

# South Africa Off the Beaten Path

South Africa is home to hundreds and thousands of exciting and fascinating activities that locals and visitors alike partake in on a daily basis. However, there are some not as well known as the other major attractions and highlights. Therefore, here are some of the more unique and interesting activities that one could get up to while on a visit to sunny South Africa.



## Shakaland Zulu Experience

A visit to the Shakaland Zulu cultural village is a unique, culturally enhancing experience that will ignite the inner warrior in you. Shakaland is a Zulu Kraal near Eshowe in the Nkwalini Valley (Zululand) and is only a two-hour drive from Durban. Here you can participate in and experience the Zulu cultural programme of traditions, which includes spear making, pottery, weaving, hut building, Zulu etiquette, traditional dress, and learning about the layout and social structure of the kraal.

One can also watch the foot-stomping tribal dancing and singing by the warriors wearing traditional animal skins, as well as enjoying a traditional Zulu meal, buffet style. There are many other interesting activities one can participate in at Shakaland, and if you are lucky then you could even find yourself in consultation with a sangoma (a spiritual leader believed to have contact with the ancestors).

## Hoerikwaggo Trail

Hiking up Table Mountain is not the only 'must hike' route when in South Africa. How about hiking from Table Mountain to Cape Point? It is possible, and it is called the Hoerikwaggo Trail. This five or seven day 100 km hike claims to rival that of the Inca Trail in Machu Picchu.

Hoerikwaggo, meaning 'mountain in the sea' in Khoi'san, refers to Table Mountain chain that starts from the city centre all the way to Cape Point. This forms part of the Table Mountain National Park. The hike is suitable for both local and international hikers, with optional shorter routes within the park.

Comfortable accommodation specifically built for the Hoerikwaggo Trail is provided along the route and offers a much deserved rest at the end of the day after exploring the natural wonders and astounding diversity of the region.



The hike is definitely a unique and fun way to spend time in the outdoors, as well as witnessing some stunning views of the Cape landscape from the many lookouts along the way.

### **Birds of Eden**

Just a few kilometers east of Plettenberg Bay in the Garden Route, one will find the largest, single span aviary in the world. At the Birds of Eden, the birds are free to fly in an enormous two-hectare dome that spans over a massive indigenous forest.

Wooden walkways lead through the forest, over rivers and behind waterfalls. There are even storms emulated within the dome with claps of thunder and short cloudbursts from the irrigation system, providing an overwhelming experience of nature and wildlife.

It is an amazing and safe environment for the over 2000 previously caged birds who now fly free through the expansive dome. The park also enables bird owners to apply to release their pet birds into the sanctuary (once after undergoing rehabilitation). There are also about 100 species of African birds, some of which endangered.

It is a stunning place to visit, and offers many opportunities to capture that perfect photo of some very colorful and often very friendly and inquisitive birds.

### **The Apartheid Museum**

A visit to the Apartheid museum is essential if one wishes to learn more about South Africa's history and to understand what it was really like during those years under the apartheid regime.



Located only 15 minutes from OR Tambo International airport in Johannesburg, the museum is the first of its kind, offering insight to the rise and fall of apartheid. The 22 individual exhibition areas take visitors through a dramatic and emotional journey through the years of tyranny that government inflicted upon

the minority groups from the 1940's through to the early 1990's. The exhibitions include large blown-up photographs, metal cages, concrete floors, and provoking film footage of scenes illustrating the events and human stories that were directly affected by apartheid.

There are, of course, positive events that focus on the post-apartheid times, such as when former president Nelson Mandela became the president of South Africa in 1994 and a new democracy was born – becoming a shining beacon of hope and freedom to all South Africans.

No matter what, one will come away with a deeper understanding and appreciation of South Africa, having learnt about its darkest days as well as its greatest victories over adversity.

### **The Namaqualand Flowers**

Every year during spring, which is from September through to early November, the indigenous flowers in the Namaqualand region come into full bloom, literally covering the landscape with a carpet of colors. This incredible phenomenon never ceases to amaze visitors, and even the locals cannot get enough of the flowers in spring. The amount of rainfall from the winter will determine the type of flowers that will germinate at a specific time and place, so no matter where you are you will always be in for a surprise with a constantly changing landscape.

Many companies offer tours through the Namaqualand Flower Route, which is only about a five-hour drive north of Cape Town. Included in the route are the Richtersveld National Park, Skilpad Wild Flower Reserve, and the Goegap Nature Reserve that provides picnic spots and overnight facilities. There are hiking and cycling trails as well that allow visitors to get right up and personal with the fauna, offering ample opportunities to take photographs and admire the view. It is highly recommendable to take a drive up to the Namaqualand, not only are the flowers a natural wonder, there are also great guest houses and B&B's where one can stay and explore the small towns and villages in the area. The perfect getaway from the hustle and bustle of the city.

**By Thea Felmore**

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