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BEST ADVENTURES IN SOUTH AFRICA



ZEE NDABA AND HER MOUNTAINS

Carrie Hampton

"Welcome to my backyard," says Zee Ndaba. The first black woman Level 4 Mountain Guide leading hikes amongst the gigantic peaks and big-sky landscapes of the Drakensberg Royal Natal National Park of KwaZulu Natal.



Zee has been roaming the Drakensberg mountains ever since she was a child and smiles broadly at being able to say she now hikes these hills and valleys for a living. She whispers to the wind, as if making sure the massifs hears her, "I like to think the mountains know my name."

There's an enduring myth that dragons live amongst these peaks and Zee is certain her brothers took her along as bait should the creature feel hungry, while they rock-hopped and raced around the foothills. They were dutifully at home doing chores or homework before their mother returned from work, hoping she would remain blissfully unaware of their afternoon antics.

When lost in the kind of fog where you can't see your hand in front of you, Zee is the right person to lead you out of trouble. It's easy to become dangerously disoriented when the weather "comes in", as it so suddenly does in the Drakensberg, making a freelance guide like Zee an essential part of your trip planning. Experience and expert training from some of South Africa's finest instructors and mentors, covering practical essentials like map and compass navigation, and technical rope access, gives indispensable peace of mind to holiday hikers who walk with Zee.

She leads Drakensberg trips for any level of fitness from 45 minutes to 14 days, and sees a wheelchair as no obstacle to being able to reveal the magnitude of the landscape. "I'm a fat woman," she giggles, "which makes the less fit feel comfortable and the fitter think they can outwalk me. But I've got stamina for Africa!"

Zee asserts that being amongst such grandeur you cannot fail to feel a spiritual connection. "You become part of the magic." Zee's favourite campsite is Umbundini Abbey, in the northern ranges. It's here that the formations known as Madonna and her Worshippers create a divine amphitheatre on a grand scale. It's the outline of these peaks that Zee has used as the logo for her trading name Drakensberg Treks. Zee invites you to visit her backyard and be part of the magic that is the Drakensberg Mountains.

The main entrance to Royal Natal National Park is about 3½ hours' drive, fairly equidistant between Johannesburg and Durban.

Contact Zee: 078 190 8191, email zee1zn@gmail.com, or see her Facebook pages, Drakensberg Treks or Zee Ndaba.