



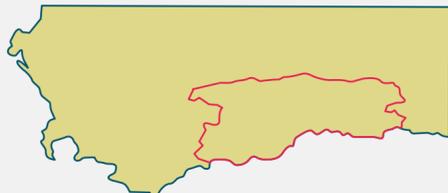
GARDEN ROUTE



From Ancient Landscapes to Modern Awe: The Story of the Garden Route

"The greenbanks and little hollows along the margins of these streamlets are adorned with innumerable species of brilliant plants and flowering shrubs in wild profusion. Amongst them, to my eye, the most dazzling in their beauty were perhaps those lovely heaths for which the Cape is so justly renowned."
R Gordon Cumming, on an expedition in the Southern Cape, in 1850

The Garden Route stands out as the favoured coastal driving route in the nation, extending from Mossel Bay in the western part to the renowned surfing destination of Jeffreys Bay, just beyond the provincial border into the Eastern Cape. Enchanting cliffs, sandy beaches, and the lush expanse of the Langeberg Mountains provide a picturesque backdrop for the journey. The area's scenic charm and extraordinary natural attractions invite exploration through adventure activities, water sports, and hiking trails. Its history, shaped by indigenous communities, European explorers, and early settlers, intertwines with its natural beauty, creating an enchanting region as diverse as it is breathtaking. As visitors embark on a journey along the Garden Route, they become part of a narrative that spans centuries, connecting the past with the present and showcasing the enduring allure of this remarkable destination.



Unveiling the Historical Tapestry of the Garden Route

The arrival of European explorers in the 15th century brought about significant changes to the region. Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias had been sailing with his crew for over three months before reaching the Cape of Good Hope.

He became the first known European to set foot on South African soil when he landed near Mossel Bay in 1488. Dias bestowed the name 'Pic Formosa' upon the highest peak in the Tsitsikamma mountain range. These early encounters with the Garden Route marked the beginning of its exploration and its connection to the known world. Unfortunately, Dias' experience took a different turn. Initially, everything went well when he interacted with the local Khoi-na inhabitants, exchanging trinkets and gifts, and engaging in songs and dances. However, distress arose, and Dias shot one of the locals with his crossbow. This tragic event caused the terrified locals to flee.

The mountains along the Garden Route in the Western Cape of South Africa have a

fascinating geological history that spans millions of years. These mountains are part of the Cape Fold Belt, a complex mountain range formed through tectonic forces and the collision of continental plates. Their formation began around 500 million years ago when sediments were deposited in ancient seas, forming sandstone, shale, and limestone layers. The sandstone is the most resistant to erosion, and it forms the ridges and peaks of the mountains. The shale is less resistant to erosion and forms the valleys and foothills. The limestone is the least erosion-resistant, forming the plateaus and coastal plains. Over time, these layers were subjected to intense pressure and folding, creating the distinctive folded structures visible in the mountains today. Around 280 million years ago, volcanic activity led to the intrusion of molten rock, which cooled and solidified to form granite and other igneous rocks.

Tracing History's Footsteps on a Road Trip

The journey along the Garden Route officially starts at Riversdale and concludes slightly over 300 km away at Storms River. Key towns along this route include Mossel Bay, George, Knysna, and Plettenberg Bay.

Riversdale
Riversdale is an agricultural town on the Goukou River, previously Kafferkuils River (native pools). Settlers established farms in the 18th century, and the Doornkraal River that flows through its heart lent its name to the town. Riversdale thrived as an agricultural hub with wheat, dairy farming, and ostrich feather production. Preserved Cape Dutch and Victorian-style buildings reflect its history. Museums and galleries showcase its heritage and artistic talents. The main street, adorned with oak trees on either side, served as the focal point for social and economic activities. The impressive Garcia Pass, carved by Maurice Garcia in 1868, still attracts adventurers today.



A misty Knysna.

En Route

Journey through an undulating route once submerged underwater, known for its Bokkeveld Shale content. Evidence of mining activity can be seen in Reisesbaan in large piles of golden rocks, as lime extracted from ancient marine life is mined there to counteract soil acidity. Restios, reed-like plants widely used for thatching, thrive alongside the road. Visit Still Bay and Gouritsmond, and enjoy seaside resorts with beaches, canoeing, hiking, and centuries-old Khoi-na fish traps. Albertinia, founded in 1900 as Fonteinvlief, is a nearby working town engaged in farming, thatching, mining, and Aloe ferox production.

Continuing along the N2, Aasvoëlberg, a Cape Fold Mountains remnant, gained

attention in 1918 for a significant diamond discovery. The Gourits River, entering the Indian Ocean on the Southern Coast of Africa, is 34 km southwest of Mossel Bay. The origin of its name is uncertain, with theories ranging from the Gourikwa Khoi-na to the Portuguese term 'Rio das Vaacas' (river of the cows) after Bartolomeu Dias' voyage. Shaped like a deltoid leaf, the river system consists of various rivers emerging from the surrounding mountains and converging near the coast, with the lower 129 km known as the Gourits River. The drainage area, encompassing Karoo country, spans 44,000 sq km, with a diverse climate and occasional floods. Important branches include the Buffalo River, forming the Groot River, and the region is characterised by low runoff.

The River posed challenges for explorers, so a bridge was built in 1892. Construction of a new road bridge began in 1972. The Gourits River Bridge, once used for swing and bungee activities, was deemed unsafe in 2009, with the Bloukrans River Bridge serving as an alternative bungee

Mossel Bay

Mossel Bay is a charming coastal town in a unique half-heart-shaped bay. Its mild climate, stunning beaches, and rich history make it a popular destination. It marks significant historical firsts in South African history, including the first European landing on African soil, the encounter with locals, the recorded murder of a local person, and Vasco de Gama's successful trade nine years later (a bull for three bracelets). It had the first rudimentary postal system with a hanging sailor's boot signal for passing ships. João da Nova built the first European structure, a church, after Dias' drowning. Mossel Bay served as a supply station for the Portuguese until conflicts and the Dutch presence prompted relocation. The area was renamed Mossel Bay in 1601 for its abundant mussel shells.

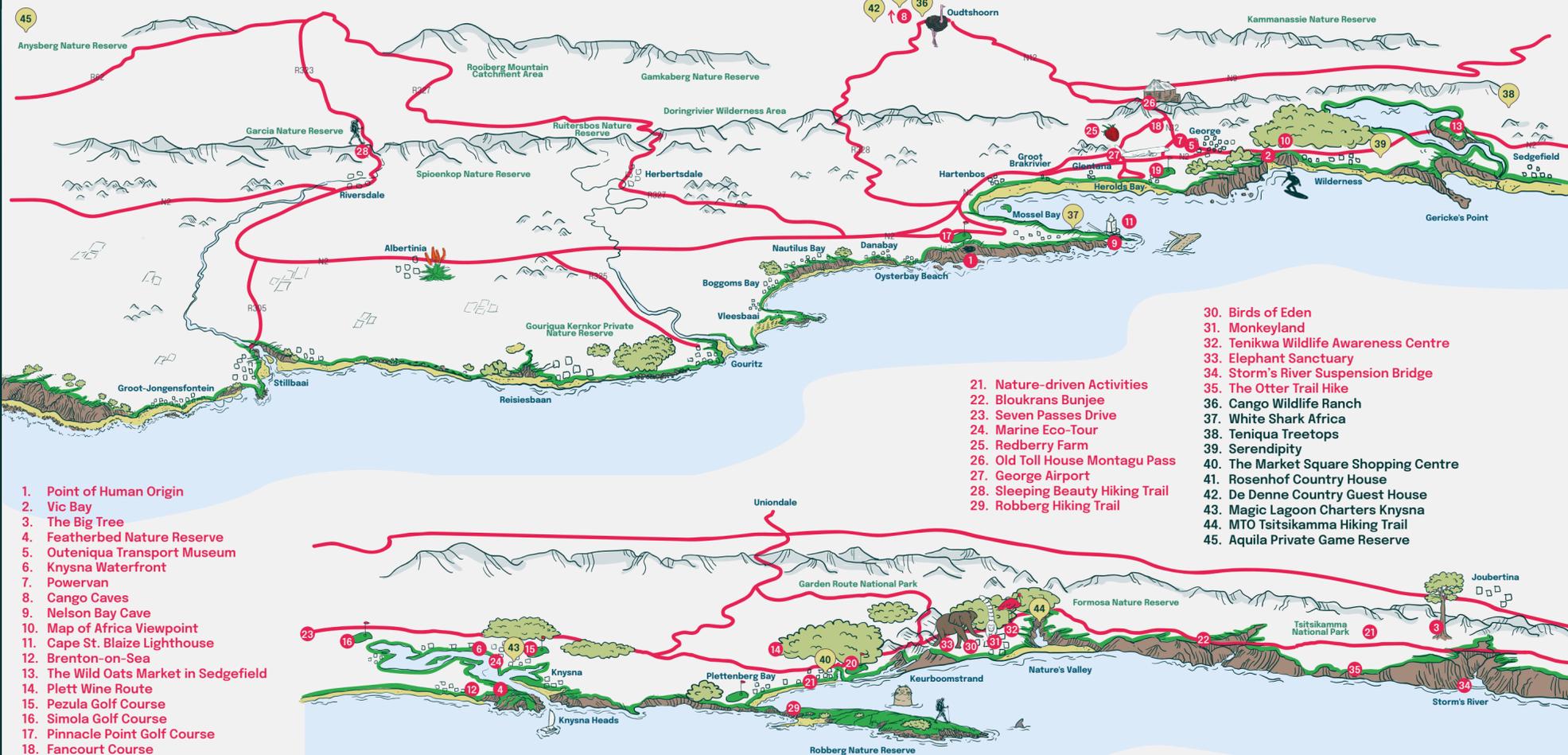
During British rule in 1848, attempts to rename Aliwal South were rejected. Dutch settlers established a granary and trading post in 1787. Ostrich feather booms led to Mossel Bay's prosperity as a port. Today, it thrives in fuel production, tourism, industry, fishing, and farming. Visit the Maritime Museum, the Post Office Tree, and Bat's Cave. Explore the sea cliff path of Table Mountain sandstone. The Poort offers sandy-bottomed pools, and Cape Saint Blaize Lighthouse stands above.

En Route

Hartenbos is a coastal village famed as a retreat for Afrikaners during the Great Depression. It offers a beach, river, and a Voortrekker exhibition at Hartenbos Museum. The historical N2 diverged here from the present-day N2 due to impenetrable forests, leading to the carving of a road over the Outeniqua Mountains. Continuing on the N2, you cross the Little Brak River and arrive at the Great Brak River, where the Searle family established enterprises and a hydroelectric power station. The old road up the valley, now a gravel pass, built by Henry Fancourt White in 1840, leads to Fancourt, a renowned hotel and golf estate.



A curious dassie overlooking The Cape Saint Blaize Lighthouse built in 1864, situated in Mossel Bay.



1. Point of Human Origin
2. Vic Bay
3. The Big Tree
4. Featherbed Nature Reserve
5. Outeniqua Transport Museum
6. Knysna Waterfront
7. Powervan
8. Cango Caves
9. Nelson Bay Cave
10. Map of Africa Viewpoint
11. Cape St. Blaize Lighthouse
12. Brenton-on-Sea
13. The Wild Oats Market in Sedgefield
14. Plett Wine Route
15. Pezula Golf Course
16. Simons Golf Course
17. Pinnacle Point Golf Course
18. Fancourt Course
19. Oubaa Golf Course
20. Goose Valley Golf Course

21. Nature-driven Activities
22. Bloukrans Bunjee
23. Seven Passes Drive
24. Marine Eco-Tour
25. Redberry Farm
26. Old Toll House Montagu Pass
27. George Airport
28. Sleeping Beauty Hiking Trail
29. Robberg Hiking Trail

30. Birds of Eden
31. Monkeyland
32. Tenikwa Wildlife Awareness Centre
33. Elephant Sanctuary
34. Storm's River Suspension Bridge
35. The Otter Trail Hike
36. Cango Wildlife Ranch
37. White Shark Africa
38. Teniqua Treetops
39. Serendipity
40. The Market Square Shopping Centre
41. Rosenhof Country House
42. De Denne Country Guest House
43. Magic Lagoon Charters Knysna
44. MTO Tsitsikamma Hiking Trail
45. Aquila Private Game Reserve

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George

The road to George follows a flattish plain on a granite pluton, resulting in a less eroded coast and preserved height above the sea. French naturalist François Levaillant explored this region in 1781 and found that European settlers and Outeniqua Khoisan people had already settled there. Initially named Georgetown in honour of King George III, it served as a strategic outpost during the British occupation of the Cape Colony. The town experienced notable development with the completion of the Montagu Pass in 1847, connecting the coastal area to the interior and facilitating trade and transportation. George played a pivotal role in the timber industry, and its railway line, inaugurated in 1906, further enhanced its connectivity. The town's history is marked by cultural diversity, with influences from various communities, including the indigenous Khoisan people and later European settlers.

Despite the continued use of the historic Montagu Pass across the Outeniqua Range, most traffic



A sunset over the grasslands of George

En Route

Once you depart from George, you can opt for the Kaaimansgat Pass, famously described by explorer George Thompson in 1827 as one of the most terrifying sights he had ever witnessed. Before entering Wilderness, from the Dolphin Viewing Point, you'll see the railway bridge constructed above the river mouth. The Outeniqua Choo Tjoe train was a picturesque steam-powered passenger train that traced the stunning coastline of the Garden Route. Covering a scenic route of 67 kilometres, the journey aboard this charming train spanned three hours from start to finish.

Wilderness

Wilderness, once called the Lake District, is known for its rare lakes. These lakes are exceptionally unique, only found again 1000 km up the east coast. The landscape was shaped by soft rock, changing sea levels, and persistent winds. Sea levels fluctuated, the area was elevated and later flooded, forming broad valleys. Over time, calcified rock and sand led to the creation of sand dunes and landlocked lakes. The lakes are sustained by rivers and seawater permeation, except for Groenvlei, the sole freshwater lake near Sedgfield.

Wilderness is nestled within the Cape Fold Belt, a mountainous region shaped by millions of years of sedimentary rock folding and faulting. The majestic Outeniqua Mountains, composed mainly of Table Mountain sandstone, provide a stunning backdrop. These formations showcase layered sandstone and preserve fossils of marine life from

now flows through the scenic Outeniqua Pass, completed in 1951 at approximately R8,000,000. This pass connects George and Knysna with a road branching off at Wilderness that traverses the Lakes Area, including Langvlei, Rondevlei, and Swartvlei, all serving as bird sanctuaries. The district is crisscrossed by numerous rivers, such as the Great Brak, Maalgaten, Gwayang, Swart, Kaaimans, Touw, Silver, Diep, and Kammanassie. While the district was once renowned for its indigenous forests, large-scale destruction has left only a modest heritage. In 1936, the government imposed a 200-year ban on felling the remaining trees to allow for recovery. The district houses the Forestry Training College, Saasveld, established in 1931. It is known for its moderate climate conducive to agriculture, with the Department of Agriculture setting up an experimental farm in 1952. This initiative has led to improvements in livestock and the successful cultivation of hops, making George the sole district in South Africa where hops are grown.

HISTORY

En Route

Before Knysna, visit three notable places. First, stop in Sedgfield, known for its stunning beaches, estuary, and farmer's markets. Next, pass Groenvlei and ascend to the scenic Goukamma River Valley. After crossing the river, turn right towards Buffelsbaai, a coastal resort. Lastly, reach Rhenendal by following a road inland from the hill overlooking Knysna Lagoon.

Knysna

The Khoi-San first inhabited Knysna before European settlers arrived. The timber industry drove its early growth, benefiting from lush forests. A gold rush in 1875 was short-lived. Miners left for the Witwatersrand gold boom, but Knysna's timber industry thrived. Undeterred, Knysna transformed into a top tourist spot, attracting visitors with its history, natural beauty, and diverse activities.

The Knysna Lagoon and Heads form a geological estuary system. Located in the Knysna Basin, the area contains sedimentary rock formations dating back millions of years, including shale, sandstone, and conglomerates. The lagoon covers approximately 18 square kilometres and is fed by the Knysna, Karatara, and Goukamma rivers. Over time, these rivers deposited sediments, creating a tidal inlet where the estuary meets the Indian Ocean. Flanked by the iconic Knysna Heads, two sandstone cliffs formed around 300 million years ago, the lagoon offers a stunning backdrop with intricate layering and reddish hues.

The Knysna Lagoon and Heads hold historical significance. The indigenous communities relied on the lagoon's resources for sustenance and trade. European exploration and settlement introduced new influences. With its natural harbour and access to the Indian Ocean, the lagoon attracted seafarers, traders, and explorers. It became a crucial stopover on the maritime trade route between the Cape Colony and the East. The treacherous nature of the Knysna Heads became well-known, as the



The Knysna Heads and a lucky yacht

narrow channel posed a challenge for ships entering or leaving the lagoon. Many vessels fell victim to the strong currents and shifting sandbars, leading to numerous shipwrecks. The notorious Knysna Heads and the shipwreck history have become part of the town's lore, attracting divers and maritime enthusiasts.

Today, Knysna is known for its stunning lagoon, ancient forests, outdoor adventures, and a thriving arts and crafts scene. The town's historical landmarks, such as the Holy Trinity Church and the Knysna Fort, offer glimpses into its past, while its welcoming atmosphere and breathtaking surroundings continue to captivate visitors from near and far. Each year, the town hosts the Knysna Forest Marathon, where novices and veterans test their fitness in a full or half marathon. The iconic trail run lives up to its name, deep through the forest and past stunning views of the estuary and the Knysna Heads. Knysna and its surrounding area is a bird-lover's paradise. Watch the treeline closely, and you will likely be rewarded with the sight of a Knysna loerie and the brilliant greens of its feathers. While the once innumerable herds of forest elephants are all but extinct, various nature reserves in the area offer a haven to elephants and various other wildlife species.

En Route

From the Knysna basin, the route leads to Plettenberg Bay, passing through Hornlee and Diepwalle on the R339 route. Take advantage of the scenic Prince Alfred's Pass for walks, biking, and a chance to spot elephants. A road to Knietz offers access to a secluded beach via a staircase; this little beach has several private beach homes, some of them in the form of fanciful little "castles". On the N2, the Garden of Eden is worth visiting, especially for its big tree.

Plettenberg Bay

Originally inhabited by the indigenous Khoi-San people, the area became a prominent stop for European explorers and seafarers. The bay was named Bahia das Alagôas (bay of lagoons) by Portuguese explorers in 1488. In 1778, the French established a colony called 'Hardelot' in the bay, eventually leading to the British settlement in the early 19th century. Eventually, it became known as Plettenberg Bay in 1778. In the 17th century, the tragic shipwreck of São Gonçalo occurred, but survivors managed to construct wooden boats to reach Mozambique and Cape Town. Plettenberg Bay served the Dutch as a replenishment station and timber source. Its prominence declined when the main harbour moved to Knysna. However, the town regained its status as a premier holiday destination, earning the nickname 'Saint Tropez of the South'. Plettenberg Bay is cherished for its stunning beaches, coastal landscapes, and recreational activities. Robberg Nature Reserve offers unique rock formations, hiking trails, and ocean vistas teeming with marine life. A visit to Nelson Bay Cave, an ancient Stone Age dwelling, is mandatory.

Wilderness remains a cherished coastal town that blends its natural wonders with a sense of community and environmental conservation. The rich geological heritage continues to draw geologists and researchers to explore its ancient rock formations and uncover the mysteries of its past.

En Route

From Plett, cross the Bitou River with its ancient rock face, now flowing through a wide valley. Next, reach the Keurbooms River, which historically

marked a boundary in the Tsitsikamma region. In 1869, a fire opened up this area, which led to the creation of a route to Port Elizabeth. Construction began in 1879, featuring impressive bridges like the Paul Sauer Bridge. Three large single-span bridges were built, including the famous bungee-jumping Bloukrans Bridge, the world's highest at the time. This altered Bain's route, saving distance but sacrificing scenic views.

Natures Valley

In the late 1700s, Dutch officials explored the Tsitsikamma coast and found a beautiful valley between the mountains and the Indian Ocean. They named it 'Nature's Valley' or 'Natuurvlei' in Afrikaans. Despite its initial discovery, Nature's Valley remained isolated due to its challenging terrain and limited routes. In the late 19th century, permanent settlements emerged as timber merchants recognised the area's valuable forests and established sawmills. The timber industry drove development, attracting settlers who built houses and farms. However, the valley's isolation and transportation challenges posed difficulties for its residents.

In the early 20th century, the construction of the Prince Alfred Pass transformed Nature's Valley. This road connection between Knysna and the valley created new settlements and economic prospects. It was named after Prince Alfred; the pass facilitated trade and transportation, enabling farmers and traders to reach markets in Knysna and beyond.

In 1964, Nature's Valley was incorporated into Tsitsikamma National Park to preserve its natural beauty. This protected the valley's unique ecosystem, including forests, wetlands, and wildlife. Today, Nature's Valley remains an integral part of the park, allowing visitors to experience its untouched splendour.

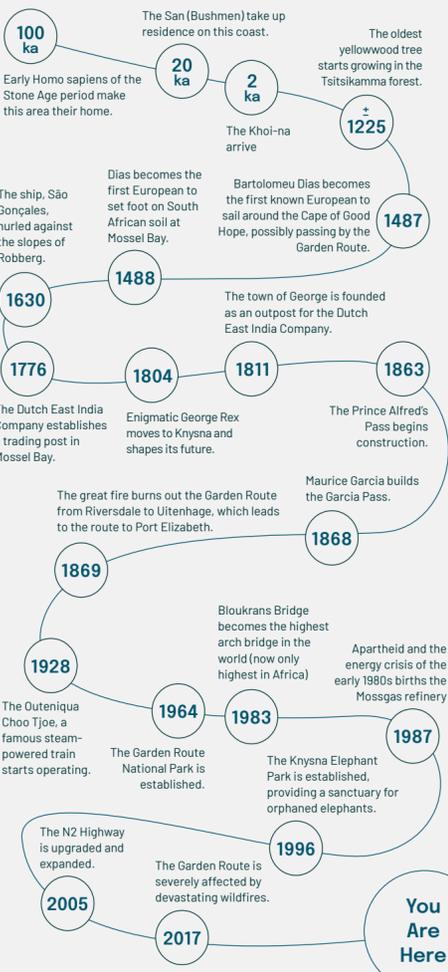
Storms River

Storms River was named after the powerful waterway that cuts through deep gorges and lush forests. In the late 19th century, Thomas Bain opened the remote area by constructing a road network, including the iconic Paul Sauer Bridge. These developments made it easier for visitors to experience the awe-inspiring landscapes. Today, Storms River is famous for outdoor activities and Tsitsikamma National Park.



The Storms River Suspension Bridge

A Timeline of the Past



1-Point of Human Origin

The Cradle of Humankind, located in South Africa, is a renowned UNESCO World Heritage site with extraordinary significance as one of the critical points of human origin. This region has yielded countless fossil discoveries, including those of Australopithecus and early Homo species, providing invaluable insights into the origins and evolution of humanity.

2-Vic Bay

Short for Victoria Bay, is a charming coastal town nestled along the picturesque Garden Route in South Africa. Known for its stunning bay, with golden sandy beaches and rolling waves, Vic Bay is a popular destination for surfers and beach lovers. With its laid-back atmosphere and breathtaking ocean views, visitors can relax, soak up the sun, and indulge in various water sports, making Vic Bay a delightful seaside getaway.

3-The Big Tree

is a majestic and ancient Outeniqua Yellowwood tree that stands tall and proud in the heart of the Tsitsikamma Forest. Estimated to be over 800 years old, this giant tree is an impressive sight, reaching a height of approximately 36 metres and boasting a massive trunk circumference.

ARTS & CULTURE

13-The Wild Oats Market in Sedgfield

is a vibrant and bustling farmers' market that draws locals and visitors alike. Every Saturday, this lively market comes alive with various stalls offering fresh produce, artisanal goods, delectable treats, and unique crafts. With its vibrant atmosphere, friendly vendors, and wide selection of locally sourced products, the Wild Oats Market is a must-visit destination for food lovers, craft enthusiasts, and those seeking a taste of the vibrant local community.

14-Plett Wine Route

This enchanting wine route offers visitors the opportunity to explore a variety of vineyards, taste exquisite wines, and immerse themselves in the beauty of the surrounding countryside. With its picturesque vineyards, award-winning wines, and warm hospitality, the Plett Wine Route is a haven for wine enthusiasts seeking a memorable and indulgent experience in the heart of the Garden Route.

15-20-Golfing

Whether you tee off at renowned courses like Fancourt, Pinnacle Point, or Pezula, you'll be treated to an unforgettable golfing experience surrounded by the region's natural beauty. From exhilarating drives to precise putts, golfing along the Garden Route is a perfect blend of sport, relaxation, and enjoyment.

ADVENTURE

21-Nature-driven Activities

Embark on thrilling adventures along the Garden Route with activities like abseiling, kayaking, hiking, boating, paragliding, biking, the Oystercatcher trail, Robberg exploration, skydiving, lilo river floats, and ziplining. From cliff descents to coastal gliding and scenic hikes to serene boating, there's something for everyone seeking an unforgettable adrenaline rush amidst the stunning natural landscapes.

22-Bloukrans Bunjee

The world's highest commercial bridge bungee. Plunge from the towering heights of the Bloukrans Bridge, soaring above the Bloukrans River and surrounded by breathtaking views of the dramatic gorge below.

23-Seven Passes Drive

Traverse seven meticulously crafted passes, each revealing its unique charm and character. Immerse yourself in the breathtaking beauty of dense forests, cascading waterfalls, and panoramic vistas while tracing the footsteps of early pioneers who once navigated these winding roads.

24-Marine Eco-Tour

Set sail on a boat excursion, guided by knowledgeable experts who will introduce you to the rich marine life that thrives in these waters. Encounter playful dolphins, majestic whales, and a variety of seabirds as you cruise along the stunning coastline. Learn about the importance of marine conservation and the ecosystem's delicate balance while enjoying the scenic beauty surrounding you.



The highest bungee jump in Africa - Bloukrans



The well-lit Cango Caves

8-Cango Caves

These vast limestone caverns feature awe-inspiring stalactite and stalagmite formations, creating a surreal underground landscape. Guided tours take visitors through the chambers, showcasing the impressive rock formations and providing insight into the geological history of the caves. Exploring the Cango Caves is a fascinating adventure, allowing visitors to marvel at the beauty of nature's underground masterpiece.

9- Nelson Bay Cave

is a captivating natural wonder in the scenic Tsitsikamma region. This ancient cave, nestled along the rugged coastline, offers a fascinating glimpse into the past, as it served as a dwelling for Stone Age humans thousands of years ago. Visitors can explore the cave's intriguing rock formations, marvel at the remnants of ancient artefacts, and witness the powerful forces of nature that have shaped its interior over time.

ANIMALS SIGHTINGS

The Garden Route is a haven for wildlife enthusiasts, offering a variety of sanctuaries and incredible animal encounters. Explore the captivating world of wildlife rehabilitation at sanctuaries like **Monkeyland**, where you can observe rescued primates in their natural habitats and learn about their conservation. Get up close and personal with gentle giants at the **Knysna Elephant Park**, where you can interact with these magnificent creatures and gain insight into their behaviour and conservation efforts. Discover the feathered wonders of **Birds of Eden**, the largest free-flight aviary in the world, where you can witness an array of colourful bird species soaring overhead. For an underwater adventure, head to the **Tenikwa Wildlife Awareness Centre** and encounter rehabilitated African penguins, as well as other marine animals like seals and otters.



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Did you know?

11- Cape St. Blaize Lighthouse

is a timeless sentinel in Mossel Bay, South Africa. Built in 1864, this historic lighthouse serves as a beacon of safety for mariners navigating the treacherous coastline. Visitors can climb to the top of the lighthouse for panoramic views of the surrounding coastline and gain insight into the fascinating maritime history of the area.

In 1867, Prince Alfred went on an elephant hunting expedition in Knysna that symbolises the eradication of these herds (from 1000s before the Europeans arrived to fewer than 10 today).

12-Brenton-on-Sea

is a breathtaking coastal village nestled along the Garden Route of South Africa. The village is situated on a hillside, providing stunning panoramic views of the Indian Ocean and the surrounding landscape. The area was originally inhabited by the indigenous Khoi-San people, who lived off the bountiful resources provided by the ocean and surrounding forests. The village itself takes its name from Sir Jahleel Brenton, a British naval officer who surveyed the area in the early 19th century. Over time, Brenton-on-Sea evolved from a small fishing community into a popular holiday destination.

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