

South Africa - The Cape & Kalahari

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Depart London
-
- Day 2** Arrive Upington & transfer Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park
-
- Day 3/5** Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park
-
- Day 6/7** Augrabies Falls National Park
-
- Day 8/10** Cape Town
-
- Day 11/12** Langebaan & West Coast National Park
-
- Day 13** Depart Cape Town
-
- Day 14** Arrive London
-

Departs

August/September.

Focus

Birds, mammals and general natural history.

Grading

Grade A - A mix of gentle walks and vehicle safaris.

Dates and Prices

Visit website www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code ZAF14).

Highlights:

- Spectacular scenery of South Africa's Western Cape
- Cape Town, Table Mountain & Kirstenbosch
- Southern Right Whales & African Penguins
- Spring flowers in the West Coast National Park
- Dramatic scenery of Augrabies Falls National Park
- Explore the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park in search of Cheetah, Lion, Meerkat & Bat-eared Fox
- Desert birds including Crimson-breasted Shrike, Violet-eared Waxbill & Namaqua Sandgrouse
- Expertly guided by one of our South African naturalists



SATOUR



From top: Table Mountain, Black-maned Lion & Violet-eared Waxbill



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Introduction

South Africa is a country blessed with a wonderful variety of spectacular landscapes and fascinating wildlife. It is a land of contrast, and no two areas of this beautiful country are more contrasting than the coastal mountains and plains of the Western Cape and the parched inland deserts of the Kalahari. This is especially true in September, at the start of the austral spring, when the well-watered habitats of the Cape erupt into a kaleidoscope of floral colour. To the north – away from the tempering influence of the ocean – life in the Kalahari could not be more different. Here, the animals and birds that call this harsh, but beautiful, landscape home are in the midst of the long dry season and crowded around the few remaining waterholes awaiting the first of the summer rains.

This exciting wildlife holiday offers the chance to explore these two contrasting regions of South Africa, at a prime time of year for both. We begin with a week to enjoy the mammals and birds of the striking desert landscapes of Augrabies Falls National Park and the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and end amidst the colourful spring explosion of life around South Africa's Western Cape.



Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary above offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations may necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

NB - Please also note that following the launch of our 2017 brochure we have taken the decision to reverse the itinerary of this tour to begin in the deserts of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and end in the Western Cape.

Day 1

Depart London

We depart London Heathrow this evening on board a scheduled British Airways or South African Airways flight bound for Johannesburg.

Day 2

Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

On arrival into Johannesburg we will connect with a late morning flight to Upington, a small town which lies around 650 kilometres to the north-east of Cape Town. On arrival into Upington we will be met by our South African specialist wildlife guide who will accompany us for the duration of this tour. After loading the vehicles we will head north on the 3 hour drive to the comfortable Twee Rivieren Rest Camp, located on the edge of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park for the first night of the safari. After checking-in, and if time permits, we take an afternoon game drive in search of our first South African mammals and birds.

Day 3 - 5

Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

After breakfast, we will head north into the renowned Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, squeezed between Namibia and Botswana. Amongst the interesting species we could encounter on our way into the park are Karoo Korhaan, Pale Chanting Goshawk, Sociable Weaver, Stark's Lark and Greater Kestrel.

The Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park spans over 38,000 square kilometres of the Kalahari Desert split between the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park in South Africa and larger Gemsbok National Park in neighbouring Botswana. This land



Hartebeest

of extremes is home to a fascinating variety of desert wildlife backed by majestic red sand dunes and lit by some of the most evocative sunsets in all of Africa. Kgalagadi means 'place of thirst'. The park is cut by two dry riverbeds, the Nossob and Auob Rivers which are said to flow above ground only once a century! However, water does flow underground which allows grasses and camelthorn trees to grow along these seemingly dry and dusty waterways making them a magnet for many of the park's mammals and birds and a focus of many of our

game drives over the next few days.

The Kalahari Desert is home to a surprisingly diverse assemblage of mammals, birds and other wildlife considering how harsh this region can be. Springbok, Burchell's Zebra and Gemsbok are common and we are sure to see small herds of graceful Southern Giraffe, Blue Wildebeest and Greater Kudu. Such an abundance of game species attracts predators such as Cheetah, Spotted Hyena and the famous Black-maned Lions of the Kalahari. On a smaller scale we hope to see Suricate (Meerkat) and Woosnam's Desert Rat whilst South African Ground Squirrel are common and confiding.

To date around 280 species of bird have been recorded in the park, although only 92 of these are resident. Raptors are common and include Bataleur, Tawny Eagle, Black-breasted Snake Eagle, White-backed and Lappet-faced Vultures, Pale Chanting Goshawk and Pygmy Falcon. The huge Kori Bustard is frequently seen pacing through the grasslands, whilst some of the more unobtrusive species include and the beautiful Violet-eared and Black-faced Waxbills, Rufous-eared Warbler, Red-headed Finch and Swallow-tailed Bee-eater.



Cheetah



Crimson-breasted Shrike

Our 3 nights in the heart of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park will be spent at the exclusive !Xaus Lodge.

Day 6 - 7

Augrabies Falls National Park

From the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park we drive south to Augrabies Falls National Park for a 2-night stay in the national park chalets. After settling in we should have enough time to quickly wander down to the spectacular

Augrabies Falls which thunders into the Orange River Canyon in front of our camp. Rock Hyraxes are often seen running around over the rocks here, whilst those with an interest in reptiles will enjoy the colourful Augrabies Flat Lizard (*Platysaurus broadleyi*) can be watched sunbathing on the rocky walls of the gorge in front of the camp.



We now have a full day to explore this small but diverse national park which covers around 820 square kilometres. We begin with an early morning drive to the west of the rest camp following the flow of the Orange River as it cuts through a spectacular 18 kilometre long gorge. There are viewpoints dotted along the rim of the gorge affording both excellent views over the cleft and great photographic opportunities! An interesting variety of large and small mammals live within the park including Steenbok, Southern Giraffe, Gemsbok and Eland along with Hartmann's Mountain Zebra, a scarce species in South Africa. Amongst the birds we will be looking for such species as Pygmy Falcon, Rosy-faced Lovebird, Cinnamon-breasted Warbler, Short-toed Rock-thrush and Ludwig's Bustard. The most obvious plant within the park is the Quiver Tree or 'Kokerboom', so called because its soft branches were favoured by the San Bushmen to make quivers for their arrows.

We will return to our rest camp for a late breakfast after which there will be the opportunity for a siesta or to wander around the grounds of the camp and down to the Falls at leisure. Later in the afternoon we will head out once more on an afternoon game drive, before returning to the rest camp for the evening. Night drives are also available at Augrabies Falls National Park but are not included in the tour cost and are payable locally. They are conducted by national park staff, in park vehicles and offer the opportunity to look for such mammals as Springhare, Black-backed Jackal, African Wild Cat and perhaps, with a bit of luck, the elusive Leopard.



Day 8

Cape Peninsula, overnight Simons Town

We must make an early start this morning to catch our 0900 hours flight from Upington to Cape Town. Once we land we will make our way towards Simon's Town, a small town located on the eastern edge of the Cape Peninsula and overlooking False Bay. We will be based here in the comfortable Whale View Manor guesthouse for the next 3 nights of the tour. Soon after leaving Cape Town Airport our view will be dominated by the dark brooding slopes of Table Mountain, the now iconic flat-topped mountain that looms over Cape Town and its surroundings. As we near its precipitous slopes we turn south through the city's affluent suburbs, over the spectacular Ou Kaapse Weg (Old Cape Road) Pass and down onto the Cape Peninsula itself.

After freshening up, we will spend the rest of the afternoon enjoying our first taste of Cape wildlife. We will take the advice of our local guide on exactly where to go, but our route is likely to include a stop at the Rondevlei Wetlands on the Cape Flats. As we approach Rondevlei we will search the roadside trees and scrub for such species as Cape Robin-Chat, Cape Canary, Karoo Prinia, Burchell's Coucal, Cape Francolin and Acacia Pied Barbet, to name a few, whilst overhead, African Black, Little, Alpine and White-rumped Swifts wheel around after insects.

Inside the reserve itself, several hides overlook the marsh affording excellent views of a wide variety of water and marshland birds which should include African Purple Swamphen, African Marsh Harrier, Caspian Tern, African Darter, Malachite Kingfisher, White-breasted Cormorant and Black-crowned Night Heron. The Strandfontein Sewage Works lie close to Rondevlei and, whilst this spot may not be included on the more standard Cape Town tours, it attracts many a visiting birdwatcher or wildlife enthusiast! Here we will be able to sift through the numerous ducks that often crowd the pools along with Great White Pelican, Glossy Ibis, both species of flamingo, Maccoa Duck and a variety of waders.



If time permits we will stop at the Silvermine Nature Reserve on our way back to Simonstown. Here we will be able to enjoy our first experience of the Fynbos, a totally unique habitat confined to the Western Cape region of South Africa. Fynbos is a collective term used to describe the shrubby, heath-like plants such as the ericas, proteas and restios, which dominate the Cape Floral Kingdom (one of only eight worldwide). Over 8,500 different plant species are found here, more than in some of the tropical rain forests of South America! Many of these are endemic to the Cape and have adapted over the millennia to tolerate regular bush fires and sandy infertile soils. Indeed, the flora of the Fynbos has many similarities with those of the West Australian bushland, the Mediterranean Macchia, and Californian Chaparral. Furthermore, since our tour is timed to coincide with the start of the South African spring this unique habitat should be in full flower and awash with colour.

Not surprisingly, the Fynbos supports many endemic bird species found nowhere else in the world such as Cape Sugarbird, Orange-breasted and Malachite Sunbirds and Cape Siskin. Other species to look out for include Karoo Prinia, Ground Woodpecker and Bokmakierie, a beautiful yellow, grey and black shrike.



Day 9

Cape Peninsula/, overnight Simon's Town

After breakfast we will spend the day exploring Table Mountain and Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens (weather and tablecloth permitting!). From Simons Town we will take the dramatic, world renown, Chapman's Peak coastal drive to the cable car station in Cape Town. From here we will join the spectacular cable-car ride to the top of Table Mountain and, after enjoying the beautiful views of the city, explore the surrounding slopes in search of birds and plants.



King Protea

In the afternoon we will drive round to the other side of Table Mountain to Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens. Delicately nestled on the eastern slopes of Table Mountain, this 830 hectare reserve, of which only 60 hectares is cultivated, not only offers a fabulous collection of Cape flora but is one of the region's best birdwatching spots. Kirstenbosch commands a spectacular setting. The high ramparts of Table Mountain reach to almost 3,000 feet above whilst to the east the views stretch out across the southern suburbs of Cape Town to the far-off mountains of the Hottentots Hollands

Range. Birds around should include Brimstone Canary, Southern Boubou, Olive Thrush, Cape Batis, Speckled Mousebird, Cape Bulbul, Southern Double-collard Sunbird and Cape Canary whilst a walk up Skeleton Gorge should produce good views of Forest Canary, African Paradise Flycatcher, African Olive Pigeon, Sombre Greenbul and Lemon Dove.

Day 10

Cape Peninsula, overnight Simon's Town

We will spend today exploring the spectacular landscapes of the Cape of Good Hope Reserve, which forms part of the greater Cape Peninsula National Park. This 75 kilometre mountainous peninsula is edged by one of the most scenic stretches of coastline in the world, one that was even remarked upon by Sir Frances Drake in 1580 as "*the fairest Cape we saw in the whole circumference of the world*". The rugged backbone of the Cape is carpeted in the aforementioned fragile and beautiful Fynbos flora which should be in full bloom during our September tour.



African Penguins, Boulder's Beach

En route to the Cape we will stop at Boulders Beach to have a look at one of only two mainland colonies of the African Penguin. Despite the encroaching development the penguins are thriving (nearly 1,000 pairs) and you are assured wonderfully close views of these endearing creatures lining the beach and bobbing in the surf. Whilst the penguins seem so at home here it is interesting to note that the first pioneering pair only arrived in 1985 and numbers have been increasing ever since. Leaving Boulders Beach we will drive south along the edge of False Bay stopping occasionally to scan for

the Southern Right Whales which are regularly seen in this area. These whales visit the South African coast in thankfully increasing numbers to calve and to feed between June and October, returning to Antarctic waters in the southern hemisphere's summer months. The coastline from the Cape to Hermanus must rank as one of the world's very best whale watching destinations and we should be always be on the look-out for these leviathans whenever we are on the coast. Mothers with small calves are frequently seen as are mating pairs. Whilst the whales often stay close to the water's surface (one of the reasons why this species was the 'right whale' to hunt), tail flukes are frequently raised as the animals make the deeper dives. If fortunate you may even witness that most spectacular of whale behaviour, a full breach, whereby the huge animal leaps clear of the water to return with a tremendous



Southern Right Whale

splash. Such behaviour is not uncommon in False Bay and be sure to keep your eye on a breaching whale for they often leap three or more times in a row!

At the Cape of Good Hope Reserve we are sure to enjoy the fine range of flowers typical of the Fynbos (numerous species of *protea*, *leucosperma*, *leucodendron*), we also hope to see the rare Bontebok, one of Africa's rarest and, without doubt, most beautiful antelopes. Other mammals that may be seen today include Chacma Baboon, Cape Fur Seal, Common Dolphin, Cape Mountain Zebra, Eland and Cape Grysbok. Amongst a range of birds, such species as Cape Francolin, African Black Oystercatcher, Cape Grassbird, Bokmakierie, Southern Boubou, Southern Double-collared Sunbird and Yellow Bishop are all possibilities. In addition, patches of flowering proteas are sure to hold Cape Sugarbird and Orange-breasted Sunbirds whilst it may seem somewhat out of place to watch Ostrich feeding on the beach backed by the crashing waves of the Southern Ocean.



We will also have the opportunity of visiting Cape Point itself, home of numerous Rock Hyrax, Red-winged Starlings and Cape Cormorants. After a full day exploring the Cape Peninsula we will return to Simon's Town for our second night.

Day 11 - 12

West Coast National Park, overnight Langebaan

Today we will head north to the West Coast National Park, a beautiful 27,000 hectare reserve located approximately 100 kilometres to the north of Cape Town. The West Coast National Park lies immediately south of the coastal town of Langebaan – where we will spend our 2 nights in a comfortable guesthouse - and protects a large tidal lagoon, shoreline and the rocky Postberg peninsula. Life here is dominated by the cold, nutrient rich, Benguela current which accounts not only for the huge kelp beds and abundance of sea-fish, lobster, seabirds and seals, but also the arid climate and cool sea breezes.



The wildlife here is superb. Ostrich are commonly seen striding along the edge of the roads whilst other smaller species to look out for include Black-shouldered Kite, Southern Black Korhaan, Common Fiscal, Chestnut-vented Titbabbler, Karoo Scrub Robin, Bokmakierie, Cape Sparrow, White-throated Canary, Cape Bunting and a variety of larks. This is also our best opportunity to look for the rare and beautiful Black Harrier.

We also hope the early spring rains have been kind, for if they have the West Coast National Park will be awash with colour. The Postberg section of the park is only open from August through September when the flowers are at their best. This is the southern edge of the great spring flowering that carpets Namaqualand a little further to the north. It is a spectacular and colourful sight. The meadows and rocky hills are painted in the yellows, reds and purples of a wide variety of daisies and other flowers. Through this kaleidoscope of colour stride a variety of mammals including Bontebok, Eland, Cape Mountain Zebra and Springbok. whilst offshore lines of Cape Gannets

track north and south from their breeding colonies and Southern Right Whales fluke and dive. Although rare, Caracal have been seen here by past Naturetrek groups.

We visit a hide overlooking mudflats of the Langebaan Lagoon a wetland of international importance. The Lagoon harbours thousands of waders migrating from the northern hemisphere including Little Stint, Bar-tailed Godwit, Greenshank, Marsh Sandpiper (numbers increase as the South African summer approaches) plus more resident species such as Black-winged Stilt, Three-banded Plover, White-fronted Plover and Kittlitz's Plover.

Day 13

Depart Cape Town

It is around a two and a half hour drive from Langebaan to Cape Town and so we will have a final morning to explore around the town or perhaps stop at a few wildlife sites on our way south. Our direct British Airways or South African Airways flight is due to depart Cape Town Airport in the late afternoon.

Day 14

Arrive London

We will arrive back at London Heathrow early this morning.

Weather

We will be travelling to the Cape in the southern spring, when the weather can be somewhat fickle. Around Cape Town the climate is typically 'Mediterranean' and the winter rains have usually ended. Daytime temperatures will vary between around 18°C and 25°C, although it can be cooler on occasion and night-time temperatures are lower. Whilst conditions should generally be settled, pleasant and comfortable, the weather in the Cape can be stormy and unpredictable! Unfortunately, this is one destination where you need to be prepared, and pack, for any eventuality!

We are expecting dry and sunny weather for our time in the Kalahari with daytime temperatures climbing into the mid 20s to low 30s Centigrade. Nights will be much colder, however, with temperatures dropping down close to zero. Since all drives (including those in the early morning) are conducted in open vehicles warm clothing (including hat and gloves) is essential! The occasional rain shower is possible but unlikely.

Tour grading

Grade A - This will be a holiday of two parts. Wildlife viewing during the first half of the holiday will be mostly by vehicle on morning and afternoon safaris, although there will be gentle wildlife walks around the lodges and camps too. During our days around the Western Cape we will try to spend as much time as possible exploring on foot. Although most of the trails are easy going, it should be noted that some of the paths on the Cape Peninsula and Table Mountain can be steep and uneven in places.

Although, you should be prepared for a busy programme of wildlife watching throughout this tour - including plenty of early mornings and several late nights - there is nothing to stop you taking a day, or part of the day, off

to relax at the accommodation should you so wish! This tour is, therefore, suitable for anyone with an average level of fitness who enjoys walking and wildlife.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included in the cost of this holiday. We will be using a mix of guesthouses (Simon's Town and Langebaan), national park rest camps (Augrabies Falls National Park) and a small exclusive lodge in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. All rooms have private facilities.

Please note that it may, on rare occasions, be necessary to change the one or more of the camps and lodges outlined above. You can be assured, however, that any alternate lodge or camp will be of the same standard as the original and all will be in excellent areas for mammals, birds and other wildlife.

Extra expenses

Please note that the following expenses are excluded from the cost of the holiday and are paid locally. Any necessary Visas (not needed for UK citizens), locally paid airport taxes, additional activities not outlined above, drinks, guide and lodge tips and all items of a personal nature.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to South Africa. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/south-africa or telephone 0870 6060290 prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card or book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk. Alternatively please complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website.

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