Horse Riding and Wildlife Conservation Programme

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF IMIRE

Imire was founded in the 1950s by Norman Travers, initially as a cattle, maize and tobacco farm. He longed for the presence of game and in the late 1970s branched out into game farming. He pioneered the integration of cattle ranching, farming and long term sustainable wildlife management. Like Noah, the animals came in two by two and within 10 years Imire had become a 10,000 acre conservancy stocked with impala, waterbuck, kudu, eland and the rare sable antelope.

BLACK RHINO BREEDING AND RELEASE

Imire is internationally renowned for its black rhino breeding and release programme. In the 1980s, during a period of Zimbabwe’s worst poaching, rhino numbers crashed from 10,000 to less than 1,000 in just a few years. The Department of National Parks & Wildlife moved the remaining wild rhino into the custodianship of private conservancies, called Intensive Protection Zones. Norman believed that Imire could successfully care for rhino, but was derided as a dreamer - how could rhino from the dry heat of the Zambezi Valley survive the bitter Wedza winters? However, he convinced sceptics by showing them proof of the rhinos depicted in the 700 year old bushman paintings on the conservancy. Imire’s adopted rhino and their offspring have since thrived.

THE IMIRE RHINO

Imire were given seven orphaned baby black rhino in 1985. Noddy, Sprinter, Fumbi, Cuckoo, DJ, Amber and Mvu were aged between four and six months. Their parents had been poached in the Matusadona National Park in Northern Zimbabwe. Each of the seven calves were hand-reared on formula milk for eight years and raised as a semi-domesticated herd. Several in-depth studies were carried out by ecologists to ensure the rhino suffered no ill-effects from the new vegetation, climate and herding, since black rhinos are naturally solitary animals.

The seven original rhino bred very successfully at Imire, with 15 births in less than 20 years - a record given the rhino’s notoriously slow speed of reproduction. Over the next 15 years, 11 rhino were successfully returned to the Matusadona National Park where they were monitored by National Parks and a team of volunteer student vets. The Matusadona release programme was stopped in 2000 due to a lack of funds and today this ancient animal once again faces extinction in the wild.
IMIRE’S TRAGEDY

On November 7th 2007 Imire suffered the worst poaching incident in its history when three rhino were shot and killed. Two females, DJ and Amber and a male, Sprinter were killed, along with Amber’s almost full term unborn calf. The incident left DJ’s 6 week old calf, Tatenda, a confused and terrified orphan. On that night, Imire lost a generation of rhino.

Tatenda became an international star in the Animal Planet documentary, “There’s a Rhino in My House” which tells the chaotic story of his first year; hand-raised by Judy Travers in her home with a warthog named Pog and a hyena named Tsotsi. He was released into the game park to be a partner for Shanu, our youngest female rhino, in 2008. In November 2016 Imire was struck by another tragedy when Tatenda suddenly fell ill and passed away at the age of just 9 years old. He taught us all so much about hope and survival, and so many people world-wide joined us in mourning our loss. Our work to protect the rhino and secure its future in Zimbabwe continues.

Since the poaching incident in 2007, we have had two baby black rhino, Tafika and Tafara and one baby White Rhino, Masimba. We are grateful and proud that our breeding and release programme can begin again. We are now home to five black and three white rhino.

HELP CREATE A POSITIVE FUTURE

Volunteers get very involved with our rhino at Imire, learning about their behaviour and monitoring their activities, feeding and socialisation. You will play a role in their continued protection and security as you enjoy getting to know their eccentricities!
THE IMIRE ELEPHANTS

Imire is home to four elephants. Mac, Toto and Mandebvu and form our small family herd, and then there is Nzou, who happily lives with a herd of buffalo! The elephants living at Imire were orphaned in the wild at a very young age. Imire rescued them and has since provided them with an environment that is as close to their natural habitat as possible, whilst maintaining both animal and human safety. Had the elephants not been saved and given a forever home at Imire, they would certainly have perished in the wild.

Ivory and rhino horn poaching is rife throughout Africa and to protect our elephants and rhinos they sleep in secure bomas at night. In this way we can ensure that there are armed guards, proper lighting and communication systems in place in the event of any incident threatening their safety.

Elephants are extremely intelligent and sensitive creatures. They need constant stimulation in order to remain content. This stimulation occurs in the wild by being part of a large, hierarchical herd, and through the constant challenge of finding food and water, while avoiding predators. Our elephants do not face these challenges which can lead to boredom, stagnation and seeking excitement in other, often very destructive, ways. In order to prevent this from occurring, we set them challenges of our own, developed by elephant behaviour experts. Our training keeps their minds and bodies occupied and helps keep them stimulated. All the training and handling done at Imire is on a reward basis and we do not condone cruelty of physical punishment of any description.

CARNIVORES AT IMIRE

Imire is home to Mambo the lion and two hyenas. We are lucky enough to be able to provide these carnivores with comfortable, spacious enclosures. Imire is a retirement home for these animals, who have faced difficulties elsewhere, been abandoned or abused. We are happy to rescue these animals from any unfortunate circumstances and create a better quality of life for them in their golden years. None of the carnivores are bred from or handled.

OTHER WILDLIFE AT IMIRE

In addition to our eight rhino, four elephants and lion, we are also home to a herd of buffalo (with Nzou the elephant matriarch!) and a wide variety of antelopes: sable, eland, kudu, nyala, waterbuck and blesbok, as well as zebra, giraffe, wildebeest, warthog and crocodile. With over 48 bird species and numerous snakes and lizards, Imire is an animal lovers paradise.
HORSE RIDING & WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Our volunteer programme is a unique opportunity to live in the heart of Zimbabwe and share the experiences of a 10,000 acre family-run African game reserve. You will live in close proximity to black and white rhino, elephants, buffalo, giraffe and many other animals and birds. You will hear incredible stories, learn our history, witness amazing animal relationships and help with research projects to further our knowledge of the wildlife which surrounds you.

This is a wonderful experience for horse lovers of all ages. Experience Africa in a safe environment, work hard, ride horses and become part of a very special family. Our volunteer programme is a life-changing experience both for volunteers and for our staff and local community. It is a wonderful way to get involved and give something back.

WHAT MAKES OUR PROJECT UNIQUE?

It’s all about intimacy and connections. We take just 12 volunteers in total at Imire, including a maximum of 4 horse riders, so you will have plenty of time and space to form bonds with other people, your horses, our animals and the spell-binding African bush. You will be part of our family in no time, with three generations of the Travers family living at Imire - from granny to babies!

We also pride ourselves on our programme’s diversity; you will work with animals, go on horse back patrols, help with community projects and in the local school, carry out work around the game park and undertake research projects. Learn about the animals, birds and trees which surround you and take a moment to savour the peace and serenity which is so unique to Africa.

Every activity our volunteers get involved with, no matter how small it seems, makes a difference. You will see first-hand the impact that your volunteer experience has to the conservancy and the community.
No two days on Imire are ever the same and there is always something unexpected around the corner! You will get involved with most of the following activities, depending on the time of year, the weather and what other projects are going on at the time.

**RHINO CONSERVATION**
- Learn all about these amazing animals from experienced handlers
- Observe and record rhino behaviour for research projects
- Ride and walk alongside the rhino as they roam the game park
- Feed and walk with the rhino - interact with iconic animals close up
- Clean out rhino beds and repair enclosures

Volunteers monitor our rhinos’ behaviour to identify patterns between individual rhinos and establish their relationships with different handlers and each other. Our observations are used to identify the personalities of the different rhinos, gauge their moods and try and predict behaviour or responses to different stimuli. This is especially important for monitoring the development of Tafika, our youngest rhino. Volunteers also monitor feeding patterns to help prevent over-grazing, to plan rhino movements through the game park and to determine if any supplements are needed to ensure they have a balanced diet.

You will walk with the rhino on their way back to their bomas in the evenings and help the handlers ensure the animals are secure for the night with sufficient food and water. Horse riding volunteers will also have the opportunity to interact with the rhinos on some of their rides.

Volunteers will also spend time with our white rhino scouts on morning patrol. The white rhino do not stay in bomas or have overnight guards because they are nocturnal feeders and can move large distances at night. One rhino is collared and volunteers learn to use the telemetry set, identify tracks and signs of rhino movement and identify spoor.

**WORK WITH ELEPHANTS**
- Monitor elephant movements and behaviour
- Ride and walk alongside the elephants and their handlers
- Clean out elephant beds and repair enclosures

Volunteers monitor the elephants’ behaviour to identify patterns and relationships between each elephant and learn about their personalities and responses to different stimuli. You will also monitor their feeding patterns and repair elephant damage in the game park. Walk with the elephants in the mornings or evenings, learn about these iconic animals from their knowledgeable handlers and understand the threats they face and what’s being done to protect them. You will also get the opportunity to spend time with the elephants on your riding patrols.
ANTI-POACHING AND SECURITY

- Undertake snare patrols and critical anti-poaching monitoring on horseback
- Fence and boundary monitoring on horseback - patrol inaccessible areas of the game park to check for fence damage and evidence of snares or traps
- Camp-outs
- Weapons training

Volunteers will patrol different areas of the game park on horse-back, looking for evidence of poaching and collecting snares and traps. This minimises small animal poaching and helps the dedicated Anti-Poaching Unit in their daily work to ensure that the large animals are protected. You will also carry out herd monitoring off the beaten track where you will ride alongside herds of sable, blesbok, zebra and wildebeest. Horse patrols give increased protection in different areas of the park and enables coverage of less accessible areas.

Volunteers will experience at least one camp-out during their stay (depending on the weather), where you will cook over an open fire and sleep out in the game park under the stars. You will also have the opportunity to do weapons training with our Anti-Poaching Unit and scouts. You will use paintball guns to simulate the scouts FN rifles to gain familiarity with a “weapon”. You will also join the APU as they do their drills and training.

CONSERVANCY MANAGEMENT

- Undertake herd monitoring on horseback
- Help maintain fences, roads, fireguards and park equipment
- Tree planting, bush clearance and removal of alien species
- Cleaning and maintenance of animal beds
- Cattle management: help the cattle section on dip days and support the cattle team with counting and location animals around the park
- Animal and plant monitoring
COMMUNITY AND TEACHING PROJECTS

There are approximately 500 people living or working at Imire, including conservancy, lodge, volunteer programme and farm staff plus their families. There is a primary and secondary school just outside the game park which we support through sponsorship of building projects, teaching assistance, sports, gardening and conservation education. We also support the local Idube Clinic through the provision of medicines and financial donations.

- Assist with English lessons in primary and secondary schools
- Work with the local Conservation Club - educate children in the game park on animals, birds and the environment
- Playing sports and games with the younger children
- Cultural evenings - learn to cook and dance from the experts!

We have introduced a teaching programme in the local primary school where volunteers use a Ministry of Education approved English literacy scheme aimed at rural African schoolchildren. The materials address conservation issues in a way which is relevant to their learning. You will also work the the local school’s Conservation Club, helping to teach secondary school students practical and theoretical lessons about nature and conservation. These lessons are based in the game park.

Please remember that our school children also have holidays, when there will be no teaching at the school. The 2019 term dates (when there will be teaching) are:

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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
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<tr>
<td>First term</td>
<td>8th January - 11th April</td>
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<td>Second term</td>
<td>6th May - 8th August</td>
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<td>Third term</td>
<td>9th September - 5th December</td>
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HORSE RIDING - PLEASE READ BEFORE BOOKING

You will ride for five days a week, Monday - Friday, for approximately 3 hours each day. This may be one long ride or two shorter ones, depending on the weather and what work needs to be done.

Riding Ability
- This is not a teaching programme - all Horse Riding volunteers must be able to ride when they arrive!
- You must be able to confidently carry out a rising trot and canter
- You must have had a number of years experience of regularly riding different horses
- You must be confident that you can handle a horse on your own and get out of potentially challenging situations

Should we deem your riding ability to be below the required standard and if there are other, experienced riders on the programme at the time, you may be asked to transfer to the Rhino & Elephant Conservation Programme.

Weight Limit
- We have a maximum weight limit of 80kg. Our horses are not strong enough to carry more than that weight over sustained periods.

Rules
- There is no galloping allowed anywhere on Imire
- Riders may not take horses out unaccompanied by a member of staff

Riders must bring their own riding helmet, 2 litre water bottle / camel pack and small day pack / rucksack.

You will ride for five days a week, Monday - Friday, for approximately 3 hours each day. If you wish to ride outside of those times, please ask the volunteer managers. Extra rides are subject to horse and staff availability and cost an additional $30 for a 2-3 hour ride (payable in cash).
LEISURE TIME

In your free time you can go fishing and canoeing, enjoy camp-outs in the bush or relax by the pool at the volunteer house with a beer after a hard day’s work! You may also have the opportunity to do additional horse rides in the bush (extra cost). If you enjoy hiking we can arrange trips to Wedza Mountain and trips to see the Bushman paintings at Markwe Caves (about 5km outside the reserve).

If you would like to arrange a driver to take you into Harare to visit the markets and shops, we can arrange a private taxi for $100 per car each way (costs shared between volunteers). Speak to Vera to organise this. There is no reliable public transport from the reserve to Harare.

ACCOMODATION

Your home is a thatched two-storey house with a family atmosphere. Situated in the heart of the conservancy on our largest dam, Numwa House is in an idyllic spot with a pool, bar, braai area and plenty of opportunities for fishing. There are two bathrooms inside the house, one with a bath and the other a shower, one toilet, plus three outside solar showers and two outside toilets with amazing views over the dam! There is hot and cold running water for showers, baths and cooking.

Rooms are shared, but a twin or double room can be requested. The house has three twin/double rooms and two same-sex dormitories. Private rooms can be requested but are not guaranteed.

We are lucky enough to have a borehole at Imire with fresh spring water for drinking. You will receive three home-cooked meals a day during your stay, made by our expert cooks, Stocks and Tafadzwa, served buffet style. Dietary requirements can be catered for, please let us know before you arrive!

On a Sunday our staff are off so volunteers are responsible for preparing food for themselves or the group. Food is provided. Alternatively you may book to have a delicious 3-course meal at Imire Lodge. The cost of this is $20 per person.
EQUINE PROJECT PRICING 2019

1 week - $1159.20
2 weeks - $2318.40

RHINO PROJECT PRICING 2019

1 week - $901.25
2 weeks - $1802.50

Prices are in US Dollars. All bookings are subject to an additional $40 administration fee. Please note that items on your final bill e.g. drinks from the bar; t-shirts, additional transfers etc are subject to VAT charged at 15%. VAT will be added to your bill at the end of your stay.

The price includes:
- Return transfers to and from Harare Airport
- All meals and accommodation while you are on the project
- Drinks (tea, coffee, juice, water) excluding fizzy and alcoholic drinks
- All activities while you are at Imire
- Laundry and housekeeping
- 24 hour support from our on-site volunteer managers
- Full orientation upon arrival

The price excludes:
- Any excursions outside the volunteer programme
- Fizzy and alcoholic drinks (over 18s only) from our bar
- 3-course Sunday dinner at Sable Lodge ($20 per head - optional)
- Any extra travel e.g. to Harare or to Victoria Falls

HOW DO I BOOK?

Email us your dates and we’ll check availability. Once your dates are confirmed we will send you a booking form and medical form to complete and send back once you have organised your flights and travel insurance. In addition you will receive an invoice for your payment.

Unless otherwise agreed, a 50% deposit is required to secure your place. Once this is received into our bank account, your place is confirmed. Full payment is due 60 days before your programme start date. If a booking is made less than 60 days before your start date, 100% of the fee must be made immediately.

Should you wish to cancel, then your initial deposit is refundable up to 60 days prior to your project start date. We will make any refunds back into your bank account, less any bank charges applied by our bank.

If you cancel within 60 days of your start date and have paid the full amount for the programme, then the refund is as follows:
- 31-60 days prior to programme start date - refund of your initial deposit. You may transfer the remaining balance paid onto a new booking with a start date within 1 calendar year of the original or first project start date. If you have only paid a deposit, then no refund is available.
- Less than 30 days prior to programme start date - no refund of any monies paid. You may transfer your money to a new booking with a start date within 1 calendar year of the original or first project start date.
Riding in Zimbabwe turned out to be a whole different experience than riding in Sweden! Just the fact that you can discover a giraffe just behind that tree or a herd of impala curiously looking at you through the high grass, takes some getting used to. The rides are very adventurous and you get to ride over rocks, through thick bushes and in water. All on a safe calm horse! Its a truly amazing experience. We were guided by one of the owners tho is great to ride with. She has been there so long that you can feel she knows every plant, tree and animal you see. She also tells you a lot about everything and always looks out for you and your horse. Our two weeks of riding went by really quickly and I’d love to come back and do it all again!

- Klara Knutsson, Sweden, September 2015

I chose to come to Imire because all the reviews said I would get a lot of hands-on experience and that I would get to work in the community. Also because I really wanted to horse ride. The horse riding was the best part and I am so glad I chose to combine my project and do both. I loved to get to know all the different people (staff and volunteers) - everyone had such interesting stories. Imire is really the greatest place I’ve volunteered at and the people are so nice. I loved every second of my time here.

- Courtney Harris, USA, April 2016

The rides out over the Imire property were just breathtaking, and we got to see many areas and sights that you just would not see by vehicle. We could get right up close to the wildebeest herds, and walk quietly past as the sable grazed in the distance. I remember cantering through a beautiful patch of land after a long ride with the others, zebras in the foreground and impala watching on from afar, and just thinking ‘this is exactly what I had hoped for’.

The cattle rounding was so much fun - you set off with a group of cattle in sight and yoo, whistle and yee-hah until they go in the direction you want for. It satisfied every little girl dream I had ever had about becoming a cowgirl all in one session. I am not kidding when I say I could pitch a tent on the vol house lawn and live at Imire forever. The place is incredible. You really get stuck in and do things that help with the running of the park. I wanted to be able to get a sweat on, and feel like I was truly contributing. The rewards were being able to spend time up close and personal with the animals, like Tafika the baby rhino and her mum Shanu, or walking the elephants back to their ele-beds. On my final drive out as I was leaving for the airport, the entire journey of giraffe surrounded the driveway (I like to think they were saying goodbye) and all I could think was two weeks was definitely not enough. If you want an experience that fills your soul and opens your mind, and then pours you a beer at the end of the day, go to Imire... just be prepared to want to go back time and time again.

- Rachel Miller, New Zealand, November 2015
OPTIONAL EXCURSIONS

Victoria Falls - Adrenaline and Adventure
No trip to Zimbabwe would be complete without a visit to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Victoria Falls. At 1,708m wide, it is the largest sheet of falling water in the world and one of the most spectacular natural wonders. In Ndebele, the Victoria Falls are called Mosi-au-Tunya - “the smoke that thunders” and the spray and noise are visible and audible around the town. The Falls drop between 90m-170m from the Zambezi River into the Zambezi gorge, with an average of 550,000 cubic metres of water plummeting over the edge every minute!

The Falls inspire and impress visitors today as much as they did David Livingstone, who was the first European to discover them back in the 1860’s. Today you can do all manner of exciting activities, from bungee jumps and zip lines from the 19th Century Victoria Falls bridge, to game drives, high tea at the Victoria Falls hotel and take part in some of the best white water rafting in the world!

Flights to Victoria Falls cost around $200 return and there are a variety of accommodation options from $20 per night, depending on your budget. You will also need to budget $100 each way for a taxi transfer from Imire to Harare Airport should you choose to visit the Falls during your middle weekend. A taxi from Victoria Falls airport to town is around $30 each way.