

Haunted: South Africa's most notorious ghosts

Written by {ga=staceyv}

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Without a doubt, South Africa's most well-told ghost tale is that of **the Flying Dutchmen**, or better known as Der Fliegende Hollander. It's a story as old as the seas: in 1641 a Dutch trade ship is said to have sunk just off the coast of the Cape of Good Hope after sailing into a fierce storm, its cargo-hold packed full of treasures from the Far East. Legend has it that whoever spots the phantom Flying Dutchman at sea will die a horrible death quite soon. And there have been sightings throughout history: by the crew of the Royal Navy in the late 1880s, by a German submarine during WWII and many holidaymakers claim to have spotted her tattered sails (or is it just an optical illusion?).

The old town of Matjiesfontein in the Western Cape is famous for its ghost stories; many a spirit is said to haunt the **Lord Milner Hotel** and the surrounds. Perhaps the most well-known is the Kate, a 19-year-old Boer War nurse who loved playing cards with her patients, and who passed away mysteriously. It is said she's sometimes seen staring from the hotel's top turrets, and the sound of shuffling cards can be heard from a small room on the second floor known simply as "Kate's Card Room". Other ghosts haunting the Lord Milner Hotel, which was proclaimed a national monument in 1970 for its well-preserved Victorian architecture, include the town's founder James Logan, who's said to favour the lounge areas towards the back of the hotel. Then there is Lucy, a ghostly figure that roams the hallways of the first floor wearing nothing but a nightgown, sobbing over a lover's tiff.

It may be that some apparitions prefer to do their haunting in comfort, as this next well-known South African ghost also haunts a hotel: the **Nottingham Road Hotel**. A prostitute called Charlotte fell in love with a British soldier. It is unknown what happened, perhaps a case of unrequited love, but Charlotte fell (or leapt) to her death from room 10. Now her spirit keeps busy by rearranging mirrors and flowers, and generally scaring the socks off the modern-day occupants of that ill-fated room. Every country has a story about a hitchhiker that mysteriously disappears from the car when given a lift.

In South Africa, the legend of the **Uniondale ghost** persists. The story goes that on Easter weekend in 1968, a couple was killed in a car accident – the woman was sleeping in the back seat when she met her sudden end. Now this dark-haired beauty haunts the roads around the town, hitching a ride on rainy nights with unsuspecting Good Samaritans, and then vanishing from the vehicle with a shrill laugh.

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In Cape Town, the spirit of Lady Anne Barnard often makes an appearance in the ballroom of the **Castle of Good Hope**. This oldest of South African buildings is packed to the rafters with ghosts, including governor Pieter Gysbert van Noodt, a fiendish black hound that leaps at you and disappears in mid air, and the souls of the dozens who were dragged down into the Donker Gat (dark hole), a dungeon with no windows, that often flooded during high tide, and where many were imprisoned and tortured.

If you'd like to go **ghost-hunting in South Africa**, best you book your seat on the Mystery Ghost Bus Tour. It does regular drives around the most haunted landmarks and historical sites in the country, including Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town, and during the National Arts Festival that is held in Grahamstown each year. Visit

<http://www.mysteryghostbus.co.za/ghost.htm>

to find out more.