

GARDEN ROUTE SAFARI (10 days)

In this breathtaking nature safari, we explore one of the most beautiful parts of South Africa, the Western Cape's Garden Route. Not only does this region have rich scenic beauty, with its lush evergreen forests and rugged coastline, but it also teems with spectacular birds and other wildlife. The area incorporates the fynbos biome, with a diversity of plants greater than anywhere else on earth, as well as numerous National Parks and game reserves, some of which host Africa's Big 5 mammals. This tour has been designed to give you a taste of some of the best natural scenery South Africa has to offer, and is filled with great photographic opportunities and unique wildlife experiences! Due to the numerous interactive activities along the Garden Route, this tour is also very popular for families with children.

BASIC ITINERARY

Day	Accommodation
1 Hermanus	Francolinhof Guest Lodge
2 Wilderness	Wilderness National Park
3 Knysna	Island Lodge/ similar
4 Tsitsikamma	Tsitsikamma Coastal National Park
5 Addo	Addo Elephant National Park
6 Addo	Addo Elephant National Park
7 De Rust	Oulap Guest House
8 Oudtshoorn	De Zeekoe
9 Matjiesfontein	Lord Milner Hotel

Price (per person sharing)*: Please refer to the rates page on the website.

* These prices include all accommodation, meals, transport, entrance fees and guide fees. Prices exclude beverages, laundry fees, any optional activities, gratuities and items of a personal nature (such as gifts and souvenirs).

DAY 1: CAPE TOWN TO HERMANUS

Highlights: Harold Porter Gardens, Whale watching (seasonal), Swellendam Historical Museum

After fetching you from your place of stay after breakfast, we will make our way eastwards, along the beautiful False Bay Coast. We have a chance of seeing a variety of marine birds and mammals along this route, including Cape Gannets, Cape Fur Seals, dolphins and whales (seasonal). Our first stop will be at Stony Point - a great place to see the rare African Penguin as well as four cormorant species (two of them endangered southern African endemics) and several other marine bird species. We continue our tour to the spectacular Harold Porter Botanical Gardens, with its amazing variety of flowering plants and birds. We will do a brief walk through the gardens, where we will discuss the various plants and bird species we come across. This area forms part of the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve, the richest place on earth for plants - even richer than the Amazon! We then make our way to Hermanus, a picturesque coastal town nestled between a tranquil bay and the rugged fynbos-clad mountains. Here we plan to have lunch at a restaurant set inside a natural coastal cave, overlooking the bay. Depending on the time of year, this bay, well-known as one of the best land-based whale watching spots in the world, may be teeming with Southern Right Whales. Rock hyraxes and other wildlife are also usually present to entertain us. We will spend the night at a tranquil lodge at the foot of the mountains, surrounded by fynbos.

DAY 2: HERMANUS TO WILDERNESS

Highlights: Drostdy Museum/ Bontebok National Park, Aloe Factory, Wilderness National Park

After breakfast, we make our way inland to the historical and beautiful town of Swellendam, situated at the base of the high Langeberg Mountains. Swellendam was established in the early 1700s and is the 3rd oldest town in South Africa. Time-permitting, we may visit the local Drostdy Museum (the seat of the first Magistrate, or *Landdrost*, built in 1747) where we will be given insight into the early way of life of the settlers here. Alternatively, we will visit the nearby Bontebok National Park, where we can see a variety of interesting plants, birds and other wildlife. This park is home to two mammals brought back from the verge of extinction – the Cape Mountain Zebra and the Bontebok (or "*Pied Antelope*" when translated from Afrikaans) as well as other interesting species such as the Bat-eared Fox and the Agulhas Clapper Lark, with its bizarre courtship display. We then continue our journey eastwards towards the Garden Route, with its spectacular coastline, rich evergreen forests, high mountains and pristine lakes. As we approach Albertinia, we are entering "Aloe country". Our next stop will be at an aloe factory, where a myriad of products (with many useful and healing properties) are made from the *Aloe ferox* plant. We will join a short tour where we be given insight into the production process from the Aloe leaf to each of the raw products. After lunch, we continue along the Garden Route to the Wilderness National Park, which lies in the foothills of the Outeniqua Mountains. This is a region of incomparable beauty, which encompasses lakes, rivers, lagoons, forests, fynbos and pristine white beaches. Here, we hope to encounter some of South Africa's most elusive and beautiful birds, such as the Knysna Turaco and Narina Trogon. We will have sundowners overlooking the Indian Ocean (where we may be fortunate enough to see dolphins), before spending the night at our lodge with its spectacular views of the entire bay.

DAY 3: WILDERNESS TO KNYSNA

Highlights: Canoeing, Forest walk, John Benn Boat Cruise

After an early breakfast, we will embark on a canoe trip (or a walk, if preferred) up the tranquil and densely forested Touw River in search of some spectacular birds, including the elusive Narina Trogon and the Knysna Turaco - the sight of these green birds with their bright crimson wings flying from tree to tree is unforgettable! We also hope to see some of the 5 Kingfisher species found here. At the top of the river, we will enjoy some tea and coffee in a small clearing, where we can soak in the tranquil sights and sounds of the forest. After our canoe trip, we will make our way further up the Garden route to the town of Knysna, where we will enjoy a light lunch at the Knysna waterfront. Knysna is a legendary South African town, famed for its fresh water oysters and its elusive forest elephants (now virtually extinct). We then make our way to the nearby "Garden of Eden" for a gentle forest walk, where we hope to see several localised forest birds such as Knysna Woodpecker, Knysna Warbler and Knysna Turaco, as well as identify some of the giant trees of the forest. In the evening, we will join a sunset cruise on the John Benn, where we can enjoy sundowners and a relaxing dinner as we explore the Knysna Lagoon. A highlight of this cruise will be seeing the spectacular cliffs called the "Knysna Heads", where the Knysna Lagoon enters the sea.

DAY 4: KNYSNA TO TSITSIKAMMA

Highlights: Forest walks, Monkeyland, Whalewatching

We begin our day with another beautiful forest walk – this time at the spectacular Harkerville Forest, with its densely wooded coastal cliffs descending to azure waters below. We then make our way to Monkeyland, the world's first free roaming multi-species primate sanctuary. Here we will join a guided walk through the indigenous forest, where we can see some of the world's small primates, including lemurs, roaming freely in the trees. After descending into Nature's Valley, a pristine stretch of coastal evergreen forest, we will stop at Blaauwkrans River Bridge where we will enjoy a light lunch and watch or participate in (if you are really daring - optional), the highest bungee jump in the world – an incredible 217m! This area forms part of the renowned Tsitsikamma Coastal National Park. Tsitsikamma, meaning "*place of many waters*" in the indigenous Khoi-San language, is an area of unmatched beauty with a wild rugged coastline, aquamarine breakers and an abundance of marine life. In the afternoon we will again seek new plant, mammal and bird species along the forested "Loerie Trail", situated close to our log chalet in the Park. At the viewpoints along this 1km trail, we will hopefully be able spot whales and dolphins out to sea. After supper at the National Park restaurant, overlooking the moonlit bay, we will take a relaxing stroll where we hope to see owls, fireflies (seasonal) and other night creatures.

DAY 5: TSITSIKAMMA TO ADDO ELEPHANT NATIONAL PARK

Highlights: Forest walk, Boat trip, Snorkelling, African elephants and other large game

After breakfast, we will set out on a boardwalk through the forest to the impressive (and somewhat dizzying!) pedestrian swing bridge over the spectacular Storms River Mouth. On this route, we may see Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, African Paradise Flycatcher, Chorister Robin-chat and many other birds. If we are fortunate enough, we may even encounter a Cape Clawless Otter feeding on the shore. After the

walk, we will either join a boat trip up the steep-sided Storm's River gorge (weather permitting) or snorkel in one of the quiet bays or rock pools, with an abundance of marine life. After lunch at the Paul Sauer Bridge, situated in the heart of the Tsitsikamma Forest, we will continue our journey eastwards to the renowned Addo Elephant National Park. This park, set within the dense bushveld of the Eastern Cape, is sanctuary to over 400 elephants, numerous buffalo, black rhino, lion and leopard, as well as many antelope species. The late afternoon is an excellent time for game viewing and birding, so we will use this time to explore some of the park and visit the camp's bird hide before supper. After supper we will enjoy some relaxing game viewing at the floodlit waterhole in the camp.

DAY 6: ADDO ELEPHANT NATIONAL PARK

Highlights: Game viewing, Bird watching, Botanising

Addo Elephant National Park offers visitors a genuine safari experience – where you can see the Big 5 in their natural habitat! We will spend a full day exploring this fascinating and diverse reserve. One of the unique features of this reserve is that it contains five out of South Africa's seven major vegetation zones. We will embark on early morning and afternoon game drives (the best times for viewing game), and visit a number of bird hides and water holes during the course of the day. Not only are we likely to encounter some of Africa's large game, but we will enjoy observing and discussing the various vegetation types and the many new bird species associated with them. In the late afternoon, we will once again be able to do some further game viewing at the camp's waterhole, before enjoying a traditional South African Braai (barbeque on an open fire)! After supper, we will join a night drive during which we hope to spot many interesting creatures that only emerge after dark, including springhares, porcupines, genets and polecats. Sightings of lions and elephants are also a possibility.

DAY 7: ADDO TO R62

Highlights: Scenic drive, Bird watching, Botanising

After an early morning game drive, we will begin our return journey along the N2 towards Humansdorp. Here, we plan to stop for an early lunch and some great coffee at *le Chameleon*, an eccentric, yet stylish restaurant offering some tantalising local cuisine. We then continue via Kareedouw along Route 62, a scenic drive which passes directly between the Outeniqua and Swartberg Mountains. *En route*, we will enjoy a brief walk through some pristine mountain fynbos where we will observe the rich diversity of flowering plants and birds found in this area. After our walk, we continue westwards towards the "Little Karoo", where the environment becomes increasingly harsh and arid, and the vegetation increasingly sparse. The Little Karoo is a vast semi-desert bordered by majestic rugged mountains with some spectacular passes. Here we will have the opportunity of seeing a huge number of bird endemics, and *completely* different vegetation from what we have seen so far. Just before we reach the quaint and picturesque town of de Rust, we will stop for the night at Oulap Guest House, a highly acclaimed country lodge with a spectacular backdrop of the Swartberg Mountains.

DAY 8: R62 TO OUDTSHOORN

Highlights: Meiringspoort rock formations, Ostrich Farm, Cango Caves

After breakfast, we continue our drive to the intriguing and picturesque town of De Rust, where we will explore the nearby Meiringspoort, with its spectacular sandstone formations and waterfall. We then continue to Oudtshoorn, the ostrich capital of the world and the heart of the Little Karoo. During the ostrich feather boom, this town became extremely wealthy, but hit hard times after World War I, when the feather industry collapsed. Ostriches are still ranched here in large numbers for meat, leather and eggs, and we will visit an Ostrich Show Farm to find out more about these large flightless birds. After lunch, we will visit the nearby Cango Caves, one of South Africa's most famous natural wonders. These caves, formed over millions of years within a thick limestone layer, extend as far as 5.3km into the Swartberg Mountains. You will have the option of either touring the main caverns, with their spectacular stalactite and stalagmite formations, or doing the extended adventure tour, which includes climbing and crawling through tight, narrow passages. After the cave tour, we will retire for the evening to De Zeekoe, a working ostrich farm where we will spend the night in stylish log cabins situated on the edge of a vlei (marsh) teeming with water birds.

DAY 9: OUDTSHOORN TO MATJIESFONTEIN

Highlights: Meerkats, Swartberg Pass, Prince Albert, Stargazing

This morning we will get an early start in order to join a local meerkat (suricate) specialist for a sunrise tour where we can watch and learn about meerkats in their natural environment - amongst the world's cutest and most comical small mammals. This is one of the best places in the wild for getting close views of these fascinating little creatures. We continue our day with a short drive to the base of the intimidating Swartberg Mountain Pass. As we ascend the pass, the Karoo vegetation reverts to fynbos and we will encounter dozens of new plant species, including Proteas, Ericas and many others. This pass is an excellent spot for birds, including some rare and difficult-to-spot species such as Protea Canary, Victorin's Warbler and Cape Rockjumper. The summit of the pass can be cold and windy, but its huge diversity of plants and extremely localised birds make it a worthwhile stop. We then descend this awe-inspiring pass until we find ourselves in the Great Karoo, a vast semi-desert. This area is even dryer than the Little Karoo, since it lies within the rain-shadow of the huge Swartberg Mountains. We will have lunch at Prince Albert, a quaint and typical Great Karoo town. We continue our drive to a beautifully restored historical Karoo town – Matjiesfontein, with its striking Victorian architecture. After a drink on the veranda of the hotel, you can visit the charming local pub, before enjoying a relaxing dinner in the hotel dining hall - the hotel's Karoo lamb curry is nationally renowned! If the skies are clear, we should have spectacular views of the stars later in the evening. Stargazing in this part of the world is generally phenomenal, so we hope to point out some of the well-known constellations of the southern hemisphere and show you how to navigate using the Southern Cross.

DAY 10: MATJIESFONTEIN TO CAPE TOWN

Highlights: Historical town, Geology, Karoo vegetation and birds, winelands

After breakfast, we will explore the interesting town of Matjiesfontein on foot. We then continue our drive towards Cape Town, during which we will observe some of the fascinating geological formations *en route*, until we reach the beautiful Hex River Valley. This extensive valley, surrounded by awesome, rugged mountains, is a patchwork of jewel-green vineyards in the summer and a multitude of autumn shades in winter. We will then visit the Karoo Desert National Botanical Gardens, the only truly succulent garden in the southern hemisphere. This garden contains over 400 naturally occurring species, and in spring, it comes alive with thousands of annuals and brightly coloured vygies. Up to 70 bird species have been recorded in this garden, as well as numerous small mammals. After a gentle walk in the gardens, we will enjoy a light lunch and wine-tasting at the Du Kloof Estate, with some awe-inspiring views of the mountain and river. After lunch, we will take the scenic Du Toit's Kloof pass, with its pristine mountain fynbos, on our way back to Cape Town. On the other side of Du Toit's Kloof we will soon see Paarl Rock, a huge granite outcrop that resembles a large round pearl (hence its name in Dutch) and the Afrikaans Language Monument. Soon Table Mountain will become visible as we approach Cape Town, the 'Mother City' that we left 10 days ago. We will return you to your guest house/ hotel in the early evening.

If you would like us to transfer you to the airport (either in the evening or the following morning), or arrange accommodation for you in Cape Town, we would be happy to do so.