

# South Africa: Sustainable Traveling and Ecotourism

Sustainable tourism has grown over recent decades to become something of a South African specialty. It is responsible tourism, a kinder way of travelling – gentler on the pocket, sensitive to community hosts and caring towards nature.

Since 1995, a new spirit of sustainable tourism has infused the industry, Green tourism, under Government leadership and through private projects, now goes beyond the simply eco-friendly. The new green is making sure that the people living next to parks benefit from them.

South Africa is a world leader in this kind of initiative. In fact, South Africa has pioneered responsible tourism in many ways. One of the most visible ones was extending the Fair Trade label to tourism products – a uniquely South African innovation.

Fair Trade tourism products run the whole gamut of experiences – from five star game lodges all the way through to adventure operators, bicycle tours, and community-owned guest houses. Included below are a number of initiatives, activities and accommodation details in South Africa that are striving to meet a standard by which others are judged.

## **Social Upliftment**

Behind social upliftment projects – whether initiated by government, individuals or corporates – is a conscious goal for SA. This is to find a new path that can redress past inequalities, support South African community tourism, improve quality of life, and offer visitors an enriching experience.

**Community tourism projects:** South African community tourism projects enable the enlightened traveler to have a fulfilling holiday while changing the way they see the world.

**Nelson Mandela's humanitarian projects:** Nelson Mandela's influence on society didn't stop when he announced his retirement from politics in 2004 – his legacy and actions continue inspiring millions across the globe.

**The Masiphumelele township:** South Africa's Cape Peninsula is known for its scenic beauty but the benefits visitors can bring to the townships are even more gratifying.

**Eastern Cape township tours:** A morning spent in the Port Elizabeth townships and settlements of Zwide, KwaZakhele and Ramaphosa puts guests in the midst of a bustling street market, where sidewalk barbers, wire artists and hooting taxis hold sway.

## **Volunteer Projects**

Volunteer projects in South Africa, be they wildlife- or community-based, enable participants to leave for their home countries with a heightened sense of achievement, self-awareness and understanding of the host country. Said one voluntourist: 'I now live in the present...!' Volunteer projects in South Africa are among the freshest forms of responsible tourism to gain momentum in this country.



Voluntourism, as it is also known, is an extraordinary way of getting under the skin of the country, of leaving a positive legacy while also gaining experience and leaving with unforgettable memories. Hosts and visitors alike will part feeling enriched.

Broadly speaking, South African volunteer work falls into two main categories – helping to uplift impoverished communities, or nature conservation.

### **Activities for Tourists**

As a destination, South Africa is multi-faceted – never just one thing at any one time. From the people, to the landscapes to abundant wildlife there is so much to inspire and enthrall. There are nine spectacular provinces for travelers to explore, all offering activities that are helping support and develop sustainable tourism within South Africa.

### **South African World Heritage Sites**

The evolution of mankind can be traced through South Africa's World Heritage Sites. Visitors can see the birthplace of modern man, interpret ancient societies through rock art, visit an ancient trading kingdom and encounter one of the few remaining semi-nomadic cultures. Since 1999, South Africa has been privileged to have 8 of its scenic and cultural treasures declared UNESCO sites.

### **Cederberg Conservancy**

There are 162 000 hectares of pristine mountain terrain, stretching from the Pakhuis Pass in the north to Grootrivier in the south. From the ancient San and Khoi to the Stadsaal Caves in the Koue Bokkeveld, travelers can travel on the rock art trail, where some sites date back around 8000 years. The area is a celebrated hiking and climbing destination, loved for its solitude and rugged mountain beauty that's rich with endemic plant life including fynbos, the rooibos tea plant, threatened Clanwilliam Cedar trees and the rare Snow Protea, found only along the snow line of the Sneeuwberg.



## **Botanical Gardens in South Africa**

South Africa botanical gardens provide a home to many indigenous and endangered plants and these gardens are major attractions, the most popular being near Cape Town. South Africa botanical gardens are some of the best ones in the world, especially the gardens that concentrate on cultivating and conserving indigenous plants. Eight of the country's botanical gardens are managed by the South African National Biodiversity Institute. Among the examples is Lowveld National Botanical Garden, KwaZulu-Natal National Botanical Garden, and Harold Porter Botanical Garden.

## **Sacred sites**

South Africa has many sacred sites, as many as there are beliefs and cultures. From mosques and kramats to Hindu temples and sacred hills, valleys and lakes, not to mention the 'energy centers' on and around the mountains.

## **Hiking Trails**

Hiking in South Africa is the answer if travelers want to escape the rat race and disappear off the grid, what better way than by packing a bag and heading off for a good long hike in the countryside? The South African National Parks Board, or SANParks, are responsible for administering a large number of hikes in national parks, and there are many more hikes in provincial game reserves and commercial forestry areas. Hikes range in lengths from an hour or two, right up to a couple of weeks or more.

## **Become a Game Ranger**

A visit to the African bush may inspire guests to want to learn more about the nature and wildlife. In each case, there are plenty of courses available in South African for interested people to learn to become a game ranger.

## **Frog Safari**

Frogs and toads are known as indicator species, with many of the breeds already on the way to extinction. A new initiative called 'Amphibian Ark' has been established to share data from different countries. The frog safari is one way that we can safely raise awareness, while promoting SA's relatively healthy reptile population.

## **Source:**

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