

Wild Flowers of the Cape & Namaqualand

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London.
Day 2	Worcester.
Day 3/4	Clanwilliam.
Day 5/7	Namaqua National Park & Springbok.
Day 8/9	Nieuwoudtville.
Day 10	Langebaan.
Day 11/12	Cape Peninsula.
Day 13	Depart Cape Town.
Day 14	Arrive London.

Departs

August.

Focus

A general wildlife tour with a particular emphasis on the region's colourful spring flowers.

Grading

Grade A – Easy to moderate day walks.

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code ZAF10).

Highlights:

- Spectacular floral displays in Namaqua National Park.
- Botanise amongst the unique fynbos vegetation of the Cape Peninsula.
- African Penguins & Southern Right Whales.
- Abundant birdlife including Bokmakierie & the endemic Cape Sugarbird.
- Bontebok, Springbok, Eland & other mammals.
- Led by expert Naturetrek botanist & local naturalist guide.



From top: Gemsbok amongst Namaqualand flowers, Cape Sugarbird & King Protea (photos by Shutterstock images & Paul Stanbury).



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Introduction

Every August and September, as the UK begins its inevitable slide towards autumn and then winter, 9,500 kilometres to the south the mountains, deserts and grasslands of South Africa's Western and Northern Cape Provinces burst into life. Here, the start of the austral spring is marked – winter rains permitting – by an explosion of colour, as a kaleidoscope of flowers bloom (the majority of which are endemic to the region) and carpet the land from the waved-pounded mountains of the Cape Peninsula north to the rolling arid hills of Namaqualand. This tour is timed to coincide with the region's 'flower season', the intensity of which is controlled by the extent and timing of South Africa's winter rains.



Itinerary

Day 1

Depart London

We depart from London Heathrow in the early evening on board our scheduled British Airways or South African Airways flight bound for Cape Town.

Day 2

Worcester

We will arrive at Cape Town International Airport this morning after our overnight flight. There we will be met by our local South African specialist wildlife guide who will also accompany us for the duration of the tour. After loading the vehicles, we will head towards Worcester, a pleasant interior town nestled between several imposing mountain ranges. Here, a particular highlight will be a visit to the Karoo Desert National Botanical Garden. The site covers an area of 154 hectares, of which 11 are cultivated, and focuses on the succulent flora and other species adapted to this arid region. Nearly 3,000 species are represented in the collection with an additional 400 species growing, naturally, in the wilder parts. Cape Grey Mongoose, Angulate Tortoise and a variety of birds are also commonly seen.

Day 3 & 4

Clanwilliam

From Worcester we will move north as we make our way to Clanwilliam, situated around 100 meters above sea level and sandwiched between the Olifants River and the foot of the Cederberg Mountains. The town dates from the 1700's and the name was given by Sir John Cradock, Governor of the Cape at the time, who named it after his father-in-law, who had the title of Earl of Clanwilliam. Today it has the typical Karoo town feel, with wide, tree-lined streets, Cape Dutch style architecture and a wonderful old Dutch reformed church as a centrepiece. It is also

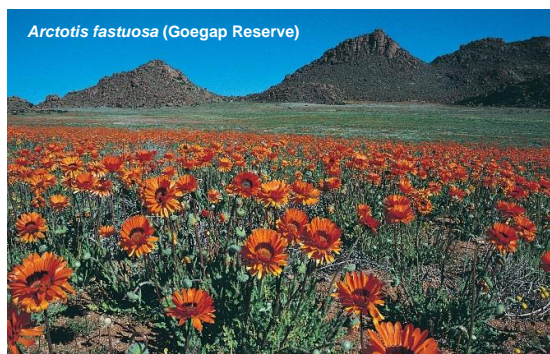
the first place that Rooibos tea was cultivated commercially, back in the 1930's, by district surgeon and botanist Dr Pieter Le Fras Nortier.

We will be staying at the northern end of the town, near to the orchards and vineyards along the Olifants River floodplain. We will spend a full day exploring the fynbos of the rugged sandstones of the Cederberg mountains, where an abundance of flowers includes a rich bulbous and succulent flora. Combined with this, the Sevilla Rock Art Trail offers some of the finest examples of the rock paintings, left behind by the San people who inhabited the area for thousands of years. The birdlife here is also interesting and includes Verreaux's and Booted Eagles, Jackal Buzzard, Ground Woodpecker, Layard's Tit-Babbler and others. If time permits, we will conclude our stay in Clanwilliam with a visit to Ramskop Nature Reserve.

Day 5 – 7

Namaqua National Park & Springbok

From Clanwilliam we move north into the Namaqualand region, well known for its carpets of 'Namaqualand daisies' and other spring annuals. We will be based in a comfortable hotel in the small town of Kamieskroon for three nights whilst we explore the Namaqua National Park and other reserves north to the community of Springbok. Our day in the Namaqua National Park is likely to be one of the highlights of the tour. The park, which covers over 700 square kilometers, is home to an estimated 3,500 species of plant, of which up to 1,000 may be endemic to Namaqualand! It also holds the world's greatest diversity of succulent plants and is the only declared desert 'Biodiversity Hotspot' on Earth! Hopefully the region would have received good winter rains before our



visit, which should result in a spectacular display of wildflowers. During our time in the park we will explore the Skilpad circular flower route and also go in search of the park's other wildlife which, if fortunate, may include the Speckled Tortoise, the smallest tortoise in the world and the creature after which the 'Skilpad Circuit' gets its name.

On our second full day – depending on the extent and location of the best flowering – will either head north to Springbok and the Goegap Nature Reserve or explore the nearby Kamiesberg Mountains. Both sites are rich in wildflowers and should provide some interesting botanical gems in addition to a selection of mammals and birds, including Gemsbok, Springbok, Hartmann's Mountain Zebra, Layard's Warbler, Southern Black Korhaan, Verreaux's Eagles, Ludwig's Bustard and many others.

Day 8 – 9

Nieuwoudtville

This morning we will head back south to the small town of Nieuwoudtville in the Bokkeveld Mountains. Here we will stay for two nights in a comfortable, but simple, guesthouse whilst we explore the rolling hills of the 'renosterveld', a vegetation type characterised by small shrubs and a rich annual and bulbous flora. In the early spring this usually arid region of South Africa erupts into a kaleidoscope of colour and, if the winter rains have been good, the flowers can be breathtaking!



The mix of arid habitats around Nieuwoudtville is particularly rich in bulbs, which are likely to include a variety of *Moraea* species, looking like delicate irises, patches of orange *Homerias*, *Sparaxis elegans* in both orange and white forms, the rare *Sparaxis tricolor* and several species of *Gladiolus*, plus *Lachenalias*, *Tulbaghias* and *Geissorhizas*. Indeed, in total over 1,300 species of plant have been recorded in this region, of which 266 are succulent Karoo endemics! We do, however, need to raise our eyes away from the ground from time to time as this region of

the Western Cape is also rich in birds. Species to look out for include Grey-backed Sparrow Lark, Rufous-eared and Cinnamon-breasted Warblers, Layard's Tit-babbler, Grey Tit, White-throated and Black-headed Canaries, Dusky Sunbird and Burchell's Courser.

The high diversity of plant life here is due in part to the fact that Nieuwoudtville, and its surroundings, lie at the convergence of several habitat types and their corresponding plant communities. As well as the renosterveld ('rhino bush'), these include the bokkeveld ('antelope bush'), boesmanland ('Bushman land'), Hanam Karoo and the Knersvlakte. The latter is a unique area of quartz gravels with a specialised succulent flora, the name thought to be derived from the 'gnashing of teeth' sound created by the passing of ox wagons over the coarse stones.

Day 10

Langebaan, West Coast National Park

Heading further south, we will visit a number of coastal sites, including estuaries, sand dunes and the impressive colony of Cape Gannets at Bird Island, Lambert's Bay. We will stay in a comfortable hotel in the coastal town of Langebaan, which will allow us to visit the nearby West Coast National Park, a spectacular 27,000-hectare reserve consisting of the Postberg peninsula, which protects a large tidal lagoon. 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 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 on rocky hills are painted in the yellows, whites, reds and purples of a wide variety of daisies and other flowers including *Gazania krebsiana*, *Dimorphotheca pluvialis* (Cape Rain Daisy), *Ursinia anthemoides* (Solar Fire), *Dorotheanthus bellidiformis* (Livingstone's Daisy) and *Heliophila coronopifolia*.

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 the occasional Southern Right Whale flukes and dives. Ostrich are commonly seen striding along the edge of the roads whilst other smaller species to look out for include Black-shouldered Kite, Black Harrier, Southern Black Korhaan, White-fronted Plover, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Fiscal, Chestnut-vented Titbabbler, Cape Sparrow and a variety of larks.

Day 11 & 12

Noordhoek, Cape Peninsula



Fynbos, Cape Town

Heading south from Langebaan, will visit some of several small nature reserves around Darling where we hope to see an outstanding bulb flora, before continuing to Cape Town and the imposing slopes of Table Mountain. We turn south through the city's affluent suburbs, over the spectacular Ou Kaapse Weg (Old Cape Road) Pass and down into Noordhoek, which will be our base for the next two nights while we explore the fynbos vegetation of the peninsula and other scenic and wildlife highlights of the region.

We will spend our full day exploring the fynbos and spectacular scenery of the Cape Peninsula. Fynbos is the 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 rainforests 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 maquis, and Californian chaparral. Furthermore, since our tour is timed to coincide with the start of the South African spring this unique habitat should be in full flower and awash with colour!

As we drive south to Cape Point we will stop occasionally to scan for 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. In the Cape of Good Hope Reserve we are sure to enjoy a fine range of flowers typical of the fynbos (numerous species of *Protea*, *Leucospermum*, *Leucodendron* etc.). We also expect to see 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.



Southern Right Whale

Amongst a range of birds, such species as Cape Spurfowl, African 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.

Our final stop will be at Boulders Beach to see 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.



Day 13

Depart Cape Town

We will spend our final morning in South Africa exploring the wonderful Kirstenbosch Botanic Garden. Kirstenbosch is the premier botanic garden in South Africa, and as well as its fine collection of local fynbos species, many of which will be in bloom at this time, there are representatives of all the major plant groups growing in South Africa; the gardens contain almost 7,000 species. In addition to the beautifully laid out gardens and huge new glasshouse containing the succulent section, the situation is outstanding. The high ramparts of Table Mountain reach to almost 3,000 feet above us and to the other side we look out across the southern suburbs of the city to the far-off mountains of the Hottentots Hollands Range.

A few of the species in flower at Kirstenbosch will be members of the Protea genus such as South Africa's national flower, the King Protea (*Protea cynaroides*) and other members of the larger Protea family such as the Silver Tree (*Leucadendron argenteum*) which is restricted to this area. Some of the 600 Erica species (Heaths), such as *Erica cerinthoides*, with its large red flowers will be present. The Western Cape has the world's richest flora of bulbous plants – most being in the families Amaryllidaceae, Iridaceae, Liliaceae and Orchidaceae – all of which are well represented at Kirstenbosch. Those with an eye for birds will be interested to see local specials such as the Cape Sugarbird, as well as the more widespread species.

Our direct British Airways or South African Airways flight is due to depart Cape Town Airport in the late afternoon.

Day 14

Arrive London

We are due back into London's Heathrow Airport early morning.

NB - Please note that the itinerary above offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can 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.

Tour grading

Grade A. This is an easy tour with no difficult walks, although some of the terrain may be rough in places. An average level of fitness – and a love of botany, wildlife and the outdoors – is all that is required to get the most of this holiday.

Weather

The tour is timed to catch the end of the winter/spring rains in Namaqualand for the best shows of flowers, but do note that these rains are somewhat unpredictable in their timing – and the extent of the flowering of Namaqualand daisies is dependent on this factor. The fynbos and succulent florals are much less dependent on the rains and are sure to be in good show at this time. Around Cape Town the climate is ‘Mediterranean’ and the winter rains will be coming to an end – although wet and windy low pressures do blow through from time to time. Daytime temperatures inland may climb to 25°C, although it will be significantly cooler around Cape Town and on coast and night-time temperatures will be lower. Warm clothing and light raingear should therefore be brought.

Your transport

We use either a small mini-coach or two smaller minibuses (driven by your guides), depending availability and the size of the group. Flights to Cape Town are direct and with British Airways or South African Airways.

Food & accommodation included in the price

Accommodation will be in a mix of comfortable hotels and guesthouses. For the nights in Nieuwoudtville our group will be split between two guesthouses but will all eat together. Bedrooms throughout the tour have private facilities. All breakfasts and evening meals are included in the cost of the holiday (from dinner on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 13). Lunches are at your own expense.

Please note that it may, on rare occasions, be necessary to change the one or more of the camps and lodges outlined above. You can be assured, however, that any alternate lodge or camp will be of the same standard as the original and all will be in excellent areas for the flora and other wildlife.

Extra expenses

Please note that the following expenses are excluded from the cost of the holiday and are paid locally. Any necessary Visas (not needed for UK citizens), locally paid airport taxes, additional activities, drives not outlined above, lunches (allow around £150), drinks, tips and all items of a personal nature.

Your safety & security

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 and Commonwealth 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.
