

Travel Briefing

South Africa

How to get the most out of South Africa as a first-time visitor

IT'S A HAPPY COINCIDENCE that many of South Africa's highlights lie upon a clearly defined, easily navigable route, a coincidence that makes it a great destination for first-time visitors. Here is a bit of an introduction to those highlights and how to stitch them all together.



Table Mountain, Cape Town



The Cape Region

The perfect jumping off spot for your visit to South Africa. Five direct flights a day from London touch down in Cape Town, and it is a cosmopolitan city that introduces you to the unique blend of Europe and Africa that defines the Cape Region. This part of South Africa is definitely a self-drive destination. Good roads, right-hand drive, not too much traffic (outside the cities!) – but don't collect your hire car as soon as you arrive: you'll have just come off an overnight flight. It's much easier to have a private transfer to your hotel in Cape Town, and spend the first few days exploring Cape Town by taxi and bus before having a hire car delivered. Make sure you take in the iconic Table Mountain, and Robben Island which holds such a key place in the history of apartheid. Once the car has been delivered, definitely take a full day to drive down to Cape Point, exploring the Cape Peninsula on the way. If it's whale season (July – December) head for Hermanus to see them: if time is short you can just visit for the day. Whatever the season, the wine estates and restaurants of Stellenbosch, Paarl and Franschhoek should be on your itinerary; fashions and standards change, so it's best to speak to us to make sure you're wine tasting at the best estates and eating in the best restaurants.



by ARISTA MIDWINTER South Africa Specialist



Meerkats at dawn, Addo Elephant National Park

The Garden Route

It's almost certain that you'll drive from the Cape Region to the Garden Route. If the five to six hour drive is too much, there are great places to break the journey. Once there, you definitely want to base yourself in one place for several days and explore the Garden Route by car: the distances involved are pretty small and there's no sense unpacking and repacking more than you have to! A visit to the Craggs beyond Plettenberg Bay is a good way to spend a day: there are rescue sanctuaries for primates, African birds and elephants where you get intimate interaction with the inhabitants. At Knysna you might want to take a cruise on the lagoon out to the Featherbed Nature Reserve, whilst slightly north of the Garden Route, but still an easy day trip, are the Cango Caves. This vast cave system offers a standard guided tour, or a longer adventure tour, which is not for the claustrophobic!

Safari

To come to Africa and not go on safari would be criminal, and time on safari is normally the highlight of any trip. Fortunately, when you finish the Garden Route, you're perfectly placed for a range of safari options. You could continue on by car to the Eastern Cape: there's an array of reserves here from the large Addo Elephant National Park through to smaller owner-run and managed reserves like Amakhala. Your game viewing in the Eastern Cape will be excellent although your chances of seeing leopard are pretty slim. For the best chance of seeing all of the Big Five in the wild, you need to hop on a flight up towards the Kruger. On the western flank of the Kruger, sharing unfenced borders with the national park are large numbers of private reserves with riverine landscapes that are perfect for leopards and the other members of the Big Five. Accommodation ranges from modest and affordable right through to amazingly opulent: as with all our itineraries, we'll make sure, after talking things through in detail with you, that the places you end up staying are absolutely right for you.



Cango Caves

FACT file



Leopard, Kruger National Park

We prefer to work with small, owner-run and managed guesthouses where possible and an introductory trip along the lines of this article would take about two weeks and cost from **£2,300 per person** in high season. Travelling in low season (our summer) is cooler in the Cape and along the Garden Route than the rest of the year, but the weather not necessarily worse. You could do a similar itinerary for under **£2,000** at this time so it is worth considering. If you wanted to stay in really luxurious hotels and a top-end safari lodge, the cost will be from **£4,500 per person**. For further information contact either **Arista, Rachel, Charlotte or Peter on 01993 838 550**.

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