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Sublime Drakensberg Experience! The Drakensberg Boys' Choir

By Brian Kemp

Travelling to South Africa? Well, you're going to Cape Town, right? And you want to see if you can

get the Big 5? Here's something that's better than Cape Town. Better than the Big 5. And it's the Drakensberg Boys' Choir.

There are quite a few things that are unique or world class in South Africa, and the Drakensberg Boys' Choir is one of them.

Doors opened in 1965 to the first 20 pupils. The dream was of a multi−racial, multi−cultural Choir School to rival the Vienna Boys.

Not in the middle of a history−rich, ancient European city. But in the boondocks. In a beautiful, rural, sparsely populated valley in the Drakensberg Mountains of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. The first and only one of its kind on the continent.

Today the annual intake is 100 boys between 9 and 15, and auditions are held nation−wide.

Can you think of anything more sublime than crisp, mountain air, majestic mountains, azure skies and natural beauty as far as the eye can see, complemented by the pure tones of counter−tenor harmony?

The Drakensberg Boys' Choir tours overseas every year and is internationally recognized as one of the best in the world. And they aren't just holier that thou brats either - after hours they're into rapids tubing, abseiling and hiking in their Drakensberg paradise. They work hard and play hard.

Be prepared for diversity. If you like a good dirge, stay away. The Drakensberg Boys' Choir has very catholic tastes. The first half of the concert is classical. You might hear Bach or Beethoven or Mozart. The second half can be anything. It could be Queen. (Freddie Mercury would have loved it). Or folk, or jazz, or sacred music. Or African harmonies you've never heard before that will bring tears to your eyes.

Come with tissues. And a jersey, for the goosebumps. But whatever you do, BE THERE. The Drakensberg Boys' Choir performs most Wednesdays during term time at 3.30 p.m. There is a world class auditorium on campus.

So if you're coming to South Africa - sure Cape Town's good and you need the Big 5. But you really shouldn't miss this. Sublime Drakensberg experience!

Brian & Janette Kemp own

http://www.hallscountryhouse.com

, a 4−star retreat in the foothills of

the

http://www.hallscountryhouse.com/drakensberg.html

in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.

Drakensberg − South Africas best kept secret

By Andrew attwood

South Africa offers tourists coming to our country a huge choice of holiday destinations. But its the Drakensberg Mountains that are still kept as an secret place thats seems a bit off the normal beaten track and while some folks do make it to the Drakensberg most dont.

The best place to start your journey would be to download the free Drakensberg Tourist Map which will give you a great idea of where everything is. This is the only to scale tourist map thats available for the region. It shows all the back roads, indicates which are recommended and which are not and indicates how far things are. But what I like about the map is that its freely distributed, includes all the activities that the region offers and a great selection of the best accommodation that the Drakensberg has to offer.

The Drakensberg starts in the North with Clarens and the Golden Gate National Park and ends in the South at Bushmans Nek. Inbetween you will find the Royal Natal National Park with its Amphitheatre, Mweni the wildest part of the mountains, Cathedral Peak, Monks Cowl, Injasuti, Giants Castle National Park, Kamberg with the best bushman rock art site in the whole Drakensberg Mountains, Loteni, Sani Pass, Cobham, and Garden Castle.

There is lots to do in the region but the main reason you come to the Drakensberg is because of the mountains. While every part of the Drakensberg is special and has its own uniqueness there are a few spots you dont want to miss. The best place to get to the top of the escarpment is at Sentinel peak. The return hike is 5 hours and takes you the top of the Tugela Falls which falls some 948 meters into the Royal Natal National Park below. The view from on top of the Amphitheatre is proberbly one of the

most spectacular views in the world. Most tourists tend to walk at the bottom and while its worth the visit ist just not the same as the top.

The Central Drakensberg and Northern Drakensberg form one region and by far the best example of this section of the Drakensberg Mountains is Giants Castle National Park. Essentially the experience in any part of this region is the same where you have the oppertunity to hike the lower reaches of the Drakensberg Mountains or otherwise stay low in one of the valleys. What makes Giants Castle more interesting is the large choice of trails and the lack of other people. I suppe it wont stay that way forever but the experice of walking in the montains and not seeing another sole can still be found here. From Giants Castle looking south the mountains become softer , less dramatic but make no mistake hiking trails in thes gentler landscape is just as good and should be included in your trip. Kamberg is a really good spot where the added attraction of the best site of bushman rock art is available.

Bushman Rock Art is most definatly a reason to visit the Drakernsberg Mountains The excellent video presentation before the 3 hour guided tour at Kamberg gives a great explaination of the history of the people as well as the rock art at game pass shelter. The rock art at Giants Castle at the main caves is also good and is a very easy walk. The Didima Rock Art Centre at Cathedral Peak offers a great presentation although the paintings are reproductions. All rock art must be viewed with a guide.

Horse riding through the foothills of the Drakensberg is an experience not to be missed. Sengani horse trails offers safe trails for beginners and experienced alike. Spionkop game reserve even offers game viewing on horse back.

Steeped in history, the Battlefields Region offers enthralling tales of British, Boer, Zulu and Voortrekker history. The Anglo Boer War reached as far south as Mooi River and the many sites are best visited with a specialist guide

The region offers a fun and fascinating collection of art galleries, craft shops, cheese tastings, leather work, antiques, clothing, gifts and pottery. All the activities represent a unique collection of South African creativity. Take a slow journey to view outstanding galleries such as Millgate, Indigo Fields Gallery, and Zombeza. Community development projects like Eyethu Ceramics and Thandanani Craft uplift local communities allowing tourism a wider benefit.

A trip up Sani Pass into Lesotho and a visit to the highest pub in Africa is a must. It's a dramatic 4x4 trail climbing 1330m in 6,5km's Passports required.

Game viewing is available at Weenen, Spionkop, Umgeni Valley and Golden Gate. For Birders the Lammergeyer hide at Giants Castle the Crane Foundation at Kamberg and the bird of prey display at Falcon Ridge are highlights. Fort Durnford in Estcourt offers one of the most complete bird egg collections in South Africa.

For adventure seekers the region offers white water rafting and quad bikes , the longest cable slide in South Africa, a gorge swing and a flying trapeze, bicycle tours and even hot air ballooning

The Drakensberg Boys Choir is a world renowned choir which performs most Wednesdays at 3:30

pm. Bookings 036 / 468 1017. Don't miss this enriching cultural experience. Another enriching culteral experience is Mpopomeni Zulu tourism experience where tourists have the oppertunity to meet local people, hear a bit of the history of the settlement and taste some of the traditional food. Whats great is that the experience is about real people and does not feel touristy at all.

Or just pamper yourself at one of the region's many health spas. For a difference Indigo Fields offers a real Africa day spa experience

www.drakensberg−tourism.com

− Hiking trails and accommodation in the Drakensberg. The best

tourism promotion website for the Drakensberg and Natal midlands available on the net.

www.drakensberg−tourist−map.com

− downloadable map for the Drakensberg and Natal Midlands

Regions. The most essential tool for torists visiting this region

www.drakensberg−accommodation.com

− A huge list of links to accommodation in the Drakensberg

Mountains

www.drakensberg.net

− pictoral guide to the Drakensberg

www.antbear.com

− Antbear Guest House near Giants Castle in the Central Drakensberg

www.vergzient.co.za

− Vergezient Mountain retreat in the Northern Drakensberg

www.palmswift.com

− Palmswift B&B accommodation in Winterton

www.sycamore−ave.com

− Treehouse accommodation in the Natal Midlands

www.sengani−horse−trails.com

− Horse trails in the Drakensberg Foothills

www.dbchoir.info

− Drakensberg boys Choir

www.bergfree.co.za

− Mountain guide for the Drakensberg region

www.midlandsreservations.co.za

− Drakensberg central reservations office

Andrew grew up in the Drakensberg region and now runs the renowned Antbear Guest House situated near Giants Castle in the Central Drakensberg See this

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