



## **PLANNING A TRIP TO SOUTH AFRICA** by Dave Jefferson

Part I - South Africa travel information and tips

Part II - The Checklist

Part III - Ten Perfect Days – a Proposed Itinerary

### **Part I – South Africa Travel Information and Tips**

Pick a month, noting the best weather is October to May, and consider the following:

We have discovered four websites that have a wealth of information for prospective travelers: Southern Destinations, [www.southafrica.net](http://www.southafrica.net), [Go2Africa.com](http://Go2Africa.com), Africa Wildlife Foundation, and &Beyond. We suggest everyone who has not visited South Africa explore these sites in conjunction with the information we have provided below. The [southafrica.net](http://southafrica.net) website is sponsored by the South African Tourism Board and is somewhat more generic in approach, but it is still very helpful. On the other hand, the AWF/Safari planner has superb information for game viewing in all relevant African countries, as does the entire [AndBeyond.com](http://AndBeyond.com) website.

1. Including jetlag recovery time, planning a two to three week trip makes for a great vacation from the US. One week you'll probably want to visit game camps (like Kruger Park in northeast RSA, the Okavango Delta in northern Botswana or East Africa (Kenya or Tanzania/Zanzibar). Note that the Galleries 5 - 9 photos are from trips to Kings Camp, Timbavati Preserve, just west of Kruger National Park, Botswana, and to Tanzania, Zanzibar and Pemba Island. Remember that distances are significant and "it's Africa, mon." Expect some delays and frustrations. Regarding game camp visits, I would generally recommend against going to Botswana during the heat of their summer: December through February. Friends of mine and I were in the Okavango Delta/Chobe National Park the third week of November and we were definitely late in the "acceptable season." Remember as you go north in Africa, it gets warmer at any time of year. That said, Botswana has the greatest game viewing of anywhere. For our most recent trips, we used a small travel company (Corporate Incentives) based in Pretoria, RSA, and owned by Cecelia Grant. She did a great job for us and can be reached via email ([cgrant@icon.co.za](mailto:cgrant@icon.co.za)) or cell phone (082-417-1877). Naturally, she has been to all the camps she recommends and stays close to where the best value/price deals are in any given season.
2. Best airfares: While you can do all the arrangements yourself via email and fax, an RSA experienced travel agent can be a great help. I book all my African flights through New Act Travel (Avril Bransky at [Avril.Bransky@newacttravel.com](mailto:Avril.Bransky@newacttravel.com)) in Canoga Park, Los Angeles, CA. Avril

and her colleagues are RSA-nationals and are up on everything. Their website is [www.newacttravel.com](http://www.newacttravel.com); their phone number is 818-501-0808.

3. Harkening back to 1994, my first trip was arranged completely by an agent: it included a guide meeting your plane, doing all the driving, carrying a cell phone, booking the restaurants, and dropping you off at the hotel/B&B at night. I highly recommend this approach if you are spending only 2-4 days in the Cape; it really makes the touring easy. However, if you were to spend 10-14 days in the Cape, using a guide for 2-4 days would be more than adequate. After that period, you may wish to rent a car and cell phone, and explore on your own. Phones and cars are available at Cape Town International Airport, and in Stellenbosch, the "St. Helena/Davis" of the Cape Winelands.

Note: While the roads are very good, driving on the left side, navigating by map, and shifting with your left hand can be too much. I always rent a car with automatic transmission to reduce the confusion, especially when receiving a cell phone call.

It would be impossible to have a better tour guide in the Western Cape, but especially in the Greater Stellenbosch area, than Pietman Retief. Recently retired after 35 years with a leading winery, Distell, where he last headed their Public Relations, Pietman has done it all and yet still has the enthusiasm for introducing people to his country and the South African wine industry. Living in Stellenbosch itself, where he previously attended university, Pietman also volunteers as a docent at a local museum in his spare time. A former rugby player in his youth, years later on the South African Rugby Board as its General Manager, Pietman also has a keen interest in history and has traveled extensively abroad. Rather than laud him further here, simply go to his website ([www.stellenboschwinetourism.co.za](http://www.stellenboschwinetourism.co.za)) for more of his exceptional background. Then send him an email at: [pietmanretief@absamail.co.za](mailto:pietmanretief@absamail.co.za) and see if he is available.



Pietman Retief

## **Southern Destinations**

Southern Destinations arranges accompanied tours and does all the work for a modest price. We think very highly of them. Contact Vanessa Ratcliffe at [Vanessa@SouthernDestinations.com](mailto:Vanessa@SouthernDestinations.com) (via Skype at [vanessadort](mailto:vanessadort)) for trip planning assistance.

For those with more ambitious travel plans in Africa, another well established guided tour service is Bushtracks Expeditions. Dave and Carolyn Tett organize and conduct customized tours throughout Southern Africa and elsewhere in the world. They can be reached at (800)995-8689 (US only) or via their exceptional website ([www.bushtracks.com](http://www.bushtracks.com)). The site is a good source for foreign travel information, and indicates they have been in business for over 10 years. Their minimum service requires a deposit of \$1,000/traveler, at least 10 consecutive travel days, and a budget of \$5,000 plus, excluding international air travel costs.

E-mail Dave Jefferson ([dave@burdell.com](mailto:dave@burdell.com)) and Anton Roos ([anton@silkbush.net](mailto:anton@silkbush.net)) for suggestions: going a week earlier or later may make a big difference in activities available and people who would be fun to meet.

If this is your first trip to Cape Town/Winlands, you'll probably want to stay the first two nights in Cape Town, take the cable car to the top of Table Mountain, see Cape of Good Hope and visit the Victoria and Albert Waterfront. An excellent place to stay, with a stunning water view, super food, and five minutes from the cable car, is Diamond House (B&B), in Camps Bay ([www.diamondhouse.co.za](http://www.diamondhouse.co.za)). Contact them at [Bookings@diamondhouse.co.za](mailto:Bookings@diamondhouse.co.za).



Another place we recommend is Greenways Country House. Located in an upscale, quiet neighborhood east of Table Mountain, Greenways has wonderful grounds, a swimming pool, and an excellent restaurant. More than just a nice B&B, Greenways can handle larger groups, including evening food service. This can be a large plus for international visitors with time constraints. (Neither of the two places is inexpensive, mind you, but quality costs.)



Other Cape Town lodgings we highly recommend are Victoria House and Villa St. Leon. They are both upscale accommodations, but very different from several standpoints. Villa St. Leon features stunning views of the Atlantic and world class sunsets. However, it is probably most appropriate for one to three couples wishing to spend a week or longer in Cape Town proper. (The rates vary with the season.) Victoria House is on the east side of Table Mountain, features outstanding furnishings, protected parking, tasty food and a charming German co-owner/manager: Martina.



If you have transportation and want the exceptional beachfront view seen below, we recommend staying at Lillian Muller's Rockhaven Guesthouse, 3 Sir David Baird Drive, Bloubergstrand. It's an honest 20 minutes north of Cape Town Harbor, but Lillian and her eccentric aunt (pictured below, think Fawltly Towers casting) are delightful and the lodging is very warm and comfortable. They may be contacted (from the US) at 27.21.554.2414; ([www.rockhaven.co.za](http://www.rockhaven.co.za)); or by email [toinfo@rockhaven.co.za](mailto:toinfo@rockhaven.co.za).

Then, relocate to Stellenbosch, an hour or more to the east. Driving back and forth to Cape Town from the winefarms is like visiting Napa Valley everyday from a hotel located in San Francisco! You lose two hours, get tired out, and spend far more money than necessary on more expensive lodging in Cape Town.

Stellenbosch is a college town, like U.C. Davis, as well as center of the traditional fine wine vineyards. It is 30 minutes east of the International Airport (or one hour from downtown Cape Town), and has many fine lodgings and restaurants. The poshest place in town is the Lanzerac Hotel ([www.lanzerac.co.za](http://www.lanzerac.co.za)), but most comfortable (and far less expensive) B&B's located at super wineries just a few minutes north are

the L'Avenir Guest House ([www.lavenir.co.za](http://www.lavenir.co.za)) or Knorhoek Guest House and Wines ([knorhoek.co.za](http://knorhoek.co.za)), located on the flank of the Simonsberg mountain. The Van Niekerk brothers and their wives (the fourth generation to own the property since 1887) are as delightful hosts as they are superb winegrowers. In fact, our colleague in Helsinki, Finland, Violetta Teetor ([www.violandrewines.com](http://www.violandrewines.com)) represents Knorhoek wines in Scandinavia. (Below are Hansie and Ingrid's home, James and Carol's home, the front and back of the Knorhoek B&B, their swimming pool & lapa, and Dave and Carol Van Niekerk sharing a laugh.)



If this is your first trip, spend at least 3-4 days touring in this area and Paarl/Wellington to the north. All three towns are located just west of a chain of imposing mountains. Also close by is the valley of Franschoek, where the French Huguenots commencing in 1688 first showed the Dutch colonists how to make decent wine.

Now, for the carriage trade that demands the most luxurious, the lodging at the 18-room Mont Rochelle (high on the hills above the winery of the same name and the village of Franschoek) is not going to be exceeded. Their website ([www.montrochelle.co.za](http://www.montrochelle.co.za)), with its panoramic views will give you an idea of its luxury. Its rates at high season are substantial, but will also communicate this place is exceptional.





Silkbush Vineyards and the Breede River Valley are less than an hour farther to the northeast, via the N1 and the Huguenot Tunnel. The drive is about one hour from Stellenbosch, about half that long from Paarl. Assuming you have spent your first week in Cape Town/Stellenbosch, a few more days "over the mountains" can be a lot of fun. The lodging is rustic, but the food superb! If you are touring Ceres and Tulbagh, we suggest the Mill and Oaks Country Inn and Restaurant (mill-oaks@lando.co.za, or fax 011-27-23-231-0860). If you are around Worcester, and perhaps headed to Hermanus to see the whales, consider Merwida Country Lodge (fax 011-27-23-349-1435 or emailmerwidalodge@worldonline.co.za -- website info at [www.breedekloof.com/merwidalodge.html](http://www.breedekloof.com/merwidalodge.html)) for a day or two. (Photo of Merwida)



## Part II – The Checklist

1. Airline Tickets (How are you going to be routed? Give yourself enough time to recover before getting into a heavy touring schedule. Why not stay in London, Paris, Amsterdam or another gateway city 2-3 days and get over jetlag as you tour museums and see plays?)
2. Passport current? Will your passport expire before/during the trip? (It almost happened to me some years ago!)
3. Ambien, or other prescription sleeping pills, and bring a lot of them. A 10 hour time zone change generally takes 7 - 10 days to get over. And remember you'll need as many pills handy when you return home.
4. Lodging confirmations. (Be sure to have phone and fax numbers, email and street addresses and manager's name before departing, especially if using B&B's.)
5. Guide reservation (consider guides above or for only safaris, check with [www.mangosafari.com](http://www.mangosafari.com)).
6. Currency/ATMs. The currency of South Africa is the Rand, and most will need some cash quite shortly after getting off the airplane, at least for cabs and gratuities. If you rent a car, bear in mind that the gas stations do not accept any international bank credit cards (like Visa, or Mastercard) so you need cash for them and toll booths (of which there aren't many). So how do you get the right amount of Rand for your stay? The most efficient way is to use your debit card at a bank ATM; I have been doing that for years, as the machine will kick out at least R1000 (about US\$139 at R7.2 / USD). However, it is a good idea to alert your principal bank that you are going overseas before you start hitting the ATMs, hotels, rental car companies, and cell phone companies. More banks have built "fuzzy logic" in their systems that says "Whoa, suddenly we are getting charges from a distant foreign country. Decline/freeze account/send email to customer." However, if you are standing outside a bank on a Sunday, and unable to get cash when you need it, this is no fun. So best to have at least two debit/credit cards along and get both institutions alerted to your travel plans. (Does this sound like the voice of experience talking? I hope so as all these issues have cropped up for me on my trips in 2007 and 2008.)
7. No guide:
  - i) car reservation
  - ii) pick up cell phone at airport

- iii) acquire/print IN COLOR our road maps – especially those to SILKBUSH Vineyards
- iv) purchase in advance a John Platter's South African Wine Guide to Wineries ([www.platters.co.za](http://www.platters.co.za))
- 8. Email to Dave Jefferson ([dave@burdell.com](mailto:dave@burdell.com)) and Anton Roos ([anton@silkbush.net](mailto:anton@silkbush.net)) your final arrangements, any final questions, and solicit any last minute suggestions.
- 9. Innoculations: I personally do not get any special shots for RSA trips, but if you will be on safari in countries to the north (especially if camping on rivers or lakes), inoculations are recommended. Malaria is no joke and is permanent. Check with your doctor.
- 10. Shoulder Bag (at least as large as a decent sized gym bag) – in my opinion – is a must for men and women alike. Camera, film, cell phone, maps, hat, sun glasses, nylon wind-breaker, wallet, small calculator (to convert local prices to dollars), purchases – the list is endless. But most all will fit in a good shoulder bag. (And never leave the bag unattended or in a car.)
- 11. VAT Reimbursement: On most purchases and services in RSA, a 14% VAT (value added tax) is collected and paid to the government by the vendors. Tourists can get a refund of the VAT on purchases (but not services) as they leave the country if:
  - (1) The purchase has been made within the last 90 days;
  - (2) The purchases exceed R250 (about US \$36.00);
  - (3) You present your VAT invoice; and,
  - (4) You show the goods to the inspector.

Many people are ready for the first three requirements but then have packed their purchases deep inside their baggage. They frequently then fail to get the VAT reimbursement which is made in cash next to the duty free shops. So if you buy very much, be ready to show the goods and get a 14% cash refund at the airport, less a R10 fee.

As of mid 2011, I had made 27 trips to South Africa of at least two weeks or more in duration. I keep expecting that the allure will diminish, and that I will become, if not jaded, at least a little bored. To date, that has not happened. The Cape is beautiful and exciting, the people charming.

As noted earlier, May to September will bring chilly winds, rain and snow in some high Cape mountains. That said, I have had wonderful May and September trips, and a freak rainy time in November. But even in their winter months, 3-4 days of rain are usually followed by 3-4 days of wonderful sunshine. In that regard, "winter" in South Africa is more like the comparable seasonable weather of the San Francisco Bay Area.

I have never felt my life or property was at risk; that understood, I have had a couple of unattended cameras stolen. (By way of comparison, a few years ago a woman friend visiting in the south of France was mugged at an ATM in daylight in a town and had her whole car stolen!) One needs to stay alert and not tempt the less fortunate, as there are far more of them than us.

Finally, be sure to visit the Game Camps as well as the Western Cape. It will mean routing, usually for a night, through Johannesburg, and Jo'berg is not very attractive or safe. But wild animals are always a risk, be they two legged or four legged. In all such areas, rely on a guide and common sense.

### **Part III – A Proposed Trip Itinerary: Game Camps and then the Western Cape**

If you have blocked out two weeks or more for your "African vacation," you need to make the strategic decisions of what countries to visit and "do we want to visit game camps and view wild animals"? In general, we advise travelers to go to Botswana (for the most game) if they have the time. If time is more limited, the camps just west of Kruger Park in South Africa are also fun and sometimes cheaper, and Addo Elephant Park in the Eastern Cape is very inexpensive as it is a "drive-yourself" tour. Further, you will probably fly into Johannesburg first, spend a night, and then fly to either Botswana or the Kruger area. None of the camps are cheap, but there is considerable variation in daily prices. (Most range from \$300 - \$600/day, per person, and some substantially more, include everything. Even the least expensive camps are super stays.)

We invariably suggest going to game parks first as once there you have no decisions to make (other than to get out of bed) and it is a wonderful way to get over any jetlag. Thereafter, we recommend a trip to the Western Cape and the Winelands of South Africa. The following itinerary has been suggested as a "Cadillac Tour." (Certainly it can be shortened but you may kick yourself later....) But, bear in mind, leaving from Victoria Falls (in Zimbabwe) or the Kruger Park area, it will likely take two flights and all day to get to Cape Town. A 5:00 pm (or much later) arrival is highly likely, so your touring in earnest may not start until the following day.

Day 1 – Old Cape Town/Victoria and Albert Waterfront/Cable Car/Robben Island.

Day 2 – Kirstenbosch Gardens/Cape of Good Hope (Cable Car alternative day).

(Assume you will spend three nights doing the above, given usual international flight arrival times and attendant fatigue; most international flights seemingly get in sometime between 1 and 5 PM, so there is often a chance to start sight-seeing if you are up to it. We strongly recommend having the prescription tablet Ambien or an alternative sleeping aide to offset jetlag. If there is cloud cover on Table Mountain, save the cable car trip to the top until it is clear.)

Day 3 – Stellenbosch - cultural, including lunch or afternoon tea at fashionable Lanzerac Hotel; perhaps one or two wine farm visits. Dinner at the Wynhuis; if fully booked, try 96 Winery Road, south toward Somerset West.

Day 4 – Stellenbosch - visit at least 4 local "wine farms" (wineries, in local parlance). Stellenbosch has many good restaurants, but it's a university town; reservations are often needed.

Day 5 – Franschhoek Valley - Huguenot Museum/Taal Monument and visit two wine farms. (Email us for recommendations on winery visits.) Three night stay at a top end B&B in the Stellenbosch or Franschhoek area is recommended; driving distances are short and beautiful.

Day 6 – Wellington and Ceres, via the Bainskloof and Mitchell Passes.

(This is a day to drive slowly, stop frequently for photos, and just revel in the natural beauty; it will take your breath away.)

Day 7 –Tulbagh: relax in the colonial town; visit Twee Jonge Gezellen ("Two Young Bachelors") and Saronsberg ([www.saronsberg.com](http://www.saronsberg.com)) wineries; Saronsberg has incredible art as well as wine; eat *aboutie*

at Paddagang Restaurant. Tulbagh is about 40 minutes from Silkbush Mountain Vineyards so it is an easy day trip if you are staying there.

Day 8 – Relax; since you are presumably staying with us at SILKBUSH Vineyards near Breerivier. Visit Bergsig Estate, then nearby Du Preez Estate in Rawsonville, and the large KWV Brandy (really "Cognac") Distillery in Worcester.

(Three nights at Silkbush is highly suggested; this area is beautiful but it really needs a destination resort to pull travelers from the normal Wine Route routine over the mountains to the southwest.)

In the Ceres/Tulbagh area again, we highly recommend the Mill & Oak Restaurant and B&B. The setting (at the foot of Mitchell's Pass) is impressive and the food is exceptional. The rooms have been redone, but it is on a highway with some degree of auto noise.

Just west of the Worcester, and two miles south of the hamlet of Rawsonville, is the Merwida Guest House. (See photo above in Part I.) A large, marble "Tara-like" former residence of a wealthy farmer, Merwida sports a huge swimming pool, heavily land-scaped grounds, and is quiet (well off the high way). The breakfasts are super, and they can pack a lunch by arrangement. But for dinner there are few choices unless you drive 15 minutes to Worcester, where there are adequate restaurants but not cuisine dining. (The Breede River Valley is the countryside, and most social dining is a "braai" [barbeque] at a friend's home.)

Day 9 – Hermanus (for seasonal whale watching) or Cape Agulhas, the Southern tip of Africa. (Cape Point, a few hours to the west is the Southwest most tip of Africa).

Strandveld. If you have time to tour the Cape Agulhas (the true Southern tip of Africa) area, a rolling land devoid of the typical Winelands mountains, and somewhat reminiscent of the seemingly desolate plantings of Monterey County in CA, there are a handful of new wineries specializing in cool weather grapes: Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, and Pinot Noir. Our favorite is Strandveld, started in 2002 by our good friend, Gerrie Wagener and several partners from Jo'berg. Starting as a winemaker, Gerrie was a few years later the MD of storied Boschendal, where



he then created the iconic winery Vergelegen and more recently served as MD for four years of neighbor Morgenster. Strandveld will be his winemaking swansong and undoubtedly will be quite an aria. Beside producing exceptional wine (my personal favorite being a 50/50 Semillon/Sauvignon Blanc white blend called Adamastor), due to its proximity to the ocean, the property features the jawbone of a beached and deceased sperm whale and the plankton straining baleen of the same departed creature.

Day 10 – Shopping/Golf/Relax (presumably in the seaside resort area of Hermanus, but there are a myriad of alternatives on the Coast. The historic grounds of Vergelegen winery are truly worth a visit if you have the time, it is not far off the N2 freeway, in Somerset West. And then check out Morgenster. Their olive paste is exceptional.)



Day 11 – Final shopping (perhaps at the Cape Town V&A Waterfront), packing and departure. (It seems almost all international flights depart about 6-8 PM, so the last day is usually pretty easy to arrange, including driving back from Hermanus if you choose.)



© 2000-2012. All rights reserved Burdell Properties.