

travel by jody barron

THE OTHER DOWN UNDER CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA



Half a world away, in another hemisphere, a South African city is fast becoming a popular destination for hipsters from Europe and beyond, seemingly in search of the next Ibiza. On this southernmost tip of a continent steeped in tradition and juxtaposing cultural values, Cape Town is a beacon of progress and tolerance, with a large and visible gay community and a welcoming environment for travelers of all types. South Africa is a land of many cultures, multiple realities and 11 official languages, with one of them thankfully being English. Weather can be funny. You might experience four seasons in one day, with the best time to visit being the summer months—November through February. Most areas and attractions can be safely visited while following common sense safety, like being discreet with expensive camera equipment and jewelry and avoiding deserted areas after dark.

For the modern urban traveler there are enough charity events, festive parties, late-night hotspots and fine dining to compete with any major European city. When planning your vacation-of-a-lifetime to the other land down under, be sure to coincide with at least one of these noteworthy gay-themed events to really experience the best of gay South Africa. Cape Town Pride (www.capetownpride.co.za) is a community festival uniting the various gay cultures offering over 40 events that cater to the broader gay and lesbian community. Pink Loerie (www.pinkloerie.com) is a South African version of Mardi Gras and the only such party to be found on the African Continent. The Out In Africa Film Festival (www.oia.co.za) is a gay & lesbian film festival held in all the major cities of South Africa covering the latest movies and documentaries from the international circuit. Mother City Queer Project (www.mcqp.co.za) is a hugely popular party each December that celebrates local queer culture in a most fabulous way, attracting in excess of 7,000 people from all over the world. The project plays host to a festival of events, including a launch pool party at gay-owned The Glen Boutique Hotel, a charity dinner, and the main costume party itself with an official after-party.

Where to stay:

The Glen Boutique Hotel and Apartments (www.glenhotel.co.za) is a popular upscale gay property, hosting visitors from across South Africa and around the world, in addition to sponsoring local events and poolside parties. Casually chic, The Glen blends the best elements of personalized hospitality to offer a discreet haven for the discerning gay traveler and his friends. The Glen's tranquil private spa includes a spacious Moroccan-style steam room, traditional Swedish sauna, hot tub and swimming pool.

Where to dine:

The Pan-Asian tapas-style menu at Haiku (<http://bukhara.com/haiku>) is prepared by 18 Japanese and South African chefs in four different kitchens, featuring fresh sushi, Chinese dim sum and Asian barbeque. Tank (www.the-tank.co.za) offers a sophisticated interior with a cool palette of blue, turquoise, beige and white with a huge focal fish tank. Large floor to ceiling windows enhance the feeling of light and space and provide a dramatic nighttime background view of the Cape Town skyline. The menu is Californian "new wave" sushi and Pacific Rim cuisine.

Ginja (www.ginja.cjb.net) is the winner of a multitude of awards, "Top 10 Eat Out Johnny Walker Awards" and "Top 15 People's Choice Awards." It's a must-try in Cape Town. Five Flies (fiveflies.co.za) is situated in the heart of the Cape's legal and financial district and is set inside a historical national monument. While the exterior remains unchanged, the interior has been skillfully remodeled. The cuisine is innovative, flavorful and surprising with fresh local meats, fish and seafood.

Where to party:

There are so many gay clubs and bars from which to choose, it's impossible to list them all here. This mere sampling of Cape Town's gay nightlife will give you the idea of the city's diversity and tolerance for good times.

Bronx Action Bar (www.bronx.co.za) is one of the top dance bars in Cape Town with topless barmen and DJs spinning great music. Bronx has recently undergone some upgrades including the addition of a second floor and a rooftop bar. The Loft Lounge and Bar (www.loftlounge.co.za) is on the other end of the social spectrum. This sophisticated scene with stunning views of Table Mountain has two stylish levels and two metropolitan bars and ambient music, perfect for a night of improving international relations.

Beulah Bar (www.beulahbar.co.za) has a relaxed, good-vibe atmosphere where boys can meet boys and girls can meet girls. The party really kicks off on Friday and Saturday nights with local DJs mixing it up until the early hours of the morning. Café Manhattan (two locations - www.manhattan.co.za) is where locals and tourists come together. Half restaurant, half bar, they also offer live performers twice weekly and feature regular art exhibitions and parties.

There are several new ultra-upscale social/dance venues in Cape Town frequented by the pretty gay set, including Roosevelt Juice at The Roosevelt Club (www.theroosevelt.co.za). This premium gay party goes down monthly with a mix of cutting-edge music and hot South African guys in a sophisticated atmosphere. They say Hemisphere (hemisphere.org.za) is 31-floors closer to heaven. With majestic views of iconic Table Mountain and the seaside city of Cape Town spread out below at your feet, all you sinners will be happy to know that heaven is only a dance floor away.

HELPFUL TIPS

While Capetonians are a welcoming and friendly bunch, understanding their slang can be difficult. Here are some local phrases you'll likely hear:

Howzit is a traditional South African greeting meaning, "How are you?" or "How are things?"

Boet is the Afrikaans word for "brother" and it's often used as a term of affection between male friends.

The local corner shop selling milk, bread, newspapers, cigarettes and such is called a **Café**. Chances are you won't find a cute table and cappuccino here.

When a South African tells you just **now** they mean they'll do it in the near future - not immediately.

Now now... isn't intended to comfort, rather, it means shortly, as in: "I'll be there now now."

Lekker is an Afrikaans word meaning nice and is often used in association with food, as in: "That meal was lekker."