



KIRSTENBOSCH

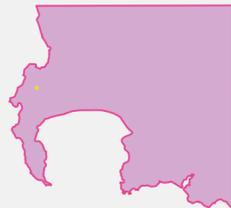


# On the eastern slopes of Table Mountain, beauty is always in bloom

The Kirstenbosch Garden is one of the greatest botanical gardens in the world, as well as one of the biggest.

Kirstenbosch stands as one of the world's premier botanical gardens, preserving indigenous plants while also housing historical exotic species. Nestled in a picturesque valley against Table Mountain's eastern slopes, with Bishopscourt and Wynberg Hill to the left and the distant Cape Fold Mountains to the east, it boasts open lawns, diverse flora, and natural areas extending up the mountain.

This 36-hectare garden hosts 7,000 plant species, including 450 trees, rare plants, and a world-class cycad collection. Unique South African arid species find refuge in the Botanical Society Conservatory. Kirstenbosch is part of the South African National Biodiversity Institute's network of nine Botanical Gardens, and its exceptional location in the Cape Floral Kingdom, home to over 9,000 species, two-thirds of which are exclusive to the region, led to its UNESCO World Heritage site designation in 2004. It's also been recognised as one of the world's seven most magnificent botanical gardens.



## Roots

Evidence of human presence in the area includes Stone Age tools discovered near a spring in the Dell at the heart of the garden. The Khoi people, who settled here well before Eastern or Western explorers, likely frequented the region for medicinal plants, food, and wood.

When Western explorers first arrived and eventually settled, they encountered groups of Khoi, such as the Goringhaikwa people, who annually migrated to the area, particularly Rondebosch and Claremont, close to Kirstenbosch. However, access became more challenging due to Jan van Riebeeck's establishment of his estate.

The earliest recorded reference to the region now known as Kirstenbosch dates back to 1652 when Van Riebeeck, the first commander of the Dutch East India Company in the Cape, mentioned surveying the forest. Ownership of the Kirstenbosch site was tentatively established in 1657, initially granted to Leendert Cornelis of Zevenhuysen, a carpenter tasked with safeguarding the forest and supplying timber for the Company's construction needs. After accumulating a personal fortune, misusing his privileges, and indulging in excesses, Cornelissen was expelled from the property, and the botanical garden returned to the Company.

In 1659, the slopes of present-day Wynberg and Kirstenbosch became part of Van Riebeeck's estate, marking the Dutch outpost's boundary. He farmed wheat, fruit trees, chestnuts, and grey poplars. To fend off indigenous raids on his estate, Van Riebeeck planted a dense Wild Almond hedge.

**By Any Other Name**  
Kirstenbosch had various names in its early history. In 1698, it was referred to as the "yellow-wood forest" or Lindenbosch. Maps from the 1780s mentioned names like Boshof, Claassenbosch, and Bosch-Heuvel. The name "Kerstenbosch" first appeared on a 1796 British map, likely named after Johannes Kirsten, who operated a tollgate for the Company near the current Rycroft Gate. In 1797, Lady Anne Barnard considered Kirstenbosch as a location for a country cottage but chose Parady's instead.

In 1811, Kirstenbosch became private property under Henry Alexander, the Colonial Secretary of the Cape, who owned half of the present garden, south of the Liesbeek River. Christopher Bird, the Assistant Colonial Secretary, initially owned the other half, including the spring where he built the famous Bird Bath in the Dell, but he later sold it to Henry Alexander.

Henry Alexander, known for his eccentricity, built a homestead in Kirstenbosch and lived there until his death in 1818. The property changed hands

several times, with W. F. Versveld and Dirk Gysbert Eksteen among the owners. Cecil John Rhodes acquired Kirstenbosch in 1895 and planted various trees along the original road to Hout Bay, now known as Camphor Avenue. Upon Rhodes' death in 1902, he bequeathed these properties to the nation, under the condition that they remain preserved and not be sold.



A sunbird resting on some flowers in the Kirstenbosch Gardens

## History Grows

The establishment of the garden was driven by two key factors. First, the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 paved the way for a national botanical institution. Second, Dr. Henry Pearson, a Botany Professor at the South African College with ties to Kew Gardens and Cambridge University, initiated the creation of a botanical garden in the Cape Peninsula. His vision included a herbarium, library, museum, and laboratories, with an emphasis on showcasing South African flora. Pearson also sought government funding,

which initially faced rejection but was eventually approved after two years of advocacy.

In 1911, Pearson embarked on a search for state-owned land since there were no funds to purchase property. Initially considering the area now occupied by the University of Cape Town, he was directed by Neville Pillans to the present-day Kirstenbosch site, exclaiming, "This is the place!" In 1913, Sir Lionel Philips championed the resolution in Parliament, designating Kirstenbosch as the home of

the National Botanical Garden. The resolution passed unanimously, leading to the establishment of a Board of Trustees. Dr. H.H.W. Pearson became the first director, and J.W. Mathews the first curator. Together, they worked tirelessly to create a world-class garden in under two years. Tragically, Dr. Pearson passed away in 1916 and is interred within the garden.

## Green-thumbed Guardians

J.W. Mathews, trained at Kew Gardens, played a pivotal role in transforming the wilderness into a remarkable repository of South African flora. He meticulously designed rockeries, terraces, stone paths, and lawns, even collecting seeds and rare plants from Namaqualand. Specimens poured in from all corners of South Africa during his tenure, which lasted until his retirement in 1936.

Following Pearson's passing, there was a two-year gap before Professor R.H. Compton assumed the directorship, holding the position until 1953 and elevating the garden to a global botanical leader. Professor H.B. Rycroft succeeded him, continuing the garden's excellence. The current CEO of SANBI, Dr. Tanya Abrahamse, now carries the torch. Werner Voigt took over as curator in 2018 following the unfortunate passing of Philip le Roux, who had held the position since 1999.

Managing a garden of this scale requires a dedicated team of about 130 individuals, including horticulturists, administrators, collectors, groundsman, guides, and various specialists, all working diligently to ensure the garden's smooth operation.



Conservatory at Kirstenbosch

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1. The Botanical Society Conservatory
2. The Dell
3. Pearson's Grave
4. Colonel Bird's Bath
5. The Cycad Amphitheatre
6. The Protea Garden
7. The Mathews Rockery
8. Camphor Avenue
9. The Peninsula Garden
10. The Arboretum
11. Useful Plants
12. The Fragrance Garden
13. The Forest Braille Trail
14. The Garden of Extinction
15. Van Riebeeck's Hedge
16. The Sculpture Garden
17. Buchus
18. Annuals
19. The Fynbos Garden
20. The Koppie
21. The Erica Garden
22. The Restio Garden
23. The Waterwise Garden
24. The Garden of Weeds
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33. The Kirstenbosch Shop
34. The Botanical Society Bookshop
35. Manor House
36. Seed Orchard
37. Viewing Deck
38. Rycroft Gate 3
39. Garden Office
40. Seed Room
41. Stores
42. Workshop
43. Winter House
44. The Old Rhodes Drive
45. Conference Centre
46. Parking
47. Service Entrance (No Entry)
48. Main Entrance
49. Gazebo
50. Gate House
51. SANBI Cape Office
52. Window Stream
53. Bell Tower and Gates
54. Botanical Society Office
55. Lecture Hall
56. Education Centre
57. Skeleton Stream
58. Stone Pines
59. Old Dam
60. Nursery Stream
61. Sun Shelters
62. The Big Fig
63. The Boomslang
64. The Otter Pond
65. Main Pond
66. Toilets
67. Toilets
68. Toilets
69. Toilets
70. Toilets



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To view every single species of flora in Kirstenbosch would take days. Here is a selection of some of the most beautiful, along with a few of the garden's resident animals that you might spot while walking through the Garden.

**King Protea - Protea Family**  
The King Protea, South Africa's national flower, is the largest member of the Protea family and is hailed as the "king" of the Cape Floral Kingdom. It thrives in the mountainous regions of the Western and Eastern Cape.



**Wild Almond - Protea Family**  
This tree, renowned for its use as a protective barrier by Jan van Riebeeck in 1660, can be seen in its wild state at Kirstenbosch, particularly around Van Riebeeck's Hedge, the upper Concert Lawn, and along the Arboretum's edge.



**Pincushion - Protea Family**  
With 52 species primarily located in the Western Cape, pincushions are excellent choices for garden plants. You can admire them along the Fynbos Walk and in the Protea, Restio, Erica, and Waterwise Gardens.



**Red Disa, Pride of Table Mountain - Orchid Family**  
This emblematic plant, native only to the Western Cape, can be observed in bloom within the Conservatory Bulb House from February to March. In their natural habitat, they thrive near streams and on mossy cliffs.



**Silver Tree - Protea Family**  
Silvertrees, distinguished by their silvery leaves, are exclusive to the Cape Peninsula. Their wild population has dwindled to half of what it was six decades ago, making them rare and endangered. You can spot them in the Peninsula Garden, Fynbos Walk, and Silvertree Trail.



**Whorled Heath - Heath Family**  
Once native to the region spanning Rondebosch to Rondevlei, this Erica species succumbed to the encroaching suburbs of Cape Town by the early 1900s. Fortunately, it was rescued from extinction and now blooms in the Garden of Extinction and Erica Garden from November to February.



**Albertinia Thatching Reed - Restio Family**  
Traditionally employed in Cape roof thatching, Restios, perennial plants resembling reeds, exhibit a wide array of forms, ranging from delicate grass-like varieties to bamboo-like ones. Find them in the Restio Garden, Fynbos Walk, and Useful Plants Garden.



**Krantz Aloe - Asphodel Family**  
During the period from May to July, the Krantz Aloe displays vibrant orange or yellow flowers. You can find aloe and numerous other succulent plants showcased in the Conservatory, Vygienegarden, Mathews Rockery, and the Koppie.



**White Namaqualand Daisy - Daisy Family**  
Spring marks the annual burst of colour from Namaqualand daisies, which range in hues from white to peach, yellow, blue, orange, mauve, and purple.



**Lesser Double - Collared Sunbird**  
These petite, vivid birds are native to Kirstenbosch. They perch on proteas, pincushions or aloes to quench their thirst for nectar. The 125 species of birdlife in the Garden include, among others, the Orange-breasted Sunbird and the green Malachite Sunbird.



**The Helmeted Guineafowl**  
A common bird in sub-Saharan Africa. Interestingly, it was absent from the Western Cape before 1900. They can be a nuisance during picnics and become notably aggressive during the breeding season. It's best to keep a safe distance from them and avoid feeding them.



**Caracal (rooiakat/African lynx)**  
A medium-sized wild cat indigenous to Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, Pakistan, and north-western India. Typically, it weighs between 8 to 19 kg and stands at a shoulder height of 40 to 50 cm. In the past, encountering a Caracal on Table Mountain was uncommon. However, the introduction of the Urban Caracal Project has led to a significant increase in sightings of these cats in the area.



**Wood's Cycad - Cycad Family**  
Extinct in the wild, with only 500 specimens remaining in botanical gardens and nurseries worldwide. You can locate it in the Cycad Garden, situated just above The Dell. To safeguard it from potential theft, a metal cage protects its base.



## Something To See

**1-The Botanical Society Conservatory**  
is a desert house showcasing the diverse succulent flora of southern Africa, ranging from small stone plants to the impressive baobab, the world's largest succulent. It also includes displays of bulbs, ferns, and Welwitschia. Constructed between 1895 and 1996, it stands as the sole conservatory of its scale designed specifically to accommodate arid-adapted plant species.

**2-The Dell**  
Kirstenbosch Garden's oldest section, showcases tree ferns and plants that thrive in shade. Its centrepiece is Colonel Bird's Bath.

**3-Pearson's Grave**  
situated above The Dell, bears the epitaph: "If ye seek his monument, look around."



Rich Biodiversity at Kirstenbosch

**4-Colonel Bird's Bath**  
often misattributed as Lady Anne Barnard's Bath, was constructed around 1811 to gather spring water for Colonel Christopher Bird's residence. Although the house is no longer standing, the bath has been renovated and can be found at the centre of the Dell. Made from Batavian-style bricks, it is continuously supplied by a perennial spring.

**5-The Cycad Amphitheatre**  
located just above The Dell, serves as a natural amphitheatre showcasing ancient cycads, a plant group that dates back to the time of the dinosaurs.

**6-The Fynbos Walk**  
is a path from Rycroft Gate through the upper Garden, featuring the famous Cape Floral Kingdom fynbos.

**6-The Protea Garden**  
showcases a diverse range of plants from this remarkable family. Proteas and serrurias bloom during winter and spring, while pincushions thrive in the summer.

**7-The Mathews Rockery**  
is home to some of South Africa's succulents and bulbs from arid regions, and is named in honour of the first curator.

### Did you know?

In 2015, the **International Garden Tourism Awards Body** declared Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens the **International Garden of the Year**.

**8-Camphor Avenue**  
was planted by Rhodes in 1898. It features camphor trees (Cinnamomum camphora) and Moreton Bay figs (Ficus macrophylla).

**9-The Peninsula Garden**  
exhibits a selection of the 2,500 plant species discovered in the Cape Peninsula.

**10-The Arboretum**  
features more than 450 southern African tree species within a picturesque forest environment. To commemorate the Garden's centenary in 2015, the Tree Canopy Walkway, known as "The Boomslang", was introduced, winding through this area.

**14-The Garden of Extinction**  
is a themed garden exhibiting approximately 1500 South African plants at risk of extinction in the wild. It provides information on the causes and potential conservation efforts.



Agapanthus Africanus in full bloom

**17-Buchus**  
are a highly-aromatic member of the citrus family.

**18-Annals Garden**  
provide a vibrant spring display, with Namaqualand daisies best seen at midday.

**19-The Fynbos Garden**  
features a variety of its namesakes.

**20-The Koppie**  
displays hardy, drought-resistant plants adapted to the well-drained sandstone outcrop.

**21-The Erica Garden**  
houses over 600 species.

**22-The Restio Garden**  
home to the Cape Reed family.

**23-The Waterwise Garden**  
teaches visitors how to save water in their gardens through the right plants.

**26-The Centre for Home Gardening**  
(Gate 2) boasts a garden shop and retail nursery, a bookshop and a gift store.



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The Centenary Tree Canopy Walkway was built in 2013-14 to celebrate the centenary of Kirstenbosch in 2013

## Something To Do

**27-Summer Sunset Concerts**  
are held at the open-air amphitheatre on the Concert Lawn from mid-November to early April. Enjoy a picnic on the gentle grassy slopes facing the stage to the sounds of diverse musical genres, including jazz, folk, rock, orchestral, and big band swing. Numerous local talents and renowned artists like Elton John, Joe Cocker, Cliff Richard, and Bryan Adams have graced the stage. Due to their popularity, it's best to book tickets in advance and arrive early for a prime spot.



SANBI Concerts at Kirstenbosch (View the concert schedule here: <https://www.sanbi.org/event/kirstenbosch-summer-sunset-concerts-2/>)

**Walks and Trails**  
are well-marked and weave throughout the Garden. If you're seeking a more challenging trek to higher altitudes, there are two main routes to the mountain's peak: Nursery Ravine and Skeleton Gorge. Keep in mind that these routes are demanding and suitable only for the physically fit. Don't forget essentials like water, energy snacks, sunblock, and a hat. Stick to designated paths and avoid disturbing local flora and fauna. Inform someone about your hiking plans, and note that dogs are not permitted below the Contour Path.

**Free Guided Garden Tours**  
(lasting 90 minutes) depart from the Information Desk at the Visitors' Centre (Gate 1) on Mondays to Saturdays at 10 am. These tours accommodate up to 15 people and operate on a first-come, first-serve basis.

**Special Interest and Group Bookings**  
can be booked in advance through the Information Desk. The fee is in addition to the garden entry fee.

**28-Shuttle Car Tours**  
depart from the Visitors' Centre, on the hour, daily, from 9 am to 3 pm. Book at the ticket office.

**The MyGuide Self-guiding Audio Guide**  
is available in English or German. Buy your ticket at the Ticket Office and collect your handset from the Information Desk. This fee is in addition to the garden entry fee.

## Useful Information

**Rain or shine, there is always something to enjoy in Kirstenbosch. However, the best times to visit are towards the end of winter, in spring or in early summer (August – November).**

**Entry Times**  
Kirstenbosch Garden is open year-round, every day. In winter (April to August), the operating hours are from 8 am to 6 pm, and in summer (September to March), it extends to 8 am to 7 pm. The Conservatory has slightly different hours, open daily from 9 am to 5 pm.

**Disabled Access**  
All visitor facilities at Kirstenbosch Garden are wheelchair-friendly. However, it's important to note that the garden itself is situated on a steep gradient, making some areas inaccessible to wheelchairs. To assist visitors with disabilities, disabled parking bays and stop-and-drop zones are available at Gates 1 and 2.

Please follow these simple rules to help maintain this living museum.

- |                               |                                |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Do's</b>                   | <b>Don't's</b>                 |
| • Discover plants and animals | • Disturbing plants or animals |
| • Walk, hike, explore         | • Balls, bikes, skateboards    |
| • Bird watch                  | • Dogs, pets                   |
| • Picnic on the lawns         | • Radios, noise, games         |
| • Relax at concerts           | • Climbing trees               |
| • Enjoy sculptures and art    | • Swimming                     |
| • Take photographs            | • Entering the flower beds     |
| • Take litter home            | • Litter, fires, braais        |

**Facilities**  
**The Information Desk** (Tel: 021 799 8783) is situated in the Visitors' Centre at Gate 1.

**Ticket Offices** are located at Gates 1, 2 and 3.

**The main Ticket Office** (Tel: 021 799 8782) is at Gate 1. Information Desk, gift shop, bookshop, coffee shop, the Old Mutual Conference Centre, an ATM and public telephones.

**Centre for Home Gardening** at Gate 2 Tea room, indigenous retail plant nursery and garden shop, bookshop, gift shop, garden design studio, exhibition hall and marquee lawn.

## RESTAURANTS

**29-Moyo Restaurant**  
is home to a Buffet with seafood, African, South African and vegetarian food, wine bar and the unmistakable Moyo experience of an exciting blend of design, food and entertainment. Situated near the Visitors' Centre (Gate 1). Open from 9 am to 9 pm, Monday to Sunday. (Tel: 021 762 9585)

**30-The Kirstenbosch Tea Room**  
offers Breakfast, lunch, tea and picnic baskets. Situated in the Centre for Home Gardening (Gate 2). Open 9 am to 5 pm. (Tel: 021 797 4883)

**31-Vida e Caffè**  
offers Espresso and high quality coffee, pastries, croissants, muffins, rolls, pannini, wraps and treats. The go-to drink is a chocolate frio with almond milk! Open daily from 7 am to 7 pm (Gate 1). (021 762 6047)



Moyo Restaurant (credit: <https://moyo.co.za>)

## SHOPPING

**32-The Kirstenbosch Garden Centre**  
is a retail nursery that stocks a wide variety of indigenous plants, seeds, garden accessories, tools, compost, etc. with experienced staff on hand to offer help and advice. Located at the Centre for Home Gardening (Gate 2), trading 9 am to 5 pm.

**33-The Kirstenbosch Shop**  
sells gifts, curios, clothing, homeware, botanical cosmetics and Kirstenbosch memorabilia. Located at the Visitors' Centre (Gate 1) trading 9 am to 6 pm with a smaller satellite store at the Centre for Home Gardening (Gate 2) trading 9 am to 5 pm.

**34-The Botanical Society Bookshop** sells a wide range of books on gardening, flora, fauna and natural history, children's educational books, stationery and gift cards. At the Visitors' Centre (Gate 1) trading 9 am to 6 pm with a smaller satellite store at the Centre for Home Gardening (Gate 2) trading 9 am to 4.30 pm.



Gift Shop at Kirstenbosch

## GET INVOLVED

**Support Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden**  
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## MORE

No first trip to Cape Town is complete without setting foot in the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden. Its tranquility and wonder are always a welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of the Mother City. A visit to the Garden is the perfect half-day activity. But be warned, to properly see all of its beauty requires far more time than even a full day. You may very likely find yourself returning once, even three times to fully experience Kirstenbosch.

## CONTACT

**go that way**  
73 Loop St, Cape Town City Centre, Cape Town  
+27 (0)76 408 4185  
bookings@gothatway.co.za | hayley@gothatway.co.za  
www.gothatwaycapetown.co.za  
Design and Illustration by Rebecca Hayter | bexstjohn@gmail.com

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