

Willis's Walkabouts

2014 South African Special

October-November 2014 – New Trip 25 May

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.

The original 8 week trip had to be cancelled. This shorter trip replaces it and needs five bookings to run. While there will be some serious walking, you will not need to carry a full pack on any of the walks.

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

This will be our ninth trip 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 overnight pack.

The Itinerary

The new itinerary will be restricted to the Western Cape and areas which border it. It will include some or all of the following walks.

We will begin with two or three days in the Cape Town area after which we will collect one or more hire cars and begin the walks.

We did a three day section of the five day Hoerikwaggo Trail last year. We may repeat that or we may decide to do the whole thing. In either case, we would collect our hire cars after the walk. For more information see http://www.sanparks.org/parks/table_mountain/ht/default.php

If we don't do the full walk, we may drive to the Cape of Good Hope where we will hire the Olifantsbos Cottage for two nights. Everyone on our trips which stayed there thought this was a very special place. The one night isn't enough so we will spend two nights there as we did in 2010. You can see photos from that trip at

www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.475112561927.259424.205216266927&type=3

For more information about Olifantsbos see

http://www.sanparks.org/parks/table_mountain/tourism/availability_dates.php?id=410&resort=39

The Wellington Wine Walk we did last year was so good, we may do it again.

<http://www.winewalk.co.za/winewalk.htm>

See also http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/pdf/wine_walk.pdf

Some of the people who created the Wine Walk have now created the Biosphere Breaker Way a three or five day tour which emphasised the incredible fynbos vegetation in southwest South Africa. If those who book are interested in the flora and natural history of the region, we'll try and include one of the two walks. See <http://www.breakerway.com/>

A bit further north, we have the Cedarberg. Possibilities include Travellers Rest,

<http://www.travellersrest.co.za/index.php>, and doing a short walk there. Click on their gallery link to see photos of what we'll be doing.

From there we'd go south to Sanddrif and doing one moderate half day walk and one very long-full day walk. Self catering cabins. <http://www.cederberg.co.za/sanddrif.html>

The longest trail that we may include is all or part of the Outeniqua Trail. We can have our packs transported from hut to hut so we'll never need to carry more than a day pack. We did a five day section of this trail on our 2010 trip. The Footprint Hiking Club has good web pages describing the walk.

Part 1. <http://www.footprint.co.za/outeniqua1.htm>

Part 2. <http://www.footprint.co.za/outeniqua2.htm>

One of the most spectacular coastal trails in South Africa is the Harkerville Trail. This connects to the Outeniqua so we may just go straight through or we may spend a night in the nearby town of Knysna between walks. There is a hut so we wouldn't need tents, but we would need to carry everything else for the two day trail. Walkabouts owner Russell Willis has done the Harkerville four times and would be more than happy to do it again. It's not easy, but it's not as hard as the photos on our Facebook album, www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10151608565266928.1073741825.205216266927&type=3 make it look. We've had a number of people well into their 70's do the walk.

The Footprint Hiking Club has a good Harkerville page, <http://www.footprint.co.za/harkerville.htm>

If you've never been to South Africa, you will almost certainly want to visit one of the Game Parks.

We would expect to include either or both of Bontebok and the Addo Elephant Park. The official South African National Parks website has information about both. We have been to both on previous trips and are more than happy to go back.

Bontebok. <http://www.sanparks.org/parks/bontebok/>

Addo. <http://www.sanparks.org/parks/addo/>

Note. We can't do every single thing we have listed above. 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.

What does it cost?

South Africa is one of the few countries where the Australian dollar still goes a long way. Our fee is \$1695 which as of this year covers our liability insurance. 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 \$1695 covers the guide, who also acts as organiser and cook, plus the evening meals on the walks where we do the catering. 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\$25 to A\$60 (US\$20 to US\$50) 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. The prices above were twin share in what would be considered three or four star establishments in Australia.

Based on our recent expenses, we do not expect the whole trip to cost less than \$3500 or more than \$5500. This does not include 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 the food shopping for the walks, organising accommodation etc. You get someone who will provide all the group equipment (billies, stoves, etc) and who will cook all the evening meals on the walks allowing you to relax and enjoy yourself. 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. Purchasing a Wild Card might save you money over the course of the trip. I'll check this again when the itinerary has been finalised.) It will also get you additional information.

For more information see <http://www.sanparks.org/wild/tourism/pricing.php>

Note 2. Some of what you get for your money is not very visible. Bushwalking in South Africa is restricted. Permits have to be arranged well in advance all trails have strict limits. Some of our walks are in national parks run by a national authority. Some are in provincial parks. Some are in other areas. In 2001, making these bookings took anywhere from ten minutes to three weeks depending on the agency involved. All that paperwork has to be done well in advance or we won't be able to do the walks as planned.

As another example, prior to one of the long walks, 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 walk. 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 2. Prices are subject to change.

Note 3. 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 4. 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 5. 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 6. As some of the walks have a permitted maximum of eight people, we expect to restrict our group to eight including the guide. Depending on what vehicles are available, we may consider increasing this slightly and running two groups for short sections as we did in 2003. *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 and Toyota Condors on another. We've only 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 the 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 carried a pack on an overnight walk, have never walked off trail, have never camped in cold, windy and wet conditions, it will be harder for you to cope with the likely conditions than for a person who has had the relevant experience. 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.

A Final Caution and a suggestion

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 or her while (s)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 by 1 August or within a week of your booking, whichever is later.
2. Our cancellation fee is your \$200 deposit before 1 August and the full \$1695 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