

COLOURFUL

Cape Town



With its dramatic location, collision of cultures and tumultuous history, this South African city promises a trip of a lifetime, says Alison Moffat

Sandwiched between the sea and a national park, with the rugged wilderness of Table Mountain at its heart, Cape Town is a city like no other. Boasting white sandy beaches, lush vineyards and a mountain range running through it, it attracts outdoor enthusiasts aplenty. Hiking, water sports

and a wealth of both plants and animal species are all here to enjoy. This, combined with shops, restaurants, museums and architecture to rival any other cosmopolitan city, means it really does have something for everyone to enjoy. Cape Town's culture is as diverse as its landscape, with 11 different

national languages spoken within its perimeter. Both European and African, first and third world live together side by side, making for some occasionally shocking contrasts in lifestyle. Community-based tourism is helping to rebuild post-apartheid South Africa, through fair trade products, B&B style 'homestay'

accommodation and organised tours of the city. It creates sustainable development where it is needed most, by enabling those already equipped with the knowledge and skills to run small businesses, which in turn allows them to generate more jobs. This kind of tourism is becoming more popular with people wishing to experience the 'real' South Africa and benefits the local rural and urban communities directly. From social and environmental volunteering, to buying popular wire crafts, beadwork and soap stone souvenirs at the local craft market, there are many projects to get involved with.

With a little research it's easy to explore some of the finest adventure travel and safari opportunities on offer. South Africans drive on the left, so there's no complication of adjusting to the roads if hiring a car. The world famous Garden Route is a must if you have four or more days to do it justice and can be easily reached from Cape Town via the main motorway, the N2. This picturesque coastal drive links a series of charming towns and natural wonders,

from Mossel Bay in the west to just beyond Plettenberg Bay in the east. If possible this should be done at leisure to appreciate the wealth of lakes, bays, mountains and lush green forests it gets its name from.

For those with less time, a short internal flight will take you to Port Elizabeth from where you can visit the Amakhala Game Reserve, in Paterson. This 16,000-acre reserve, which the Bushman's River runs through, was once sheep and cattle farmland. Now the reserve offers game drives and guided walks with a ranger, as well as boat cruises or canoeing on the river. It's an amazing experience seeing the native wildlife in this breathtaking landscape. Nothing quite prepares you for the peculiarly prehistoric figure of a rhino appearing through the bushes, or witnessing the touching greeting between a lion and his family after a day apart. The land has been successfully returned to nature with original flora and

Take a cable car to the top of Table Mountain (left), where you can enjoy stunning views of Cape Town and the Garden Route (above), or get to know the locals in Kayamandi

fauna species re-established, so you would never believe sheep had dared to graze where lions prowl.

You can choose to stay in a colonial homestead, classic bush lodges or a historic inn, which are owner-managed by the descendants of the families who arrived here with British settlers in 1820.

For those who want to be more actively involved in the reserve's work, there is also a volunteer programme where time is split between conservation work and the Isipho orphanage. The children at the latter provide an unforgettable welcome full of joy and energy. As soon as I arrived, my heart was stolen by a little boy with a beaming smile and a tummy that just begged to be tickled, something that left



TRAVEL TIPS

On a homestay you will be welcomed into the hearts and homes of locals, where you can connect with people, hear fascinating stories and get the most out of your visit. Mandisa St. Clairs Homestay and Township tours are one of the best. For more information visit www.bonanitours.co.za



us both in fits of giggles. Volunteers come from varied backgrounds – some furthering vocations by gaining knowledge and insight into a different culture, some simply wanting to give something back to this fascinating country. It seems more people from all ages are taking gap years or shorter holidays with a purpose.

If you're a wine lover, the picturesque wineland regions offer the opportunity to appreciate some

of the Cape's history and culture in beautiful surroundings. Wander around the grounds overlooking hill-hugging vineyards and sample some of the wines that Cape Town is famous for.

With only two hours time difference it's possible to take a short break in Cape Town without suffering jet lag, but with so much to see and do it's just a tantalising taster. The sense of 'ubuntu' (African hospitality and humanity) is hard to



leave behind and it's a feeling that lasts. As beautiful as Cape Town is, with its wealth of activities and the lure of winter sun, it's the warm and welcoming people who make it such a special destination. ■

Don't leave without...

Visiting a game reserve

With a bit of luck you'll see the big five – buffalo, elephant, rhinoceros, lion and leopard – as well as contributing to their conservation and reintroduction to the wild.



Tantalising your tastebuds

GOLD restaurant offers a Pan-African night of feasting and live entertainment for R220, or, for R190, you could expand your culinary skills by taking part in a CookUp with Kamamma to create mouth-watering African fusion food. Contact dreamcatcher@telkomsa.net for more information.



Standing atop Table Mountain

You can't visit Cape Town without enjoying the spectacular views from the city's central mountain. Take a cable car, which costs R145 return or R74 one-way, or climb one of the 100 different ways up.



Fact file

Currency: South African Rand, approx 14 Rand to the pound

Time difference: +2hours

Visa required? No but you'll need a valid passport that does not expire within 6 months and with at least one empty page for endorsements.

Health: No vaccinations are required and most of the main tourist destinations are malaria free. Tap water can be drunk throughout the country.

Weather: Cape Town has a Mediterranean climate. The summers are warm and dry (average temperature 27°C) and winters cool and wet (15°C).

Getting there: British Airways, Virgin Atlantic and South African Airways all fly direct to Cape Town for around £750 return, including taxes.

Responsible holidays specialists: Africa Inside Out www.africainsideout.com, Abang Africa Travel and Trust, www.abangafrica.com.

For more information: Visit www.tourismcapetown.co.za.