



The imposing Table Mountain keeps a watchful eye over the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront — South Africa's most visited destination

“Walk gently, breathe peacefully, laugh joyfully”

I don't normally quote fridge magnets, but that line on a souvenir purchased at Cape Town International Airport perfectly sums up my recent experiences in South Africa. They included being up close and very personal with elephants and cheetahs, tasting magnificent wines in sublime surroundings, cruising in a luxury motor yacht and spending an uplifting day in the townships.

In June and July, the eyes of more than a billion people will be focused on South Africa for the 2010 World Cup Finals. If you're planning on heading to South Africa for the World Cup, particularly Cape Town, here are some of my experiences.

Cape Town is an absolutely stunning city and the imposing Table Mountain keeps a watchful eye over it. The city has a fascinating history, wineries and beaches within half an hour's drive, fabulous restaurants and great people.

An African ENCOUNTER

Steve Williams goes on a fascinating tour of South Africa

One of your first stops will have to be the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront — South Africa's most visited destination. It's an interesting mix of a working harbour, restaurants, 11 hotels and more than 400 retail outlets. The Victoria & Alfred Waterfront has some excellent dining options — which my wife and I took advantage of. We enjoyed the relaxed vibe in the area, watching seals bask in the sun on a wharf. A nearby busker was suggesting

that we “*Don't Worry, Be Happy*” — we didn't, and we were.

Wine country

After a visit to the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront, you may want to catch a cable car to the top of Table Mountain (the revolving floor is a unique twist), visit infamous Robben Island (where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned) and explore the spectacularly beautiful Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden.

The winelands are also on the to-do list, and we spent a fascinating day on a private, exclusive tour organised by the delightfully named Racontours.

Lisa Griggs, who has been involved in the wine industry for many years, gave us an interesting insight into the history of winemaking in the Cape and the characters. Griggs knows everyone and has access to people and places not found on regular tours. We visited three wineries. First was Klein Constantia, where we were taken on a private tour of the estate with winemaker Adam Mason and Chico the Jack Russell. It's not every day you taste grapes off the vine while hearing baboons screeching over the ridge.

The estate is set in the verdant Constantia valley, which first produced wine in 1689. It was an experience tasting wines in “Duggie's Dungeon”, a magnificent subterranean room housing four individual cellars with ornate wrought-iron gates depicting the four seasons. Make sure you

sample their signature Vin de Constance — a re-creation of the Constantia unfortified sweet wine of the 18th and 19th centuries, released five years after the vintage. The wine is presented in a replica of the original half-litre bottle.

Next, we had lunch in the Constantia Uitsig wine estate, at the magnificent La Colombe, recognised as South Africa's best restaurant. We dined al fresco in the courtyard garden, and the food and service was exceptional. La Colombe is so popular that bookings are quite difficult, but it helped that Griggs was the sommelier! We adjourned to taste Constantia Uitsig's wines under a sun-filtered canopy of trees overlooking a quaint cricket oval.

De Grendel Wines was our last stop, 20 minutes from Cape Town in Durbanville. It is another spectacular estate, with panoramic views of Table Mountain and the sea. Charles Hopkins is the cellar master and, again thanks to Griggs, we had a private tasting with Hopkins in the cellar, his passion and character coming through as he told us of the history of the estate and the intricacies of harvesting. It was a great day with Griggs, and I would strongly recommend booking a tour with Racontours. It offers a range of experiences — from discovering the ecology of the Table Mountain range to a ramble through Cape Town's fascinating streets.

Constantia has some excellent accommodation options and we had a very pleasant dinner at The Constantia boutique hotel. With only eight suites, it has a very comfortable, homely, yet exclusive ambience.

Game time

One of the best experiences in South Africa was two nights at the Shamwari Game Reserve. Many visitors drive from Cape Town along the famed “Garden Route”, but it is also accessible via a one-hour flight to Port Elizabeth, and then a one-hour drive to the reserve. The place is amazing — 25,000ha with seven luxury lodges scattered throughout. Luxury is the word:



Captivating scene at the Shamwari Game Reserve

