



CITY BREAK: CAPE TOWN

# out on the town

South Africa's second biggest city has plenty to see, from urban attractions to natural wonders, says **Olivia Greenway**

IF YOU COULD dream up the perfect city, it could well be Cape Town. It has Table Mountain, due to be confirmed this month as one of the New Seven Wonders of Nature, towering behind it; the Atlantic and Indian Oceans on either side; an average of eight hours' sunshine a day; wide golden beaches; a natural harbour; and a long European heritage, starting with the Dutch in the 1700s and continuing with the British from 1814. Add in world-class restaurants and an abundance of locally sourced food, first-rate hotels, the superb Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden and vibrant V&A Waterfront, and it's hard to imagine what could be lacking.

Cape Town is fairly compact and walking around it is a joy, so save the high heels for the evening and bring some sensible shoes. After exploring Table Mountain, whether you're people-watching in the sophisticated bustle down on the Waterfront, rooting for bargains in quirky Woodstock, checking out the museums in downtown Government Avenue or enjoying a sundowner in chic Camps Bay, you'll find no shortage of things to do. And as the recently designated World Design Capital for 2014, the city is

preparing to gear up for some stellar design initiatives — all good news for visitors.

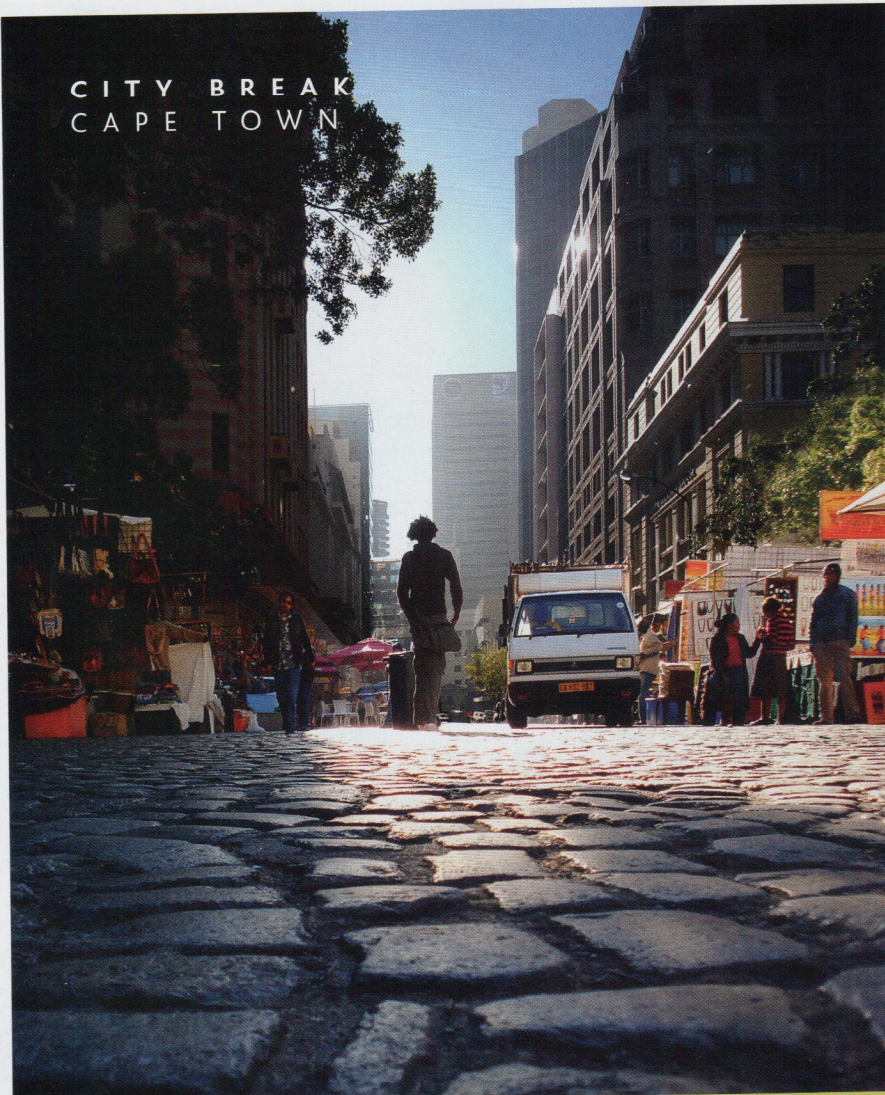
However, you can't talk about Cape Town without touching on the legacy of apartheid. While the barriers have been removed, difficulties remain. Last year's World Cup football tournament was a welcome boost to the country and enabled the rest of the world to appreciate what a first-rate destination it really is, but there is 22% unemployment and many people, especially its black residents, are still very poor.

A visit to Robben Island, where political prisoners including Nelson Mandela were incarcerated, and taking an organised township tour will help visitors get a handle on the city's past and offer some sort of appreciation of life in the present. Tourism is vitally important to the South African economy and Cape Town is one of its most-visited cities. By supporting tourism, visitors are not only stimulating the local economy but also helping the many people who depend on it.

Cape Town is perfect for a first-timer to Africa, but it's addictive. The latest tourism strapline says it all: 'You don't need a holiday, you need Cape Town'. ►



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## EATING OUT

There's a huge variety of food, with South African fare alongside cuisines from around the world. Meat features heavily in the local diet, often cooked on the *braai* (barbecue), but vegetarians will still find good pickings.

► **CHEAP EATS:** The Eastern Food Bazaar offers freshly cooked food, canteen-style. Brave the queues and tuck into bunny chow, butter chicken or lamb shawarma. *The Wellington*, 96 Longmarket Street. T: 00 27 21 461 2458. [www.easternfoodbazaar.co.za](http://www.easternfoodbazaar.co.za)

► **GOOD VALUE:** The Harbour House has its own fishing boat. Try to get a window seat with glorious views of the sea, and perhaps a whale, as you feast on freshly caught mussels or hake. *Kalk Bay Harbour*. T: 00 27 21 788 4136. [www.harbourhouse.co.za](http://www.harbourhouse.co.za)

► **SPLASH OUT:** It's worth the taxi ride out of town to British chef Luke Roberts' La Colombe — one of South Africa's most awarded restaurants. *Constantia Uitsig Wine Estate*. T: 00 27 21 794 2390. [www.constantia-uitsig.com](http://www.constantia-uitsig.com)

## CULTURE

► **Artscape Theatre Centre:** This city centre complex houses the Cape Town Opera House, the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra and the Cape Town City Ballet, with performances to suit all budgets and interests, from top Broadway shows to plays from new writers. [www.artscape.co.za](http://www.artscape.co.za)

► **South African Museum:** Under the umbrella of the Iziko Museums of Cape Town, this is one of many open daily. Established in 1825, it has a vast collection, including 700 million-year-old fossils and life-size whale casts. [www.iziko.org.za](http://www.iziko.org.za)

► **Township tour:** Run by locals, Siviwe Tours visits Langa, Cape Town's oldest township — the place where black Africans had to live during the Pass Laws of apartheid. This escorted walking tour involves meeting local Xhosa residents and schoolchildren. [www.townshiptourscapetown.co.za](http://www.townshiptourscapetown.co.za)

► **South African National Gallery:** In gardens opposite the South African Museum, this gallery houses not only African art, but works from British, Dutch, French and Flemish artists. Permanent displays are rotated regularly. [www.iziko.org.za](http://www.iziko.org.za)

## SHOPPING

► **Canal Walk:** Situated in the Century City business and residential complex, this is a squeaky clean American-style mall with 400 shops offering international and South African brands, along with a large food court and cinema complex. [www.canalwalk.co.za](http://www.canalwalk.co.za)

► **The Old Biscuit Mill:** Housed in the slightly down-at-heel suburb of Woodstock, this fascinating Saturday market is crammed with local food goodies such as ostrich burgers, milk tarts and *koeksisters* (syrupy doughnuts), while all around are craft shops and places selling arty knick-knacks. [www.theoldbiscuitmill.co.za](http://www.theoldbiscuitmill.co.za)

► **The Diamond Works:** See diamond cutters and goldsmiths at work. Starting with a glass of champagne, take a short tour and then perhaps choose a piece of jewellery for your loved one. *Metropolitan Life Building*, 7 Coen Steytler Avenue, Foreshore. T: 00 27 21 425 1970.

► **Greenmarket Square:** Set in a cobbled square, this is one of Cape Town's oldest open-air markets. It's great for African curios, crafts and souvenirs, but be prepared to haggle. *Shortmarket Street*.



## FACT FILE

► **NUMBER OF UK VISITORS:** South Africa had 454,000 UK visitors in 2010, 61% of them stopping off in Cape Town.

► **CONTACT:** South African Tourist Board. T: 020 8971 9350. [www.southafrica.net](http://www.southafrica.net)

► **CAMPAIGN:** With the strapline 'Leave ordinary behind', South African Tourism's £2m campaign is due to kick off this year with Monty Don, Jamie Theakston, Gloria Hunniford and Chris Packham showcasing their adventures in South Africa.

► **GEOGRAPHY:** Enjoying a Mediterranean climate, Cape Town is at the south-west tip of South Africa, where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans meet. Table Mountain is the key landmark.



## SIGHTS

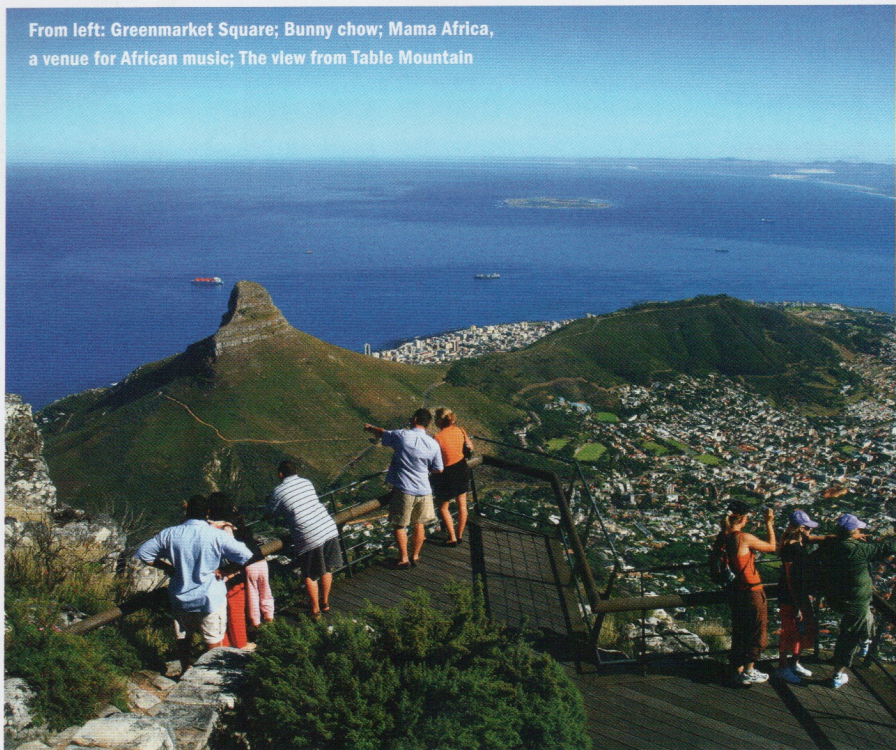
► **Table Mountain:** No other city has such a natural attraction at its heart. Although you can hike, most people take the cable car that rotates through 360 degrees so everyone can see the fabulous views. There are walks at the top. [www.tablemountain.net](http://www.tablemountain.net)

► **Robben Island:** The prison where Nelson Mandela was held for 27 years is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Former inmates give tours, offering a fascinating insight into South Africa's apartheid past. Allow half a day for the ferry ride, guided bus tour and trip to Mandela's cell. [www.robben-island.org.za](http://www.robben-island.org.za)

► **Victoria & Alfred Waterfront:** Named after Queen Victoria and her second son, the V&A is Cape Town's dynamic harbourside centre with scores of restaurants, museums, cinemas and shops. Live street entertainment adds to the atmosphere of this working harbour. [www.waterfront.co.za](http://www.waterfront.co.za)

► **Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden:** Situated on the slopes of Table Mountain, these gardens are among the most beautiful in the world, crammed with indigenous species not found elsewhere. From the higher slopes there are superb views over the city. [www.sanbi.org/gardens/kirstenbosch](http://www.sanbi.org/gardens/kirstenbosch)

From left: Greenmarket Square; Bunny chow; Mama Africa, a venue for African music; The view from Table Mountain



## ENTERTAINMENT

► **West End Jazz Club:** Featuring live bands, this club's a must for serious jazz fans on a Friday or Saturday night. *Cine 400 Building College Road, Rylands.* T: 00 27 21 637 9132.

► **Mama Africa:** This is the place for live African music. You can eat if you like or just prop up the bar with a beer or two. *178 Long Street.* T: 00 27 21 426 1017.

► **St Yves Beach Club:** Join the beautiful people and head to Camps Bay. With dramatic views over the Atlantic Ocean, enjoy a quiet romantic cocktail before the crowds arrive. *The Promenade, Victoria Road.* T: 00 27 21 438 7717.

► **The Waiting Room:** This club is well hidden, but after you've climbed the steep stairs you'll discover a cosy bar with a cool crowd and a lovely roof terrace. There's usually a live band on Tuesday and a DJ from Wednesday to Saturday. *273 Long Street.* T: 00 27 21 422 4536. ►

► Join the beautiful people and head to Camps Bay to enjoy a romantic cocktail at St Yves Beach Club before the crowds arrive

## TOP TIPS

► **BE SENSIBLE:** Although Cape Town is one of the safest areas in South Africa, at night make sure you take regulated taxis, stay in busy areas and never walk anywhere alone after dark.

► **TAKE A TOUR:** An open-top bus tour is an inexpensive way to get a feel for the place. With one- or two-day tickets, it's ideal for visiting Table Mountain and Kirstenbosch. [www.citysightseeing.co.za](http://www.citysightseeing.co.za)

► **BE FLEXIBLE:** If Table Mountain is surrounded by cloud, don't venture up. Choose a clear, sunny day without wind for the best views and experience.





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## IN THE KNOW

### WHEN TO GO

Cape Town is an ideal winter sun destination, with the peak season November to April. December is especially busy as the schools are on holiday, so January to March are often quieter. It rains in winter, so April/early May and late October into November are the optimum times to avoid the crowds, the heat and the rain.

► **CURRENCY:** South African rand (R). £1 = R12.70.

► **TIME:** GMT +2.

► **INTERNATIONAL DIAL CODE:** 00 27.

► **LANGUAGE:** South Africa has 11 official languages, including English and Afrikaans.

► **RED TAPE:** No visa is required for UK visitors, but you must have two adjoining blank pages in your passport and six months' validity.

### GETTING THERE

Virgin Atlantic, British Airways and South African Airways fly direct to Cape Town from Heathrow.

► **AVERAGE FLIGHT TIME:** 12h20m.

### GETTING AROUND

The city is fairly compact and many hotels offer a shuttle service to the centre. The best way to see Cape Town is on foot.

## ROOMS

Cape Town's hotels are generally of a high standard, with many offering transfers to the airport 12 miles from the city.

► **LUXURY:** The Mount Nelson is the grande dame of Cape Town, having aged gracefully since its opening in 1899. With an excellent spa and critically acclaimed Planet restaurant, as well as one of the best afternoon teas in town, the hotel has hosted high-profile guests including Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher and the Dalai Lama. 76 Orange Street. T: 00 27 21 483 1000. [www.mountnelson.co.za](http://www.mountnelson.co.za)

► **MID-RANGE:** Blackheath Lodge is a Victorian boutique-style guest house with just 10 rooms near the V&A Waterfront – and a real find. It offers extra length king-size beds in all rooms and breakfast on the terrace. 6 Blackheath Road, Seapoint. T: 00 27 21 439 2541. [www.blackheathlodge.co.za](http://www.blackheathlodge.co.za)

► **BUDGET:** Although it's positioned as a business hotel, Upper East Side is equally suited to holidaymakers, with an indoor pool, a decent restaurant and bar, and a free shuttle bus into town. In trendy Woodstock, it's handy for The Old Biscuit Mill. 31 Brickfield Road. T: 00 27 21 404 0570. [www.uppereastsidehotel.co.za](http://www.uppereastsidehotel.co.za) ■

## SAMPLE

► **KUONI** offers a five-night break on room-only basis in a one-bedroom luxury apartment at the Waterfront Apartments, including direct flight with South African Airways from Heathrow and transfers. It costs from £1,335 per person for March 2012, the price based on two sharing. T: 01306 747008. [www.kuoni.co.uk](http://www.kuoni.co.uk)

## WHAT'S NEW

► **WATERFRONT PROPERTY:** Holiday Inn Express is to open at the V&A Waterfront in mid-2012. The three-star hotel will have 222 rooms and offer an affordable alternative to the luxury options that proliferate in the area. [www.hiexhotels.co.za](http://www.hiexhotels.co.za)

► **WORLD DESIGN CAPITAL 2014:** Cities awarded this honour are given plenty of notice to allow them

to prepare to showcase their design potential and to generate social, economic and cultural changes. Cape Town is set to launch a marketing campaign which in itself should increase demand for the 'Mother City'.

► **NEW TOURS:** Coffeebeans Routes has introduced three new urban tours this year, enabling visitors to see the 'real' Cape Town. One of them is the Beer

Route, exploring Cape Town's burgeoning beer culture with 20 microbreweries having opened in the past two years. [www.coffeebeansroutes.com](http://www.coffeebeansroutes.com)

► **BEACH HOTEL:** Radisson Blu is due to open a 144-room beachside hotel in late 2012. The property next to Rietvlei Nature Reserve, is across the road from a sandy beach. [www.radissonblu.com](http://www.radissonblu.com)