

THE GREAT CAPE ESCAPE

Table Mountain National Park covers 25 000 hectares from Table Mountain to the Cape of Good Hope at the southern-most tip of the Peninsula, and offers superb accommodation that lets you get away from it all, close to the city

WORDS AND PICTURES DALE R MORRIS

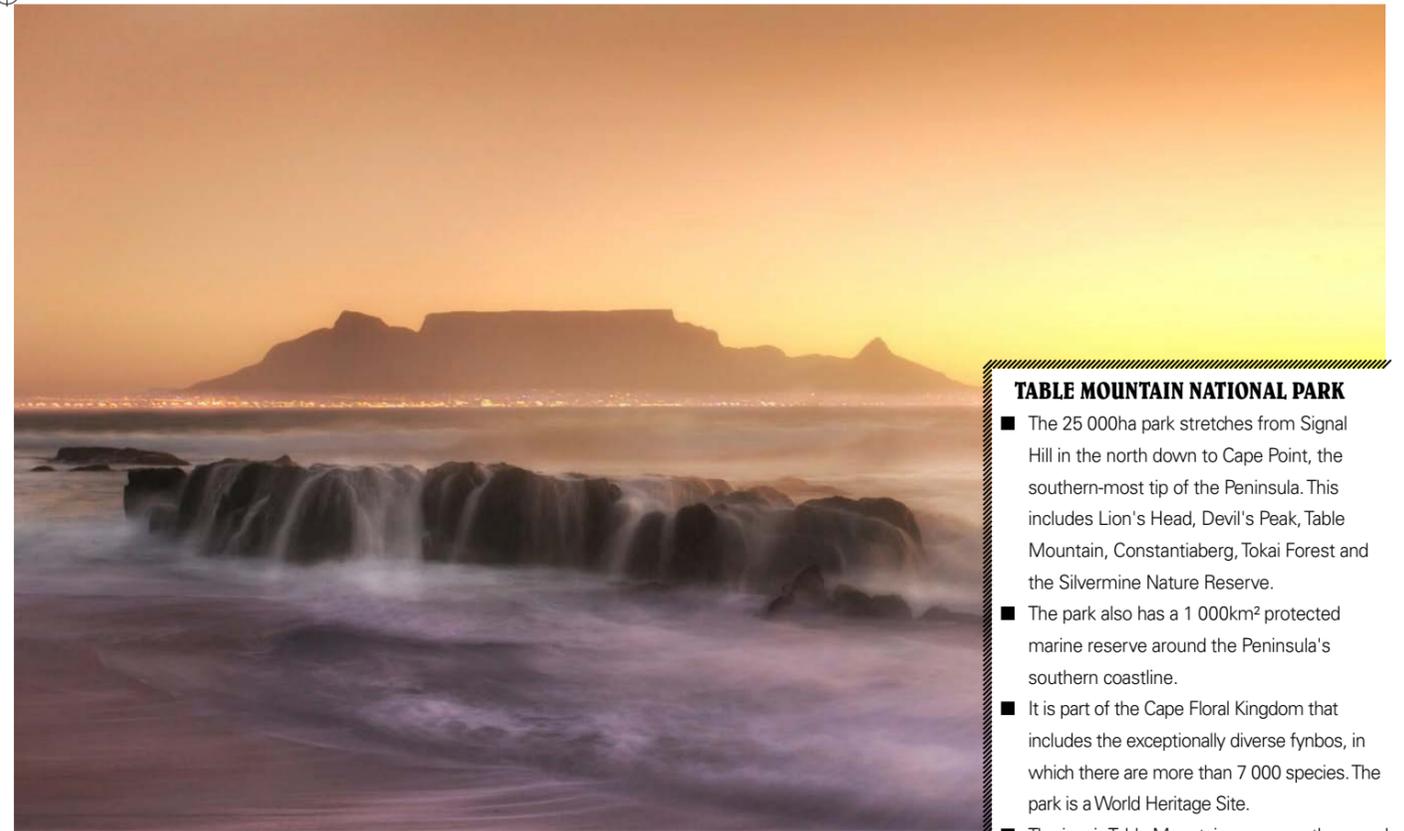


TABLE MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

- The 25 000ha park stretches from Signal Hill in the north down to Cape Point, the southern-most tip of the Peninsula. This includes Lion's Head, Devil's Peak, Table Mountain, Constantiaberg, Tokai Forest and the Silvermine Nature Reserve.
- The park also has a 1 000km² protected marine reserve around the Peninsula's southern coastline.
- It is part of the Cape Floral Kingdom that includes the exceptionally diverse fynbos, in which there are more than 7 000 species. The park is a World Heritage Site.
- The iconic Table Mountain was recently named one of the world's New 7 Wonders of Nature.
- The park is divided into three sections, each separated by developed areas:

Table Mountain, Silvermine-Tokai and Cape Point



It was early morning on the Cape of Good Hope. The sun wasn't up yet but the sky was already softly aglow, a misty pink and yellow. An ethereal fog swirled over the fynbos, creating a low-slung cloud bank out of which rose an archipelago of hills and mountain tops. It looked like a sea of ghosts from where I stood on a rock, on a hiking trail in the heart of Table Mountain National Park (TMNP).

All around, dewdrops glistened on proteas and ericas, cobwebs, mosses and the wings of dragonflies. But suddenly the serenity was broken by a column of rare mountain zebras, making all manner of noises as they scoffed their breakfast. 'Isn't Nature elegant?' I thought to myself while trying to snap a photo or two. The noise of my shutter caused them to jump, and I winced, expecting them to bolt like bullets, but instead they returned, unconcerned, to tuck in to the fynbos.

TMNP receives around 800 000 visitors each year, and, as such, these zebras were obviously used to seeing humans on their property, but not that often at this ungodly hour of the morning.

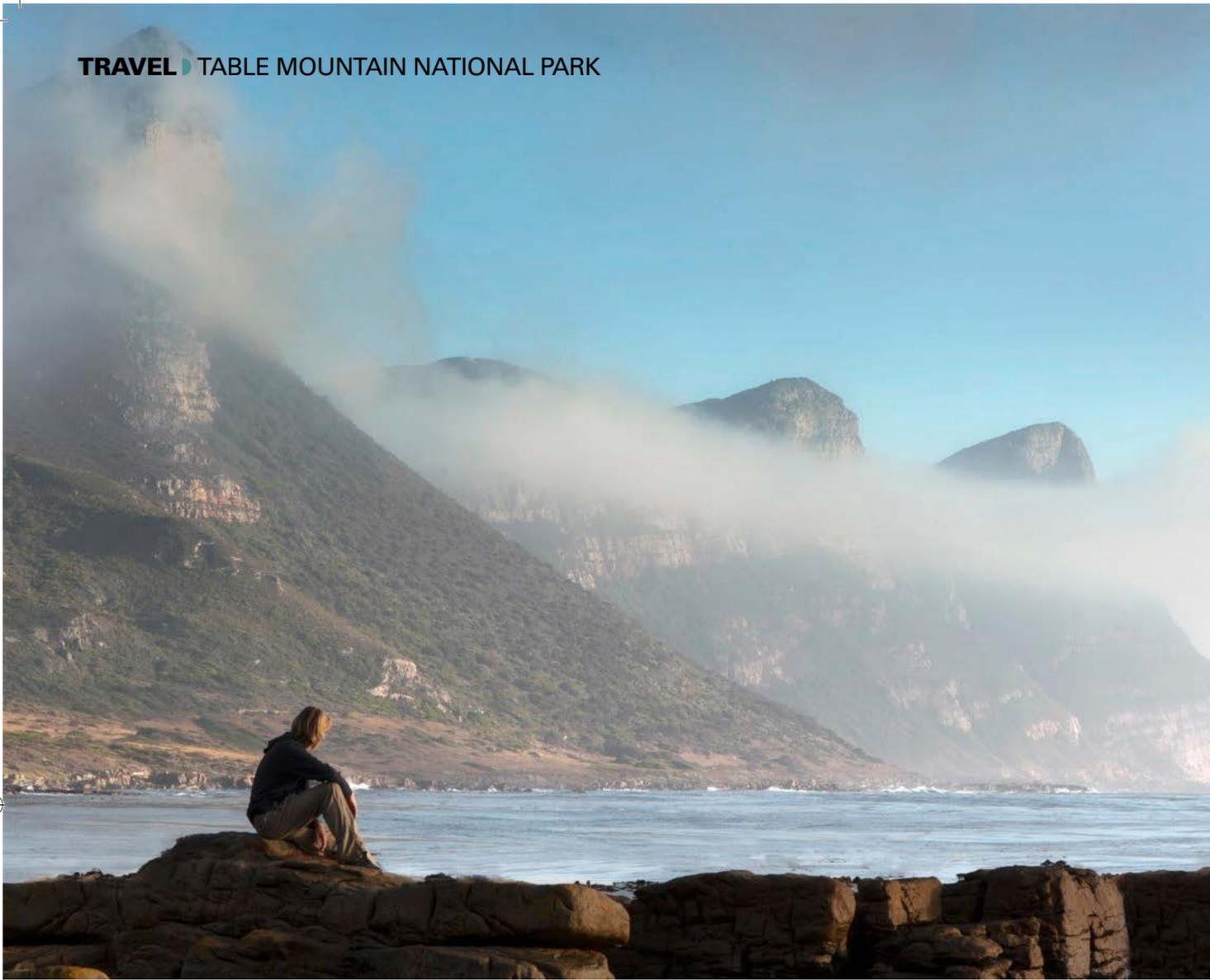
It's a privilege to be alone in such magnificent landscapes as those found in TMNP. The previous night I had stayed at the cosy and comfortable Duiker Cottage, the SANParks self-catering accommodation

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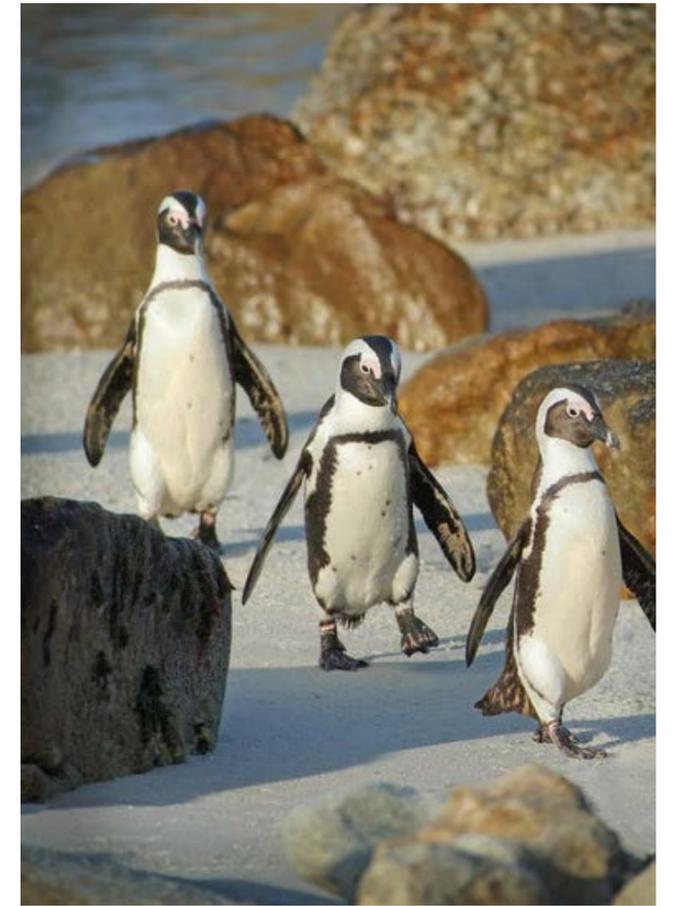
in the heart of the Cape Point section of the park. It's a cute little place, surrounded by hills and scrub, and it's a great central base for exploring the southern part of the Peninsula and park early in the morning, before the public gates are opened. There was no one else around, the roads were empty and, as such, I had a few privileged hours of feeling like I had the whole of Table Mountain National Park to myself. Magic.

While visiting here you certainly won't see elephants, tigers or polar bears but there are thousands of flowering plants, lots of small game species (hyrax, birds, reptiles) and, at Boulders Beach, one of the most important penguin breeding colonies in the world.

There are no fewer than ten accommodation options throughout TMNP, all situated in superb locations – four luxury campsites (with tents, lapas, kitchens and hot showers), five restored cottages (all with a unique character), a luxury beach house and the old Overseer's Cottage high up on Table Mountain. You could easily spend a week



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here, and, in the process, have an alternative holiday in Cape Town.

During the evening, as I relaxed with my friends and family on the stoep of Duiker Cottage, we all commented on the serenity of this very special place. The only sounds were of the wind in the restios and an unseen Nightjar singing beyond the reach of our

scenery surrounding Platteklip. Unusual accommodation, it's tall and modern, decorated with a colourful African flare. You reach it via suburban streets, and it is the one lodging in the park that doesn't give you the impression of being miles away from anywhere. But it's a top location for quickly reaching the city centre and the Waterfront,

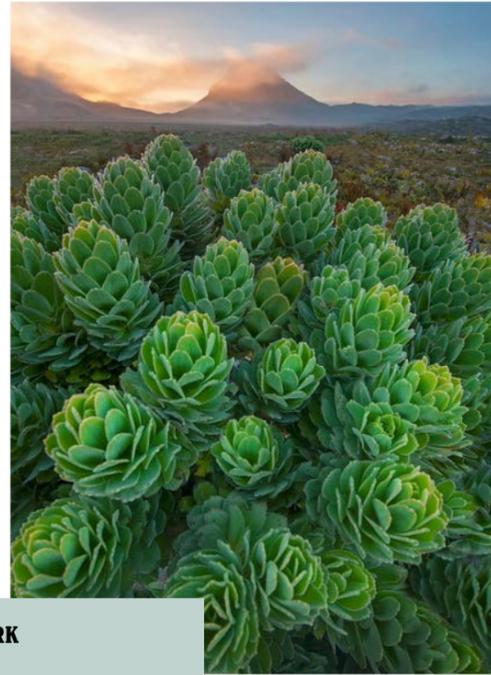
“ I spent a day, as one should, atop the magnificent Table Mountain, gawping at sensational 360° degree views

torch beams. A zebra or bontebok snorted in the darkness, sounding for all the world like a kid with a cold. No light pollution spoiled the star-filled sky, and we felt stranded in the middle of nowhere. Indeed it was hard to reconcile this with the fact that bustling Cape Town was around the corner.

On the edge of the city bowl, the self-catering Platteklip Wash House is most intriguing. Behind looms the iconic rock face of Table Mountain, ahead the bustling CBD rises in sharp contrast to the natural

and it's a skip from the world-famous Table Mountain Cable Car. And, as close as it is to the hubbub, at night the sound of rustling leaves and mountain streams all but drowns out those of the city.

When staying at the Wash House (so named because it was a laundrette during the colonial era) I spent a day, as one should, atop the magnificent Table Mountain, gawping at sensational 360° degree views (luckily the table didn't have on its cloth of cloud.) Tourists have free reign at the top and can



USEFUL INFO

Price enquires and bookings can be done through www.sanparks.org
 To book a **tented camp**, or the **Platterklip Wash House** and **Overseers Cottage** use the following contact information 021 712 7471
hoerikwaggobookings@sanparks.org
Eland, Duiker and Olifantsbos cottages can be booked through the Bufflesfontain Visitor center 021 780 9204 musam@sanparks.org
Wood owl Cottage can be booked through the following contacts 021 712 2337 jo.kruger@sanparks.org

join a number of hikes and rambles, some steep and treacherous, others flat and mellow. A restaurant at the top will keep you fuelled, perhaps long enough to watch the sun go out and the city lights come on, and catch the last cable car that descends well after sunset.

In the park there are four tented camps, where the tents are more akin to those luxury five-star safari affairs at upmarket African bush lodges. I stayed at Smitswinkel Tented Camp, near the park's main entrance and a fifteen minute scenic drive from the Penguins of Boulders Beach. It's a great place to base yourself if you want quick and easy access to the Cape of Good Hope and the magnificent rocky coastline that characterises this region of the park. The camp is a very plush affair that consists of six, luxury two-man safari tents with en suite bathrooms and comfortable beds. Each tent is very private and has its own sheltered deck and a walkway leading to the ultra-plush, communal dining house and braai area. It's a beautiful building of sculpted wood and Mayan brick design, and is a fantastic place for a peaceful braai and an early morning start on some of the parks most scenic southern hiking trails.

Last but not least, I travelled to Constantiaberg, past the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden to the Silvermine-Tokai section of the park, where I stayed in the self-catering, spacious and luxurious Wood Owl Cottage. A typical whitewashed Cape cottage (fortified with electric fencing to keep out the baboons) it's surrounded by forests and mountains and is a lovely location from which to explore the world famous Tokai Arboretum. This amalgamation of trees from across the world, now a huge woodland that is home to numerous hiking and cycling trails, was started in the 1880s as part of a forestry experiment.

Sadly my night at Wood Owl, a night of forest scents, barking baboons and hooting owls, was the last of a stay that turned into a delightfully alternative way to enjoy a trip to Cape Town. And with another six accommodation options that I missed this time around, I'll be sure to head back as soon as I can. ■

Map reference G2, see inside back cover



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ACCOMMODATION IN THE PARK

Cape Point Section:

Smitswinkel Tented Camp. This is fully equipped, with private two-man tents, a communal kitchen and braai area. Bring own bedding.

Duiker Cottage. Fully equipped, it sleeps six and is in the middle of the Peninsula.

Eland Cottage next door to Duiker Cottage is fully equipped and sleeps six.

Olifantsbos Guest House is a fully equipped, luxury, solar-powered cottage close to the beach in the quietest southern part of the Peninsula. It has three double rooms.

Slangkop Tented Camp close to Kommetjie is situated in a milkwood forest, but is close to shops and the beach. Fully equipped, it has private two-man tents and a communal kitchen and braai area. Bring your own bedding.

Silvermine-Tokai Section:

Wood Owl Cottage in the Tokai Forest is fully equipped, with three double bedrooms.

Silvermine Tented Camp is situated in mountainous fynbos scenery, and offers a series of two-man tents plus a communal area. It's fully equipped but bring your own bedding.

Table Mountain Section:

Platterklip Wash House has several fully equipped, self-contained units that sleep four comfortably, with an outdoor braai and garden.

Orange Kloof Tented Camp is close to Hout Bay, in a limited access area of indigenous forest. It is fully equipped and has two-man tents and communal areas, but bring your own bedding.

Overseers Cottage high on the slopes of Table Mountain is designed to be walked to, but baggage portaging can be arranged. It sleeps up to 16 and is fully equipped.

