

Bell Traverse Hike Drakensberg

📍 Drakensberg, Okhahlamba Ward 10, Okhahlamba Local Municipality, Uthukela District Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa



When it comes to determining the best hiking experiences in the Drakensberg, two routes come to mind. The **Bell Traverse Hike** Via Organ Pipes Pass and the Mini Traverse hike from the Sentinel to Cathedral Peak. Rated as the **top hikes in the Drakensberg** based on a number of criteria from the stunning scenery, remoteness, challenge and location. The Bell Traverse is a popular choice for hikers with limited time taking 3 days to complete. This is in comparison to the Mini Traverse that takes 5 days.

The Bell Traverse Route

The **Bell Traverse hike** follows a circular route starting and ending at the Cathedral Peak Hotel in the **Central Drakensberg** area. The distance covered is about 40km over 3 days. We spend 2 nights in the mountains sleeping in Rolands Cave on day 1 and Twins Cave on day 2. The route to the escarpment is up **Organ Pipes Pass** and Cleft Peak at 3,277m. Once on top, we hike north along the escarpment towards Twins Cave, the starting point of the Bell Traverse Hike. Once we have completed the traverse, we make our way back down to **Cathedral Peak** Hotel via Bugger Gully, Orange Peal Gap and Shermans Cave.

Difficulty level of the Bell Traverse Hike

The Bell Traverse Hike is considered to be a challenging hike. Previous hiking experience and a good level of fitness is required for the hike. Factors that influence the difficulty level:

- The hiking terrain in the Drakensberg can be tough and super exposed. Some of the main areas of concern would be the entrance into Rolands Cave and a couple of sections on the the Bell Traverse. The path is very narrow with massive steep drops. Hikers with a fear for heights should not attempt this hike. The path is also not advisable in wet and rainy conditions.
- Volatile weather conditions must always be taken into account when **hiking in the Drakensberg**. In the summer months from October through to April, there is a good chance of thunderstorms, heavy rain and heat. In the Winter months from June to August, there is a good chance of snow, ice, freezing conditions and wind. Hikers must not attempt the Bell Traverse Hike without the correct equipment. Always prepare for the worst case scenario when it comes to weather conditions in the Drakensberg.
- Compounded Fatigue must also be taken into account on the hike. Hikers must be used to hiking for multiple days with a backpack. The backpack weight is between 12 and 15kg and will contain all your clothing, sleeping bag and food. The other factor influencing the compounded fatigue is the hiking distances covered per day and the altitude. We cover on average 14km a day at 3100m. There are also some severe inclines and declines on the hike. Organ Pipes Pass has an altitude gain of about 800m over 5km.

What the Bell Traverse hike entails

Basically the hike is a self sufficient hike that is guided by one of our Drakensberg experts. You will be required to carry all of your own gear in a backpack. We do have 75 and 65 litre backpacks and sleeping bags available to hire. You will also be required to help with a portion of the food rations. Your backpack should not weigh more than 15kg.

We like to approach the hike from a purists perspective. This means we do supply porters on the trek. We bring along basic cooking and eating utensils and make some really scrumptious mountain cuisine on our gas cookers. Porters are available at an additional cost if you think you need them. The water we drink and cook with is sourced from the many mountain streams along the way. There are no toilets or showers on the route.

Tour Facts

Language:

Engilsh

Duration:

3

Tour Type:

continuous

Tour Itinerary

Day 1 :

We depart Johannesburg at 5am. The drive down to the start of the hike takes about 5 hours. (including a stop in Harrismith for breakfast). Upon arrival, we sign the mountain register, do a final equipment check and hike briefing before heading out. The goal is to hike up Organs Pass and overnight in Rolands Cave. Distance to be covered is 14km with an altitude gain of about 900m.

Day 2 :

Wake up at 5am. We then have breakfast and get ready to start the hike by 7am. The first part of the hike sees us heading up to the escarpment via Cleft Peak at 3,277m. We then hike along the escarpment to Twins Cave. Hiking Distance is about 12km.

Day 3 :

A long day today. Wake up at 5am. Breakfast and get ready to start hiking by 6:30am. The first part of the days challenge is the Bell Traverse Hike, exiting via Buggers Gully (situated at the base of Cathedral Peak). We then head on down to the ending point via Orange Peel Gap. Hiking Distance is about 16km.

We should be down by about 3pm. We then take the 5 hour drive back to Johannesburg. A nice option is to add an extra night and overnight in a really cool bed and breakfast. And then head back to Johannesburg the next day. Contact us for more info on this option.