

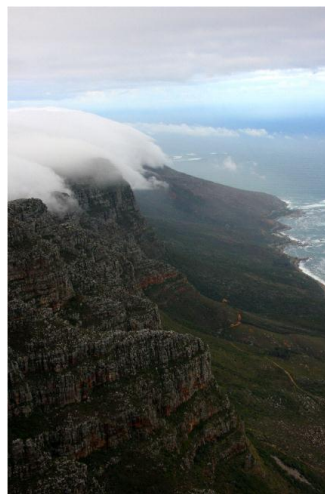
If you were to have asked me many years ago if a girl who grew up in a small town in Alberta would one day be jetting off to South Africa for a weekend, I would have said, “absolutely, in a parallel universe...”. Well, fortunately for me those universes have collided, because that’s exactly what I did. Sean and I took advantage of the Eid holiday to venture to a part of the continent we’d never seen before. A place where huge boulders meet raging waves and mountain tops reign heavy over a city below. Where wildlife is plentiful, both in and out of the water, and each turn around every new corner introduces you to an array of wonders and jaw dropping scenery.

Nestled between Table Mountain and Table Bay, which is fed by the Atlantic Ocean, Cape Town appears to cover just a small area. This is deceiving however, as the majority of the city’s development has been in the suburbs. These stretch for miles and many function as small towns in their own rights, essentially creating “cities within the city”. There are many brilliant things to see in the heart of Cape Town, and an equal amount of spectacles in the surrounding countryside, so it was difficult to decide what we should focus on during our short three day stay. We decided on a self guided tour of the city the first day, and spent the other two days with our uber guide Wayne from Take2Tours. In the past we have realized that the enjoyment of a trip can be greatly influenced by the person holding the reins. Sometimes you can end up wandering around in circles, frustrated by the lack of control, other times you can sit back, relax and let him lead you to the best watering hole you’ve ever seen. Lucky for us, Wayne definitely fit into the latter category and he made our trip very enjoyable indeed.

After checking into the iconic Mount Nelson hotel, and having a quick lunch by the pool (commandeered by a family of Egyptian Geese), we took a leisurely stroll down Government Avenue. While passing through the Company’s gardens, Sean had a close encounter with a cheeky grey squirrel, which proceeded to climb up his leg and dive into his pocket, presumably looking for nuts. I’m happy to report that Sean got away safely with his still intact. We spent an hour or so perusing the informative displays at the Iziko Slave Lodge, which was formally used to house slaves, and informally as a brothel. It was later converted into the Supreme Court and other government offices. After continuing our brief walking tour we settled in at “& Union” for some artisan beer and to sample the flavor of the local culture.

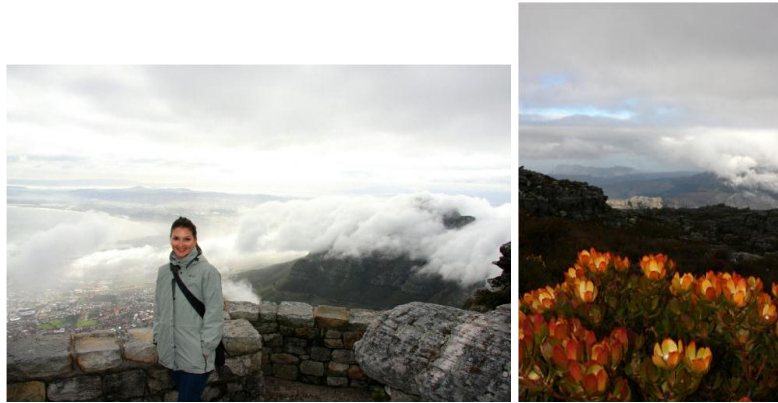


*Cheeky Squirrel*



*Table Mountain*

Although we were slightly unlucky with the weather while we were there, we still managed to squeeze in most of the things we wanted to do. Cape Town is known for having four seasons in one day and we were witness to Mother Nature's power at her best. We took the cable car up Table Mountain bright and early Thursday morning and were able to take in the spectacular vistas before a dense cloud cover rolled in to create an eerie, but mysterious ambience. Well cared for paths lead you around the 2 mile long table top and the rocky plateau, home to various types of vegetation and a selection of creatures including the rock hyrax, provided a beautiful launching pad from which to take in the picturesque landscape below.



*Top of Table Mountain*

As the clouds rolled in and threatened to open the skies, we caught a taxi down to the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront. Still a working dock, it has been transformed into a food connoisseur and shopping fiend's delight. It is also the gateway to Robben Island, famous for its prison which held Nelson Mandela for part of his sentence. A World Heritage Site it was a must-see on our list, and we were fortunate to be able to go on the tour as they close the ferry when the water becomes too violent. Although it wasn't rough enough, it sure felt pretty close, as our rather large vessel was tossed up and down like a really enthusiastic yo-yo. There were many people 'escorted' to the back, thankfully we weren't among them. The tours themselves are led by ex-political prisoners, which provide a valuable insight into the life and times of the people held captive on the tiny island.



*Hermanus*

Friday was a cloud covered day with spots of showers and the occasional downpour with winds strong enough to create some pretty serious swells. So much so, all boats were ordered out of the water, which put a slight damper on our plans to go on a whale

watching tour. We were still keen to visit the town of Hermanus though, which is famous for its premier opportunities to catch a glimpse of the giant mammals right from shore. We boldly stood on the cliff tops hoping for just a glance of one of those magnificent tails sliding out of the water, but the weather kept them well hidden, so the best we could do that day was tour the museum and see the remains of a whale long since passed. Not to worry though because all that really meant is that we got to start our wine tour that much sooner, so our disappointment didn't linger long. With more than 200 wine and grape producers in the area, on the Stellenbosch wine route you are literally spoiled for choice. We had lunch at a delicious, quaint restaurant called Terroir, sampled our very first Pinotage at Beaumont, and tested the combination of chocolate with wine at Bilton, with huge success. Perhaps one of the highlights of the day for me though was a visit to the Cheetah Outreach program, where we got to meet and pet one of their hand-reared captive born cheetahs. What a beautiful animal.



*Beaumont Winery*



*Cheetah Outreach*

Our last day in Cape Town involved a coastal drive on the maritime highway leading us on a scenic tour of Hout Bay, Chapman's Peak and Scarborough before turning inland to Table Mountain National Park. Once upon a time that land was slated to become the next big real estate development until fortunately someone stepped in to stop it. What a tragedy that would have been, as the area would not have been the same if riddled with concrete blocks and buildings. After a short walk from Cape Point to the Cape of Good Hope we had officially arrived at the most south-western point of the African continent. Words cannot describe the beauty of that spot and pictures cannot do it justice. Our journey brought us to a close with one more stop at Boulders Beach which is residence to a colony of endangered African penguins. I know they are pretty stealthy in the water, but on land, they don't get too far too fast with that cute little waddle they've got going on. They earn top points for looking so adorable though.



*Cape of Good Hope*



*Baboon*



*Penguins*

Perhaps I spoke too soon when I mentioned our last stop. Officially the last place we visited before Wayne dropped us off at the airport was Kauai, a healthy version of fast food. After raving about their smoothies, we would have been remiss to leave SA without trying one, and the Peanut Butter Bomb came highly recommended. With peanut butter, chocolate and banana, how could you go wrong; it was like having a party on your taste buds. A smoothie like no other, it was a little out of this world, not unlike our whirlwind trip. From historic sites, breathtaking backdrops and encounters with all things wild and tame, it was just a small taste of a country that I would love to return to. I may not know exactly what I'm doing in my parallel universe right now, but for this trip alone, I'm perfectly content staying in this one.

