

# TABLE MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

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# TABLE MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

To the Khoesan (Khoisan) peoples who lived on the peninsula long before Europeans arrived, it was Hoerikwaggo (Mountain in the Sea) a place of legend and life-giving fresh water. To Nelson Mandela and his fellow prisoners on Robben Island it was a beacon of hope. To the millions of people who have climbed or been transported in the cableway to its 1088m peak, it is the ultimate viewpoint over the city. We're talking about Table Mountain, Cape Town's icon, and star attraction of [Table Mountain National Park](#) (Map p53; ☎ 021-701 8692; [www.sanparks.org/parks/table\\_mountain](http://www.sanparks.org/parks/table_mountain)).

The park covers 24,500 hectares, about 73% of the entire Cape Peninsula, and stretches from Signal Hill (p77) to Cape Point (p105), encompassing both Devil's Peak and Lion's Head, which abut Table Mountain. Other parts of the park – all covered in the Neighbourhoods chapter – include Silvermine Nature Reserve (p102), Tokai (p99), Boulders Beach (p106) and the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve (p105).

## HISTORY

At over 100 sites in the national park, such as Peers Cave (p102) in Silvermine and a cave in Smitswinkel Bay near the entrance to Cape Point, evidence has been found of the indigenous people who lived on the Cape long before the first recorded arrival of Europeans in 1503. This is when Portuguese navigator Admiral Antonio de Saldanha bagged the title of the first white guy to climb Table Mountain; he named it Taboa do Cabo (Table of the Cape).

The Dutch thought this name appropriate, too, and so it stuck. It was also the Dutch who coined the term Lion's Head (Leeuwen Kop).

At the Cape Point end of the national park, the name game also got underway with the Portuguese. Bartholomeu Dias coined the name Cabo da Boa Esperança (Cape of Good Hope), which by a smidgen qualifies as the southwesternmost point of the African continent; a recently discovered cross carved into the rock near here could indicate the spot where Dias stepped onto the Cape in 1488. In comparison to the

port that grew rapidly at the foot of Table Mountain, Europeans were slow to come to live in rugged, windswept Cape Point, the first farms being granted here in the 1780s. The areas really didn't become fully accessible until 1915 when the coastal road from Simon's Town was completed.

The campaign to designate the Cape Point area a nature reserve first got underway in the 1920s when there was a chance that the land could have been turned over to developers.

At the same time, the future prime minister General Jan Smuts – a keen hiker – started a public appeal to secure formal protection for Table Mountain; today there is a track on the mountain named after him. The Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve was eventually secured in 1939.

This was the first formal conservation on the Cape, although Cecil Rhodes had used a small part of his vast fortune to buy up much of the eastern slopes of Table Mountain; he gifted this land, which includes Kirstenbosch and the Cecilia Estate stretching to Constantia Nek, to the public in his will.

## WILD CARDS

If you're planning on doing a lot of travel in South Africa's 88 national parks and nature reserves, it might be worth investing in the [Wild Card](#) (☎ 031-240 9470, 086-123 4002; [www.wildinafrica.com](http://www.wildinafrica.com)). This smart-card loyalty program costs R840 for individual overseas visitors, R840 for a couple and R1990 for a family.

If you're a Cape Town or South African resident the best deal is the Cape Cluster Wild Card for R180/310/420 per single/couple/family, which covers entry to the park for a year to the various places you have to pay, such as the Cape of Good Hope and Silvermine. It also offers discounts at other city venues and cash-back rewards from local program partners