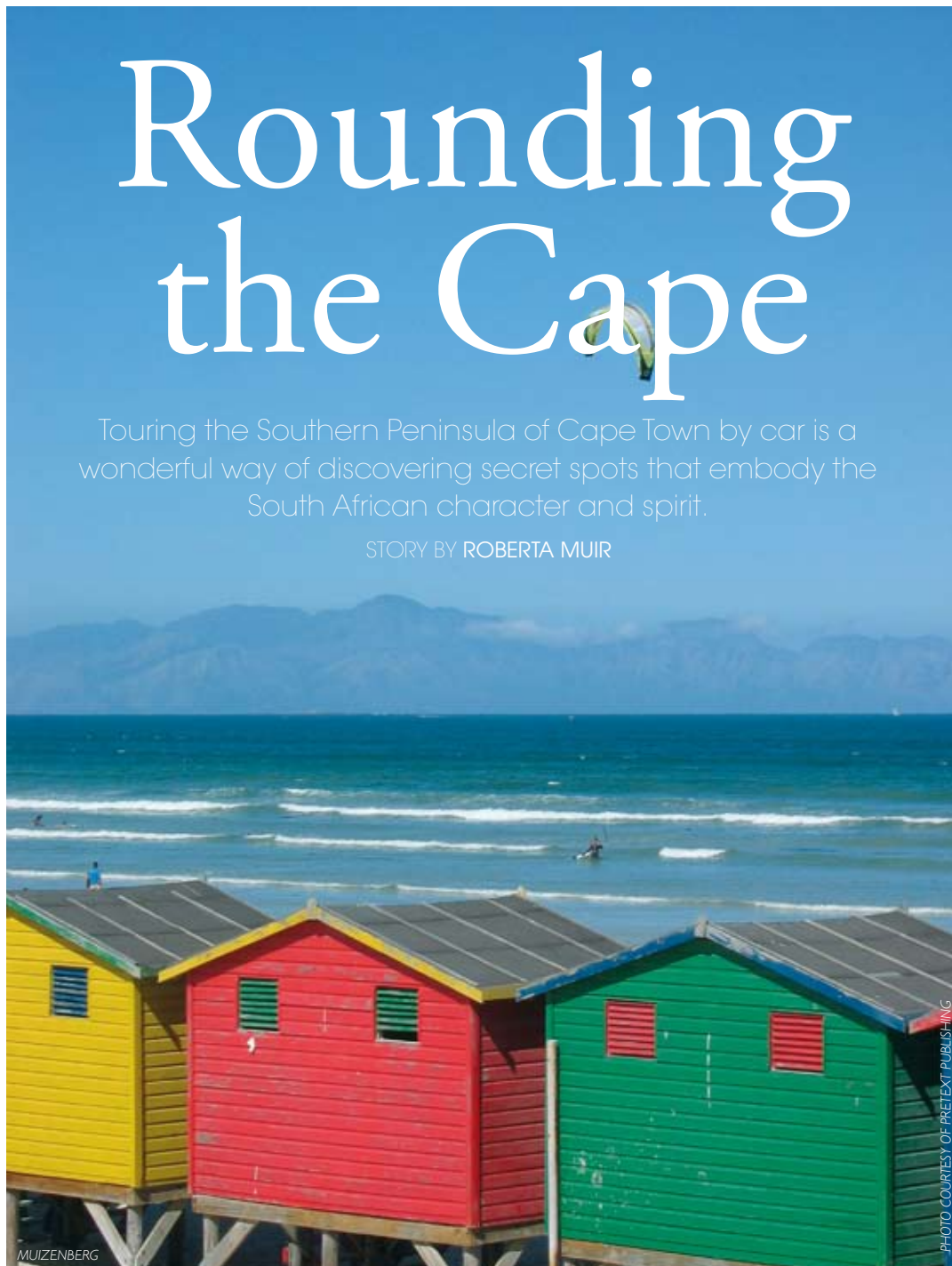


# Rounding the Cape

Touring the Southern Peninsula of Cape Town by car is a wonderful way of discovering secret spots that embody the South African character and spirit.

STORY BY ROBERTA MUIR



MUIZENBERG

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Cape Town is a beautiful city, dominated by the towering majesty of Table Mountain; but visitors who don't venture outside the city limits miss the spectacular beauty of the mountain range that runs south from Table Mountain forming the spine of the Cape. The best way is to hire a car or arrange a personal tour and head out of town.

A day driving along the southern peninsula around False Bay to Cape Point and then back up the Atlantic Coast is time well spent. In the past, the southern peninsula was the holiday retreat of rich diamond and gold-mining magnates, such as Cecil Rhodes, who made their money further north, then came south to holiday in Cape Town's Mediterranean climate. Early houses were built from stone cut from the rocky mountains forming the peninsula, which is still evident in the fences that run along the street fronts.

These days, the peninsula is a string of beachfront suburbs with houses pressed against steep mountainsides, one above the other so that everyone has a view. There is abundant greenery, with tall pines and beautiful gardens everywhere, bougainvillea being especially popular; and many houses have traditional Cape Dutch features such as gables and thatched roofs. Galleries (offering traditional and contemporary art), theatres, live music venues and cafés provide plenty of diversion for day-trippers and locals alike.

A drive along the peninsula, especially at night, is reminiscent of driving around the Amalfi Coast in southern Italy, or, some say, the Riviera of southern France. Higher up the mountainside, houses are dotted among the boulders, while along the coast there are sweeping expanses of beach with waves breaking almost on the roadside and a view of hazy hills on the far side of False Bay which is often partially covered in mist. The mist is one of

the distinguishing features of this rocky landscape, from the 'tablecloth' that slowly creeps over Table Mountain on most days, to the mist that hugs the water leaving mountain tops peeking out above it.

About 30 minutes south of Cape Town along the M3, you reach the coast at **Muizenberg**, an old town with a lovely beach and some fun cafés and bars. **The Empire Café** (11 York Rd, Muizenberg, +27 21 788-1250) is a two-storey space with polished wooden floors, black wooden tables and chairs and a spiral staircase leading to the mezzanine floor looking out over the dining room below, with large windows opening onto a beach-facing balcony. Photos adorn one wall including a wonderful image of a laughing Desmond Tutu shaking the hand of a smiling Dalai Lama. A short blackboard breakfast menu offers omelettes, pappadews (a local pickled chilli) and goat's cheese with bruschetta, scrambled eggs with caramelised tomatoes, and kippers on cumin French toast, while lunch tends towards soups, pasta and salads. The staff is friendly and keen to help and there's a good range of cakes, slices and muffins to go with coffee (let them know if you like it strong) and a pleasant laidback ambience.

Beyond Muizenberg is **Kalk Bay**, a lovely town full of art deco buildings and tall palm trees, with a great fishing harbour and a wealth of antique stores, galleries and shops full of township art (funky bags and bowls made from recycled packaging), quality crafts, antiquarian books and bric-à-brac. Wandering along the main street, be sure to check out The Ice Café for great gelato (especially pernod and orange flavour); Gypsy for colourful Indian fabrics, cushions and clothes; Anne's Ceramic Studio; The Cook's Room; Curiosity - Objets d'Art for gorgeous local ceramics; and Cape To Cairo for township art.

**Olympia Café & Deli** (134 Main Rd, Kalk Bay

+27 21 788-6396) is the favourite haunt of many locals, and with good reason. Kenneth McLarty, a burly redhead obviously passionate about his calling as a chef, converted this old café, which for many years sold nondescript burgers, hot dogs and all manner of fishing paraphernalia, a few years ago. A bit bohemian with its concrete floor, wooden tables and chairs and paper serviettes, it offers friendly service and generous servings of good food; the blackboard menu lists whatever came in fresh from the fishing boats that day. Full of couples and groups of friends and with a bakery out the back, it's an ideal place to perch on a high stool around small round tables, or at the bar along the window and enjoy coffee and excellent croissants or other delicious cakes, cookies or pastries at anytime of day. At dinner, McLarty brings a plate to the table displaying raw sirloin with a healthy strip of fat attached (rumour has it he once sacked a diligent apprentice for trimming all the fat off the sirloin) and a raw, slightly pink, piece of kingklip, a local fish. He gives both a good prod to show how fresh they are before taking them off to be cooked. The sirloin returns with a green peppercorn sauce and a pile of roasted vegetables, while the fish gets a beautifully crunchy skin from a very hot grill, which explains the flames that flash from the kitchen at regular intervals and reflect beautifully in the windows.

Across the road stands **Harbour House** (Kalk Bay Harbour, Kalk Bay, +27 21 788-4133) with the best views of any restaurant on the peninsula. It's built almost out over the water next to the fishing harbour and is whitewashed like a Greek waterfront café, while its minimal decorations and seashell collection give a definite beach house feel. The floor-to-ceiling windows provide all the décor needed and standing out on the veranda watching the seals at play feels like being on a

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MUIZENBERG



GAZEBO WINE GARDEN



HARBOUR HOUSE

# road trip



SEAFOOD PLATTER,  
HARBOUR HOUSE



YELLOW FIN TARTARE,  
HARBOUR HOUSE



KALK BAY HOUSE, BISHOPS VIEW

ship's deck. The fish are so fresh you can see the fishing boats that delivered them that morning. A seafood platter is a great way for a table to graze: Crayfish, prawns, tender squid, mussels and grilled fish are accompanied by rice or freshly made potato wedges and a range of sauces (mayonnaise, basil and fresh tomato). Local yellowtail is chopped for a tartare served with large crisp croutons and fresh tomato, and sesame-crumbed goat's cheese is deep-fried and served with a great fig sauce.

Drive on through Fish Hoek with its interesting name (hoek actually means 'corner' in Afrikaans) and very colourful changing sheds along the beach. A popular spot with wind surfers and catamarans, this is also one of the best spots to view Southern Right whales when they are in the bay to calve from June to November.

**Simon's Town** is a touch more bustling than Kalk Bay, perhaps because of the naval base there, but just as charming, with art deco buildings, a great coastal ambience and lots of antique, craft and

bric-à-brac stores. Wander along Georges Street and browse the shops full of antiquarian books, African art and more. Frou Frou is great for fine art and collectibles and Curiosity - Objets d'Art of Kalk Bay has a sister store here with more local ceramics.

**The Meeting Place** (98 Georges Street, Simon's Town, +27 21 786-1986), a café, restaurant, deli and homeware store, with a wide balcony upstairs, is exactly that for the locals: A great place to meet at anytime of the day or night. The balcony is set with casual outdoor furniture and offers a good view over the marina and harbour. The deli offers a great range of cakes and snacks to take away and a good selection of gourmet goodies including Illy coffee. The mezze plate is ideal for sharing with excellent feta and small falafel, samosas and hummus, cucumber and yoghurt dips and toasted baguette, while the beef burgers are generous and tasty and come with a pile of onion rings and chips. At night there's candlelit ambience and a more

formal menu, which may include meltingly tender chicken livers or springbok (local antelope) loin with honey and thyme sauce. With great coffee, shortbread hearts, Florentines and other goodies, it's worth stopping by anytime.

Just around the corner from Simon's Town, you arrive at **Boulders Beach Penguin Colony**. A boardwalk leads past the nesting areas, but you can also go down onto the beach and get quite close to these curious little birds.

A little further on, you come to the entrance to Table Mountain National Park, and the final stretch of road leading to **Cape Point**, the tip of the treacherous Cape of Good Hope and Africa's most south-westerly point. To get the most from a visit to Cape Point, go early; the park opens at 7am year round. Arriving in the cool of the morning has its advantages. Apart from feeling as if you're the first to discover the wild beauty of this area, you'll also see more of the wildlife; ostrich, antelope, and even zebra, graze by the roadside early in the

# road trip

morning before sensibly resting in the shade later in the day. There's also an abundance of bird life and native flora (called fynbos) not found anywhere else in the world. The morning sun glistening on False Bay is another incentive to drive along this coast as early as possible.

Leaving the national park, you cut inland across the tip of the Cape of Good Hope to the Atlantic Ocean. A few hundred metres past the national park gate is **Cape Point Ostrich Farm** (+27 21 780-9294), offering regular tours, meals and a great range of ostrich-leather products.

The Atlantic coast is far wilder and more dramatic than that of False Bay. The first town, **Scarborough**, is a small village of new holiday homes with the occasional café and restaurant, surrounded by the national park. From June to November, you have a good chance of spotting Southern Right whales on the drive north from here. If you miss the whales, you can still join a tour of **Slangkoppunt Lighthouse**, South Africa's tallest cast-iron lighthouse, and enjoy spectacular views over Chapman's Bay and the surrounding hills as you come down the steep road towards Kommetjie. A little further on you'll come to **Imhoff Farm**, an historic Cape Dutch farm built in the mid-1700s, its restaurant overlooks Long Beach and the wetlands, and there are organic cheeses for tasting and camel, horse or tractor rides.

Head inland again for a while to skirt around the tidal lagoons of Chapman's Bay and rejoin the coast at **Noordhoek**, known for its beautiful long white beach, stables, stud farms and thriving artistic community. **Noordhoek Farm Village** is a series of white thatched cottages set among huge oak trees; with farm stalls selling local produce, craft shops, two restaurants and a children's play area, it's the perfect place to spend a few hours.

**Chapman's Peak Drive** is a precarious 9-kilometre winding pass between Noordhoek and Hout Bay, with spectacular views. It was 'hewn out of sheer mountain' in 1915 as the plaque at the lookout says. Following a series of rockslides, it was closed for almost four years before reopening in late 2003. **Hout Bay** is a fishing village tucked into a fold of mountains at the northern end of Chapman's Peak Drive. Established in the

mid-1600s, it played a strategic role in the battles between French, Dutch and English for control of the sea route around the Cape, and some of the forts, batteries and cannons from this time can still be seen. Mariner's Wharf is a great place for fish 'n' chips by the harbour (try snoek, a local speciality), before the 30-minute drive back to Cape Town.

*Don't want to drive yourself? Call Glen Christie at Vineyard Ventures +27 21 434-8888 ([www.vineyardventures.co.za](http://www.vineyardventures.co.za)) or Pam McOnie at Cape Fusion Tours +27 21 461-2437 ([www.capefusion.co.za](http://www.capefusion.co.za)). Both operators are locals, with lots of knowledge about history, culture, cuisine, wines, flora and fauna, who will collect you in their air-conditioned cars and take you on a day's sightseeing tailored to suit your interests. |*



1, 2 & 3 - CHAPMAN'S PEAK DRIVE