

Low on cash but keen to travel before settling down? Explore South Africa on a backpacking tour.

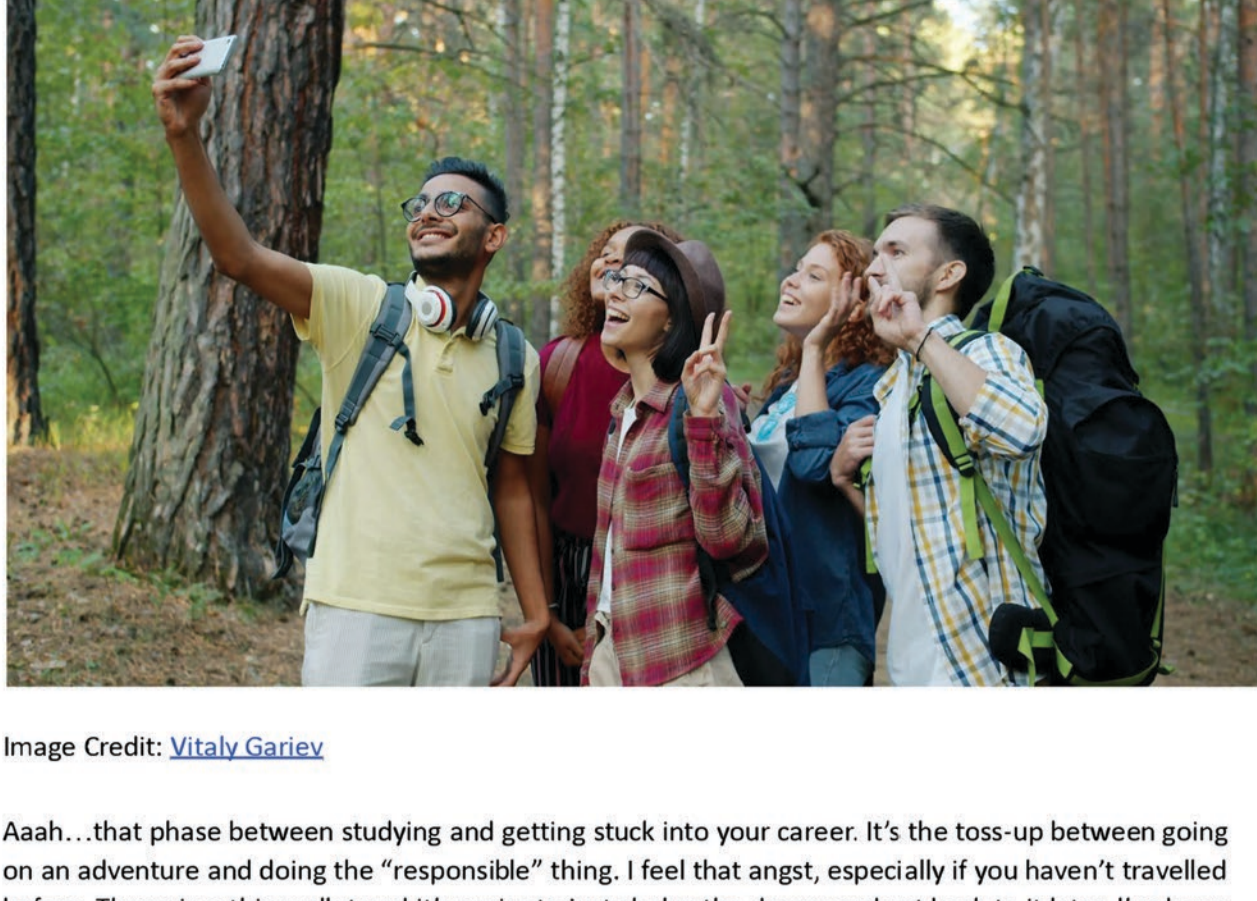


Image Credit: [Vitaly Gariev](#)

Aaah...that phase between studying and getting stuck into your career. It's the toss-up between going on an adventure and doing the "responsible" thing. I feel that angst, especially if you haven't travelled before. Throw in a thin wallet and it's easier to just shelve the dream and get back to it later. I've been there, but spoiler alert—later might never come.

So, go make some memories! Your future self will thank you for it.

When I planned my last trip, I thought it would be cheaper to do everything myself. It was exhausting and I finally gave up in frustration and just booked a backpacking tour with [Thornbush Tours](#). It was the best decision I could have made. I felt safe throughout the trip and it was surprisingly affordable—ideal for a student's budget. The tour was well-balanced with enough adventure to keep it exciting, but also allowing for some downtime.

This kind of tour is available across South Africa, from the [Drakensberg](#) to the [Garden Route](#). I settled on a [5-day backpacking tour of Cape Town](#) and surrounding areas.

This trip was everything, with a whole bunch of surprises thrown in! My Instagram is full, as is my heart, and I'd love that for you.

Here's what we did:

5-Day Backpacking Tour of Cape Town and Surrounds:

Day 1: Arrival and hitting Long Street

I arrived at [91 Loop Boutique Hostel](#) with no idea what to expect. When I made the booking, I closed my eyes and hoped for the best, and this trip ended up being the highlight of my year. 91 Loop is colourful and loud, the perfect place to start a tour with a bunch of strangers. I checked in, dumped my bag on my bunk, and met the others in the bar area. I was a little nervous at first, but ended up having a two-hour conversation with one of the other girls. We were all so different, yet so alike in many ways.

That evening we had dinner at [Eastern Food Bazaar](#) on Longmarket Street, a bustling Cape Town institution where you can eat anything from Indian curry to Lebanese wraps. I settled on a chicken shawarma, sauce dripping down my fingers. It's a little chaotic, with many options to choose from and different smells assaulting your senses, but it was the perfect end to our first day.

Day 2: Table Mountain, Bo-Kaap and Waterfront:

Breakfast was toast, eggs and coffee at the hostel before the tour guide had us out the door by 7:30. Some of the others took the cable car up and down Table Mountain, but I decided to join a small group who chose to hike up instead. It took us just under two hours to reach the top. Our guide set a pace that was tough, but not undoable.

Although, I have to admit that my legs started burning around the halfway mark, leading me to question my life choices. We got to the top of the mountain just as the cloud lifted. It's legit one of the best views I've seen; and I've been places. We all took the cable car down—there was no need to punish ourselves and we still had a lot to look forward to that day.

The view from the top of Table Mountain:

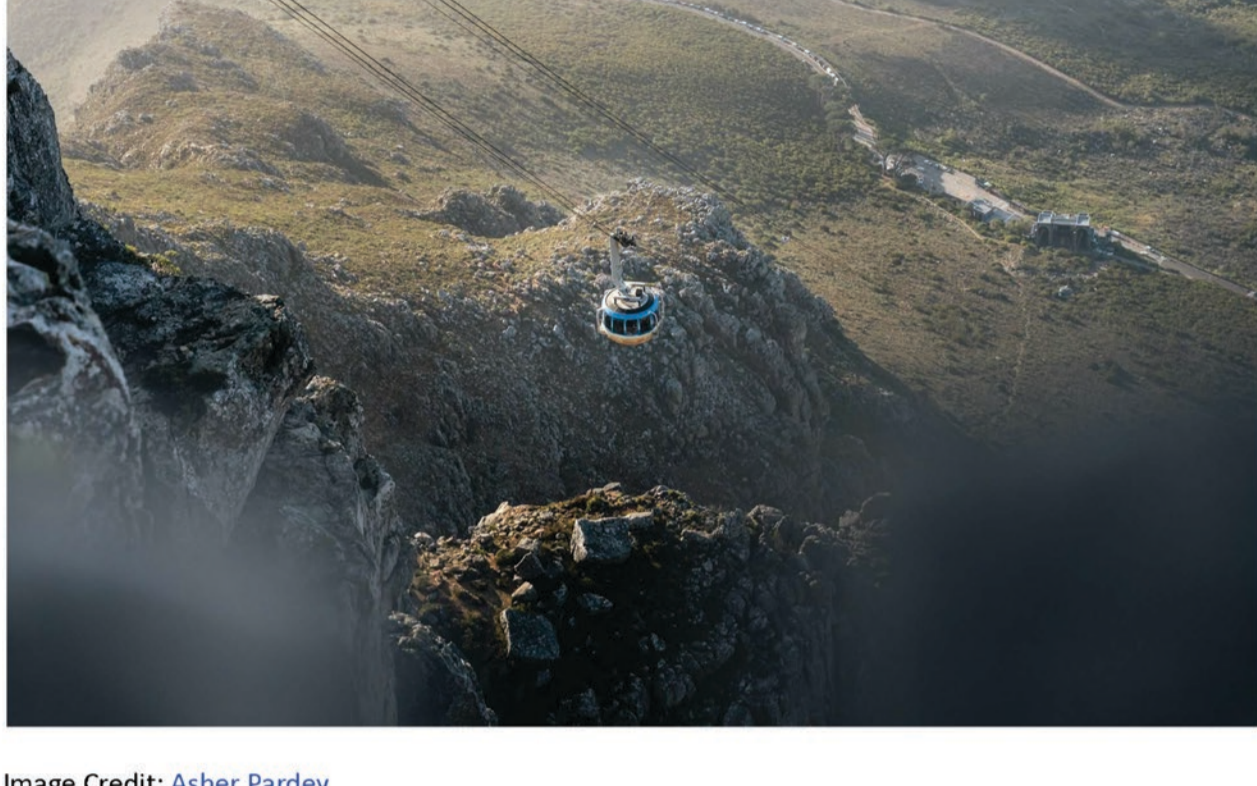


Image Credit: [Asher Pardev](#)

Next up was a walk through the famous Bo-Kaap area with its distinctive, brightly coloured houses. Our guide knew what he was talking about and answered all of our questions about the history of the area and the Cape Malay community that lives there. Here and there we saw kids playing in the streets and neighbours chatting on the stoep. The place has a lived-in, welcoming feel. And as a bonus, it's fabulously photogenic.

The colours of the Bo-Kaap:

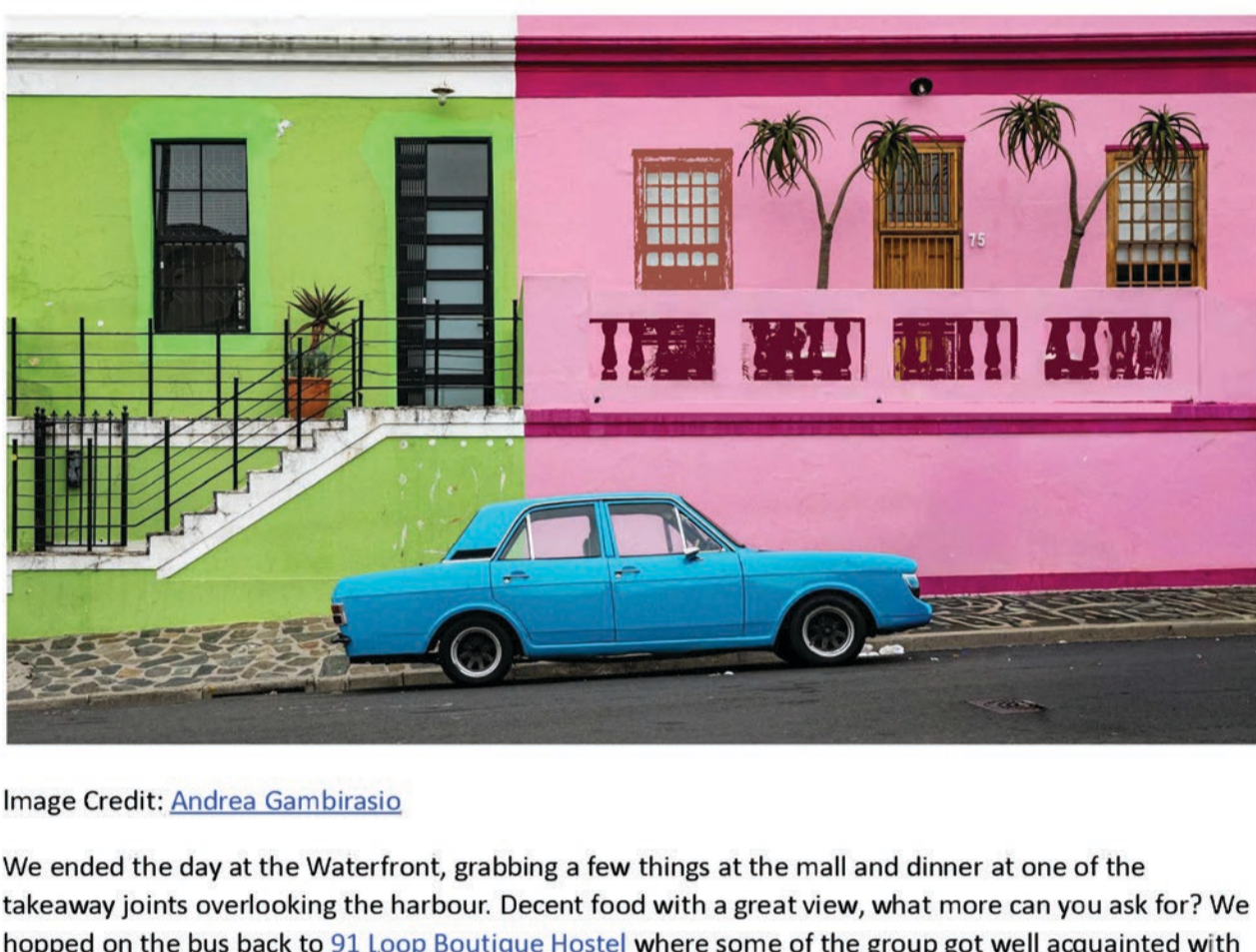


Image Credit: [Andrea Gambirasio](#)

We ended the day at the Waterfront, grabbing a few things at the mall and dinner at one of the takeaway joints overlooking the harbour. Decent food with a great view, what more can you ask for? We hopped on the bus back to [91 Loop Boutique Hostel](#) where some of the group got well acquainted with the drink selection at the bar. Oof...there were quite a few pounding heads the next morning, with a ton of stinks to tell.

Victoria & Alfred Waterfront:

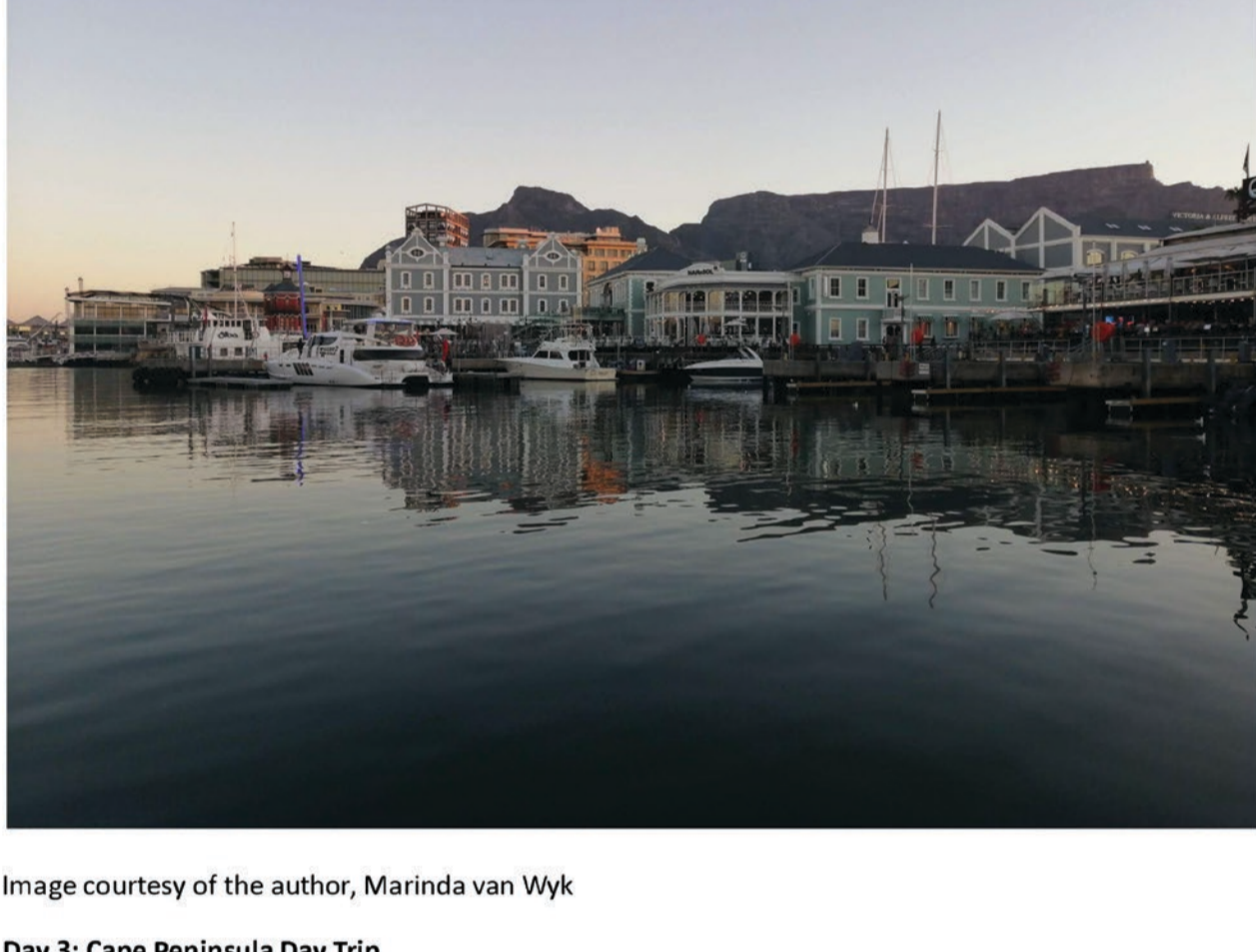
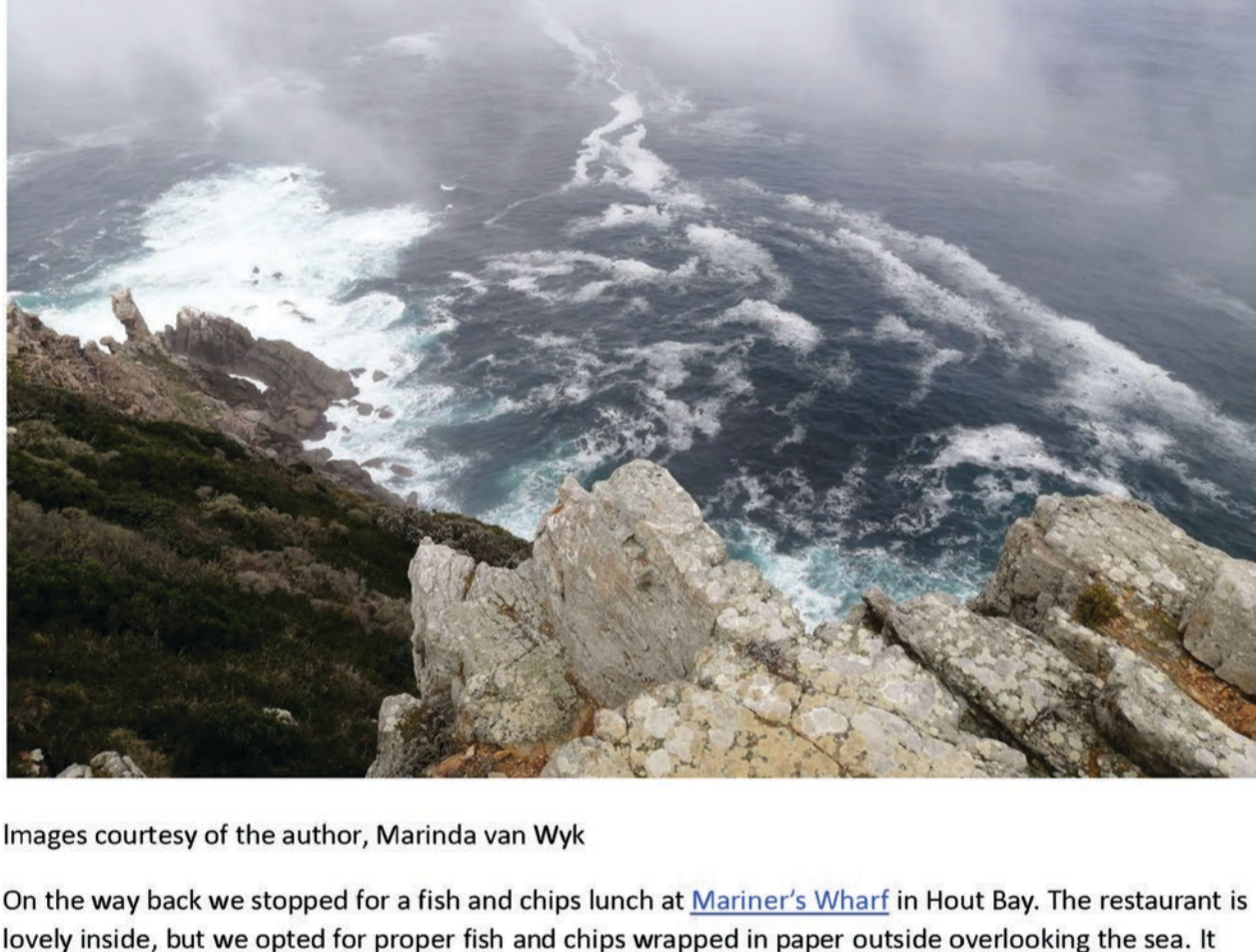
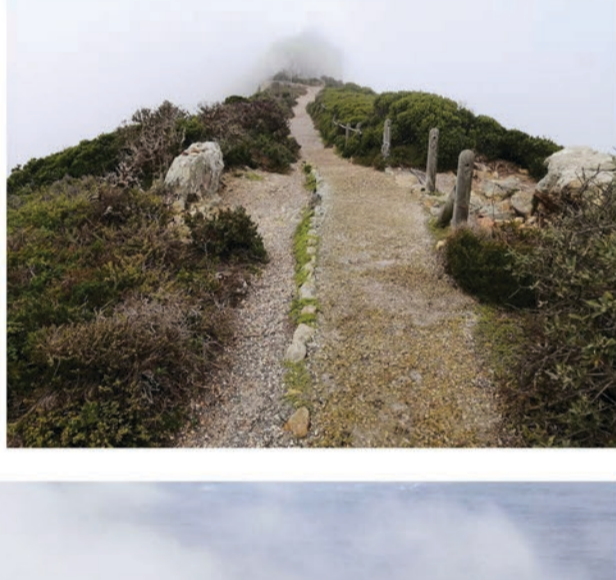


Image courtesy of the author, Marinda van Wyk

Day 3: Cape Peninsula Day Trip

Our first stop was Cape Point, that's located at the southernmost point of Table Mountain National Park. It's quite a walk and my legs were a little sore from the day before, so I really wasn't up for reaching Cape Point only to see a cloud. The guide kept reassuring us that the skies would clear and I wasn't disappointed. By the time we reached the top, the clouds had parted and the view was everything I'd hoped for. Standing at the top of the cliff looking down at the tip of the continent makes you realise how small you are. The frizzy hair from the sea mist was totally worth it.



Images courtesy of the author, Marinda van Wyk

On the way back we stopped for a fish and chips lunch at [Mariner's Wharf](#) in Outer Bay. The restaurant is lovely inside, but we opted for proper fish and chips wrapped in paper outside overlooking the sea. It was a bargain at R120. Afrikaans is widely spoken, with the occasional 'my bru' thrown in for good measure.

From there we headed to our next accommodation at the foot of Table Mountain, [Ashanti Lodge](#). After checking in, we had a group braai on the sun deck. I huddled around the fire with a few people after the rest called it a night. I already felt connected to my new friends, and the deep conversations around the fire just made it even better. I went to bed tired, but content.

Day 4: Stellenbosch Winelands and Kalk Bay

We eased into the day with a slow breakfast at the lodge. The tour bus picked us up mid-morning and we headed to [Spier Wine Farm](#) in Stellenbosch, a 45-minute drive out of the city. It was my first wine tasting and I had no idea what "earthy" or "flabby" meant, but the more wine we tasted, the less I cared about faking it.

Spier Wine Farm:



Image Credit: [Magda Ehlers](#)

We stopped at Kalk Bay on the way back to the lodge for two seagulls. It was a beautiful day and I sat and watched what I imagined was a blossoming romance between two seagulls, no pressure to do anything or be anywhere else. A moment to pause after the busyness of the previous days. Kalk Bay has a string of galleries and antique shops along the main road, it's a must-see when you're in the area.

Kalk Bay Harbour:

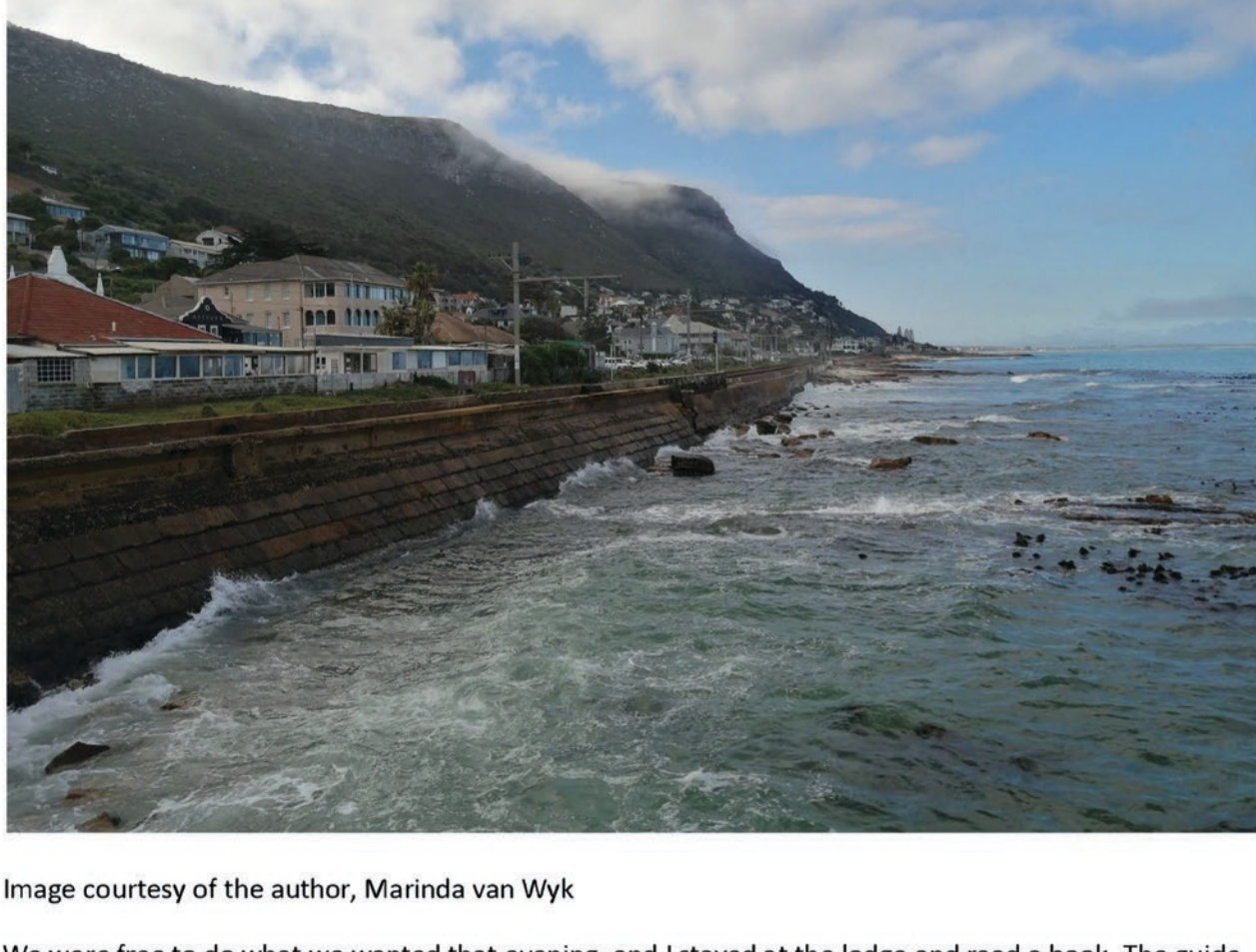


Image courtesy of the author, Marinda van Wyk

We were free to do what we wanted that evening, and I stayed at the lodge and read a book. The guide pointed out a couple of affordable, student-friendly places so some of the others did a pub crawl in Observatory, right on the lodge's doorstep. I was pooped and grateful for an early night.

Day 5: Muizenberg Surf and Final Goodbyes:

The tour bus dropped us in Muizenberg mid-morning and the group surf lesson was booked, ready to kick our butts. Surfing looks easy until you try it. Thankfully the water in Muizenberg is a little warmer than in other areas around the coast, although it's still on the chilly side. I wish I could say I managed to stay standing, but I wiped out again and again. That feeling when you first stand on your board though, legs shaking—it's priceless. That alone made the trip worthwhile.

Muizenberg Beach:



Image Credit: [Jennifer Stroh](#)

We ended the day with a late lunch at a chilled spot on the beach, sunburnt and still slightly wet. Nobody wanted to say goodbye, so we lingered until the guide dragged us out of there. It's still hard to believe how close you can get to people who were strangers just five days before. We all exchanged numbers and promised to stay in touch. I felt a little melancholy going home, proof that it was a trip worth remembering.

Keen to get your adventure on and experience this tour? [Click here](#) to book, you won't regret it.