Western Cape

Introduction

The Western Cape is home to Table Mountain, the vast Cape Winelands and two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: Robben Island and the Cape Floral Region.

Top attractions

Table Mountain

Table Mountain is Cape Town’s most famous landmark. A cable car trip to the top of the mountain is the perfect way for visitors to orientate themselves on their first trip to the city.

Cape Point

At Cape Point, see where Portuguese mariner Bartolomeu Dias first sailed around the Cape, discover the legend of the *Flying Dutchman* ghost ship, and take the funicular railway up a steep slope to the lighthouse at the top.

Cape Winelands

Constantia, Durbanville, Darling, Walker Bay, Stellenbosch, Paarl, Wellington, Franschhoek, Ceres, Worcester and more... wine estate tours and wine tasting are a must.

Robben Island

Take a boat trip to Robben Island, where humanitarian, freedom fighter and former South African president Nelson Mandela spent 18 of his 27 years in prison. Tours take in this World Heritage Site, a museum and the stone quarry where prisoners worked.

Shark cage diving
For something thrilling and different, shark cage diving is a safe and popular attraction, with specially equipped tour boats and cages affording face-to-face meetings with great white sharks in Gansbaai and Mossel Bay.

**Garden Route**

Take a trip along the picturesque Garden Route, which stretches along the N2 highway from Mossel Bay eastward, taking in the towns of George, Knysna and Plettenberg Bay.

The Western Cape's motto is 'spes bona', which means 'good hope'.

**Overview of the Western Cape**

The mountainous Western Cape province extends from the Cape of Good Hope on the south-western tip of Africa 400km north and 500km east. It is South Africa’s fourth-largest province. It is bounded by the Northern Cape and Eastern Cape.
It is best known for Cape Town, South Africa’s ‘Mother City’, a popular travel destination that is home to Table Mountain and beautiful beaches, among many other attractions.

North of Cape Town, the West Coast incorporates the West Coast National Park, well known for birds and spring flowers (in late August and September), and the West Coast Fossil Park in Langebaan. Also in the province is the Cederberg, an area of contrast where 71,000ha of rugged mountains are offset in spring by carpets of yellow, orange, blue and purple flowers.

Along the province’s eastern coastline lies the picturesque Garden Route, which stretches several hundred kilometres from Cape Town to Port Elizabeth. This is one of the country’s most popular routes: your clients can either drive it themselves or take a package tour along it.

The Western Cape’s beaches are beautiful, some with mountains rushing down to meet a turquoise ocean. The most popular bathing beaches in Cape Town include Clifton, Camps Bay, Muizenberg and Fish Hoek, while others, such as Llandudno and Noordhoek, are popular among surfers.

The wine-growing areas of Stellenbosch, Paarl, Wellington, Franschhoek, Ceres, Worcester, Bonnievale and Robertson are popular attractions, where a Mediterranean climate favours the production of superb wines.

The province is also renowned for its fresh seafood, from line fish to lobster, prawns, snoek and sole. Most restaurants have fish on the menu and fresh fish is sold from the boats in Fish Hoek and Kalk Bay.

Infrastructure in the Western Cape is excellent, with a well-maintained road system linking the main centres and outlying regions – the Karoo, West Coast, Winelands, Overberg and Garden Route. Cape Town International Airport is the second busiest in the country, after OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg.
From the waterfront hotels of Cape Town to campsites in national parks, guest houses, B&Bs and luxury apartments, there’s a variety of accommodation options to suit all tastes.

Cape Town

Undoubtedly the jewel of the Western Cape is Cape Town. The Mother City, as it is also known, is an extremely popular destination for local and international visitors, and is home to scenic and natural attractions, beautiful beaches, a vibrant nightlife, and a rich history.

It is the perfect launch pad for many of the Western Cape’s attractions, including the famed Cape Winelands, the Garden Route, and the attractions of the West Coast and interior.

The most well known of Cape Town’s attractions is Table Mountain, which offers amazing views, a selection of hiking trails, and abundant flora and fauna.

From the top of Table Mountain (as well as from Cape Town itself), visitors can see the infamous Robben Island, where political prisoners were jailed during apartheid. Nelson Mandela spent 18 of his 27 years in prison on Robben Island.

Cape Town is also home to the V&A Waterfront, South Africa’s most-visited tourist attraction. The V&A boasts shops, restaurants, nightlife, museums and the Two Oceans Aquarium.

And no description of Cape Town would be complete without mention of its wide, sandy beaches. From the trendy Clifton and Camps Bay, to beaches on the warmer waters of False Bay (Muizenburg and Fishhoek), to the more adventure-oriented Noordhoek and Blouberg, there’s swimming, sunbathing, surfing and kitesurfing for all.
The most widely spoken language in the Western Cape province is Afrikaans, but don’t worry – English is also almost universally spoken here.

**Flora and fauna**

With one of the world’s recognised floral kingdoms, botanical gardens, the Garden Route, national parks and prolific sea life, the Western Cape is blessed with a wealth of flora and fauna.

Cape Town’s New7Wonder of Nature, Table Mountain, rises from Table Mountain National Park, which includes part of the Cape Floral Region, one of South Africa’s eight World Heritage Sites and the world’s smallest, most diverse floral kingdom.

There are 9 000 fynbos species found in the Cape and 2 000 types on Table Mountain alone – more plant species than in the entire United Kingdom.

Set against the backdrop of Table Mountain and Devil’s Peak is Kirstenbosch, a 528ha national botanical garden featuring 22 000 indigenous plants with paved walkways affording access to view them.

Travellers can also take in Cape Point, a rugged tail of land that marks the south-westerly tip of Africa and which supports pelagic bird species, zebra, eland, reptiles and baboons in the Cape Point Nature Reserve; Boulders Beach, which is home to a breeding colony of African penguins; and Seal Island in False Bay, which supports a seal colony that attracts great white sharks.

The Western Cape also offers some of the best land-based whale watching in the world.

Further inland, about a 480km drive east of Cape Town in the Little Karoo, the town of Oudtshoorn boasts the world’s largest ostrich population.

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**Dassie**

Cape dassies can be seen on Table Mountain.

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**Fynbos**

Fynbos typically found on Cape Agulhas dunes.

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**African penguins**
African penguins have made Boulders Beach in Cape Town their home.

Pink and orange flowers
Wildflowers in the Overberg region.

Ostriches
Oudtshoorn is world famous for its ostriches.

Karoo fynbos
Flowers, plants, trees and fynbos at Worcester.

The Breede, Berg and Olifants are the province's major rivers.

Cape Winelands and the Garden Route
The Cape Winelands are a major tourist attraction in their own right

A visit to the popular Cape Winelands – which feature wine estates that date back hundreds of years, wine tasting, wine making, good food and spectacular scenery – is a must.

Very popular are the Stellenbosch Wine Route and Route 62, which takes the traveller to a number of well-known wine destinations, including Stellenbosch, Paarl, Wellington, Franschhoek, Ceres, Worcester, Bonnievale and Robertson.

Wine estates are an important part of the Western Cape’s heritage, and one of its most popular tourist attractions.

The Western Cape is also home to the picturesque Garden Route, a mix of deep river gorges, white beaches, rocky headlands and dense forests that stretches along the N2 from Cape Town in the south, taking in the towns of George, Knysna and Plettenberg Bay, to the lovely city of Port Elizabeth.

It is one of the most recommended routes in South Africa, and offers the traveller many options. Apart from the spectacular scenery, the route offers adventure (the 216m Bloukraans bungee jump, and canopy tours); holidaying (Plettenberg Bay and Knysna); and golf (Simola, Pezula, Fancourt, among others).

Stellenbosch, Western Cape, South Africa

Stellenbosch

Situated about 50km north-east of Cape Town, Stellenbosch is the country’s second-oldest town. Famed for its wines and wine route, it is also home to some of the country’s top restaurants. Here you’ll find panoramic views, oak trees and Cape Dutch architecture.
Paarl, Western Cape, South Africa

Paarl

In the heart of the Cape Winelands, Paarl is dotted with ancient oak trees and examples of Cape Dutch, Victorian, Edwardian and Art Deco architecture.

Wellington, Western Cape, South Africa

Wellington

Situated in the Cape Winelands, this town is about a 45-minute drive from Cape Town.

Franschhoek, Western Cape, South Africa

Franschhoek

Some of the country’s top restaurants call this town, about 80km from Cape Town, home. Franschhoek also has a rich wine heritage (which makes a great combination with the excellent food) and the Huguenot Memorial.

Ceres, Western Cape, South Africa

Ceres

Ceres is about 150km from Cape Town. It is a major producer of deciduous fruit and is known for its fruit juices.

Worcester, Western Cape, South Africa

Worcester

Surrounded by wine and table grape farms. On the famed Route 62 tourist route.

Robertson, Western Cape, South Africa

Robertson

An attractive Cape Winelands town, it has Victorian-era buildings and jacaranda-lined streets.
**Constantia, Western Cape**

**Constantia**

About 15km from Cape Town, Constantia has its own wine route – the Constantia Wine Route. It is the Cape’s oldest wine-producing region.

**Bonnievale, Western Cape**

**Bonnievale**

This town, about 180km from Cape Town, boasts beautiful fruit and wine farms. Image courtesy of Karen Kleingeld

South Africa’s wine industry dates back to the 1600s, when the second Dutch governor of the Cape, Simon van der Stel, brought vines with him from Europe.

**History**

In pre-colonial days, the Cape was inhabited by indigenous Khoi people, who were herders and traded with early European visitors in the 16\textsuperscript{th} and 17\textsuperscript{th} centuries.
The Cape of Good Hope (it was also known, less flatteringly, as the Cape of Storms) was important both geographically and politically, as it was on the only early trade route from Europe and the Americas to India, the ‘Spice Islands’ of the East Indies, and the East.

The first European explorer to round the Cape was Bartolomeu Dias, in 1488.

It was to be more than 150 years later, in 1652, that the Dutch established a permanent settlement here, which grew much-needed fresh supplies for those who by now more frequently sailed this perilous route.

The first governor of the Cape, Jan van Riebeeck, started work on the Castle of Good Hope as a star-shaped fort. It was completed in 1679, and is the oldest building in South Africa. It is now open to the public as a museum featuring 18th-century décor.

As trade between Europe, India and the East increased, the Cape (Cape Town and its hinterland) became more important politically. The British took control of the Cape in 1795, then returned it to the Dutch in 1802, but fought for it again and occupied it from 1806 to 1814. After that, the Cape remained nominally under British rule until 1910, when the Union of South Africa was formed.

Apart from the history of the Dutch and British in the Cape, other influences included that of the French – many of whom came as Huguenots fleeing religious repression in the 17th century – and the Malays, who came mostly as slaves during the Dutch rule.

The French influence is still especially apparent in the small Western Cape town of Franschhoek, a drive of about an hour or so from Cape Town, while the Malay influence is still strong in some Cape cuisine and in the colourfully painted Bo-Kaap area in Cape Town, for instance.
Like South Africa’s other large cities, Cape Town witnessed large-scale forced removals when apartheid laws in the second half of the 20th century decreed it illegal for different races to live with one another. Today, Cape Town’s District Six Museum houses memorabilia from the community of District Six, donated by former residents who were forcibly removed to the barren Cape Flats during apartheid.

Cape Town also became notorious for Robben Island, the island-prison a few kilometres offshore, where apartheid’s most feared political prisoners were kept. Among its inmates was Nelson Mandela.

Outside of Cape Town, you can visit many little historic towns rich with heritage. During the 1800s, for example, mission stations were established by European missionaries along what is now the West Coast Mission Route.

Dutch architecture is evident in many of the older parts of the province, but Stellenbosch, 'the town of oaks', remains the most well preserved, with many historical buildings still intact.

The numerous galleries and museums in the Western Cape house historical collections as diverse as art, gold, fossils, furniture, rock art, dinosaurs and Stone Age tools.

But your travellers won’t need to step into a museum to feel the history and multicultural traditions of the Western Cape, South Africa’s oldest province. They just need to walk down a street in central Cape Town, or visit the homestead on one of the province’s vineyards, some of them now hundreds of years old...

**Main centres**
**Cape Town**

South Africa’s second-largest city (after Johannesburg) and very popular with international travellers, Cape Town is home to the world-famous Table Mountain and Robben Island. With an international airport and busy port, the city is a bustling metropolis.

**Plettenberg Bay**

Along the Garden Route, Plettenberg Bay is a popular holiday destination with its long, white beaches. Adventurers are attracted to the nearby Bloukrans bungee jump and tree canopy tours.

**Paarl**

In the heart of the Cape Winelands, Paarl is dotted with ancient oak trees and examples of Cape Dutch, Victorian, Edwardian and Art Deco architecture.

**Oudtshoorn**

Situated inland in the Little Karoo, about a 480km drive east from Cape Town, Oudtshoorn is the world’s ostrich capital and is also home to the spectacular Cango Caves and Swartberg mountain range.

**Franschhoek**

Some of the country’s top restaurants call this town, about 80km from Cape Town, home. Franschhoek (in Afrikaans, ‘French Corner’) also has a rich wine heritage (which makes a great combination with the excellent food) and the Huguenot Memorial.

**Stellenbosch**

Situated about 50km north-east of Cape Town, Stellenbosch is the country’s second-oldest town. Famed for its wines and wine route, it is also home to some of the country’s top restaurants and the University of Stellenbosch. Here you’ll find panoramic views, oak trees and Cape Dutch architecture.
Hermanus

About 120km south-east along the coast from Cape Town, Hermanus is known as the whale-watching capital of South Africa. These massive creatures (most commonly southern right whales) can be seen from about June to December, from the shore, by boat, or by air.

Knysna

Situated on an estuary along the Garden Route, Knysna's lush natural beauty makes it particularly picturesque. The town is famous for oysters (and an annual oyster festival), forests, outdoor activities and nearby beaches.

Timeline

260-million years ago

Table Mountain is formed approximately 260-million years ago, making it one of the oldest mountains on Earth and far older than ranges like the Andes and Himalayas.

1488

In 1488, Portuguese navigator Bartolomeu Dias discovers and names the Cape of Good Hope. He is the first to round the treacherous Cape Point.

1652

The first Dutch governor, Jan van Riebeeck, arrives at the Cape in 1652 and a colony is established where present-day Cape Town now stands.

1990

Nelson Mandela is released from prison in 1990 and makes a historic speech from the Cape Town City Hall. The first
In his role as president of a democratic South Africa, he spent a total of 27 years in prison.

Table Mountain is named one of the New7Wonders of Nature after a global voting campaign.

There are more plant species in the Table Mountain National Park than in the entire United Kingdom.

**Tips for your traveller**

- Trips on Table Mountain Aerial Cableway start at 8am and end as late as 9.30pm, but these times vary seasonally and are weather-dependent. Check on the day by calling the information line on +27 (0)21 424 8181.

- Whale watching: For the best land-based whale watching in the world, try the Cape Overberg coast from Stony Point near Betty’s Bay, along the Kleinmond cliffs, and at Onrus and Hermanus between June and November.

- The best way to see Cape Town is by taking a guided, open-top bus trip that includes the V&A Waterfront, Table Mountain and Camps Bay, among many other landmarks.

- Langebaan on the West Coast has a tidal lagoon that attracts thousands of migratory birds and is also covered in flowers in spring (late August and September).

- If you decide to hike up Table Mountain, go in a group and always let someone know which route you intend taking.

- If you take the cableway to the top of Table Mountain, take a warm jacket because the weather is prone to change unexpectedly, with sudden drops in temperature common.

- Beautiful as they are, Western Cape beaches sometimes have strong undertows, so always swim in designated areas, never swim alone, and listen to lifeguards’ instructions.

- Through interaction with humans, some baboons in the Cape have become opportunistic thieves and scavengers. Keep all food hidden and never feed these animals as they can be treacherous.

The capital of the Western Cape is Cape Town.