

TRAVEL

# SOUTH AFRICA'S jewel by the sea

From scenic mountain peaks to adorable penguin colonies and world-class Pinotage, Cape Town offers a rich tapestry of experiences, making it one of South Africa's most captivating and beloved destinations. **Pallavi Pasricha** comes away charmed.



A picturesque view from the hill



Chapman's Peak is a scenic drive



Bo-Kaap district is known for its eye-catching, brightly painted houses



Take a cable car to the top of Table Mountain



View of Cape Town from Table Mountain

Standing atop a flat-topped mountain is the perfect way to take in the spectacular beauty of one of the world's most iconic cities — embraced by both the Atlantic Ocean and majestic mountains, offering magical views in every direction. Often referred to as the 'Mother City', Cape Town, South Africa's most popular destination, overflows with unforgettable experiences.

### Iconic Table Mountain

Start by taking the aerial cableway to reach the top of Table Mountain, the majestic landmark that towers over the city. Unlike any other cable car, the floor rotates, ensuring that each passenger gets a 360-degree view of the gorgeous surroundings during the brief but memorable five-minute ride. Along the way, a dramatic sight unfolds even before you reach the summit: a cascade of clouds spilling over the 1,084-meter-high mountain, forming an ethereal "tablecloth", that drapes its slopes in a slow, graceful descent.

Keep an eye out for trekkers who choose to hike to the summit instead of taking the cable car — the hills around Cape Town are a favourite with hikers. As you approach the top, you might momentarily think the cable car is about to brush against the mountain itself, so close does it pass. Once there, take your time to stroll around and soak in the city panorama spread out before you — a picture postcard brought to life. From various viewpoints, such as Lion's Head and the Twelve Apostles — named for their distinctive shapes — to the distant silhouette of Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for 18 years, the vistas are spectacular. On a clear day, it's a breathtaking canvas for those perfect Instagram shots.

### History, culture, colour

In the city, visit the vibrant Bo-Kaap district, a working-class neighbourhood on the slopes of Signal Hill, whose eye-catching, brightly painted houses have put it on the tourist map. It is a splash of colour with houses in pink, green, orange, blue and yellow. But more than being a perfect spot for your Instagram pictures, it has deep meaning.



Boulders Beach in Simon's Town is home to thousands of waddling African penguins

Established in the 18th century by Dutch colonists, these houses — originally white — were leased to slaves. After slavery was abolished and restrictions on the white facade were lifted, the occupants painted them in vivid colours. Nobody knows the exact reason, but some see it as an expression of freedom, liberty and identity by the residents. It is now a part of Bo-Kaap's culture and tradition to paint colourful houses.

In this district, you can also indulge in Cape Malay cuisine, a delicious blend of African, Malaysian and Indonesian influences — don't miss the traditional curries and slow-cooked meats. Try Bobotie, a traditional baked dish made of minced meat, at Bo-Kaap Kombuis, one of the most popular restaurants in the area for this cuisine.

Another vibrant area is the V&A (Victoria & Alfred) Waterfront, which is home to a number of boutiques, restaurants, and bars. Buzzing all day long, it's easy to while away hours here. You can end your visit with a peek into the work of African artists at the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art, housed in a former grain silo. It is the largest museum of its kind on the continent.

### Beaches and penguins

Cape Town's real magic often lies just beyond the city. An hour's drive away, Boulders Beach in Simon's Town is home to thousands of waddling African penguins. Standing just 60 to 71 cm tall, they are a delight to watch — nonchalantly playing in the water or shuffling around the shore with their tiny feet leaving delicate imprints on the soft sand. Also called "jackass penguins" because of the braying sound they make, they are an endangered species. In the 1980s, only two pairs remained, but their numbers have now multiplied manifold with conservation efforts. Special wooden boardwalks have been created for visitors to get close-up views, but touching or feeding is prohibited. The stunning setting of the vast ocean, the rocky boulders, and the small penguins is a rare encounter so close to a city.

A visit to the Cape of Good Hope, where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans merge, is another exhilarating experience. Part of the Table Mountain National Park, it lies at the southern tip of the Cape Peninsula. Save time on the rugged uphill walk by taking the Flying

Dutchman Funicular, a cable-pulled railway that takes you up to a 19th-century lighthouse for some spectacular views. The towering sea cliffs jutting into the ocean, with waves crashing against them, make for a truly breathtaking sight. You will want to spend some time here just to drink in the view.

### Take a scenic drive

Meandering along a 9-km road with rocky cliffs rising to the left and the rolling blue waves of the Atlantic Ocean on the right, the Chapman's Peak Drive from Hout Bay to Noordhoek is considered one of the world's most scenic drives. Try going at sunset — it's the perfect time. Take in a few deep breaths, put your phone away, and let your eyes feast on the natural beauty as the sparkling waters and the towering cliffs compete for your attention. Keep time in hand, because this is not a drive to be rushed — the road has as many as 114 curves. This also ensures an ever-changing panorama, with countless spots to pause and take photographs.

### South Africa's only wine tram

Dotted with more than 500 wineries, South Africa's Cape Winelands region has three main towns — Franschhoek, Stellenbosch and Paarl — whose wines are considered among the best, not just in the country but in the world. A charming way to explore the vineyards in Franschhoek is by hopping onto South Africa's only wine tram, the Franschhoek Wine

Tram. Running on century-old vintage tracks, this double-decker tram traverses five different colour-coded routes — blue, red, navy, pink and orange — each winding its way through six to eight estates. In total, Franschhoek boasts more than 40 wine estates.

At the Navy Line, one of the stops is South Africa's second-oldest wine estate, Boschendal, where you can taste wines while sitting under century-old oak trees. They offer six types of wine tastings, each paired with either cheese, chocolate, oysters, or charcuterie. A popular wine here is the Black Angus, a bold, ruby-coloured Shiraz. Be sure to also try Pinotage at any of the vineyards you visit. This South African grape variety was developed in the 1920s by crossing Pinot Noir with Cinsault grapes, producing a deep-coloured, full-bodied red wine that is pleasing to the palate.

Another interesting wine estate is Vrede en Lust, which dates back to 1688. Set against the stunning backdrop of the Simonsberg slopes, it is best known for its Bordeaux and Malbec wines. While they offer a range of wine tastings, the 'Flagship' tasting includes three white wines and two red wines.

All in all, in the Cape Winelands, every sip is a taste of history and every view is a postcard. Come thirsty — leave enchanted. *L*

### Below, left-right:

Vrede en Lust Malbec wine; The Franschhoek Wine Tram

