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The Historical Whale Watching Town of Hermanus

By Sarah Manners

Each year thousands of domestic and international tourists flock to the shores of the gorgeous

coastal town, Hermanus. Internationally renowned for its whale watching, Hermanus is an ideal holiday destination. Despite being one of South Africa's most loved tourist destinations Hermanus has managed to maintain the quaint and tranquil atmosphere of years gone by.

The Hermanus of Days Gone By

This gorgeous seaside town has a proud history dating back to the early 1800s when a man by the name of Hermanus Pieters followed a path etched into the ground by a herd of elephants. Hermanus Pieters was a travelling teacher and shepard who growing tired of his locality, made the decision to pack up and try somewhere new.

He wandered south of Caledon along the elephant trail and ended up next to the sea where he discovered a fresh spring. Hermanus Pieters decided to set up camps here because of this spring and the fine grazing the land provided for his livestock. This beautiful setting became known as Hermanuspietersfontein (directly translated as Hermanus Pieters Fountain). Once farmers in neighbouring districts begun to hear of his success they too began their journeys to this new and fertile location. Many of the farmers only vacationed in Hermanuspietersfontein during the warmers summers months. They spent their time fishing whilst their wives and children spent many a happy day along the magnificent beachfronts. Once the winter months set in the farmers would return to their homes, the fishermen however stayed. The fish was plentiful and the men had great successes in the ocean that lapped the shores of this small town.

By 1886 so many families had moved to Hermanuspietersfontein that a church and school were built. In 1902 after an irate postmasters complaint due to the towns' exceptionally long name, Hermanuspietersfontein became Hermanus. The town was so beautiful and filled with fresh sea air that it was not uncommon for doctors to recommend a trip to the seaside town for their patient's health.

The Sleepy Village Beside the Sea

The residents of Hermanus fought strongly for their home to remain a sleepy, quaint seaside village rather than succumb to the modernization that was creeping up all around them. One of the most significant contributors to this "village feeling" was William Hoy who was a frequent visitor to Hermanus. Hoy was the general manager of the railways and he ensured that the natural beauty of

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Hermanus would not be marred by the extension of the railway line into the village. Hundreds of years later Hermanus is the only railway station in the country with no trains. Hermanus is historically rich with many tales and interesting facts about the people who were responsible for making the town what it is today: from anti-railway activist William Hoy to the last indigenous beachcomber who lived in a cave in town. These people amongst many other contributed to both the development and the uncommercialised feel of Hermanus today.

What to do in Hermanus

Hermanus may be a quiet town but it is definitely not an uneventful one. There are a number of choices for beaches, from rock-protected coves to long expanses of sandy beach, perfect for safe swimming and strolling and the many tidal pools provide safe bathing and are perfect for children. The variety of cliff path walks and hiking trails, magnificent diving spots and excellent birdwatching opportunities are a treat for the nature lovers.

Many renowned **artists**, sculptors, ceramicists, writers, jewellers, glass designers, quilters and

photographers have settled here and brought international recognition to Hermanus. These artists often hold exhibitions which should not be missed. There are also a wide variety of shops where you can purchase anything from clothing to curios. The museum enables visitors a fascinating glimpse into what the town was like in the past.

It is however the **whale watching** which draws so many visitors to this seaside paradise. Each year from July to December South Africa becomes home to thousands of Whales who leave the icy Antarctic to mate and birth their calves. The Western Cape is a hot spot for Whale watching in South Africa. The most common whales in this area are the majestic and once near extinct Southern Right Whales. Hermanus, which is located a mere 45 minute drive from Cape Town, is known as the "heart of the Whale Coast" and is recognised by World Wildlife Fund as the best land-based whale watching area in the world. The Annual Whale Festival held in September celebrates these truly magnificent creatures. A trip to the festival, 5 days of exhibitions, boat trips, flea markets and entertainment, is highly recommended.

During your visit to this gorgeous town stay at the

which is situated on a cliff edge with

spectacular panoramic views of the Indian Ocean below. This Hermanus hotel is perfect for a relaxing seaside holiday break, and the frolicking whales in the Indian Ocean will add to your enjoyment!

It's June So The Whale's Are Coming!

By SA-Venues.com Editor

Whale watching in South Africa: Every year, these beautiful gentle giants congregate to our shores to mate and calve. South Africa has got to be one of the most incredible destinations in the world for watching marine mammals. In early June, southern right whales leave their Antarctic feeding ground to frolic in the warmer waters of the Western Cape coast. Here they mate, calve and generally hang out,

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occasionally flopping a tail up, or sticking their heads out of the water, much to the delight of onlookers. They are a true marvel to behold.

Whale watching in South Africa is done from June to November, although it's not uncommon for whales to be spotted outside this period. They pick some of the most beautiful stretches of our coast for their activities. Some of the best viewing spots include Lamberts Bay on the Cape West Coast, the Cape Peninsula, False Bay, Hermanus, Arniston, Mossel Bay, Wilderness, Sedgefield, Knysna and Plettenberg Bay. Some 37 species of whales and dolphins are found in South African waters, but the most common are the humpback whales and southern right whales (in spring), which are frequently encrusted with white barnacles. Humpback whales are similar in size to southern right whales (around 15m), and are often seen off the South African coast between July and November as they move to Mozambique to calve and breed, and to Antarctica, where they feed.

The absolute best way to enjoy whale watching in South Africa, is to go on a whale-watching boat trip. The boats are big, comfortable and moderately dry. Boarding is easy and people in wheelchairs can be accommodated. In some cases, the prices of these whale watching boat trips can be quite high, but the chance to get within metres of whales at water-level is simply unforgettable.

Hermanus is one of the finest places for South African whale watching. It is home of the Southern Right Whale which is named as such because it was considered to be the 'right' whale to catch. Whether it is the calm waters or their well-documented curiosity that brings them closer in, whales often come within a few meters of the shore. Hermanus as a town, is very much geared towards whale watching and many vantage points have been set up to accommodate the hundreds of people who flock here for the Hermanus Whale Festival every year in late September. The festival consists of nine days filled with music, theatre, sport and parties. The famous Whale Crier will be around to give everyone the latest whale watching news.

You could also visit one of the many coastal nature reserves to enjoy more South African whale watching. For example the De Hoop Nature Reserve near Bredasdorp which offers numerous spectacular trails and hikes varying in distance to get the most out of your whale watching experience.

Plettenberg Bay justly lays claim to the title of the South African Whale Watching Capital. The southern right whales can be seen for the whole season and when they are getting ready to leave in early November, the humpback whales arrive with their calves, and stay until the end of December or early January. A truly memorable sight! Plettenberg Bay is where the South African dolphin and whale watching industry is said to be the most organized. There are whale watching boat trips, dolphin-watching kayak trips and a number of aircraft from which you can check out the whales from the air. The town has made a vast effort to promote a responsible boat-based whale and dolphin watching program. Viewing, distances and time spent with each animal are strictly monitored so that

there is minimal interference.

Which ever way you choose to watch these magnificent creatures, it is an absolute must. South African whale watching is truly an unforgettable experience!

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SA–Venues.com is a comprehensive travel guide for South Africa with essential travellers information including visas, safaris, hotels, accommodation, maps, attractions and more. Visit the site at:

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