# Top 10 places to visit in South Africa



**Top 10 places to visit in South Africa** – South Africa is a beautiful and exciting country. Its home to a wonderful mix of beaches, mountains, wildlife and 2500 km of incredible coastline. Famous for its gold and diamonds and also for its fondness for sport – especially rugby. If you get a chance to see the Springboks in action, it will give you a real understanding of passion. Like any country of South Africa’s size, travelling in South Africa can be tricky. To avoid any potential problems make sure you plan your trip well.

## 1. Table Mountain



This flat topped mountain overlooking Cape Town is a key tourist attraction for all visitors to South Africa and when you are here you would probably want to get to the top. There are a couple of options, you can take a cable car or if you are more of an adventurous type you can hike to the top. The climb is definitely worth it; once you reach the summit the views are spectacular. Table Mountain is also home to rock hyrax (which looks a like a mix between a squirrel and a mouse), porcupines, mongooses, snakes and tortoises and some playful monkeys who are always on the hunt for food.

## 2. Robben Island



Robben Island is located 7 km off the coast of South Africa, its 3.3 km long and 1.9 km wide. The notorious prison where Nelson Mandela was held as a political prisoner for 18 years (1964-1982) is located on Robben Island. The prison is a poignant and moving attraction and a tour here will allow you to see how the prisoners lived. When you arrive at Nelson Mandela’s 7 ft by 7 ft cell you find a replica chair, mat, bowl and blanket. Outside the cell you will see a list of the food once served in the prison and also the separate menus for black South Africans, mixed race/Asians and white South Africans. Ferries leave for Robben Island from the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town six times a day. Although be sure to book your ferry early as visitors to the island are restricted to 1800 people per day and waiting lists can get long.

## 3. Garden Route



The Garden Route is a very scenic stretch on the south-eastern coast of South Africa, starting at Mossel Bay and finishing at Storms River. There are various excellent stops along the way including two towns on this list – Knysna and Oudtshoorn. The Garden route has ten different nature reserves which are home to dolphins, seals and the endangered Southern Right Whale. In addition to the marine life there are almost 300 species of beautiful multi-coloured birds living here. To see the area it’s probably best to hire a car or the Baz Bus is a good budget option.

## 4. Knysna



Knysna is a charming town in the middle of the Garden Route which deserves a special mention. It’s definitely worth stopping here because it’s such a great place to have fun, relax and enjoy some great food. Knysna attracts many artists due to the lovely views and relaxing atmosphere giving the whole town a bohemian feel. An area that appeals to both artists and water sport fanatics is Knysna Heads. Here you can find a lagoon which is perfect for the fun pastime ‘wave jumping’ and it’s also known for its incredible sunsets. I found Knysna as a perfect place to stop and relax for a few days, whenever I meet South Africans I always tell them how much I liked Knysna and they all agree it’s definitely one of the country’s true gems.

## 5. Stellenbosch



Stellenbosch is South Africa’s second oldest town established in 1679. The town’s highlight is the incredible wine route which boasts 44 cellars. A vast range of wines are produced in the area and whilst it is classed as ’Cabernet country’ my personal favourite is Pinotage. As you travel from cellar to cellar you will find the area very visitor friendly. Each cellar’s entrance is clearly signposted and many of the cellars offer tours as well as fantastic lunches in beautiful gardens or restaurants. Naturally you will have the chance to enjoy one or two bottles of locally produced wine!

## 6. Oudtshoorn



Oudtshoorn maybe an unusual choice but I still think it’s worth a stop when travelling in South Africa. If you’ve ever fancied riding an ostrich then Oudtshoorn is the place to visit. It’s known as the Ostrich Capital of South Africa and here you can actually ride one or just sample their eggs. Many hotels serve ostrich eggs for breakfast and the eggs are naturally rather large and very rich in flavour. Meat-eaters might fancy trying the ostrich sausages and steaks which are also readily available. Oudtshoorn isn’t just about ostriches. Its great scenery makes it popular with cyclists and people looking to wind down after the madness of Cape Town.

## 7. Durban



Durban is South Africa’s third largest city but it’s also the friendliest. Durban is famous for its “Golden Mile” which is a string of beaches filled with surfers. It’s also a shark free zone which is always a bonus. After a relaxing time at the beach, head to Durban’s promenade where you can find various hotels, pubs, restaurants, shops and the Marine World Aquarium. Durban has a large Indian community and the Victoria Indian Street Market is very popular. Here you can see mosques, temples, exotic shops and restaurants where you can try some delicious Indian cuisine.

## 8. Kruger National Park



No trip to South Africa would be complete without visiting the Kruger National Park. The Park is Africa’s oldest national park and was originally founded in 1898. The Kruger is located five hours north of Johannesburg and is home to a huge variety of wildlife including the famous “Big Five” (buffalo, elephant, leopard, lion and rhino). When visiting you can hire a 4×4 vehicle to explore the park and choose to stay in a bungalow, caravan, chalet, cottage or campsite. A tour allowed me to be taken around by professionals who knew every aspect of the park and the resident wildlife (as opposed to me heading into the park on my own - where I could potentially be eaten by a lion!)

## 9. Soweto



Whilst Soweto is not the best looking location it is classed as one of the most important and educating sites in the country. Soweto is a huge township where 3.5 million people call the 90 square mile sprawl home. There are vast areas covered by shanty huts, most of which have been made by the people who occupy them. A tour of Soweto is very humbling. On my tour I was introduced to one of the residents in his home and taken to a shebeen (once an illegal drinking hole in South Africa) where I sat and chatted with the locals. I was also taken to Nelson Mandela’s old residence and to the Hector Pieterson Memorial.

## 10. The Drakensberg Mountains



The Drakensberg Mountains stretches for approximately 600 miles along the entire length of KwaZulu-Natal’s western boundary. It’s an incredible location where you can hike, bird/wildlife watch, horse ride or go on a safari. There is also the opportunity to follow 4×4 trails, go quad biking, rock climbing or white water rafting. I also recommend the Royal Natal National Park which is rated as one of the most beautiful parts of the Drakensberg. It is home to Mont-aux-Sources (one of the highest mountains in the Drakensberg) and the stunning Tugela Falls. There are many eco-tours on offer including the Karkloof Canopy who offer a steel cable tour located 30 metres above the forest floor. This allows you to witness the incredible scenery and bird-life.

South Africa is an incredible and diverse country and there are many great places to visit. Hopefully my top ten will help you plan your trip. After I left I remembered how true the Big Five Safari website description of the South African experience is. In its opening paragraph it states: “Be warned – once you have visited our country, you will spend the rest of your life longing to return!”