

The Telegraph

De Hoop, Western Cape: getting there, restaurants and activities

A guide to the best ways of getting to De Hoop Nature Reserve in the Western Cape, plus the best activities and restaurants in the area.



Animals are so plentiful in De Hoop that one might suspect they are paid to stand around and pose for visitors Photo: ALAMY

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1:01PM GMT 20 Dec 2010

GETTING THERE

British Airways (0844 493 0787; www.britishairways.com (<http://www.britishairways.com>)) and **South African Airways** (0027 11 978 5313; www.flysaa.com (<http://www.flysaa.com>)) have direct flights from London to Cape Town from around £700.

From the airport you can rent a car (reserve in advance; visit www.southafrica.to (<http://www.southafrica.to>) for a list of rental companies and contact numbers). From Cape Town it's approximately three hours' drive to De Hoop via the N2 highway to Swellendam and then 28 miles (45km) on the unpaved Spitskop Road.

PACKAGES

Because De Hoop is off the beaten track, there are not many organised tours. **Fynbus** tours (28 514 3303; www.fynbus.co.za (http://www.fynbus.co.za/de_hoop_nature_reserve_tour.html)) offers a day trip, which includes hikes, game-viewing and whale-watching, from £45.

De Hoop also offers various hiking packages. The most popular is the **Whale Trail Hike** (28 542 1253; www.dehoopcollection.co.za (<http://www.dehoopcollection.co.za>)). Regarded as one of the most breathtaking hikes in South Africa, it's a 34-mile (55km), five-day excursion of moderate to strenuous walking along the reserve's coastline. Accommodation along the route is in comfortable, fully-equipped cottages. Reservations are limited to 6 or 12 people and prices start at £90 per person per day.

GETTING AROUND

There is a lot of distance to cover, so a car is a necessity (renting a 4WD will make the journey easier as some of De Hoop's roads make for a bumpy ride). But once you've decided which part of De Hoop you want to explore, there are various ways to do it. The most popular option is to hike and there are myriad well-marked trails for every level of fitness. Mountain and quad-bikes are also available for rent at reception.

[The jewel of the Western Cape](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/safariandwildlifeholidays/8213758/South-Africa-whale-watching-dazzled-on-the-Western-Cape.html) (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/safariandwildlifeholidays/8213758/South-Africa-whale-watching-dazzled-on-the-Western-Cape.html>)

[Wilbur Smith's Cape Town](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/africaandindianocean/southafrica/7999408/Wilbur-Smiths-Cape-Town.html) (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/africaandindianocean/southafrica/7999408/Wilbur-Smiths-Cape-Town.html>)

[Cape Town: flights and packages](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/africaandindianocean/southafrica/7999586/Cape-Town-guide-flights-) (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/africaandindianocean/southafrica/7999586/Cape-Town-guide-flights->

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[Into the world of the Afrikaners \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/africaandindianocean/southafrica/8048363/South-Africa-road-trip-through-the-Free-State.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/africaandindianocean/southafrica/8048363/South-Africa-road-trip-through-the-Free-State.html)

[Kenya: Visions in African widescreen \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/safariandwildlife/holidays/6218937/Kenyas-Chyulu-hills-Visions-in-African-widescreen.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/safariandwildlife/holidays/6218937/Kenyas-Chyulu-hills-Visions-in-African-widescreen.html)

[Kenya: A safari open to the African elements \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/safariandwildlife/holidays/8105052/Kenya-A-safari-open-to-the-African-elements.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/safariandwildlife/holidays/8105052/Kenya-A-safari-open-to-the-African-elements.html)

THE INSIDE TRACK

De Hoop's whale expert, Dalfrenzo Laing, is not only an authority on whales; he is also the best person to ask about the reserve's prime snorkelling spots. Laing also conducts tours of the tidal pools that pepper the coastline during low tide – you'll be amazed at their abundance of life.

Even if you're not a bird enthusiast, bird tours are a must at De Hoop. The reserve is home to the only remaining breeding colony of the endangered Cape vulture.

Though the quickest way to De Hoop is via the N2 highway, it's worth adding an extra 20 minutes to your trip to take the scenic route through the towns of Napier and Bredasdorp via the R316 and R319; ask De Hoop for complete directions. This way takes you through miles of farm land and the largest concentration of blue cranes in the region.

Make a point of stopping by reception once a day to ask if there have been any Cape mountain zebra sightings. Employees know these are a favourite and will "radio zebra-intelligence" to reception.

THE BEST HOTELS

The nearest town is almost an hour away and because the drive into the reserve is such a long and bumpy affair (40 minutes along an unpaved, pothole-riddled road), and because the best times for game viewing are at dusk and dawn, it's best to stay in the reserve itself.

De Hoop provides an excellent range of accommodation, from budget options, including tent and caravan spots (starting at £27) and traditional hut-like rondavels (£40 a night; self-catering), to cottages with a kitchen and two or three bedrooms (£115 to £215).

If you're looking to indulge with a group of friends, the best (and most expensive) accommodation at De Hoop is the luxurious Koppie Alleen, a four-bedroom Mediterranean-style cottage just steps from the beach and the best whale-watching spot on the reserve (starting at £450 a night).

EATING OUT

The Fig Tree is the reserve's only restaurant and is worth a visit; it is especially pleasant to dine outdoors on the covered terrace where you will probably spot bontebok and baboons. The menu changes daily and is focused on fresh, locally grown ingredients. An excellent and affordable South African wine list, with a strong nod to local vintages from the Southern Cape area, is on offer. The Fig Tree serves three meals daily and will also prepare picnic baskets on request.

Because most of the cottages are self-catering, you can supplement visits to the restaurant with your own meals. Farm stalls are common along the highway from Cape Town and are the best place to pick up local cheeses, charcuterie and wine.

WHAT TO BRING HOME

At De Hoop the motto is "Look, don't touch". The reserve is filled with rare and endangered flora and fauna, therefore rules about what not to touch are strictly observed. You cannot pick flowers, collect seeds, or go fishing. The only souvenirs to be had are at the curio shop at reception, which offers a small but lovely collection of locally-made craftsmanship and art.

If you have the time and the urge to spend, 45 minutes west of De Hoop is the Southern Cape wine region, the most southerly in Africa. Try a few different vintages at the restaurant and then check out the wineries themselves on a day trip from De Hoop.

WHAT TO AVOID

The Cape cobra and puff adder are definitely best viewed from afar.

It's tempting to believe that the terribly cute baboons really do want to be your friends. This is certainly not the case so keep a respectful distance. With the profusion of animals at De Hoop it's easy to lose sight of the fact that they are wild and should only be approached via the zoom of your camera lens.

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