Did you know?
South Africa is blessed with about 3 000km of coastline.

This provides for an enormous diversity of habitat and marine life.

Nature lovers wishing to experience this bounty when visiting are well catered for and can enjoy a host of exciting marine excursions.

Whale watching

They migrate here to spend time in sheltered bays where they mate, calve and nurse their babies, before heading off again into the deep Southern Ocean by December.

A fantastic place to view these giant visitors is the coastal town of Hermanus, which has earned a reputation for the best shore-based whale watching in the world, although it's by far not the only location.

In Hermanus, tourists need only listen out for the sound of the whale-crier's horn that alerts bystanders that there is a whale in the vicinity, easily sighted from the cliff path overlooking the bay.

Your clients might also wish to view whales from a boat, but there are rules that apply to how close the boats may come to these animals in the sea.
Other whale species sighted off the South African coast include humpbacks (generally in the winter months), the smaller Bryde’s whale and even occasional orcas (or killer whales).

**Travel fact**

Hermanus has earned a reputation for the best shore-based whale watching in the world.

**Did you know?**

From June onwards, southern right whales start to arrive along the southern African coastline. Image courtesy of Cathy Withers-Clarke

**Travel fact**

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**Dolphin tours**

Among the species that occur in South African waters are bottlenose, common and humpback dolphins. The bottlenose dolphin tends to keep closer to shore and so is most often seen playing around in the surf.

If your clients are keen to go on a dolphin boat tour then advise them to head for the seaside town of Plettenberg Bay on the Garden Route, where there are a variety of marine tourism experiences to be had.

Here they can book a boat-based dolphin- and whale-watching trip or, for the more adventurous, a kayaking trip, which brings with it the possibility of getting even closer to these marine mammals.

Dolphins can also be seen along the Sunshine Coast and Wild Coast in the Eastern Cape, as well as off the coast of KwaZulu-Natal.

These beautiful, sleek creatures love to surf in the breakers, so if your clients are planning a beach holiday they should keep an eye out for them, particularly in the early morning.
Types of dolphins

Among the species that occur in South African waters are bottlenose, common and humpback dolphins.

Travel fact

Dolphins can also be seen along the Sunshine Coast and Wild Coast in the Eastern Cape, as well as off the coast of KwaZulu-Natal. Image courtesy of Earth Touch.

Did you know?

The bottlenose dolphin tends to keep closer to shore and so is most often seen playing around in the surf. Image courtesy of David Jobson.

Penguin experience

Here, the highly endangered African penguin has chosen to establish a colony, making its nests on the slopes and even in the gardens of nearby seaside homes.

At Boulders there are three beaches (one of which is reserved exclusively for the penguins), a viewing area and boardwalks that limit disturbance to the nesting pairs.

Here beach-goers can sunbathe and have a dip in close proximity to these comical black-and-white birds waddling between their nests and the sea.

This is also an excellent outing for children as the waters are calm, but on no account should they try to interact with the birds as they have razor-sharp beaks and can inflict a nasty bite.

Boulders falls within the Table Mountain National Park and so a small entrance fee must be paid. The only other land-based African penguin-breeding colony is at Betty’s Bay (about 80km east of Cape Town).

Travel fact

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Did you know?

The only other land-based African penguin-breeding colony is at Betty’s Bay (about 80km east of Cape Town). Image courtesy of Natalie

Seal Island

Visitors to Cape Town can book a boat trip to spend some time observing a seal colony in a natural environment, particularly in summer when the pups are born.

For a close-to-shore outing, advise your clients to head for Hout Bay in Cape Town, where boats take visitors to a breeding colony on a rocky outcrop called Duiker Island (sometimes called Seal Island).

Alternatively, they might wish to book a slightly longer marine safari from the naval port of Simon’s Town to the actual Seal Island in False Bay, about 16km offshore.

This island is famous for being the only place in the world where great white sharks are regularly seen breaching as they predate on the seals (although the likelihood of witnessing this is limited to early mornings in the winter months – May to August).

If time is short, then seals can often be seen basking in small harbours, like at Kalk Bay or Hout Bay, where they have become so tame some of them even have names.

Travel fact

Seal Island in False Bay is famous for being the only place in the world where great white sharks are regularly seen breaching as they predate on the seals. Image courtesy of Anna Phillips

Did you know?

Cape fur seals, also known as South African fur seals, are delightful to watch because of their agility, curiosity and trusting nature
Travel tip

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Sardine run

In an attempt to evade their pursuers, the fish form ‘bait balls’ that wildlife photographers and film crews have captured in dramatic footage and images.

Sardine shoals also sometimes come ashore, sparking a land-based frenzy as people rush into the shallow water to gather this seasonal bounty in whatever receptacle they can find.

At places like Margate and Shelly Beach in southern KwaZulu-Natal, tour operators can take your clients out to get closer to the shoals.

Those who are shore-bound should use their binoculars to watch for the telltale signs of diving birds and churned-up water, indicating a shoal in the vicinity.

Advise your clients that during the sardine run, the shark nets that protect some of the bathing beaches in KwaZulu-Natal are temporarily lifted to minimise harm to marine life. When this happens, ‘discretionary bathing’ (own risk) signs are put up.

Travel fact

At places like Margate and Shelly Beach in southern KwaZulu-Natal, tour operators can take your clients out to get closer to the shoals.

Did you know?

The sardine run is also referred to as ‘Greatest Shoal on Earth’. Image courtesy of Wildest Animal
Did you know?

In an attempt to evade their pursuers, the fish form 'bait balls' that wildlife photographers and film crews have captured in dramatic footage and images. Image courtesy Sergey Artemenko.

Two Oceans Aquarium

This aquarium has a strong conservation ethos, providing support for shark conservation, the rehabilitation of penguins and turtles, and helping to free seals that sometimes get entangled in plastic strips and fishing lines.

Visitors can happily spend an afternoon exploring the world-class displays here, among them a predator tank with ragged-tooth sharks, a kelp forest (one of only three in the world), the Indian Ocean and Atlantic Ocean galleries, and a shoreline display that houses both African and rockhopper penguins.

Visitors can also arrange to dive with ragged-tooth sharks in the Predator Exhibit or in the Kelp Forest Exhibit, but advise your clients that a scuba licence will be required for this.

Your clients can also dine in good conscience at the adjoining restaurant, the Shoreline Café, which serves only sustainable seafood and which was consequently the first restaurant in Africa to be certified by the Marine Stewardship Council.

Travel fact

The aquarium contains a predator tank where guests are able to see ragged-tooth sharks

Did you know?

The Two Oceans Aquarium is designed to show the diversity of marine life off the South African coast. Image courtesy of flowcomm
uShaka Marine World

It is also home to a water park called Wet ‘n Wild, where the younger set can work off their excess energy on an array of water slides and pools, including Africa’s highest water slide.

Included in the uShaka experience are underground viewing galleries inside the aquarium that are designed around old ship wrecks; animal encounters; penguin presentations; shark feeding times; and the ever-popular dolphin and seal shows. For an extra fee, visitors can also sign up to dive with sharks or snorkel with beautiful tropical fish in the snorkel lagoon.

Advise your clients to set aside at least half a day for this outing and to enjoy every aspect that uShaka has to offer. There are also several takeaway outlets and restaurants on the premises.

Travel fact

This aquarium has a strong conservation ethos. Image courtesy of flowcomm

Travel tip

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Travel fact

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Shark cage-diving

These animals now enjoy full protection in South Africa, which is consequently one of the best places in the world to view them.

There are several places where visitors can go cage-diving with sharks, the most popular being Gansbaai, about 160km east of Cape Town.

Here, your clients can board a boat and head out to a spot known as Shark Alley, where chum is used to attract the sharks. Once a shark puts in an appearance, it’s time to hop into the cage dangling off the side of the boat for a closer look underwater.

Your clients won’t need any special diving experience as snorkels are used. However, if they are susceptible to seasickness, advise them to take a remedy ahead of the trip, as the boat stays anchored for several hours in one spot during this outing, which can exacerbate the problem.

The months of May through to October are the best time to go cage-diving as the sharks tend to disperse in summer.

**Travel tip**

The months of May through October are the best time to go shark cage-diving

**Travel fact**

Great white sharks now enjoy full protection in South Africa, which is consequently one of the best places in the world to view them. Image courtesy of Hermanus Backpackers

**Travel tip**

Your clients won’t need any special diving experience as snorkels are used. Image courtesy of Valerie Hinojosa