

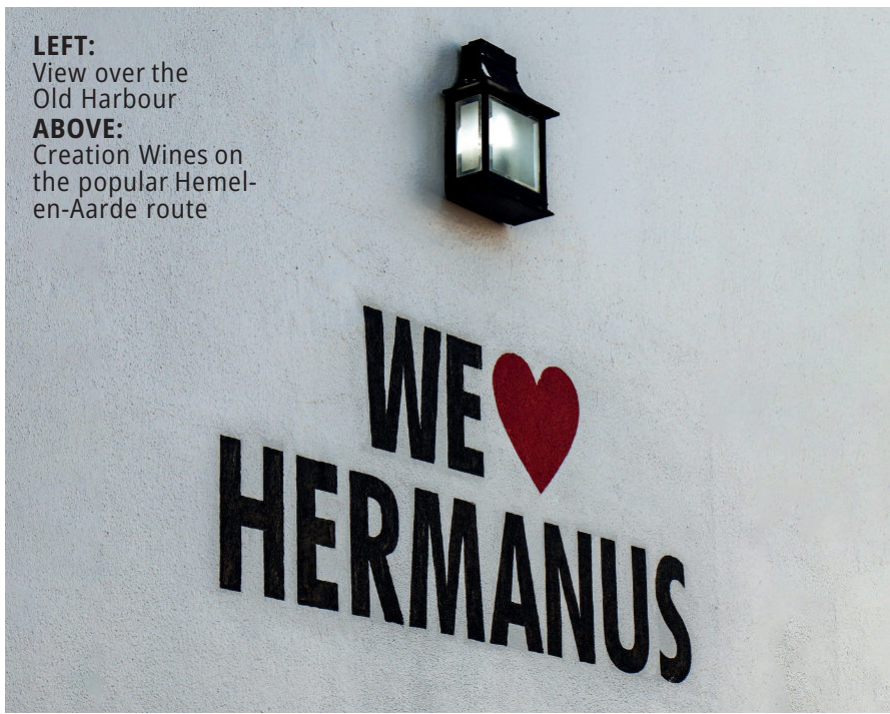
# SOUTHERN | SPIRIT

Whale-besotted Hermanus is no longer the second-fiddle village it was 20 years ago – today it's a bustling hub of adventures to be had on land, at sea and in the vineyards. By **Keith Bain**

34.4063° S, 19.2687° E



**LEFT:**  
View over the  
Old Harbour  
**ABOVE:**  
Creation Wines on  
the popular Hemel-  
en-Aarde route



**FROM** Hermanus' New Harbour, a marine safari aboard the purpose-built catamaran *MV Miroshca* ([southernrightcharters.co.za](http://southernrightcharters.co.za)) might just get you within 50 m of a southern right whale – a fabulous (and respectful) way of communing with these peaceful, playful cetaceans, which gather annually to give birth and nurse their calves within the relative safety of Walker Bay. If the whales aren't cooperating (and, let's face it, they have their own schedule), there's a possibility of glimpsing a pair of sibling orcas (Port and Starboard) that have taken a shine to these waters in recent years.

If a big boat's too rambunctious for you, you can always ride on the water, paddle in hand, in a two-person sea kayak on a Walker Bay Adventures tour ([walkerbayadventures.co.za](http://walkerbayadventures.co.za)); there's every chance of seeing Cape fur seals, penguins, cormorants and other sea birds and marine mammals. For a different focus, they offer a kayak and wine tour from Hermanus Yacht Club to Mosaic Farm (near the laid-back hamlet of Stanford) where you chill under the milkwoods with vino and a feast before paddling back. The route is mostly contained within the Klein River, which connects to the sea at Grotto Beach. It forms a wide and gorgeous lagoon, a 10 km stretch of water enshrouded by nature reserves and rural serenity, coastal birds and fish eagles soaring overhead.

Near Stanford, on the lagoon's southern bank, Coot Club ([cootclub.com](http://cootclub.com)) is set within a protected milkwood forest on a private nature reserve. Based here you have it all: access to Walker Bay, views of the looming Maanschynkop mountain slopes, and the river itself, teeming with bird life – the lagoon's a gorgeous playground on which to paddle, stand-up paddle board, sail or float. The beach stretches for around 17 km, perfect for everything from seaside frolics and fat-tire bike rides to dune exploration.

Many of the Hermanus landlubbers' experiences – restaurants, cafés, boutiques, galleries and open-air displays of public art – are best discovered on foot. To wrap your head around the town's phenomenal array of dining options, there is one guided tour worth joining. It's a food safari with Eat Like a Local's Susan Mann, whose Taste of Hermanus walking circuit ([eatlikealocal.co.za/taste-of-hermanus](http://eatlikealocal.co.za/taste-of-hermanus)) magically squeezes about eight different food-and-drink stops into several hours. The tour visits a handful of the culinary hidden gems that got the town recognised as Africa's first UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. There's a coffee stop, some wine tasting, snacking, conversations with entrepreneurs growing organic produce, and some proper feasting along the way. Arrive hungry.





Gorgeous views from  
The Marine hotel

The Sculpture on the Cliffs  
exhibition changes annually

**VITALITY TRAVEL  
TIPS AND TRICKS**

Book now! As a Discovery Bank client, you have access to over 1 500 local Vitality holiday accommodation options on the Vitality Travel website at up to 25% off. Don't hold back!

Stops on the tour might include meeting restaurateur and baker Emilia Knight, who has turned croissants into a bit of a cult (notably thanks to those made with cheese and Marmite) – you can sample a variety of her fantastically buttery, flaky, more-ish experiments at Black Medicine, where the coffee will give you a kick too.

Then there's the baking genius of Rickey Broekhoven whose Onshore Eatery (14 Hope Street) brims with the smell of coffee and sourdough, surfboards and sacks of Lowerland flour waiting to be transformed into loaves and buns in the wood-burning oven out back. The sit-down deli-cum-café serves scrumptious breakfasts, pizzas and exquisite pastéis de nata too.

Culinary arts aside, Hermanus is also a haven for 'actual' artists. There are more than 25 galleries in the town, plus displays of public art, notably along the Cliff Path, which has some wonderful outdoor sculptures. It's easy enough to make a tour of it all simply by setting off, but you can add a social dimension by timing your walkabout to coincide with the town's First Fridays Artwalk (held on the first Friday of each month; 083 259 8869) when galleries remain open until 20:00. Maps are available at any of the venues, and there might be a glass of wine available, plus an artist or sculptor, jeweller or ceramicist ready to discuss their work.

Slip on a pair of white Wellingtons for an immersive tour of Hermanus' abalone-growing facility, a hallowed outing among Asian travellers who revere perlemoen and leave Abagold's factory with their shopping bags full. Going behind the scenes on a Heart of Abalone (heartofabalone.co.za) tour, you'll see each stage of the sea mollusc's fascinating lifecycle, from broodstock to spat to ready-for-harvest, fully matured abalone. Your guide walks and talks you through the biology, conservation issues and intricate farming processes required to

rear the farm's 10-million abalone, homed in some 40 000 baskets. It's at New Harbour and the 11am daily tours include a tasting of the delicacy. Be sure to book in advance.

Hermanus, which is apparently 'magnetically pure', is also home to an outpost of the South African National Space Agency (SANSA, 028 312 1196, [sansa.org.za](http://sansa.org.za)), which conducts geomagnetic research – basically it keeps an eye on the sun, checking for any space weather that could significantly impact the Earth so warnings can be given, should need arise. It's one of 17 such stations globally. Once a week, for an hour on Wednesdays, guides take visitors around, show off the electronic gadgets in the monitoring station, and give the inside scoop on how SANSA's research and engineering brainiacs actually forecast space weather.

Offering different insights is the Hermanus Brewing Company (11 Mimosa Street), where there's a pimped-up container that has been transformed into a bar. Its main focus is making Old Harbour Beer (brewed since 2014), which means that if James and Di Rattle – whose personal passion project turned into an entrepreneurial success story – are around, they might be persuaded to take you on a tour of their facility.

More wine lover than beer enthusiast? Head for the nearby Hemel-en-Aarde Valley for a full-blown wine safari in a bucolic, faraway countryside, unimpeded by city congestion yet packed with innovation when it comes to wine cellars. Defined by the looming Babilonstoring Mountains, it's a patch of pastoral bliss where all the estates are situated along one meandering road – the R320, which connects Hermanus with Caledon. Most are blessedly uncommercial, and run the gamut from virtually unknown garagiste-style cellars where time appears to have stopped, to respected labels that have

“  
**THERE ARE MORE THAN  
25 GALLERIES IN THE TOWN,  
PLUS DISPLAYS OF PUBLIC  
ART, NOTABLY ALONG  
THE CLIFF PATH**  
”



## LOCAL TRAVEL

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Southern right whales; Creation food and wine pairing, and one of their very creative main dishes



made significant impact internationally. The latter, such as Creation, Bouchard Finlayson and pioneering Hamilton Russell Vineyards, are where some of the finest wines in the country are being produced. They offer personalised tasting experiences and have excellent restaurants. Don't miss the likes of Spookfontein Wine Farm (which serves wonderful food and has country cottages that you can stay over in), Domaine des Dieux or the stupendous setting of Ataraxia.

Scenically, the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley is a stunner, and there's even the novelty of being able to hike across vineyards, pausing in certain cellars to sample their vintages. Expert hiking guide Tim Lundy ([glamtrails.co.za](http://glamtrails.co.za)) leads you up and over majestic mountains, and across the wine route's estates with stops at various cellars to revive with vino (notably Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs). From the start at Fernkloof Nature Reserve, it takes around two-and-a-half hours to reach Hamilton Russell Vineyards, where a tasting is followed by a short walk to sample more wines at Bouchard Finlayson (Hemel-en-Aarde's first winery); you might cross Creation Wines or go via Ataraxia, or request a tailored hike.

A major advantage for growers in the Hemel-en-Aarde region is that it's currently protected from the more radical effects of a warming planet. "We're seeing less hectic impacts than in many other wine-growing regions," says Jean-Claude Martin, the Swiss-born wine-farmer and cellar master who, with his South African wife Carolyn, established Creation on the then remote Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge in 2002. "The ocean essentially balances out these climactic up-and-downs. As long as the sea stays reasonably cold, we're protected from the full impact of climate change."

The Martins transformed their parcel of land from a difficult-to-access sheep farm into what's now a crucial stop – for tastings and lunch – on any wine aficionado's bucket list. In fact, within two decades, Creation emerged as Africa's best wine farm according to The World's 50 Best Vineyards, an internationally curated award showcasing 'unforgettable wine experiences'; in November 2025, it was ranked second in Africa (and seventh in the world).

It's not just the cooler climate, though, that makes what they do here special – there's also a unique tension between the ancientness of the soil and the youthful creative spirit that truly defines the Hemel-en-Aarde region's terroir. It's a uniqueness that Carolyn showcases at Creation's big, airy, art-and light-filled restaurant and tasting room, from which you can admire those ancient mountains and rolling vineyards as you pore over an innovative seasonal menu.



Creation's chefs have not only done stints in Michelin-star restaurants in Europe, but work with nutritional health experts so that every dish is formulated to keep blood-sugar levels low while hitting the right notes in terms of the accompanying wines. And, for abstainers, there's an impressive non-alcoholic pairing option.

Meals get quite touchy-feely too. On your table there'll be shells to listen to, chunks of ancient rock and vials of natural fragrances used to illustrate how a wine's perfume influences its flavour. The whole meal is a kind of interactive sensory experience – immersive, educational and quite delicious. And, unlike so many lengthy tasting menus, there's nothing overwhelming nor exhausting about this one. Carolyn and her team emphasise nourishment and fine flavours, and each dish is rooted in Ayurvedic principles – no gluten, minimal dairy, almost no sugar.

This means that by the time you head back to Hermanus, you'll feel energised and ready for more, rather than needing a nap.

PHOTOS: SUPPLIED, GALLO/GETTY IMAGES