precipitous Nyonyane (Little Bird) peak, with several fine walks in the area. Animals to be seen include zebras, giraffes, warthogs, many antelope species, crocodiles, hippos and a variety of birds. In summer, you may also spot black eagles near Nyonyane.

Activities on offer in the reserve include **walking** (per person per hr with guide E25), **two-hour vehicle safaris** (per person E130), **cycling** (per person per hr E40) and day and overnight **horse-riding trips** (per person from E100).

Mlilwane gets very busy during South African school holidays (see p612). The entrance is 2km southeast of the Happy Valley Motel on the old Mbabane-Manzini road, and signposted from the turn-off. Night access is via an alternative gate.

SLEEPING & EATING

All accommodation in the sanctuary can be booked in advance at **Big Game Parks** (☎ 528 3943; www.biggameparks.org), behind Sondzela Backpackers Lodge. It can be reached either through the wildlife sanctuary, or via Malkerns, though there's no real reason to go there as you can make bookings via telephone or email. Bookings need to be paid in advance, either via post or credit card.

Sondzela Backpackers (IYHF) Lodge (☎ 528 3117; www.biggameparks.org; camp sites per person E40, dm E55, s/d with shared bathroom E100/160, s/d rondavels E150/200) Sondzela is in the southern part of the reserve, around 1.5km beyond the main camp, and about 2km from both Malandela's B&B and Gone Rural in Malkerns Valley. This self-proclaimed 'Africa's Rolls Royce of Backpacker Hostels' is in need of a slight fine-tuning (at least, a couple of the dorm bathrooms are) but it is a superior model all the same. It has large gardens, a central living area including the Hog & Wart Bar (which can be a bit noisy), and a hilltop perch that gives it one of the best backpackers' settings in Southern Africa. The pick-up point is at Malandela's in Malkerns Valley (see opposite), where the **Baz Bus** (☎ in Durban 031-304 9099; www.bazbus.com) stops. If you're driving, you'll need to use the main Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary entrance, pay the entry fee and drive through the park to reach Sondzela.

Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary Main Camp (camp sites per person E45, dm E80, s/d 2-person huts E240/340) This homely camp is set in a scenic wooded location about 3.5km from the entry gate, complete with simple thatched huts – including traditional beehive huts (s/d per person E225/320, with shared bathroom E150/240) – and the occasional warthog snuffling around. There's a small shop, the Hippo Haunt restaurant (buffet E90), and an area for braais (barbecues). If there are groups staying there are often dance performances in the evenings.

Shonalanga Cottage (s/d E290/380, per additional person E110) This spacious self-catering cottage is near the main camp, and a good choice for families.

Reilly's Rock Hilltop Lodge (s/d from E855/1450) Rock on in to this luxurious and tranquil accommodation, promoted as 'quaintly colonial'. Indeed it has a colourful history: it was the first dwelling in Swaziland to have

SWAZI SNIPPETS

At the centre of Swazi culture is the monarchy, which rests with both the king (*ngwenyama*, the lion) and his mother (*ndlovukazi*, the she-elephant). In addition to loyalty to the monarchy, Swazi identity is supported by a long-standing tradition of age-related royal military regiments. During the *difaqane* (forced migration), these regiments provided the military clout to hold off invaders, while in more recent years they have helped to minimise potentially divisive differences between clans and to solidify the nation behind the king.

The Swazi deity is known as Mkhulumchanti, and respect for both the aged and ancestors plays an important role. Unlike in many other postcolonial countries, the wearing of traditional clothing is as common among people in the Westernised middle classes as it is among rural labourers. It's not unusual to see a man on his way to work wearing an *amahiya* (traditional Swazi robe), with a spear in one hand and a briefcase in the other.

electric lighting, and the original structure was built in exchange for a UK£80 ox wagon. Surrounded by aloes and cycads, 'the Rock' has striking views of the valley and Mdzimba Mountains from the veranda.

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 together with the Ezulwini Valley, offering a scenic and fun drive.

There's Internet access and tourist information at **Ziggy's Internet Cafe & Tourist Information** (☎ 528 3423; per hr E45; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) at Malandela's complex.

Sleeping & Eating

For budget accommodation, also check out Sondzela Backpackers (IYHF) Lodge (opposite), which is readily accessible from Malkerns Valley.

Nyanza Cottages (Nyanza Horse Trails; ☎ 528 3090; nyanza@africaonline.co.sz; dm E65, caravan s/d E160/220, E190, cottages per adult E220) A working farm with stables, the cottages here sleep four, have a galley-style kitchen, are secluded and overlook pastureland. The kids can help out on the farm and there's as much horse riding as you'd like (around E80/370 per hour/day). There's also a small backpackers dorm and a well-equipped caravan that takes up to six people. Bring your own towels for the backpackers, caravan and camping. Nyanza is just off the main road, signposted next to Baobab Batik.

Malandela's B&B (☎ 605 2598, 528 3448; r per person with breakfast E180; ☎) Offers creative and stylish rooms with a touch of ethnic Africa, a pool and a sculpture garden. Malandela's is

along the MR27, about 1km from the junction with the MR103.

Malandela's Restaurant (☎ 528 3115; entrées from E15, mains E30-60; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Next door and part of the Malandela complex, this is one of the best restaurants in the region, with good old-fashioned meals and serving an array of meat and seafood dishes under a thatched shelter.

Willows Lodge (☎ 602 1284; www.swaziwillows.com; s/d E270/395) The small private bar overlooking the sugar-cane fields indicates the tranquil scene of these nine pleasant self-catering cottages (sleeping four or five people). This place is set off the MR27 in Malkerns Valley, near Malandela's B&B.

Entertainment

House on Fire (☎ 528 2001; houseonfire@africaonline.co.sz) A cultural-site-cum-living-gallery or experimental-performance space? Whatever it is, this mosaic- and sculpture-filled site is the hot place for cool locals and is popular among travellers as well. Part of the Malandela complex, the well-known venue hosts everything from African theatre, music and films, raves and other forms of entertainment. Some nights are sizzlers (but even during daytime it's worth a look). Phone to see what's on.

Shopping

There's some excellent shopping in the Malkerns Valley.

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 made by groups of local women. It's based at Malandela's B&B. Also here are Baobab Too, offering colourful African batiks;

and Southern Country, selling handmade leather goods.

Swazi Candles (☎ 528 3219; www.swazicandles.com; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) Wax lyrical about these creative pigment-coloured candles – in every African-animal shape and hue. This signposted shop is 7km south of the MR103/Malkerns turn-off. Umgololo Gallery sells art and craft on the same premises. Shop till you melt and enjoy a snack at the coffee shop.

Baobab Batik (☎ 528 3242; www.baobab-batik.com; ☎ 8am-5pm) Next to Nyanza Cottages, 1km on from Swazi Candles, it's a small place that's worth a poke around, particularly if you're dye-ing for a wall hanging. You can also pop into the on-site workshop.

Getting There & Away

The **Baz Bus** (☎ in Durban 031-304 9099; www.bazbus.com) stops outside Malandela's. This is the pick-up point for Sondzela Backpackers Lodge in Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary. You can also get minibus taxis between here and the Ezulwini Valley for around E2 to E5 depending on the trip. As the craft shops and places to stay are spread out, you'll really need a car to get around.

MANZINI

pop 80,000

Manzini started out as the combined administrative centre for the squabbling British and Boers between 1890 and 1902. So adversarial was their relationship that during the Anglo-Boer War a renegade Boer *kommando* (militia unit) burned the town down. Today Manzini, Swaziland's largest town, is an active commercial and industrial hub whose small centre is dominated by office blocks and a couple of shopping malls. Manzini is also Swaziland's main transport hub, so you're likely to pass through here if you're getting around on public transport. Otherwise, it's of minimal appeal – it's much better to base yourself in the Ezulwini Valley. Be extra careful at night, and watch for pickpockets; 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 of the market is packed with handicrafts from around the country and elsewhere in Africa. Thursday morning is a good time to see the rural ven-

dors bringing in their handicrafts to sell to the retailers. Many Mozambican traders sell wooden carvings and the market also has a wide selection of African textiles.

Orientation

Central Manzini is set out in a grid pattern, with most of the activity on or around Ngwane and Nkoseluhlaza Sts, the main east-west thoroughfares. The large Bhunu Mall, with a good range of shops, is on Ngwane St between Sandlane and Louw Sts.

Information

Internet café (1st fl, Bhunu Mall; per hr E25) Opposite Milady's.

Standard Bank (cnr Nkoseluhlaza & Louw Sts) Does foreign exchange (Monday to Friday only).

Tours

At the time of research, Myxo, a local guide and former owner of (now-defunct) Myxo's Backpackers, was in the process of opening another backpackers. Myxo himself can be found at the **tourist office** (☎ 604 4102) next to Tum's George Hotel. He organises highly recommended **village visits** and overnight stays (E420), including transport, meals and guide.

Sleeping

Swaziland Backpackers (☎ 518 7225; www.swazilandbackpackers.com; camp sites per person E45, dm E75, d with shared bathroom E180; ☎) Formerly a doctor's house, this place operates as efficiently as a surgery but with much more fun. Activities centre around the happening 'jungle' bar and pool, as well as in the local area. It offers laundry service, email, kitchen (it also serves breakfast and dinner) and has a small pool in a lush garden with mango trees beyond. Head 8km west of town along the M103 towards Ezulwini Valley, opposite the Taiwanese Agricultural Mission compound. It's a Baz Bus stop.

Park Hotel (☎ 505 7423; 9 Mancishane St; s/d incl breakfast E200/250; ☎) The most interesting thing about this hotel is its name. But the rooms are decent, with balconies, air-con, TV and phones. It's at the eastern end of town, a block up from the police station.

Matsapha Inn (☎ 518 6893; MR103; s/d E210/280) It's near the airport and ironically, resembles an airport corridor. It has clean, spartan rooms and a restaurant.

Gibela Getaway (☎ 505 3024; www.visitswazi.com/gibela; d E250, cottages from E450) Situated 10km northeast of Manzini off the main road, these tasteful, self-contained stone cottages (named 'Leopard', 'Lion' and 'Cub' with the inevitable animal-print theme) are near the Salugazi River in private garden settings. They save you from a clinical hotel experience, but arrive in daylight. Ring for directions.

Tum's George Hotel (☎ 505 8991; www.tgh.sz; cnr Ngwane & du Toit Sts; s/d incl breakfast from E600/800; ☎) The newest and fanciest hotel in Manzini, this smart place attempts an international-hotel atmosphere and caters for the conference crowd. It has a gym, pool bar and several stylish restaurants with extensive menus.

Eating

Currie House Halal (☎ 505 6144; cnr Mancishane & Louw Sts; mains from E10) This is your 'cheap and cheerful' takeaway, serving a good range of curries.

Egg Yolk Coffee Shop/Sports Bar (cnr Ngwane & du Toit Sts; snacks from E15, pizza E30; ☎) breakfast,

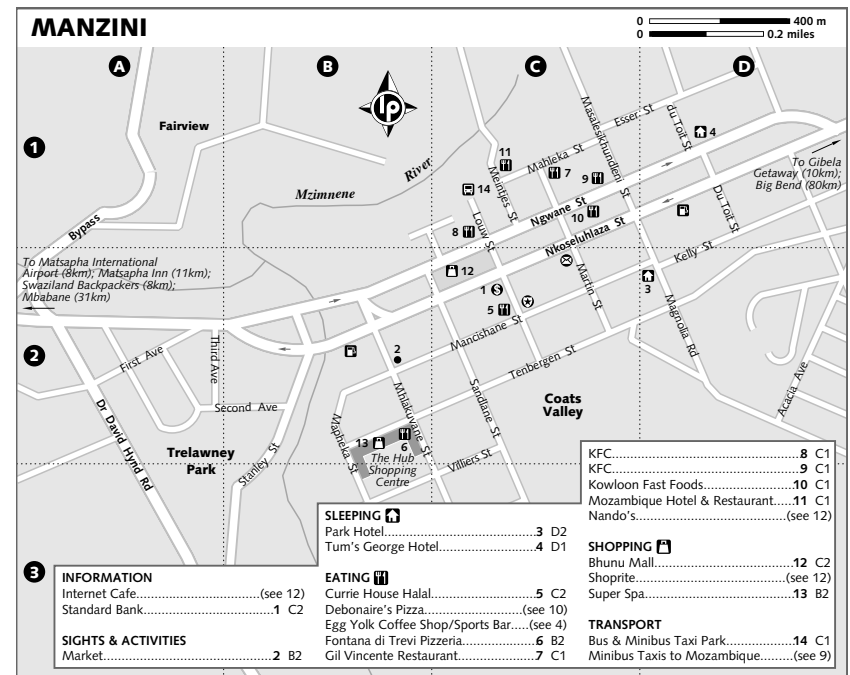
lunch & dinner) Not a bad place for a breather and serves a selection of snacks. It's run by Tum's George Hotel next door.

Fontana di Trevi Pizzeria (☎ 505 3608; the Hub, Villiers St; breakfast/pizza from E23/30; ☎) 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.

Mozambique Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 505 2489; Mahleka St; mains E30-55; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) A good place to get a taste of life across the border, with delicious prawns and seafood, various Portuguese dishes, and a generous selection of Portuguese and South African wines.

Gil Vicente Restaurant (☎ 505 3874; Ilanga Centre, Martin St; mains E40-60; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Another good spot for Portuguese and Mozambican dishes.

On Louw St in town there are a few basic food outlets that are open during the day. Bhunu Mall houses various fast-food places, including Nando's. There are two KFCs, Debonaire's Pizza and Kowloon Fast Foods on Ngwane St.



Shopping

Bhunu Mall (Ngwane St) is the main shopping centre, with fast food, an array of stores and a Shoprite. The Hub shopping centre is on Mhlakuvane St and has a Super Spa supermarket.

Getting There & Away

The main bus and minibus taxi park is at the northern end of Louw St, where you can also find some nonshared taxis. A minibus taxi trip up the Ezulwini Valley to Mbabane costs E8 (35 minutes). A nonshared taxi to Matsapha International Airport costs around E50. Minibus taxis to Mozambique leave from the car park next to KFC up the hill.

For information about transport to/from South Africa, see p632.

NORTHERN SWAZILAND

Lush hills, plantations and woodlands, streams and waterfalls, and plunging ravines are the main features of Swaziland's beautiful north. As well as boasting the best scenery in Swaziland, the northern region offers some excellent hiking and accommodation options. Away from the MR1, which runs from near the Oshoek border post northeast to the Jeppe's Reef border post, all roads are unpaved, though easily negotiable with a 2WD during most of the year. Especially in the summer months, heavy mists roll in that can limit visibility to almost zero.

Ngwenya

Tiny Ngwenya (the Crocodile), 5km east of the border with Mpumalanga, is the first town you'll reach if you're arriving in Swaziland via Oshoek. If you can't wait until you reach the Ezulwini Valley to do your shopping, there are several craft outlets here, including **Ngwenya Glass Factory** (☎ 442 4142; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4:30pm Sat & Sun), which creates beautiful African animal and bird figures from recycled glass, and **Endlotane Studios/Phumulanga Swaziland Tapestries** (☎ 442 4196; ☎ 8am-5pm), which features beautiful tapestries and lets you watch the weavers at work. Both are within 1km of each other and signposted from the main road.

Also here is the **Ngwenya iron ore mine** (admission E25; ☎ 8am-4pm), dating from around 40,000 BC and one of the world's oldest known mines. The mine is part of Malol-

otja Nature Reserve (below) and has a new **Ngwenya Mines & Visitors Centre** with an interesting display of photographs and information about the mine, including the original excavation tools. There's also a picnic area overlooking the mine. The entrance is signposted near the Ngwenya Glass Factory, although you can't continue on into the rest of Malolotja from here. To visit the mine, including visits made by vehicle, you'll need to be accompanied by a ranger.

Nearby, on the opposite side of the MR1, is **Hawane Dam** and the small **Hawane Nature Reserve** (no facilities).

SLEEPING & EATING

Hawane Resort (☎ 627 6714, 442 4744; www.hawane.co.sz; dm E86, d chalets incl breakfast E524, beehives per person E120) A touch of country luxury, and framed by the Malolotja peaks, these stylish chalets are a blend of traditional Swazi materials and glass, with ethnic African interiors. Backpackers are stabled in a converted barn, one of the most inventive dormitory accommodations around. It's a great base for visiting Malolotja Nature Reserve and horse riding is on the premises, after which you can devour delicious African fusion cuisine in the resort restaurant. It's about 8km up the Piggs Peak road from the junction of the MR1 and MR3, and 1.5km off the main road.

Malolotja Nature Reserve

This beautiful middleveld/highveld reserve (☎ 416 1151, 442 4241; www.sntc.org.sz; adult/child E20/12; ☎ 6am-6pm) is a true wilderness area, rugged and in the most part unspoiled. It's also an excellent walking destination, with around 200km of hiking trails, and an ornithologist's paradise, with over 280 species of birds, including several rare species. Wildflowers and rare plants are added attractions, with several – including the Woolly, Barberton and Kaapschehoop cycads – found only in this part of Africa.

Various antelope species make Malolotja their home, as do herds of zebras, elands and wildebeest. The terrain ranges from mountainous and high-altitude grassland to forest and lower-lying bushveld. The reserve is laced by streams and cut by three rivers, including the Komati River, which flows east through a gorge in a series of falls and rapids until it meets the lowveld.

Hiking trails range from short walks to a weeklong jaunt that extends from Ngwenya in the south to the Mgwayiza Range in the north. For all longer walks, you'll need 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 (E5) with the reserve office at the entrance gate. Wildlife drives can be arranged with advance notice.

In addition to the Ngwenya mine, it's also possible to visit **Forbes Reef gold mine** in Forbes Reef Forest towards the centre of the reserve.

Accommodation consists of **camping** (per person at main camp/on trails E60/40), 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 pleasant, fully equipped self-catering wooden **cabins** (per person E230, children half-price), each of which sleeps a maximum of six persons. Book through **Swazi Trails** (☎ 416 2180; www.swazitrails.co.sz) or directly with the **National Trust Commission** (☎ 416 1151, 416 1178; www.sntc.org.sz), both in Ezulwini Valley.

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

Piggs Peak & Around

This small town reached its pinnacle during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when gold was discovered here by William Pigg in 1884. The last mine closed in 1954. Nowadays, this gritty frontier town is the small centre of Swaziland's logging industry, which is based on the huge pine plantations in the area. It has a couple of petrol stations, a bank or two (though no foreign-exchange facilities) and a supermarket.

Piggs Peak is in a highly scenic, hilly and forested section of the country, with one of the highlights, **Phophonyane Falls**, about 8km north of town.

In addition to the scenery, the Piggs Peak area is known for its handicrafts. A good place to check these out is at the Peak Craft Centre just north of Orion Piggs Peak Hotel & Casino, where you'll find **Ethnic Bound** (☎ 437 3099; ethnicbound@africaonline.co.sz), which specialises in African fabrics, and **Likhweti Kraft** (☎ 437 3127), a branch of **Tintsaba Crafts** (☎ 437 1260; www.tintsaba.com), which sells sisal

baskets, jewellery and many other Swazi crafts. There are also numerous craft vendors along the road up from Mbabane.

SLEEPING & EATING

Highlands Inn (☎ 437 1144; s/d incl breakfast E160/300) This inn, 1km south of the town centre on the main road, is the only place to stay in town itself and only worth considering if you're on a tight budget. **Khulilie Craft Shop**, and **Woodcutter's Restaurant** (mains from E25, open for breakfast, lunch and dinner) are both attached to the inn.

Jabula Guest House (☎ 437 1052; www.swaziplace.com/jabulaguesthouse; s/d E225/375; 📍) Turn right at the Piggs 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' is this place's catch-cry. The best B&B in Piggs Peak with small, neat rooms in a residential setting.

Phophonyane Lodge & Nature Reserve (☎ 437 1319; www.phophonyane.co.sz; tents E490-700, s/d cottages incl breakfast from E700/980) This stunning hide-away lies northeast of Piggs Peak on a river in its own nature reserve of lush indigenous forest. It has a network of walking trails around the river and waterfall, and you can swim in the rock pools. Accommodation is in comfortable cottages (with a self-catering option) or East African-style luxury safari tents overlooking cascades. Excellent meals are available at the Dining Hut (mains from E50, open for breakfast, lunch and dinner). Entry to the reserve and therefore the lodge is an additional E20/10 per adult/child. Day visitors are charged E30/20 per adult/child to enter the surrounding reserve. The lodge is about 14km from Piggs 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 down this road 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 Piggs Peak; a taxi costs about E60.

Orion Piggs Peak Hotel & Casino (☎ 437 1104; www.oriongroup.co.za; d with half board E1200) South Africans flock to this safe bet: a massive sanitised upscale-resort-and-casino-in-one, complete with amenities. It's about 10km northeast of Piggs Peak, on the road to the Jeppe's Reef border post. Midweek specials are often available.

Bulembu

A fascinating detour from Piggs Peak is to wind your way 20km through scenic plantation country to the historic town of Bulembu. The town was built in 1936 for the Havelock Mine, which became the fifth-largest chrysotile (asbestos) mine in the world. At its peak it supported 10,000 mine workers, but the mines started to scale down and then eventually closed; by 2003 Bulembu was a ghost town with around 100 residents and no amenities. To visit it today is to enter a true-life time warp; thousands of deserted corrugated iron houses and many Art Deco buildings nestle on a pretty hilly landscape. There are churches, an **Art Deco cinema**, a **hospital** (complete with equipment from the 1930s), a golf course and the longest **cableway** in the world, extending from the old mine to Barberton, 20km away. The town has seen much adversity – from litigation over the mine to major environmental and ecological issues (the mine dumps have not been rehabilitated). Today, however, two passionate investors (who also run the village's saw mill and charcoal kilns) have started to rehabilitate the village and have major plans for its future.

Stunning hikes include the highest mountain in Swaziland, Emlembe Peak (1863m), plus there's excellent off-road cycling around streams, and waterfalls in the natural riverine forest amid the plantations. Afterwards, you can cool off in the village pool. The region's features include the oldest mountains in the world – claimed to contain some of the oldest life forms.

Accommodation is in the main **Bulembu Lodge** (☎ 437 3888, 602 4577; bulembulodge@realnet.co.sz; per person from E150) in the former General Manager's residence or stylish Directors' cottages, all renovated. If you care less about status and more about novelty, choose the spacious and delightfully converted backpackers cottage (E80). Family suites are available, as are all meals (breakfast/lunch/dinner E40/35/65).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

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

The stretch of dirt road running west from Piggs Peak to Bulembu can be boggy in wet conditions. The road can be rough further to Barberton (Mpumalanga).

The minibus taxi stand is next to the market at the top end of the main street, with several vehicles daily to Mbabane (E14, one hour).

EASTERN SWAZILAND

The eastern Swaziland lowveld nestles in the shadow of the Lebombo Mountains, within an easy drive to the Mozambique border. The area is known for its sugar-cane plantations, as well as for the Lubombo Conservancy, a conservation area comprising Hlane Royal National Park, Mkhaya Game Reserve, and Mlawula, Shewula and Mbuluzi Nature Reserves. Together these provide excellent wildlife-viewing and cultural experiences.

Simunye

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

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 E75/220), 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 E10). You can camp or stay in basic rondavels, with shared ablutions and self-catering facilities. Local meals can also be arranged (breakfast/lunch/dinner E25/40/40; must be booked in advance). You can organise a visit through **Swazi Trails** (☎ 416 2180; www.swazitrails.co.sz) or, if you're arriving via public transport, get a minibus taxi from Simunye to the camp (E9, one hour).

Tambankulu Country Club B&B (☎ 373 7111; tam@realnet.co.sz; s/d E244/352; ♿ ♻️) has comfortable if slightly jaded rooms, plus green lawns, a restaurant, swimming pool and tennis court. The club is north of Simunye – head 6km west of the junction at Maphiveni, and another 3km off the Tshaneni road.

Simunye Country Club (☎ 313 4792; www.visitswazi.com; s/d from E244/352, cottages E347/580; ♿ ♻️) 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 you can use the club facilities (swimming pool, golf course, tennis and squash courts).

Several minibus taxis run daily to Simunye (and further north to the junction for Mlawula and Mbuluzi) from Manzini (E18, one hour). There's also at least one minibus taxi daily to/from Piggs Peak (E30, 2½ hours).

Hlane Royal National Park

This **park** (☎ 528 3943; www.biggameparks.org; admission E25; ♿ 6am–6pm) is near the former royal hunting grounds. Hlane (the name means 'wilderness') is Swaziland's largest protected area, home to elephants, lions, cheetahs, leopards, white rhinos and many antelope species, and offers wonderfully low-key wildlife-watching.

There are guided walking trails (E30 per person), which afford the opportunity to see elephants and rhinos, as well as two-hour wildlife day drives (E130 per person, minimum two), a cultural village tour with dance performances (E40 per person, minimum four) and mountain-bike rentals (R55 per hour).

Hlane has two good camps. Both can be booked through **Big Game Parks** (☎ 528 3944; www.biggameparks.org) in Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary.

Ndlovu Camp (camp sites per person E40, s/d rondavels from E225/320, 8-person cottage per person E190) is pleasant and rustic, with no electricity, a gas-cooking area and a restaurant. Accommodation is in self-catering rondavels and cottages. It's just inside the main gate, and near a water hole (fenced off, although you can see the odd antelope). Bring your own food and supplies.

Bhubesi Camp (s/d cottages E290/380) is the pick of the spots: it overlooks a river about 10km from Ndlovu Camp. Accommodation is in tasteful, stone, four-person, self-catering cottages, and electricity is available.

Minibus taxis to Simunye will drop you at the entrance to Hlane (E5; the gate is about 7km south of Simunye). Once at the park, you can explore most of it with a 2WD, with the notable exception of the

special lion compound. For this you'll need to hire a guide (E30 per hour). The main road in the park branches off right just before Ndlovu Camp.

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, among others, plus rewarding bird-watching. You can hire fireward rods for E20 and bring your own mountain bike.

For accommodation, there's **Sara Camp** (s/d E150/300), with self-catering double safari-style tents, about 3km from the main gate, and **Siphiso camping ground** (camp sites per person E60), where you can pitch your own tent. The self-catering **Mapelepele Cottage** (accommodates 4 people E500) has a gas stove and fridge. Twenty new chalets are being built in the southern part of the reserve, with plans to open access from Siteki. Accommodation can be booked through the **National Trust Commission** (☎ 416 1151, 416 1178; www.sntc.org.sz).

The turn-off for the entrance gates to the reserve is about 10km north of Simunye, from where it's another 4km from the main road. Minibus taxis will drop you at the junction (E17, 1¼ hours from Manzini). There is no transport from the junction to the reserve but if you call in advance a lift may be possible if there's a reserve vehicle available. Ask for the *Trails and Day Walks* flier.

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 a choice of lovely five- or eight-person self-catering lodges (s/d E375/530; ♿), 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** (per person E30) 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.

Siteki

Siteki (Marrying Place) is a trading town in the foothills of the Lebombo Mountains about 8km from Lonhlupeko off the MR16. It got its name when Mbandzeni (great-grandfather of the present king) gave his frontier troops permission to marry. Siteki is the fastest route to Mozambique from Manzini through the Mhlumeni/Goba border. It lies above the surrounding lowveld, with wide views, cooler temperatures and a bustling market. There's an ATM on the main street.

Siteki (Stegi) Hotel (☎ 343 4126; s/d with half board E195/280) harks back to colonial days with cane chairs and a smoking area and modest, no-frills rooms and meals. The friendly Marie has worked there for over 30 years and is the one in the know.

History buffs will admire the colonial relics that decorate the pleasant self-catering cottage, **Mabuda Farm** (☎ 343 4124; www.geocities.com/mabudafarm; s/d incl breakfast E200/400), on a working farm just outside Siteki town; others will love the green outlook. Highly recommended.

Minibus taxis from Manzini run twice daily (E13, one hour). There are also one or two minibus taxis daily connecting Siteki with Big Bend (E10, one hour) and Simunye (E7, 30 minutes).

Mkhaya Game Reserve

This topnotch **private reserve** (☎ 528 3943; www.biggameparks.org) was established in 1979 to save the pure Nguni breed of cattle from extinction. Its focus expanded to include other animals including roan and sable antelopes, tsessebe, elephants, and white and black rhinos (it boasts that you're more likely to meet rhinos here than anywhere else in Africa). It's near the hamlet of Phuzumoya, off the Manzini–Big Bend road. The reserve takes its name from the *mkhaya* (or knobthorn) tree, which abounds here. *Mkhayas* are valued not only for their fruit, from which Swazis brew beer, but for the insect and birdlife they support.

Note that you can't visit 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, it's ideal to stay for at least one night.

Stone Camp (all-inclusive s/d with full board E1035/1780) is reminiscent of a 19th-century hunt-

ing camp, with accommodation in rustic-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.

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, and is the base for some good horse-riding (near Nsoko).

Big Bend

The picturesque panoramas from the edge of town set off this sleepy sugar town, appropriately set on a big bend in the Lusutfu River just before it joins the Usutu. If you're here during summer, you can cool off in the pool at the Bend Inn Hotel.

There's an ATM at the First National Bank booth next to the BP petrol station on the main street just before the Bend Inn Hotel.

SLEEPING & EATING

Riverside Motel (☎ 363 6910; s/d with breakfast E171/262; 🍷) Friendly with decent rooms and a good restaurant (mains E40 to E70; open breakfast, lunch & dinner). It's nearly 2km further south past Lismore Lodge on the MR8.

Bend Inn Hotel (☎ 363 6855; s/d E189/280; 🍷) The faded foyer in this classic place features a massive faux 'window' framed by lime-green curtains depicting a forest 'outlook'. Its own views are quite pleasant enough: it faces out over the river from a hilltop position south of town. It also has a restaurant and an outdoor bar.

Lismore Lodge (☎ 363 6613; d from E200) Has small, comfortable, good-value doubles. It's about 4km south of Big Bend on the MR8.

LL Restaurant Bar (☎ 363 6380; mains E40-80; 🍷 lunch & dinner). Located next door to Lismore Lodge, you can get great seafood dishes, including calamari, seafood kebabs and seafood curry.

WHITE-WATER RAFTING

One of the highlights of Swaziland is rafting the Usutu River (which becomes the Lusutfu River). The river is usually sluggish and quite tame, but near Mkhaya Game Reserve it passes through the narrow Bulungu Gorge, which separates the Mabukabuka and Bulunga Mountains, generating rapids.

Swazi Trails (☎ 416 2180; www.swazitrails.co.sz) is the best contact to organise a rafting trip. It offers a full-day trip (E610 per person, minimum two, including lunch and equipment) involving portaging a 10m waterfall, followed by a sedate trip through scenic country with glimpses of the 'flat dogs' (crocodiles) sunning on the river bank. The crocs haven't devoured anyone recently, hence the claim that rafting here is '...safer than driving through Jo'burg'. In sections, you'll encounter Grade-IV rapids, which aren't for the faint-hearted, although even first-timers with a sense of adventure should handle the day easily.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Big Bend makes a convenient stop en route to/from KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Minibus taxis go daily to Manzini (E15, one hour) and to Lavumisa border post (E16, one hour).

Nsoko

Nsoko, halfway between Big Bend and the border post of Lavumisa, lies in the heart of sugar-cane country, with the Lebombo Mountains as a backdrop.

Nisela Safaris (☎ 303 0318; www.niselasafaris.co.za; camp sites per person E65, beehive huts E100, lodge incl breakfast per person from E250) is a small touristy private reserve, and is convenient if you're coming from the south. It has accommodation options galore, including creative chalets-cum-safari-lodge (note the internal trees and basins) and simple beehive huts. Also on offer are wildlife drives (E65 per person, minimum two) and guided walks (E30 per person). There's a restaurant with craft shop and traditional Swazi dancing.

Nhlangano

Nhlangano is the closest town to the border post at Mahamba, but unless you want to visit the casino, there's no real reason to stop here. There's a well-stocked Spar supermarket in the shopping mall in the town centre.

The pleasant **Phumula Farm Guest House** (☎ 207 9099; s/d incl breakfast E230/460) is about 3km from the border gate and about 1km off the main road. It's a private house with a manicured lawn and garden setting, pleasant rooms and a braai area. Dinner can also be arranged.

On offer at the **Nhlangano Sun Hotel & Casino** (☎ 207 8211; s/d E597/665; 🎰) is a grandiose setting and somewhat faded tiny rooms, together with a popular casino. It's 4km southeast of town along the Lavumisa road (MR11).

Several minibus taxis run daily between Nhlangano and Manzini (E16, 1½ hours), from where you can get another vehicle on to Mbabane. There are also frequent connections to the Mahamba border post (E4), where you must change for Piet Retief in South Africa (E20, one hour). Large minibus taxis go direct to Jo'burg (E110, 4½ hours).

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. The atmospheric double-storey **Khopho Hut** (dm E90) is built around massive boulders and Mhlabeni Hut is by a waterfall. It's compulsory to take a local guide (E50 per day plus E10 for each hiker; you can park your transport in a secure location near reception). You must also take your own food and bedding, although porters are available (E15 per day). Another accommodation option, **Horseshoe Estate B&B** (☎ 606 1512), is near the trail entrance and can arrange hikes.

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