



TRAVEL

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South Africa: Cape Town is an open canvas for art

HIGHLIGHTS

Art is found in museums, hotels, sidewalks, walls, mosques and minarets

Table Mountain Cableway takes passengers to the mountaintop

In 1966 the District Six neighborhood was declared "white;" tens of thousands of black residents evicted



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A pair of statuesque cheetahs at the entrance to Delaire Graff Estate winery, which has a few sculpted cheetahs roaming the property, in Stellenbosch, about an hour's drive from Cape Town. **MARY ANN ANDERSON - THE WASHINGTON POST**

BY MARY ANN ANDERSON
Washington Post Service

Resting in the shadows of the severe and imposing Table Mountain, Cape Town rises above and lies beneath my hillside hotel in an unforgettable display of tints and textures.

The South African city, sculpted with flower-filled balconies, leafy streets, mosques and minarets, is an open canvas of art. At every turn, there is art in one form or another, whether in its staggering natural beauty or its museums that harken to every historical period in South African history.

Here at the Ellerman House, I am surrounded by art, not only from Mother Nature's showy palette, but also galleries of paintings and sculptures of South Africa's most impressive collections, so that it seems more art gallery than hotel.

"The art is part of the house, and not a separate gallery," explains the hotel's Lindsay Marais, as she shows me works by Thomas William Bowler, known for his watercolor landscapes of South African scenery; Diane Victor, for her delicate smoke and charcoal drawings; William Kentridge, who is probably the best known of all South African artists and whose works feature primarily charcoal with minimal touches of pastel; and my favorite, Dylan Lewis, whose African wildlife and wilderness bronze sculptures are so detailed they seem to leap at you.

Peel away the layers of just about every painting, piece of pottery or jewelry, or handcrafted sculpture or ceramic, and you'll find a story of emotion, history and nature. You see it in places like the Ellerman House, museums and even sidewalks. Plenty of buildings are etched with artwork. That's the thing about Cape Town — it inspires art in all forms.

MUSEUMS IN AND AROUND CAPE TOWN THAT ARE WORTH A VISIT INCLUDE THE KOOPMANS-DE WET HOUSE, THE IRMA STERN MUSEUM AND THE DISTRICT SIX MUSEUM.

We are a group of five friends besotted by wanderlust who want to see this city often termed the most beautiful in the world. With a recommendation from the Ellerman House, we have hired Richard Rahim, a local guide working for Passage to Africa, to shuttle us around Africa's "Mother City," so named because it is the first one settled in South Africa. Although

it didn't start out to be an arts-related trip — we had merely wanted to see Cape Town — that's what it soon becomes.

One of the first stops on our city sojourn is Bo-Kaap, one of the prettiest neighborhoods of Cape Town, enhanced by Malaysian, Indian and Indonesian influences.

I'm captivated by the cobbled streets and homes painted in every shade of the pastel spectrum: Light lavender, pale yellow and peach pink are mixed in with darker greens, bold purples and vibrant blues. It's as if I've stepped into an impressionist painting on which an artist has dropped a paint bomb.

I live in a small town in Georgia where everyone is either Baptist or Methodist, and the first time I hear the haunting yet lyrical muezzin's call to prayer is in Bo-Kaap. It heightens the sense of just how far away from home South Africa really is.

For the greater experience of Bo-Kaap, check out the small Bo-Kaap Museum, built in 1768 in early Cape Dutch style, for Islamic culture and heritage. Its unassuming facade seems almost out of place among all that splashy color. Seeing the exhibits takes only an hour or so, but the highlight is a series of historical black-and-white and sepia-toned photos titled *Who Built Cape Town?* that depict primarily the Muslim lifestyle of the Bo-Kaap



Tourist walk toward the summit of Table Mountain in Cape Town, South Africa. **SCHALK VAN ZUYDAM** - ASSOCIATED PRESS

neighborhood.

Next Rahim drives to Table Mountain, which is older than the Himalayas. He has brought along a gourmet boxed lunch from the Ellerman House, but the area is so crowded — with bicyclists, hikers and people waiting to take cable cars to the top — that he decides nearby Signal Point would be a better place to have a picnic lunch.

“You can’t keep a Capetonian inside on a beautiful day,” he observes.

I must say, the views from Signal Point are just as stupendous as they are from Table Mountain, but here we have an added bonus: Groups of parasailers are running and leaping off the side of the mountain into the wind. In moments they are hovering over the city in a spectacle that is both mesmerizing and terrifying.

850,000-
plus

Number of people who ride the Table Mountain Cableway every year

That afternoon we wander into the Old World working harbor of the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront — here it’s just called the V&A — marveling at the myriad galleries and shops plastered with local art. Storefronts crammed with herds of hand-carved elephants and giraffes compete for space with beads, bowls, ceramics and of course the requisite paintings and photography of South African wildlife and scenery. Set in rows of converted dockside warehouses, the V&A, with its more than 450 shops, is probably the heart of the tourism industry for Cape Town, but I am keen on returning to the townships.

On a previous trip to Cape Town a few years back, I took an extensive cultural tour into Langa and Khayelitsha townships, the shantytowns created by the South African government during the time of apartheid. The journey into the townships is extraordinary. No matter that most of the people here live in utter poverty: Art and design are incorporated into the elements of daily life.

During this trip, we mostly drive through Khayelitsha but occasionally get out and walk.

Everywhere there are drawings and paintings, on pieces of rusty tin, lean-tos or anywhere there is an open space. Hand-painted images, sometimes crude and sometimes quite sophisticated, depict everything from simple graffiti to complex portraits of local men, women and children. I see a Cat in the Hat drawn on one shack, a leaping lion on another. It’s complete sensory overload, and I want to take photos but I keep the camera tucked away. I don’t want to intrude into the personal space of the people who live here.

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We have other places to visit, so we leave behind Khayelitsha and its rainbow of outdoor art to visit a couple of museums. Several are definitely worth popping into, including the Koopmans-de Wet House, an 18th-century house museum that’s a mixture of Cape Dutch and Georgian architecture filled with antiques. The opulent furniture — four-poster beds, glittering glass-front cabinets and chandeliers — is the centerpiece of the collection.

Although I like the museum because it shows a different facet of lifestyles in Cape Town, I am struck by the sharp contrast to the poverty of the townships not so far away.

The Irma Stern Museum in the chic neighborhood of Rosebank is another highlight. The collection is impressive, showcasing not only the artist's pieces inspired by her journeys through Africa and Europe, but also artwork from other South African artists. The walls of the museum are painted with dramatic yellows, reds and greens, and the artwork — vivid paintings and African carvings and sculptures brought from deep in the continent from exotic Zanzibar to the Congo — seems to leap to life against the background hues.

One of most touching and even disturbing museums we visit is the District Six Museum. The obliteration of District Six is perhaps the harshest of anything to come of the apartheid era. In 1966 the neighborhood was declared “white,” and its mishmash of more than 60,000 mostly black, working-class residents, plus a mix of Indians, Muslims and immigrants from other African countries, was forced to relocate to the more desolate Cape Flats on the outskirts of the city. District Six was completely razed, flattened by bulldozers.

Several times as our group tours the museum, which opened in 1994, I am reminded of the American South in its pre-Civil Rights era. “For Use By White Persons,” reads one unforgettable artifact. “These public premises and the amenities thereof have been reserved for the exclusive use of white persons.” The razing was really the end of a world for residents of District Six, and still not much has replaced it, just the exceptionally well-told story in the dignified exhibits.

At the end of the trip, as my friends and I sip glasses of pinotage, a wine that was created in South Africa, I reflect on the sounds and colors of Cape Town. Undoubtedly it's the perfect jumping-off place in South Africa. Our group agrees that seeing the city as a work of art or for its artwork, whether it's in a museum, a chalk drawing on a sidewalk, or simply the natural color of the sky, is truly one of the great travel adventures of the world.

That's part of the hype of Cape Town, and if you buy into it, your expectations will almost certainly be met. Everywhere is an artist's palette. “Cape Town is like a coloring book,” Rahim said at one point as we watched over the city from Signal Point. “It's just so beautiful.”

GOING TO CAPE TOWN

Information: Cape Town Tourism, 011-27-86-132-2223; www.capetown.travel.

Tour: Passage to Africa, 011-27-15-793-0811; www.passagetoafrica.com. Offers half-day Cape Town tours with private vehicle, guide and entrance fees from \$97 per person. Other custom-tailored tours available at varying rates.

WHERE TO STAY

Ellerman House, 180 Kloof Rd., Bantry Bay; 011-27-21-430-3200; www.ellerman.co.za. Rates vary but usually are in the \$620-\$700 range; from \$470 Oct. 1-Nov. 30; includes breakfast, laundry, spirits and beer, 24-hour guest pantry, sunset cocktails and canapes, and return transfers to Cape Town International Airport. Features farm-to-fork dining with South African ingredients.

South Beach, 6 Link Rd., Camps Bay; 011-27-21-437-0074; www.blueviews.com/southbeach. Luxury apartments. South Beach also features the art collection of Lionel Smit, known for portrait painting and sculpture. From \$175.

WHERE TO EAT

The Pot Luck Club, Silo Top Flr., The Old Biscuit Mill, 373-375 Albert Rd., Woodstock; 011-27-21-447-0804; www.thepotluckclub.co.za. South African fare including “bunny chow” (curry in a bread bowl), springbok carpaccio and pork belly with entrees from \$6.

Carne, 70 Keerom St., Cape Town city center; 011-27-21-424-3460; www.carne-sa.com. Trendy, fine dining restaurant offering cuts of Romagnola beef and Dorper lamb and game that you pick out tableside. Entrees from \$12.

TRAVEL PACKAGES

The Africa Adventure, 800-882-9453; www.africa-adventure.com. Fort Lauderdale-based company offering nine- to 15-day safaris in South Africa combined with sightseeing in Cape Town. Set itineraries from \$1,895 per person, exclusive of air. Also offers fully customized safaris, with costs depending on itinerary.

Extraordinary Journeys, 800-403-6012; www.ejafrika.com. New York-based mother-daughter team specializing in customized itineraries priced per person and varying by season. Set itineraries in South Africa for 10-day Cape Town sightseeing and Phinda Private Game Reserve safari begin at \$5,300 per person, exclusive of air.