

Table Mountain National Park

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Table Mountain National Park

To the Khoisan (Khoesaaan) who lived on the peninsula long before Europeans arrived, it was Hoerikwaggo (Mountain in the Sea) a place of legend and life-giving fresh water. To Nelson Mandela and his fellow prisoners on Robben Island it was a beacon of hope. To the millions of people who have climbed or been transported in the cableway to its 1088m peak, it is the ultimate viewpoint over the city. We're talking about Table Mountain, Cape Town's icon, and star attraction of **Table Mountain National Park** (Map p68; ☎ 021-701 8692; www.tmnp.co.za).

The park covers 24,500 hectares, about 73% of the entire Cape Peninsula, and stretches from Signal Hill to Cape Point, encompassing both Devil's Peak and Lion's Head, which abut Table Mountain, as well as the Silvermine Nature Reserve, Tokai, Boulders Beach and the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve. All these areas are covered in this chapter, as are details of the ground-breaking series of overnight hikes through the park (see p75) launched in 2005.

HISTORY

At over 100 sites in the national park, such as Peers Cave (see p72) in Silvermine and a cave in Smitswinkel Bay near the entrance to Cape Point, evidence has been found of the indigenous people who lived on the Cape long before the first recorded arrival of Europeans in 1503. This is when Portuguese navigator Admiral Antonio de Saldanha bagged the title of the first white guy to climb Table Mountain; he named it Taboa do Cabo (Table of the Cape). The Dutch thought this name appropriate, too, and so it stuck. It was the Dutch who coined the term Lion's Head (Leeuwen Kop).

At the Cape Point end of the national park, the name game also got underway with the Portuguese. Bartholomeu Dias coined the name Cabo da Boa Esperança (Cape of Good Hope), which by a smidgen qualifies as the southwesternmost point of the African continent; a recently discovered cross carved into the rock near here could indicate the spot where Dias stepped onto the Cape in 1488. In comparison to the port that grew rapidly at the foot of Table Mountain, Europeans were slow to come to live in rugged, wind-swept Cape Point, the first farms being granted here in the 1780s. The areas really didn't become fully accessible until 1915 when the coastal road from Simon's Town was completed.

The campaign to designate the Cape Point area a nature reserve first got underway in the 1920s when there was a chance that the land could have been turned over to developers. At the same time the future prime minister General Jan Smuts – a keen hiker – started a public appeal to secure formal protection for Table Mountain; there's a track on the mountain named after him. The Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve was eventually secured in 1939. This was the first formal conservation on the Cape, although Cecil Rhodes (see p105) had used

WILD CARDS

If you're planning on doing a lot of travel in South Africa's national parks and nature reserves, it's worth looking into the saving on entry fees afforded by the **Wild Card** (☎ 021-527 7887; www.wildinafrica.com). This smart-card loyalty programme costs R195 for individual overseas visitors, R335 for a couple and R440 for a family. There are plans to introduce a cheaper Wild Pass for short-term overseas visitors so check the website for details.

If you're a Cape Town resident the best deal is also Cape Town's **Wild Card**, which costs R45 and includes 12 entries a year to the park at the various places you have to pay, such as the Cape of Good Hope and Silvermine. It also offers discounts at other city venues and cash-back rewards from local programme partners.

SUNPATHS OF TABLE MOUNTAIN

Dean Liprini, an archaeoastronomer, has been researching what he believes to be the sacred sites of the Khoisan and perhaps even older people on the Cape for the last 15 years. His astonishing theory is that the Cape is crisscrossed by a grid of sight lines and carefully selected points comprising caves, sound chambers, geometrical marker stones and sun and moon shrines, some in the uncanny shape of giant human faces. Sunrise and sunset is exactly aligned with these points at the summer and winter solstices and the spring and autumn equinoxes, thus indicating they formed a way for the ancient people to measure the passing of the year and record auspicious dates.

As whacky as it may sound, there is certainly something in Liprini's theory, as you'll discover if you take a tour with him or one of his colleagues (p75). Observed from certain angles, unmistakable profiles of faces appear in the rocks, some with 'eye' holes that catch the light – one such rock is a granite boulder on Lion's Head, while another is the 'Pyramid All Seeing Eye' just off the M6 between Glencairn and Sunnydale. Liprini's hikes will also take you to the Cave of Ascension, above the ancient burial site of Peers Cave (p72), and to Llandudno on the coast where the setting sun casts an eerie trail of light through the giant granite boulders. To find out more about the sunpaths, check the website www.sunpath.co.za or buy Liprini's recently published book *Pathways of the Sun*.

a small part of this vast fortune to buy up much of the eastern slopes of Table Mountain; he gifted this land, which includes Kirstenbosch and the Cecilia Estate stretching to Constantia Nek, to the public in his will.

Although the Van Zyl Commission in the 1950s balked at creating a single controlling authority for the park, in 1958 all land on Table Mountain above the 152m contour line was declared a National Monument. The city of Cape Town proclaimed the Table Mountain Nature Reserve in 1963 and the Silvermine Nature Reserve in 1965. By the 1970s 14 different bodies were in control of the publicly owned natural areas of the Cape – a situation that was obviously unsatisfactory. It would take until the end of apartheid before all the various bodies could be brought to the table, and it wasn't until 1998 that a single Cape Peninsula National Park became a reality. In 2004 the park was renamed Table Mountain National Park.

THE LAND

Table Mountain's flat-top shape as we know it today probably first came about 60 million years ago, although the mountain as a whole started to be thrown up about 250 million years, making it the elder statesman of world mountains. In comparison, the Alps are only 32 million years old and the Himalayas 40 million years old.

The types of rock that make up the mountain and the Cape Peninsula are broken into three major geological types. The oldest, dating back 540 million years, is Malmesbury shale – this forms the base of most of the City Bowl and can be seen along the Sea Point shoreline, on Signal Hill and on the lower slopes of Devil's Peak. It's fairly soft and weathers easily. The second oldest is the tough Cape granite, which forms the foundation for Table Mountain and can also be seen on Lion's Head and the boulders at Clifton and Boulders Beaches. The third type of rock is called Table Mountain Sandstone, a combination of sandstone and quartzite.

It's thought that originally the summit of Table Mountain was a couple of kilometres higher than it is today. Over time this rock has weathered to create the distinctive hollows and oddly shaped rocks found on the mountain's summit and at Cape Point. The sandy soil on top of these rocks is very poor in nutrients. The plants that grow in this soil – the *fynbos* (see p68) – don't make for very good eating, hence the lack of large herbivores grazing in the region.

THE TWELVE APOSTLES

One of the most dramatic features of Table Mountain is the series of buttresses that runs down its western flank behind Camps Bay. They're known as the Twelve Apostles even though there are well over 12 of them and none is individually named after an apostle! The Dutch called them De Gevelbergen, which means Gable Mountains; the current name is said to have been coined by British governor Sir Rufane Donkin in 1820.



FLORA

In June 2004 the Cape Floristic Region (CFR) was awarded World Heritage status. The CFR, which covers the entire Cape Peninsula, is the richest and smallest of the world's six floral kingdoms and home to some 8200 plant species – more than three times as many per square kilometre as in the whole of South America! Table Mountain and the peninsula alone contain 2285 plant species, more than in all of Britain.

The most common type of vegetation is *fynbos* (from the Dutch meaning 'fine bush'; pronounced fain-bos). *Fynbos* somehow thrives in the area's nitrogen-poor

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soil – it's supposed that the plants' fine, leathery leaves improve their odds of survival by discouraging predators. *Fynbos* is composed of three main elements: proteas (including the king protea, South Africa's national emblem), ericas (heaths and mosses) and restios (reeds). Walking through the park you'll see many common examples of *fynbos* flowers, such as gladiolus, freesias and daisies, all of which have been exported to other parts of the world.

On Signal Hill and the lower slopes of Devil's Peak you'll find the second main type of vegetation in the park, *renosterbos* (literally 'rhinoceros bush'), composed predominantly of a grey ericoid shrub, and peppered with grasses and geophytes (plants that grow from underground bulbs). In the cool, well-watered ravines on the eastern slopes of Table Mountain you'll also find small pockets of Afro-montane forest, such as at Orange Kloof where only 12 entry permits are issued daily.

While the biodiversity of the Cape Peninsula is incredible, it is also threatened. More than 1400 *fynbos* plants are endangered or vulnerable to extinction; some have minute natural ranges. Most *fynbos* plants need fire to germinate and flower, but unseasonal and accidental fires – such as the one that swept across the northern flank of Table Mountain in January 2006 – can cause great harm. The fires burn far longer and more fiercely, too, because of the presence of alien plants (see the boxed text, below), such as the various pines and wattles that also pose a threat because of the vast amounts of water they suck up.

FAUNA

The animal most closely associated with Table Mountain is the dassie (rock hyrax). Despite the resemblance to a plump hamster, these small furry animals are – incredibly – related to the elephant. You'll most likely see dassies sunning themselves on rocks around the upper cableway station.

Other than dassies, the national park is home to well over 100 invertebrates and two vertebrates (including the incredibly rare Table Mountain ghost frog) not found anywhere else on earth. Among the feral population of introduced fallow deer that roam the lower slopes of Table Mountain around the Rhodes Memorial, you may spot an animal long regarded as extinct: the quagga. This partially striped zebra was formerly thought to be a distinct species, but DNA obtained from a stuffed quagga in Cape Town's South African Museum showed it to be a subspecies of the widespread Burchell's zebra. A breeding programme, started in 1987, has proved successful in 'resurrecting' the quagga.

Mammals in the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve include eight antelope species, Cape mountain zebras and a troupe of Chacma baboons. Many signs warn you not to feed the baboons (and you shouldn't – they're potentially dangerous; see p73).

BATTLING THE ALIEN INVASION

As well as guns and diseases, the European colonists also brought their plants to the Cape, some of which have proved to be aggressively invasive and damaging to the environment. Pines, oaks, poplars, wattles and three species of hakea were planted.

The park has recognised the need to bring these thirsty alien invaders under control. A public-private partnership campaign *Ukuvuka* (www.ukuvuka.org.za) was started in the wake of the devastating forest fires that swept across the Cape in 2000. *Ukuvuka* is Xhosa (isiXhosa) for 'Wake Up'. The campaign aims to rid the peninsula of invasive alien plants, rehabilitate fire-damaged areas and educate vulnerable communities, such as the townships, about fires. This programme and others have been successful so far, clearing around a third of the park's management area of invasive aliens. They have also helped employ nearly 300 people from the townships adjacent to the park.

It's not just alien plants that have been destructive to the Cape environment, but also imported animals, such as fallow deer and the Himalayan tahr. In 1936 a pair of tahrs escaped from Grootte Schuur Zoo on the slopes of Devil's Peak; by the 1970s that couple had multiplied into a herd of 600, wreaking much damage throughout the park. A culling programme has since brought the tahr population under control.

Across the park there's an abundance of bird and insect life. The most famous birds are the jackass penguins, so called because of their donkeylike squawk. You'll find some 3000 of the friendly penguins at Boulders Beach (p72).

The national park's area of responsibility also extends out to sea, with a single 975-sq-km Marine Protected Area being proclaimed in 2003. On the False Bay side you'll be able to spot southern right and humpback whales (p109). Dolphins, Cape fur seals at Duiker Island (reached from Hout Bay; see p103) and loggerhead and leatherback turtles are among the other marine animals you could hope to see.

SAFETY

Just because Table Mountain National Park is on the doorstep of the city doesn't make this wilderness area, extending above 1000m, any less dangerous and unpredictable. Hardly a week goes by without some accident or fatality on the mountain, often due to a climbing expedition gone wrong. More people have died on Table Mountain than on Mt Everest. The mountain fires of recent years have also claimed their victims, and there have been reports of muggings on the slopes of Table Mountain and Lion's Head.

To ensure visitor safety there are around 60 staff and an equal number of volunteers on hand in the park; you'll find park visitor information centres (Map p68) on Signal Hill, the Tafelberg Rd, Platteklip Gorge, Lion's Head and Deer Park. At the Table Mountain National Park Head Office visitors can find out more about various areas of the park, pick up leaflets, buy books, and register and pay for various hikes and accommodation in the park. Visitors themselves should also be well prepared before setting off into the park. Even if taking the cableway to the summit, be aware that the weather up top can change very rapidly.

However hot it is, it's always a good idea to hike with long trousers. The *fynbos* may look soft and feathery but much of it is tough and scratchy. There's also the seriously nasty blister bush (its leaves look like those of continental parsley); if you brush against this plant it can leave blisters on your skin that refuse to heal for years.

If you do run into problems or believe that others are in trouble call **Metro Wilderness Search & Rescue** (☎ 10177, from a mobile phone 112).

MAPS, BOOKS & WEBSITES

The national park endorses the pictorial *Mountains in the Sea: Table Mountain to Cape Point*, by John Yeld, as the best single guidebook. It is indeed an impressive store of information, covering practically everything you'd care to know about the park, including guides to flora and fauna and the most popular walks. The maps in the guide are produced by Peter Slingsby, whose series of handy, detailed maps covering different sections of the park also get the thumbs up from the park authorities and the Mountain Club of South Africa. Slingsby's website, www.themaps.co.za, includes some free downloads of maps.

One good map that covers the entire peninsula is the handsome *National Geographic AdventureMAP*, produced in conjunction with Map Studio. As its title suggests the map covers all kinds of adventures you could have on the Cape, apart from hiking or climbing in the national park.

Mike Lundy's regularly updated *Best Walks in the Cape Peninsula* remains a popular choice for casual hikers; each month

you'll find details of one of his walks posted on the www.hikecapetown.co.za website. You could also search out Shirley Brossy's *A Walking Guide for Table Mountain*, which details 34 walks in the park, or *Table Mountain Classics*, by Tony Lourens, which will be of interest to more-serious mountain climbers as it covers routes where ropes are necessary. Walks and a hell of a lot of other activities are covered in Fiona McIntosh's useful *Table Mountain Activity Guide*.

Other helpful books are *Wild About Cape Town*, by Duncan Butchart, a pocket-sized photo guide to the common animals and plants on the peninsula. For those interested in geology, John Compton's *The Rocks and Mountains of Cape Town* and Map Studio's fold-out map and chart *How The Cape Got Its Shape* are worth searching out.

SIGHTS

The following section covers the main sights within the park, starting with the cableway and moving down the peninsula to Cape Point. For details of Signal Hill, which is part of the park, see p96, and for hikes within the park, see p73.

CABLEWAY Map p68

☎ 021-424 8181; www.tablemountain.net;
one way/return adult R60/110, child R30/60;

🕒 8.30am-7pm Feb-Nov, 8am-10pm Dec-Jan

Riding the cableway up Table Mountain is a no-brainer; the views from the revolving car and the summit are phenomenal. Once you are at the top there are souvenir shops, a café and some easy walks to follow. Departures are every 10 minutes in high season (December to February) and every 20 minutes in low season (May to September), but the cableway doesn't operate when it's dangerously windy, and there's obviously not much point going up if you are simply going to be wrapped in the cloud known as the 'tablecloth'. Call in advance to see if it's operating. The best visibility and conditions are likely to be first thing in the morning or in the evening.

If you don't have your own transport, **Rikkis** (☎ 021-418 6713; www.rikkis.co.za); 🕒 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat) will come up here for R16; a non-shared taxi will cost around R50.

RESERVOIRS Map p68

On the area of Table Mountain known as the Back Table, you'll find five dams and reservoirs created in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to provide a secure water supply for the booming population of Cape Town. Work commenced on the first dam in 1890 and the 995-megalitre reservoir, **Woodhead Reservoir**, was named after the mayor of the time Sir John Woodhead when it was eventually completed in 1897. At the same time the independent municipal-

ity of Wynberg began working on a series of dams: **Victoria Reservoir** was completed in 1896, **Alexandra Reservoir** was finished in 1903 and the **De Villiers Reservoir** in 1907. The city of Cape Town also added the 924-megalitre **Hely-Hutchinson Reservoir** (named after Governor Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson) in 1904.

In hikes around the Back Table you can admire the construction skill and detail of these dams and learn something of their history at the **Waterworks Museum** (☎ 021-686 3408). This small building at the northern corner of the Hely-Hutchinson Reservoir is often closed, but is usually opened if you're on one of the Hoerikwaggo Trails hikes (p75). Inside, various bits of machinery used to build the dams are displayed, including the Barclay locomotive made in Scotland in 1898, dismantled and reconstructed on top of the mountain.

TOKAI PLANTATION Map p68

This wooded area, south of Constantia, is a favourite spot for picnics and walks, the most challenging of which is the 6km hike to **Elephant's Eye Cave** within the Silvermine Nature Reserve. The zigzag path is fairly steep and offers little shade as you climb higher up Constantiaberg (928m), so bring a hat and water. At the walk's base you'll find the **Tokai Arboretum**, a historic planting of 1555 different trees representing 274 species, begun in 1885 by Joseph Storr Lister, the conservator of forests for the Cape Colony. There's a pleasant café here where you can pick up a map of walks in the area.

To reach the forest from the city centre, follow the M3 towards Muizenberg and take the Retreat and Tokai exit.

TABLE MOUNTAIN DOS & DON'TS

The following are a few basic dos and don'ts for tackling the national park.

Do

- Tell someone the route you're planning to climb and take a map (or, better still, a guide).
- Take plenty of water and some food.
- Take weatherproof clothing – the weather can change for the worse with lightning speed.
- Wear proper hiking boots or shoes and a sun hat.
- Take a mobile phone, if you have one.

Don't

- Climb alone.
- Leave litter on the mountain.
- Make a fire on the mountain – they're banned.

SILVERMINE NATURE RESERVE Map p68
☎ 021-715 0011; www.tmnp.co.za; Ou Kaapse Weg; adult/child R10/5; 🕒 7am-6pm Oct-Mar, 8am-5pm Apr-Sep

This reserve is named after the fruitless attempts by the Dutch to prospect for silver in this area from 1675 to 1685. Today the reserve's focal point is the **Silvermine Reservoir**, constructed in 1898. It's a beautiful spot for a picnic or leisurely walk around the reservoir on a boardwalk that is wheelchair accessible. The reservoir waters are tannin stained and although there are signs forbidding swimming, you'll often find locals taking a dip here.

On the southeastern edge of the reserve is **Peers Cave**: a trail leads here from a marked parking spot on the Ou Kaapse Weg. The cave, which is actually an overhang, is named after Victor Peers, who with his son Bertie, started excavating the site in 1927, collecting evidence of the Khoisan's habitation of the area dating as far back as 10,000 years. The most dramatic find was of an 11,000-year-old skull; it's thought this was an ancient burial site. Declared a National Monument in 1941, the cave provides a dramatic viewpoint out across Noordhoek towards the sea and is well worth visiting.

BOULDERS BEACH PENGUIN COLONY Map p68

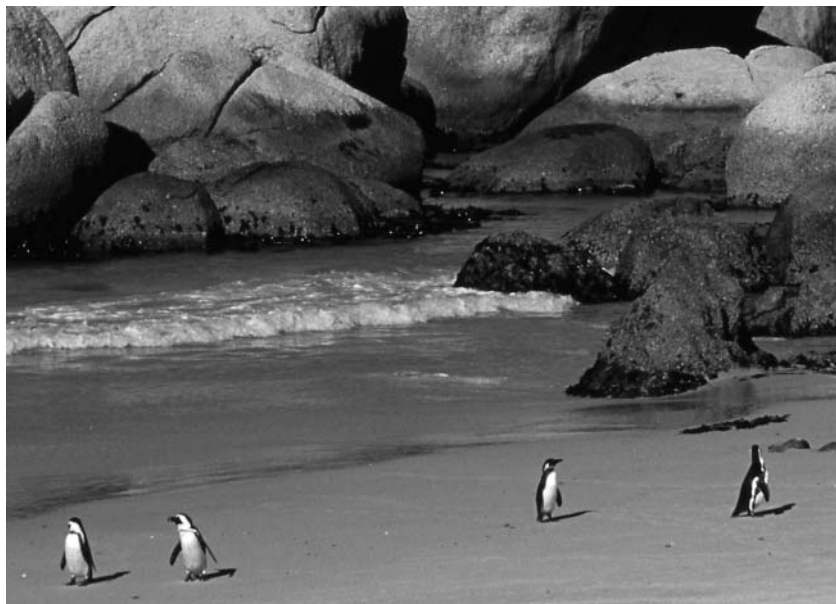
☎ 021-701 8692; www.tmnp.co.za; adult/child R20/5; 🕒 7am-7.30pm Dec-Jan, 8am-6.30pm

Feb-May & Sep-Nov, 8am-5pm Jun-Aug

Some 3km south of Simon's Town is Boulders, a picturesque area with a number of large boulders and small sandy coves, within which you'll find Boulders Beach, home to a colony of 3000 jackass (African) penguins. Delightful as they are, the penguins are also pretty stinky, which may put you off from getting too close.

There are two entrances to the penguins' protected area. The first, as you come along Queens Rd (the continuation of St George's St) from Simon's Town, is at the end of Seaforth Rd; the second is at Bellevue Rd, where you'll also find accommodation and places to eat. You can observe the penguins from the boardwalk at Foxy Beach and at Boulders Beach. The sea is calm and shallow in the coves, so Boulders is popular with families and can get extremely crowded, especially on holidays and weekends.

Rikkis (☎ 021-418 6713; www.rikkis.co.za; 🕒 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat) meet all trains to Simon's Town and also go to Boulders.



Penguins, Boulders Beach (above)

BABOON MATTERS

The signs at Cape Point warning you not to feed the baboons are there for a reason. After years of interacting with tourists, the baboons will quite happily grab food from your hands or climb in the open doors and windows of your car to get at it. *Never* challenge them as they will turn aggressive. The damage inflicted might end up being far more serious than baboon crap over your car seats, so keep an eye out and your food carefully hidden away.

Showing a much gentler side to baboon life is the project **Baboon Matters** (☎ 021-783 3882; www.baboonmatters.org.za; adult/child R200/100). On a two-to-three-hour guided hike you'll get to spend time observing a baboon troop at very close quarters – it's an amazing experience. The tours usually depart from the **Southern Right Hotel** (Map pp244–5; 14 Glen Rd, Glencairn), but the guides can pick you up from anywhere in Simon's Town. The project was started to help preserve the Chacma baboon population, estimated at 247 and dangerously close to extinction on the Cape. Monitors have been employed to keep the baboons out of the villages where they come into conflict with humans; 25% of the tour fee goes towards the project.

CAPE OF GOOD HOPE NATURE RESERVE Map p68

☎ 021-780 9204; www.tmnp.co.za; adult/child R45/15; 🕒 6am-6pm Oct-Mar, 7am-5pm Apr-Sep

With truly awesome scenery, some fantastic walks and deserted beaches, plus the chance to spot wildlife (including bonteboks, elands and zebras), a visit to this nature reserve (known locally as Cape Point) can easily swallow up a day. You'll not have seen the half of it if you go on one of the many tours, which whip into the reserve, pause at the **Buffelsfontein Visitor Centre** (Map p68; ☎ 021-780 9204; www.tmnp.co.za), then allow you just enough time to walk to Cape Point, grab lunch, and get your picture snapped at the Cape of Good Hope (Africa's most southwesterly point) on the way back.

The best way to explore the reserve is on foot or by bike. It's particularly beautiful in spring, when the wild flowers are in bloom. Get a map at the entrance gate if you plan to go walking, but bear in mind that there is minimal shade in the park and the weather can change quickly. Also see p74 for details of the reserve's popular two-day hike.

It's not a hard walk, but if you're feeling lazy a **funicular railway** (one way/return adult R32/24, child R16/12; 🕒 10am-5pm) runs up from beside the restaurant to the souvenir kiosk next to the **old lighthouse** (1860). The old lighthouse was too often obscured

by mist and fog, so a new lighthouse was built at Dias Point in 1919 – take the thrilling walkway along the rocks here to avoid the crowds.

There are some excellent beaches, usually deserted. This can make them dangerous if you get into difficulties in the water, so take care. One of the best beaches for swimming or walking is **Platboom Beach**, and the pretty one at **Buffels Bay** is also safe for swimming. **Maclear Beach**, near the main car park, is good for walks or diving but is too rocky for enjoyable swimming. Further down towards Cape Point is beautiful **Diaz Beach**. Access is on foot from the car park.

If you forget to bring your own picnic, sandwiches and snacks can be bought at the Buffelsfontein Visitor Centre and a shop next to the funicular, where you'll also find the Two Oceans restaurant, which is generally packed with tour-bus crowds.

Numerous tour companies include Cape Point on their itineraries; both **Day Trippers** (p91) and **Downhill Adventures** (p150) are recommended because they offer the chance to cycle within the park. The only public transport to the Cape is with **Rikkis** (☎ 021-418 6713; www.rikkis.co.za; 🕒 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat), which run from Simon's Town train station. The best option is to hire a car for the day, so you can explore the rest of the peninsula.

HIKING

There are hundreds of routes on Table Mountain alone, covering everything from easy strolls to extreme rock climbing. Signage on the routes is improving (see the boxed text, p75), but it's far from comprehensive and even with a map it's easy to get lost; read our safety tips (p70) before setting off. Below we cover details of the most popular routes.

Apart from hiking, the park provides an ideal venue for many other activities, such as abseiling, mountain biking, rock climbing and paragliding – details of these can be found in the Activities chapter (p150).

CLIMBING TABLE MOUNTAIN

None of the routes up Table Mountain are easy, but the **Platteklip Gorge** (Map p68) walk on the City Bowl side is at least straightforward. Unless you're fit, try walking down before you attempt the walk up. It takes about 2½ hours from the upper cableway station to the lower, taking it fairly easy. Be warned that the route is exposed to the sun and, for much of the way, a vertical slog.

Another far-trickier possibility recommended for experienced climbers only is the **India Fenster** (Map p68) route that starts from directly behind the lower cableway station and heads straight up. The hikers you see from the cableway, perched like mountain goats on apparently sheer cliffs, are taking this route.

The **Pipe Track** (Map p68) is a less-steep route that runs along the west side of the mountain towards the Twelve Apostles; it's best walked in the early morning before the sun hits this side of the mountain.

There are also two popular routes up the mountain from Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens along either **Skeleton Gorge** (Map p68; which involves negotiating some sections with chains) or **Nursery Ravine** (Map p68). These can be covered in three hours by someone of moderate fitness. The trails are well marked, and steep in places, but the way to the gardens from the cableway and vice versa is not signposted.



Relaxing on a deck overlooking Table Mountain

CLIMBING LION'S HEAD

The 45-minute, 2.2km hike from Kloof Nek to the peak of Lion's Head (Map p68) is deservedly popular. A lot of people do it as an early-morning constitutional and it's a ritual to go up on and watch the sun go down a full-moon night. The moonlight aids the walk back down, although you should always bring a torch (flashlight) and go with company. The track is easy to follow and its start is clearly marked at the top of Kloof Nek Rd, where you'll also find a national park information hut; it involves a little climbing but there are chains on the rocks to help.

CAPE OF GOOD HOPE TRAIL

You'll need to book to walk the two-day/one-night Cape of Good Hope Trail, which traces a spectacular 33.8km circular route through the reserve. The cost is R88 (not including the reserve entry fee) with accommodation at the basic Protea and Restio huts at the southern end of the reserve. Contact the reserve's **Buffelsfontein Visitor Centre** (Map p68; ☎ 021-780 9204; www.tmnp.co.za) for further details.

There are plenty of other great walks in the reserve if you don't have time for the two-day trail. On the False Bay side, try the straightforward 3.5km walk from **Buffels Bay** to the spectacular Paulsberg peak, whose sheer cliff plunges 369m into the sea.

GUIDED HIKES

Check **Cumhike** (www.cumhike.org.au) and the **Trails Club of South Africa** (www.trailsclub.co.za) for details of guided hikes held each weekend, many in the national park. Also contact the **Buffelsfontein Visitor Centre** (Map p68; ☎ 021-780 9204; www.tmnp.co.za) about volunteer guided walks each weekend in the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve, and about the two-day Cape of Good Hope circular trail throughout the reserve, for which you need to make a reservation.

HOERIKWAGGO TRAILS

In 2005 Table Mountain National Park launched the first of its planned trio of **Hoerikwaggo Trails** (www.hoerikwaggotrails.co.za), designed to allow visitors, for the first time, to sleep on the mountain, and eventually to hike 80km or so from the City Bowl to Cape Point.

The three-day **Table Mountain Trail** is a fully guided hike starting at the Waterfront with a boat ride out into Table Bay and proceeding through the City Bowl to spend the night at the historic Platteklip Wash Houses (p76) in Vredehoek, on the lower northern slopes of the mountain. On day two the hike continues up to the cableway and then to the summit and across to the Overseer's Cottage (p76), beside the De Villiers Reservoir on Table Mountain's Back Table. On the final day you explore the Back Table, including the reservoirs and Waterworks Museum (see p71), and descend via the eastern slopes of the Mountain to Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens (p105).

The trail costs R1900 per person (based on double occupancy of a room), which includes all meals, portering of luggage and accommodation of a very high standard. There's a maximum of 16 people on a hike.

By the start of 2007 the less-pampered **Tip to Top Trail** should be up and running. This six-day, five-night guided hike beginning at Cape Point will involve carrying your own food, gear and sleeping bag and camping at fixed spots in or close to the park. The proposed route will have hikers camping the first night at Smitswinkel Bay on False Bay and continuing up this coast to spend the second night at an old navy signal station above Simon's Town. On day three the route crosses the peninsula to the Atlantic coast, with the night spent in the wireless station next to the lighthouse at Slangkop Point. On day four the hike continues along the beach to Chapman's Peak and on to the Silvermine Nature Reserve where you'll stay in the Silvermine camp site. Day five takes you through the reserve to Orange Kloof. On the final day you'll head for Platteklip Gorge for the climb down into the City Bowl.

By the end of 2007 a luxury version **Top to Tip**, running in the opposite direction, and sleeping in comfortable huts, should be available.

KABBO AFRICAN ADVENTURES

☎ 021-701 0867, 072 024 6537;

www.kabboadventures.com

Using accredited mountain guides, this operation has put together its own version of the Hoerikwaggo Trail, using the Mountain Club's hut on the Back Table as well as backpackers and camping sites close to the City Bowl to Cape Point route. An overnight trip to the mountain costs R725, while a summit hike or sunrise/sunset walk is R320.

SUNPATH

☎ 072 417 6800; www.sunpath.co.za;

tours R100-325

Dean Liprini and his fellow guides will take you on a series of fascinating hikes into the national park and around the peninsula to discover the ancient sunpaths thought to have been used by the indigenous people of the Cape (see p67).

VENTURE FORTH

☎ 021-556 4150; www.ventureforth.co.za

Excellent guided hikes and rock climbs with enthusiastic, savvy guides. Outings (start-

ing from R400 per person) are tailored to individual requirements and aim to get you off the beaten track.

THE PEOPLE'S PARK

Though Table Mountain National Park records about 4.5 million visitors a year, relatively few of these visits are from Cape Town's coloured and black communities. There are historical reasons for this: during the apartheid era the entire mountain area was declared a whites-only area. Even today many coloured and black Capetonians still see the park as somewhere only for the rich, the whites and the tourists.

To achieve its aim of 'a park for all, forever' the park authorities have thought about ways to encourage disadvantaged groups onto the mountain. Upgrading of the park's paths and signs, and training of guides for the trail has provided employment for over 300 people from townships. Also, the first Hoerikwaggo Trail to be launched in June 2005 was the two-day, one-night People's Trail aimed at school groups. The trail runs from Constantia Nek up the Back Table through Orange Kloof to stay the night at the basic People's Cottage.

SLEEPING

If you're not on one of the Hoerikwaggo Trail hikes (p75), the only accommodation you'll be able to book in the national park is Olifantsbos and Eland & Duiker Cottages at Cape Point.

TABLE MOUNTAIN

Until the national park launched its Hoerikwaggo Trails the only hut for sleeping on the mountain was that belonging to the Mountain Club of South Africa (p155). Now hikers on the Table Mountain Trail (p75) can stay at the revamped Overseer's Cottage (Map p68) beside De Villiers Reservoir on the Back Table. Actually consisting of two cottages, the Overseer's Cottage is decorated in a smart, contemporary style, with a comfortable lounge heated by an open fire – very welcome when night falls or the weather changes for the worse. The rooms have either bunk beds or single beds.

In Vredenhoek, on the edge of Deer Park, one of the Platteklip Wash Houses (Map p68) has been converted into very stylish accommodation for the first night of the Table Mountain Trail. The decoration here includes pieces by top Capetonian craftspeople and there's also Internet access. In good weather meals are eaten outside beside the *bomah* (sunken campfire circle) and there are hammocks to relax in.

CAPE OF GOOD HOPE RESERVE

For bookings for all the following contact the **Buffelsfontein Visitor Centre** (Map p68; ☎ 021-780 9204; www.tmnp.co.za).

The pretty whitewashed cottage **Olifantsbos** (Map p68; 1-6 people R1750, annexe per person R185) is an excellent self-catering option in an isolated position just steps from the beach and the pounding waves of the Atlantic. Together with its annexe it sleeps a maximum of 12 people.

The **Eland & Duiker Cottages** (Map p68; 1-6 people R590) also sleep a maximum of six people each and are located at the northern section of the reserve. Currently the simple but pleasantly decorated cottages share a compound with the reserve's offices, but there are plans to move these out and turn the area over entirely to tourists. One nice feature are the cottages' outdoor showers.

On the two-day Cape of Good Hope Trail, accommodation is in Erica in one of the stone cottages on the north side of De Gama Peak that were once part of a WWII radar station; their elevated position allows you to see both sunset and sunrise. The dormitory sleeps six in bunk beds and you need to bring your own sleeping bag and cater for yourself. There's a hot shower.

ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY HOERIKWAGGO

With millions of visitors annually, the park authorities are conscious about minimising their impact on the environment. So the Hoerikwaggo Trails only use existing paths, structures and access points into the park. At both the Overseer's Cottage and the Platteklip Wash Houses you'll also find outdoor furniture made from alien trees such as blue gum, oak and black wattle, which have been cleared from the park, and some decorative features made from recycled plastic. The Overseer's Cottage uses solar panels for its energy and use of water is minimised at all the accommodation venues.

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