



MARINE PARK Scuba divers will discover an underwater paradise along this protected coastline.

A FORTNIGHT OF fun

Who better than a local to spill the beans about a park's lesser-known attractions? **Dale R Morris'** day-by-day itinerary for 14 days' holiday in the Garden Route National Park reveals where to go and what to do.

There are more than enough activities and accommodation in the various sections of the Garden Route National Park to keep you happy for a fortnight. Stay in a forest cabin or a tent or on a boat, and use the park as a base from which to explore forest trails, mountains, riverbanks, beaches and lakes. Go hiking and biking and then chill with the family on a beach and eat ice cream. This is a blueprint for a trip through the national park with its unconnected forest reserves, waterways and other State-owned lands.



Dolphin's Point is just outside Wilderness.

DAY 1 Start in the western extreme of the park, in the foothills of the Outeniqua mountains, on the old forested back road between George and Wilderness Heights. Not many know that behind the George campus of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University there is the superb Groeneweide loop trail. There are three lengths (9, 11 and 13 km) that mostly

traverse dense evergreen Afromontane forests. In summer, take a dip in the waterholes and rivers.

The old *bos pad* road, with its charming stone bridges and forest mountain views, is an absolute treat to drive, so when you have finished hiking the Groeneweide, don't go on to Wilderness on the N2 but rather take this slower but prettier back route.

Stop just outside of Wilderness at Dolphin's Point. This viewpoint and picnic stop on the highway offers commanding views over Wilderness beach and the lakes and lagoons. The ocean below is a haven for dolphins and whales, and they are often sighted there. In my opinion, the best way to experience this is from the swinging hammock of a tandem paraglider. There's nothing quite so exhilarating or as magical as seeing whales below while you fly through the sky on a silent sheet of canvas.

DAY 2 Accommodation in Wilderness comes courtesy of the Ebb and Flow rest camp, a rambling riverside complex with everything from tent sites to fully equipped family units. From here I like to rent a canoe and paddle up the beautiful forest-edged Touw River and then hike for several kilometres beneath the canopy to a lovely little waterfall.

There are a number of easy hikes near the camp, including the Half Collared, Giant, Pied and Brown Hooded Kingfisher trails. If you don't fancy walking, you can hire an all-terrain, battery-driven Segway and go on a guided tour through some of the flatter fynbos and lakeside locations. You may look a little silly, standing upright with a helmet on your head, driving a two-wheeled contraption, but it is surprisingly good fun.

DAY 3 You won't see a soul all day, except perhaps for oystercatchers and cormorants, if you hike from the Touw River estuary and traverse the entirety of Wilderness beach, past sandstone cliffs, all the way to the rocky outcrop of Gericke's Point and beyond to Sedgefield. If you think 19km of sand might be a bit much for the ankles, you can shave a few kilometres off by starting at the small coastal village of Klein Krantz.

DAY 4 A worthwhile excursion is the close-by Cape Dune Molerat trail, a scarcely visited 3 km loop through fynbos and lakeside grasslands. You are unlikely to see a molerat, because they are always underground, but you will find yourself falling down their holes from time to time. The lakeside road that takes you there from the Ebb and Flow campsite has three very worthwhile bird hides to pause at en route.



Towering yellowwoods in Garden Route National Park.

DAY 5 To reach the Knysna section of the park, I prefer to take the Seven Passes road, a winding and stunningly scenic route that runs parallel to the less interesting though faster N2 highway. On the way, stop off at the Woodville Big Tree, an 850-year-old giant yellowwood, and partake in an easy 2 km forest loop hike.

FLAGSHIP HIKES

 **Outeniqua Trail**
8-night, 105 km route that sees you traipsing through some of the most amazing mountain landscapes in the country, overnighting in hiker's huts. There's a guiding and portaging service for those who hate to carry backpacks.

 **Garden Route Trail**
4-day, fully catered and guided slackpack hike that traverses the best parts of the Wilderness Section of the Garden Route National Park and the adjacent CapeNature Goukamma reserve.

 **Dolphin Trail**
3-night slackpacking alternative that takes in similar scenery to the Otter Trail yet treats you to comfy hotels, high-class dining and even a hot tub.

 **Otter Trail**
5-day odyssey along what is one of the world's most scenic stretches of coastline. Backpacking to these rustic huts takes you far from the crowds.



SCULPTED BY NATURE Wind and waves have carved shapes into the rocks.

DAY 6 Visit the Millwood and Diepwalle forest stations where you should take time out for the steep 3,5 km Drupkelders hiking trail. This is another of those little-known Garden Route National Park secrets, a forested kloof with the most beautiful tannin-stained swimming hole at the bottom. Pack a lunch and your swimsuit. The kids will truly love it. Get your permits at the Goudveld Entrance boom or from the SANParks office on Thesen Island, Knysna.

DAY 7 The earthy, moss-covered forests above Knysna literally ooze history and here you will find gold mine tunnels dating back to the 18th century. Generations of log cutters also lived here with their families. If you want to find out more about them, visit the small museum at Diepwalle forestry station or opt for a guided full day 4x4 excursion with local historian Dennis Carlisle. Included in his day trip is a traditional meal prepared by caterers from a local forestry community.

Elephants still exist in these deep and secretive Knysna forests but, like phantoms, they remain elusive and are rarely seen. There are three 'elephant' forest trails commencing at Diepwalle and although you are unlikely to encounter one of these elusive beasts, you might find evidence of them in dung, broken branches and footprints.

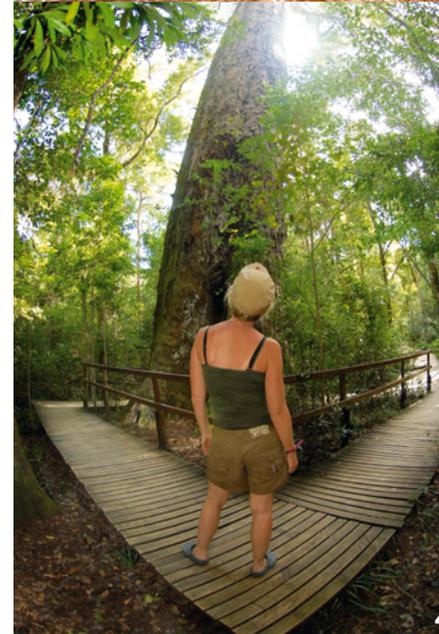
I like nothing more than to wake up early in the morning from one of the Diepwalle fully equipped tented decks and go for a hike in the hopes of finding an ellie. It's not happened yet, but I'll keep on trying. Even if I never see one, it's always lovely to be in an Afromontane forest for the dawn chorus.

Bring supplies for a braai or eat at the basic but pleasant Diepwalle Tea Garden. Pretty locations such as Jubilee Creek picnic area and the King Edward big tree are ideal for day outings.

DAY 8 If you have a mountain bike, the 19 km circular Homtini track out of Millwood winds through indigenous forests and pine plantations and has commanding views of the surrounding mountains. But if you're a lazy biker, there's always the awesome Petrus-se-brand route, a 23 km downhill forest ride commencing at Diepwalle station and ending at the Garden of Eden on the N2 highway.

At the Garden of Eden, a boardwalk in the forest suitable for wheelchairs, you can pick up an additional four mountain-bike rides that traverse the Harkerville forest section, a place of giant trees draped in mosses and ferns. Take the Green or Red route to ride seriously dramatic paths atop coastal cliffs that plummet into a sea alive with giant waves and, in winter, whales. A new circuit is due to open before the end of 2015, so make sure you bring a bike or hire one from the Harkerville village.

1. Little cabin in the woods ... the forest huts in Nature's Valley sleep two people.
2. A dassie basks in the sun next to the boardwalks at Storms River Mouth.
3. Explore on Segways in the Wilderness section.
4. Wheelchair-friendly boardwalks in the Garden of Eden take you past some of Knysna's most impressive trees.
5. Follow in the footsteps of Knysna's forest elephants on one of three trails starting at Diepwalle.
6. Overnight in the forest and get roused by the dawn chorus when you stay at Diepwalle Camping Decks.
7. The crashing waves along the Tsitsikamma coast make for spectacular photos.
8. Stay in an oceanette at Storms River Mouth and you'll fall asleep to the roar of the ocean.
9. Harkerville Forest offers a choice of mountain-bike trails, from easy to expert.



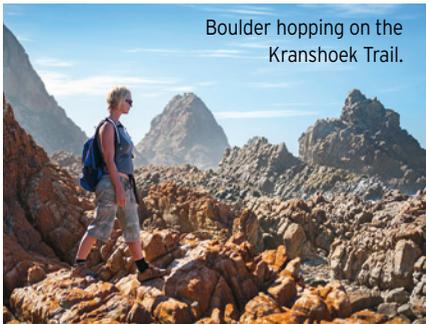
■ PARK IN THE SPOTLIGHT

DAY
9/10

Hikers have a lot of choices in Harkerville, with several well-signposted day walks departing from the Kranshoek viewpoint and braai spot. The views are to die for (especially if you're taking selfies on the edge of a cliff).

The little-known, two-day Kranshoek path is the cream of the hiking trail crop in the Garden Route National Park. Although it's certainly not for sissies, what with chain bridges, crashing waves and precipitous drops, the rugged scenery makes this one of the most beautiful hikes in the country. Accommodation is provided in a pleasant hiker's hut.

Other places to stay include the luxurious self-catering Harkerville Tree-top Chalet that lies secreted away in the canopy of the indigenous forest. For those who like being out on the water, fully equipped houseboats are available to rent from Knysna quay. A day and a night spent out on the lagoon is a seriously fun and romantic thing to do, and much more adventurous than a hotel.



Boulder hopping on the Kranshoek Trail.

DAY
11/12

Next in line, after passing through Plettenberg Bay on the N2, is the Nature's Valley section of the park. This is a beautiful area of forests, lagoons, hills and beaches with a quaint little residential suburb in its folds. The Nature's Valley rest camp has facilities for tents as well as self-catering log cottages and larger family units. If you stay here, you get to use the canoes for free. It's an ideal beach and braai destination with plenty of hiking trails encompassing beach, deep forests and fynbos routes.



On the Storms River there's the chance to try cliff jumping with Untouched Adventures.

DAY
13

Proceed to Storms River in the Tsitsikamma area, the most easterly section of the park and world famous for its rugged coastline and hiking trails. The Otter and Dolphin trails both start from here. Accommodation options are numerous with caravan sites, cottages and honeymoon suites, all of which have awe-inspiring views across an ocean that rages with some of the biggest waves you are ever likely to see.

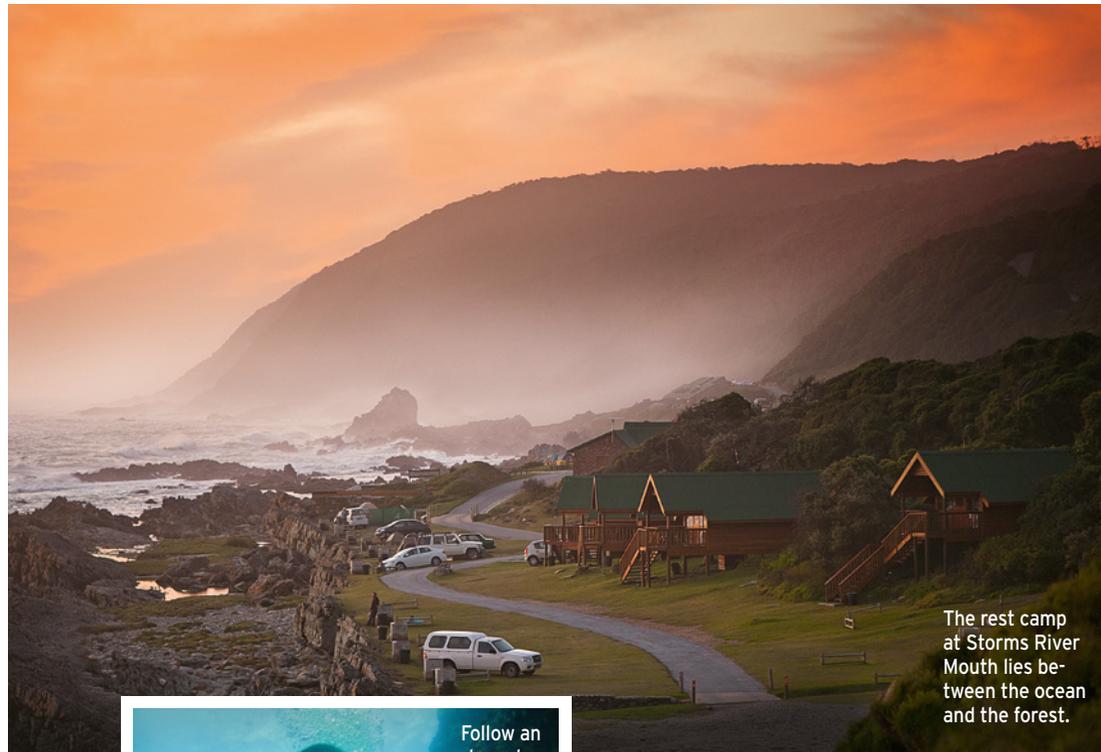
For a taste of the Otter Trail, head west of the rest camp and hike to the superb waterfall right on the coast. Alternatively take a twice-daily boat trip up the Storms River valley, a stunningly narrow and steep-sided kloof.

For an adrenalin fix visit the Untouched Adventures company, which has a kiosk right next to the Cattle Baron Restaurant in the heart of the park. I went with them on a fun and thrilling canoe trip part way up the Storms River until eventually the water became too shallow to paddle further. We then climbed onto inflatable lilos and swam up into a gorgeous waterhole, set between tall and narrow cliffs festooned in forests. An otter followed us all the way.



An otter followed us as we made our way between tall and narrow cliffs.

PADDLE AWAY
Explore Storms
River Gorge on a
combined kayak-
lilo trip.



The rest camp at Storms River Mouth lies between the ocean and the forest.



Follow an underwater trail to learn more about the coast.

DAY 14 In summer, you can rent snorkel equipment or even go scuba diving on what must surely be the only designated underwater trail in the world. If you get lucky, you might spot stingrays and ragged toothed sharks.

Lastly, go black-water tubing from Storms River village and drift for kilometre after kilometre through sheer-sided gorges, so narrow in some areas that, with outstretched arms, you can touch both sides. The full-day trip, which includes a picnic lunch, terminates at the Storms River mouth.

There's so much to do, you'll never have enough time. So you'll just have to come back again... and again, and again. 🐾

TRIP PLANNER

Getting there The Garden Route National Park stretches from Wilderness (500km from Cape Town) to Tsitsikamma (200km from Port Elizabeth). The closest airport is George.

Accommodation From rustic camping and forest huts to eco cabins and luxury chalets, the choice is yours. Booking 012-428-9111, www.sanparks.org

CONTACTS

- www.gardenrouteadventureguide.com
- www.cloudbase-paragliding.co.za
- www.dolphinparagliding.co.za
- www.segwayfun.co.za
- www.gardenroutetrail.co.za
- www.dolphintrail.co.za
- www.gotrekking.co.za
- www.knysnahouseboats.com
- www.untouchedadventures.com
- www.blackwatertubing.net
- www.bhejane.com for 4x4 historical guided tours of the Knysna Forest
- Harkerville mountain-bike hire 044-532-7644 or 083-252-7997



Pied kingfisher



The Garden Route National Park lies along the Southern Cape coastline.

Don't miss awe-inspiring views across an ocean that rages with some of the biggest waves you are ever likely to see.



Visit www.wildcard.co.za for more about the Garden Route National Park's individual attractions.

ROCK OF AGES
The dramatic shoreline is characteristic of Tsitsikamma.