

ISN'T IT WONDERFUL?

With a show-stopping selection of natural wonders, it's no surprise South Africa continually tops international lists of countries to visit. Here's how to experience each of our seven wonders affordably

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1 TABLE MOUNTAIN What better place to begin than with our beloved Table Mountain, as not only does it feature on our local list, but also the acclaimed global New7Wonders of Nature. Flanked by Devil's Peak on the left and Lion's Head on the right, the impressive 3 km long plateau provides the city with its iconic backdrop. At 1 086 m above sea level Maclear's Beacon is the highest point and a scenic 45-minute walk from the upper cable station.

If you're wanting to spend a night close to the mountain, SANParks has several offerings: the Platteklip Wash Houses on the slopes of the mountain, the Overseers Cottage on top of the mountain, or the magical Hoerikwaggo Tented Camps in Orange Kloof (sanparks.org). If you're fit enough, hike up either the Kasteelspoort path, Platteklip- or Skeleton Gorge. Return cableway tickets cost from R360 and are free for the week around your birthday! (tablemountain.net)

2 CAPE POINT At the majestic southernmost point of Cape Town, the last stretch of Table Mountain National Park's peninsula tumbles dramatically into the ocean below. The 60 km drive from the city is in itself a spectacle, winding around the plentiful bays and dramatic outcrops. It's part of the Cape Floristic Kingdom, so don't forget you're also in a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Entrance fees are R80 for South Africans (just don't forget to take your ID) and if you're feeling a little lazy to do the walk up to the lighthouse for R85 you can enjoy a return trip on the Flying Dutchman Funicular (capepoint.co.za). The Two Oceans Restaurant also serves exceptionally fine food and the cafeteria offers reasonably priced pizza and subs (two-oceans.co.za). Duiker and Eland Cottage and Olifantsbos Guest House are available through SANParks if you want to overnight in the park (sanparks.org).



From top: Cape Point's magnificent, unforgiving peninsula; the refreshed Two Oceans Restaurant with a view; the Drakensberg wearing her summer green



3 DRAKENSBERG The mighty Drakensberg, or 'Barrier of Spears' to translate its isiZulu name, rises in the Eastern Cape and then runs northwards for almost 1 000 km before finally coming to rest in Limpopo. The most impressive stretch is the 200 km section of the Drakensberg in KwaZulu-Natal where the mountains reach heights of more than 3 000 m. If you have a 4x4, Sani Pass is an exhilarating drive up into Lesotho where you're rewarded with a drink at the highest pub in Africa (sanimountain.co.za).

Two of the most popular trails are the 60 km five-day Giants Cup Trail, or the Chain Ladder day hike to the top of Tugela Falls (second tallest in the world). Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife offers a wide variety of accommodation options. Our top accommodation spots are Royal Natal in the north for one of SA's most beautiful and most well-kept campsites, and then the rustic Cobham overnight hut in Underberg for exceptional value (kznwildlife.com).

4 CRADLE OF HUMANKIND

Not many countries have the privilege of stewarding the revered sacred sites that offer us insight into some of the origins of human life. The Cradle of Humankind is a 90-minute drive from Joburg and was proclaimed a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999 for its ancient stones that harbour precious bones. The Maropeng Visitor Centre is an impressive and world-class learning facility that offers a look into some of what we know about the dawn of humankind. The Sterkfontein Caves are a treasure chest of hominin fossils – the largest collection in the world. R190 gets you access to both the Maropeng Visitor Centre as well as the Sterkfontein Caves. Stay over at the new Maropeng Boutique Hotel (maropeng.co.za) for some luxury or try Alto Log Cabin (booking.com) or Teak Guest Rooms (teakplace.co.za) for affordable but comfortable stays.



From top: The fascinating Maropeng Visitors Centre's entrance; take a tour of the underground marvels at the Sterkfontein Caves; go on an enchanting walk to Tsitsikamma's Big Tree



5 TSITSIKAMMA FOREST

This ancient forest, famously brought alive by stories of South African writer Dalene Matthee, is a magnificent green belt that stretches from Nature's Valley to Storms River Mouth. The indigenous forest is home to giant yellowwood trees, deep gorges, and startlingly beautiful coastal areas: one of the country's best-loved hiking, paddling and nature playgrounds. The suspension bridge walk at Storms River Mouth is a must-do and is free. If the SANParks cottages, cabins and campsite at Storms River Mouth Rest Camp (sanparks.org) aren't for you, perhaps have a look at Tranquility B&B in Nature's Valley (tranquilitylodge.co.za), Fynbos Golf and Country Estate in Eersterivierstrand (fynbosgolf.co.za) or Waterfall Cottage at Bramon Wine Estate (bramonwines.com).



6 KAROO NATIONAL PARK

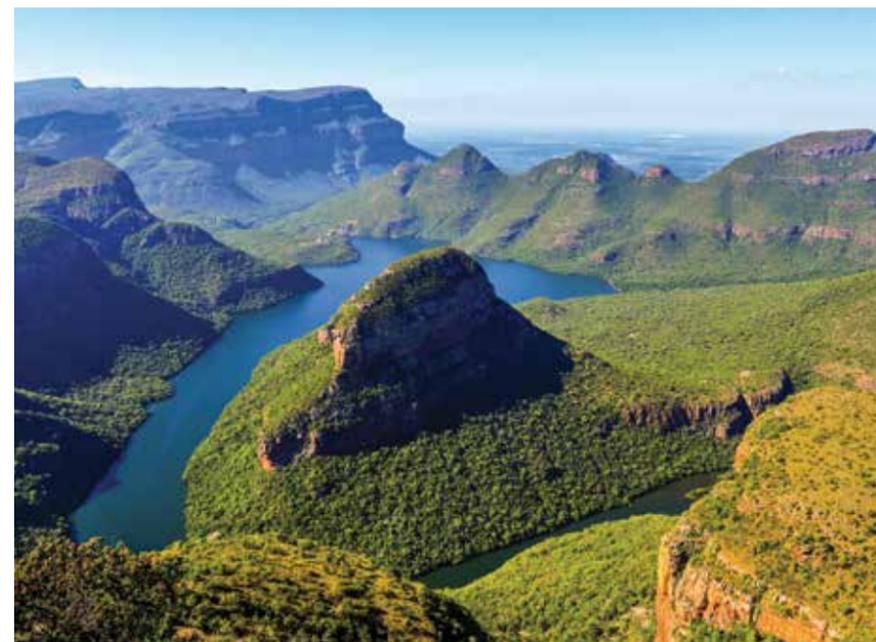
The Karoo's ancient landscape may initially appear stark and devoid of life, but this couldn't be further from the truth. The semi-desert region has a vibrant eco-system including over 60 mammals, 200 bird species, and 60 reptiles. The fossil trail is an informative walk that will give you some insight into the creatures that lived here more than 250 million years ago. Also check out the viewpoint on Klipspringer Pass and the adventurous Pienaars Pass if you have a 4x4. Day visitors pay R56 to enter the park, which is best enjoyed with a night or two's stay – especially to break up the Joburg to Cape Town drive. Accommodation is available in the form of the rest camp's chalets, two isolated cottages or camping (sanparks.org).



From top: The ancient majesty and desolation of Karoo landscapes; the Karoo National Park has a surprising abundance of wildlife; panoramic views of the Blyde River Canyon

7 BLYDE RIVER CANYON

Mpumulanga is the proud home to the Blyde River Canyon, the largest green canyon in the world and the only true canyon in South Africa. No South African holiday along the Panorama Route would be complete without a stop at Blyde River and God's Window. Here are three ways to best enjoy this natural wonder: Firstly, the well-known view spot on the R532 offers startling vistas of the canyon and Three Rondavels and costs around R25 entrance. If you're looking for a more close-up experience, the classic boat trip costs around R220 for the 90-minute journey (blydecanyon.co.za). Expect to meet the local hippo pod, and the eerie and striking 'weeping face of nature' – the second-largest tufa waterfall in the world. Lastly, and if the budget allows, Hoedspruit Helicopters offers flips over the canyon (hoedspruithelicopters.co.za) – a thrilling ride that provides a remarkable perspective. The nearby highveld towns of Hazyview and Hoedspruit are favourite places to overnight. ✨



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