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PORT ELIZABETH TO MAPUTO - SOUTH AFRICA EXPEDITION CRUISE

This voyage takes in much of South Africa's natural and cultural diversity, from Port Elizabeth's sunset safaris to Maputo and its well-preserved Portuguese colonial architecture. Sail first to Bird Island, a tiny island that is a critical nesting habitat for the endangered African penguin and Cape gannet. A day at sea, followed by a day in Cape Town are next, then it's the trinity of Langebaan, Hermanus and East London. Durban's lively waterfront beckons you next, before a final overnight in Richards Bay – aka the official gateway to Zululand.



ITINERARY

Day 1 Pre Cruise

Days 2 - 3 Port Elizabeth

Port Elizabeth, or PE is an uncut gem of a destination. Loved by wealthy South African families as a holiday destination, it is a city has of faces. One: a natural haven with unspoiled beaches, rolling sand dunes and the warm Indian Ocean lapping at your



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feet and two: a post-industrial migrant city with a rich heritage. PE is also called Nelson Mandela Bay, and there is much here that celebrates him – starting with Route 67, a collection of 67 artworks honouring the 67 years that Mandela dedicated to achieving South Africa’s freedom. Known as “the friendly city”, Port Elizabeth is enjoying an urban regeneration, spurred on by the youth of the region that want to put it (back) on the map. Think vibrant creative projects spilling out wherever you go; a pedestrianised central zone, galleries selling local artworks, restaurants serving South African fusion food, award-winning buildings that house museums, restored Victorian terraces. Unsurprisingly, the boardwalk is buzzing. PE’s proximity to the excellent nature parks at Addo and Lalibela make it an ideal destination for game lovers. Both of these parks are a little way from PE (70 and 90 kilometres east respectively) but both offer a chance to revel in South Africa’s no holds barred natural beauty. This is the real reason why people come to South Africa – for a chance to see the fabled Big Five. Addo even boasts the Big Seven (lion, elephant, rhino, buffalo and leopard, as well as the great white shark and Southern right whale).

Day 4 Bird Island

Embark on a modern-day treasure hunt to unearth the riches of Bird Island. The isle may be layered in stories of shipwrecks, survivors and lost gold – but Bird Island’s true reward is the brilliant, endangered bird life that thrives here. Set among the moon-shaped arc of Algoa Bay, beside Port Elizabeth (now officially known as Gqeberha), Bird Island is the largest of this island group. Its treasure-map history is traced back to the ill-fated Doddington ship, which spilt sparkling gold and silver wares during a devastating shipwreck. Only a handful of survivors made land at Bird Island, surviving for seven months

there before successfully escaping. Further victims of the treacherous rocks and low-lying island led to the construction of the watchful cherry and white painted lighthouse which was first constructed on the island in 1852. It makes for a photogenic focal point among the moody rocks. Bird Island is one of just a handful of sites left in the world where the endangered cape gannet – with its distinguished white body and golden head – breeds in vast numbers of 200,000. Watch the majestic gannets of the largest colony in the world as they swoop and plunge into the waves at breakneck speeds. It’s not just birds of a feather who flock here, however. Algoa Bay is alive with a delightful rabble of aquatic life – from curious African penguins to bottlenose dolphins, southern right whales and cape fur seals.

Day 5 Day at sea

Days at sea are the perfect opportunity to relax, unwind and catch up with what you’ve been meaning to do. So whether that is going to the gym, visiting the spa, whale watching, catching up on your reading or simply topping up your tan, these blue sea days are the perfect balance to busy days spent exploring shore side.

Day 6 Cape Town

Sprawling across endless, staggeringly blue coastline, and watched over by the iconic plane of Table Mountain, Cape Town is without doubt one of the world’s most beautiful cities. A blend of spectacular mountain scenery, multiculturalism and relaxed ocean charm awaits in the Mother City, where you can venture out to rolling vineyards, dine in laid back sea suburbs, or spend days exploring cool urban culture. Cape Town’s natural splendour fully reveals itself as the cable car rears sharply to the top of Table Mountain. From the summit, 3,500 feet above sea

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level, you can let the scale of the panoramic vistas of the city rolling down towards the ocean wash over you. Another heavenly perspective waits at the top of Lion's Head's tapering peak. A sharp hike and an early start is required, but the views of the morning sun painting Table Mountain honey-gold are some of Cape Town's finest. Cape Town's glorious sunshine and inviting blue rollers can be a little deceiving - these oceans are anything but warm at times, with nothing between the peninsula's end and Antarctica's icy chill. This cool water has upsides though, bringing a colony of adorably cute African penguins to Boulders Beach. Boarded walkways offer the perfect vantage point to see the cute creatures dipping into the sea and lounging in the sun. Nearby, journey to the end of Africa at the Cape of Good Hope, where you can stand at the bottom of this mighty continent, watching out over the merging waves of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Cape Town's beauty is counterpointed by the ominous island form, which sits four miles offshore from the bustling restaurants and lazy seals of the lively V&A; Waterfront. A living history lesson, you can sail in the ships that transported prisoners out to Robben Island, before a former prisoner tells of the traumas of life on this offshore prison. Your guide will show you the cramped cells, and render Mandela's long walk to freedom in heartbreaking, visceral clarity.

Day 7 Langebaan

Langebaan goes by many names, from the Ornithological Capital of South Africa, to the Jewel of the West Coast, so it's no surprise that visitors and bird life alike flock here to revel in the intense natural beauty. The picturesque town luxuriates in a glutinous amount of sunshine, blooming with booms of colour during the brazen beauty of the region's renowned flower season. Pristine white sand beaches roll out beside azure

Langebaan Lagoon, where shallow waters simmer under plentiful sun, offering up a spa-like experience, in stark contrast to the icy currents of the open ocean. The lagoon's vast mudflats and salt marshes, fed by the rise and fall of the tides, cultivate a unique and sheltered enclave of ecological diversity. Over 300 different species of bird drop in each year. The photogenic lagoon shelters colossal plumes of roosting seabirds, and elegant long-legged wetland species like Palearctic waders, sanderlings and little egrets among its many residents. The rise of the afternoon winds promises adrenaline-seekers a thrill, with kite surfers whipping into the air and kayakers digging their way across the surface. Langebaan's shallow beaches and lagoons are never more spectacular than when gorgeous sunsets are spilling a deep-red haze over the landscape. West Coast National Park brushes up close to Langebaan, inviting you out on adventures during the park's flower season, when it explodes with burnt-orange colours, as the daisies and wildflowers unfurl to enjoy long, sunny days.

Day 8 Hermanus

Feel your heart skip a beat at your first sight of a majestic Southern Right Whale tossing itself high in the air before crashing back into the water with a colossal boom. Hermanus is the land-based whale-watching capital of the world, and locals welcome back the area's massive marine mammals like long-lost friends on their return each year. Azure water sparkles before the lively town, which is framed by a spectacular backdrop of the Western Cape's emerald-green hills. Watch for fizzles and fountains rising from the ocean - these are telltale signs that playful whales are surfacing close to the shore. Hermanus is particularly special because the curious whales venture so intimately near the town's lookouts, beaches and



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paths. Observe wonderful displays from the cliffs, while lounging on pristine beaches, or as you sip renowned local wines in overhanging restaurants. The whales frolic here from July until December, migrating up from the Antarctic waters, but there is an abundance of other draws throughout the year too. Enjoy the fishing town's artisan charm, or pick your spot on the vast 11-mile band of sand that is Grotto Beach to soak up the plentiful South African sun. Walk along the spectacular Cliff Path so you can bask in wildflower-sprinkled scenery and panoramic ocean views.

Day 9 Day at sea

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Day 10 East London

A very British name tells us who established the city of East London. The British built this port on the Buffalo River in 1847 to service their military forts and troops in disputes over land with the Xhosa people. European settlement expanded and East London grew. Settlers usually walk in the footsteps of others who lived on the land before them. Here, many people must have resided over the years as the oldest footprints in the world, at 200,000 years, were found nearby. Most of the eight million Xhosa people live in Eastern Cape Province. They are a proud tribe with a rich and ongoing culture which they celebrate with vibrant clothing, music and dance. Beaded jewellery is important for many reasons—decoration for dancers, special ceremonies and indicating the social status of women. Today

they live in an Africa with modern opportunities and challenges, and ongoing links to their past. The city has several natural attractions for residents and visitors alike. Sandy beaches are popular with residents, who also enjoy water activities on the sheltered and picturesque Buffalo River. Like many areas of South Africa, game parks are popular for local wildlife lovers. Speaking of nature, near to East London is where the first living (well freshly dead in an angler's catch) coelacanth known to science was found in 1938. This lobe-finned fish had been only known from 66-million-year-old fossils. It is more closely related to four-legged land animals than typical ray-finned fish. This place has history.

Day 11 Durban

What is it about South Africa's third most popular city that draws people so much? Is it the vibrant waterfront, complete with street performers and sand artists? Is it the melting pot of ethnicity, with all cultures from Zulu to Indian finding a home here? Is it the laid back life style that has locals calling it simply "Durbs"? Is it the sweeping landscape? The clement climate? One visit to Durban will quickly make you see the reason people love it so is a combination of all of the above. Durban has always been a beach city but it was the massive investment for the 2010 World Cup that really put it on the map. A huge revamp of the promenade has brought with it some fantastic eateries which serve up all kinds of "chow" from traditional bunny chow to bobotie, (a sweet spiced mince dish with egg topping). Expect Asian influences wherever you go, too. Durban has the largest Indian population outside of India. Although there is little evidence, it is known that the city of eThekweni – Durban in Zulu – was inhabited by hunter-gatherers as early as 100,000 BC. It was first sighted by Vasco de Gamma in 1497,

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but it was not until 1824 that the British settlers raised the Union Jack. This was after King Shaka gifted “25-mile strip of coast a hundred miles in depth” to Henry Francis Fynn after Fynn helped him recover from a stab wound. It remained part of the British Commonwealth until 1960, when it became part of the Republic of South Africa. The city’s Euro-African heritage remains to this day.

Days 12 - 13 Richards Bay

Considered as the official gateway to Zululand, Richard’s Bay has morphed from being a tiny fishing village into a bustling harbour town. Today, the 30 km² lagoon is the major port of the region (and also the deepest in Africa), a growth spurred on by the significant mineral deposits, wonderful wetland scenery, unspoilt beaches and game reserves. Located on the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal, Richards Bay was founded in 1879. British Rear Admiral Sir Frederick William Richards eponymously named the port after landing there during the Anglo-Zulu colonial wars. Despite its superlative natural setting, Richards Bay was long considered a southern African backwater, with as little as 200 residents as recently as 1969. This number grew when it was proclaimed a town, but even today it is relatively underpopulated, with fewer than 60,000 calling the province home. The town’s Zulu heritage is omnipresent so be sure to look out the local arts and crafts. Nearby Zulu village Dumazulu is the only Zulu village to be opened up to tourism by King Goodwill Zwelithini, and the only authentic example of Zulu traditions that foreigners are allowed to enter. If African culture is not your cup of tea, the hinterland offers fascinating flora and fauna, including a chance to see the incredibly rare white rhino along with the bucket list Big Five. Richards Bay’s attractions can be found closer to port too – the 350 kilometres of

coastland, also known as “Dolphin coast”, are a joy for divers and beach lovers alike.

Day 14 Maputo

Maputo is not known for being the capital of Mozambique, but also for the buzzing vitality that is unfound elsewhere in Africa. The end of 15 years of civil war in 1992 saw an economic uprising and visitors to Maputo today are just as likely to come for the busy bars and restaurants as they are to enjoy colonial architecture worthy of the Mediterranean. Maputo is different from other cities in the region. It’s magical. There is a story book quality to the city, an almost palpable belief that someday Maputo will be recognised as the leading city it is. And nothing – not the floods nor the drought that plagues so many other parts of Africa will be able to stop it. Glimpses of this self-confidence are everywhere, from the lively music that spills out onto the street to the eccentric belief that building a cast iron house in Africa was a good idea. Head for the town square to see the latter for yourself. Formerly known as Lourenco Marques, the city was named after a Portuguese explorer who landed here in 1544. Most of the city’s infrastructure (and architecture) was destroyed during the war years, but thankfully a few must see places remain. The train station – often incorrectly attributed to Gustave Eiffel, is one of the world’s most beautiful buildings, a large-domed, green and white steel structure that would look more at home in Lisbon. The gleaming white Roman Catholic cathedral, the neo-classical City Hall and the French-Mozambican cultural centre are all also top of sightseers lists.

Day 15 Post Cruise

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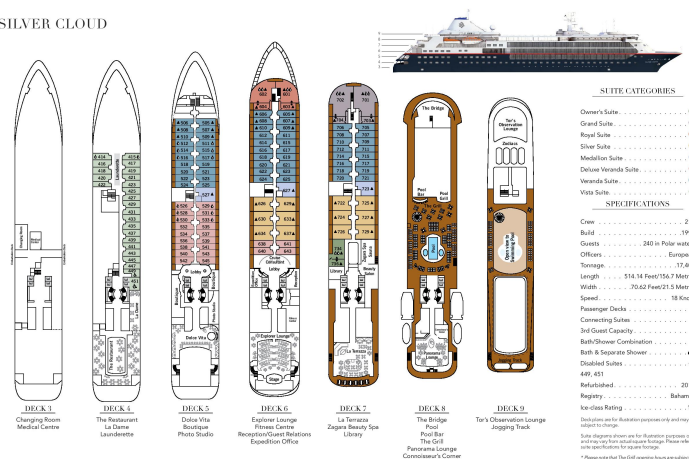
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