

# Garden Route Towns, Beaches and Game Reserves

Information supplied by SA Venues.com



*The Garden Route is a coastal corridor on the western coast of South Africa, where ancient forests, rivers, wetlands, dunes, stretches of beach, lakes, mountain scenery and indigenous fynbos all merge to form a landscape of restorative beauty. This is a strip of land like no other in the world in terms of beauty, natural attractions and unique flora and fauna - hence its name. Three of South Africa's top hikes take place here - the Otter Trail and the Tsitsikama and Dolphin trails and man's footprint has made little impact on the rugged and sometimes inaccessible coastline. The Garden Route is a paradise for eco-lovers, bird watchers and solitude seekers and one of the most beautiful parts of the Western Cape. It lies sandwiched between the Outeniqua Mountains and the Indian Ocean and is on every tourist's itinerary. The Garden Route is a popular holiday destination during summer and a tranquil hideaway during the winter months - both seasons are equally beautiful and attractive due to the largely Mediterranean climate of the Garden Route. Hit the beach. Enjoy a great day out at one of the Garden Route's many excellent beaches. With hundreds of kilometers of coast line and some of the most stunning beaches in the world, visitors to South Africa's Garden Route are bound to find the perfect Garden Route beach. Whether you just fancy a gentle stroll along the sand, a refreshing swim or to ride some waves on your surf board, the Garden Route offers it all. Most beaches have toilet and shower facilities and in Garden Route towns such as Jeffrey's Bay you will find surf boards for hire. Knysna and Plettenberg Bay have some lovely swimming beaches and offers a wide selection from sandy beaches to rugged rocky beaches where kids can examine the rock pools to see what they can find. A visit to a Garden Route beach makes for a great day out!*

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## Contents

Wilderness, Garden Route.....	2
Glentana, Garden Route.....	2
Adventureland Plett (Plettenberg Bay).....	3
Hartenbos Waterpark (Hartenbos).....	3
The Lost Plot (Knysna).....	4
Herolds Bay, Garden Route.....	4
Brenton On Sea, Garden Route.....	5
Dana Bay, Garden Route.....	5
Gouritsmond, Garden Route.....	6
Great Brak, Garden Route.....	6
Hartenbos, Garden Route.....	7
Keurboomstrand, Garden Route.....	7
Sedgefield, Garden Route.....	8
Mossel Bay, Garden Route.....	8
Plettenberg Bay, Garden Route.....	9
Tsitsikamma, Eastern Cape.....	10
Victoria Bay, Garden Route.....	11
Garden Route National Park, Garden Route.....	11
Birds of Eden Bird Sanctuary, Garden Route.....	12
Boosmansbos Wilderness Area, Garden Route.....	12
Featherbed Nature Reserve, Garden Route.....	13
Formosa Nature Reserve, Garden Route.....	13
Gondwana Private Game Reserve, Garden Route.....	14
Goukamma Nature Reserve, Garden Route.....	14
Keurbooms River Nature Reserve, Garden Route.....	15
Monkeyland Primate Sanctuary, Garden Route.....	15
Outeniqua Nature Reserve, Garden Route.....	16
Robberg Nature Reserve, Garden Route.....	17

## Wilderness, Garden Route

Lying in the foothills of the Outeniqua Mountains in a region of incomparable beauty, **Wilderness** is an attractive holiday resort with beautiful beaches and numerous vantage points from which to watch the whales and dolphins. As far back as the late 1800's the reputation of **Wilderness** with its natural bounty of rivers and lakes and intrinsic peace and tranquillity, ideal for seaside holidays, was established in a little stone farmhouse.



A seaside boarding house was established in the old homestead - and so began the tradition of hospitality which has made this small resort town famous all over the world. The romantic resort of Wilderness lies 15 km east of [George](#), between the Kaaimans River in the West and the [Goukamma Nature Reserve](#) in the east, bordered by the Outeniqua Mountains in the north and the Indian Ocean in the south. Wilderness is renowned for its vast stretches of beach, its peace and

tranquillity and the absence of windswept headlands and wild, stormy seas. The long stretch of beach embraces the mouths of the Touw and Kaaimans Rivers, and is backed by northward cliffs over which the fringe of the forest reaches down to sea level.

### Wilderness, Garden Route

Wilderness not only overlooks the sea, but also the placid lagoon (Touw River Estuary), the Serpentine, which meanders between the Touw River, Island Lake and Rondevlei. This is a favourite venue for waterskiing and attracts enthusiasts from far and wide. Recreational activities in Wilderness include hiking, mountain-biking, bird- and whale-watching, hang- and paragliding, horseriding, scenic drives, day tours, angling, boating and other water sports.

Excellent viewpoints are Map of Africa with breathtaking scenery of forests, lakes, mountains and coastline and Dolphin's Point, an excellent vantage point from which to study whales and dolphins. Kaaimans River Bridge is a much favoured spot for photography and particularly for taking snaps of the Outeniqua Choo-Choo that travels along the coastline between George and Knysna.

Woodville Big Tree, over 800 years old, creates shaded areas with its massive branches, making it a great picnic spot. Take a stroll along the boardwalk (also wheelchair-friendly) which is part of the Pied Kingfisher Trail and home to a wide variety of birds. The winter climate is splendid with sunshine days and temperatures that rarely drop below 8° C. The annual rainfall averages around 700 mm.

## Glentana, Garden Route

Just east of the Great Brak River, almost half way between [Mossel Bay](#) and [George](#), lies the beautiful seaside village of **Glentana**, its beaches topped by fynbos covered cliffs that plunge precipitously into the Indian Ocean.



The origins of the name, Glentana, are a little murky, but there are those who believe that there is a very strong connection between the town and a certain whiskey still brewed in Northern Scotland that goes by the same name. The rich combination of Milkwood trees, white beaches and rocky outcrops make for a beauty that leaves every visitor rewarded, and even today, despite the demand for property along the [Garden Route](#), manages to remain uncluttered and unspoilt. Glentana Bay lies in an

ancient riverbed where shell collecting and fishing are pastimes that have changed little since the origins of the town that began with a smattering of houses in the early 1900s.

To the south of the cliffs of Glentana, there is little other than open sea, and waves build to immense proportions, their thundering surf over time forming a number of sea caves. These caves occur as one leaves Glentana village east along the coast, and include Glentana cave, Helm's Hole, Jessica's Cave and the caves of Cape Windlass Beach.

Activities, other than drinking in the views and beauty of the surrounds, include whale watching in season, and the golf courses of nearby Fancourt - regarded as one of the country's premier golf resorts - each a wonderful way to pass the time.

## Adventureland Plett (Plettenberg Bay)



**Address:** On the N2 between Plett and Knysna, Garden Route

**Telephone:** +27 (0)44 532-7869

**Opening hours:** Every day (water based activities are every day September to April only)

Want a break from the beach but still need a way to keep cool and entertain the kids during the summer months? Try Adventureland in Plettenberg Bay. The park offers a 75m supertube, a 25m mini-tube, a 'Raging Rapid' tube, a 'Kamakazee' slide and a 12m Free Fall slide.

Mini versions of the Free Fall and Kamakazee slides are also available for youngsters and these lead into a separate baby pool for extra safety. There are also trampolines, jungle gyms and swings for those who tire of the water. Braai facilities are available for those who want to make a day of the activities on offer at Adventureland.

## Hartenbos Waterpark (Hartenbos)

**Address:** Corner Kaap de Goede Hoop Ave and Port Natal Way, Hartenbos, Garden Route



**Telephone:** +27 (0)44 695-2083

**Opening hours:** Monday to Thursday from 09h 00 to 16h00.

Friday and Saturday from 09h00 to 17h00.

Sunday from 10h00 to 16h00.

On the corner of Kaap de Goede Hoop Ave and Port Natal Way in Hartenbos, you will find Hartenbos Waterpark, offering the biggest variety of water slides in the [Western Cape](#).

Come spend the day with us while enjoying our exhilarating new rides. Fun for all ages, from toddlers to Grandpa and Grandma! Not limited to birthday parties, school and church outings. Next to amusement park and miniature golf course.

## The Lost Plot (Knysna)

**Categories:** [Beaches & Pools](#) / [Family Entertainment](#)

**Price group:** On Request (see other [things to do in this price group](#))

**Available in the following region(s):** [Garden Route](#)



**Address:** Corner of Swart and Lake, Knysna, 6570, Garden Route.

**Telephone:** +27 (0)44 381-0099, Mobile: +27 (0)76 311-3020

**Opening hours:** Please enquire.

Residential guests and day visitors to [Brenton Hill Self Catering](#) in Knysna are welcome to enjoy the facilities at The Lost Plot, a beautiful natural setting with unspoilt outstanding views stretching across Knysna Lagoon towards the Outeniqua mountains.

Facilities available at The Lost Plot include an enclosed safe jungle gym, a foefie slide and ample outside seating areas. Adults can spend some quiet moments taking in the beautiful scenery whilst the children can run free, enjoying the natural spaces or fly through the air on the foefie slide. For the smaller children, the fenced and gated jungle gym provides safe play area.

An ideal venue for parties where all are welcome. The Lost Plot is a relaxed venue you will want to come back to again and again.

## Garden Route Destinations

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### Herolds Bay, Garden Route

The beautiful, secluded bay called **Herold's Bay** has held an allure for holiday makers since time of old. Sketches and photographs in the [George](#) museum tell of ox wagons filled with tents, goods and servants, camping out on the beach itself. Today the bay is no less of an attraction and surfing, fishing and swimming, sheltered from the south easterlies that can blow on the coast, make this a favourite destination. Only 15 kilometres from [George](#), the bay literally nestles in a sheltered rocky cove with a wide stretch of beach and inviting waters.



The little village of Herold's Bay has short of 100 homes, making it something of a hamlet in much the same way that [Llandudno](#) in Cape Town has managed to retain its village appeal. Certainly this isn't a humming spot. If you're after bright lights and the clatter of the city, then Herold's Bay isn't the holiday for you. But for those after a complete break and the chance to unwind, Herold's Bay will not disappoint.

There are a serious number of activities one can do from here. The [Oubaai golf course](#), the first Ernie Els signature golf course in the country - is an 18-hole course built around the natural landscape between the Gwaing River Valley and the Indian Ocean.

The Outeniqua Choo-Choo is one of the few remaining steam trains in the country and travels between George and [Mossel Bay](#), providing one of the most enjoyable and scenic rides in the heart of the [Garden](#)

[Route](#). The beautiful coastal fynbos in and around Herold's Bay makes for some wonderful walks and trails, a fantastic area for spotting birds, and when the time is right, dolphins and whales.

## Brenton On Sea, Garden Route

Lying on the other side of Knysna's Western Head, nestled on the shores of the Indian Ocean in a quiet, lazy bay, residents describe **Brenton on Sea's** beauty as the coast that [Knysna](#) doesn't have, and in reality, Knysna lies on a lagoon, the rough seas making itself heard only at the Heads.

Brenton on Sea lies virtually encircled by the [Goukamma Nature Reserve](#), its slopes rich with fynbos, only 500 kilometres from Cape Town and 60 kilometres from the airport at [George](#). The little community derives its name from the fragile free-flying butterfly, the Brenton blue, occurring only on the south-facing slopes of coastal fynbos at Brenton on Sea. Human disturbance in nearby [Natures Valley](#) led to the final disappearance of this beautiful specimen during the 1980s, only to re-emerge in 1991 in Brenton on Sea where the [Brenton Blue Butterfly Reserve](#) has been proclaimed.



### Brenton On Sea, Garden Route

The Brenton blue butterfly, evident in late October until December, lives within one hectare of asteraceous coastal fynbos and its larvae depend entirely on the lower side of the leaves of *Indigofera erecta*

for their food. Other than catching a glimpse of the butterfly, Brenton on Sea's golden sands are an invitation to sunbathe, fish and stroll the shores.

The cliff tops provide ample whale and dolphin watching opportunities in season and paragliding is a popular pastime for obvious reasons. Brenton on Lake has a jetty for launching boats and canoes, and the Knysna forests and the [Goukamma Nature Reserve](#), which includes a 14 kilometre coastline, offer glorious walking and hiking opportunities.

## Dana Bay, Garden Route



Whilst often disregarded simply as a suburb of [Mossel Bay](#), **Dana Bay** is in fact a conservancy, set in the heart of the [Cape Floral Kingdom](#), home to fine examples of coastal and limestone varieties of fynbos under threat from global warming. Limestone fynbos is rich in species and supports among the highest numbers of endemic species in the entire Cape floristic region.

Because of its conservancy status, bush buck, steenbok, mongooses and Cape francolins roam freely in Dana Bay; and the prolific [bird life](#), which includes a colony of [black oyster catchers](#) and over 85 other bird species, adds to the tranquillity and beauty of the coastline and incredible views of

beach and horizon.

The white sandy beach here stretches for miles and is largely undisturbed, inviting lengthy morning and afternoon strolls and sundowner picnics - sunsets are legendary on this part of the coast. Add to this Dana Bay's easy access to restaurants, museums, harbour and yachting facilities, water sports, and eco adventure opportunities, and the beachfront village becomes something more of an attraction. [George's](#) Airport is an

easy 20 minute drive, schools of up to 500 dolphins have been sighted along the coastline, and during [whale-watching](#) season, Southern Right Whales are a joy to behold.

The St Blaize hiking trail is a wonderful cliff walk - an easy 13.5 kilometres along seaside cliffs and through sections of fynbos - of which you can hike a part or do the walk in its entirety. It also provides ideal spots to sight whales in season.

## Gouritsmond, Garden Route

Just over an hour's drive from [Still Bay](#), **Gouritsmond** lies on the [Garden Route](#) on the coast, at the mouth of the Gourits River - creating a wonderful water playground where river meets sea. Pretty little stone houses that date back to the 1920s still dominate parts of the village, testimony to the farmers that descended on



the area on holiday from the [Albertinia](#) district. The area continues to be dominated by sheep and wheat farmers, as the town continues to function as a holiday spot, a popular beach, and place which to escape.

It is also great for fishing and used to be called The Fisheries, because of the opportunity to catch, especially, kabeljou. Thus fishing charters are available and stories abound about 'how big' the last kabeljou caught in the river was.

However **Gouritsmond** is well known for a completely different reason too. Both railway and the N2 cross the Gourits River in the form of bridges, and where they do this in parallel, is one of the most popular bungee jump stations in the country. Whilst it isn't as high as the jump from Blaauwkrantz, it is nonetheless pretty daunting for even hardened adrenaline junkies. The village itself is small, so stocking up before arrival is probably a good idea. This said, it does have its own supermarket, a restaurant or two, an ATM and a tidal pool that is good to know about if you have children. The beach too is beautiful, swimmable and renowned for surfing. Look out for, or should I say avoid, the threatened black oyster catcher, but enjoy incredible coastal hikes. It is also a great place to spot whales during the season between July and November, and shell middens that date back 2000 years have been discovered on the east and west banks of the Gourits River.

## Great Brak, Garden Route

Whilst the adjectives - peaceful and tranquil - have been bandied about when referring to holiday locations, when applied to **Great Brak** they take on new meaning. This little village, just a few kilometres from both [Mossel Bay](#) and [George](#), is without doubt tranquil and beautiful.



Great Brak has unspoilt beaches, a lagoon that is safe to swim in and generous sea views. The stillness experienced along the banks of the Great Brak river, which also offers a number of picnic spots, has led to this little town being much sought after by those wanting to escape it all. Great Brak is called such because of the brackish water of the Brak Rivers - the lagoon mouth is divided into two sandy channels with a small island between them.

This charming, little island has become a place of refuge to many seeking solitude and has a number of holiday cottages and homes on it. It is linked to the mainland by a single-lane bridge and tiny lanes lead between the houses down to the sandy beach. The village of Great Brak dates back to 1859, the year in which a toll-bridge was built over the river.

Interesting things to do include the Great Brak River Museum, in the old school house built in 1902, the Watson Shoe Factory - the reason for the town's existence - and an example of the largest Pepper tree in [South Africa](#). There is a circular route, outlining history and culture, through the village, and Southern Right and other whales visit the shore from May through November.

## Hartenbos, Garden Route

Between the towns of [Mossel Bay](#) and [George](#) lies a perfect holiday resort with an endless expanse of golden beach for walkers and anglers and a shallow, sandy lagoon that offers safe swimming and canoeing.



Hartenbos lends itself to family holidays and during school vacation the tranquil town becomes a bustling seaside destination. The village of Hartenbos started life as a farm granted to Esaias Meyer, a local farmer, as a reward by the Dutch East India Company after he helped shipwrecked sailors. He called the farm Hart en Bosch (deer and bush). Most of the farm was later bought by the Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuurvereniging (Afrikaans language and culture organisation) and turned into a holiday resort for its members during the years of apartheid. Today it is still very popular with visitors from [Limpopo](#) to the Cape and thousands of people spend their annual summer holiday in Hartenbos.

Whale, dolphin and seal watching are very popular, particularly during May through November and the river mouth is an active breeding ground for sea birds. During peak season, the beachfront is lined with colourful kiosks selling anything from seafood to clothing and there is also a heated indoor pool, a supertube, amusement centre and the local museum has an excellent exhibition of the Great Trek.

## Keurboomstrand, Garden Route

Lying on the other side of Keurbooms River from [Plettenberg Bay](#), **Keurboomstrand** or beach lies on an enviable part of the [Garden Route](#), highly popular for camping, fishing and swimming. But don't let the idea of holiday fever crowds deter you during the off season, as the views and beach at Keurbooms Strand are pretty spectacular.



The word 'keurboom' comes from the local Keurboom tree or choice tree (*Virgilia oroboides*), which produces pretty pink-mauve flowers from August to September and again in December. Keurboomstrand lies in the shadow of a mountain thick with trees, its beaches a pristine and the warm waters of the Indian Ocean an added bonus here in the heart of the Garden Route, with easy access to its highlights like the Tsitsikamma (but a half hour's drive from here), Storms River Mouth, Knysna, [Nature's Valley](#) and the attractions of Plettenberg Bay.

From the beach your direct line of sight across the waves is of the Robberg Peninsula and nature reserve on the other side of Plett, as the very popular neighbouring beach side town is known. The Keurbooms River, which lies just a little further than midway between Plett and the suburb of Keurbooms Strand, meets the Bitou River to form a lagoon with its own island. This is a wonderful hive of skiing, fishing and boat cruises where one can explore the river in a canoe. The estuary of the Keurbooms River is one of the best examples of a tidal river mouth that the Garden Route has to offer



One can take long walks along the Keurboom Strand or if hikes are what you after then the [Keurbooms River Nature Reserve](#), just a few kilometres out on the N2 from Keurbooms Strand, has a few to offer.

## Sedgefield, Garden Route

Lying between [George](#) and [Knysna](#) on the Garden Route and 490 km from Cape Town, **Sedgefield** is a beautiful seaside village surrounded entirely by lakes, sand dunes covered in fynbos, pine plantations, the Swartvlei Estuary and the Indian Ocean. Described by some as a sleepy little village, **Sedgefield** borders the [Goukamma Nature Reserve](#) and the [Wilderness National Park](#), leaving the visitor spoilt for choice when it comes to bird watching and walks through indigenous fauna and flora.



Groenvlei Lake, the only fresh water lake in the district, lies to the east of Sedgefield and is popular for its Bass fishing. The lake forms part of the [Goukamma Nature Reserve](#), which stretches from the river of the same name all the way to Buffalo Bay, and has some of the highest vegetated sand dunes in the country. The area around Sedgefield is a network of

fynbos, lakeside and forest hiking trails, bearing names like the 'Pied Kingfisher trail' and the 'Brownhooded Kingfisher trail', meandering through rivers and forests. Maps for the walks are available from the Rondevlei Wilderness National Park office.

It is safe to say that Sedgefield is a paradise for those who love the great outdoors and because of all the water is a veritable feast of water sports. To the west of Sedgefield is the Swartvlei, one of the largest lakes in the area, forming a safe estuary for swimming and some excellent fishing.

The 'Paragliding Fly In' competition, which has gained popularity over the past few years, has earned Sedgefield a reputation amongst paragliders. The competition has been included in the Sedgefield Lakes Festival, initially falling over the Easter weekend but now taking place in September to coincide with the Eastern Cape Yachting Provincials. The Outeniqua Choo-Tjoe stops here, on her trip between [George](#) and Knysna, and is worth the ride for the sheer breathtaking scenery. Yet the predominant appeal of Sedgefield is her uncomplicated charm and quiet simplicity. Her beauty lies in her lack of sophistication and relaxed way of life and many seeking an alternative lifestyle have settled her

## Mossel Bay, Garden Route

Mossel Bay is a bustling holiday town and port, set on the sunwashed slopes of Cape St Blaize overlooking the expansive bay, against the blueblack backdrop of the Outeniqua Mountains.



Mossel Bay lies halfway between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, close to the towns of Swellendam, [Outdshoorn](#), [Plettenberg Bay](#) and [Knysna](#) on the Garden Route and is synonymous with the Mossgas project, where offshore gas fields are mined for gas that is then converted into petroleum.

Despite this obvious industrial leaning, **Mossel Bay** has a tradition of unhurried hospitality and there is sufficient natural beauty in the town and its surrounds to make a stopover essential. **Mossel Bay** features in the Guinness Book of Records as having the mildest all-year climate in the world, second only to Hawaii. Add to this the long stretch of beaches, the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, a championship golf course or two and Mossel Bay becomes an ideal retreat for both summer and winter.

Mossel Bay has a significant history and there are a number of historic houses worth a visit, including about

200 stone homes built a century ago by Cornish stonemasons. She received her present name in 1601 when the Dutch navigator, Paulus van Caerden found a collection of mussel shells in a cave at the headland of Cape St Blaize although Mossel Bay was 'discovered' as far back as 1488, when Dias first encountered the ancient Khoi-San people upon stepping ashore.

Mossel Bay is still famous for its mussels and oysters and some of the largest catches of tunny and black marlin are made on this part of the coast. Tunnel Cave is a 60-metre passageway through the headland of Cape St Blaize, which emerges on stretch of wild coast where the beaches are notorious for their variety of sea shells.

Of real interest is the fact the very first Post Office in [South Africa](#) was at Mossel Bay in 1500, when a man named Pedro de Ataide left a letter in a shoe under a milkwood tree. Today the ancient Post Office is a national monument and mail is still sorted here.

Amongst the surfing fraternity, Mossel Bay is up there on the list with [Jeffreys Bay](#) and [Port Elizabeth](#) and Outer Pool is probably Mossel Bay's most famous wave. Water sports are enormously popular and whale and seal watching and scuba diving a way of life.

Mossel Bay with its wide beaches for safe swimming and the awesome cliffs of Cape St Blaize's southern shores, with the ever-watchful Outeniqua Mountains in the background provides a welcome and a worthwhile stopover on the [Garden Route](#).

## Plettenberg Bay, Garden Route

The town of **Plettenberg Bay** lies almost on the border of the Western and [Eastern Cape](#). Built on the hillside, most of the town is on a steep slope leading down to the sea, which means that regardless of where you find yourself accommodated, you will be treated to spectacular views of the bay and surrounding hills and mountains.



**Plettenberg Bay** has a relatively long history for a South African town, having been regularly visited by Portuguese explorers during the 15th and 16th centuries. Signs of their visits abound, and history enthusiasts can view artifacts such as the remains of the Gonzales Wreck in the town. Early European settlers to the area arrived in the late 1700's, and have also left behind many fascinating historical relics, for example the Old Rectory, built by the Dutch East India Trading company in 1776, and Forest Hall, a privately owned stately home, built in 1864 by William Henry Newdgate.

In modern times, **Plettenberg Bay** has gained somewhat of a reputation as a pleasure seeker hotspot, and has many leisure activities on offer. From polo at Kurland, to yachting at the Keurbooms River mouth and marina, to less high brow activities like swimming and water sports in the warm, gentle waters. In fact, when you enter the town proper, a monument to one of the symbols of this lush, almost tropical bay greets you: a bronze statue of the dolphins that play in the warm waters just off the coast.

For holiday-makers, [accommodation in Plettenberg Bay](#) is plentiful. From upmarket hotels to budget B&B's, [Plettenberg Bay accommodation](#) is offered in varying price ranges from budget to over the top luxury. You are sure to find a great place to stay.

With miles of pristine beaches to choose from, it's no wonder that lazing on the beach is so popular with visitors, but, for those that manage to pry themselves away, there are charter boat cruises, hiking, canoeing and abseiling to choose from, to name but a few. Another attraction well worth a visit is the Monkeyland

Primate Sanctuary; the world's only multi-species, free roaming primate sanctuary, located a few minutes outside of town.

For the adventurous palate, trips to the Mampoer and Witblits distillery are available, where one can view the making of, and sample, these very strong locally produced alcoholic beverages.

While on the topic of culinary and other indulgences, and while there are many fine restaurants, café's and other eateries to choose from in the town, one of the most memorable must surely be the restaurant at the Beacon Isle Hotel. Built literally straddling a small strip of land between a lagoon and the sea, it almost seems when seated in the restaurant, that the hotel is floating on the water.

For those seeking a once in a lifetime experience, a short trip on the N2 towards [Port Elizabeth](#), and over the border into the [Eastern Cape](#), will bring you to the Bloukrans Bridge. Itself an engineering marvel, this bridge holds another claim to fame. It is the site of the world's highest commercial bungee jump. At 216 meters, or the equivalent of almost 70 storeys, it is definitely not for the faint (or weak hearted) and many may prefer to view the seemingly endless plunge from the purpose built observing platform on the edge of the gorge.

While at the bridge, whether or not you decide to take the plunge, it is worth visiting the Khoisan Village, which offers insights into the lives of the native peoples of the area, as well as opportunities to buy local arts and crafts.

## Tsitsikamma, Eastern Cape

The incredibly beautiful area of land that lies between the Tsitsikamma Mountains and the sea stretches west to the Bloukrans River and east to Eerste River, and is named after the San word that means 'place of abundant water'. The area is like a treasure trove; a crypt overflowing with protected indigenous forest that bears ancient trees like yellowwood, hard pear, stinkwood, and ironwood; fynbos covered landscape and the appearance of entrancing animals and birds, like the shy [Knysna loerie](#).



Described as the 'garden of the garden route', the Tsitsikamma actually deserves a more vivid description to encapsulate the beauty of the place. Far from being a garden, the Tsitsikamma is a place where magic and the ancient have merged to create a fairytale. The Tsitsikamma forest is a huge protected conservation area that supports an incredibly diverse ecosystem. This isn't any forest. It is eons old and trees tower above one as one walks in

the immediate cool and shade their protective cover creates; the floor of the forest an intricate trail of ferns, moss and fragile fungi.

But it is the waters contained in rivers that have carved their way through mountains to create spectacular gorges that have earned the area its unusual name. From these trickle streams that wend their way through vegetation, complete with crystal clear pools that glisten over river pebbles. The deep gorges widen as the rivers make their way to the sea through a series of kloofs and waterfalls. Storms River mouth is one of the most magnificent of these, complete with suspension bridge that spans the mouth and offers visitors incredible views.

## Victoria Bay, Garden Route

**Victoria Bay** (or "Vic Bay" as it is called by those in the know) is one of the smallest bays on the [Garden Route](#). Traveling along the N2 National Road, **Victoria Bay** is 3km off the N2 and situated between [George](#) and [Wilderness](#).

**Victoria Bay** is a special find - small, beautiful beach, almost hidden between George and Wilderness. The Outeniqua Tjoe-Choo steam train passes through Victoria Bay daily, taking passengers on a scenic train ride between George and [Knysna](#).



Basically a cove enclosed by cliffs, Victoria Bay is a small resort made up of a number of cottages clustered around the water front. The gently sloping beach makes bathing safe and big waves from far out give surfers a particularly long ride.

Victoria Bay beach has a safe bathing area and it's own tidal pool and jetty, is also close to some beautiful areas where there are walks and trails for the whole family to enjoy. Victoria Bay Beach is one of the most famous beaches in the vicinity for safe bathing and is ideal for angling and a challenge to top surfers.

There are natural paddling pools amongst the rocks where children can spend many happy hours playing. Young and old can splash about or quietly observe the little fish in the tidal pools.

## NATURE RESERVES IN THE GARDEN ROUTE

### Garden Route National Park, Garden Route

The new Garden Route National Park, established by SANParks and also known as GRNP, spans an impressive 121 000 hectares and includes the existing [Wilderness](#) and [Tsitsikamma national parks](#), the Knysna Lakes area and roughly 52 000 hectares of newly proclaimed land.



Still regarded as 'new' the GRNP was only gazetted in March 2009 and is part of a long-term plan to extend areas in [South Africa](#) under formal protection from 6% to 8% of the country. It is no surprise to learn that the [Garden Route](#) is one of the most important conservation areas in the country in terms of biodiversity and that its sheer beauty attracts a major number of tourists, both local and from overseas.

The Garden Route is regarded as a critical focus area. The Knysna estuary and Wilderness lake areas alone are rated number one and six respectively; it is home to a section of 60 500 hectares of indigenous forest - the largest continuous complex of such forest in the country; and the fynbos of the Garden Route falls within the [Cape Floristic region](#) - a global diversity hotspot.

The Garden Route National Park is so large it falls across both the [Eastern Cape](#) and [Western Cape](#) and brings together a series of tourist facilities that include camping areas, chalets, hiking and mountain bike trails, forest trails, canoeing, diving and other local activities.

The Garden Route National Park is an example of 'conservation without boundaries' and SANParks believes that it is in essence a new conservation model for the country, particularly if you consider the over 1 000 private landowners who border the park and the need to create stewardship programmes that encourage these residents of the Garden Route to help conserve the natural heritage of the area.

## Birds of Eden Bird Sanctuary, Garden Route

The world's largest single span aviary, just a few kilometres east of Plettenberg Bay in the Garden Route, where birds are free to fly free provides an incredible experience for those who visit, and a wonderful way of life for over 2000 previously caged birds.



The completely unique venture of Birds of Eden is an enormous two hectare dome spanning a gorge filled with verdant, indigenous forest. Within it are some 100 species of incredible African birds, a few of them endangered, that provide anyone entering the dome with a literal experience of paradise. There are 1.2 kilometres of wooden walkway to lead you through the beautiful place (unlike Monkey Valley, you don't need a guide to take you through the refuge), over a river and behind a waterfall (part of the sanctuary's mysterious ruin). Birds of Eden's dome emulates thunder storms, complete with renditions of claps of thunder and short cloudbursts from the irrigation system in the dome structure.

The same group of people who created Monkeyland, the popular primate sanctuary that is just next door to Birds of Eden making a two-in-one day trip effortless, were behind the incredible project that provides a safe haven not only for birds and miniature monkeys, but for rehabilitated pet birds too.

But the overwhelming experience of being in the wild with hundreds of birds as they swoop, fly and call around you is what Birds of Eden is essentially about.

The park has seven dams, the largest of which has a floating bridge with seating at which you can order light meals; a 200-seater amphitheatre and a breath-taking canopy walk.

## Boosmansbos Wilderness Area, Garden Route

Boosmansbos Wilderness Area - Pincushion, part of the Protea family indigenous to South Africa.



West of Swellendam and north east of Heidelberg lies a large area of wilderness known as Boosmansbos (angry man's forest) apparently named after a hermit who lived around here early in the 19th century and who scared away anyone who came even close to the beehives he kept here.

Boosmansbos Wilderness Area lies in the beautiful Langeberg Mountains, over 14 000 hectares that is, in turn, part of the [Grootvadersbosch Nature Reserve](#). It is regarded as a hiker's domain, a great space in which to scale peaks to reach views that are virtually unsurpassable, if clambering up and down the peaks here is your thing. Certainly Grootberg is the highest peak in Boosmansbos at 1 637 metres, and because the wilderness area has escaped the notice of most people, the 70 or so kilometres of footpaths and roads are virtually uninhabited

and allow one an uninterrupted commune with nature at its best.

The best sites though are off the beaten track and 'bundu-bashing' (beating your own path through the terrain) is a pre-requisite if you're after more interesting views, forests and kloofs. Hikers who venture forth for overnight hikes can choose from either simple overnight huts or simply sleeping under the stars.

But it is the indigenous kloof forests and the Cape fynbos that steal the limelight at Boosmansbos. The forest is what remains of an old indigenous kloof forest within Cape montane fynbos set on the slopes of Grootberg. Stinkwoods, yellowwoods, Cape holly, red alder and beech lie side-by-side with white alder and candlewood trees, and, if you're a tree-spotter, there is a section of mountain cypress - one of few indigenous softwoods in the country - growing on a neighbouring ridge.

## Featherbed Nature Reserve, Garden Route

A Natural Heritage site, the Featherbed Nature Reserve in Knysna is an utterly unique privately owned reserve that lies on the Western Head of the famous landmarks known as 'The heads' in Knysna, accessible only by ferry.



Many people make a day of it, catching the ferry across the lagoon, going on a drive or walk through the reserve followed by a picnic under milkwood trees, in the hopes of sighting the beautiful green, but rather elusive, [Knysna Loerie](#). This and the other popular [Garden Route](#) icon, the [blue duiker](#) - one of the smallest and most endangered of the antelope species, which is not only found on the Featherbed reserve but is also part of a breeding programme here.

The Knysna Heads are two enormous sandstone cliffs that stand like sentries on either side of the entrance to the Knysna Lagoon from the sea. They're a famous landmark and locals speak about them as 'the Heads'. The Featherbed Nature Reserve's main function is to protect the natural beauty of what remains of the indigenous beauty of Knysna. The number of visitors are restricted and visits are only allowed if you are with one of the reserve's guides. The walk through the milkwood forests onto the sheer sandstone cliffs and into sea caves, known as 'beachcomber caves' that used to be the stamping ground of the Khoi Khoi is one of the highlights.

The Featherbed Nature Reserve was 25 years old in 2008. The good news is that despite the fact that it was recently sold by well-known television teacher William Smith, the new owner was carefully selected and intends maintaining the reserve as is.

**Additional Reading:** If you are considering a visit to the Garden Route then you may find this article helpful - "[Visit to Featherbed Nature Reserve](#)".

## Formosa Nature Reserve, Garden Route

Just north of Nature's Valley, between the towns of Kareedouw and Misgund, the **Formosa Nature Reserve** lies inland of what is arguably the most beautiful stretch of coastline in the country - the [Garden Route](#). The Formosa Nature Reserve probably got its title from Bartholomew Dias, as early as 1488, when he named the peaks that surround Plettenberg Bay 'Pic Formosa'. The Formosa peak remains the highest peak in the Tsitsikamma range of mountains today and is one of the major attractions of the reserve.



The 5 000 hectare reserve, which includes the Tsitsikamma Mountains within its range, is described as 'beautifully wild' and little is written about it, ensuring its obscurity and making it high on the itinerary list of anyone who enjoys the solitude of a reserve seldom disturbed. There are no formal hikes in the reserve, which doesn't stop walkers of all description heading out here to amble along informal paths and trek towards the famous peak. Whilst a flourishing [bird life](#) attracts birders to the reserve, which is dominated mainly by mountain forest and wet fynbos.

One could spend days in the area surrounded only by the wild, as the long stretch of the Formosa Nature Reserve lies almost midway between the [Tsitsikamma National Park](#), Nature's Valley, and the [Baviaanskloof Wilderness Area](#). Just north of Formosa Nature Reserve lies a short stretch of [Route 62](#), best likened to America's Route 66, which strings together the little towns of [Kareedouw](#), Kammiebos, [Loubertina](#), Louterwater, Misgund and Haarlem - a group of beautifully preserved villages that have suffered little from remaining in hibernation awaiting re-discovery.

## Gondwana Private Game Reserve, Garden Route

Along the [Garden Route](#) of [South Africa](#) just 4 hours from [Cape Town](#) you will find 11 000 hectares of indigenous fynbos and free roaming big 5 game, home to the lion, black rhinoceros, eland, red hartebeest, endangered Cape Mountain Zebra, springbok, kudu, as well as elephant, among others. The unique vegetation on the reserve consists of both Fynbos and grass plains which is arguably the most beautiful in the world. The Fynbos resembles wild flowers and is endemic to the [Western Cape](#) which is found nowhere else in the world. Here you will find species such as Proteas, Erica's, and Restios which provide much colour and beauty to the reserve.



The Gondwana reserve gets its name from the original land mass that existed one hundred and twenty million years ago called "Gondwanaland". Africa was formed after this Land mass broke up into different continents. The last bit of visible evidence of the 100 million year old land mass is the Outeniqua and Swartberg mountain ranges which surround the reserve. When the reserve was developed much care and consideration was taken in reducing the impact on the environment and kept areas of indigenous vegetation protected and untouched. Processes are in place to remove all alien invasive plants that may harm this natural vegetation. The water system and supply at Gondwana is completely self-sufficient as it uses its own streams and has water restrictions in place.

Before the development of the reserve, it was home to three sheep and cattle farms and was chosen for its conservation value and viability to support wildlife. By developing the reserve, Gondwana contributes to the conservation of the critically endangered fynbos species such as Renoster thicket and Blanco Fynbos Renosterveld.

## Goukamma Nature Reserve, Garden Route

The glorious Goukamma Nature Reserve is one of those unrivalled hideaways that, despite being on the popular [Garden Route](#), manages to remain relatively obscure and unknown - a treasure trove near the mouth of the Goukamma River.



Goukamma Nature and Marine Reserve, just 20 kilometres west of Knysna, is an area of about 2500 hectares that includes a 14 kilometre coastline that extends from Buffalo Bay to just outside Sedgfield, and 1 nautical mile seawards.

Staying here affords one access to a long, protected beach, an extensive dune field that boasts some of the highest vegetated dunes in the country, the Goukamma River and estuary and the curious Groenvlei Lake that lies effortlessly self-contained, without a link to the sea or an inflowing river.

The Goukamma reserve is rich with coastal fynbos and coastal forest; the dune forest thick with milkwood, yellowwood and candlewood trees and the protected marine area an invitation to bottle-nosed and common dolphins which relish the surf, devoid as it is of ski-boats and spearfishermen. Boat-based and shore-based [whale watching](#) is a joy during the whale season between July and October.

Goukamma's weather is also relatively unique - there is no cold wet or dry season, although rainfall is higher in spring and autumn - and as a result, fairly unpredictable with even the odd cold day in summer and an equal chance of warm days in the middle of winter. There are day trails within the reserve, swimming in the sea and river are permissible, canoe trips up the river are a delight, whilst the lake offers some of the best bass-fishing in [South Africa](#).

## Keurbooms River Nature Reserve, Garden Route

Head off towards [Nature's Valley](#) from [Plettenberg Bay](#) on the N2 and Keurbooms River Nature Valley lies roughly 8 km along the major route of the N2.



The beautiful Keurbooms River nature reserve that stretches over a distance of 2500 hectares, is bisected by the Keurbooms River and overlooks the estuary. Despite the fact that the estuary below the N2 bridge falls outside of the boundaries of the reserve, it remains one of the finest examples of a tidal river mouth the [Garden Route](#) has to offer. The easily accessible Keurbooms River estuary gives no indication of the incredibly convoluted journey of the mother river, which winds its way downstream from its source in the Langkloof, north of the main [Tsitsikamma](#) Mountain range. It wends its way between mountain valleys providing a spectacular, unspoilt gorge within the reserve well

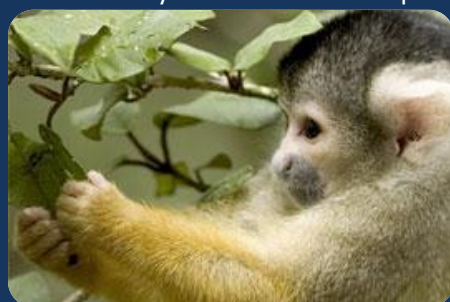
worth visiting.

The banks of the Keurbooms River are lined with dense afro-montane forests of stinkwood, yellowwood, ironwood, and the western keurboom, after which the reserve is named. The Keurbooms River reserve is home to a wonderful display of [birds](#) - including the Knysna lourie, giant kingfisher, Knysna woodpecker and an array of sunbirds - wild pigs, monkeys, [blue duiker](#), mongoose, the Cape clawless otter and antelope.

One can either hike along the river (roughly one hour) or canoe upstream for the opportunity of a quiet and soulful commune with nature. No power boats are allowed upstream beyond the 4 km mark providing calm, quiet waters marred only by the call of birds and the subtle voice of the forest.

## Monkeyland Primate Sanctuary, Garden Route

Monkeyland is the world's first free-roaming multi-species primate sanctuary. Monkeyland, is unique in that the sanctuary caters for several species of primate, and they are not caged, they are free to move about the forest, and do so in harmony.



Monkeyland Primate Sanctuary is a modern primate sanctuary established in a pristine natural high canopy forest which is well suited to those primates fortunate enough to live there. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the sanctuary is that it is both a multi



specie and free-roaming facility. Monkeyland which is only three years old, is totally self sustaining from the revenue it derives from tourism, this revenue is generated by taking visitors out on monkey safaris, and these safaris are conducted by enthusiastic rangers. The safaris which are fun and exciting, are also educational and generally result in our guests leaving the sanctuary with a whole new focus on the primates of the world and the problems they are facing.

Monkeyland has through the establishment of the Touch a Monkeys Heart Foundation; a non-profit organisation or as they are better known in South Africa, a Section 21 Company, secured the future of all the primates which reach Monkeyland.

Over and above being the sole custodian of all the primates at Monkeyland, The Foundation is also responsible for the development and implementation of The Eden Syndrome, which is the process used at Monkeyland to prepare previously caged primates for their eventual release into the sanctuary.

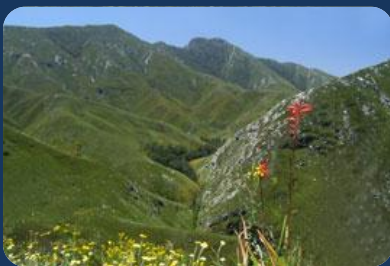
Possibly the important aspect emanating from the existence of the sanctuary, is that Monkeyland is a living example that these wonderful creatures can be kept in an almost wild state. From this must surely come the realisation that re-introducing primates to their habitats of origin from this wilder state must stand a far greater chance of success as a result.

Lunch in the lively forest of Monkeyland is a unique experience. It is the only eating spot in the world where you can actually sip your coffee while you watch a large variety of primates, from all over the world, playing - enjoying their new-found freedom.

Entrance to Monkeyland is free, however there is a fee for the guided safaris. Note that these guided safaris are open ended which means that one may go on as many safaris as you wish, in a given day, having only paid for the first excursion. A visit to Monkeyland is a must for every local resident of, and visitor to The Garden Route. So swing by visit this awesome monkey kingdom..

## **Outeniqua Nature Reserve, Garden Route**

Not far from George on the [Garden Route](#), the Outeniqua Nature Reserve lies in the heart of the Outeniqua Mountains, its 38 000 hectares divided up over the impressively solid barrier that separates the high rainfall, and subsequent abundance of the Garden Route, from the miraculously contrasting and arid [Little Karoo](#).



And the mountains themselves follow suite - the southern slopes that gently roll towards the coastline enjoy bounteous mountain fynbos interspersed with pockets of indigenous forest in the gorges, whilst the side that leads into the hinterland of the Little Karoo with the Swartberg in the distance, is home to hardy succulents and other sturdy plants that withstand the almost desert conditions of this beautiful part of the country.

Five passes cross the reserve, and ten hiking trails, lead along the mountain face of the Outeniqua with incredible views over land and sea.

There is a lot of history in these hikes and markers of some of the initial trails, which would have been used by settlers and explorers in ox-wagons, are carved on rocks; a sharp indicator of just how difficult it was to cross what must have seemed like an enormous obstacle back then.

Three overnight trails include the Tierkop Hiking Trail, the 35 kilometre Attakwaskloff Trail (more arduous), and the Doring River Wilderness Trail, advisable only for seasoned hikers. This 117 kilometre trail travels the

length of the Outeniqua Nature Reserve and runs over a week, although it can be shortened. There are also shorter hikes that take hours, as opposed to days, and are more enjoyable for day visitors.

## Robberg Nature Reserve, Garden Route

Just outside [Plettenberg Bay](#) on the [Garden Route](#) is a beautiful, remote rocky peninsula touted as the most popular walking destination in and around Plettenberg Bay. Robberg Nature Reserve is a charged booster of outdoor living - incredible scenery, views over shoreline and sea, a thriving Cape fur seal colony, a huge diversity of bird life, and uniquely beautiful fynbos.



You have access to three trails that range from 45 minutes to 5 hours and 11 kilometres in length - a moderately strenuous (most of it is flat, and relatively easy going) circular walk that leads one right to the Robberg point - not advisable with little ones or at high tide, however.

Robberg Nature Reserve is a marine reserve and national monument roughly 4 kilometres in length that sweeps out into the ocean, something like a mini Cape peninsular. Rocks here date back to the early Cretaceous period - roughly 110 million years old - and during the whale season the point is an ideal place to spot whales and dolphins.

Another way of seeing Robberg is to [sea kayak](#), with an experienced guide, from Central beach in Plettenberg Bay to the nature reserve. This exciting and certainly alternative way of seeing the peninsular from the sea gives one up close and personal encounters with the resident seal colony. From the sea, Robberg's other secrets - its caves and rock faces that relay a story of their own, having stood the test of time against strong head winds and strong sea currents.