WEST COAST

iziko museums of South Africa



Beyond the Waves

"Africa has her mysteries, and even a wise man cannot understand them. But a wise man respects them"

- Miriam Makeba (South African singer and civil rights activist)

The captivating West Coast of South Africa is a landscape where windswept beaches, quaint fishing villages and breathtaking natural scenery await discovery. The region stretches from Cape Town to the Northern Cape border.

Step back in time as you explore the rich cultural heritage of the San people at the !Khwa ttu San Culture and Education Centre, in Yzerfontein. Here, you'll gain insights into one of Southern Africa's oldest indigenous communities.

Trace the footsteps of early explorers and settlers as you wander through heritage fishing villages like Saldanha Bay, where centuries-old traditions still thrive. Walk among whitewashed walls, visit local markets, and immerse yourself in the maritime history that has shaped this coastal gem.

Venture into the heart of the Cederberg mountains, where ancient rock art offers a glimpse into the spiritual and artistic legacy of the region's earliest inhabitants. Gaze at the intricate designs and motifs that adorn the sandstone cliffs, each telling a story of a bygone era.

Indulge in the region's culinary delights, from freshly caught seafood in Saldanha Bay to world-class wines in the vineyards of the Swartland. The smell of woodsmoke from the traditional South African 'braai' pairs particularly well with the salted ocean breeze.

Where Hominids Roamed

The West Coast is a region where the footsteps of ancient hominids echo through the ages. The story begins millions of years ago when early hominids roamed South Africa's grasslands and woodlands. Fossil discoveries in the region have provided crucial insights into the evolutionary origins of Homo sapiens. From the coastline's rugged cliffs to the interior's sheltered valleys, the West Coast was a melting pot of human evolution, shaping the physical and behavioural traits that define our species.



The Saldanha Skul

Fossil Finds

One of the most significant fossil discoveries on the West Coast is the "Saldanha Skull," a fragmented skull cap belonging to an archaic Homo sapiens person, which dates back about 400,000 years. It points to the early presence of humans in the region.

In addition, **Eve's footprints** were discovered on the shores of Langebaan Lagoon, by geologist, Dr Dave Roberts in 1995. These fossilised footprints are believed to be over **120,000 years old,** making them the oldest known footprints of an anatomically modern human. The footprints are thought to belong to a **female human about 1.6 metres tall.** Today, replicas of Eve's footprints can be viewed at the Geelbek section of the West Coast National Park, allowing visitors to connect with this profound piece of human history, first-hand.

The GriQua People: Guardians

The West Coast's shores bear witness to the stories of diverse

indigenous peoples who have called this region home for millennia,

The GriQua people, also known as Griqua or Griekwa, are descendants of

intermarriages between indigenous Khoikhoi, San and European settlers,

particularly Dutch and German colonists. Emerging as a distinct ethnic

group in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the GriQua forged a unique

cultural identity that blended elements of indigenous African traditions

Like their Khoisan ancestors, the GriQua were traditionally semi-nomadic

pastoralists and hunter-gatherers, traversing the vast expanses of the West Coast in search of grazing land for their livestock and seasonal food sources.

One of the defining features of GriQua society was their role as intermediaries

between European colonists and indigenous peoples. As skilled negotiators and traders, they facilitated trade relations between European settlers and

indigenous communities, often serving as guides, interpreters, and mediators

challenges, including land dispossession, discrimination, and marginalisation

under colonial rule. However, the GriQua have preserved their cultural heritage

Despite their pivotal role as intermediaries, the GriQua faced numerous

through oral traditions, storytelling, music, and dance. Their language,

Griauatown or Grikwastad, Griaualand West, Southern Africa, 1820.

Afrikaans, which first developed as a creole language blending elements of

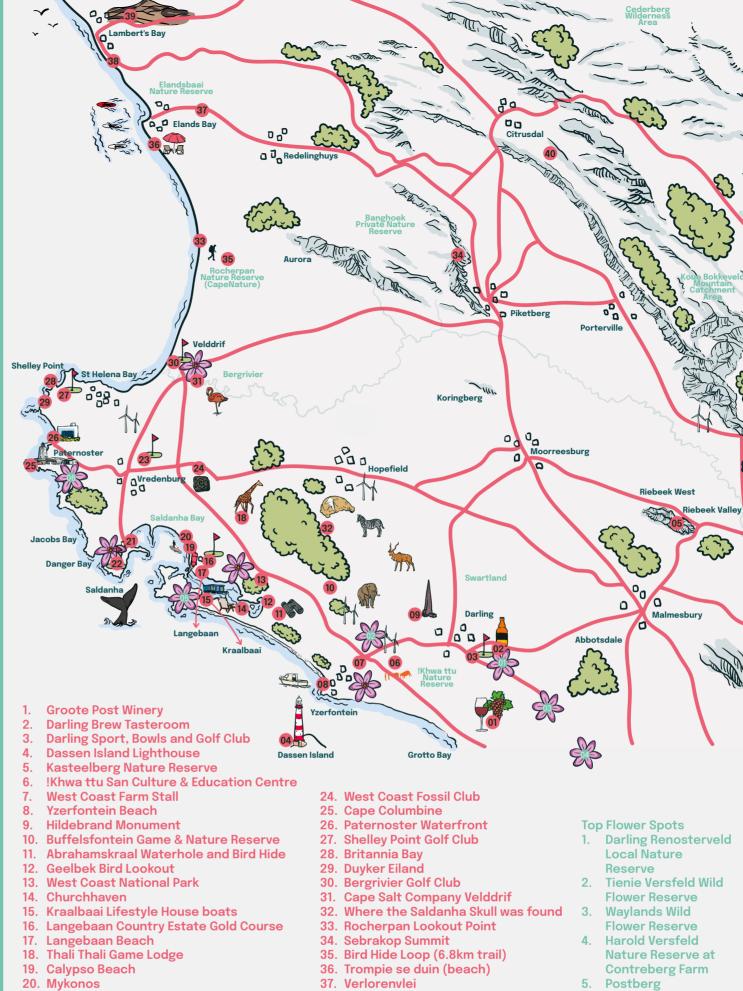
Dutch, Malay, Khoisan and other African languages, is a testament to their

in disputes over land, resources, and trade routes.

of the West Coast

among them, the **GriQua**.

with European influences.



- 21. Saldanha Bay Yacht Club
- 22. Military Academy Combined Club 23. Vredenburg Golf Club



Darling Kalkoentjie (Gladiolus Meliusculus) Month in Bloom: October

Flora

Conservation Challenges

delicate life balance.

Ancestral Artefacts

The West Coast holds cultural significance as a landscape where early humans forged connections with their environment and each other. Archaeological sites throughout the region bear testament to the ingenuity and adaptability of our ancestors, from stone tools and hunting implements to traces of ancient settlements and ceremonial sites. These artefacts offer insight into the daily lives and spiritual beliefs of prehistoric communities that once thrived along the coast.



A typical settlement on the banks of the Orange River. A painting by Samuel Daniell.

The history of the first local peoples of the West Coast is shrouded in the mists of time, with archaeological evidence suggesting their presence in the region as early as 20,000 years ago. These first local peoples, often collectively called Khoisan, were descendants of some of the earliest anatomically modern humans, and they played a pivotal role in shaping the West Coast's history, culture, and landscape, leaving behind a rich legacy that resonates today.

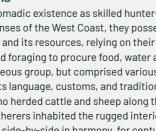
Hunter-Gatherer Traditions

These first local peoples lived a nomadic existence as skilled huntergatherers. Roaming the vast expanses of the West Coast, they possessed an intimate knowledge of the land and its resources, relying on their expertise in tracking, trapping, and foraging to procure food, water and shelter. They were not a homogeneous group, but comprised various distinct communities, each with its language, customs, and traditions. The Khoikhoi were pastoralists who herded cattle and sheep along the coastal plains; the San hunter-gatherers inhabited the rugged interior regions. These communities lived side-by-side in harmony, for centuries.

The arrival of European colonists in the 17th century, however, brought profound changes to their lives. Dispossessed of their ancestral lands, marginalised, and subjected to violent repression, many indigenous peoples faced displacement, enslavement and cultural assimilation.

An Indigenous Legacy







South African

National Park

explore a

coastal paraalse.

Unwind on the shore of *azure lagoons*. Discover

the many rock pools along the coast. Meander

through the surrounding white dunes, rare fynbos

and fields of seasonal flowers.

🗡 🖄 😫 🗶

Experience the thrill of

seasonal whales and endless

flower fields by staying in one

of the Park's cozy cottages.

6. Paternoster and Cape Columbine **Nature Reserve**





Cineraria (Senecio Elegans)



39. The Dunes

40. Olifantsrivier

38. Gerrit 'Farmer' Burger Memorial

Kukumakranka (Gethyllis Afra) Month in Bloom: December

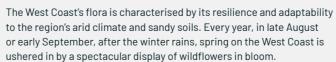
Poeierkwassi



surflife

SURF SCHOOL

Blue Pypie (Gladiolus gracilis) (Haemanthus pubescens) Month in Bloom: March Month in Bloom: June & July



Month in Bloom: November

While the West Coast is a haven for biodiversity, it also faces significant conservation challenges. Habitat loss, overgrazing, and invasive species threaten native flora and fauna, while pollution and overfishing threaten marine ecosystems. Climate change exacerbates these challenges, with rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns impacting the region's

West Coast Dishes

The culinary scene along the West Coast is a delightful fusion of fresh seafood, Cape Malay flavours, and locally sourced ingredients that reflect the region's rich maritime heritage and cultural diversity. From the iconic bokkoms of Velddrif to the traditional Cape Bobotie at Geelbek Restaurant in the West Coast National Park, there's something to tantalise every taste bud. Sample freshly caught snoek prepared on open fires, savoury seafood stews brimming with crayfish and mussels, or delicate fish curries infused with aromatic spices. For those with a sweet tooth, take advantage of traditional South African desserts like koeksisters or melktert, best enjoyed with a cup of locally brewed rooibos tea.





An ideal shot of the flowers in bloom over the West Coas

The Settlers

The first Europeans to come into contact with the West Coast were Portuguese navigators in the late 15th century. Their arrival heralded a new era of interaction between European powers and indigenous peoples, as explorers and traders sought to establish footholds in the lucrative spice trade.

In 1652, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) established a refreshment station at the Cape of Good Hope, laying the foundations for Dutch colonisation of the region. Dutch settlers, known as Boers, gradually spread eastward from the Cape, establishing farms and trading posts along the coast. This expansion of Dutch colonial rule brought them into conflict with indigenous peoples, notably the Khoekhoe and San, whose territories were gradually being usurped.

In 1795, British forces occupied the Cape Colony, signalling the beginning of British rule in the region, during which the Cape Colony underwent significant changes, such as the abolition of slavery in 1834, and the introduction of British legal and administrative systems.

Colonialism brought profound social and cultural changes to the West Coast as European norms and values began to dominate indigenous societies. Missionary activity, education, and urbanisation contributed to the spread of Christianity and Western ideologies, while indigenous languages and traditions were marginalised or suppressed. Racial segregation and discrimination became institutionalised under colonial rule, shaping patterns of inequality and injustice that persist to this day.

strand

Notable Places

1-Blaauwberg Nature Reserve

Offering breathtaking A serene stretch of views of Table coastline popular Mountain across the among locals and bay, it's a haven for tourists alike, it birdwatchers and boasts wide sandy hikers, with numerous beaches and stunning trails winding through ocean views. indigenous fynbos and coastal dunes.

2-Melkbosstrand Known for its pristine beaches and relaxed atmosphere, it is a charming coastal town just north of Cape Town, Visitors can swim, surf, or soak up the sun on the sandy shores. the dunes on guided

3-Koeberg **Private Nature** Reserve

sustainable energy

in the area. Located near the Koeberg Nuclear 6-Riebeek Valley Power Station, this This picturesque nature reserve destination is famous offers a unique for its wine farms, olive blend of natural groves, and gourmet beauty and industrial cuisine. Visitors can infrastructure. It's explore quaint towns home to various like Riebeek Kasteel bird species and and Riebeek West provides educational while sampling local opportunities for wines and artisanal visitors interested in products.

7-Mamre Mission Station 4-Silwerstroom Now a cultural heritage site, with a rich history dating

back to the 18th century. Offers insight into the lives of early settlers and indigenous communities. Explore historic buildings,

arts scene and annual Darling offers visitors a taste of small-town charm with its quaint

atmosphere.

streets, historic

buildings, and friendly

9-Groote Post Wine Cellar Nestled in the picturesque Darling Hills, and renowned for its award-winning wines. Enjoy wine tastings, cellar tours, and gourmet picnics on the estate grounds.





The Preekstoel (pulpit) rock formation at the Langebaan Lagoon

10-West Coast

National Park Stretches along the coast from Langebaan to Yzerfontein. The Park is a biodiversity hotspot, home to various bird species, antelope, and marine life. Enjoy hiking, birdwatching, and picnicking.

11-Yzerfontein A tranquil fishing village known for its pristine beaches and stunning sunsets, it is a popular holiday destination for those

seeking relaxation and natural beauty. 12-!Khwa ttu

San Cultural and Educational Centre Dedicated to

preserving and showcasing San culture and heritage, it offers visitors an immersive cultural experience through guided tours, storytelling sessions, and traditional craft demonstrations. A unique opportunity to learn about the history and traditions of the

San people.

13-Langebaan

This "Jewel of the West Coast" is a picturesque coastal town nestled on the pristine shores of the Langebaan Lagoon, just a short drive from Cape Town. Caribbean-like beaches and crystalclear waters make it a haven for water sports enthusiasts, and for visitors simply seeking relaxation. Accommodation options range from upscale resorts to cosy questhouses. Ecological attractions include the West Coast National Park and the West Coast Fossil Park.

14-Saldanha

This picturesque bay, embraced by the azure waters of the Atlantic, is about 110 kilometres north of Cape Town. It is the largest and deepest natural bay in South Africa, offering a sanctuary for marine life as well as water sports, such as yachting, kite surfing, game fishing and whale watching. The sheltered harbour provides safe anchorage for an array of vessels, from fishing craft to naval ships, making it a vital hub for the region's export and fishing industries. Other cultural attractions include archaeological sites and ancient fossilised remains.

15-Jacobsbaai

A hidden gem, tucked away on the coast, known for its tranguil atmosphere and unspoiled beaches. Explore the town's charming architecture, go hiking along coastal trails, or simply unwind in the natural beauty.

16-Paternoster A quaint fishing village characterised by

whitewashed cottages and pristine beaches. A popular destination for seafood lovers and beach enthusiasts. Explore tidal pools, or take leisurely walks along the shoreline.



Bird Island offshore from Lambert's Bay: A small island sanctuary and breeding ground for seabirds, particularly Cape gannets. Other island species include cormorants,

GEOLOGY

A Geological Tale of Tectonic Upheaval

beaches, rocky cliffs, and tidal

flats. The action of waves, wind,

and currents plays a vital role in

shaping the coastal landscape.

contributes to the formation of

coastal deltas and estuaries.

transported by rivers and streams

At the same time, sediment

The geological history of the West Coast dates back millions of years, with the region shaped by a complex interplay of tectonic activity, erosion, and sedimentation. The West Coast is situated along the boundary of the African Plate and the South Atlantic Ocean, making it susceptible to geological forces such as faulting, folding and volcanic activity.

One of the most prominent geological features of the western region of Southern Africa is the Cape Fold Belt, a series of folded and faulted rock formations that run parallel to the coastline. The Cape Fold Belt was formed during the late Paleozoic era, approximately 300 million years ago, resulting from tectonic collisions between the African and Antarctic Plates, which uplifted and folded sedimentary layers.

The iconic Table Mountain Sandstone, a distinctive feature of the Cape Fold Belt, dominates much of the landscape along the West Coast. This durable rock formation, formed from ancient sand dunes and sedimentary deposits, has been sculpted by erosion over millions of years, resulting in the dramatic cliffs, valleys, and rock formations that characterise the region.

Along the coastline, the forces of erosion and deposition continue to shape the land, sculpting sandy

17-Shelley Point

A coastal resort town known for its luxury accommodations and stunning beaches, it offers visitors a tranquil escape from the bustle of city life. Enjoy a game of golf, collect shells, or simply soak up the sun on the sandy shores.

The flowers of the West Coast

18-St Helena Bay

With its sheltered harbour and scenic coastline, it is a popular destination for boating, fishing and water sports. Explore charming fishing villages, or do some whale-watching during the winter months.

19-Hopefield

A quaint little town, nestled amid wheat fields and wildflowers, known for its annual fynbos show and historic architecture. Explore the town's museums, art galleries, and craft shops or take scenic drives through the countryside.

20-Velddrif

A picturesque little town on the banks of the Berg River, known for superb birdwatching and scenic river cruises. Explore the town's historic buildings, or take boat trips to nearby bird sanctuaries and wetlands.

21-Bird Island

A small island sanctuary and breeding ground for seabirds, particularly Cape gannets. These majestic birds flock to the island during the breeding season, forming one of the largest colonies of Cape gannets in the world. Other island species include cormorants, seagulls and terns, making it a paradise for birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts. This island, near Lambert's Bay, is accessible only via boat tours.



Kraalbaai in Langebaan showing house boats that can be rented

Stretching from just north of Yzerfontein's Main Beach to the West Coast National Park, 16 Mile Beach is the longest uninterrupted stretch of beach on the South African coastline. It's perfect for long walks, and visitors can enjoy the day's catch at local restaurants.

3 - Kraalbaai Beach Situated in the West Coast

National Park, Kraalbaai Beach offers crystal-blue lagoon waters, ideal for fishing, angling, boating, skiing, and kayaking. Families can also enjoy picnics and braais in the fantastic surroundings.

4 - Tietiesbaai

Known as the westernmost beach on the Cape West Coast, it offers pristine beauty, ideal for swimming, kitesurfing, and kayaking. It's also home to the last manually control lighthouse in South Africa.

5 - Sandbaai Beach Half a kilometre south of Langebaan Beach, this beach is perfect for yacht spotting and beachside relaxation. While swimming is not advisable due to strong currents, visitors can enjoy the sunshine and nearby restaurants.

22-Cederberg Just 200 kilometres from Cape Town, the Cederberg region is a rugged and enchanting wilderness. The Cederberg Mountains stand as sentinels of ancient tales and breathtaking vistas. The area is named after the indigenous cedar trees that once flourished here. It is renowned for its striking sandstone rock formations, including iconic landmarks like the Maltese Cross and the Wolfberg Arch. Scattered throughout this rugged landscape are remnants of the ancient San people, who left behind a legacy of rock art that offers glimpses into their spiritual world and way of life. Today, the Cederberg Wilderness Area encompasses over 71,000 hectares of protected land, providing sanctuary to a diverse flora and fauna. Hiking trails wind through the mountain passes, offering adventurers the opportunity to immerse themselves in this untamed realm and discover its hidden wonders.



Rock formations on the Vensterklippe hiking trail at Dwarsrivier in the Cederberg



Groote Post is an historic 18th century farm where winemaking traditions have been seagulls, and terns.

5-Witzand churches, and gardens **Aquifer Nature** while learning about Reserve the area's fascinating This nature reserve past showcases the unique ecosystem of the 8-Darling Atlantis Sand Dunes, A charming towr home to various plant known for its vibrant and animal species adapted to the harsh wildflower show, desert environment. Visitors can explore

tours and learn about

conservation efforts

revived by the Pentz family. (credit: https://www.grootepost.co.za/)

Unmissable Beaches

1 - Pearl Bay Beach

Located on the southern edge of Yzerfontein, Pearl Bay Beach offers tranquillity, spectacular views of Table Mountain and Dassen Island, and activities such as fishing, waterskiing, sailing, and kayaking. Enjoy the exquisite seafood at nearby restaurants and cafes.

2 - 16 Mile Beach



23-West Coast Fossil Park

Near Langebaan, the West Coast Fossil Park is a remarkable destination where visitors can journey back in time to explore the prehistoric wonders. of the region. This renowned park, approximately 150 kilometres north of Cape Town, transports visitors to an era dating back around 5 million years when the West Coast was adorned with lush landscapes and teeming with exotic wildlife. Here, amidst the rocky landscape, lies the fossil site of Langebaanweg, celebrated for its exceptionally well-preserved fossil faunal remains from the terminal Miocene/early Pliocene period. Within the park's boundaries, visitors can view the ancient remnants of bears, sabre-tooth cats, short-necked giraffes, and other fascinating creatures that once roamed the area. Led by a team of dedicated researchers, ongoing efforts are underway to unravel the mysteries of this ancient ecosystem and recreate its environment and climate. The park's newly constructed Visitor Centre, made possible through funding from the National Lotteries Commission (NLC), serves as a discovery hub, offering immersive exhibitions, educational resources, and modern facilities for visitors to enjoy. As a designated National Heritage Site and integral part of the Cradle of Human Culture Artist's Route, the West Coast Fossil Park is a testament to the region's rich geological and paleontological heritage.

6 - Kersbosstrand Beach This beach offers 40 kilometres of unspoiled white sand, making it ideal for long walks, swimming, boating, stand-up paddling, and whale watching from July to December. It's less than an hour from the Cape West Coast Nationa Park and Langebaan

7 - Silwerstroomstrand A Blue Flag Beach in the West Coast National Park, this beach boasts clear waters, sheltered picnic spots, and excellent birdwatching opportunities. It's about 60 kilometres from Cape Town, accessible via paved walkways suitable for wheelchairs and pra

8 - Mosselbank Beach Located in Paternoster, this beach offers golden sands and excellent surfing, swimming, fishing, snorkelling, and diving opportunities. Visitors can also explore hiking and mountain biking

trails in Columbine Nature Reserve 9 - Tsaarsbank Beach In the West Coast National Park, this beach offers rugged beauty, whale-watching opportunities from August to October, and hiking trails to explore the coastline and the Pantelis A Lemos shipwreck

10 - Langebaan Lagoon Known for its turquoise waters

and soft sandy beaches, Langebaan Lagoon is perfect for a wide range of water sports activities, including windsurfing, kitesurfing, snorkelling, kayaking, and more. Visitors can also enjoy strolls along the pristine beaches.

The fauna of the West Coast is equally diverse, with a wide range of terrestrial, avian and marine species. Along the coastline, colonies of seabirds such as African penguins, Cape gannets and cormorants nest on rocky outcrops and offshore islands; while shorebirds like sandpipers and plovers forage along the sandy shores. Marine life supported by the nutrient-rich waters of the Benguela Current includes seals, dolphins and whales, as well as fish species like snoek, mullet and cob. Inland, the array of mammals includes antelope such as springbok, gemsbok and eland; as well as carnivores such as caracals, black-backed jackals and Cape foxes that prey on smaller mammals and birds.



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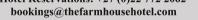




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