



# Parker Cottage's Self Drive Tour of the West Coast

Often overlooked in favour of the Peninsula and central Winelands, the West Coast is a cornucopia of delights, both culinary, cultural and natural. The distances are not that vast but if you intend to return to Cape Town after a long drive to Paternoster in one day, that's a long and tiring drive.

Long before the arrival of the European settlers, this land was populated by the San people, some of the oldest extant people on the planet. Their rock art and history abounds over the area and their language forms the basis of most of the South African languages we have today.

The West Coast is characterised by long, flat semi-desert bordering long, sandy beaches. The towns themselves (other than Paternoster) are not particularly beautiful but they cater for watersports enthusiasts and are very nice places to 'do the beach'. We rather like this site [www.capewestcoast.org](http://www.capewestcoast.org) which has a lot of ideas and photos of the place to get you excited.

The big things about the West Coast are:

- The West Coast National Park (on the shores of and in the Langebaan lagoon, the colour of the water alone is a wonderful attraction as is the amazing bird life)
- Watersports (sailing, windsurfing and kitesurfing here is safe and in warm water. Properly qualified and insured teachers can get you on the water in an hour!)
- !Kwa ttu (a cultural village explaining the culture of the San people) [www.khwattu.org](http://www.khwattu.org)
- The amazing collection of small, independent nature reserves (there are over 12) with their vast range of indigenous flowers, shrubs, succulents and birds.
- Paternoster (beautiful seaside fishing town with great seafood; kayaking on the sea here is particularly splendid because of the abundant sea mammals) However, this is a bit far for a one day trip.
- Stunning beaches all up and down the 500km coastline.

You could just about manage to see three or four of the above in one day.

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Here's a summary of where this tour takes you:

- 09h00 Leave Parker Cottage after an epic breakfast
- 09h20 Melkbosstrand (watch the kite surfers over coffee)
- 10h00 Koeberg Nature Reserve (beautiful coastal reserve)
- 11h00 Mamre Nature Garden (tiny but beautiful reserve run by the locals)
- 12h00 !Kwa ttu San Cultural Centre (traditional people's village)
- 13h30 Darling (lunch stop and very fun small town)
- 15h00 Yzerfontein (small coastal town: endless beach)
- 16h00 West Coast National Park (stunning bird life on a warm blue lagoon)
- 18h00 Drive back to Parker Cottage

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## Koeberg Nature Reserve

Tel (021) 550-4021

Please phone ahead as the reserve is sometimes closed without notice



You would be forgiven for thinking that perhaps the last thing you would want to do on your holiday in South Africa is to visit a nuclear power station. Like most things in South Africa, we do things a little differently! Koeberg is a small but the only example of a nuclear power plant on the African continent. It is surrounded by a medium-sized nature reserve which houses some very unusual animals the like of which you won't get to see anywhere else in the country. See above pictures of the caracal (African wild cat) and the grey mongoose. There is also abundant eland, grysbok and duiker to be seen.

You can either walk or cycle around the reserve: unfortunately at the time of writing there was no way to hire a bicycle at the site so you have to bring your own. The cycling is all flat and level on wide tracks so very easy to navigate even for total beginners. The walking is also very easy and you have a choice of two trails: one at 6 and one at 13 kilometers.

It's also possible to just drive to the bird hide: follow the signs for Boundary Loop which will take you back towards the main road. From the hide you can see pelicans, the African fish eagle and flamingos

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## Mamre Nature Garden

Tel (021) 577-5000/2



This is something rather special but you will have to set it up before you leave, preferably the day before. The Mamre Nature Garden is a tiny reserve which houses some of the world's most endangered and unique plants: many of the plants that grow there grow nowhere else on the planet. What is particularly great about it is that you can take a donkey cart ride (the traditional form of transport in this area) around the reserve and into the town of Mamre itself (which it is totally lost in time and very pretty).

More information on how to book can be found on [this page](#).

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# !Khwa ttu San Cultural & Educational Centre

Tel (022) 492-2998 | [www.khwattu.org](http://www.khwattu.org)



Confusingly for visitors to South Africa (and even some South Africans), the San people are not officially recognized as a people of the new democracy. Often referred to as Bushmen they are among the oldest people on earth and are not unique to the territory of South Africa. They are also to be found in Namibia, Botswana, Angola and even as far east as Zimbabwe and Zambia. Their contribution to humanity has been vast, not least in the realm of plant knowledge. We have been lucky enough at Parker Cottage to have had San cultural ambassadors speaking to us and our guests at our wine evenings.

At the centre, you have so many choices: there are walks and trails to explore, you can take tours of the village and you're taken on a bushwalk with a San guide who will show you plants and animals that have significance in the traditional culture of the San. Although the village is a replica, this isn't a Hollywood film set experience. The centre was set up by the San themselves and they use it for their own traditions and training of their youth.

We think you'll find it a rewarding and off beat experience.

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## Darling



A very strange place, Darling! Well, with a name like that, you have to be a bit odd, don't you? Actually, it has nothing to do with Colonel Darling from Blackadder but a lot to do with Sir Charles Henry Darling after whom someone should name a dog but was in fact the name of one of the governors of the Cape. We visited it many moons ago on a preliminary trip to South Africa way back in 2000 (God, I feel old) and have been back several times since. It's the totally laid back vibe of the place, with just enough things to do to keep you interested that make it such a find. For more information look at [www.darlingtourism.co.za](http://www.darlingtourism.co.za)

### What to do in Darling ...

Darling was put on the map by none other than **Pieter Dirk Uys**, South Africa's most pre-eminent living playwright who just happens to be a transvestite with his own cabaret show. Pieter is a force to be reckoned with. This was the man from a staunch rural Afrikaans background who put on a posh frock, a silly voice and walked in the apartheid-era parliament and took the piss out of the politicians there. And they loved him for it! So having become a little like a court jester who speaks more truth than his subjects can handle, Pieter has been at the cutting edge of South African politics (from the stage) for quite some time. He now runs **Evita Se Perron** (you need to understand Afrikaans to get the joke there) in Darling's station building which is a sort of cabaret come supper club. If you want to attempt to understand this crazy country we live in, it's a compulsory trip.

Darling is now also famous for **Darling Brew**, one of the very first and certainly one of the most successful craft beers made in the Cape. You can take tours of the brewery and of course sample such delicacies as The BoneCrusher (which you can also do from the bar fridge at Parker Cottage, of course, but there's nothing like having been to the place it's made, is there?) Check out [www.darlingbrew.co.za](http://www.darlingbrew.co.za)

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## Yzerfontein

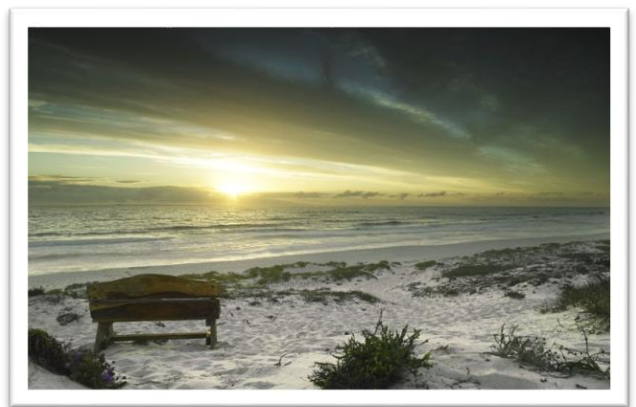


Literally, the name means Iron Fountain. No, that's not some Kafka-esque absurdity and you would be forgiven for thinking that some of the very ugly buildings in Yzerfontein came out of a hole in the ground. However, it's really worth a visit: the place is tiny with only 1 200 permanent residents but in the summer this swells as the holiday makers come through to experience the lagoon waters and the beach.

Yzerfontein's big attraction is its **enormous sandy beach** which is a whole 16km long: this makes it a beautiful place to walk, fish and paint and photograph, particularly with cloud scapes over Table Mountain some 90km away. Many artists have taken up residence in the town because of the tranquility and vistas which appear endless in every direction.

The place abounds with superb birdlife and fishing and many sailors (wind and kite surfers especially) head up here for the summer winds too. If you're lucky enough to be here during spring, the flowers will just delight you as they carpet the coastal dunes before you hit the beach. There is a special flower trail, which is the delight of SANBI (those are the guys who run Kirstenbosch called the **Bokbaaiwyg Route**).

One of the nicest walks you'll ever do in South Africa is along the **Schaapeiland Trail**. It goes around the whole village on the beach side and passes in front of the Yzerfontein Tourism Office (so if you can't find it, head for there). Only 2km in length so a lovely stroll but if you're lucky plenty of bird life to see and perhaps whales too.

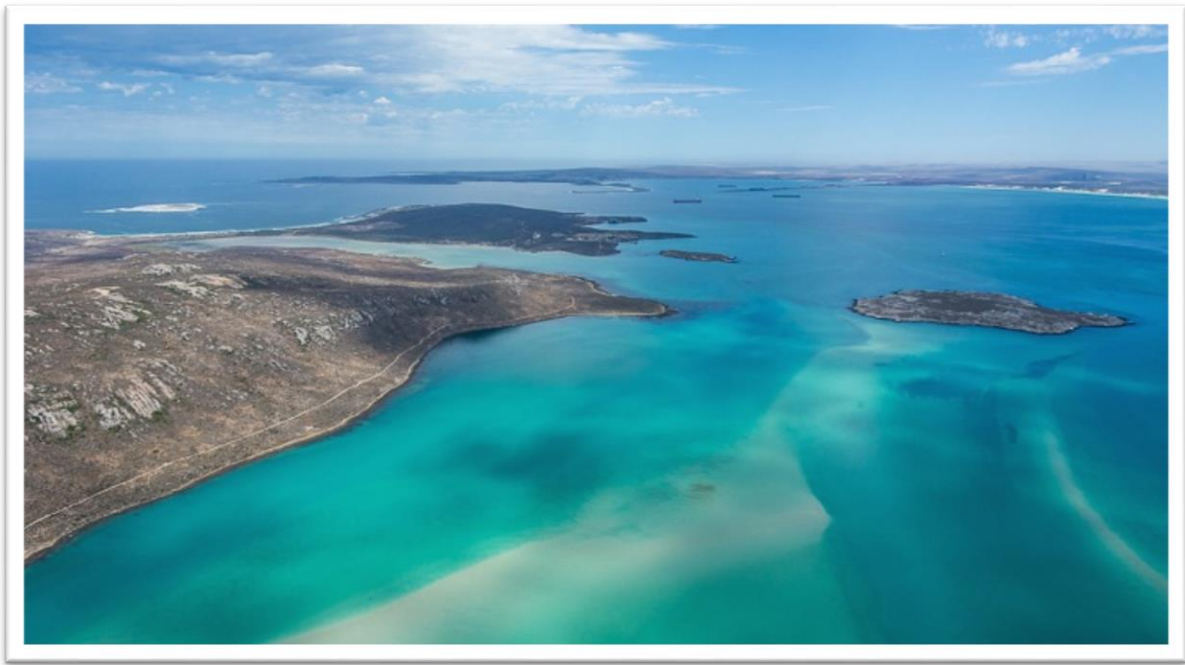


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# West Coast National Park

Tel (022) 772-2144/5



Yes, it really does look like the photo and yes, it's less than an hour away from Cape Town. Often overlooked in favour of the St. Lucia Wetlands, the West Coast National Park is arguably one of the best places in the world for aquatic bird life. It is particularly an attraction to wading birds as the lagoon's waters are warm and shallow (which makes it far nicer to swim in than the sea!)

In terms of mammalian wildlife, there are Cape foxes and Honey Badgers here too to be seen. You can drive through the whole park looking for wildlife from the car.

The restaurant here is no café: the Geelbek has won several international awards and would really make a lovely place to stop for a coffee and a cake before heading back to town.

Check out [www.sanparks.org/parks/west\\_coast/tourism](http://www.sanparks.org/parks/west_coast/tourism)

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