



## PLANNING A TRIP TO SOUTH AFRICA by Dave Jefferson

**Part I** --- South Africa travel information and tips

**Part II** --- The Checklist

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

Pick a month to visit, noting the best weather is **October to May**, and consider the following.

- We like these websites as they have a wealth of information for prospective travelers: [www.southerndestinations.com](http://www.southerndestinations.com) , [www.southafrica.net](http://www.southafrica.net), [www.go2africa.com](http://www.go2africa.com), [www.awf.org](http://www.awf.org) and [www.andbeyond.com/destinations/africa/](http://www.andbeyond.com/destinations/africa/) . If you have not visited South Africa, explore these sites in conjunction with the information we have provided, below. The southafrica.net website is sponsored by the South African Tourism Board and is somewhat generic in approach but 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 website.

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). Check our "Gallery" on this website; you can see shots from our visits sites such as Kings Camp, Timbavati Preserve, just west of Kruger National Park, Botswana,Tanzania, Zanzibar and Pemba Island. Remember that distances are significant and "it's Africa, Mon!" Expect some delays and frustrations. Regarding game camp visits, we generally recommend against going to Botswana during the heat of their summer which is December through February. We were in the Okavango Delta/ Chobe National Park the third week of November and 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.

**Air Travel:** While you can do all the arrangements nowadays yourself online and book with a carrier such as Lufthansa out of the US, using an experienced travel agent, alternatively, can be a great help.

- We like to use New Act Travel at [www.newacttravel.com](http://www.newacttravel.com) . Avril Bransky ([Avril.Bransky@newacttravel.com](mailto:Avril.Bransky@newacttravel.com)) in Encino, CA. and her colleagues are RSA nationals and are very knowledgeable about South Africa travel and think of things you may not be aware of in planning your specific visit.

- Harkening back to 1994, our first trip was arranged completely by a travel agent. It included a professional travel 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. We highly recommend this approach if you are spending only 2-4 days in the Cape as 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 explore on your own.

**Rental Cars** are available at Cape Town International Airport and in Stellenbosch, the "St. Helena/Davis" of the Cape Winelands.

- Choose a car with GPS built in, if possible. If not, you can utilize map programs on your smartphone, assuming you have gotten an international plan.
- While the roads are very good, driving on the left side, navigating by map/GPS, and shifting with your left hand can be too much. We suggest renting a car with automatic transmission to reduce the confusion.

**Tour Guides:** It would be impossible to have a better tour guide in the Western Cape, but especially in the Greater Stellenbosch area, than Pietman Retief. <http://www.wine-tours.co.za>



Pietman Retief

- He retired after 35 years with a leading winery, Distell, where he 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, where he once attended university, Pietman also volunteers as a docent at a local museum in his spare time.
- A former rugby player in his youth, then, 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 <http://www.wine-tours.co.za/> for more of his exceptional background. You may contact him through the website to check his availability.

**Southern Destinations** also 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) 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 or via their exceptional website [www.bushtracks.com](http://www.bushtracks.com). The site is a good source for foreign travel information. 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.

## Lodging

### Recommendations:

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.

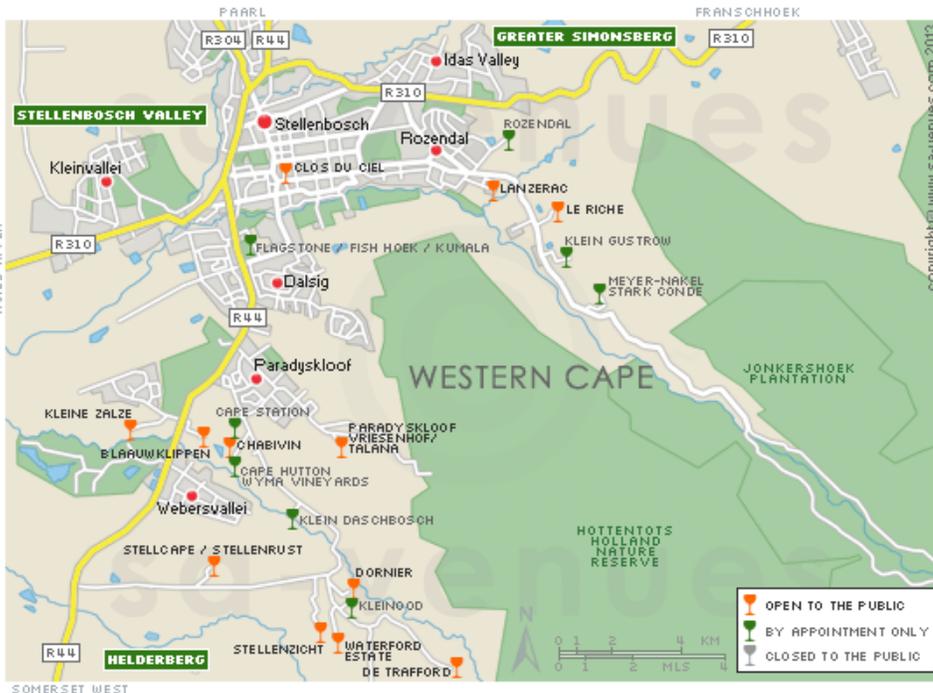


For close to 20 years we have included lodging advice in this memo, but with the advent of [www.airbnb.com](http://www.airbnb.com), we are no longer directing people as to where to stay. These decisions are driven by so many factors (such as arrival time of day, how long one will be in Cape Town, time of year, how many days in the Winlands, and the list goes on). We were AirBnB hosts ourselves for several years in Sonoma County, and used the sites services in finding our own lodging elsewhere in South Africa and many other countries we have visited.

What we do suggest is blocking out your trip in advance, finding tentative lodging for the nights via the Internet, and then, if your travel involves visiting or staying at Silkbrush, give us a shout. We may be able to help you refine things a bit more, coming or going.



After seeing Capetown (*Kaapstad in Afrikaans*), 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.



examples of Cape Dutch architecture here. There is also a bustling nightlife for your vacation enjoyment. The city is busy, offering many museums and tours, and has a wide variety of wine tasting options.



*Greater Stellenbosch Area*

If this is your first RSA trip, spend at least 3-4 days touring the Stellenbosch area as well as Paarl and Wellington to the north. All three towns are located just west of a chain of imposing mountains. Also close by, nestled between towering mountains in the beautiful Cape Winelands is the magnificent Franschoek Valley. It is here where the French Huguenots, commencing in 1688, first showed the Dutch colonists how to make decent wine.

Silkbush Mountain 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, and 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.

If you have time, tour Ceres and Tulbagh. Ceres, named after the Roman goddess of fertility, is at the north-eastern entrance to the Mitchell's Pass (which was the old route between Cape Town and Johannesburg). There are large farming estates and breathtaking landscapes and passes. Tulbagh is a town in the "Land van Waveren" mountain basin which has been inhabited for thousands of years by indigenous Bushman and Khoi peoples. Or, if you prefer, head to Worcester (see the Karoo National Botanical Garden) and perhaps Hermanus, (<http://www.hermanus.co.za>).

Hermanus has been recognized by the World Wildlife Fund as one of the 12 best whale watching destinations in the world. The best time to enjoy whale watching in Hermanus is between July and November. The whale viewing during the months of July and August vary from year to year with regards to how many whales are present in Walker Bay and along the coast; however, you are almost guaranteed of seeing whales in September, October and November. Hermanus is the mating and breeding grounds of the Southern Right Whale during Winter and Spring. They migrate from the Antarctic around June to clave and mate.



## 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 of RSA. 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, then take the second leg of your flight to RSA?)
2. Passport current? Will your passport expire before/during the trip? Bring a few photocopies along in your suitcases.
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 may need as many pills handy when you return home.
4. Lodging confirmations. (Be sure to have phone numbers, email, and street addresses before departing, especially if using B&B's.)
5. Guide reservations? (Consider tour guides noted above or, for game camp safari guides, check with [www.mangosafari.com](http://www.mangosafari.com)).
6. Cell phone with international rate plan and/or international calling card.

7. Currency/ATMs. The currency of South Africa is the Rand, and you will need cash 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 international bank credit cards, 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, as the machine will kick out at least R1000 (about US\$139 at R7.2 / USD).



- You need to alert your principal bank and credit card companies that you are going to South Africa before you start hitting the ATMs, hotels, rental car companies, etc. Decline/freeze account/send email to customer can be the result if you do not. It's best to bring a couple of different credit cards and ATM cards just in case.

8. Road Maps (especially those to Silkbush Mountain Vineyards).
9. John Platter's South African Wine Guide to Wineries
10. Innoculations? Depends on your specific trip details. If you are going on Safari, check with your doctor.
11. Shoulder Bag (at least as large as a decent sized gym bag) ... 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.)

12. 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.

13. Email addresses for Dave Jefferson ([dave@burdell.com](mailto:dave@burdell.com)) in the US and Anton Roos ([anton@silkbush.net](mailto:anton@silkbush.net)) in RSA for any final questions or suggestions.

The Cape is beautiful and exciting, the people charming. It is tough to imagine “not” having the vacation of a lifetime. Note that May to September will bring chilly winds, rain and snow in some high Cape mountains. That said, we 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.

In many trips to RSA, we have never felt life or property was at risk; that understood, we have had a couple of unattended cameras 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



([addopark.com](http://addopark.com)) 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 high-end 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 & Albert Waterfront [www.waterfront.co.za](http://www.waterfront.co.za)

Cable Car ([www.tablemountain.net](http://www.tablemountain.net)) /Robben Island (<http://www.robben-island.org.za/> ).

**Day 2** – Kirstenbosch Gardens ([www.sanbi.org/gardens/kirstenbosch/](http://www.sanbi.org/gardens/kirstenbosch/)



Cape of Good Hope (or 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.)

*Left, Nelson Mandela Bust at Kirstenbosch*

**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 (<http://96wineryroad.co.za>), 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 babout at Paddagang Restaurant. Tulbagh is about 40 minutes from Silkbrush 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 in our Kingsbury Cottage, near Breerivier. Visit Bergsig Estate ([www.bergsigcoestate.co.za](http://www.bergsigcoestate.co.za)), then nearby Du Preez Estate ([dupreezestate.co.za](http://dupreezestate.co.za)) in Rawsonville, and the large KWV Brandy (really "Cognac") Distillery in Worcester (<http://www.kwv.co.za/>).

(Three nights at Silkbrush 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).

We next recommend visiting Strandveld (<http://strandveld.co.za/>).

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 wineries specializing in cool weather grapes such as 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 (our 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 (<http://www.hermanus.co.za>), 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 (<http://www.morgenster.co.za/>). Their olive paste is exceptional.

**Day 11** – Back to Capetown, the *Mother City*... Final shopping (perhaps at the Cape Town V&A Waterfront <https://www.waterfront.co.za>), 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.)

