

South Africa's



Rock art, Cederberg

Amongst South Africa's countless attractions, one area is often overlooked. Charlotte Mellor and Sarah McGuinness head north from Cape Town to find sweeping beaches, pretty fishing villages and San rock art. Best of all, there's not another visitor in sight.

Travelling north from Cape Town we reached the West Coast within two hours of setting off. As we drove out of Cape Town all thoughts of the city were left behind as we moved through the vast open landscapes. As soon we reached the coast we were bewitched by its beauty and quaint fishing villages. The West Coast is an area not often considered by visitors to South Africa but is home to some of the country's most tranquil and beautiful locations.

Our first stop in the area was the windsurfers' haven of Langebaan. Langebaan Lagoon is favoured by locals as the perfect spot for relaxing on the beach and certainly rivals the more popular Knysna Lagoon on the Garden Route. Close to Langebaan is the West Coast National Park, an absolute gem, where plains game wandered through. The area is blessed with some magical beaches. A secluded spot on white sand in front of shallow turquoise waters isn't hard to come by and is ideal for picnicking. Young children will also enjoy the chance to play and explore the area. With a local tip-off we discovered Churchaven. This stunning stretch of beach is reminiscent of an Indian Ocean Island although the Atlantic Ocean is a little chillier than its Indian counterpart!

An hour further up the coast we found ourselves at Paternoster, a traditional fishing village now discovered by artists. On the surface this is a peaceful coastal village with its local artisans painting or designing ceramics, but we found plenty of more active pastimes to undertake: plenty to do: sea kayaking, whale, dolphin, seal and penguin watching, climbing the local lighthouse for fantastic views and one of our favourite moments was a simple walk along the beach to settle on some boulders and watch the sun set. Traditional white-washed fishermen's cottages adorn the West Coast, with many providing accommodation or cuisine. We discovered three great restaurants in the village, all serving sublimely fresh seafood. If visiting between the months of November and April we highly recommend the crayfish, which you will find on every menu. Also try the West Coast oysters which are absolutely delicious, especially with a crisp dry South African white wine to wash them down.

After our time on the coast we headed inland to the Cederberg Mountains, which run through the most northern part of the Western Cape. This breath-takingly scenic area hosts one of the top places to stay in South Africa: Bushman's Kloof

Wild West



View across the bay at Langebaan

Wilderness Reserve and Retreat. This reserve shelters some unusual and rare animals such as the bat-eared fox, African wildcat, Cape fox, caracal (African lynx), Cape clawless otter, klipspringer, aardwolf, aardvark, the Cape mountain zebra and porcupine. One of the main highlights of a stay here is the high concentration of Bushman's cave painting sites. Our expert local guide took us to see the paintings on the early morning game drive where we were fortunate enough to find tracks of a small female leopard that had crossed our path an hour or so earlier that morning. During the day we tackled one of the walking trails that lead from the lodge into the mountains before a quick test of the spa to ease our aching limbs, and rounded off with a fine afternoon tea. All in all, not a bad day.

The West Coast and Cederberg mountains are a microcosm of the whole country with wonderful scenery, great wildlife, bushman history, fine food and welcoming accommodation. In fact, the only difference is the notable lack of other visitors.

Charlotte Mellor & Sarah McGuinness
South Africa Specialists



Wolfberg Arch, Cederberg mountains



Fishing boats, Paternoster

FACT FILE

A ten night self-drive trip to Cape Town, the West Coast and the Cederberg mountains including return flights starts from £2,500 per person. The region can also be incorporated into longer itineraries that include other parts of South Africa. For further details please call our South Africa specialists on 01993 838 550.

