

5 ways to explore Cape Town's city centre this holiday season

The Cape Town central city is all set to entertain locals and tourists alike in the 2020 holiday season.

The award-winning city is often associated with beaches and wine estates, but it is its central city – as vibrant, culturally rich, gastronomically exciting and downright cool as any in the world – that woos visitors with its depth and charm.

“While the broader Cape Town region boasts beautiful beaches, the Winelands and excursions through the Deep South to Cape Point, the hustle and bustle of the Central City is a must-visit, even as a tourist in your own town,” says Tasso Evangelinos, CEO of the Cape Town Central City Improvement District (CCID), whose mandate is to keep the CBD safe, clean, caring and open for business.



Cape Town’s traditional downtown has a lot going for it, Evangelinos says. “It is a unique area, from its culturally-rich green lung in the form of the Company’s Garden to the 44 hotels and myriad shops, bars, clubs, restaurants and hotels.”

The CCID's *State of Cape Town Central City Report 2019* reveals there are over 1.200 retail and entertainment entities in the Central Business District. "Of these, 151 are restaurants – with many being award-winning destination eateries – and 73 are coffee shops," Evangelinos confirms. "Visitors are spoilt for definitely spoilt for choice and we would like to invite them to come back to town to experience what we have to offer."

Here's how to get the most out of Cape Town's city centre these holidays.

Take a tour of the city on a topless bus

If you're new to the CBD, why not take in the sights aboard a double-decker Red Bus. These hop-on, hop-off excursions allow travellers to get closer to iconic monuments and famous landmarks. Locals get a special rate of R179 (usually R245), R120 for pensioners and R90 for a child.



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Stay cultured

Bookworms and art lovers are also well looked after in the CBD with stores such as The Book Lounge - a gem that boasts two floors of novels and nonfiction - and iconic Clarke's (no relation to the café). If you have kids, pop into The Book Lounge on Saturday at 11am for storytime or see if a book launch evening is planned during your stay.

Visitors will be spoilt for choice with the world-class galleries dotted around the central city. Meander through the streets to enjoy public art including Ralph Borlands' ghost shark sculptures on Jetty Square and pop into spaces such as Michael Chandler's Voorkamer Gallery of StateoftheART. Or visit the popular Iziko Museums, which is an amalgamation of 14 national museums located in and around the CBD. Among them is the Iziko Planetarium while the South African Jewish Museum is Africa's first Holocaust Centre. It mixes interpretive panels and archival photos with recreated environments and multimedia display.

If you happen to be in town on 3 December, then join in on the First Thursdays event. This popular gathering of art and café lovers allows visitors to explore the Central City on foot, with galleries and museums staying open late into the night, often serving a glass of wine on the entrance.

Walk around

Another popular way to enjoy the city's many treasures is on foot. The CBD's streets are as easy to navigate as they are charming, and if it is almost impossible to get lost with the majestic Table Mountain visible at every turn.

Start at the Heerengracht Fountain and meander up through Adderley Street, past the kaleidoscope of flowers at the Adderley Street Flower Market and up to the Arch for Arch, a beautiful wooden structure created and installed to celebrate the life and work of one of South Africa's greatest heroes, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu. Then, stroll up Government Lane in the Company's Garden, stopping for refreshments at The Heritage Shop and its café.



Soak up the city's history

Or, combine a walk past the Houses of Parliament with a visit to the city's famous squares. Among them is Church Square, on the corner of Parliament and Spin streets. The cobbled square offers a quiet space away from the otherwise busy streets. It is also a former slave market site. Connected to the Slave Lodge, it is an important part of the Cape's history.

If you'd prefer to have a guide, join a walking tour. These free 90-minute excursions leave at 11am daily from Greenmarket Square - home to the popular craft market where you can buy traditional African souvenirs, curios and crafts - and take a historic amble around the central city. If a self-guided walking tour is more your scene, why not explore the city's original shoreline from the Castle of Good Hope, through the Cape Town CBD, to the V&A Waterfront. The 4.5 km tour retraces the original shoreline, from the first making of the land to the present day bustling commercial city.



Indulge your inner foodie

For foodies, there are walking culinary tours that explore the central city's epicurean delights. Eat like a local, sampling Cape Malay curries and traditional South African foods while taking in historic sights. For those with a sweet tooth, there is even a stop at an artisanal chocolatier, Honest Chocolate.

Walking tours aside, there is no shortage of eateries that cater to every culinary taste. For authentic Indian, Chinese, Malay and Turkish street food, head for the Eastern Food Bazaar on Longmarket Street. A popular canteen-like eatery, it's a stone's throw from the Grand Parade and is loved by locals. If fine dining is your flavour visit FYN on Speakers Corner. With visionaries, Peter Tempelhoff, Ashley Moss and Jennifer Hugé, behind the award-winning restaurant, its selection of menus and use of unusual ingredients will please your palate. For something a little more every day, there's Burger & Lobster, the ever-popular Clarke's or La Parada – all on Bree Street – for casual dining with views of the bustling streets.

Where to stay for the night

Choose from establishments in the Tsogo Sun stable, including the signature Southern Sun The Cullinan, and check out the special deals on at the moment. Or opt for one of downtown Cape Town's new boutique hotels; Gorgeous George in St Georges Mall, a celebration of local design and innovation located in two tastefully renovated heritage buildings, or Labotessa on Church Square with its classic European style and luxury. If you're in the mood for something a bit more casual, try 91 Loop Hostel, the CBD's first boutique backpackers' lodge, or Urban Hive, which is housed inside one of the City's historic Victorian buildings.

For more great ideas on where to go visit the CCID's website: www.capetownccid.org.