

Willis's Walkabouts

First Draft: 2018 South Africa

About 4 weeks: September - October 2018

All of our tours to southern Africa have all been great successes – at least that's what our clients have said. We've seen a lot, but we want more. Every trip we offer will include at least one walk we haven't done before.

This trip is based on a number of things I have done on previous trips plus others I'd like to do. While there will be some serious walking, you may not need to carry a full pack on any of the walks as the multi-day walks should all come with the possibility of having your pack transported between 'huts'. We may, however, include at least one walk where you need to carry an overnight pack for two days. Exactly when the trip will begin will depend on what is still available when there are enough bookings to guarantee the departure. The current plan is to begin in Cape Town and finish in Port Elizabeth.

Why use a Darwin-based firm for a South African tour?

Since 1999, we've done more than ten trips to South Africa. No one else offers tours like these. Transport during the trip will be primarily by rental cars but may include various forms of public transportation as well and, of course, your own feet while carrying a day or possibly an overnight pack.

The Itinerary – Depends on Weather and Availability

Weather?? Yes weather. Cape Town and parts of the Western Cape province are now into the third year of a drought. A city of more than four million may run out of water. Here are two stories that show just how bad it is.

- <https://qz.com/1110143/cape-town-drought-and-water-shortage-in-south-africa-is-now-a-disaste/>
- <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-10-05-drought-capes-day-zero-looms-large/>

Cape Town is a winter rainfall area. If they get decent rains next winter and if those rains extend to the north, we'll aim to start in Cape Town and do a loop up into Namaqualand so we can enjoy the amazing wildflowers.

If we do that, we'll include some time in the Cedarberg, just as we did in 2016 and 2017.

The Cedarberg

This is a must. I've been to different parts of the Cedarberg many times. Each time is different so I'd like to go back. Exactly what we do will be determined by the weather, the interests of the group and the vehicles we have available. In 2016, some of us did a great day walk that was possible only because we had two vehicles and some of those who didn't want to do the really long one were happy to do a shorter walk after dropping us off. We did another through walk, half of the group walking in each direction.



Approaching the Maltese Cross, Cedarberg day walk

For general park info about the Cedarberg, see

<http://www.capenature.co.za/reserves/cederberg-wilderness-area/> and
<http://www.capenature.co.za/reserves/matjiesrivier-nature-reserve/>



Gifberg waterfall, look closely and you can see one of our group

The latter has a link to a beautiful, short time-lapse video. See if you can see the baboons.

In 2016, we stayed at Groothuis on the Driehoek Guest Farm, nice enough so I'd like to go back. See <http://www.cederberg.co.za/accommodation/driehoek-guest-farm>

Further north we have Travellers Rest, <http://www.travellersrest.co.za/>. I've stayed there a couple of times and have done their short walks. Nice scenery, not too hard, good rock art.

Still further north is a place called Gifberg Guest Farm, <http://www.gifberg.co.za/>. I stayed there with a group in 2008 and did some of their walks. I went back in 2017 and did more. If we return, the experience from 2017 will allow me to improve on the longer walk we did in 2017.

The Gifberg waterfall did not look anything like this in 2017. If the drought persists, we'll go elsewhere.

If we get as far as Gifberg, we will drive up Vanrhyns Pass. This will take us across the border into the Northern Cape. There are several possible short walks at the top. Great for flowers as well. We did this on the 2008 and 2017 trips. But 2017 was the driest year on record. If the drought doesn't break, we'll go elsewhere.

In 2017, we passed the turn to the Limietberg Nature Reserve. They did not have the same water shortage and it looked interesting. We may decide to include some day walks there. See <http://www.capenature.co.za/reserves/limietberg-nature-reserve/> for more information.

Kogelberg

We did a day walk in Kogelberg in 2017. No drought here. The flowers were magnificent. Our guide was one of the two main authors of the South African Botanical Society Fynbos Flower book. If she is still available, we'll do a walk with her, probably a 4½ hour walk from Kogelberg finishing in the Harold Porter Botanic Gardens.



Walking in De Hoop

De Hoop



Breaching whale at De Hoop

De Hoop is a must. There are a number of walking trails, short and long. I have been dreaming of doing the Whale Trail for years. It books out early. I'll try and book as soon as I know that the trip will run. See <http://www.dehoopcollection.com/project/hiking-whale-trail/> for more information.

Even if we can't do the Whale Trail, walking along the beach is rewarding. If we're lucky, we'll see whales breaching as I did in 2010 when I took the photo at left. A better camera would have given a better result.

Harkerville

I have done this five times. The fact that I want to do it again should say something. This is, however, one walk where there might be no escape from carrying a full overnight pack.

In the same area, we might also include a part of the Outeniqua Trail. For more information see

<http://www.gardenrouteadventureguide.com/outeniqua-hiking-trail.html>

The full trail is a bit too long for our trip but there are shorter options and it may be possible to get our gear transported so we don't have to carry more than a day pack.



Misty morning on the Outeniqua Trail

Yet another possibility is part of the Tsitsikamma Trail. There are 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6 day options, all of which allow for packs to be transported between huts. For more info see <http://www.trails.co.za/hikes/wcape/tsitsikamma.html> **Note.** This is a commercial site. There are other service providers. Who we would use would depend on what's happening at the time.



Enjoying the view before the final climb on the Harkerville Trail

For a host of photos and more information about the Harkerville Trail see

<http://www.gardenrouteadventureguide.com/harkerville-coastal-hiking-trail.html>

Mountain Zebra and Addo Elephant Parks

Both of these parks include a variety of big game. I've visited both of these parks. I'd like to go back. One or both now has hikes you can do. Below are a few photos from one of our previous visits to Addo.



For more information about Addo, see the South African National Parks site, <https://www.sanparks.org/parks/addo/> Visiting some of the many links on that page will give you a good idea of what's on offer.

For more info about Mountain Zebra see, https://www.sanparks.org/parks/mountain_zebra/ Make sure you visit the What to Do Activities page and have a look at Activities on Foot

https://www.sanparks.org/parks/mountain_zebra/tourism/activities.php

One of the real highlights is cheetah tracking. The best story I've seen is at

<https://www.roxannereid.co.za/blog/cheetah-tracking-in-mountain-zebra-national-park>

That site has a link to "Beginner's guide to the Mountain Zebra National Park", also well worth a read.

<https://www.roxannereid.co.za/blog/beginners-guide-to-the-mountain-zebra-national-park>

Accommodation

Our accommodation will range from basic but comfortable to some that might even be called luxurious.



Bunk room at one of the Outeniqua huts



Main lounge, Driehoek cottage, Cedarberg



Bedroom at the Kapensis Guesthouse near Kogelberg



Bedroom at one of the tented camps in Addo



View from the balcony, Addo tented camp

The photos here show some of the different types of accommodation we may use. While we are likely to include something as basic as the Outeniqua hut where we hike in and sleep four to six in a room, most of the accommodation is likely to be more upmarket as shown in the other photos.

Note. We can't do every single thing we have listed above. For that matter, there are other possibilities not listed here. Our final choices will be determined by what is actually available and what those who book early want. If you have specific interests and would like to be involved in planning a holiday like no other, this is the trip for you. If you'd rather not think about the trip in advance and would prefer that someone else did 100% of the planning, you would probably be better off going with a more mainstream tour operator or at least waiting until we have finalised the itinerary.

What does it cost?

South Africa is one of the few countries where the Australian dollar still goes a long way. Our fee is \$1795. Our public liability insurance requires you to have your own travel insurance. It may sound like overkill, but I have heard of a case where the Travel Insurer sued a tour operator for something that happened that they had to cover.

The \$1795 covers the guide, who also acts as organiser and sometimes the cook. In addition, you will have to pay your share of all the expenses for food, accommodation, transport, etc. The guide will pay the same fees and fares as everyone else and will keep these as low as reasonable comfort, reliability and availability will allow.

If exchange rates stay similar, our town accommodation should cost anywhere from about A\$30 to A\$70 per night. The relatively low cost of restaurant meals and the high quality of our accommodation have been one of the more pleasant aspects of our previous trips.

Some of the accommodation will be in self-catering cottages. Participants will be encouraged to share in the cooking and/or cleaning up. If everyone takes a turn, it's relatively easy for all concerned.

Based on our recent expenses, we do not expect the whole trip to cost less than \$4000 or more than \$6000. This does not include airfares or any souvenir shopping you may do. We should have a more accurate estimate closer to departure.

What do you get for the fee?

You get expert advice on the things to bring, the probable weather, etc. You get someone who will handle the mundane details of making the travel arrangements, doing most of the food shopping for the self-catering cottages and overnight walks (if any), organising accommodation etc. You also get a small, like-minded group of people with whom you can share your experiences and expenses. Hiring a vehicle as part of a group costs far less than hiring it with only two or three.

Note 1. All parks in South Africa charge fees. Most charge more for international visitors. When we have worked out more of the final itinerary, it may turn out to be better to purchase a Wild Card which pays fees for all parks. See https://www.sanparks.org/wild_new/ Couples can save more with Wild Cards as a couples card is cheaper than two singles while there is no saving on individual entry for couples.

Note 2. Some of what you get for your money is not very visible. Bushwalking in South Africa is restricted, even for some day walks. Where possible permits should be arranged well in advance. If we want to stay in park accommodation, bookings need to be made far in advance.

While we will be in some sort of accommodation every night, some of that accommodation is self-catering and far from any store. This means that you might spend a day relaxing or sightseeing while the guide goes out and hits the supermarkets, then spends an hour (or two or three) doing the final organising for the meals on the next section. If you can't see the value in services like these, you are unlikely to feel that you are getting real value for your fee.

Note 3. If you are over 65 you will need a medical certificate to say you are fit enough to participate in some of the walks. This hasn't been a problem in the past as the walks requiring the certificate are no harder than the ones which don't.

Note 4. Prices are subject to change.

Note 5. A large majority of those who have taken part in our overseas tours are Australian so all prices are quoted in Australian dollars. We have had several people from other countries take part by making their own travel arrangements to and from the start and finish points.

Note 6. All bushwalks are subject to change due to weather conditions. If we get really foul weather at the start of a walk, we may wish to abort it, at least temporarily. If we get really foul weather later on, we may have to cut a route short.

Note 7. Most or all of the walking will be on marked trails staying in huts. This means that this trip will be somewhat easier than most of our others. There are, however, lots of ups and downs so aerobic fitness and reasonable strength are required.

Note 8. Vehicles have been a problem for us in the past – it was hard to get small vehicles suitable for four or five people with pack on gravel roads. An eight person minibus worked well on one trip, Toyota Condors on another. The 4WD Hi Lux twin cab we had in 2017 was ideal. While we'll try for a similar vehicle, we've seldom managed the same vehicles on two trips so far. The car companies keep changing their offerings. Using two vehicles would allow us to do through walks as well as loops.

What you don't get?

You do not get a guide who will hold your hand and make every decision for you. **You** must be prepared to take on a much greater degree of responsibility than on most other tours. All members of the group, including the guide, are expected to work together in establishing how the group will function, who will lead on the walks, who will look after the stragglers, etc.

A trip such as this cannot work unless everyone helps out. A few examples may help you understand just how important this is.

Hypothermia could be a potential problem on mountain walks. A person who becomes hypothermic is unlikely to realise it. In an extreme case, he or she may have to be physically restrained from doing something which a rational person would describe as insane.

There is no way that any one person, no matter how experienced, can look after an entire group 100% of the time. No matter how careful the guide may be, there is always a possibility that he will be the one to get injured or otherwise incapacitated.

Accepting the responsibility that goes with a trip like this is part of the experience we offer. It is one of the things that sets our trips apart from the vast majority of "adventure" trips on the market. For those prepared to accept this responsibility, it makes the experience doubly rewarding. Those who are not prepared to accept such responsibility would be better off going on a "normal" tour.

Is it for you?

This trip is not for the average tourist. We can neither control nor predict the weather, only accept it as it comes. If you do not want to take the necessary responsibility and/or you cannot obtain the necessary equipment, it is not for you. Good physical fitness and a good mental attitude are both necessary.

If you have never walked over really rough ground, you might find some of the terrain very challenging. On a long day walk in 2016, only one person, the guide, chose the most strenuous but most spectacular route on one of the walks. (Having said that, a family with two children under the age of 13 followed close behind the guide on the hard route. It wasn't **that** hard, just looked it.) Past experience has shown us that a fit, experienced 70 year old may cope better than a fitter 25 year old who does not have experience in coping with adverse conditions.



If you don't want to take the time to stop and look at the little things as well as the big ones, this trip isn't for you.

A Final Caution

Do not expect everything to run like clockwork. Such things often fail to happen in South Africa. If you want to get maximum value for your money, you can go off and go sightseeing or simply relax while the guide does the food shopping or tries to organise or reconfirm hiking permits, etc. Or, if you wish, you are welcome to join him he does these things.

There may be occasional days between sections where you will be left to your own devices while the guide slows down and relaxes a bit and catches up on the organising. Based on past experience, things will run more smoothly if the guide does this.

Conditions

1. A deposit of \$200 is payable on booking. This will be refunded in full if five people have not booked by mid July. Final payment is due 6 weeks prior to departure or within a week of your booking, whichever is later.
2. Our cancellation fee is your \$200 deposit more than six weeks prior to departure and the full \$1795 afterwards. The different South African authorities with whom we make bookings all have their own cancellation fees. If you cancel after we have made and paid for a booking on your behalf, you will lose whatever is non-refundable as well as our cancellation fee.
3. All participants are responsible for obtaining the necessary passport and visas and must have some form of travel insurance. We need to see proof of your travel insurance before departure. We need this because of our own insurance.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Russell Willis