

South Africa - Best of the Cape

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London.
Day 2/6	Wildlife excursions from Cape Town.
Day 7/8	Wildlife excursions from Hermanus.
Day 9	Depart Cape Town.
Day 10	Arrive London.

Departs

August/September

Focus

Birds, Cape flora, mammals and other wildlife

Grading

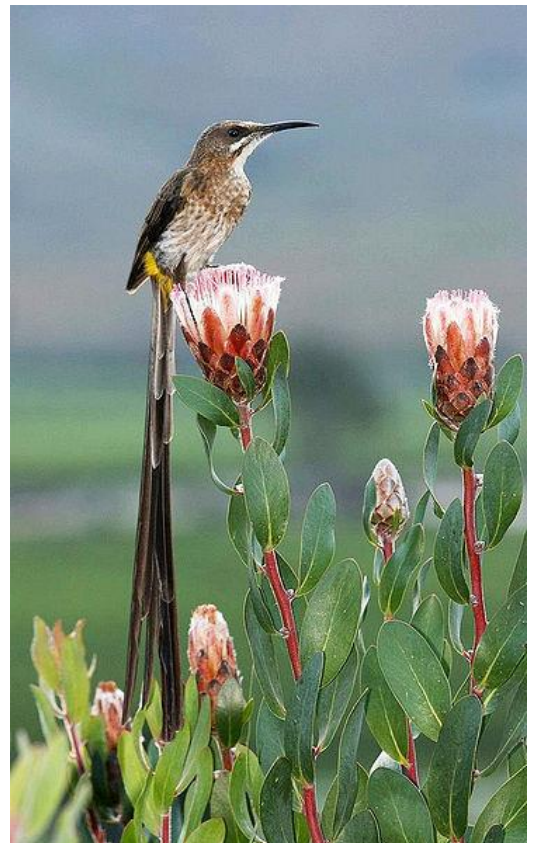
Grade A (except optional Table Mountain climb/descent)

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ZAF05) or brochure

Highlights:

- Spectacular scenery of South Africa's Western Cape
- Cape Town, Table Mountain & Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens
- Southern Right Whales in Walker Bay, Hermanus
- Endemic birds including Cape Sugarbird & Cape Rockjumper
- Spring flowers in the West Coast National Park
- Endemic Fynbos vegetation on the Cape Peninsula
- African Penguins at Boulders Beach & Stoney Point
- Optional seabird pelagic
- Visit Robben Island, Nelson Mandela's notorious prison
- Expertly guided by one of our South African naturalists



*Images from top: Table Mountain & Cape Sugarbird on protea
All images courtesy SATA & Alan Manson*



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Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations may necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Depart London

We leave London's Heathrow Airport this evening on board a scheduled British Airways flight bound for Cape Town.

Day 2

Noordhoek

We will arrive at Cape Town International Airport this morning after our overnight flight. There we will be met by our South African specialist wildlife guide who will accompany us for the duration of this holiday. After loading the vehicles we will head towards Noordhoek, a small town located on the Fynbos-covered slopes of the northern Cape Peninsula and our base for the first 5 nights of the tour. Soon after leaving the airport our view will be dominated by the dark brooding slopes of Table Mountain, the now iconic flat-topped mountain that looms over Cape Town and its surroundings. As we near its precipitous slopes we turn south through the city's affluent suburbs, over the spectacular Ou Kaapse Weg (Old Cape Road) Pass and down into Noordhoek itself.

After freshening up, we will spend the rest of the afternoon enjoying our first taste of Cape wildlife. Our first stop will be at the Rondevlei Wetlands on the Cape Flats. As we approach Rondevlei we will search the roadside trees and scrub for such species as Cape Robin-Chat, Cape Canary, Karoo Prinia, Burchell's Coucal, Cape Francolin and Acacia Pied Barbet, to name a few, whilst overhead, African Black, Little, Alpine and White-rumped Swifts wheel around after insects.

Inside the reserve itself, several hides overlook the marsh affording excellent views of a wide variety of water and marshland birds which should include African Purple Swamphen, African Marsh Harrier, Caspian Tern, African Darter, Malachite Kingfisher, White-breasted Cormorant and Black-crowned Night Heron. The Strandfontein Sewage Works lie close to Rondevlei and, whilst this spot may not be included on the more standard Cape Town

tours, it is a must for any visiting birdwatcher or wildlife enthusiast! Here we will be able to sift through the numerous ducks and waders that often crowd the pools along with Great White Pelican, Glossy Ibis, both species of flamingo, Maccoa Duck and if fortunate maybe even a Red-necked Phalarope.

If time permits we will stop at the Silvermine Nature Reserve on our way back to Noordhoek. Here we will be able to enjoy our first experience of the Fynbos, a totally unique habitat confined to the Western Cape region of South Africa. Fynbos is a collective term used to describe the shrubby, heath-like plants such as the Ericas, Proteas and Restios, which dominate the Cape Floral Kingdom (one of only eight worldwide). Over 8,500 different plant species are found here, more than in some of the tropical rain forests of South America! Many



of these are endemic to the Cape and have adapted over the millennia to tolerate regular bush fires and sandy infertile soils. Indeed, the flora of the Fynbos has many similarities with those of the West Australian bushland, the Mediterranean Macchia, and Californian Chapparal. Furthermore, since our tour is timed to coincide with the start of the South African spring this unique habitat will be in full flower and awash with colour.

Not surprisingly, the Fynbos supports many endemic bird species found nowhere else in the world such as Cape Sugarbird, Orange-breasted and Malachite Sunbirds and Cape Siskin. Other species to look out for include Karoo Prinia, Ground Woodpecker and Bokmakierie, a beautiful yellow, grey and black shrike.

Day 3

Cape Peninsula, overnight Noordhoek

We will spend today exploring the spectacular landscapes of the Cape of Good Hope Reserve, which forms part of the greater Cape Peninsula National Park. This 75 kilometre mountainous peninsula, the south-western most tip of Africa, is edged by one of the most scenic stretches of coastline in the world, one that was even remarked upon by Sir Frances Drake in 1580 as “...the fairest Cape we saw in the whole circumference of the Earth”. The rugged backbone of the Cape is carpeted in the aforementioned fragile and beautiful Fynbos flora which should be in full bloom during our tour.



En route to the Cape we will stop at Boulders Beach to have a look at one of only two mainland colonies of the African Penguin. Despite the encroaching development the penguins are thriving (nearly 1,000 pairs) and you are assured wonderfully close views of these endearing creatures lining the beach and bobbing in the surf. Whilst the penguins seem so at home here it is interesting to note that the first pioneering pair only arrived in 1985 and numbers have been increasing ever since. Leaving Boulders Beach we will drive south along the edge of False Bay stopping occasionally to scan for

the Southern Right Whales which are regularly seen in this area. These whales visit the South African coast in thankfully increasing numbers to calve and to feed between June and October, returning to Antarctic waters in the southern hemisphere's summer months. The coastline from the Cape to Hermanus must rank as one of the world's very best whale watching destinations and we should be always be on the look out for these leviathans whenever we are on the coast.



At the Cape of Good Hope Reserve we are sure to enjoy the fine range of flowers typical of the Fynbos (numerous species of *Protea*, *Leucospermum*, *Leucodendron* etc.), we also hope to see the rare Bontebok, one of Africa's rarest and, without doubt, most beautiful antelopes. Other mammals that may be seen today include Chacma Baboon, Cape Fur Seal, Common Dolphin, Cape Mountain Zebra, Eland and Cape Grysbok. Amongst a range of birds, such species as Cape Francolin, African Black Oystercatcher, Cape Grassbird, Bokmakierie, Southern Boubou, Southern Double-collared Sunbird and Yellow Bishop are all possibilities. In addition, patches of flowering proteas are sure to hold Cape Sugarbird and Orange-breasted Sunbirds whilst it may seem somewhat out of place to watch Ostrich feeding on the beach backed by the crashing waves of the Southern Ocean.

We will also have the opportunity of visiting Cape Point itself, home of numerous Rock Hyrax, Red-winged Starlings and Cape Cormorants. After a full day exploring the Cape Peninsula we will return to Noordhoek for our second night.

Day 4

Pelagic, overnight Noordhoek



Early this morning we will board our boat, weather permitting, at Simonstown Harbour for a day at sea spent searching for pelagic birds (not included in the tour cost and payable directly to the boat owners). The south-western offshore waters of South Africa provide some of the most exciting seabird watching the world has to offer. Due to the nutrient rich cold Benguela current's upwelling along the continental shelf, some 40 nautical miles offshore, seabirds are abundant. Albatrosses such as Black-browed, Yellow-nosed and Shy

Albatross glide effortlessly over the sea whilst a variety of their smaller cousins - petrels, prions and shearwaters - will test even the most knowledgeable sea-birders skills to the limit. If fortunate we may cross paths with the magnificent Wandering Albatross (a species with the largest wing-span of any bird) whilst other species to look out for include African Penguin, Wilson's and Black-bellied Storm Petrel, Great Shearwater, Pomarine, Long-tailed Skua and Subantarctic Skua, Northern Giant Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, Cory's and Manx Shearwater, Pintado (Cape) Petrel, Broad-billed Prion and Great-winged Petrel to name but a few!

Our pelagic usually arrives back into Simonstown around 1400 hours, although this will be dependent on weather and on our success with the seabirds. After returning to our guesthouse to freshen up we will spend the rest of the day further exploring nearby wildlife sites. We spend a third night in Noordhoek.

Day 5

Table Mountain, overnight Noordhoek

After breakfast we will spend the day exploring Table Mountain and Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens (weather and tablecloth permitting!). From Noordhoek we will take the dramatic, world renown, Chapman's Peak coastal drive to the cable car station in Cape Town. From here we will join the spectacular cable-car ride to the top of Table Mountain and, after enjoying the beautiful views of the city, explore the surrounding slopes in search of birds and plants. The weather up here can be notoriously fickle, but if kind, we will continue our exploration by walking down to the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens where we plan to spend the rest of the afternoon. Should the weather not permit this, then we will take the cable-car back down and drive to the gardens.



Delicately nestled on the eastern slopes of Table Mountain, this 830 hectare reserve, of which only 60 hectares is cultivated, not only offers a fabulous collection of Cape flora but is one of the region's best birdwatching spots. Kirstenbosch commands a spectacular setting. The high ramparts of Table Mountain reach to almost 3,000 feet above whilst to the east the views stretch out across the southern suburbs of Cape Town to the far-off mountains of the Hottentots Hollands Range. Birds around should include Brimstone Canary, Southern Boubou, Olive

Thrush, Cape Batis, Speckled Mousebird, Cape Bulbul, Southern Double-collared Sunbird and Cape Canary whilst our walk up Skeleton Gorge should produce good views of Forest Canary, African Paradise Flycatcher, African Olive Pigeon, Sombre Greenbul and Lemon Dove.

At the end of the day we return back to the Cape Peninsula to overnight at our comfortable guesthouse in Noordhoek.

Day 6

West Coast National Park, overnight Noordhoek

We need to make an early start this morning and be on the road no later than 0630 hours to beat the Cape Town traffic. Today we will be heading north to the West Coast National Park, a spectacular 27,000 hectare reserve located approximately 100 kilometres to the north of Cape Town. The West Coast National Park lies immediately south of the coastal town of Langebaan and protects a large tidal lagoon, shoreline and the rocky Postberg peninsula. Life here is dominated by the cold, nutrient rich, Benguela current which accounts not only for the huge kelp beds and abundance of sea-fish, lobster, seabirds and seals, but also the arid climate and cool sea breezes. We hope to arrive at the West Coast National Park around 0830 hours at which point we can start to familiarise ourselves with the park's abundant wildlife. Ostrich are commonly seen striding along the edge of the roads whilst other smaller species to look out for include Black-shouldered Kite, Southern Black Korhaan, Common Fiscal, Chestnut-vented Titbabbler, Karoo Scrub Robin, Bokmakierie, Cape Sparrow, White-throated

Canary, Cape Bunting and a variety of larks. This is also our best opportunity to look for the rare and beautiful Black Harrier.

We also hope the early spring rains have been kind for if they have the West Coast National Park will be awash with colour. The Postberg section of the park is only open from August through September when the flowers are at their best. This is the southern edge of the great spring flowering that carpets Namaqualand a little further to the north. It is a spectacular and colourful sight. The meadows are rocky hills are painted in the yellows, reds and purples of a wide variety of daisies and other flowers. Through this kaleidoscope of colour stride a variety of mammals including Bontebok, Eland, Cape Mountain Zebra and Springbok. whilst offshore lines of Cape Gannets track north and south from their breeding colonies and Southern Right Whales fluke and dive.

Before returning to Cape Town we visit a hide overlooking mudflats of the Langebaan Lagoon a wetland of international importance. The Lagoon harbours thousands of waders migrating from the northern hemisphere including Little Stint, Bar-tailed Godwit, Greenshank, Marsh Sandpiper plus more resident species such as Black-winged Stilt, Three-banded Plover, White-fronted Plover and Kittlitz's Plover. At the end of the day we retrace our steps back to the Cape for our final night in Noordhoek.

Days 7 & 8

Hermanus

This morning we must leave the Cape Peninsula and head a little way east to our second base in the coastal town of Hermanus. Despite the fact that Hermanus is less than a two hour drive from Cape Town it will take us most of the day to reach for there is so much to do and see en-route. Our first stop will be at the small Helderberg Nature Reserve. All five fynbos bird endemics are present in this attractive and compact reserve. These include the beautiful Cape Rockjumper, a much sought after but elusive species that occurs along the cliffs of the Helderberg Mountain. Grey-wing Francolin, Cape Francolin, Cape Sugarbird, African Olive Pigeon, Cape Robin-Chat, Sentinel Rock Thrush, Cape Batis and Ground Woodpecker are also possible in this beautiful reserve.



Our journey continues along the spectacular mountainous coastline between the communities of Gordon's Bay and Kleinmond. Southern Right Whales are frequently seen out in False Bay and we will stop and scan at a variety of vantage points. We have a backup plan for Cape Rockjumper near to the small community of Rooi Els, but if successful at Helderberg we will probably continue on to the Stony Point Penguin Colony, the second of the two land based African Penguin colonies, smaller than

Boulders Beach but still worth a visit. There should also be time to explore the Harold Porter Botanical Gardens, a great place for birds as well as the region's fascinating flora.



We aim to arrive in Hermanus late afternoon where we will check into our comfortable hotel for our final two nights of the tour. The town of Hermanus is located on the northern shoreline of the Walker Bay Whale Reserve, the most important Southern Right Whale breeding and calving grounds in South Africa. It is undoubtedly the very best land-based whale watching destination in the world. Boats are not needed here to enjoy these amazing leviathans, the animals come very close inshore and are frequently seen less than 100 metres from the cliffs, often at the edge of the surf! Mothers with small calves are frequently seen as are mating pairs. Whilst the whales often stay close to the waters surface (one of the reasons why this species was the 'right whale' to hunt), tail flukes are frequently raised as the animals make the deeper dives. If fortunate you may even witness that most spectacular of whale

behaviour, a full breach, whereby the huge animal leaps clear of the water to return with a tremendous splash. Such behaviour is not uncommon in Walker Bay and be sure to keep your eye on a breaching whale for they often leap three or more times in a row!

For those who wish, we will also offer the opportunity to enjoy these gentle giants from the water by joining a whale watching cruise out into Walker Bay. The excursion can last anywhere from one to three hours depending on the location of the whales and the sea conditions out in the bay. This is an optional cruise and not included in the tour price (see page 7 for more information).

Day 9

Depart Cape Town

This morning we return to Cape Town by the direct route for our final day in South Africa (a journey of around two hours). You are free today to explore the city or perhaps take a three hour excursion to Robben Island. Robben Island is most famous – or infamous – for having been the isolated prison of former South African President Nelson Mandela and many other black political dissidents. A number of these former prisoners now guide visitors around the island, providing a uniquely personal insight into its recent history. Around mid-afternoon we must make the short journey back to Cape Town International Airport where we must say goodbye to our local guides and check-in for our mid-evening flight back to London.

Day 10

Arrive London

We will arrive back at London Heathrow early this morning.

Weather

We will be travelling to the Cape in the southern spring, when the weather can be somewhat fickle. Around Cape Town the climate is typically 'Mediterranean' and the winter rains have usually ended. Daytime temperatures will vary between around 18°C and 25°C, although it can be cooler on occasion and night-time temperatures are

lower. Whilst conditions should generally be settled, pleasant and comfortable, the weather in the Cape can be stormy and unpredictable! It will also be cold out on the water. Unfortunately, this is one destination where you need to be prepared, and pack, for any eventuality!

Tour grading

Grade A. This is an easy tour suitable for those with an average fitness level who enjoy walking. We plan to spend as much of the holiday as possible on foot walking on good trails. It should be noted that some of the trails on the Cape Peninsula and Table Mountain can be steep and uneven in places and the optional walk from Table Mountain down to Kirstenbosch Botanic Gardens can be quite strenuous.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included in the cost of this holiday. We first stay in the 4-star De Noordhoek Hotel, nestled at the foot of Chapmans Peak in a tranquil village, whilst the final two nights are spent at the comfortable Windsor Hotel which overlooks the sea in Hermanus. All rooms have private facilities.

N.B. Please note that, subject to availability at the hotels, we sometimes operate this itinerary in reverse, starting with two nights in Hermanus and ending with five nights in Noordhoek on the Cape Peninsula. This will in no way affect the wildlife content of the holiday, but if you have any questions please call 01962 733051 or email info@naturetrek.co.uk

Your transport

We use 8-seater Volkswagen minibuses for this tour. In these we carry six passengers, plus your guide who is also your driver. As there are only five passenger window seats, positions in the vehicle must be rotated to ensure that everyone has a window seat for five sixths of the time! You should be aware – particularly if you wish to take photographs – that one window does not open. Please note that we plan to spend as much time as possible on this holiday on foot and the vehicles will mostly be used for getting from A to B.

Extra expenses

Please note that the following expenses are excluded from the cost of the holiday, subject to change and are paid locally. 1) Pelagic trip at approximately 2,995 Rand per person. 2) Whale watching at approximately 1,350 Rand per person. Plus dinks, tips, laundry, souvenirs and all items of a personal nature.

Boat trips

We exclude the costs of the two boat trips from the tour price to give clients the option of staying on shore if they wish. Whilst the wildlife rewards are very worthwhile, the trips are not for everyone and sea conditions can be rough on occasion. These trips do have to be booked well in advance, however, so if you would like to join them please let the Naturetrek office know on booking, or as soon as possible afterwards. Payment is made direct to the boat owners in South Africa. Your guides will arrange alternative excursions for those not wishing to head out to sea.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to South Africa. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/south-africa or telephone 0870 6060290 prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read the Naturetrek terms and conditions in the back of our brochure or on our website, and then book either online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, by calling us on 01962 733051, or by completing and returning the booking form in the brochure together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us on 01962 733051.
