

Itinerary Planner for the Western Cape

Self-drive itineraries aimed at Walkers



Walking on the Paul Cluver Estate, Green Mountain Trail (photo: Walks in Africa)

Overview

The Western Cape contains a vast array of things to do and regions to visit, all very different. The aim of this document is to give you a sense of the range of possibilities, suggest some itinerary outlines that work, and inform an itinerary planning discussion with us.

The key geographical and activity areas can all be linked easily by road, making a self-drive itinerary a great way to sample the very best of the Cape. There are also some great opportunities for walking and this itinerary planner is designed to help you make the most of what's on offer. It's also possible to avoid self-drive all together – some walking trips work best with a guide providing full logistics and other stages can be linked by transfers.

Key destinations and experiences, all thoroughly researched and experienced by Walks in Africa, are listed below. The second half of the document outlines several itinerary ideas. These are not cast in stone – all of the suggested experiences can be linked in a myriad of ways, depending upon time available and the order that works best. The list is not exhaustive.

Flexibility & budget considerations

It is possible to undertake worthwhile tours of the Western Cape whatever your budget and we can help devise tours to suit most pockets. Some of the experiences we list are for those with a higher budget, eg. Sanbona is a 5-star game reserve, and multiday, fully-supported private walking trips (guide, transport, catering) are not inexpensive unless you are travelling in a group of 4 or more people, but it is easy to put together excellent itineraries that suit lower and mid-range budgets. Note that certain walking trips and safaris commence on fixed days of the week, which affects sequencing. Most experiences are completely flexible.

Key Experiences and Accommodation

Cape Town & The Cape Peninsula



Cape Town is a place that many people logically start an itinerary, before heading out. The city and its immediate environs offer a vast array of things to do. So where to start and how long to spend here? Our recommendation is to aim spend 4 nights as a minimum ideally, assuming you are planning to move on and explore the Western Cape more fully over a fortnight. This will give you a day to unwind on arrival, before enjoying some of the key things to do:

- *Visit Robben Island, lunch and shop in the Waterfront, then relax at Clifton or Camps Bay beaches*
- *Enjoy a guided day hike on Table Mountain and/or in the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve*
- *Tour the Cape Peninsula by car – a dramatic coastal driving route, stopping at beaches, Cape Point and the penguin colony at Simonstoun*
- *Visit the Constantia Winelands then explore beautiful Kirstenbosch Gardens nearby*
- *If not going to stay there, tour the Stellenbosch and Franschhoek wine routes by car, or take a guide for the day – it's more informative and you won't need to watch the units!*

We have a list of carefully selected accommodation suiting a range of budgets. Note that it pays to book early to avoid disappointment - Cape Town has become hugely popular.

Hiking in Cape Town



The Cape Peninsula boasts some fantastic hiking routes, all easily accessed from city accommodation. In recent years, central sections of the Hoerikwaggo Trail have suffered from a land dispute, security concerns and a hut burning down. Our recommendation, endorsed by local guides, is to concentrate on the **Table Mountain National Park** (northern end of the Peninsula) and the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve (southern end), where hiking is both safe and exquisite. Some brilliant day hikes are on offer and we strongly recommend that these are guided. Certain 2-day, overnight trails are viable if preferred.

Cape Winelands



The Cape Winelands, notably Stellenbosch and Franschhoek, can be visited on a day tour from Cape Town. However, it's a beautiful area to dwell in and has some excellent and charming accommodation. Squeezing a couple of nights into a touring itinerary is strongly recommended. Visiting several wine estates, enjoying tastings and good food, is obviously a key thing to do, but there are also distractions for active people: of note is the

Mont Rochelle Nature Reserve, which has beautiful, accessible mountain walks; Boschendal estate has some good mountain biking routes.

Farm Stay in the Overberg



Grootvadersbosch is an historic, working Overberg farm in an idyllic setting beneath the Langeberg, just off the Garden Route. The homestead was built in 1735 and has been owned by the Moodie family for six generations. It holds great appeal for those seeking an antidote to hotel and safari camp living, and a glimpse at down-to-earth South African rural life – it's also a lovely place to walk and there is complete freedom to roam. The Grootvadersbosch Nature Reserve and Boosmansbos Wilderness Area offer scope for further exploration.

Klein Karoo via the R62 Route



Just over the folded mountain ridges of the coastal belt lies the Klein Karoo and its well-worth venturing here, skipping the less interesting, western stage of the Garden Route (you'll re-join it at George, where the best section starts). The R62, the main artery cutting east-west across the Klein Karoo, is a supremely scenic driving route which is getting a reputation as South Africa's "Route 66". You won't encounter much traffic, but might well spot the odd biker on a Harley. The R62 links scattered historic settler towns, including Calitzdorp (pictured), the port capital of South Africa, and there are some lovely properties to stay at. A favourite is **The Retreat at Groenfontein**, situated directly beneath the Swartberg.

The Garden Route



Arguably the best section of the Garden Route is the one that hugs the coast, heading east of George as far as the Tsitsikamma Forest beyond Plettenberg Bay. The coastal towns of Wilderness, Knysna and "Plett" are good places to stop and linger. Enjoy fine beaches, sweeping coastal vistas and lovely places to stay and relax. If you wish to be active there are good coastal and forest walks, sea kayaking and inland canoeing opportunities, and more besides. The **Dolphin Trail** is a supported coastal trail in the Tsitsikamma Forest area; day walks and mountain biking are easily accessed here too.

Sanbona Explorer Safari... and others further east



Sanbona Private Game Reserve is a successful and interesting conservation project occupying more than 50,000 Ha of the starkly beautiful semi-arid Klein Karoo landscape only 3½ hours' drive from Cape Town – it's perhaps the last place you'd expect to see a lion or a herd of elephants, but before the settlers moved in these species and many others used to roam here, and they have been gradually re-introduced. There are two upmarket permanent safari camps here (Dwyka being our favourite), but worth noting is the seasonally-operated Explorer Camp. This is an imaginative, back-to-basics tented camp which accommodates up to 6

persons only on a 3-day/2-night safari commencing on Fridays in the summer months. Walks are mixed with drives, according to group preference.

Other game reserves, both national (**Addo Elephant Park**) and private (**Shamwari, Kwandwe** and others) are located just east of Port Elizabeth and can easily be tagged on to the end of a Garden Route itinerary.... or fly to the Kruger, Zambia, Botswana etc!

Hermanus & The Hemel-en-Aarde



For a nice little side trip if you are heading up the Garden Route, Hermanus has a good deal to offer: during the whaling season (Jun-Dec, best Sep-Oct) you can enjoy land-based whale watching from the clifftops. There are good beaches, hiking trails in Fernkloof Nature Reserve, and a great little wine route in the Hemel-en-Aarde valley tucked behind the town; a guided trail linking farm stays in Hemel-en-Aarde is expected to come to fruition soon – please ask!

Multiday Hiking Trails in the Western Cape

One of the best ways to explore the mountain ranges of the Western Cape is on a private, fully supported excursion over 3 or 4 days. Many ranges have only very basic facilities and require you to carry a pack with all provisions in order to explore these (we can arrange it for strong hikers used to that that style of hiking), but others, such as the Cederberg and the Gamkaberg, have high quality self-catering camps and these work well for international visitors being looked after by a guide, who arranges the catering and all logistics from an agreed pick-up point, eg, Cape Town or the Winelands. Other trails are run on fixed dates for small groups, and can be joined provided there are places available.

Private, fully supported hiking excursions:

The Cederberg



Some of the Cape's best hiking can be found in the Cederberg. This 70,000 Ha Wilderness Area contains some significant peaks, the highest being **Sneeuberg** at 2027m, as well as fantastic rock formations, including the **Wolfberg Arch**, **Wolfberg Cracks** and the 20m high **Maltese Cross**. Hikes can be big (Sneeuberg is 9 hours) and the Wolfberg Cracks (left) offer some exciting scrambling and canyoning-style exploration. Three or four nights are recommended.

The Tiekloof Trail



This is a lesser known but very worthwhile 2-day trail in the **Gamkaberg**, an isolated range located in the heart of the Klein Karoo. Hike in rugged, classic **Klein Karoo** terrain, all within a protected reserve featuring interesting flora and fauna. Stay in excellent, private tented camps, fully catered by the guide. The middle night is spent on high at **Ou Kraal**, a rustic, refurbished, former herders' hut, with views off to the Swartberg and Outeniqua mountains.

Fixed date, small group trails:

The Green Mountain Trail



The GMT is a very enjoyable, high quality trail that is led by degree-qualified botanists who'll engage you on flora, conservation, Cape history and more besides. Both have seemingly endless supplies of enthusiasm for the habitats through which the trail passes. Throw in a wine tasting each day, delicious, "cut-above" food and exceptional home-from-home farm house accommodation, and this 4-day route is transformed into a full-on sensory experience.

If you wish to receive more detailed information on any of the above, please don't hesitate to ask us.

Outline Itinerary Ideas:

Cape Explorer I (incorporating the Cederberg)

- Day 1 (Sat)** Arrive Cape Town. Overnight at a recommended Hotel or Guest House
 - Day 2 (Sun)** At leisure in Cape Town. Overnight Cape Town
 - Day 3 (Mon)** Guided hike on Table Mountain. Overnight Cape Town
 - Day 4 (Tue)** Guided hike near Cape Point. Overnight Cape Town
 - Day 5 (Wed)** Travel to the Cederberg with a guide. Afternoon walk. Overnight in a chalet (catered by the guide)
 - Day 6 (Thu)** Day hike in the Cederberg (eg. Wolfberg Cracks and Arch). Overnight in a chalet (catered by the guide)
 - Day 7 (Fri)** Day hike in the Cederberg (eg. Sneeuberg & Maltese Cross). Overnight in a chalet (catered by the guide)
 - Day 8 (Sat)** Morning activity in the Cederberg, then drop off in the Winelands. Overnight at a recommended Hotel or Guest House near Franschhoek
 - Day 9 (Sun)** Optional hike in the Mont Rochelle Nature Reserve. R&R in the Winelands. Overnight near Franschhoek
 - Day 10 (Mon)** Drive the R62 into the Klein Karoo. Overnight at The Retreat at Groenfontein
 - Day 11 (Tue)** Enjoy walks at Groenfontein and explore, eg. to Calizdorp. Overnight at The Retreat at Groenfontein
 - Day 12 (Wed)** Drive to the Garden Route on the coast. Overnight in a recommended Hotel or Guest House in or near Plettenberg Bay
 - Day 13 (Thu)** R&R on the coast near "Plett". Overnight in or near Plettenberg Bay
 - Day 14 (Fri)** R&R on the coast near "Plett". Overnight in or near Plettenberg Bay
 - Day 15 (Sat)** Drive to Port Elizabeth and fly to Cape Town for International departure
- END of ITINERARY

Cape Explorer II (incorporating the Tierkloof Trail)

- Day 1 (Sat)** Arrive Cape Town. Overnight at a recommended Hotel or Guest House
- Day 2 (Sun)** At leisure in Cape Town. Overnight Cape Town
- Day 3 (Mon)** Guided hike on Table Mountain. Overnight Cape Town



- Day 4 (Tue)** Travel to and explore the Winelands. Overnight at a recommended Hotel or Guest House near Franschhoek
- Day 5 (Wed)** Optional hike in the Mont Rochelle Nature Reserve. R&R in the Winelands. Overnight near Franschhoek
- Day 6 (Thu)** Drive to Grootvadersbosch Farm. Short walk before dinner up at the Farmhouse. Overnight in The Top House (farm guest house)
- Day 7 (Fri)** Full morning hike on Grootvadersbosch property. Swim and R&R. Dinner at The Top House or up at the Farmhouse. Overnight in The Top House
- Day 8 (Sat)** 5-6 hour hike in the Bosmansbos Wilderness Area. Dinner at the Farmhouse. Overnight in The Top House
- Day 9 (Sun)** Drive to the Gamkaberg Nature Reserve and RV with the guide. Overnight in a tented camp, fully catered
- Day 10 (Mon)** Hike day 1 of the Tierkloof Trail. Overnight at Ou Kraal herder's hut, fully catered
- Day 11 (Tue)** Hike day 2 of the Tierkloof Trail. Overnight in a tented camp, fully catered
- Day 12 (Wed)** Drive to the Garden Route on the coast. Overnight in a recommended Hotel or Guest House in or near Plettenberg Bay
- Day 13 (Thu)** R&R on the coast near "Plett". Overnight in or near Plettenberg Bay
- Day 14 (Fri)** R&R on the coast near "Plett". Overnight in or near Plettenberg Bay
- Day 15 (Sat)** Drive to Port Elizabeth and fly to Cape Town for International departure
- END of ITINERARY

Cape Explorer III (more upmarket)

- Day 1 (Sat)** Arrive Cape Town. Overnight at a recommended Hotel or Guest House
- Day 2 (Sun)** At leisure in Cape Town. Overnight Cape Town
- Day 3 (Mon)** Guided hike on Table Mountain. Overnight Cape Town
- Day 4 (Tue)** Guided hike near Cape Point. Overnight Cape Town
- Day 5 (Wed)** Travel to and explore the Winelands. Overnight at a recommended Hotel or Guest House near Franschhoek
- Day 6 (Thu)** Optional hike in the Mont Rochelle Nature Reserve. R&R in the Winelands. Overnight near Franschhoek
- Day 7 (Fri)** Join a small group, 2-night safari at Sanbona Explorer Camp
- Day 8 (Sat)** Sanbona Explorer Safari
- Day 9 (Sun)** Enjoy a comfy night at Sanbona Dwyka Lodge
- Day 10 (Mon)** Final game drive and brunch at Dwyka. Drive to Porcupine Hills ready for the Green Mountain Trail (GMT)
- Day 11 (Tue)** Hike day 1 of the GMT. Overnight at Porcupine Hills
- Day 12 (Wed)** Hike day 2 of the GMT. Overnight at Wildekrans Country House
- Day 13 (Thu)** Hike day 3 of the GMT. Overnight at Wildekrans Country House
- Day 14 (Fri)** Hike day 4 of the GMT. Depart after wine tasting and lunch and travel to Hermanus. Overnight in a recommended Hotel or Guest House in Hermanus
- Day 15 (Sat)** Relax in Hermanus before afternoon drive to the airport. International departure

END of ITINERARY

Cape Explorer IV (sample 3-week itinerary)

- Day 1 (Sun)** Arrive Cape Town. Overnight at a recommended Hotel or Guest House
- Day 2 (Mon)** At leisure in Cape Town. Overnight Cape Town
- Day 3 (Tue)** Guided hike on Table Mountain. Overnight Cape Town
- Day 4 (Wed)** Guided hike near Cape Point. Overnight Cape Town
- Day 5 (Thu)** Travel to and explore the Winelands. Overnight at a recommended Hotel or Guest House near Franschhoek
- Day 6 (Fri)** Optional hike in the Mont Rochelle Nature Reserve. R&R in the Winelands. Overnight near Franschhoek
- Day 7 (Sat)** Drive to Grootvadersbosch Farm. Short walk before dinner up at the Farmhouse. Overnight in The Top House (farm guest house)
- Day 8 (Sun)** Full morning hike on Grootvadersbosch property. Swim and R&R. Dinner at The Top House or up at the Farmhouse. Overnight in The Top House
- Day 9 (Mon)** 5-6 hour hike in the Bosmansbos Wilderness Area. Dinner at the Farmhouse. Overnight in The Top House
- Day 10 (Tue)** Drive the R62 into the Klein Karoo. Overnight at The Retreat at Groenfontein
- Day 11 (Wed)** Enjoy walks at Groenfontein and explore, eg. to Calizdorp. Overnight at The Retreat at Groenfontein
- Day 12 (Thu)** Drive over the superb Swartberg Pass to Prince Albert. Overnight in a Guest House in Prince Albert
- Day 13 (Fri)** Drive to the Garden Route on the coast. Overnight at Moontide Guest Lodge in Wilderness
- Day 14 (Sat)** Explore the Wilderness section of the Garden Route National Park, exploring by foot or in canoes. Overnight Moontide Guest Lodge
- Day 15 (Sun)** Continue along the Garden Route to "Plett". Overnight in a recommended Hotel or Guest House in or near Plettenberg Bay
- Day 16 (Mon)** R&R on the coast near "Plett". Overnight in or near Plettenberg Bay
- Day 17 (Tue)** R&R on the coast near "Plett". Overnight in or near Plettenberg Bay
- Day 18 (Wed)** Drive beyond Port Elizabeth to a national or private game reserve to commence a safari in the afternoon. Overnight in a safari camp
- Day 19 (Thu)** Enjoy morning and afternoon safaris. Overnight in a safari camp
- Day 20 (Fri)** Enjoy morning and afternoon safaris. Overnight in a safari camp
- Day 21 (Sat)** Drive to Port Elizabeth and fly to Cape Town for International departure
- END of ITINERARY

Onward travel

Walks in Africa is highly experienced at arranging itineraries across South Africa and the wider Southern Africa Region. In addition to South Africa, we cover Zambia, Botswana, Namibia, Malawi and Zimbabwe.

Continued overleaf

General Weather Patterns

South Africa's coldest weather occurs between June and September. Although Cape Town and the south coast experience periodic cold fronts, the main inland plateau (the *highveld*) and north western reaches of the country have dry winters - this is the best time of year for game-viewing in many of the country's game reserves as the lack of water forces wildlife to congregate around water holes, and low vegetation means that it's difficult for animals to hide. The opposite is true of Cape Town and the Garden Route, which have wet winters, and which are usually at their best between November and May. Whale-spotting is possible between June and December (best September and October) on the south coast of the Western Cape. For general touring, South Africa is a good destination all year round, with local emphasis changing according to the season.