

WHALE OF A TIME

A golfing trip in South Africa is seldom just a golfing trip. This month we look at the unique combination of golf and whale watching, which takes us to Hermanus and surrounds

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With such diversity in scenery and leisure activities across all major destinations, golf can easily be paired with a variety of other attractions. Whale watching is something that offers unique golf experiences, along with endless coastal attractions that can provide memories for a lifetime.

Timing is everything. The Southern Right Whales, who have gestation periods of 12 months, head to the shallows of the Hermanus Coast to mate and calf. The general time frame for this is from June to November, although the peak viewing window is essentially spring time of September–November, when you are likely to have the highest density of whale activity in the bay.

Whale watching during this time can be done as easily as walking the famous Hermanus Cliff Path, with the whales getting as close as 10–20 metres from the water's edge. Guided boat tours can naturally get you on the water, which then also provides insights from the marine guide to further enhance the experience.

The peak viewing window also ties in nicely with better golfing weather, just after the Cape winter months.

GETTING THERE

From the major hub of Cape Town International Airport, the town of Hermanus is a 90-minute drive away over Sir Lowry's Pass. Coming from Cape Town centre itself, add another 15–20 minutes to that.

As this trip is extremely scenic in nature, something well worth considering is taking a right at Gordon's Bay before reaching Sir Lowry's pass. This then opens up the breath-taking Clarence Drive as a scenic route that is hard to beat anywhere in the world.

This will add another 25–30 minutes to the drive. But likely a little more as you may want to make a few stops to truly take in the views of the steep Hottentots Holland Mountain and spectacular panoramic views across False Bay.



HERMANUS GOLF CLUB

Easily one of South Africa's underrated gems, Hermanus Golf club is a simply delightful collection of 27 holes that sits beautifully between the Kleinrivier Mountains and the coast. Originally a 1950s, Bob Grimsdell, 18-hole golf course, Peter Matkovich was responsible for the redesign and adding the additional nine holes, while modernising the course in general in the process.

Playing like a parkland classic in places, open and links like in others, this course alone is reason enough to make a trip to the area for. A true small-town icon, with a welcoming clubhouse feel as well as scenic views with club in hand during the round, and beverage in hand afterwards.



ARABELLA GOLF CLUB

A 25-minute drive from Hermanus back towards Cape Town brings you to the Arabella Country Estate and Golf Course. Another Peter Matkovich design, it's a superb 18-hole course consistently ranked within the top 10 in South Africa. It offers some truly breathtaking holes rolling towards the Bot River lagoon that sits between the ocean and the course.

You will struggle to find a more scenic place to play a round, and much like other iconic courses in South Africa, you have to play Arabella at least once in your life.



KLEINMOND GOLF CLUB

For a more laid back golf environment, the 9-hole Kleinmond Golf Club (played from 18 tees) provides another great golfing option in the region. With mountain and sea views throughout, you may also encounter some local wildlife along with walking among rare indigenous Cape fynbos that thrives on this course.

WHERE TO BASE YOURSELF

First prize accommodation wise is to be within walking distance of the famous whale spotting cliff path with Gearings and Sievers Points in Hermanus.

Such a location naturally comes at a premium, with luxury coastal accommodations like The Marine Hermanus near Gearings Point a big favourite. Further down at Sievers Point is the highly rated Abalone Guest Lodge, with advance booking a must there.

On the more budget-friendly and golfing side of things in Hermanus, the **19th Hole Guest Lodge** is a well known establishment that opens onto the Hermanus Golf Club. Accommodation here consists of three double rooms en suite, with large dining room, bar and lounge area making it ideal for golfing groups.

Another premium option should golf be the primary focus of this trip, is Arabella's superb hotel and spa. This plays brilliantly into having a day of golf in the morning when the wind is likely at its lowest, followed by an afternoon of whale watching and sundowns in Hermanus.





ADDITIONAL ATTRACTIONS

Wine Estates

Just when you thought the region couldn't offer anything more, the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley famously offers world class Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from celebrated estates like Creation Wines, Hamilton Russell Vineyards and the Bouchard Finlayson Winery. Here again you have tremendous mountain views with opportunities to pair fine wines with local cuisine. Something that may warrant spending an extra day on this particular trip.

Hiking

There are many accessible hiking trails from Hermanus' Fernkloof Nature Reserve which provides a vigorous exercise opportunity and unbeatable oceans views. Along with the abundance of fynbos and views, these trails also give you access to dams and waterfalls, and you may even experience some local wildlife sightings along the way. Some of the routes may be a little trickier than others, so downloading an app like alltrails is recommended for the more serious hiker.

Beach Break

Then there is of course the opportunity for a great beach day out in Hermanus. Grotto Beach is the largest, with Blue Flag Beach status and an easy choice, especially for families. For surfers and general wave seekers, Kammabaai and Voelklip Beach are additional options with the latter offering levelled grassy lawns to picnic on. Then there is Langbaai, which is a little more isolated and generally favoured more by the locals. With such a stunning coastline you can also enjoy ocean dining from the Hermanus Harbour and beyond, which again ties in with the seasonal whale watching. For slightly more adventurous tastes, a trip further up the coastline away from Hermanus can take you to Gansbaai. A place that has become well known for its shark cage diving in recent years.