

Gordons Bay Location Guide

things to do and places to visit in Gordons Bay

Gordons Bay is a small beachfront community lying on False Bay in the Western Cape which is one of South Africa's most popular and picturesque tourist areas. It is about 45 minutes from Cape Town and about 35 minutes from Cape Town International Airport. It is also on the fringe of the Stellenbosch wine region which starts in Somerset West, less than 10 minutes away. To the south, over Sir Lowry's Pass, is Hermanus, famous for whale watching.

Gordons Bay remains a small, picturesque old-style seaside village boasting two harbours, narrow streets and a beautiful water front. It nestles in the corner of False Bay, between the blue Indian Ocean and with the visually stunning Hottentots Holland Mountains as a spectacular backdrop.

The beachfront of Gordons Bay is lined with small restaurants, coffee shops, pubs, a bookstore and curio shops. All overlook a clean sandy beach which slopes down gently down into the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. The area is renowned for its stunning sunsets.

The village was once known as Combuys because fresh water, fish and game could be obtained there. It was renamed Gordons Bay after Robert Jacob Gordon, a Dutch military officer who commanded the Cape garrison from 1777 to 1795. Above the harbour on the mountainside is a giant anchor and the letters "GB" written in stone. These do not stand for Gordons Bay but for General Botha which was the original name of the Naval Station which is adjacent to the old harbour and the yacht marina.

Facilities in Gordons Bay

Eating and drinking – There are a large number of good restaurants, pubs and coffee shops to be found in and around Gordons Bay with an emphasis on fresh locally-caught seafood. Most restaurants are along Beach Road or at the Old Harbour. There are also a number on the boardwalk at Harbour Island. A

little further away, there are plenty of eating places along the beach front at Strand.

Shopping – In Gordons Bay, there are a number of shops in Beach Road and the small roads set back behind this. These include a small supermarket, filling station (with car wash), internet café, a bookshop and some interesting curio and gift shops. In the Bay Centre on the back road, there are Pick ‘n Pay and Spar supermarkets and other shops including a tobacconist, pharmacy, locksmith, video shop and hardware shop.

Beaches – Gordons Bay has two beach areas. Main Beach sweeps round the bay, and is a safe area to walk or swim, although the waves can be strong at times. Bikini Beach (just beyond the Old Harbour) is a smaller and very beautiful beach, very popular with sunbathers and with safe and protected swimming.

Harbour Island boardwalk & marina – This leisure harbour and marina complex halfway between Gordons Bay and Strand has a variety of restaurants and pubs where you can enjoy a quiet lunch by the water.

Amenities – Gordons Bay is well provided with useful amenities – a post office, internet café and small tourist office are all within easy walking distance. There is a BP petrol station and shop at the junction of Beach Road and R44. There is also a small clinic.

Walking and Hiking Trails – There are some lovely walks above Gordons Bay, including the Danie Miller trail which traces the foot of the mountains from Aurora Drive to the landmark anchor. The historic cannon and wagon wheel walk from Sir Lowry’s Pass viewpoint passes through the historic Gantouw Pass. Enjoy the sound of running water and a dip in Chrystal Pools up Steenbras Valley.

Sports

- **Yachting and Boat Trips** - Charter cruises leave daily (weather permitting) from the Old Harbour and also from Harbour Island. Bookings can be made through the Helderberg Tourism Bureau. The Gordons Bay Yacht Club offers temporary membership to overseas yachtsmen.

- **Fishing** - The Gordons Bay Boat Angling Club is sited at Harbour Island. The Gordons Bay Offshore Classic is an annual weeklong offshore gamefishing tournament in May attracting keen anglers from far and wide.

things to do and places to visit . . . further afield

Wildlife – The following reserves provide excellent opportunities to see the local wildlife :

- **Helderberg Nature Reserve** : Bird watching, antelope (including grey duiker, grysbok, steenbok and bontebok), walking, shady picnic areas, restaurant, arts & crafts, summer evenings of music, information centre.
- **Dick Dent Bird Sanctuary** : Bird hide in Helderberg for ornithologists and keen photographers.
- **Good Hope Nature Reserve** : Good whale watching in season, bird watching, some game viewing and various flora.

The area offers a wide range of fauna , including :

- **Antelope** - Helderberg nature reserve
- **Baboons** - Baboons can often be found on the roads and will snatch food or any bag which looks as though it may contain food. You should not feed them.
- **Ostriches** - Several farms around Stellenbosch. 'In the wild' at Good Hope Nature Reserve
- **Other Birds** - Helderberg Nature Reserve
- **Penguins** - A large colony of African penguins can be seen all year round at Boulders Bay, near Simon's Town. There is also a smaller colony at Betty's Bay.
- **Rock Dassies** - More properly called the rock hyrax, these rodent-like creatures can be seen at the top of Table Mountain.
- **Seals** - Cape fur seals can often be seen in the late evening sunbathing on jetties.
- **Whales** - Between June and December each year, hundreds of Southern Right Whales visit the sheltered, shallow bays to calve and nurture their offspring. The best place to spot them are at official whale watching spots found on the coastal road from Gordons Bay to Rooi Eis. Further along the coast,

Hermanus is also a famous site for whalewatching. The best months for whale-watching are September and October. There are also Bryde's whales further off shore all year and Humpback whales which pass from May to November.

Walking and Hiking Trails – In addition to the lovely walks above Gordons Bay, slightly further afield, there are many walking and hiking trails within the Helderberg Nature Reserve and also the Boland Hiking Trail and Lourens River Trail. In Cape Town, you can also choose to spend 2 or 3 hours walking up Table Mountain instead of taking the cable car.

Beaches and Swimming - The long sheltered beaches of False Bay are excellent for swimming and sunbathing. Strand has two main beaches – Milk Bay Beach and Harmony Beach. The best beach for surfing is Kogelbaai Beach which is a long stretch of pure white beach situated on Faure Marine / Clarens Drive, just outside Gordons Bay - this is also the only braai (barbecue) area on the Helderberg coast. Strand also boasts a heated Olympic size indoor swimming pool for cooler days. It is situated next to the Strand Pavilion on Beach Road.

Sports

- **Golf** – Golf is extremely popular in South Africa and can be played all year round. The area around Gordons Bay is a golfer's paradise with three 18-hole courses, a 9-hole golf course and a golf driving range. The areas close to the Helderberg also offer a number of world class golf courses such as Stellenbosch, Spier, Devonvale, Boschenmeer, Royal Cape and Arabella.
- **Yachting and Boat Trips** - Charter cruises leave daily (weather permitting) from the Old Harbour and also from Harbour Island. Bookings can be made through the Helderberg Tourism Bureau. The Gordons Bay Yacht Club offers temporary membership to overseas yachtsmen.
- **Fishing** - Steenbras Dam is stocked annually with trout, and fishing is permissible provided a permit is obtained. Sea fishing is good from the harbour walls and coastline. There are also opportunities for deep sea fishing trips.
- **Water sports** – There are plenty of opportunities locally for water sports, including canoeing, scuba and snorkel diving,

jet-ski and water-ski. You can even try white shark cage diving.

- **Tennis** – Tennis facilities are available in Strand.
- **Horse Riding** – Facilities are available close by.

Wine Tasting and Estates – Gordons Bay is right on the doorstep of the Winelands, near several of the main wine routes, where many of the dozens of beautiful estates offer visitors the opportunity to sample wines free or for a small charge. Take a circular route through Stellenbosch, Simonsberg, Franschhoek and Grabouw via the beautiful mountain passes of Helshoogte, Franschhoek, Viljoens and Sir Lowry. Nearer Cape Town, Lourensford and Verglegen are among many estates that are worth a visit.

Childrens Activities - Animal Zone, Monkey Town and the Vintage Train Ride (up the magnificent Sir Lowry's Pass) are among a number of children's activities locally. Slightly further afield is Ratanga Junction, South Africa's first full-scale theme park.

Shopping – There are a number of good modern shopping malls within easy driving distance, including Somerset Mall, Century City (Canal Walk) and Cavendish Square. The closest is Somerset West, just 10 to 15 minutes away. All these malls include "Woolworths" (similar to Marks & Spencers), "Pick n Pay" (Tesco), "CNA" (WH Smith), "Game" (Walmart/Asda) and many others. Clothes are good value – they are generally of good quality and value for money. Local arts and crafts are excellent souvenirs.

Scenic drives – There are many mountain and coastal scenic drives right on the edge of Gordons Bay. The Sir Lowry's Pass climbs up the mountain immediately behind the village and provides stunning views over the bay. The Clarence Drive coast road (R44) snakes its way from Gordons Bay all the way to Betty's Bay and Pringle Bay, and is a spectacular route with steep cliffs and lovely coves. At Betty's Bay, there is a colony of penguins. Various look-out points along the way offer amazing views over False Bay, right over to Table Mountain and Cape Point. North of Gordons Bay, the Helderberg and Stellenbosch Wine Routes also offer beautiful views and lots of opportunities for wine tasting. Further afield is the most scenic drive of all - the famous Garden

Route. This starts at Mossel Bay, about 200 km east of Gordons Bay and then continues eastwards for 230 km through an area of forests, rivers and valleys running down to the southern coast.

Entertainment – There are cinemas and also a theatre (Playhouse Theatre) in Somerset West (Somerset Mall). Grand West Casino, about a 25-minute drive away (just east of the airport), offers Las Vegas style gambling and a wide range of restaurants and bars.

Arts and crafts – There are a number of curio and gift shops dotted along the beach front in Gordons Bay, and these offer some unusual crafts. Somerset West is famous for its craft markets which are held at Southey's Wines in the main street on Saturday mornings.

Cape Town and Cape Peninsula Attractions

[Click here for tourist information about Cape Town](#)

Cape Town is an easy 45-minute drive from Gordons Bay. Sandwiched between Table Mountain and Table Bay, it is a beautiful city with many attractions. The following are described as the “Big Six” which should not be missed :

- **Robben Island** – famous as the site of Nelson Mandela's imprisonment. The guides are former political prisoners who give a very personal insight. Enjoy the views of Cape Town from the boat. Trips about every hour – it is best to pre-book.
- **Victoria & Alfred Waterfront** – Situated in the heart of Cape Town's working harbour with the dramatic backdrop of the majestic Table Mountain, the V&A Waterfront is widely acknowledged as Cape Town's premier shopping and tourist destination and a well known entertainment and dining hotspot. It also houses the Two Oceans Aquarium and Tourist Information. Free concerts and street entertainers, especially at weekends.
- **Table Mountain** - fantastic views over the city and the ocean – either walk up or take the cable car
- **Kirstenbosch National Botanic Garden** – a massive array of flowers, trees and sculptures

- **Winelands (Constantia & Durbanville)** – wide areas of private wine estates growing great grapes. Many offer wine-tasting opportunities
- **Cape Peninsula** – the Cape of Good Hope National Park extends down to the Cape Point lighthouse, where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans meet, with dramatic coastlines and seascapes. A great place for a picnic.

Other attractions in and around Cape Town include :

- **Bo-Kaap** (Malay Quarter) – interesting colourful and historical downtown area with narrow streets and old houses – the area is best avoided at night.
- **District Six Museum** – this tells the history of apartheid and its effect on ordinary people through an intimate look at their stories and memories
- **Rhodes Memorial & Groote Schuur Estate** – set in lovely grounds with lots of wildlife and views over the city
- **Camps Bay** – the so-called Riviera, where the young and rich play – lots of bars, cafes and music
- **Hout Bay & Chapmans Peak** - Unpretentious beach area popular for walking and fresh fish. On your way, enjoy the views from the spectacular winding Chapman's Peak road and visit the World of Birds wildlife rehabilitation centre.
- **Muizenberg & Kalk Bay** - Muizenberg lies at the other end of the 25-mile False Bay beach which sweeps all the way round to Gordons Bay. Kalk Bay is full of small antique and arts and crafts shops.
- **Simon's Town & Boulders Beach** (Penguins) – Traditional settlement with old buildings, home of the South African Navy. Boulders is a small beach with elevated boardwalks where you can swim with the South African penguins.