

WEST COAST



WEST COAST



Beyond the Waves

"Africa has her mysteries, and even a wise man cannot understand them. But a wise man respects them"

- Miriam Makeba
(South African singer and civil rights activist)

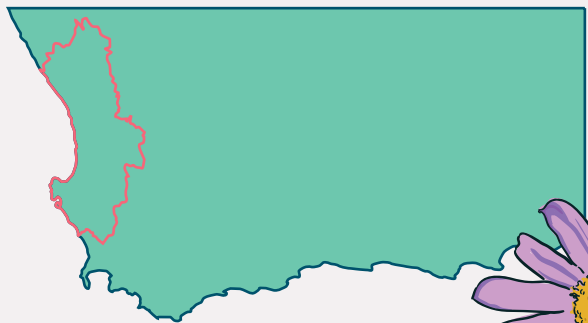
The captivating West Coast of South Africa is a landscape where windswept beaches, quaint fishing villages and breathtaking natural scenery await discovery. The region stretches from Cape Town to the Northern Cape border.

Step back in time as you explore the rich cultural heritage of the San people at the !Khwatla San Culture and Education Centre, in Yzerfontein. Here, you'll gain insights into one of Southern Africa's oldest indigenous communities.

Trace the footsteps of early explorers and settlers as you wander through heritage fishing villages like Saldanha Bay, where centuries-old traditions still thrive. Walk among whitewashed walls, visit local markets, and immerse yourself in the maritime history that has shaped this coastal gem.

Venture into the heart of the Cederberg mountains, where ancient rock art offers a glimpse into the spiritual and artistic legacy of the region's earliest inhabitants. Gaze at the intricate designs and motifs that adorn the sandstone cliffs, each telling a story of a bygone era.

Indulge in the region's culinary delights, from freshly caught seafood in Saldanha Bay to world-class wines in the vineyards of the Swartland. The smell of woodsmoke from the traditional South African 'braai' pairs particularly well with the salted ocean breeze.



Where Hominids Roamed

The West Coast is a region where the footsteps of ancient hominids echo through the ages. The story begins millions of years ago when early hominids roamed South Africa's grasslands and woodlands. Fossil discoveries in the region have provided crucial insights into the evolutionary origins of Homo sapiens. From the coastline's rugged cliffs to the interior's sheltered valleys, the West Coast was a melting pot of human evolution, shaping the physical and behavioural traits that define our species.



The Saldanha Skull.

Fossil Finds

One of the most significant fossil discoveries on the West Coast is the "Saldanha Skull," a fragmented skull cap belonging to an archaic Homo sapiens person, which dates back about 400,000 years. It points to the early presence of humans in the region.

In addition, **Eve's footprints** were discovered on the shores of Langebaan Lagoon, by geologist, Dr Dave Roberts in 1995. These fossilised footprints are believed to be over 120,000 years old, making them the oldest known footprints of an anatomically modern human. The footprints are thought to belong to a female human about 1.6 metres tall. Today, replicas of Eve's footprints can be viewed at the Geelbek section of the West Coast National Park, allowing visitors to connect with this profound piece of human history, first-hand.

The GriQua People: Guardians of the West Coast

The West Coast's shores bear witness to the stories of diverse indigenous peoples who have called this region home for millennia, among them, the **GriQua**.

The GriQua people, also known as Griqua or Griekwa, are descendants of intermarriages between indigenous Khoikhoi, San and European settlers, particularly Dutch and German colonists. Emerging as a distinct ethnic group in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the GriQua forged a unique cultural identity that blended elements of indigenous African traditions with European influences.

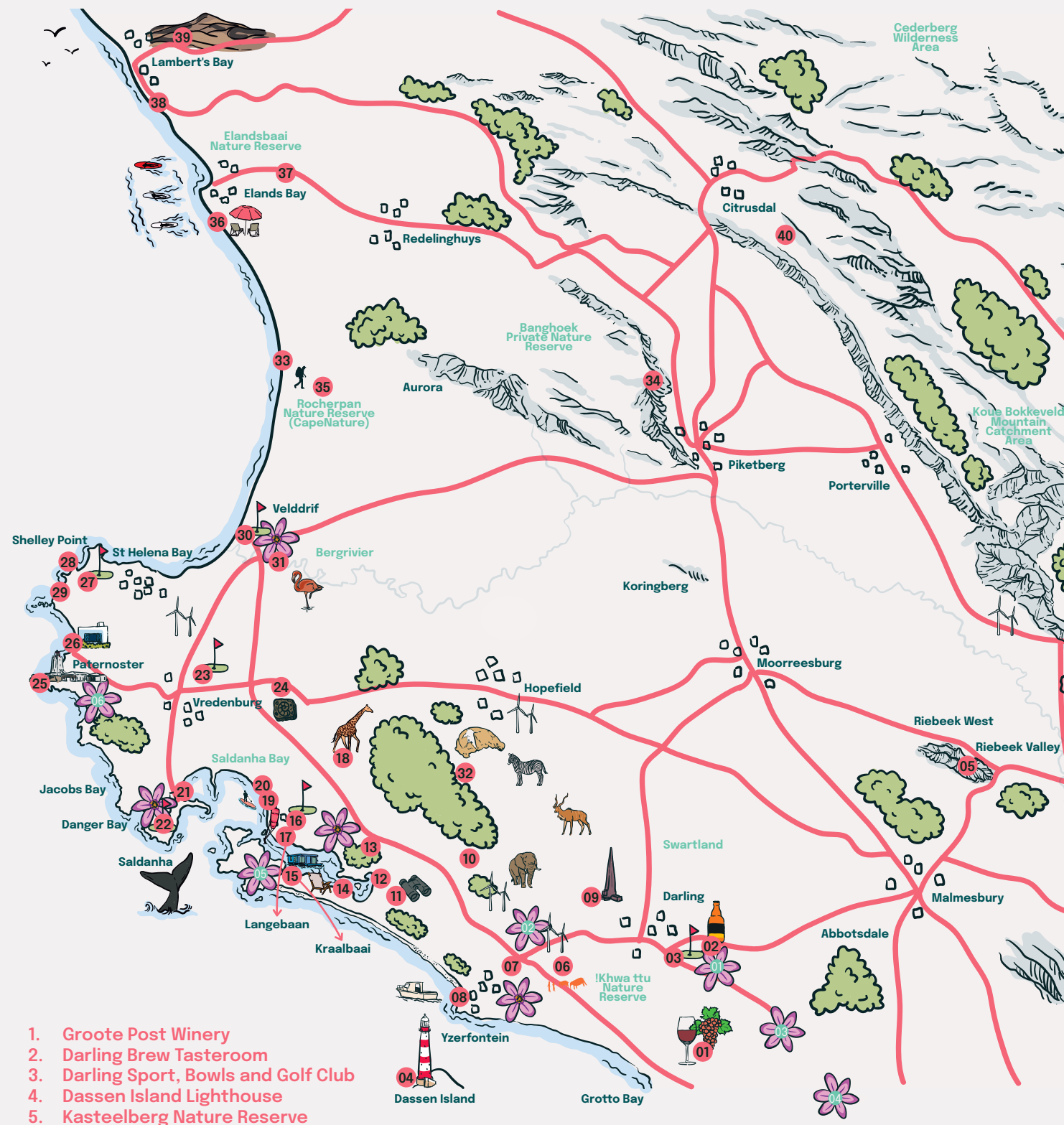
Like their Khoisan ancestors, the GriQua were traditionally semi-nomadic pastoralists and hunter-gatherers, traversing the vast expanses of the West Coast in search of grazing land for their livestock and seasonal food sources.

One of the defining features of GriQua society was their role as intermediaries between European colonists and indigenous peoples. As skilled negotiators and traders, they facilitated trade relations between European settlers and indigenous communities, often serving as guides, interpreters, and mediators in disputes over land, resources, and trade routes.

Despite their pivotal role as intermediaries, the GriQua faced numerous challenges, including land dispossession, discrimination, and marginalisation under colonial rule. However, the GriQua have preserved their cultural heritage through oral traditions, storytelling, music, and dance. Their language, Afrikaans, which first developed as a creole language blending elements of Dutch, Malay, Khoisan and other African languages, is a testament to their multicultural heritage. Today, efforts are underway to revitalise GriQua culture, promote linguistic diversity, and reclaim their ancestral lands.



Griquatown or Grikwastad. Griqualand West. Southern Africa. 1820.



1. Groote Post Winery
2. Darling Brew Tasteroom
3. Darling Sport, Bowls and Golf Club
4. Dassen Island Lighthouse
5. Kasteelberg Nature Reserve
6. !Khwatla San Culture & Education Centre
7. West Coast Farm Stall
8. Yzerfontein Beach
9. Hildebrand Monument
10. Buffelsfontein Game & Nature Reserve
11. Abrahamskraal Waterhole and Bird Hide
12. Geelbek Bird Lookout
13. West Coast National Park
14. Churchhaven
15. Kraalbaai Lifestyle House boats
16. Langebaan Country Estate Gold Course
17. Langebaan Beach
18. Thali Thali Game Lodge
19. Calypso Beach
20. Mykonos
21. Saldanha Bay Yacht Club
22. Military Academy Combined Club
23. Vredenburg Golf Club
24. West Coast Fossil Club
25. Cape Columbine
26. Paternoster Waterfront
27. Shelley Point Golf Club
28. Britannia Bay
29. Duyker Eiland
30. Bergrivier Golf Club
31. Cape Salt Company Velddrif
32. Where the Saldanha Skull was found
33. Rocherpan Lookout Point
34. Sebrakop Summit
35. Bird Hide Loop (6.8km trail)
36. Trompie se duin (beach)
37. Verlorenvlei
38. Gerrit 'Farmer' Burger Memorial
39. The Dunes
40. Olifantsrivier

Top Flower Spots

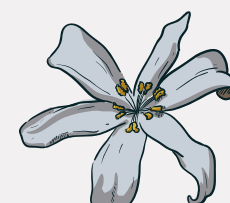
1. Darling Renosterveld Local Nature Reserve
2. Tienie Versfeld Wild Flower Reserve
3. Waylands Wild Flower Reserve
4. Harold Versfeld Nature Reserve at Contreberg Farm
5. Postberg
6. Paternoster and Cape Columbine Nature Reserve



Darling Kalkoentjie
(Gadiolus Meliusculus)
Month in Bloom: October



Cineraria
(Senecio Elegans)
Month in Bloom: November



Kukumakranka
(Gethyllis Afra)
Month in Bloom: December



Poeierkwassie
(Haemanthus pubescens)
Month in Bloom: March



Blue Pypie
(Gadiolus gracilis)
Month in Bloom: June & July

Flora

The West Coast's flora is characterised by its resilience and adaptability to the region's arid climate and sandy soils. Every year, in late August or early September, after the winter rains, spring on the West Coast is ushered in by a spectacular display of wildflowers in bloom.

Conservation Challenges

While the West Coast is a haven for biodiversity, it also faces significant conservation challenges. Habitat loss, overgrazing, and invasive species threaten native flora and fauna, while pollution and overfishing threaten marine ecosystems. Climate change exacerbates these challenges, with rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns impacting the region's delicate life balance.

Ancestral Artefacts

The West Coast holds cultural significance as a landscape where early humans forged connections with their environment and each other. Archaeological sites throughout the region bear testament to the ingenuity and adaptability of our ancestors, from stone tools and hunting implements to traces of ancient settlements and ceremonial sites. These artefacts offer insight into the daily lives and spiritual beliefs of prehistoric communities that once thrived along the coast.



A typical settlement on the banks of the Orange River. A painting by Samuel Daniell.

An Indigenous Legacy

The history of the first local peoples of the West Coast is shrouded in the mists of time, with archaeological evidence suggesting their presence in the region as early as 20,000 years ago. These first local peoples, often collectively called Khoisan, were descendants of some of the earliest anatomically modern humans, and they played a pivotal role in shaping the West Coast's history, culture, and landscape, leaving behind a rich legacy that resonates today.

Hunter-Gatherer Traditions

These first local peoples lived a nomadic existence as skilled hunter-gatherers. Roaming the vast expanses of the West Coast, they possessed an intimate knowledge of the land and its resources, relying on their expertise in tracking, trapping, and foraging to procure food, water and shelter. They were not a homogeneous group, but comprised various distinct communities, each with its language, customs, and traditions. The Khoikhoi were pastoralists who herded cattle and sheep along the coastal plains; the San hunter-gatherers inhabited the rugged interior regions. These communities lived side-by-side in harmony, for centuries.

The arrival of European colonists in the 17th century, however, brought profound changes to their lives. Dispossessed of their ancestral lands, marginalised, and subjected to violent repression, many indigenous peoples faced displacement, enslavement and cultural assimilation.

WELCOME

HISTORY

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History



An ideal shot of the flowers in bloom over the West Coast



The Settlers

The first Europeans to come into contact with the West Coast were Portuguese navigators in the late 15th century. Their arrival heralded a new era of interaction between European powers and indigenous peoples, as explorers and traders sought to establish footholds in the lucrative spice trade.

In 1652, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) established a refreshment station at the Cape of Good Hope, laying the foundations for Dutch colonisation of the region. Dutch settlers, known as Boers, gradually spread eastward from the Cape, establishing farms and trading posts along the coast. This expansion of Dutch colonial rule brought them into conflict with indigenous peoples, notably the Khoekhoe and San, whose territories were gradually being usurped.

In 1795, British forces occupied the Cape Colony, signalling the beginning of British rule in the region, during which the Cape Colony underwent significant changes, such as the abolition of slavery in 1834, and the introduction of British legal and administrative systems.

Colonialism brought profound social and cultural changes to the West Coast as European norms and values began to dominate indigenous societies. Missionary activity, education, and urbanisation contributed to the spread of Christianity and Western ideologies, while indigenous languages and traditions were marginalised or suppressed. Racial segregation and discrimination became institutionalised under colonial rule, shaping patterns of inequality and injustice that persist to this day.



Holiday houses on the edge of beach dunes at sunset with wispy blue sky in Jacobsbaai



The Preekstoel (pulpit) rock formation at the Langebaan Lagoon

Notable Places

1-Blauwberg Nature Reserve

Offering breathtaking views of Table Mountain across the bay, it's a haven for birdwatchers and hikers, with numerous trails winding through indigenous fynbos and coastal dunes.

2-Melkbosstrand

Known for its pristine beaches and relaxed atmosphere, it is a charming coastal town just north of Cape Town. Visitors can swim, surf, or soak up the sun on the sandy shores.

3-Koeberg Private Nature Reserve

Located near the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station, this nature reserve offers a unique blend of natural beauty and industrial infrastructure. It's home to various bird species and provides educational opportunities for visitors interested in sustainable energy.

4-Silwerstroom-strand

A serene stretch of coastline popular among locals and tourists alike, it boasts wide sandy beaches and stunning ocean views.

5-Witzand Aquifer Nature Reserve

This nature reserve showcases the unique ecosystem of the Atlantis Sand Dunes, home to various plant and animal species adapted to the harsh desert environment. Visitors can explore the dunes on guided tours and learn about conservation efforts in the area.

6-Riebeeek Valley

This picturesque destination is famous for its wine farms, olive groves, and gourmet cuisine. Visitors can explore quaint towns like Riebeeek Kasteel and Riebeeek West while sampling local wines and artisanal products.

7-Mamre Mission Station

Now a cultural heritage site, with a rich history dating back to the 18th century. Offers insight into the lives of early settlers and indigenous communities. Explore historic buildings, churches, and gardens while learning about the area's fascinating past.

8-Darling

A charming town known for its vibrant arts scene and annual wildflower show, Darling offers visitors a taste of small-town charm with its quaint streets, historic buildings, and friendly atmosphere.

9-Groote Post Wine Cellar

Nestled in the picturesque Darling Hills, and renowned for its award-winning wines. Enjoy wine tastings, cellar tours, and gourmet picnics on the estate grounds.

10-West Coast National Park

Stretches along the coast from Langebaan to Yzerfontein. The Park is a biodiversity hotspot, home to various bird species, antelope, and marine life. Enjoy hiking, birdwatching, and picnicking.

11-Yzerfontein

A tranquil fishing village known for its pristine beaches and stunning sunsets, it is a popular holiday destination for those seeking relaxation and natural beauty.

12-!Khwa-tu San Cultural and Educational Centre

Dedicated to preserving and showcasing San culture and heritage, it offers visitors an immersive cultural experience through guided tours, storytelling sessions, and traditional craft demonstrations. A unique opportunity to learn about the history and traditions of the San people.

13-Langebaan

This "Jewel of the West Coast" is a picturesque coastal town nestled on the pristine shores of the Langebaan Lagoon, just a short drive from Cape Town. Caribbean-like beaches and crystal-clear waters make it a haven for water sports enthusiasts, and for visitors simply seeking relaxation. Accommodation options range from upscale resorts to cosy guesthouses. Ecological attractions include the West Coast National Park and the West Coast Fossil Park.

14-Saldanha

This picturesque bay, embraced by the azure waters of the Atlantic, is about 110 kilometres north of Cape Town. It is the largest and deepest natural bay in South Africa, offering a sanctuary for marine life as well as water sports, such as yachting, kite surfing, game fishing and whale watching. The sheltered harbour provides safe anchorage for an array of vessels, from fishing craft to naval ships, making it a vital hub for the region's export and fishing industries. Other cultural attractions include archaeological sites and ancient fossilised remains.

15-Jacobsbaai

A hidden gem, tucked away on the coast, known for its tranquil atmosphere and unspoiled beaches. Explore the town's charming architecture, go hiking along coastal trails, or simply unwind in the natural beauty.

16-Paternoster

A quaint fishing village characterised by whitewashed cottages and pristine beaches. A popular destination for seafood lovers and beach enthusiasts. Explore tidal pools, or take leisurely walks along the shoreline.



Bird Island offshore from Lambert's Bay: A small island sanctuary and breeding ground for seabirds, particularly Cape gannets. Other island species include cormorants, seagulls, and terns.

A Geological Tale of Tectonic Upheaval

The geological history of the West Coast dates back millions of years, with the region shaped by a complex interplay of tectonic activity, erosion, and sedimentation. The West Coast is situated along the boundary of the African Plate and the South Atlantic Ocean, making it susceptible to geological forces such as faulting, folding and volcanic activity.

One of the most prominent geological features of the western region of Southern Africa is the Cape Fold Belt, a series of folded and faulted rock formations that run parallel to the coastline. The Cape Fold Belt was formed during the late Paleozoic era, approximately 300 million years ago, resulting from tectonic collisions between the African and Antarctic Plates, which uplifted and folded sedimentary layers.

The iconic Table Mountain Sandstone, a distinctive feature of the Cape Fold Belt, dominates much of the landscape along the West Coast. This durable rock formation, formed from ancient sand dunes and sedimentary deposits, has been sculpted by erosion over millions of years, resulting in the dramatic cliffs, valleys, and rock formations that characterise the region.

Along the coastline, the forces of erosion and deposition continue to shape the land, sculpting sandy

beaches, rocky cliffs, and tidal flats. The action of waves, wind, and currents plays a vital role in shaping the coastal landscape. At the same time, sediment transported by rivers and streams contributes to the formation of coastal deltas and estuaries.



The flowers of the West Coast

Geology

Unmissable Beaches

1 - Pearl Bay Beach

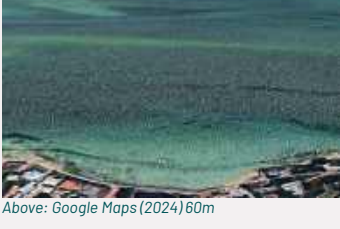
Located on the southern edge of Yzerfontein, Pearl Bay Beach offers tranquility, spectacular views of Table Mountain and Dassen Island, and activities such as fishing, waterskiing, sailing, and kayaking. Enjoy the exquisite seafood at nearby restaurants and cafes.



Above: Google Maps (2024) 5km



Above: Google Maps (2024) 70m



Above: Google Maps (2024) 60m

2 - 16 Mile Beach

Stretching from just north of Yzerfontein's Main Beach to the West Coast National Park, 16 Mile Beach is the longest uninterrupted stretch of beach on the South African coastline. It's perfect for long walks, and visitors can enjoy the day's catch at local restaurants.

3 - Kraalbaai Beach

Situated in the West Coast National Park, Kraalbaai Beach offers crystal-blue lagoon waters, ideal for fishing, angling, boating, skiing, and kayaking. Families can also enjoy picnics and braais in the fantastic surroundings.

4 - Tietesbaai

Known as the westernmost beach on the Cape West Coast, it offers pristine beauty, ideal for swimming, kitesurfing, and kayaking. It's also home to the last manually controlled lighthouse in South Africa.

5 - Sandbaai Beach

Half a kilometre south of Langebaan Beach, this beach is perfect for yacht spotting and beachside relaxation. While swimming is not advisable due to strong currents, visitors can enjoy the sunshine and nearby restaurants.

6 - Kersbosstrand Beach

This beach offers 40 kilometres of unspoiled white sand, making it ideal for long walks, swimming, boating, stand-up paddling, and whale watching from July to December. It's less than an hour from the Cape West Coast National Park and Langebaan.



Above: Google Maps (2024) 100m



Above: Google Maps (2024) 300m



8 - Mosselbank Beach

Located in Paternoster, this beach offers golden sands and excellent surfing, swimming, fishing, snorkelling, and diving opportunities. Visitors can also explore hiking and mountain biking trails in Columbine Nature Reserve.

9 - Tsaarsbank Beach

In the West Coast National Park, this beach offers rugged beauty, whale-watching opportunities from August to October, and hiking trails to explore the coastline and the Pantelis A Lemos shipwreck.

10 - Langebaan Lagoon

Known for its turquoise waters and soft sandy beaches, Langebaan Lagoon is perfect for a wide range of water sports activities, including windsurfing, kitesurfing, snorkelling, kayaking, and more. Visitors can also enjoy strolls along the pristine beaches.



Animals

The fauna of the West Coast is equally diverse, with a wide range of terrestrial, avian and marine species. Along the coastline, colonies of seabirds such as African penguins, Cape gannets and cormorants nest on rocky outcrops and offshore islands; while shorebirds like sandpipers and plovers forage along the sandy shores. Marine life supported by the nutrient-rich waters of the Benguela Current includes seals, dolphins and whales, as well as fish species like snoek, mullet and cob. Inland, the array of mammals includes antelope such as springbok, gemsbok and eland; as well as carnivores such as caracals, black-backed jackals and Cape foxes that prey on smaller mammals and birds.



Humpback whales (Megaptera novaeangliae) migrate from the cold antarctic to the warm tropics every winter



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Ask us to style and plan your unique African adventure!

22-Cederberg

Just 200 kilometres from Cape Town, the Cederberg region is a rugged and enchanting wilderness. The Cederberg Mountains stand as sentinels of ancient tales and breathtaking vistas. The area is named after the indigenous cedar trees that once flourished here. It is renowned for its striking sandstone rock formations, including iconic landmarks like the Maltese Cross and the Wolfberg Arch. Scattered throughout this rugged landscape are remnants of the ancient San people, who left behind a legacy of rock art that offers glimpses into their spiritual world and way of life. Today, the Cederberg Wilderness Area encompasses over 71,000 hectares of protected land, providing sanctuary to a diverse flora and fauna. Hiking trails wind through the mountain passes, offering adventurers the opportunity to immerse themselves in this untamed realm and discover its hidden wonders.



Rock formations on the Vensterklippe hiking trail at Dwarsrivier in the Cederberg

23-West Coast Fossil Park

Near Langebaan, the West Coast Fossil Park is a remarkable destination where visitors can journey back in time to explore the prehistoric wonders of the region. This renowned park, approximately 150 kilometres north of Cape Town, transports visitors to an era dating back around 5 million years when the West Coast was adorned with lush landscapes and teeming with exotic wildlife. Here, amidst the rocky landscape, lies the fossil site of Langebaanweg, celebrated for its exceptionally well-preserved fossil faunal remains from the terminal Miocene/early Pliocene period. Within the park's boundaries, visitors can view the ancient remnants of bears, sabre-tooth cats, short-necked giraffes, and other fascinating creatures that once roamed the area. Led by a team of dedicated researchers, ongoing efforts are underway to unravel the mysteries of this ancient ecosystem and recreate its environment and climate. The park's newly constructed Visitor Centre, made possible through funding from the National Lotteries Commission (NLC), serves as a discovery hub, offering immersive exhibitions, educational resources, and modern facilities for visitors to enjoy. As a designated National Heritage Site and integral part of the Cradle of Human Culture Artist's Route, the West Coast Fossil Park is a testament to the region's rich geological and paleontological heritage.

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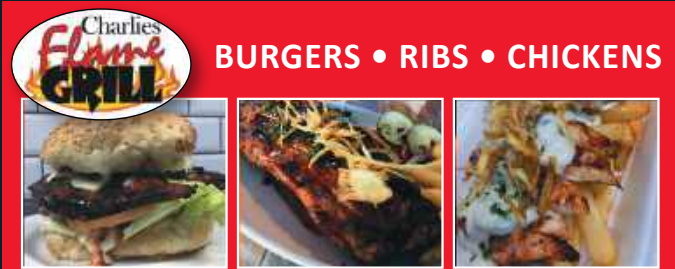
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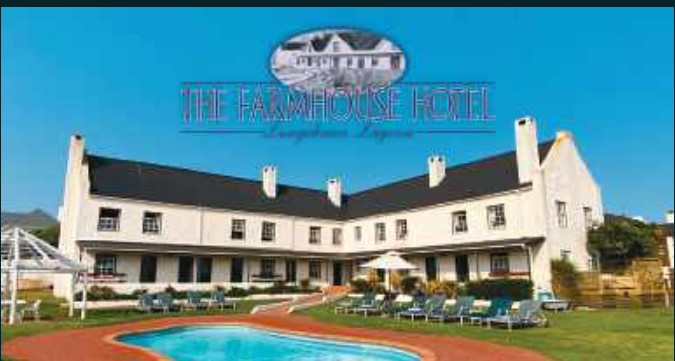
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