

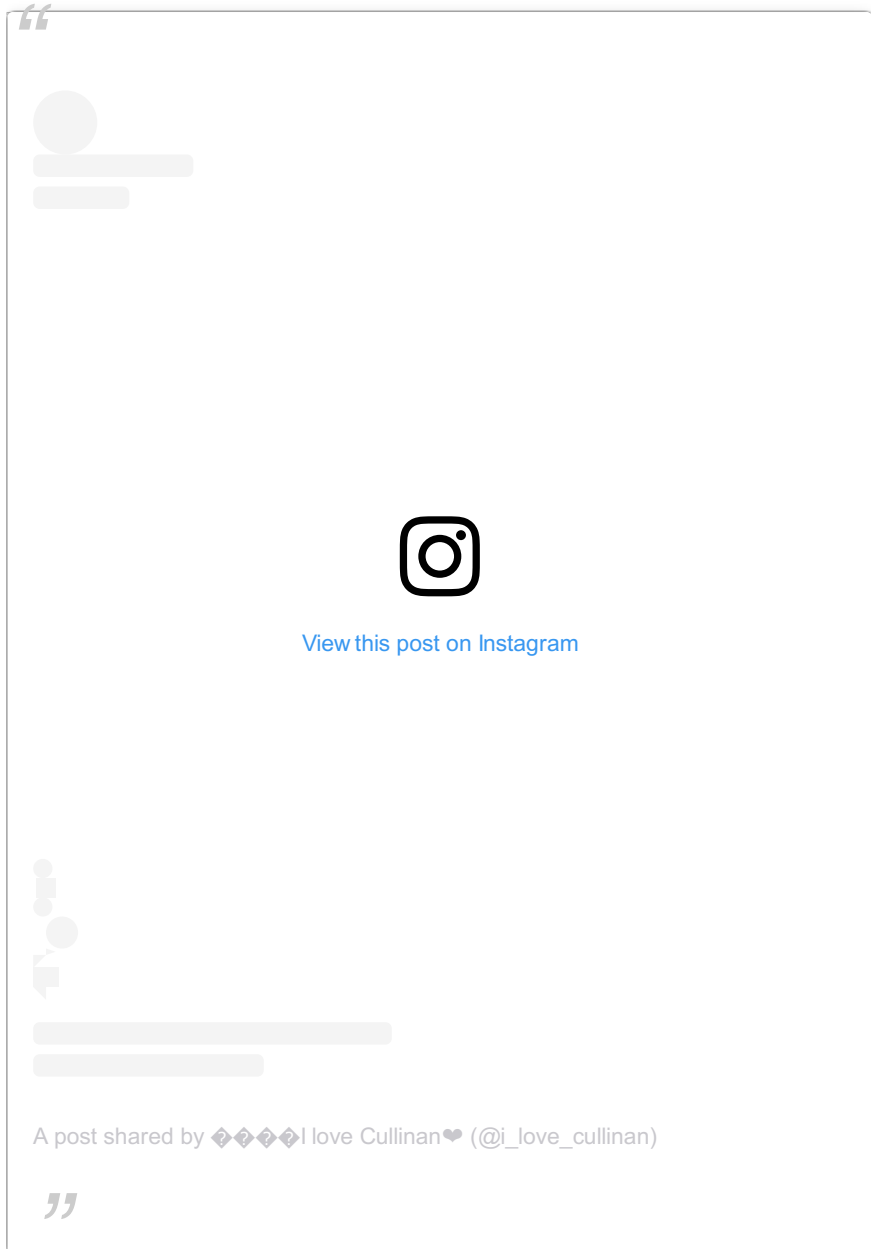
## 6 off-the-beaten-path suggestions for day trips in Gauteng

Contrary to non-Gautengers' belief, the province has lots more to offer than skyscrapers and traffic. If you're staying home (in Gauteng) this holiday season, you'd be delighted to find that there are lots of fun staycation ideas, especially outdoor activities, available.

Here are six off-the-beaten-path suggestions for Gauteng day trips, most of which can be extended into overnight stays if desired.

### Explore Cullinan

Cullinan is a quaint little town about an hour-and-a-half from Joburg (significantly less from Pretoria) with just enough to see and do in a day, maybe two days for hardcore history buffs.



Cullinan is best known for its diamond mine tours, which range from R150 for a surface tour to R600 for an underground tour. But there is plenty to see in Cullinan beyond the mine.

Visit McHardy House, the oldest house in Cullinan, built for mine manager William McHardy in 1903, and check out some

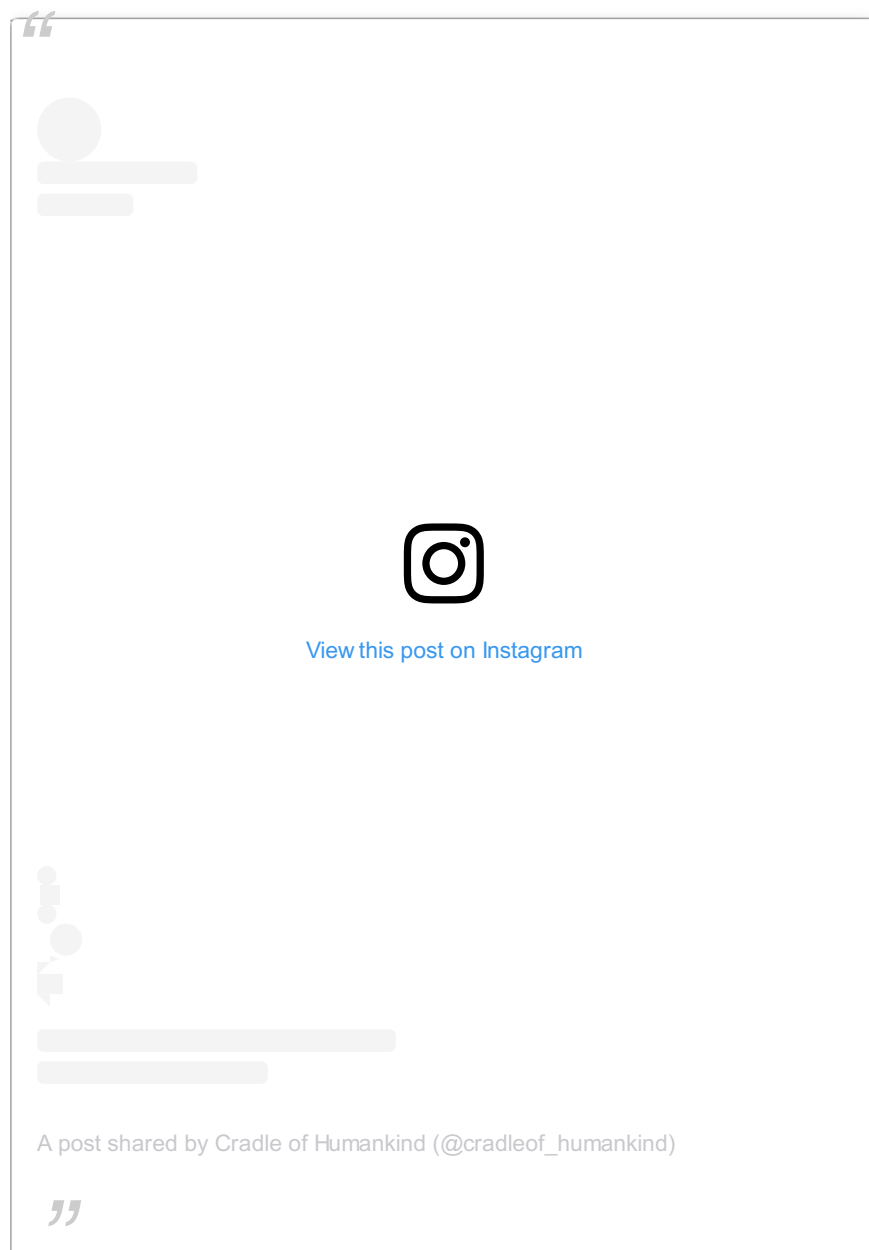
of the other historic buildings, including the Herbert Baker-designed St. George's Anglican Church.

Enjoy a leisurely lunch at As Greek As It Gets or grab a drink at the pub along the train tracks near the Cullinan Railway Station.

## Take a journey back to the Cradle of Humankind

The Cradle of Humankind, a Unesco World Heritage site less than an hour northwest of Joburg, is the bucolic home of some of the world's oldest human ancestors.

Day-trippers can visit the Sterkfontein Caves, where archaeologists discovered the famous 'Mrs Ples' and 'Little Foot' fossils, and the nearby Maropeng Visitors Centre, a museum that takes visitors on a journey through the history of the universe, for a combined price of R160.



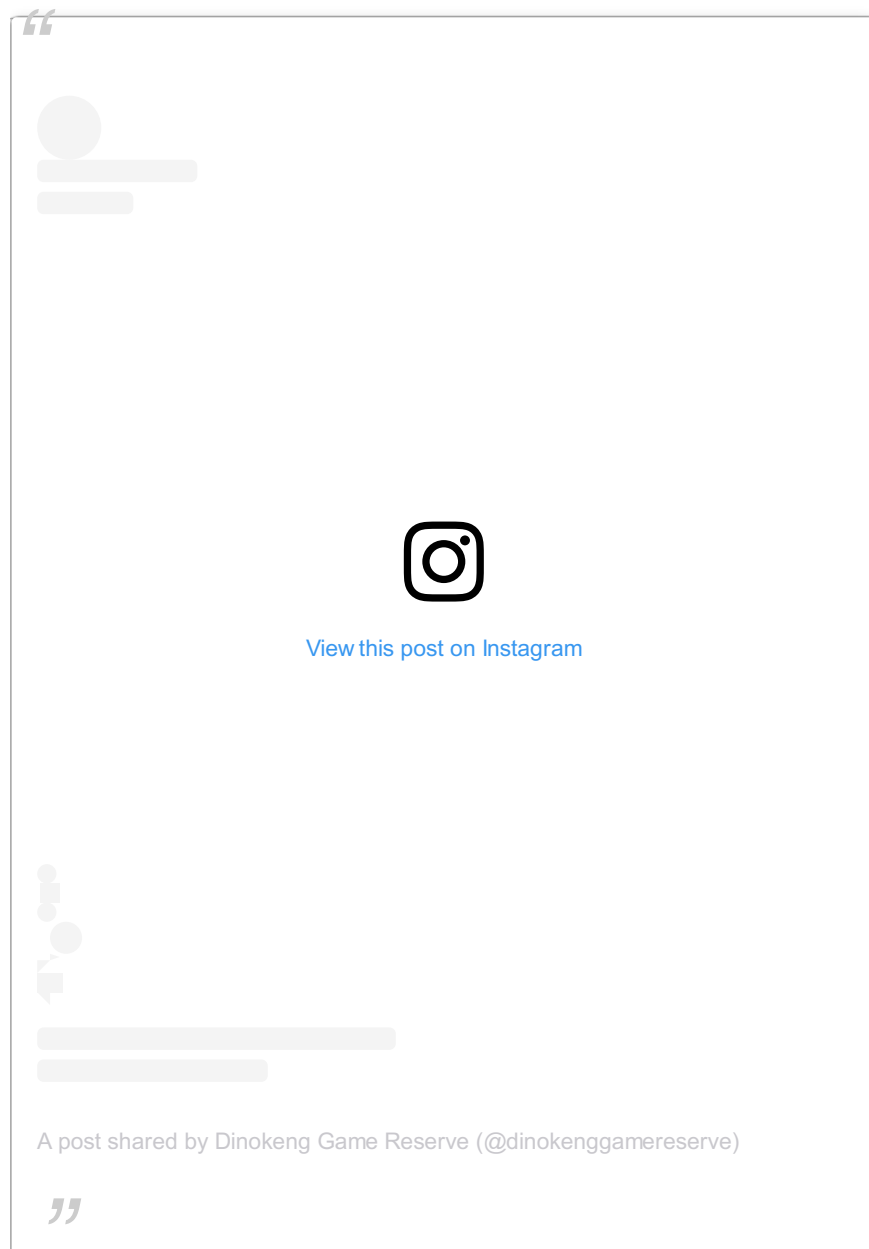
A post shared by Cradle of Humankind (@cradleof\_humankind)

Besides the caves and museums, the Cradle of Humankind is a lovely area to drive around and enjoy the rolling hills and the tall, swishing highveld grasses.

## See the Big Five at the Dinokeng Game Reserve

Just 30 minutes from Pretoria, Dinokeng Game Reserve is the only free-roaming big five reserve in Gauteng. Although Dinokeng is a relatively new reserve and hence doesn't have the same biodiversity as the Kruger Park or Pilanesberg, it's

still a great spot to get away and hopefully spot an elephant or lion or two.

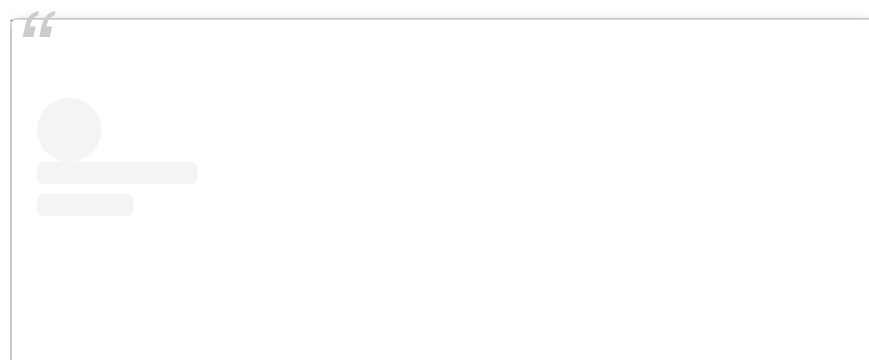


A large portion of the Dinokeng Reserve is open for self-driving day-trippers, but overnight visitors can also book into one of several private lodges, which offers upscale tented accommodation.

## Enjoy a day of twitching at the Marievale Bird Sanctuary

Although it's well-known to many hardcore birders, the Marievale Bird Sanctuary, about an hour east of Joburg near the town of Nigel, is one of Gauteng's best kept wildlife-viewing secrets.

Located on a Ramsar wetland site created accidentally by the mining industry in the 1930s, Marievale boasts nearly 300 bird species and a variety of other wetland animals. The park is maintained by Gauteng province and admission is free.





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It's best to arrive at Marievale early, as soon as possible after the sun comes up, in a vehicle that can handle muddy roads. Once you've spotted a few African spoonbills and pied kingfishers, plan a leisurely braai breakfast in the picnic area.

Marievale is located on the R42 in Ekurhuleni, about four kilometres from the town of Nigel. Opening hours are from 5.30am to 7.30pm in summer and 6am to 6pm in winter.

## Go wild and amble at the Wilds and Melville Koppies Nature Reserve

Joburg's city parks are its most underrated attraction. Here are two of the best.

Spend a few hours in the Wilds, a municipal nature reserve between Killarney and Houghton. It's a wonderland of indigenous trees and shrubs and is dotted with colourful art installations. The Wilds' greenhouse is home to a beautiful collection of rare cycads.



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waik in the Memele Koppies Nature Reserve and 1,000 years back in time, to a rock-strewn, primordial landscape that looks much the same as it did in the Iron Age, but with a beautiful city skyline view in the distance.

The open day is a great opportunity to hike through this pristine landscape and check out the well preserved Iron Age furnace and other archaeological artefacts.

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