

Garden Route & Coast

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Birkenhead House | Hermanus

An All-inclusive Small Boutique Hotel

Personal Impression

An outstanding property. It is very difficult to describe the combination of luxury, warmth and romance that the Birkenhead House conveys. The setting is idyllic and right on the ocean with amazing views. The rooms are all unique, beautifully decorated with great bathrooms. This is a property you will always remember. If you have an interest this is the place to go for Great White Shark viewing. Fully inclusive of all meals and selected local wines and spirits and laundry. [Click here for a personal review of this experience.](#)



Location

Birkenhead House is situated in Hermanus and is approximately 120km (75 miles) from Cape Town. Easily accessible by car from Cape Town, either by freeway or a scenic road. The hotel is positioned right on the cliff overlooking the beach and ocean. This is a prime whale spotting area and you can sit on the patio of the hotel to view the whales.

Accommodations

The rooms all have completely different styles and layouts. Each has its charm, so it is hard to determine one room better than another. The prime rooms are on the front of the house with a clear view overlooking the ocean. All rooms have an ocean view except for room number 11 and that has a mountain view. Deluxe Superior Rooms: 1 and 2. Superior Rooms: 3, 4, 6, 8. Luxury Rooms: 5, 7, 9. Standard Rooms: 10, 11. No matter where you are accommodated, you will be delighted with your room.



All rooms include all meals, local beverages and laundry.
[More Pictures of Birkenhead House and Great White Shark Experience](#)

Dining and Public Rooms

All areas of Birkenhead are exquisitely furnished and very comfortable. There are two pools on the property. One pool is in the center of the property with ample deck chairs and umbrellas. Another pool is on the patio overlooking the ocean. This area can be set up with tables and chairs, as pictured below and is a favorite spot for a wedding reception. Many of the public rooms look out onto the ocean. A view is very much a part of the stay at Birkenhead House. The menus are fairly extensive and offer a huge variety of options with an emphasis on seafood. Room service is happy to provide breakfast in bed. Birkenhead House has a full workout and spa facility with a variety of treatments.





Internet: Complimentary WIFI throughout the property.

Website: [Birkenhead House](#)

Great White Shark Diving | Gansbaai

Close to Hermanus, South Africa

Personal Report by Susan Walsh

The shark diving was incredible! We are definitely using the best tour operator for this excursion. [White Shark Ventures](#)

Most of the other boats were smaller and much older. This is a good size boat, fairly stable and new. The guide we had was excellent. His name was Robert Cole and he has been diving for 7-years. It is important to be one of the first boat groups in the water. There was only one ahead of us so we had a good amount of time to see sharks ourselves, but eventually 4 other boats came out and anchored relatively close to us.

It was about a 15-minute boat ride. We were only 15 minutes at the site when the first shark approached the bait. We all suited up and got into the cage 5 people at a time. They gave us nice, full-length wetsuits with hoods. He said the water was about 17 degrees Celsius (63 degrees Fahrenheit). They provide you with the suit, booties, and mask. We did not use scuba gear. The cage has rungs that you hold onto and place your feet until he tells you to hold your breath and go down just below the surface as he sees a shark approach. He teases the shark with the bait, and they swim quite close and even knocking the cage occasionally. You can only stay down a few seconds and then come back up. He calls out each time he thinks you should go down so that you can see the shark or sharks (we saw three at one time).

It is very non-threatening; however, I truly say that you can see them much better from the boat. They have a very large open top deck from where you can view all the action from a much better vantage point. We saw 7 sharks total, the largest was 4 meters (13 feet) and we also saw a baby shark that was about 1.5 meters (5 feet). They swam past probably 50+ times and several breached a number of times. Of course, when you are under the water, you miss the breach but the motion really rocks the cage.

It was quite spectacular. Eventually, we ran out of bait. At the end of the trip, they take you to Dyer Island where there are thousands, yes, thousands of fur seals. They are so thick that you can barely see the rocks.

They provided drinks and snacks on the boat.

As it is a small craft, it does have a fair amount of movement so for those not steady on their feet they need to stay seated as much as possible. Also, if anyone is prone to seasickness, they should take medication as it does rock to and fro.

They have benches on the top so that you can sit and watch the sharks. There is also a small inside area that seats about 6 people. There is a nice bathroom and storage area.

We had a great time. I think that you will too, but if you go in the water, please be aware that is is cold even with the wetsuits and it is physically demanding.

Website: [White Shark Ventures](#)

The Marine at Hermanus



The Collection by Liz McGrath

"A beautiful hotel in a beautiful setting"

Personal Impression

The hotel is situated right at the waterfront in the beautiful resort town of Hermanus. As part of "The Collection" you can be assured of

wonderful cuisine and quality accommodations.

The waterfront location is simply stunning. During the whale season from June to October, Hermanus is the prime area for whale watching. White shark diving can also be arranged from Hermanus. There are many excursions and activities available in this region. They include wildlife viewing with whales, sharks, penguins and fishing. Also available are nature walks and hikes, wine tours and botanical excursions.

Location of the Hotel

Hermanus is a resort town on the ocean, about 140 km south east from Cape Town. The setting for this hotel is right on the ocean front and it is truly spectacular for great walks along the cliffs.



Accommodations

The hotel has 43 rooms, all unique and individually decorated. These range from singles rooms to the Premier Suites. The rooms have comfortable furniture and warm colors. Not all rooms have a sea view.



Dining and Wines

The casual dining restaurant "Seafood at the Marine" has a very inviting contemporary atmosphere and serves an outstanding selection of fresh fish. I enjoyed one of the best pieces of fish I have had in years. The Pavilion restaurant has fashionable South African Cuisine and a breathtaking view of the ocean. The bar and lounge areas are filled with comfortable overstuffed chairs with cluster seating arrangements conducive to conversation.



Internet Access

Available for guests use, along with business services.

Spa Services

The Carchele Spa. The spa offers a comprehensive list of treatments. Special features are a Sea Salt Scrub or Body Massage next to the Tidal Pool while listening to the sounds of the ocean. The facilities include the Steam Room, Dynamic Hydro Bath Table for Mud, Gel Body Wraps and a Vicci Shower.

Summary

A trip to Hermanus is a wonderful experience. The small-town feel, complete with plenty of activities, delightful accommodations and scenic beauty make this a wonderful place to spend a few nights.

Website: [The Marine](#)

Plettenberg Hotel | Western Cape, South Africa



Part of "The Collection" of fine properties

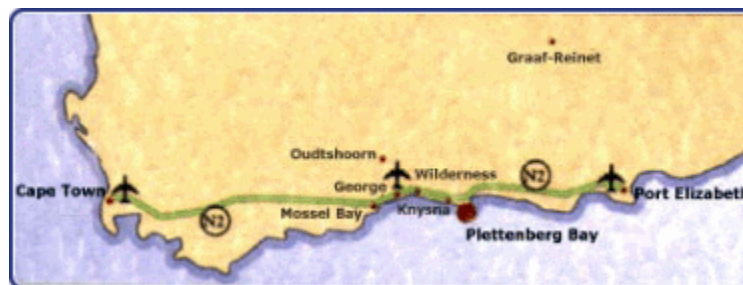
Personal Impression

This beautiful property is a sister property to Cellars-Hohenfort and The Marine at Hermanus. These are "Relais and Chateaux" properties, all in prime areas in South Africa. The whale watching from June to October is truly spectacular as the whales come close into shore. The area surrounding the hotel offers activities for everyone.



Hotel Location

The hotel is situated on a point over-looking the ocean. It is located 2 hours from Port Elizabeth airport, 15 minutes from Plettenberg Bay airport and 1 hour 15 minutes from the George airport.



Local Activities

The rugged Outeniqua and Tsitsikamma mountains form the backdrop for an area encompassing no fewer than fifteen private and public nature reserves.

The Tsitsikamma National Park is internationally recognized for its forests which harbor and conserve the giant *Outeniqua* yellowwood - one of the few true monarchs of the world's forests. You can visit elephants, Harry, Sally and Duma at the Knysna Elephant Park, just a few kilometers out of Plett, where you can learn more about these fascinating animals. Scenic flights are offered by African Ramble - who specialize in low-flying scenic flips along the magnificent coastline.



Golf is available at the 18-hole course Plettenberg Bay Country Club, which is also a Nature Reserve, boasting a wide variety of birds and small wildlife. Or visit the 18-hole Gary Player signature course at Goose Valley. Stormsrivier Adventures offers blackwater tubing, abseiling, woodcutter's journeys, eco-cruises, mountain biking and snorkeling. For a real adrenaline rush, the highest bungee jump in the world is offered from the Bloukrans Bridge - a jump of 216 meters!

Accommodations

There are 38 rooms in the hotel. All are air conditioned and have under floor heating. The rooms range from a standard room; to a spacious 3-bedroom villa. Most have sea views. Every room has a slightly different décor and layout. All are very luxurious and comfortable. The view from our room that we stayed in was wonderful. There are three buildings on the property. The main hotel, and a secondary building across the street with rooms. Either building is wonderful and both offer the same delightful accommodations. The view from the breakfast area from the secondary building across the street from the main hotel is breathtaking. There are; two villas available in an additional building. These have two or three bedrooms, lounge, full kitchen and large screen TV. These would be perfect for a family or two couples traveling together.



Internet Access

The hotel has two guest computers off the lounge area and offers free internet access.

Dining and Wines

The Plettenberg's restaurant "The Sand" was voted one of the country's top 100 dining establishments in the Diner's Club Annual Awards. The team of chefs have won several awards at the annual Knysna Oyster Festival. The Executive Chef is Peter Tempelhoff. The Sand is open for breakfast, lunch, dinner and tea. Breakfasts offer a sumptuous buffet of fresh fruit, cheeses, cold meats, cereals and yogurts, or a full cooked English breakfast of your choice. The lunch menu offers a variety of light meals, salads and sandwiches, which can be eaten on the terrace, while watching dolphins and whales at play in the bay below. The Sand at the Plettenberg serves global cuisine prepared with special emphasis on fresh seafood and local produce. The night we dined at Sands, I had the rack of lamb and my husband had the tenderloin steak. Both were truly outstanding.



Spa

The hotel features the CARCHELLE SPA. A variety of treatments are available and they also have a hair salon.

Summary

This is an idyllic setting on the ocean and truly remarkable for whale and dolphin watching during the season. The hotel offers one of the nicest areas of the Western Cape.

Website: [The Plettenberg](http://ThePlettenberg.com)

Samara | In the Great Karoo

Personal Impression

This is a wonderful resort that offers safari drives. This cannot be compared to a normal safari lodge in the games reserves like Sabi Sands, Madikwe or Phinda. There is only one large predator; the cheetah. This lodge offers a more relaxed safari, without the very early start and some unique antelope species, rhino, giraffe, and cheetah.

Location of Samara

The Great Karoo where Samara is located is about a 3-hour drive or one hour flight from Port Elizabeth airport. The flight from Johannesburg to Port Elizabeth is about one hour. You can rent a car and at the Port Elizabeth airport and drive there and back or arrange for a land transfer or flight. We attempted to fly one way and drive the other but the weather did not co-operate and we drove both ways.



Game Drives and experiences at Samara

It is important you understood that this was not really a safari lodge, simply a place to come and chill out before going on safari or after being on safari. So, keep your anticipation of the game experience in perspective. With that said, the game surprised us on our visit to Samara. On our first drive we saw giraffe, rhino, gemsbok, kudu, and many varieties of antelope. The scenery is spectacular, huge mountains all around and tremendous variety of topography. I am going into detail here so you can understand what to expect with a visit to Samara.

Walking up to animals - One of the very unique things at Samara is the opportunity to walk up to animals. Without lions, leopards and elephants this makes this a possibility. We saw three giraffes and Andre, our tracker said "let's go". We all got out of the land rover and approached the giraffes on foot. I have never done this before. It was fantastic! We circled around and got fairly close to the giraffes, a really neat experience.



Finding the cheetah - During our game drive our ranger pulled out a tracking device. There were approximately 10 cheetahs on the property and there are only three collared cheetahs. Samara is involved deeply in conservation and it

is necessary to collar the cheetahs in order to find them and study them. Being a die-hard safari enthusiast, my first instinct was "I don't like that". However, I found it was such fun to hold up the tracking device and hear the "beep beep beep" as we got closer to the cheetah. I have seen this so many times on television shows and seeing the vastness of this reserve I softened my attitude and went with the flow. With the tracking device beeping, we went to the general vicinity and then climbed out of the land rover. We started out on foot. After quietly walking for about 5 minutes, Andre our ranger told us to stay put while he went on a little further. He came back in a flash and told us to follow him. Right there in front of us, about 20 feet away was a beautiful female cheetah. We all stood very quiet and she started to walk and we followed her. I think as long as we were in an open area, she was fine with us. She knew we were no threat. After about 10 minutes, she wandered off into a thicker area and we left her. It was an amazing experience!

The Mountain Drive - If you have good weather a trip to the mountain top is a delight. Going on a steep road up the mountain the land rover managed the climb beautifully. Once at the top the mountain, the landscape opened up to a huge savanna area. We saw blue wildebeest, gemsbok, mountain zebras and many other savanna animals. It was a fantastic view over the plains of the Great Karoo, we could see for miles. It was really wonderful. This is where two male cheetahs live. He pulled out the tracking device and we could not get any response. Later as we came down the mountain he tried again and we picked up the signal. Again, on foot we proceeded to see if we could see the two male cheetahs. The bush got thick and Andre explained he was not comfortable taking us into this area. In the open it is fine, but not in thick bush. We were a little disappointed, but also thankful that he was cautious.

On one drive we saw a very unusual sighting, an aardvark in the daylight (see picture at top). This is one fabulous animal, far furrrier than I envisioned and quite beautiful. We followed her on foot for about 30 minutes as she dug in the ground for termites.

The cheetah and aardvark experience we were fortunate to have, and it certainly made our stay and that may not happen on every person's visit. I would highly recommend Samara as long as people realized what Samara is really all about and that is a laid back, comfortable lodge with spectacular scenery, safari drives (leaving at the civilized hours of 7:00 to 7:30 am) that are not the action-packed experiences of a normal safari lodge. I believe the opportunity to walk close to the animals being a key highlight of Samara.



The Reserve and Lodges

This is a huge reserve 70,000 acres with only the two Samara lodges traversing the property. Samara Lodge is an old farm with very comfortable accommodations and lots of public space, it can accommodate 12 guests. The main house is surrounded by a large wooden deck with comfortable chairs and seating areas. The main lounge and bar have a nice fireplace and a TV room is right off the lounge. The dining area has a large with a massive table, and great farmhouse atmosphere. The three main lodge bedrooms are quite spacious and there are three suites of about the same size located a short distance from the main house. The Lodge was completely full when we visited so I could not take pictures of the rooms. Internet is available with a computer room right off the main entrance. A curio shop has some interesting items.



Samara Manor is newer and more upscale. It can accommodate 8 guests. This is usually taken as a full house booking rather than individual guests suites. The public space for 8 guests is amazing. Four different conversation areas in the lounge could easily seat over 20 in great comfort in big comfortable overstuffed sofas and chairs. This coupled with a large terrace with even more seating areas. The lodge offers a large dining, bar and general public areas. There are two rooms with king beds and two rooms with twin beds. All the rooms have a nice view and private terrace. The bathrooms are large and feature twin sinks and a separate bath and walk in shower. The décor is colonial, very comfortable. I wish they had a few additions to the rooms, a mini bar, ceiling fan, full length mirror, bottled water in the room and a magnifying mirror. They will bring you all the water and anything you want of course I just like it to be there without asking.





The Staff and Service

There is a wonderful staff who are there to accommodate your every desire. The Manor is run by a husband-and-wife team with the wife managing the property and the husband the ranger. A great combination. Dinner service was efficient and very professional.

Dining and Wines

The kitchen area is totally open to the guests at the Manor. If you wish you can watch the chef creating your meals. The meals are very good. Although there are set meals, they do cater to the majority of people and can accommodate simple additional requests such as a simple salad. Upon arrival, you are asked if you have any food allergies and/or if you have any special requests.

Internet Access

Free WIFI access to the guests.

Spa

Spa Treatments are available on request.

Website: [Samara](#)