

ALL TRAVEL, ALL THE TIME

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# TRAVELLER

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WHAT IT REVEALS  
ABOUT OUR OCEANS  
& HOW YOU CAN MAKE  
A DIFFERENCE

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10 TRIPS TO SUIT EVERY TASTE,  
BUDGET AND TIME FRAME

### COASTAL GETAWAYS

LUXE, LAID-BACK, LOCAL HOTELS

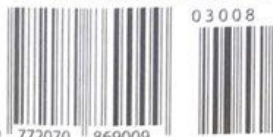
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the best short trips in the world

# LONG WEEKEND



**PICNIC PARADISE**  
The Wild Coast's mild climate is great for alfresco dining

## WALKING THE WILD COAST

**YOU CAN MAKE A POSITIVE IMPACT TO THE PEOPLE AND THE PLACE WHEN FAIR-TRADE PRINCIPLES ARE WOVEN INTO THE TAPESTRY OF YOUR HOLIDAY**

WORDS AMY EDMONDS PHOTOGRAPHS SEAN CALITZ

Legend has it that in the late 1730s a seven-year-old English girl named Bessie washed up on the shores of the Wild Coast. She was rescued and subsequently raised by the resident amaPondo tribe. The little *umlungu* became known as Gquma, the Roar of the Sea. Over the years, Bessie is said to have deliberately eluded the many rescue missions made by her European kinsmen. Ancient shipwrecks litter the shoreline, bearing testimony to the futile attempts at taming this merciless stretch of coast. In contrast to the unforgiving territory, the warmth of the Xhosa people tugs at my heart strings. Almost three centuries later, I appreciate young Bessie's decision to stay.

**PONDERING AMAPONDOLAND** The Wild Coast stretches from Port Edward to just north of East London. The area is characterised by vast undulating mountains, crowned by velvety plains that have fattened the flanks of lambs for centuries. The rolling hips of the motherland seem to be clad in a snug-fitting caramel-coloured dress smattered with polka dots of crisp white, dusty pink and bubblegum blue rondavels – shades carefully chosen to appease the ancestors. Soon summer rains will transform the landscape from a tawny pauper's table to a verdant princely banquet. The four-legged lawnmowers will once again take to the burgeoning banks, minded by sprightly herd boys.

I explore some places along the aptly named Wild Coast where just by lazing in a hammock, taking to the waves or drinking *umkomboti*, the local brew, your visit makes a positive impact. Here, the golden rules of Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa (FTTSA; [www.fairtourisma.org.za](http://www.fairtourisma.org.za)) are carefully woven into the tapestry of your holiday experience. FTTSA is a nonprofit organisation that ensures that responsible tourism practices are employed to promote human rights, culture and the environment. Together with the National Development Agency (NDA), FTTSA mentors six community-based tourism projects, including traditional home stays in Knysna and Grahamstown, community-run enterprises on the Wild Coast and adventure trails in the majestic Drakensberg.

**JUST COASTING** Away from the familiar comfort of the tarred N2 highway towards the coast, most of the secondary roads are gravel. The concept of slow travel may have been born on the Wild Coast. High-clearance vehicles are recommended in the dry season (May to August) and a 4x4 is essential in the rainy season (September to April). We arrive at Msikaba, five hours' drive north of East London or south of Durban respectively. This is the start of the Pondoland Hiking Trail that meanders 65 kilometres southwards, ending in bustling Port St Johns. Drifters

**Highlights of the Wild Coast**

- Canoeing on Msikaba River.
- Angling with a gillie.
- Waterfall Bluff, a spectacular waterfall that plunges directly into the sea.
- Cathedral Rock, a freestanding sandstone cliff in the sea.
- Swimming in the clear natural mountain pools.
- Horseriding along the coast.

**Shopping highlights**

Bargaining with informal traders gives you a great opportunity to pick up snatches of local lingo. Choice items to buy: wicker baskets and chairs; handwoven grass mats; clay models of jeeps made by kids at the roadside.



Adventures ([www.drifters.com](http://www.drifters.com)) has aligned itself with the Pondoland Community Trust, consisting of six communities that claim a 25 percent equity stake in the operation. All camp staff and gillies (local fishing guides) are from these local populations. The three-day 'slack-packing' trail is fully catered and portered, or give the more challenging six-day self-catering option a go. Each day is spent walking or mountain biking along the coast; the terrain is fairly easy to cover and requires a reasonable level of fitness. Overnight at one of six Drifters trail camps or at hand-picked beach lodges. The Robinson Crusoe-style camps, each with 12 luxurious Meru-style en-suite canvas tents on wooden platforms and kitted out with twin beds, are located in the most pristine coastal setting. Bringing a sleeping bag is essential – ear plugs too if you think the sound of the crashing waves will keep you awake at night.

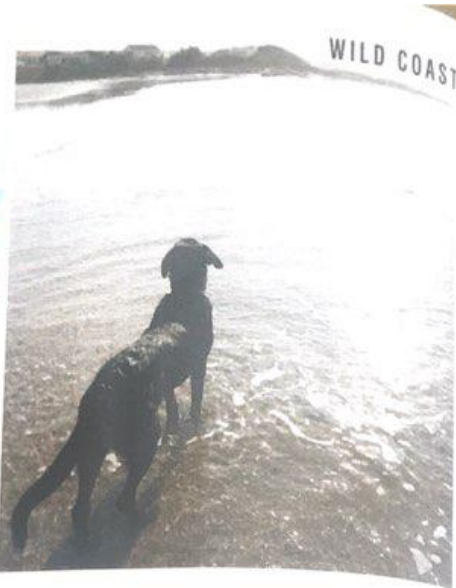
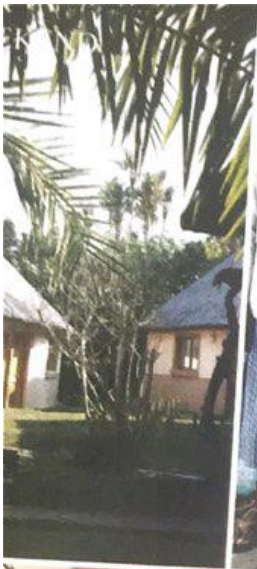
**BEGUILING BULUNGULA** Sandwiched between the serpentine Bulungula and Xhora rivers, Bulungula Lodge ([www.bulungula.com](http://www.bulungula.com)) is perched on a headland just three hours' drive on a gravel road from Mthatha. Trailblazers Dave Martin, his wife Rejane Woodroffe and the Nqileni community, who own a 40 percent equity stake in Bulungula Lodge, launched it in August 2004 as the first Fair Trade-accredited backpackers lodge in South Africa. The lodge is structured around a garagiste tavern with a convivial restaurant, self-service bar, communal kitchen and chill-out lounge. It's not just the rocket showers, eco-loos and sweeping views that put Bulungula on the map: Bulungula holds expansive tourism appeal for a melange of professionals and travellers who wish to mingle fluidly with the locals. The lodge has four dormitories that can sleep three or four people each. The four twin or double safari tents are a great new option, although my favourite lodgings are the traditional Xhosa rondavels with zany hand-painted murals on the cow-dung plastered walls and floors.

The absence of prescribed programmes at Bulungula means you unwind at your own pace. Embark on one of the many tours that are fully owned and operated by members of the Nqileni community. Each experience offers you a taste of rural Xhosa life. Comb the forest for medicinal plants with herbalist Khunjulwa Mbi or savour Pinki Sinoni's fluffy pancakes at the iLanga fire restaurant. On the Women Power tour, Khululwa Dodwana shared her views on being a progressive African *cece* while painting my face. There are many more enthralling experiences that await you.

The tug at my heart strings I felt at the outset has turned out to be far more serious: a part of my heart has absconded. I suspect, like Bessie, it's hidden itself deep inside the vast bosom of this motherland. I will certainly beat a path back to these captivating shores to resume my search for it.

**GETTING THERE** By air: Fly directly with SA Airlink from Joburg to Mthatha daily, from R2 500 return ([www.flysaa.com](http://www.flysaa.com)), or fly with 1Time from Joburg to East London, from R531 one way (1Time <https://www.1timeaero/>). Transfers: To get to Msikaba, you will need to hire a car at the airport. Msikaba is about 5 hours' drive north of East London or south of Durban respectively; trails start at Mbotyi River Lodge or Port St Johns, where you can safely leave your car. Bulungula Lodge is 3 hours' drive from Mthatha or 4½ hours from East London. For Bulungula only: after flying to East London, take the airport shuttle (082 569 3599) to the East London bus station, catch a Greyhound or Translux bus (departing 12pm) to Mthatha, then take the Bulungula shuttle. R70: the shuttle departs the Mthatha Shell Ultra City at 3pm and must be booked via Bulungula Lodge a day ahead.





**SKEI KALEIDOSCOPE**  
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 ig the coast; simple,  
 re from Bulungula's  
 kitchen; Wild Coast  
 quaint, comfortable  
 tting; proud gogos  
 qileni village; Port  
 r's pristine beach  
 gs to be explored



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