

# WILDLIFE, WETLANDS & WINE

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A GROWING TREND TOWARDS IMMERSIVE HOLIDAY EXPERIENCES HAS PROMPTED THE PLETTENBERG BAY TOURISM COMMUNITY TO DEVISE A RANGE OF LUXURY SLACKPACKING OPTIONS TO EXTEND BEYOND THE TOWN'S MORE WELL-KNOWN BEACH OFFERING. **SOUTH** WENT ALONG FOR AN INTRODUCTORY PLETT TRAIL EXPERIENCE.

One are the days when holidays were just about working on a tan and visiting tourist attractions. In a world of super fast, superficial tourism offerings, a growing number of holidaymakers are yearning for unique and authentic experiences that expand knowledge and engage all the senses.

Veteran trail guide Grahame Thomson, who was key to the Plett Trail's development, is among the first we meet. "Plettenberg Bay has an undisputed image of being the ultimate summer, sun and beach destination, but there are so many other interesting gems that are relatively undiscovered. The Plett Trail showcases the Bitou region's hidden treasures by linking them with hiking and horse riding trails to make up an immersive holiday and unique luxury slackpacking experience," says Grahame.

Few, for instance, know that Bitou has significant archeological sites – such as Nelson's Cave at Robberg, which was home to a small human population more than 160 000 years ago – or that Kranshoek was home to visionary Griqua leader Andrew Abraham Stockenström le Fleur.

The area is also a birdwatching hotspot, with 50 percent of South Africa's 841 indigenous bird species found here. It is home to 52 endemics and 32 near-endemics.

The Plettenberg Bay wine region, which has expanded significantly since the first vineyards were established some 15 years ago, is another trail highlight. Grahame says the region now boasts 16 vineyards and produces more than 200 000 bottles of wine annually, many of which are award-winning vintages.

The trail offering, which will be officially launched at the World Travel Market Africa in Cape Town this April, will operate outside the summer holiday season and comprises a range of one- to ten-day guided packages over 100km of rugged coastline, country roads, wetland terrain and forest paths.

Slackpackers can look forward to numerous attractions, including peninsular paleontology, wine-tasting and cellar tours, birding, cultural tours, coastal walks and marine ecology, forest walks and forest ecology, horse trails, community trails, picnic lunches, five-star accommodation and top class meals.

While it sounds daunting, Grahame says most of the hikes are more than manageable for reasonably fit participants. If our group – who managed to pull off a large portion of the trail in cheap tennis shoes and sweatpants – is any indication, experienced slackpackers should find the Plett Trail well within their abilities.





The beauty of slackpacking is that you can experience the adventure and thrill of hiking without the burden of carrying all your supplies on your back, pitching tents, sleeping on hard beds, cold showers and cooking your own food.

Once the day's hiking is over, you are greeted by friendly faces at one of the region's top accommodation establishments and shown to a luxury suite with a comfortable bed, soothing hot shower and delicious meals.

We joined the Crag module, which began with breakfast at the enchanting Emily Moon River Lodge outside Plettenberg Bay before a transfer to Keurbooms beach. Our guide, Colin Wylie, shared interesting facts about the area's geology, birdlife and marine species.

A forest path led to Forest Hall Country Estate, where we picnicked next to the pool before continuing the adventurous hike to Nature's Valley. One of the most spectacular views of the trail – the snaking Salt River, ocean and beautiful vegetation of the valley – also proved to be the most challenging hiking spot. Our miscalculation of tides turned what was meant to be a knee-deep river crossing into a swim – sweatpants and all! Colin came to our 'rescue', eventually carrying all our daypacks and camera equipment across the river. Our day ended at Nature's Valley beach, before we took up residence at Trogon House – luxury accommodation tucked away in a private forest in the Crag.

The next morning was on horseback, departing from Hog Hollow Horse Trails where owner Debbie Fermor expertly matched horse to rider to ensure even complete novices enjoyed the ride.

Lunch was at Newstead Wine Estate, owned by the Lund family. Nothing beats a glass of ice-cold bubbly after a morning on horseback – or so we believed until Sue Lund laid on a feast that must rank among the most opulent on the Garden Route. It is little wonder visitors return time and again for the exceptional hospitality.

The Plett Trail also includes an overnight stay at the award-winning Kurland Hotel, where adventurers can explore the beautiful country estate, enjoy supper at its prestigious restaurant and overnight in one of its 12 five-star suites.

The final day's activities entailed a short but exhilarating hike to Redford House – a historic four-star country guest house in the Crag – where we were able to reflect on the journey over tea and scones – the perfect ending to a perfect adventure.



The ten-day, nine-night Plett Trail comprises two main modules (you can do both or either).

The five-night, six-day **Kranshoek Experience** stretches between the Harkerville Forest and the Bitou River Wetlands in Wittedrift. It includes guided bird-watching, wine-tasting, forest walks, a gallery visit, traditional Griqua cultural activities, nature talks, a visit to Nelson's Cave and more.

The four-night, five-day **Crag Experience** explores activities and attractions between Keurbooms beach and Nature's Valley, the Bitou River Wetlands and Kurland area in the Crag.

One-day specialty guided trails include an interpretive bush walk at **Buffalo Hills Game Reserve**, the **Covie Community Trail** of coastline and mountain fynbos ridges as well as visits to Bramon and Newstead Wine, and the **Robberg Origins Trail** in the Robberg Nature Reserve.

Two-night, three-day options are the **T-Niqua Stable Inn/Packwood Trail**, the **Kurland Redford Trail** and the **Hog Hollow/Kurland Horse Trail**.

#### **BOOKING AND INFORMATION:**

A complete guide to Plett Trail is available for download from [www.plett-tourism.co.za](http://www.plett-tourism.co.za)

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