



ORANGE RIVER THUNDER ALLEY, HOPETOWN

Where: Hopetown, N Cape
Season: All year round
Difficulty: Class 2 – 4 Suitable for all skill levels
Distance paddled: 55km
Minimum age: 8 years



OVERVIEW

Starting near Hopetown in the Northern Cape, this is the most accessible, centrally located section of the Orange River. It's also the most consistent in terms of water levels, thanks to a daily dam release from Van der Kloof Dam, which means that we never have to cancel or move trips.

Beautifully scenic, the route traverses rolling hills and grassy riverbanks where game is often spotted. 2 days are spent travelling through a lovely basalt gorge with amazing rock formations, polished by the river's passage. There are lots of small, fun rapids and two slightly more challenging rapids which can be easily portaged.

We use inflatable 2 person boats that are easy to paddle and steer. We also have rafts that are very stable and perfect for less confident paddlers. Our usual trip length is 4 days and 5 nights – 3 nights wild camping on river and the 1st and last nights in base camp. 3 day, 4 night trips are also available and longer expeditions can be arranged for group bookings.

THE TRIP

Our trips are usually four days and five nights long – we spend the first and last nights at Witfontein Game Lodge near Douglas. Camping is included in the trip price, and you also have the option to upgrade to a lodge room. In the morning, you'll be transferred to the put in point near Hopetown by bus, a trip of around 45 minutes. Note: Our start and end points are both in South Africa so **NO border crossing or passports are required.**

We cover around 65kms during the trip, so we spend a large portion of the day on the river, but we like to try and get to camp early to allow time for fishing, hikes and some downtime. Each trip is run as a self-contained wilderness expedition – we carry everything we need with us and take everything back out again at the end. This trip will provide you with a complete break from reality – no electricity, cell phones, computers and no stress. It is truly an opportunity to recharge your batteries and reconnect with yourself, your friends and nature. All you need to provide is your personal camping gear and drinks of your choice. All meals are included, as are qualified guides, boating and safety equipment.

The area around Hopetown is very important historically. It was first settled in 1850 when Sir Harry Smith extended the northern frontier of the Cape Colony to the Orange River. Hopetown was a quiet farming area until several large diamonds, most notable the Eureka Diamond and the Star of South Africa, were discovered there between 1867 and 1869. Once the diamond rush had passed, the region returned to agriculture. It was also the centre of various Anglo-Boer War interactions and was the site for a large concentration camp where the British held many Boer wives and children captive in terrible conditions. Today, there are several game farms in the area along the river, which makes for great game viewing!

The river is fast flowing and fairly constant as it is below the Vanderkloof Dam which releases water for electricity and irrigation. It offers many class 1, 2 and Class 3 rapids. The infamous Hell's Gate rapid is a Class 3+/4 and can only be run at certain levels. It's very easy to walk around and so children 12 and under and anyone not keen to run it can walk around.

Your guides will meet you on the evening before your trip begins, at around 6pm, and dinner is provided. We usually serve dinner around 8pm to allow for late arrivals. There is lots of lovely grass to set up your camping spot for the night. The first morning is usually a hive of activity with packing of bags and cars happening before the bus takes everyone to the put in point upstream. The group will usually get on the water in late morning. Occasionally, should there be an unavoidable logistical challenge, you'll have lunch in camp and then get on the water.

On the first day, the paddling consists mainly of flowing channels, small rapids and flat water which take you under the 'old Hopetown bridge', dated back to 1871. This is a steel cast bridge, the first built over the Orange river. We camp under trees on a grassy bank where the fishing is good. Day 2 brings bigger rapids and we enter the 'Lava Gorge' through 'Hell's gate', usually a short compulsory portage. We often camp on a black beach named 'Full Moon' beach. Day 3 is full of excitement with lots of class 2 – 3 rapids which are loads of fun. You spend most of the day in the shallow Lava Gorge. We camp above the gorge with a pool which offer great fishing. Day 4 sees the gorge open up with fast flowing sections and ends off with fun rapids before the take-out at Witfontein Game Lodge. We

normally take out after lunch and transfer back to the lodge campsite to enjoy a hot shower and some clean clothes. The last dinner is enjoyed around the campfire, and you'll pack up and get going after breakfast the next morning.

Sample Itinerary (4 day, 5 night trip)

Day 1: Witfontein Game Lodge. Camping and dinner included.

Day 2: Pack up and transfer to put in point by bus. Wild Camp on banks. Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner included.

Day 3: On river, wild camp on banks. Breakfast, lunch and dinner included

Day 4: On river, wild camp on banks. Breakfast, lunch and dinner included

Day 5: On river, take out after lunch and transfer back to Witfontein Game Lodge for last night. Breakfast, lunch and dinner included

Day 6: Depart at leisure. Light breakfast included.

PRICELIST

We have various packages available including a low season discount and various optional add-ons - let us know if you have questions. Ask us about our River Safari and school and student discounted rates.

1. Premium Package: The most popular option with our legendary menu – join a scheduled trip or get a group together

4 day, 5 night trip	High season (school holidays)	Low season
Adults	R6,950 pp	R6,000 pp
Children under 18	R5,900 pp	R5,270 pp
3 day, 4 night trip	High season (school holidays)	Low season
Adults	R6,550 pp	R5,600 pp
Children under 18	R5,600 pp	R4,750 pp

Minimum group size of 12. Maximum group size of 26. Includes camping, all meals, qualified guides, boating and safety equipment and VAT. Exclusive groups – min 20 in high season and 14 in low season.

Group Package: discounted trip with a simpler menu – the best value option if you have a group of 20 or more.

4 day, 5 night trip	
Adults	R5,950 pp
Children under 18	R5,450 pp
3 day, 4 night trip	
Adults	R5,550 pp

Children under 18	R4,950 pp
Minimum group size of 20. Maximum group size of 40. Includes camping, all meals, qualified guides, boating and safety equipment and VAT.	

Optional Add-ons		
Porter Boater	Maximum 2 per group	R3,950 each for trip
<i>The porter boater will help carry extra gear, help to set up and break down camp and help to pack and unpack your boats. This is a participative trip, so it is important to note that the guide will HELP you, not do everything for you...</i>		
Camping set	Tent, roll mats (NOT mattresses)	R950 pp for trip
Upgrade to lodge accommodation		Approx. R600 pp
Full breakfast at Witfontein on morning of departure		R150 pp

2. River Safari Trips

This is an all-inclusive package aimed at those who prefer glamping to camping! Very small group sizes and an upgraded level of comfort and cuisine make this the ultimate river experience. The price per person varies according to group size so ask us for more info if you are interested in this option.



Why Gravity?

Gravity has an unwavering attitude towards quality and safety on all our trips. They're also excellent value – we include the last night in camp AND dinner in your trip fee! Some of the aspects which make Gravity one of the leading adventure companies in SA include the following;

- Only APA qualified and trained guides, in the recommended guide: client ratios
- SAMSA Approved
- Top notch equipment
- The best in bush cuisine – all fresh prepared on river
- Undiscovered sections of river – no crowds
- Guaranteed water levels – no pulling boats!
- All inclusive – 2 nights in base camp and ALL meals – no hidden extras
- No border crossings or passports needed
- Public Liability and evacuation cover

Are you a member of APA?

Yes, we are Operating Members of APA and our guides are APA registered, trained, qualified and experienced.

Do you have your SAMSA Licence to Operate?

Yes, we do, we were the first rafting operator to become compliant with the law.

Why are your trips more expensive than some other operators?

We use only APA qualified guides – they are professionals and we pay them accordingly. Our Guide: Client ratio is 1:8 on the Gorge and Thunder Alley sections and 1:10 on the Fish Eagle section. We invest in top notch equipment and keep everything well maintained – it's all about safety! We also include more in our price – first and last night's meals and camping as well as all cutlery and crockery.

What does the trip include?

It includes all of your meals, from the evening of your arrival, to a light breakfast on the morning of your departure, camping at base camp on your first and last nights, 4 full days and 3 nights on river (3 days and 2 nights if doing a 3 day, 4 night trip), qualified and experienced guides, all boating and safety equipment and no, you don't have to bring your own loo paper!

How do I get up to the river?

You can self-drive or we can put you in touch with a transport service. The road is a good tar road all the way up from Cape Town and takes around 9 hours. The road is also good tar coming in from the Gauteng direction. There is +/- 50 kms of dirt road to the end point and we'll do a shuttle on the morning of your first day.

We would like something to commemorate our trip – what do you suggest?

We can offer you a personalised Gravity T-Shirt with the name and date of your trip in a choice of T-shirt colours for R120.00 per shirt. You will need to book this in good time to ensure that the T-shirts can be handed out on the trip itself

Do I need my passport?

No, you don't. The trip takes place in South African, so no border crossing is required.

What are the camping facilities like?

Our base camp is a grassed campsite on the riverbanks. Rustic ablutions and flush toilets are provided. On river, we'll be free camping – bring your own camping gear – a full kit list will be supplied. We usually spend the last night on Witfontein Game Farm, which features a grassy lawn, great bathrooms and a comfortable communal area.

What about ablutions?

On river, your guide will give you a thorough briefing regarding ablution procedures. Generally, you will wash in the river. We usually use the environmentally friendly 'cat hole' toilet method (don't worry – your guide will explain!) but, depending on the season and the size of your group, may also provide a porta-loo.

Can we upgrade our accommodation?

Yes, subject to availability – there is an option to upgrade to a chalet on the first night and a game lodge room on the last.

What do I need to bring?

A full kit list will be supplied on confirmation of booking. Remember that whatever you choose to bring will get very dirty so don't bring your new clothes!

Will my clothes & sleeping bags get wet?

There are no guarantees on a river trip but it's extremely unlikely - you will be supplied with a dry-bag, which will keep your clothes dry even if the bag lands in the water. You can also pack your clothes into black bags inside the dry bags to make sure. Your guides will explain to you the best way to pack your bags. Space is sufficient but limited so don't bring too much with you.

Can I bring my camera?

Yes. Although there can be no guarantees on a river trip, we do provide watertight dry buckets for cameras, binoculars etc. It is also worth considering buying a disposable waterproof camera.

Do I need to be fit? What if I'm not a strong swimmer?

Although this is an exciting trip and you'll cover about 60kms over the trip, the river here has good flow so you don't have to be an athlete to do the trip. A reasonable level of fitness and good health is required, though. Temperatures can be extreme, especially in summer so please bear this in mind. There is no age limit, but you should familiarise yourself with what the trip entails and make an informed decision on your ability to participate, based on your own fitness. Our general recommendation is a minimum age of 8 years and a maximum of 70. Each client is issued with a PFD ('Lifejacket') and is instructed on how to handle him or herself in the water, you don't need to be a strong swimmer but please let us know if you are not confident in the water. There is always the option to walk around rapids you are not happy to do. You also have the option of requesting a very stable raft, which is steered by a guide (dependent on water level)

Is it difficult to steer the boats? Will I fall out?

We use 2-person inflatable 'croc's' that are very stable and easy to paddle, even for beginners. This section of river has lots of flowing water and a few challenging runs. There is therefore quite a good chance that you'll have at least one swim! You will be equipped with a PFD ('lifejacket') and will have been given instruction on exactly how to behave if you fall out of your boat. We also use only highly trained guides who will be on hand to rescue you if required. You also have the option of requesting our very stable 5-person raft, which is steered by a guide (dependent on water level).

Is it safe? What about if I hurt myself?

Whilst there is an inherent element of risk in every adventure, running rivers with our professional guides should not be considered dangerous. Our guides are all trained in First Aid and we carry a First Aid kit. It is your responsibility to inform the guides about any allergies or medical conditions you may have and to make sure you have any personal medication with you (e.g. asthma pumps, allergy medication etc.). We do not always carry a sat phone as there is cell coverage from high points at various locations along the river. We do have a satellite communicator so please request that it be taken along if you prefer. In general, evacuation by helicopter is not possible due to the rough terrain and the distance from the nearest helicopter but in our 20+ years of operation, we have not needed it! We have comprehensive Public Liability insurance and access to a 24-hour crisis call centre with evacuation cover.

What about my drinks?

Gravity provides all meals, but you should bring your own choice of drinks. We will supply you with cooler boxes and ice. It's also a good idea to bring drink mix such as Game, which can be mixed with water - water purification tablets will be supplied. You can use this to keep your drink bottle full for during the day.

Is the water safe to drink?

Generally, the water is clean enough to drink but we use water purification tablets to be on the safe side.

What will the weather be like?

In summer (September-April), days are very hot (30-40 degrees) and the nights are also warm. In between seasons, the days are still warm, but the nights can be quite cool - a change of warm clothing and a good sleeping bag are required. In winter (June-August), days are warm (20-25 degrees) and nights are extremely cold. In summer, afternoon thunderstorms can occur.

What will the meals be like?

We pride ourselves on providing our clients with the best in bush cuisine. All meals are prepared fresh on the river and consist of hearty, healthy ingredients.

I have specific dietary requirements; can you cater to them?

We are very happy to cater for vegetarians and those requiring halaal meats. For other dietary requirements and preferences, we will supply you with our menu so that you can bring along additional items of substitutions. You can chat with your Trip Leader and discuss how you'd like him/her to prepare your food if necessary. If your food requirements are complicated, we ask that you consult with us before the trip so that we can come up with the best solution for you.

Why restrict group sizes?

We generally limit our trips to 30 or less on our Standard trip and 24 or less on our Premium trips - small groups are easier to manage and, therefore, safer and the negative impact on the environment is minimised.

Any other restrictions?

The APA code of safety requires us to warn you against consuming alcohol or drugs in the 8 hours preceding the trip as well as at all times on the water.

How do I book?

To book, we will need a completed booking form as well as a 40% deposit into the following account: Gravity River Tours, First National Bank, Claremont branch #204209, Business Cheque Account: 623 790 739 60. Your booking is NOT confirmed until we have received both completed the form and payment. Please make sure to reference your deposit with your name and the dates of your trip e.g. "Smith Thunder Alley Gorge Dec 12-15".



More Questions? Give us a call!

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