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Cape Town – A Look at Africa's Most Beautiful City

By andrew muigai

As winter approaches in the northern hemisphere, the earth's rotation round the sun means that

summer beckons in the south. I admonish you– take a few days off and follow the sun! The best place to catch the Town's claim to being the most beautiful city in South Africa is undisputed. And seasoned travel writers readily accept the merit of Cape Town's claim that is indeed one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

The city is blessed with unrivalled gifts of nature. The mighty kilometer high flat top Table Mountain dwarfs even the most ambitious skyscrapers in the business district. The city is surrounded by glorious landscapes, stunning beaches and a bounty of unique vegetation. Where else do you have a choice of the cool Atlantic Ocean and the warmer Indian Ocean?

But Cape Town offers much more. It is reputed to be the most open–minded and relaxed city in South Africa and is one of the safest cities in Africa for visitors. Action hero Jean–Claude Van Damme in the city to shoot an action thriller recently declared: "I love waking up in this city with the sea around me and the fresh air. The people are young with fresh and warm personalities and are friendly and it's a country full of hope."

The movie is being shot in the city and around the harbour and if you are in town before the end of the year you just might get to see Van Damme at the waterfront. This is the same country that has produced some of the most inspiring people of our times. Desmond Tutu the Nobel Peace Prize winner past leader of the Anglican flock in Cape Town, for example and of course Nelson Mandela.

Take a boat trip to Robben Island, one of the hottest destinations for overseas visitors. This is where Nelson Mandela nearly lost his sight quarrying lime during his long imprisonment. Make sure to get to the summit of Table Mountain by cable where you will enjoy some unforgettable views.

Northwards of the city center is the Victoria and Albert waterfront– a trendy shopping and entertainment complex. It is packed with art galleries, art and craft shops, restaurants, taverns, cinemas, theatres and an aquarium. It is easy to see why many beautiful people converge here. It is when in Cape Town that you will understand why Desmond Tutu named the country as the "Rainbow Nation". The peoples here

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have roots in the four corners of the planet and together give the city its vivid colours.

Cape Town is well connected to one of the most popular travel destinations in South Africa: the Garden Route.

The Garden Route is the southern coastal area starting west of Cape Town at Swellendam and ending at Humansdorp just before Port Elizabeth. The Garden Route is probably the most scenic journey you will ever make. You encounter soaring cliffs, wide beaches, semi desert, rocky coves, rain forests, tranquil lakes and rugged mountains. The area is good for watersports and the weather allows this year round. A visit to the wine producing regions can also be staged from Cape Town. If you are short of time head for picturesque Stellenbosch just a 45-minute drive away.

The Garden Route tour usually starts from Cape Town with a stop at Mossel Bay. This otherwise uninspiring town is famous for its Post Office Tree, where sailors left letters hanging in a boot to be

picked up by those headed towards the country where the letters were addressed. Then to Oudtshoorn and George, a transport hub for the area.

Afterwards, Wilderness National Park a good place for birding and canoeing on your way to the artist colony of Knysna and Plettenberg Bay. Plettenberg Bay, the "millionaires' playground" is South Africa's trendiest resort. Then to Tsitsikamma National Park known for its nature trails, giant trees and caves. A little ahead of Humansdorp is Jeffrey's Bay, reputed to have one of the world's best surfing beaches.

Watersports are big in South Africa. Whale watching and shark-cage diving (with great white sharks) is possible in the Cape area. The best time to spot these sea giants is from June to September. In the last week of September the annual Whale Festival is held at Walker Bay. Diving facilities are good in the area and wreck diving in particular is widespread around the Cape. For fishing enthusiasts, the Cape of Good Hope has one the world's richest fishing grounds.

At the confluence of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean currents is to be found large shoals of tuna and swordfish. For those brave souls seeking hair-raising adventure, there is an excellent opportunity for bungee jumping at the bridge over Blaukrans River. This has one of the world's highest drops.

There are also many beautiful golf courses in the Cape Town and Garden Route area. The best time to play is the cooler months of May to September. The President's Cup is being held this year (18 -23 November) at the Fancourt Hotel and Country Club at George right on the Garden Route. This event is a match play competition with the world's best international players.

The best period to visit the Cape region is over the summer months November-February. The rest of the year is usually cool, rainy and windy. Most people then find it quite challenging to engage in swimming and water sports. There is a wide range of accommodation in Cape Town and the Garden Route area. Top range 5 star hotels and other rated hotels are found throughout the region.

Other accommodation options include motels, guesthouses, bed and breakfasts, farm holidays, beach cottages, holiday flats and bungalows. The Cape region is now a much sought after destination and

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advance booking is necessary during the summer season (October–April). With prior planning it is possible to get good value and affordable holiday stay.

Andrew Muigai is editor of AfricaPoint Insider online newsletter. It is part of Africapoint.com – the Africa travel website that has helped thousands of travelers discover Africa. You can view more info on South Africa Safaris at the website.

<http://www.africapoint.com/tours1/southatour.htm>

Quick Guide To Cape Town

By Chic Retreats

Cape Town has emerged as a city for romantics, adventurers, explorers and families alike. The city now boasts a number of exquisite boutique hotels from where you can enjoy everything Cape Town has to offer.

Where is it?

Cape Town sits on the south west corner of South Africa, where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans meet. It has its own airport and visitors are never short of entertainment or excitement.

Where can I stay?

Cape Town's growth into one of the most energetic cities in the world has been matched by the quality of the hotels. In particular, there has been a boom in boutique hotels - designed to catch the attention of the discerning traveller. These hotels provide well-designed and thought-out rooms and public areas and levels of service that anticipate guests' every need. This new style of hotel includes Atlantic House, which occupies an enviable position in the trendy resort of Camps Bay, the Kensington Palace, a minimalist delight with just eight rooms, set right in the heart of the city, and The Bishops Court, which supplies spacious rooms, a pool and floodlit tennis court and fabulous views of the surrounding landscape.

What can I see?

Cape Town has something for everyone. Whether you're looking for designer shopping, water adventure, mountain treks, wine tasting tours or even safari trips, you can find it in Cape Town. With an enviable climate and the domineering presence of Table Mountain, Cape Town manages to combine stunning landscapes with urban chic, catering to a wide range of visitors. For those who lack the energy but want the view, take a cable car to the top of Table Mountain, where you get fantastic views of the city below and the ocean beyond. Robben Island is notorious for being the home of Nelson Mandela during his years of imprisonment and is now just half an hour away by boat and has been transformed into a living museum. If you want to damage your credit card, visit the V&A Waterfront, home to designer shops, cinemas, restaurants and craft markets surrounding a working harbour.

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How do I get around?

Cape Town is fairly easy to drive around - cars drive on the left here - and car hire is reasonable. If you want to explore the Western Cape then it's a good idea to hire a car so that you are in control of your day. Trains and buses link all the major cities in South Africa and there are long-haul bus services as well if you're planning a few days somewhere different. You can also rent a bike to travel round the city or use local taxis.

Chic Retreats is a collection of small, sophisticated hotels around the world that are designed to give the traveller a real taste of luxury and service. Visit their website by clicking

<http://www.chicretreats.com>



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