

The fairest of them all

Cape Town enjoys one of the most scenic natural settings in the world.
Laura Miller guides us around her beautiful hometown.

*Cape Town offers
picturesque vistas at
literally every turn.*

“This cape is the most stately thing and the fairest cape we saw in the whole circumference of the earth,” wrote Sir Francis Drake in 1580. Since then, nothing much has changed in terms of natural beauty, although modes of communication certainly have: “I’ve heard many times before that Cape Town is stunning,” twittered Lance Armstrong in March this year after completing the peninsula’s famous 109-kilometre Argus Cycle Tour. “That was no lie. What a place.”

Situated at the southwestern tip of South Africa and the African continent, Cape Town is dominated by the mood-setting Table Mountain, which cradles the busy commercial hub of the city between its flanks and the royal blue waters of the Atlantic Ocean. From the city bowl, Table Bay curls in a wide smile towards the West Coast and its wild flower plains, while in the opposite direction the scalloped coastline is fringed with the finest of white-sand beaches overlooked by the regal Twelve Apostles mountain range. Beyond lies awe-inspiring Chapman’s Peak, the magnificent Cape Point Nature Reserve, False Bay and its historic seaside towns, the forests of Tokai and Newlands, Constantia’s award-winning vineyards and the beautiful Kirstenbosch Gardens, to name but a few of Cape Town’s spectacular sights.

Cape Town is a premier tourist destination because of its diverse scenery, which offers something for everyone: outdoorsmen, wildlife lovers, foodies, wine fanatics and culture mavens. And it offers it in style. Visitors can experience world-class hotels, restaurants and shopping in and around the “mother city” as well as friendly service. Known



OPENING SPREAD: ANCUS PHOTO; THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: CORBIS, GETTY IMAGES

This page, from top: Colourful beach houses add zest to Kalk Bay; Cape Town is dominated by the mood-setting Table Mountain. Facing page, from top: The Cape region is a wine lover’s paradise with many award-winning vineyards; the Neethlingshof estate near Stellenbosch produces red, white and dessert wines.



as “the rainbow nation” due to its potpourri of people (the fact that there are 11 official languages says it all), South Africa is proud of its multiracial population and locals are keen to show off their country and engage with tourists. This was well demonstrated during the recent FIFA World Cup, hailed by all as a resounding success.



For those wanting to feast their eyes on natural beauty, Cape Town offers picturesque vistas at literally every turn. Taking the cable car up to the top of Table Mountain is an unforgettable experience, as is hiking up Lion’s Head at sunrise or sunset to enjoy, perhaps, the most remarkable 360-degree panorama in the world – the Table looming behind you, the city bowl to your right, Robben Island directly ahead, Sea Point and Signal Hill below you and the Twelve Apostles and their skirt of beaches to your left. The famous drive along Chapman’s Peak towards the Cape of Good Hope provides yet more breathtaking photo opportunities high above the Atlantic and at the drive’s end, the blinding white expanse of Noordhoek beach dotted with ship wrecks is a sun lover’s dream.

Some of the most iconic images associated with Cape Town are of Cape Point – not to be missed on your itinerary. The dramatic peninsula and nature reserve juts out into the blue like the prow of a mighty ship – nothing between it and Antarctica far to the south. Known as “The Cape of Good Hope” and taking up around 20 percent of the entire Cape Peninsula, this nature reserve is wild, unspoilt and an important haven for seabirds and other wildlife including ostrich, Cape mountain zebra and antelope such as bontebok, eland and red hartebees. Curious baboons are the most visible – cavorting through parking areas in the hope of food with bright-eyed babies snuggled to their chests.

Leaving Cape Point behind, the False Bay coastline is a foodie’s delight. Historic Simon’s Town and quaint Kalk Bay boast seaside restaurants such as Olympia Café and Harbour House where superb fare can be enjoyed with excellent local wines. However, a stiffer beverage may well be needed to dispel the adrenalin after a cage-diving

encounter with the bay’s less gentle inhabitants, the fearsome great white sharks.

And then there’s the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens. Founded in 1913 to preserve the country’s unique flora, Kirstenbosch covers 36 hectares on a 528-hectare estate once owned by Cecil John Rhodes. The estate is situated on the eastern slopes of Table Mountain and offers the ideal location for picnics, strolling and bird watching – as well as sunset concerts in the summer. It is also the starting point for a number of hikes including the steep Nursery Ravine and Skeleton Gorge routes up to the top of the mountain. Less strenuous contour paths take one south to Constantia Neck or north to



CORBIS



Cape Town is a premier tourist destination because of its diverse scenery, which offers something for everyone ...

Above: The Victoria & Alfred Waterfront is a prime shopping and dining destination. Facing page, from left to right: Enjoy watching the endearing antics of wild meerkats at Klein Karoo, a popular day trip destination from Cape Town; giraffes can be encountered at the Cape Peninsula Nature Reserve.

Rhode's Memorial, designed by Sir Herbert Baker, at the foot of Devil's Peak. The monument's stone lions have gazed imperiously across the Cape Flats to the distant Hottentots Holland Mountains since 1912 and have provided many a gleeful child a "ride" on their backs.

It is at the foot of the Hottentots Holland range that wine enthusiasts will find their mecca – once they've exhausted the historic vineyards of Constantia that is. The wine lands surrounding the university town of Stellenbosch and sleepy Franschhoek offer some of the world's finest wines, including Pinotage – South Africa's signature red wine varietal. Boschendal, Haute Cabriere, Delheim, Vergelegen, Buitenverwachting, Thelema, Spier, Neethlingshof, Murati – the names roll off your tongue ... and after a day's wine tasting you might well be rolling slightly too.

From viticulture to culture proper: Cape Town's melting pot of influences through the centuries has ensured a vibrant, cosmopolitan city. The central business district is small enough to stroll and any walking tour should start at the South African Museum, established in 1825 and housing more than one and a half million specimens. With Table Mountain as a backdrop, the museum is located above the Company Gardens – originally the Dutch East India Company's vegetable patch from which trade ships were restocked on their way east. Established by Jan van Riebeeck in 1652, it is

the oldest garden in the country and today offers shady respite to tourists, locals and squirrels alike. Also situated within the garden grounds are the Houses of Parliament, Saint George's Cathedral and the South African National Art Gallery with its impressive collection of African and European art. From the Cathedral, a wander down Saint George's Mall – a pedestrian-only lane lined with flower sellers and art stalls – leads one to vibey Green Market Square. One of the city's oldest markets, it offers visitors high-quality curios, jewellery and other snap-upable goods, as well as exceptional people-watching from the surrounding cafes.

Other must-see city sights include the Castle of Good Hope – completed in 1679 and the oldest surviving building in South Africa and the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront – the city's atmospheric harbour and a prime shopping and dining destination. It is from here that boats leave on day trips to Robben Island, where South Africa's hero, Nelson Mandela, was imprisoned for 27 years during the country's dark apartheid era.

Two weeks and you will barely scratch the surface of what Cape Town has to offer. You could spend that time experiencing Cape Town's beaches alone. But even a day in this city will make your life that much richer.

Singapore Airlines flies to Cape Town three times weekly.

PHOTOLIBRARY

Wildlife encounters

Most people equate South Africa with safaris and safaris with the "big five". This term was originally used by hunters, out to bag an elephant, lion, rhino, buffalo or leopard. Thankfully, today the only shots being taken are with cameras and these beautiful wild animals live as nature intended in the country's well-tended national parks and game reserves. While the best locations for safaris are in the Great Limpopo and Kgalagadi Transfrontier Parks, which incorporate Kruger National Park and the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park respectively, visitors to Cape Town can get a taste of what a safari is all about without leaving the Western Cape.

Aquila Private Game Lodge is located in the Klein Karoo and offers day trip safaris from Cape Town. The lodge has re-introduced the "big five" and other indigenous animals including giraffe and zebra to the area and also offers luxury accommodation for those wishing to stay overnight. www.aquilasafari.com

Sanbona Wildlife Reserve is also situated in the Klein Karoo, just three hours drive from Cape Town. The reserve boasts 54,000 hectares of undulating mountains and plains, indigenous flora



and fauna and San rock art. What makes Sanbona special is that it is home to the only free-roaming white lions in the world. It is also one of the few areas where the endangered riverine rabbit can be spotted in the wild. www.sanbona.com

Of course, these reserves can only give a safari "fix". For a more genuine Western Cape wildlife experience, try whale watching, swimming with penguins, shark cage-diving or walking among baboons.

South Africa is visited annually by southern right and humpback whales between June and November. The southern rights' breeding ground is the sheltered bays of the Western Cape coast, where the giant creatures

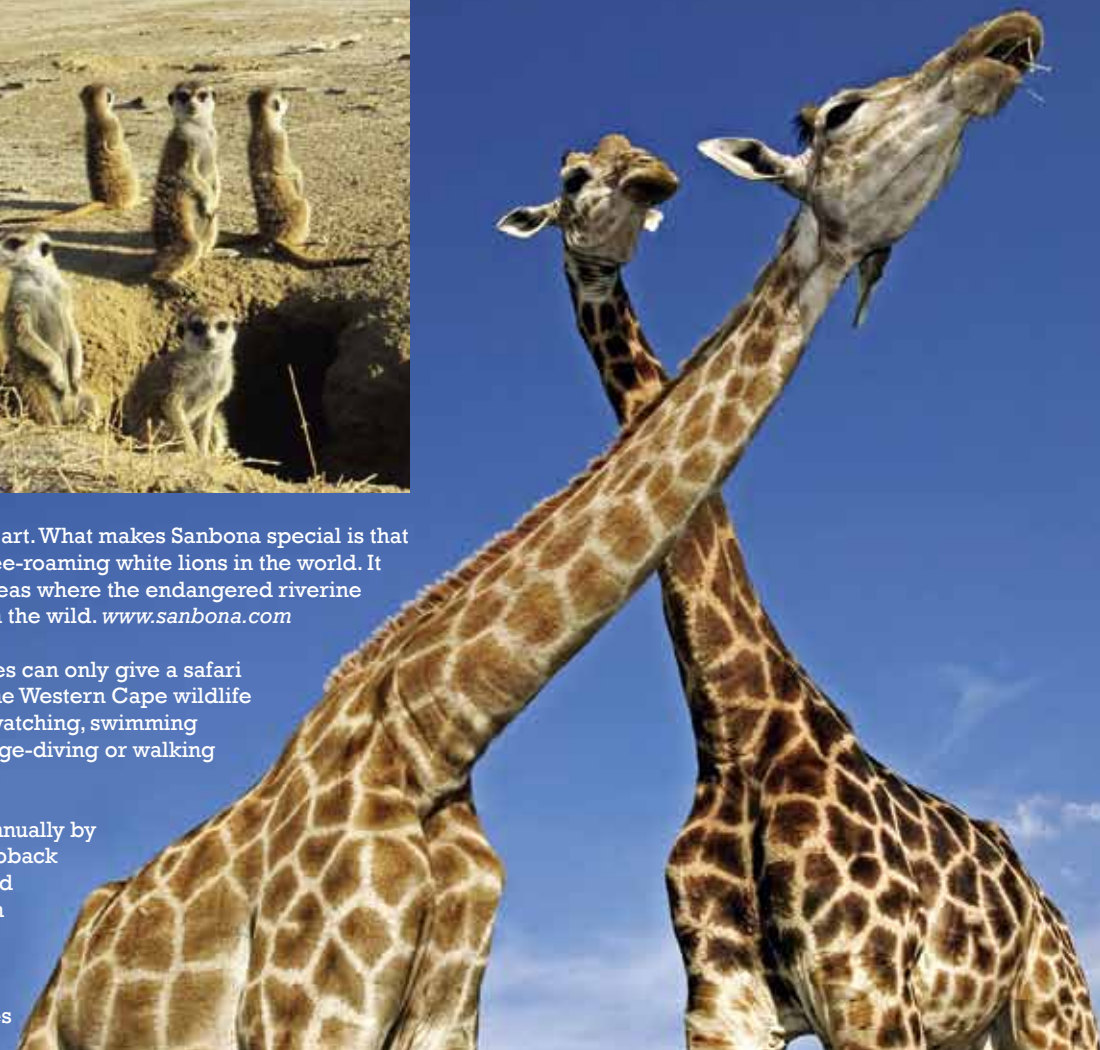
play, court and nurse their newborn calves, providing awesome land-based viewings. False Bay offers excellent sightings but possibly the best whale watching can be enjoyed from the town of Hermanus in Walker Bay – a two-hour drive from Cape Town.

African penguins are also known as "jack-ass" penguins due to their donkey-like bray. A protected colony can be found on Boulders Beach in Simon's Town. While the jade-toned water may be icy, it's worth taking a dip with a mask and fins just in case one of the gorgeous little chaps decides to check you out. The underwater life and kelp beds warrant a snorkel regardless.

For the more daring, the Western Cape offers some of the world's best shark cage diving, which gets you up close and personal with great white sharks. Offered in False Bay as well as Gansbaai (beyond Hermanus), this practice is criticised by some conservationists who fear that the sharks will learn to associate humans with food. However, the jury is still out and this is certainly a wild encounter to get your spine tingling. www.white-shark-diving.com

If you don't fancy getting wet, you can hang out with a troop of wild baboons that are habituated to humans in the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve instead. Organised two-hour walks allow small groups (maximum six people) to watch these fascinating animals as they eat, play and socialise. www.baboonmatters.org.za

ARCUS PHOTO



An insider’s guide

Cape Town offers visitors a plethora of options when it comes to wining, dining, shopping and activities. There is a restaurant to suit every occasion, whether you’re after views, seafood, authentic South African cuisine or old-world colonial charm.



Ellerman House

HOTELS

One&Only – Situated on the foreshore with stunning views of Table Mountain, this resort offers the first Nobu restaurant in Africa and an extensive spa on its own lushly landscaped island. Dock road, Victoria & Alfred Waterfront. Tel: +27 21 431 5888 <http://capetown.oneandonlyresorts.com/>

Ellerman House – Intimate and exclusive, this Relais & Chateaux establishment commands sea views all the way out to Robben Island. It also boasts a world-class spa and a wine cellar with over 7,500 handpicked bottles and is distinguished by the Ellerman House art collection, which includes works by contemporary South African artists. 180 Kloof Road, Bantry Bay. Tel: +27 21 430 3200 www.ellerman.co.za



One&Only

The Grand Daddy Hotel – Why should luxury exclude playfulness? The main talking point of this ideally located hotel is its “penthouse” trailer park, where local artists have designed seven two-sleeper vintage Airstream caravans. They share the view of Table Mountain with SA’s first rooftop cinema – The Pink Flamingo. 38 Long Street. Tel: +27 21 424 7247 www.granddaddy.co.za

FOOD

Bombay Bicycle Club – You go to this funky restaurant as much for the zany staff as for the great pastas. They’re all circus folk which isn’t surprising considering this tiny spot is an unacknowledged offshoot of the legendary SA dinner theatre road-show Madame Zingara. 158 Kloof Street,

Gardens. Tel: +27 21 423 6805 www.bombaybicycleclub.co.za

Harbour House – This dining destination gives new meaning to “on the rocks”. Feast on the freshest of seafood as waves crash below you. Afterwards, have a few “toots” in Polana, the tapas bar overlooking the Kalk Bay Harbour downstairs. Olympia Café is just down the road. Kalk Bay Harbour, Kalk Bay. Tel: +27 21 788 4133 www.harbourhouse.co.za

DRINK

La Med – The most perfect sundowner spot imaginable, this laidback restaurant cum bar claims to be “where the world meets Cape Town”. And it certainly does. Stroll in straight off Clifton or Camp’s Bay Beach and order a pizza or sushi platter with your cocktail. Bikinis, sand and great live music are the order of the day. Victoria Road, Camps Bay. Tel: +27 21 438 5600 www.lamed.co.za



Leopard Room Bar

Le Petite Ferme – Amazing restaurants abound in the Franschhoek Valley but this is one of the finest, boasting views that can only be described as heavenly. And if you sip on one too many of the region’s fine wines, why not stay the night? The five-star rooms offer private pools. Franschhoek Pass Road, Franschhoek. Tel: +27 21 876 3016/8 www.lapetiteferme.co.za

Leopard Room Bar – Romantic and rather carnal with its decadent furnishings and animal print cushions, this snazzy spot is ideal for a drink a deux, watching the sun setting over the Atlantic. Part of the five-star Twelve Apostles Hotel that boasts an unrivalled location with no other building in sight. Victoria Road, Camps Bay. Tel: +27 21 437 9000 www.12apostleshotel.com



Table Mountain Cableway

The Blue Peter – For unbeatable views of Table Mountain across Table Bay (the picture postcard shot), you can’t miss a drink at this vibey spot. Sit on the grass or one of the bench tables and watch the kite boarders doing somersaults above the waves. Popham Street, Bloubergstrand. Tel: +27 21 554 1956 www.bluepeter.co.za

SHOPPING

Greenmarket Square – Built in 1696, this cobbled square has served as a slave market, a fruit and vegetable market (hence the name) and a parking lot. Today it’s a popular craft and flea market selling everything from beaded keyrings to cotton sarongs and African artwork. Corner of Short and Longmarket Streets. www.greenmarketsquare.com

Cavendish Square – This exclusive shopping mall encompassing over 200 elite stores in the heart of Claremont is a fine place to pass a day. Browse through exclusive books, grab a coffee and giant muffin at Mugg & Bean, then get ready for serious shopping starting with the elegant Poetry store. Dreyer Street, Claremont. www.cavendish.co.za

Old Biscuit Mill – This attraction is home to day and night markets and a range of workshops and designer stores, delicious farm stalls and decadent cafes. And yes, it was once a biscuit mill. Don’t miss the Saturday morning market – and make sure you go hungry. 375 Albert Road, Woodstock. www.theoldbiscuitmill.co.za

DO

Table Mountain Cableway – From 8:30am to 6pm (weather permitting) the two cable cars take visitors up to the top of Table Mountain – a journey of five minutes – and back down

again when they’re ready. The rotating cable cars can carry 65 people and offer jaw-dropping views. Tel: +27 21 424 8181 <http://tablemountain.net/>


Helicopter Tour – What better way to experience “the fairest Cape” than from the air? Get your bearings and fabulous photos with a helicopter tour of the peninsula. Other options include airborne tours of the winelands and whale watching. www.cape-town-helicopter-tours.com

Robben Island – To see the cell where Nelson Mandela

was held as a political prisoner is moving in the extreme. The standard tour to Robben Island, today a World Heritage Site and museum, is 3.5 hours long including two 30-minute boat rides. www.robben-island.org.za

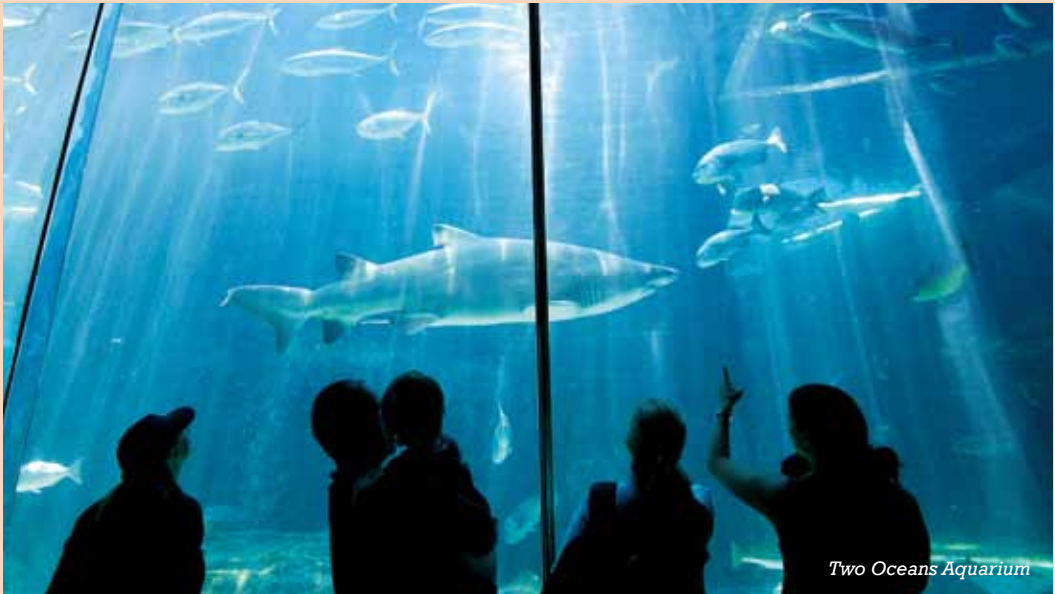
Two Oceans Aquarium – This mesmerising underwater nature reserve offers glimpses of the diverse life found off the South African coastline, including fish, invertebrates, mammals, reptiles and birds. Don’t miss the feeding of the predators at 3:30pm every day. Victoria & Alfred Waterfront. www.aquarium.co.za

For more information on Cape Town’s museums check out www.iziko.org.za.

For sassy tips on what’s hot and happening and where to find it, check out www.2oceansvibe.com. 



Greenmarket Square



Two Oceans Aquarium

FROM TOP: ARGUS PHOTO, PHOTOLIBRARY