

A scenic view of a coastline with a large mountain in the background and a body of water in the foreground. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The water is a deep blue, and the foreground shows green foliage on a hillside.

# BEYOND SOUTH AFRICA'S URBAN HUBS

A South African holiday can offer so much more than safaris, Soweto and Winelands oenophile tours. The continent's most popular tourist destination also boasts a diverse range of activities and adventures accessible on day trips from its two largest cities, Cape Town and Johannesburg. Whatever you fancy – from hiking to helicopter rides, motorcycle adventures to ballooning – memorable, single-day forays can easily be arranged. Here, our writer shares his stories from some of the best on offer.

*Words by*  
**Mark Sissons**



SOUTH AFRICA



Scenic view from Chapman's Peak



## AROUND CAPE TOWN

Gorgeous, charming, sexy and sassy: if Cape Town were a woman, I'd want to date her. Located at the southern tip of the continent – and arguably the world's most beautiful city – Cape Town offers visitors vibrant, urban sophistication, fascinating history and a stunning, ocean-side setting beneath the iconic Table Mountain. From this urban hub, travellers have easy access to all manner of day trips. You could easily spend a month here and never run out of captivating things to see and do.

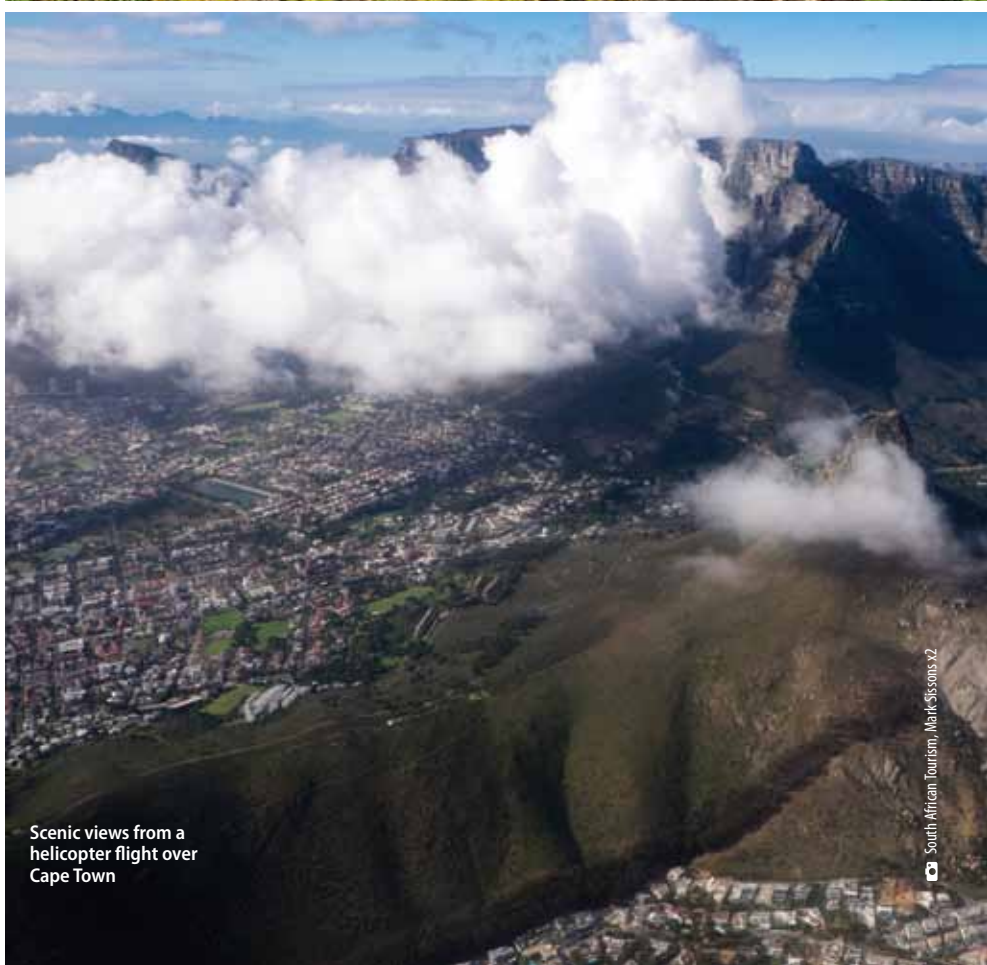
### CHAPMANS PEAK SIDECAR SOJOURN

There's nothing quite like a meandering tour through the bucolic Cape Wine Routes in a vintage World War II sidecar. Helmet and leather jacket on, my seasoned Cape Sidecar Adventures chauffeur and I departed Cape Town after breakfast for a leisurely cruise along the world-famous Chapmans Peak Drive to the picturesque village of Hout Bay, gateway to the Cape Point Route. Stopping there for lunch, we dined on freshly caught calamari on the large sun-drenched terrace of the Chapmans Peak Hotel. The views of the bay, beach and valley from this recently renovated late 19th century icon are breathtaking, as was the sun drenched ride back that afternoon past Table Mountain to Cape Town's waterfront.

### CAPE POINT CYCLING ADVENTURE

After he first sailed around the rocky coastline of southern Africa in 1488, Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias named its southern tip the 'Cape of Storms' for the notoriously rough seas his ship encountered there. Hundreds of years and shipwrecks later, the rocky promontory called Cape Point running down to its southern

At Cape Point,  
Cape Town, Western  
Cape Province



Scenic views from a  
helicopter flight over  
Cape Town



Hop aboard a vintage World War II sidecar for a tour of the Cape Peninsula



terminus, the Cape of Good Hope, is one of Africa's most famous tourist attractions. Most visitors drive the astoundingly scenic Cape Peninsula section of the Table Mountain National Park, viewing African penguins at the Boulders Beach colony en route. I opted to stretch my legs with a 25-kilometer cycle along the winding roads leading from Cape Point to the Cape of Good Hope with AWOL Tours.

This stunning natural region is home to the Cape Floral Kingdom, part of one of South Africa's eight World Heritage sites. Containing the highest known concentration of plant species in the world, its fynbos-covered scrubland boasts more than 9,600 plant species, an astonishing 69 per cent of which are endemic. It's also home to several rare and endangered creatures, including the elusive Table Mountain ghost frog and the rare Geometric Tortoise. Wild herds of klipspringers, hartebeest, eland and Cape mountain zebra also graze here.

### HELICOPTER FLIPS

Taking the notion of city tour to new heights, I hopped aboard a gleaming red Bell 206 Jetranger helicopter one morning for a flightseeing adventure over Cape Town and along the Atlantic coast. Offered multiple times per day by Cape Town Helicopters, this half-hour high flying excursion is called a 'flip' – a nickname that gave me pause before strapping in. Viewing famous landmarks like Cape Town Stadium, Table Mountain, Lions Head, the beaches of Clifton, Camps Bay, and the peaks of the Twelve Apostles from high above is an absolute thrill and gave me a new geographic appreciation for one of Africa's prettiest stretches of coastline.

### A DAY IN THE PARK

Popular with bikers, hikers, birders, whale-watchers, plant-lovers, kite-boarders, kayakers and anglers, the 27,500-hectare West Coast National Park is a pristine nature reserve 120 kilometers north of Cape Town. Spending a day here ▶





The Elephant Sanctuary  
at Hartbeespoort



At the world famous  
De Wildt Cheetah and  
Wildlife Centre



King Cheetah running at De Wildt  
Cheetah Farm, Hartbeespoort,  
North West Province

rewards photographers with a brilliant palette of wildflowers that blanket the land in orange, purple, yellow and pink as far as you can see. Flamingoes, knots, whimbrels, sanderlings, godwits and gulls all come to feed in the calm waters of this seabird safe haven. Eland, springbok, kudu, gemsbok and the rare mountain zebra also roam free, and in summer, hundreds of tortoises emerge to bathe in the hot sun. The best time to visit the park is in spring when the wildflowers are blooming. Several self-catering cottages and chalets within the park welcome overnight visitors. Houseboats are also available.

## AROUND JOHANNESBURG

Gateway to Southern Africa and the continent's second largest city, Jozi (as the locals call it) is a bustling, culturally diverse and vibrant metropolis with much to offer visitors on stopovers to and from Cape Town, Kruger National Park and Southern Africa's myriad of safari destinations. Many stopovers afford visits to animal sanctuaries clustered on the outskirts of the city where visitors often enjoy their first close encounters with indigenous wildlife. Other outings are relaxing sojourns into the countryside or adrenaline-inducing adventurous outings.

### ELEPHANT RIDES

Most people who visit South Africa are content to view elephants in the wild from a distance on safari. At the Elephant Sanctuary

at Hartbeespoort, about an hour outside of Johannesburg, visitors get to interact with these gentle giants, and even ride them if they like. One of the country's most famous and well-respected wildlife conservation and education centres, it offers a safe and interactive pachyderm experience, elephant back riding and overnight accommodation right next to their stalls. Seasoned guides led me on foot through the sanctuary, providing in-depth information and insight into African elephants. I then had the opportunity to meet the resident "ellies" – mostly orphaned pachyderms who grew up in captivity – touching, feeding, interacting and walking trunk-in-hand safely with them as their handlers looked on.

### BIG CAT CLOSE-UPS

If close encounters with *cinonyx jubatus* – the cheetah – sounds alluring, head for the world famous De Wildt Cheetah and Wildlife Centre near the Harbeespoort Dam, an hour from Johannesburg. Established in 1971, this captive breeding facility, conservation and research centre has long played an important role in the preservation and protection of cheetahs, including the famous King Cheetah. Over the years, nearly 600 cheetah cubs have been born at De Wildt; many of these have later been successfully introduced into the wild. A day spent here offered me the opportunity to learn more about my favourite animal, as well as other fascinating creatures such



HEART &  
STROKE  
FOUNDATION

**NO PARENT WANTS  
TO HEAR THEY  
PASSED ALONG A  
DEADLY GENE TO  
THEIR CHILD.**

That's what April Kawaguchi learned, that her son Andrew inherited her heart condition that causes sudden cardiac arrest and death.

Family history can double your risk of heart disease and stroke, yet many of these genes are unknowingly passed along.

Doctors predict the remaining 80% of this genetic mystery could be discovered in the next 5 years. That's why we fund the best medical minds in the world for genetic research.

**Start by knowing your family history and personal risks by getting a FREE ASSESSMENT at [heartandstroke.ca](http://heartandstroke.ca).**

Thanks to our visionary partner CP for helping move research forward.







For a unique view of South Africa, opt for hot air ballooning



Check out the views over South Africa's North West Province

as the wild dog, brown hyena, serval, suni antelope, blue and red duiker, bontebok, riverine rabbit and the very rare Egyptian vulture. The highlight was a guided tour during afternoon feeding time.

#### UP, UP AND AWAY

Drifting at sunrise in a hot air balloon at 640 meters above the Magaliesberg range (a region boasting some of the best ballooning weather in the world) has to be one of the absolute highlights of any visit to South Africa. Bill Harrop's "Original" Balloon Safaris has been

operating here for the better part of three decades. For those weary of heights, the professional pilots and crew ensure that guests can relax and enjoy the experience. If you're as lucky as I was, Bill will pilot the balloon himself, providing passengers with hilarious anecdotes as he steers you over green valleys, craggy mountains, glassy lakes and a tapestry of farmlands, soaring high before dropping to treetop level. After landing, you'll enjoy a traditional champagne toast and then a buffet breakfast at the luxurious Harrops clubhouse. ☺



#### WHERE TO STAY

##### CAPE TOWN

###### *The Cape Royale Hotel & Spa*

An all-suite luxury hotel overlooking the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront, this property is 2.8 kilometers from the Cape Town train station. Suites with butler service feature Juliet balconies with Signal Hill or Table Mountain views. Local transfers are free. There's a health-food restaurant, plus a buzzing rooftop bar and pool.

##### JOHANNESBURG

###### *Four Seasons Hotel, The Westcliff*

Resembling a hillside village featuring courtyards, fountains and gardens & boasting panoramic views across Johannesburg Zoo, this refurbished luxury hotel features 117 rooms and suites, a new spa and two swimming pools.

##### NEAR JOHANNESBURG

###### **- THE HARTBESPOORT AREA**

###### *Sterling Manor Guesthouse*

A seven-minute walk from the Hartbeespoort Dam Snake & Animal Park, this upscale guesthouse is not far from the Hartbeespoort Aerial Cableway. Complimentary breakfast is served in an elegant dining room, and dinner is available on request. There's a casual bar with a deck, a guest lounge and an outdoor pool.

###### *The Cheetah Lodge at De Wildt*

Situated five minutes from De Wildt Cheetah and Wildlife Centre in the Hartbeespoort Area, The Cheetah Lodge at De Wildt offers bed and breakfast accommodation in a beautiful rustic stone lodge, comprising eight en-suite double rooms, nestled in the foothills of the Magaliesberg mountain range. The owner, Eloise, is an especially gracious host and dining with her affords a unique opportunity to learn more about the history and Cheetah and Wildlife Centre's conservation activities.

#### RECOMMENDED TOUR OPERATORS

In Cape Town, Roots Africa Tours arranges Table Mountain and city tours, as well as day trips to Cape Point, and multi-day excursions to the Winelands, Hermanus and the Garden Route.

In Johannesburg, JMT Tours offers township and city excursions, as well as trips mentioned in this story.

#### GETTING THERE

Flights from North America normally enter South Africa via Johannesburg, with easy same-day connections to Cape Town, a two-hour flight south.