

36 Hours

CAPE TOWN

A plan for this stunning city might include a group run (or walk), farm markets, a wine estate dinner and, yes, Table Mountain.

By SARAH KHAN

“We’ll make a plan.” It’s a phrase you’ll hear often in South Africa, whether you show up at a restaurant without a reservation or are hoping to squeeze three people into a hotel room meant for two. Heralded as one of the world’s most beautiful cities — few destinations can mimic the scale of its mountain-ocean convergence — Cape Town doesn’t need to be as accommodating as it is; it could, in theory, sit pretty on the merits of its natural bounties alone. And yet it remains a singularly inviting place, wowing visitors with its colorful art and architecture (watch out for the Thomas Heatherwick-designed Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, to be completed next year), complex history, world-class wines and arguably one of the best culinary landscapes anywhere. How to squeeze all of Cape Town’s highlights, both man- and Mother Nature-made, into one weekend? Don’t worry, we’ll make a plan.

Friday

1 1:30 P.M. > MANNA FROM HEAVEN

Hemelhuijs (“house of heaven” in Afrikaans) is a worthy introduction to South Africa’s creative food scene du jour, a vibrant restaurant tableau defined by seasonal ingredients forging unexpected unions and presented with flourish. Case in point: pan-fried veal with crab butter, Parmesan, pine nuts and parsley (155 rand, or \$12.25 at 12.75 rand to the dollar); seared tuna with shredded carrots and chiloe pepper-berry vinaigrette (155 rand); and free mosbolletjie bread studded with aniseed. Wash it down with a blend of kale, pear and orange juice (45 rand).

2 3 P.M. > HISTORY LESSONS

Book a few weeks in advance for a tour of Cape Town’s Alcatraz: Robben Island, the grim penal colony five miles off the coast. Though the island’s history as a prison dates to the 17th century, its notoriety stems from its most famous inmate, Nelson Mandela, who spent nearly two decades of his 27-year sentence for sabotage against the apartheid government. A visit is an essential primer to understanding the gravity of apartheid and its impact on the 21-year-old nation. Guides are former political prisoners once incarcerated here. Ferries leave several times a day; plan to spend about four hours including the round-trip ferry. Admission, 300 rand; 160 for children.

3 8:30 P.M. > EAT STREET

If you’re wondering where the hip Capetonians are dining, have your Uber drop you off at Bree Street. This formerly nondescript city-center drag has seen new restaurants and cafes opening at a rapid clip. One of the trendiest debutantes is Bocca, with an impressive pedigree: Its owners, Neil Grant and Barry Engelbrecht, are the team behind Burrata, a top Italian restaurant. Choose between pizzas blistered to perfection in an Italian-imported wood-fired oven or heartier fare like cauliflower risotto with charred leeks, almonds, lemon and capers (95 rand). Pizzas are reasonably priced, ranging from 42 rand to 126 rand. No reservations, so you might have to wait on busy weekends. After dinner, head farther up Bree for a little barhopping : Mother’s Ruin is a mecca for gin lovers in a wine-connoisseur’s city; neighboring Door 221 is a low-key new dive bar; down the block, the speakeasy-style Orphanage Cocktail Emporium has vintage décor and drinks to match (Brimstone & Fire for 80 rand; Victorian margarita for 45 rand).

Saturday

4 8 A.M. > RUNNING TOUR

Capetonians are an active bunch, prone to hiking or biking their weekends away. While you might not have time to squeeze in a climb, work up a sweat bright and early at the weekly “parkrun” at Greenpoint Sta-



dium. Join hundreds of joggers (walkers are welcome, too) for a scenic 5-kilometer route through the city, around the stadium erected for the 2010 World Cup, and into the Greenpoint Urban Park, a sprawling inner-city tract filled with playgrounds, ponds, an open-air gym and gardens with 25,000 indigenous plants. The run is free; just show up at 8 a.m., or register online to receive your time via email.

5 9:30 A.M. > MARKET VALUES

Saturday is market day, and there are a few options to choose from. The pioneer is at the Old Biscuit Mill in Woodstock, where the weekly Neighbourgoods Market was at the forefront of this run-down district’s transformation into a creative enclave. These days, trendsetters and tourists alike descend on the complex by the thousands each Saturday morning to graze on artisanal fare and browse handmade crafts. The Oranjezicht City Farm Market is a more wholesome affair: From its humble origins at the site of a nonprofit urban farm, the market has grown and now occupies a sprawling tent near the V&A Waterfront. Both Neighbourgoods and Oranjezicht run from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturdays; cobble together a filling breakfast from various stalls before you continue on your way.

6 10:30 A.M. > MUSEUM OF MEMORIES

Somber lessons in apartheid continue in District Six, a multicultural enclave whose residents were forcibly removed beginning in the 1960s. The intimate District Six Museum paints a poignant picture of the devastation wreaked on close-knit communities, telling stories through personal narratives, pictures and memorabilia collected from uprooted families. Admission is 30 rand; arrange in advance for a guided tour with a former resident for 45 rand.

7 NOON > ART AND COFFEE

Coffee is serious business here. Haas is an art gallery-cafe hybrid that serves cappuccinos (22 rand), mochachinos (26 rand), ultra-strong death wishes — the equivalent of six double espressos (55 rand) — and more amid an array of modern art and mounted animal busts.

8 1 P.M. > THE GREAT GATSBY

Don’t leave Cape Town without trying the city’s signature Gatsby sandwich — a behemoth sub laden with saucy meat and French fries. The origin of the hoagie’s amusing name is up for debate, but they’re sold at plenty of no-frills “takeaways”; one



Left, Cape Town seen from Signal Hill. Far left, from top, the Neighbourhood Market at the Old Biscuit Mill, and the Orphanage cocktail bar.

of the best is at Mariam’s Kitchen on the pedestrian St. George’s Mall promenade. A full steak Gatsby could feed up to four people and costs 120 rand. Mariam’s closes at 2 p.m. on Saturdays, so keep it quick.

9 2 P.M. > RAINBOW BRIGHT

If you’ve ever received a postcard from Cape Town, chances are it featured a collection of candy-colored rowhouses clustered around the slopes of a mountain. That neighborhood is Bo-Kaap, and that mountain is Signal Hill. The city’s Cape Malay Muslim community has called Bo-Kaap (“Upper Cape”) home for generations, and they’ve enlivened their houses by painting them every conceivable shade of pink, green, blue and purple. If you’re lucky, someone might offer you a homemade koesister, a coconut-dusted doughnut doused in syrup (you can also buy one at Rose Corner Café for 3 rand). To learn more about the community’s history pop into the Bo-Kaap Museum on Wale Street (20 rand).

10 4 P.M. > MOUNTAIN HIGH

The other classic Cape Town shot: Table Mountain, the imposing mesa that defines the city’s skyline. Locals prefer to hike one of the many trails to the top, but you can always ride the cable car. The late-afternoon light is best for gilded 360-degree views of the beach and city as well as the Lion’s Head peak next door. Round-trip cableway tickets are 240 rand.

11 7 P.M. > WINE AND DINE

Cape Town’s coastal location means a seafood feast is required. Pigalle is the place for moist langoustines, prawns with peri-peri sauce, and Mozambican prawn curry. But be warned: The décor seems to be floundering in the 1980s, and if you find cover bands a touch cheesy, request a table far from the dance floor. Dinner is around 1,000 rand for two with wine. Or immerse yourself in South Africa’s wine culture instead. The upscale suburb of Constantia is home to South Africa’s first vineyards, dating to 1685. Make a reservation at La Colombe at Silvermist wine estate for Scot Kirtan’s French inflections on local ingredients, like roast Karoo lamb with braised tongue, rosemary gnocchi, herb purée, leek and lamb rib jus (220 rand).

Sunday

12 9 A.M. > GARDEN VARIETY

When Jan van Riebeeck and the first Dutch settlers arrived in the 1650s, they farmed a patch of land now known as the Company’s Garden, a verdant swath in the heart of the city with fish ponds and rose gardens. The outdoor seating area at the new Company’s Garden Restaurant is a playground for both grown-ups and children, thanks to a larger-than-life chess set and oversize swings and nests. Breakfast, with options like French toast and eggs Benedict: 35 to 78 rand.

13 11 A.M. > LAST-MINUTE SOUVENIRS

The Watershed at the V&A Waterfront has one-stop shopping for local crafts and clothes: rope necklaces and cuffs from Pichulik, Hello Charlie ceramics and Nunabeen baby shoes. Or make an appointment at Luxury Africa Atelier, where wildlife photography by Marius Coetzee, Legacy Collection jewelry created out of the fencing from Robben Island, and driftwood sculptures by Tony Fredriksson are on display. If haggling is more your scene, the prices at the lively daily bazaar at Greenmarket Square are always negotiable.

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