

7 things to do in and around Thabazimbi

Words Anim van Wyk

1 See Cape vultures

The Marakele National Park is the pride of Thabazimbi. This 670 km² (67 000 hectares) park was proclaimed in 1994. The park was named “Marakele”, because in the 19th century it was a “place of sanctuary” for Tswanas who hid in the mountains with their livestock to escape the Zulus.

If you drive the 18 km from Thabazimbi to the park, it’s hard to believe that you can drive all the way to the radio mast on the cliffs. A narrow tar road winds up the red slopes to the top of the Kransberg. You can walk through the veld to a point where, in the winter months, you can see about a third of the world’s Cape vulture population (about 800 breeding pairs).

The views from the top are spectacular – you can see over the Waterberg range to the horizon. Set aside at least three hours for the journey from the gate and back.

Tow a caravan or pack a tent and stay over at the Bontle Camp, or stay in a self-catering cottage at the Thlopi Camp.

Cost: R17 per person for a day visit.

Contact: ☎ 014 777 1745; 🌐 www.sanparks.org

2 Take a hike

Hike up the Kransberg via a 10 km trail on the farm Hartebeesfontein. The trail leads to a point 2045 m above sea level. There’s also a more difficult trail, but that’s not for everyone. The owners warn if you want to hike this trail you shouldn’t be claustrophobic, nor afraid of heights. If you have young children, rather walk down the valley to the Ho-Lani swimming hole, where you can braai, and swim in the clear water.

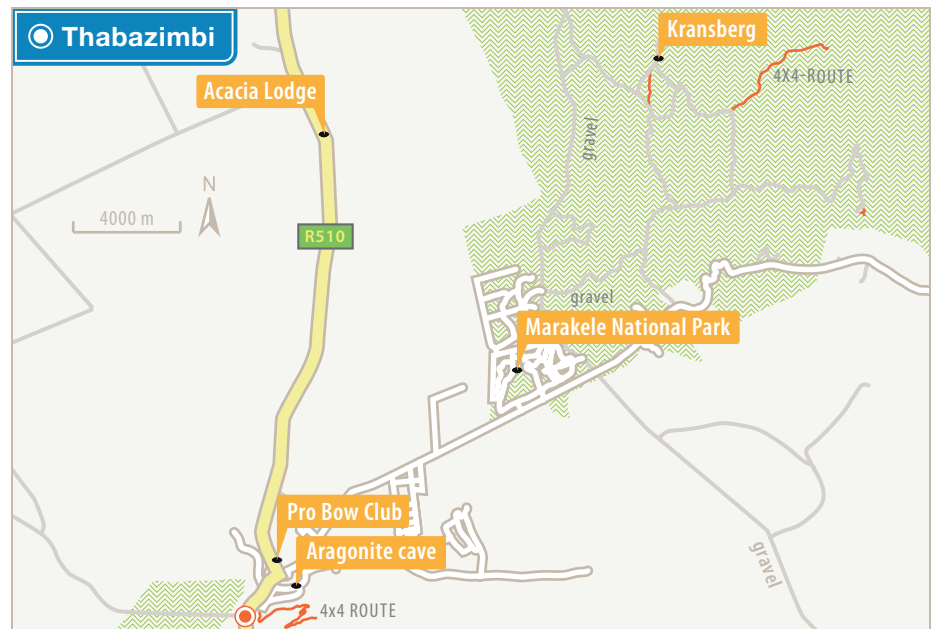
You can, of course, sleep over in Thabazimbi and do both. Where? Carry on straight past Marakele. From where the gravel road starts, it’s another 16 km to the farm gate, on the right.

Cost: R25 per person per day plus R5 parking.

Contact: ☎ 014 772 1270 (if there’s no answer, call ☎ 016 451 1407)

3 Go iron-ore mining

“*Thokomela di tyre* – R140 000,” is written on a giant tyre at the exit of the workshops at the Thabazimbi iron-ore mine. The lorries that cart iron ore and waste at the open-cast mines each use six of these R140 000 tyres; one lorry weighs almost 300 tons when fully loaded. “That front-end loader weighs 600 tons,” Ewald Botha of Ewaldtjie Tours tells me where we’re standing in the Buffelshoek quarry. My head spins: That’s the weight of 600 small cars. Ewald started



working at the mine in 1966 and knows how to get you through all the checkpoints into the quarries, not easily done with today’s high safety standards. Ewald first took me to the vulture restaurant in the Ben Alberts Nature Reserve (which is managed by the mine), where we saw Cape, lappet-faced and white-backed vultures, as well as about 100 marabou storks. In the reserve, Ewald will show you iron-smelting “ovens” dating to 1450 (they are small, thigh-deep hollows). And he will take you to a cave covered in shimmering, needle-like aragonite crystals that they say looks like a snow-covered scene (it’s only open to visitors two days a month).

Cost: R100 per person.

Hours: Every other Saturday (you have to book).

Contact: ☎ 014 772 1556; ☎ 082 878 1275

4 Float down the river

Floating on an inner tube on a farm dam or down a river is the stuff of childhood memories, and it’s something you can experience on a farm called Inibos, owned by Francois Badenhorst. Slap on the sunscreen, get comfortable on your tube and float down the Crocodile River, which runs along the border of the farm. The farm is so big you can drift for more than an hour. It’s very popular with families. Call ahead to make sure the water level is high enough (it fluctuates according to the opening and closing of sluices at the Hartbeespoort Dam upstream). The water is clean by the time it arrives at Inibos, having passed through the Rooikoppies Dam.

Where: 50 km from Thabazimbi on the R511.

Cost: R35 per person (plus a R50 day visitor tariff).

Contact: ☎ 082 465 3737; 🌐 www.inibos.com

5 Meet a white lion

Mike and Chrissy Hodge, who moved to the Waterberg from the UK 10 years ago, breed white lions at Acacia Lodge. “It’s been the best 10 years of my life,” Mike says. They’re hand-rearing Shamba, who was born in April. Visitors

may play with him while he’s still small, and watch bigger lions being fed. Where? About 30 km outside Thabazimbi on the Lephalale road.

Cost: R75 per adult and R25 per child under 12.

Contact: ☎ 082 853 0124; ☎ 082 323 2456

6 Shoot with a bow and arrow

Archery is a hugely popular sport in Thabazimbi; the town has three clubs. I pop in at the Pro Bow Club one evening.

“People who tend to rush things quickly learn to concentrate here,” says Nico Engelbrecht, chairman and owner of the Pro Bow shop. “For the same reason, children do better at school.” Nico offers archery lessons. Who knows, perhaps you have a hidden talent?

Where: Next to Build It on the Lephalale road.

Hours: 8am to 5pm (Mondays to Fridays); 8am to 1pm (Saturdays).

Cost: R100 per person.

Contact: ☎ 084 713 6603; ☎ 073 674 9956

7 Find the stray tree

President Paul Kruger spent some time in this part of the Bushveld. He used to hunt on his farm Gannahoek outside Thabazimbi. Gannahoek is also home to the southernmost known naturally occurring baobab. The name of Dwaalboom, a hamlet 60 km from Thabazimbi, is said to refer to this “stray tree”.

During the Anglo-Boer War the tree was used as a postbox, and there’s lots of historical graffiti on the trunk. It would take eight large men with outstretched arms and holding hands to enclose the trunk. “The earliest date I could find on it is 1907,” says Ronel Taljaard.

She and her husband Juan now own Gannahoek.

Where: Drive 9 km out of town in the direction of Dwaalboom. Turn right on to the gravel road and continue for 28 km. (If you care about your car, take the tar road through Sentrum.)

Contact: ☎ 082 455 3075