

A herd of zebras is gathered around a watering hole in a savanna. The zebras are drinking from the water, and their heads are lowered into the water. The background shows a dry, open landscape with some sparse vegetation.

So South AFRICA

— BY HELEN HAYES AND ROSHAN SUKHILA —

*From wildlife watching to wine tasting,
South Africa has it all for a perfect vacation.*



South Africa has it all going on, and is perhaps the best value luxury destination in the world for Australians. The selection of luxury accommodation is vast, from five-star properties in the major cities to uber-luxury safari lodges where you can often see, and hear, wildlife from your bed. The number of safari parks is wide but not as wide as the range of animals and birds you will see, whether you are at Kruger National Park, Addo National Park or Madikwe. The wines are exceptional, whether you are tasting them in trendy bars and restaurants or at wineries in some of the most beautiful wine regions on the planet. The culture is vibrant, the history broad and the beaches photogenic, whether you are snapping the super cute penguins at Boulders Beach, the magnificent mansions of Camps Bay and Clifton or the world

Opening image: While on safari at Sabi Sabi one afternoon, we came upon hundreds of water buffalos and zebras gathered around a waterhole. The zebras obligingly lined up for a drink ©Helen Hayes.

Above: Grootbos has majestic views over Walker Bay and the floral kingdom in which it sits.

Left: Stellenbosch is a feast for the senses in every way.

famous surf breaks at Jeffreys Bay. If you are partial to luxury train journeys you will have to choose between the prestigious Rovos Rail and the Blue Train, and when it comes to activities, the choice is endless.

No matter where you go or what you do in South Africa, you will take home memories of the people you meet, with smiles as wide as Table Mountain is high. Your only problem is deciding where to go, but with the Australian dollar so strong, 2017 is the time to visit. Here are 11 of our favourite places to go and things to do when you get there.

SABI SABI PRIVATE RESERVE

A safari in South Africa is one of the greatest experiences imaginable, with the excitement of seeing these wild creatures in their natural habitat quite overwhelming. One of the great places to go on safari is Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve, located in Sabi Sands in Kruger National Park. There are four lodges to choose from – Earth Lodge, Bush Lodge, Little Bush Lodge and Selati – but no matter where you stay, you will see all creatures great and small on the morning and evening safaris and around the lodge. Factor in sundowners on the savannah, incredible meals and the awe-inspiring African night skies, and you will probably start to plan another safari before your plane has its wheels up.

Right: The cave at Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela began formulating what would become the constitution of South Africa.

STELLENBOSCH BITES & SITES

A wonderful way to explore the town of Stellenbosch, the second oldest town in South Africa, is on a Bites and Sites tour, which gives you a bite-sized introduction to this fascinating region. Revisit history at the Schreuderhuis, stroll the tree-lined streets past places of interest, try a divine wine at the Brampton Wine Studio, and visit what could be the best bakery/café/ice creamery/butchery in South Africa – Schoon de Companje. Plan on a long lunch at Oude Werf Restaurant to finish off the morning, before you venture out for more wine tasting, on horseback, bike or Segway.

GROOTBOS PRIVATE NATURE RESERVE

Grootbos Private Nature Reserve is a five-star eco resort, just two hours from Cape Town with views over beautiful Walker Bay. The name Grootbos means *big forest* and it lives up to it with ancient Milkwood Forests and many wonderful walks, or saddle up and ride through this special environment. Apart from the wonders of Grootbos itself, it is located on the doorstep of the Overberg coast where the Indian and Atlantic oceans collide. Go for a cruise on Walker Bay or head out to Dyer Island in Gansbaai – this place has the highest



concentration of great white sharks in the world. It also has masses of seals, dolphins, penguins, and depending on the season, whales.

ROBBEN ISLAND

Nelson Mandela served 18 of his 27 years incarcerated on this desolate island. He also chose it as the place to make his first speech as South Africa's president. Now a museum and UNESCO World Heritage Site, a half-day tour of Robben Island

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is as much a part of any Cape Town visit as a giddy ride up to Table Mountain. Step off the boat and see the words “Freedom Cannot Be Manacled”, a sobering sight and one of many on what is now an important pilgrimage. Visit the lime quarry, the leper colony, cemetery, and a small cave where Mandela began drafting what is now a big part of the constitution of South Africa. We finish in the maximum security prison, with cells smaller than those used by the guard dogs. Mandela’s was in Cellblock B, where he wrote portions of *Long Walk to Freedom*, which were found buried in the garden of the concrete prison yard.

BLUE TRAIN

Rocking along on a luxury train is a wonderful way to see the countryside, especially when on board the prestigious Blue Train. The train runs between Cape Town and Pretoria and while the changing scenery is mesmerising, so too is the service and style on board. The deluxe suites are lavish and should you want for anything, the butler will appear as if by magic. The 27-hour journey is peppered with divine morsels and decadent drinks, with the high tea in the lounge car and exquisite dinner in the beautiful and elegant dining car a window to the wonderful South African food scene.



FRANSCHHOEK

The scenery around this fertile valley, in the heart of the Cape Winelands, is jaw-dropping. No wonder the Huguenots decided to settle here over 300 years ago, bringing with them their winemaking traditions. These days the fine wines are matched by the culinary excellence to be savoured at restaurants found at wineries and local restaurants. The small town is overflowing with galleries, craft shops and boutiques, and is well worth a few hours of shopping before you head back to your accommodation to eat and drink some more. If you are staying at divine places like La Residence or Mont Rochelle – Sir Richard Branson’s South African Hotel and Vineyard – it is much harder to tear yourself away. Although at Mont Rochelle it is easy to catch the Wine Tram, a hop-on, hop-off tour through the valley, as it stops at the Manor House, on the property.

TABLE MOUNTAIN

Known as ‘The Mother City’, Cape Town is one of the most beautiful cities in the world and is a must on any South African itinerary. Its spectacular setting, under the watchful eye of Table Mountain, one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World, is hard to beat. Take the revolving gondola to the top for views over the city, Lions Head, Robben Island, and the Twelve Apostles, and spot the cute rock hyrax that live on the mountain. Other highlights include the V&A Waterfront with its shops, bars, hotels and restaurants, and, you can take a scenic helicopter flight over this wonderful maritime city nearby.





JOHANNESBURG

Johannesburg is a great pit stop on your way in or out of South Africa. The Neighbourgoods Market, held every Saturday in the Braamfontein area, features an array of fresh produce, food and arts stalls. Try everything from decadent desserts to traditional African delicacies. Walk around the creative Maboneng Precinct and discover fascinating boutiques, galleries and street art. Just outside Jo'burg, the historic Soweto region is well worth visiting and can

Clockwise from left: Diesel and Crème in the Karoo ©Roshan Sukhla; There is so much colourful street art in Maboneng, Jo'burg ©Roshan Sukhla; A rock hyrax, closely related to the elephant, takes in the view from the top of Table Mountain ©Helen Hayes; The Blue Train is a great way to see the countryside as you journey between Cape Town and Pretoria.

be uniquely explored on a quad bike tour. Tours leave from Orlando Towers and take you through the townships so you can see the areas up close. You'll even pass by Nelson Mandela's old house on Vilakazi Street, it's the only street in the world where two Nobel prize winners have lived, the other being Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

ARTY CAPE TOWN

Explore the colourful side of Cape Town by taking a street art walking tour in the vibrant and revitalised area of Woodstock. Warehouse conversions, galleries, cafes and boutiques are slowly transforming this suburb, only ten minutes from Cape Town. A walking tour with local artist Juma Mkwela is a must. He'll guide you around the streets of Woodstock, pointing out works that highlight everything from political causes to human rights and endangered animals. Another vivid area of Cape Town is the Bo Kaap district with its rainbow streets where rows of houses are each painted different colours. Explore the area on a Cape Town Free Walking Tour and be treated to a kaleidoscope of colours.



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Left: The Palace of the Lost City at Sun City is something else.

Below: The Brampton Wine Studio in Stellenbosch is just one place to enjoy fantastic wines for an unbelievably good price ©Helen Hayes.

QUIRKY KAROO

Take a mystical journey through the Western Cape in the semi-desert Karoo region. From stories of ghosts to eerily majestic hotels, the depth and beauty of the Karoo landscape is sure to surprise you. You'll feel like you have stepped back in time in the small town of Matjiesfontein. Learn about its wartime history, stay in the Victorian-style Lord Milner Hotel, and take the world's shortest tour on the famous red bus with the town's fabulous guide and entertainer Johnnie. Drive through the Meiringspoort, an incredible mountain pass that is 25 kilometres long and passes the Groot River 25 times, then visit the natural wonders of the Cango Caves near Oudtshoorn. Drive back to Cape Town on Route 62 and stop for a selfie in front of Ronnie's Sex Shop (don't worry, it's not actually a sex shop), and a bite to eat at the endlessly fascinating Diesel and Crème, a kitschy roadside cafe if ever we did see one, filled with all sorts of curios and trinkets.

SUN CITY

A resort with a touch of Las Vegas and a drizzle of Disney, Sun City is all kinds of holiday wound into one. The star accommodation is the Indiana Jones-ish The Palace of the Lost City, with its jaw-dropping lobby just the start of the grandeur. One of the main attractions at Sun City is the Valley of Waves, with its massive Roaring Lagoon wave pool sending down waves of nearly two metres in height every 90 seconds. There are two world-class Gary Player-designed golf courses to tackle, and if you want to combine wow with wildlife, go on safari in the Pilanesberg National Park, where the Big Five await. •

Photography by Helen Hayes, Roshan Sukhla and various establishments.



travel facts

GETTING THERE

Qantas flies from Sydney to Johannesburg and connects to 29 other cities with South African Airways.
qantas.com; flysaa.com.au

THINGS TO DO

- Sabi Sabi Private Reserve: sabisabi.com
- Stellenbosch: stellenboschtravel.co.za
- Blue Train: bluetrain.co.za
- Grootbos: grootbos.com
- Juma's Tours: townshiparttours.co.za
- Cape Town Free Walking Tours: nielsentours.co.za/capetown
- Matjiesfontein: matjiesfontein.com
- Cango Caves: cango-caves.co.za
- Neighbourgoods Market: neighbourgoodsmarket.co.za

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Classic Safari Company: classicsafaricompany.com.au