

George, the 'capital' of the Garden Route

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Garden Route that takes explorers along the coastline roughly between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. The spectacular Outeniqua mountain range frames this coastal establishment.

George lies within the Cape Floral Kingdom, which is World Heritage site because it is one of the richest in flora and fauna species in the world for its size – a delight for birders and nature lovers.

While today the small town of George is the commercial hub of the Garden Route, back in the late 1700s it was a timber outpost for the Dutch East India Company. George is located in the most densely forested area of South Africa, and there was a surge of development that saw a desperate need for a continuous feed of high quality timber for construction, as well as woodcrafts such as furniture-making and building wagons. Many woodcutters and their families flocked to the forest settlements in the area, where stinkwood, ironwood and yellowwood still grow.

In 1811 the timber town was proclaimed on St George's Day (23 April), which is what it was named for. George is the sixth oldest town in South Africa.

George well-known for so much more than its place in the Garden Route... While it is unrelentingly picturesque, George also has some of the best sporting facilities in the country, an abundance of historical and cultural history, and is a hub for quality education in the district. In addition, because George is a Mecca for holiday-makers, it has the infrastructure to match (which far exceeds that of other towns in similar size), with shopping centres galore and its own airport which receives local flights.

Some of the most popular attractions in George include:

- George is often used as a base for exploring the Garden Route National Park, which incorporates the former Knysna, Tsitsikamma and Wilderness parks. The Wilderness section is only 15km from George. It has a huge variety of birds, wildlife and plants species.
- The George Museum was established in 1967. Back then it was just a single room full of Victorian artefacts collected by the editor of the town's newspaper, Charles Sayer. Today is a testament to George's history, especially its timber days. It hosts special exhibitions frequently,

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and is in the old Drostdy.

- Many of the top golf courses in South Africa are in George, a veritable hole-in-one for golfing enthusiasts. They include Fancourt, Oubaai, Kingswood and Le Grande George. Fancourt Golf Estate hosted the Presidents Cup in 2003, the first time it was ever hosted outside the States.

- The Outeniqua Park stadium hosts the IRB Sevens rugby matches in South Africa.

- The western terminal of the Outeniqua Choo-Tjoe is in George. It is the only scheduled steam train still running in South Africa. While you're at it make a point of visiting the Outeniqua Transport Museum, where you can see 13 old locomotives and interesting displays, like the crockery and cutlery used on the trains when they were running.

- 9km from George (as it is not right on the coast) is Victoria Bay, which is one of the prettiest stretches of beach in the area. Herold's Bay, which is also just outside town, is popular for swimming and sunbathing. Dolphins and whales can be seen making their way down the coastline from June to November.

- The Dutch Reformed Mother Church on Courtenay Street is a sight to behold, and St Peter & St Paul Catholic Church in Meade Street is the oldest Catholic Church in the country. St Mark's Cathedral is the smallest cathedral in the southern hemisphere.

- There is also a crocodile farm in the George area.