

Town, you are brave people. Lisbon taxi drivers are actually tame compared to the majority of South African motorists. You would be forgiven for thinking there are actually no laws or limitations, but there are.

South Africans are very proud of their country and their past and when you take into account its turbulent history, political struggles and breathtaking beauty; it is not hard to understand why. But even the most dedicated patriot will admit Cape Town is a world unto itself. More commonly known for being 'the safer part' of SA, the 'Mother City' is in fact the birthplace of South African heritage.

Portuguese explorer Bartholomew Dias first discovered it in 1488, albeit accidentally, after being embroiled in raging storms whilst on his way to India. Bartholomew spent a month anchored at sea; drawing maps of the



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land he had sighted and initially named it the Cape of Storms, now known as the Cape of Good Hope, where the Atlantic and Indian oceans merge.

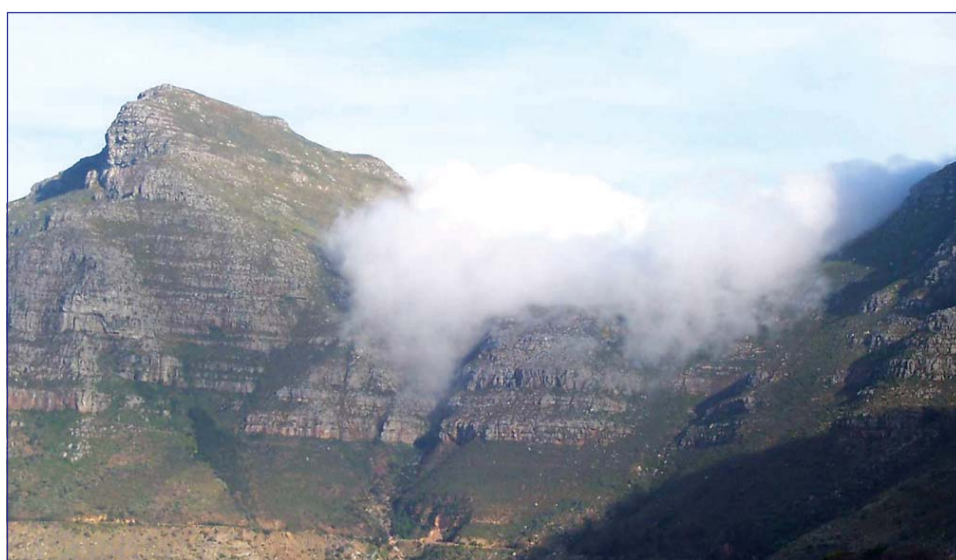
Excursions to the Cape of Good Hope are also widely available, many incorporating a stop at the Kirstenbosch National botanical gardens. But it has to be said, if you are a serious flora aficionado, the short time allocated for the stop-

off at Kirstenbosch will leave you sorely disappointed.

Situated just a short journey out of the city itself, these gardens, which are actually a world heritage site, are absolutely beautiful and completely enchanting. Home to the South African Protea (in layman's terms, 'the flower on the official national rugby shirt') the Kirstenbosch National gardens are the world's first indigenous botanical gardens. Spreading over 528 hectares they host numerous musical events every year, which in the past have featured greats from Pavarotti to Michael Bubblé. If the weather is nice, pack a picnic and spend a good part of the day just strolling and relaxing in this breathtaking part of planet earth.

Accommodation in Cape Town is generally easy to find and pleasingly affordable. It is, however, wise to book well in advance if planning to visit Cape Town over the Christmas holidays, which are effectively South Africa's high season - Europe's summer. There are many high quality B&Bs to choose from, which offer a more cosy, family-orientated service to the standard hotel.

We stayed in the Atlantic Beach Villa, Sunset Beach, a newly-built, up-and-coming neighbourhood with its own private 24-hour security patrol. It was the perfect location, being just 15 minute's drive from Cape Town's city centre, and, in the opposite direction, five minutes to popular tourist resort Bloubergstrand. More a quaint 'boutique hotel' than a mere B&B, the Atlantic Beach Villa offered more comfort and attention to detail that what was anticipated, given its reasonable price, but in Cape Town, this is the case with many little luxuries.



Pictured above: Table Mountain with its 'tablecloth' of clouds; left: A cable car takes you to the top of Table Mountain; bottom: Cape of Good Hope, where two oceans merge. Opposite page - top right: Aerial view of the City Bowl; left: Gateway to Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was held for almost 20yrs; right: Cape Town - the statue of Portuguese explorer Bartholomew Dias; and bottom right; a Jackass Penguin on Penguin Beach. (Photos: Carrie-Marie Bratley)

Eating out and treats like massages, manicures, etc, are all cheaper than in most main European countries. Renting a car is reasonable, as are taxi fares.

If you do decide to visit South Africa one place that has to be on your itinerary (and, if possible, booked well in advance) is a trip to Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was incarcerated for nearly two decades. Waiting lists are long for this very popular excursion, but it is easy to understand why. Robben Island is living history. Inhabited to this very day, the guided tours round the former Leper colony and, more recently, a prison, are conducted by ex-inmates. They offer a first-person account of daily life on the island, telling of how Nelson Mandela and his fellow prisoners survived the odds and lived to tell their sto-

ries. It is, quite simply, incredible. Despite its negative connotations regarding safety, Cape Town is one of South Africa's most secure destinations.

Even so, walking the streets after dark, wandering off the beaten track and exploring areas like the expansive informal settlements are strongly discouraged, unless with an experienced guide, known to the local community. But as in any big city, it pays to be street-and-travel wise.

Carrie-Marie Bratley  
TRAVEL DETAILS: Carrie flew Lufthansa ([www.lufthansa.com](http://www.lufthansa.com))

to Cape Town from Lisbon via Frankfurt. Return economy flight in December (high season) costs €900 - €1300. (Flights should be booked well in advance.) A twin room with en-suite bathroom at Atlantic Beach Villa, Sunset Beach costs around €28pp (R300 high season), per night, includes a full breakfast. See: [www.wheretostay.co.za/atlanticbeachvilla](http://www.wheretostay.co.za/atlanticbeachvilla).

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