



PHOTOGRAPHERS GUIDE TO TABLE MOUNTAIN

No photography trip to Cape Town would be complete without an image of its most iconic landmark, Table Mountain, which as of 2012 was inaugurated as one of the world's [New 7 Wonders of Nature](#).

It's so photogenic you merely need to point your camera at it to produce envy-worthy images for friends back home.

But if you're a photographer who wants to take it to the next level there's planning involved, most important of which is:

Where to go, how to get there and what is the best time to shoot?

And that's our aim here to help you better plan and photograph this ICONIC MOUNTAIN though this is by no means a definitive guide.

THE FOUR MOST POPULAR PHOTO LOCATIONS TO PHOTOGRAPH TABLE MOUNTAIN

1. Top Of Table Mountain
2. The City And Surrounding Mountains
3. From The Air
4. 'Postcard Shot' Across The Ocean

INTERESTING FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT TABLE MOUNTAIN

- Table Mountain is one of the oldest mountains on earth, approximately 260 million years old, older than the Andes, the Alps, the Rocky Mountains and the Himalayas!
- It hosts the planets richest floral kingdom with more than 1 470 floral species
- The first European to climb it; Antonio de Saldanha called it 'Taboa de Caba' (Table of the Cape)
- The Khoi people named it Hoerikwaggo meaning 'Mountain of the Sea'
- It only looks flat from one side it's not actually flat!
- The highest point, Maclears Beacon is 1,086 meters (3,563 ft) above sea level

FACTS CONTINUED..

- The mountain was officially recognized as one of the new seven world wonders in 2012.
- The top is often covered in cloud known locally as the “table cloth” which indicates a strong SE wind!
- It is South Africa’s most photographed landmark.
- It is the only natural site on earth to have a constellation of stars named after it. The constellation is called "Mensa", which means 'table' in Latin.
- The Table mountain cableway opened in 1929. Today each car can carry 65 passengers at a time to the top.
- For the fit and agile many hiking routes are available which take between 1-4 hours to the top.

1. PHOTOGRAPHING FROM THE TOP



Sometimes it's a misty view

The easiest way to get to the top is by cableway; you can purchase tickets and read all pertinent info [here](#)

The trip takes roughly 4 mins and is via a revolving cable car which has a number of windows to shoot out of however in poor weather these are closed. Each cable car can accommodate 65 people and as a photographer you'll want a window to capture the ascending/descending views.

Read our tips below to ensure you get a window spot.

Once at the top there are numerous trails that run the circumference of the peak with dozens of pull off points, just start walking in any direction to find opportunity.

Particularly popular are the views back over the city and across the Atlantic Seaboard, where you can capture Camps Bay and the 12 Apostles from a unique elevated angle.

TIP | Book tickets online to avoid long ticket purchase queues

TIP | When entering the cable car don't rush for the first open windows (everyone does) but as the car fills they ask people to move back further in, meaning you may lose your place anyway. Instead rush for the back of the cable car, secure yourself a spot against the wall. Once the car starts going up, the floor will slowly rotate allowing everyone along the wall a turn at the windows.

USEFUL INFO

TRANSPORT, PARKING, QUEUES

There is only one road (in & out) + parking spots fill up fast. I strongly recommend using public transport: [Hop On/Hop Off](#) or [MyCiti](#) Buses, Uber or metered taxis.

November thru to April is peak season - allow plenty of extra time for transport and queues. Just so you know 2 hours is not an uncommon waiting time just to get up or down in peak months, that's 4 hours without counting anytime exploring the top!

CABLE CAR TIMES: Sadly for photographers these are not ideal; first cable car goes up well after sunrise and comes down generally as the sunsets. However if there are long lines waiting to come down around sunset time, you will

have enough time to shoot sunset and then rush back to the cable-car line. But be warned if you miss the last one, it's a 2 hour walk down the mountain in the dark!

Hiking is the only option for guaranteed sunrise and sunset shots.

WEATHER CONDITIONS: The general rule is: If you can see the mountain, GO! In summer heavy winds produce the famous 'table cloth' cloud and in winter cold fronts bring rain. They close the cable-car during these conditions and this can happen any month of the year.

TIP | Cape Town's calmest weather months (in general) are from March to mid-May

MIST: Occurs a few times a year. Generally around autumn and spring when the sea mist rolls in, completely obscuring everything in the

city. However the top of the mountain is often above the cloud line and shooting down over the mist can be amazing. Check webcams or call Table Mountain to find out conditions at the top.

WHAT TO WEAR: The difference in temperature at the top of Table Mountain can be significant don't be fooled even on hot days take warm clothing as the weather can change rapidly!

How cold can it get? Well as an example, every month of the year has had snow/sleet recorded, so very cold!

WHEN IS BEST TIME TO SHOOT FROM TOP?

I'm often asked when is better morning or afternoon? My personal preference is the afternoon (for sunset) but I will give pros and cons to each so you can decide what works best for you and/or your timings.

MORNING PROS: Generally better weather, calmer winds and fewer crowds. Photographing the sea views with the sun behind you is nice. On clear days images with sun star bursts over the city are possible.

MORNING CON'S: You can't shoot sunrise (unless you do 2 hour hike up in the dark) as the first cable car is well after sunrise. Facing the city you'll be shooting straight into the sun. Mountain shadows are on the ocean side.

AFTERNOON PROS: Golden hour light. Good light on the city + sunset opportunity. Iconic Cable car sunset shot.

AFTERNOON CONS: Crowded, often very windy/cloudy, sunset time is about same time as the last cable car, so you have to rush it if you wish to capture sunset from the top. Mountain Shadow is over the city side.



Cable going up at sunset



Sunset shot of Lions Head from the top

PHOTO TIP: Morning and afternoon both have difficult light as one side of the mountain will always be directly into the sun. Ways to work around this you can use a longer lens to tighten into the shadow or sunlit areas. Or with a wider lens you can shoot directly into the sun and get star bursts (clear day only) or use HDR (blended exposes) to balance the light.

HIKING: If you don't wish to be hindered by the cable car times you can hike – there're numerous routes but I'd only recommended [Platteklip Gorge](#) trail for 1st timers as it's stepped all the way with no ladders. But it's a tough walk with a steep elevation gain! With camera gear you're looking at roughly 2 hours up.

Important note parked vehicles are often broken into and hikers have sometimes been mugged. I'd only do this as a group and best if you can be collected/dropped off.

Read the **South African National Parks** [website](#) **on safety** in general for hiking in Cape Town which includes this route.

- Contact Number of Table Mountain Inquires [**+27 \(0\)21 424 0015**](tel:+270214240015)
- Contact Number for Table Mountain Emergency [**+27 \(0\) 861 10 6417**](tel:+270861106417)
- SAPS (Police) Cape Town Central [**+27 \(0\) 21 467 8001/2**](tel:+2702146780012)
- SAPS (police) Mountain Patrol Vehicle [**+27 \(0\) 82 411 2401**](tel:+270824112401)
- General Emergency Number [**+27 \(0\)21 480 7700**](tel:+270214807700)

[Web cams](#) click link to view weather conditions. I find these extremely helpful for checking conditions before heading out!

2. THE CITY & SURROUNDINGS

Many places in the city offer great views! Here are a few locations we recommend.

V&A WATERFRONT

This vibrant part of Cape Town offers numerous locations to shoot Table Mountain for both a sunrise and sunset option.



I prefer the mornings, simply as it's less crowded and often less windy.

However shooting sunset and having dinner at the V&A is a fantastic option too!



Sunset clouds starting as viewed from V&A Deck

CAPE TOWN CITY

Taj, Cape Sun & Pepper Club Hotels all offer amazing elevated views of Table Mountain over the city however you need to stay there to photograph them as unfortunately there is no other access (views are from bedrooms).

Permission can be asked for roof top access to

the city's tallest building (the FNB) but it's no easy process, I've only had opportunity once.

But walking through the Company Gardens offers great potential as does the area around the Castle, the Bokaap and City Hall.

Please be careful walking any of these areas alone with a camera and never at night, it's always better to go with a group or book a tour
<http://www.photowalks.co.za>



Permission only view from FNB building

————— www.photographytours.co.za —————

SIGNAL HILL

A very popular spot for good reason, it's easy to access via public transport, its free and is superb for both sunrise and sunset. There're many options all along the road; my personal fav is at the last corner before the parking lot.

Sunrise is preferably to avoid crowds but sunset is great to stay on for blue hour/twilight shots.



Last corner of road with Canola flowers, image taken at sunrise

LIONS HEAD

If you're a keen hiker, Lions Head is an exceptional option. Fantastic for both sunrise and sunset and the opportunities are endless.

It's about an hour to the top, there are small ladders to climb but mostly its rocky steps all the way up. It is a very popular spot so expect serious crowds during sunset and even for sunrise! Take lots of water, good hiking shoes, warm clothing, a torch and some snacks.



3. FROM THE AIR

You can use a drone in and around Cape Town but laws keep changing so google first to be sure.

But a better way for quality aerals is to book a helicopter flight. There are numerous operators around the V&A waterfront such as [Nac Helicopters](#) they all keep their doors on but have small windows to shoot through.

Photography Tours offers a special aerial



package with a professional photographer including tuition and doors-off helicopter

flights can be arranged. Read more [here](#)

4. ACROSS THE OCEAN

The Classic Table Mountain Postcard Shot!
Understandable this is the most popular photograph of Table Mountain and there are many places to shoot it! Approx 10km (6mile) wide beach that face the mountain all the way from Milnerton Beach to Blouberg and beyond.

MILNERTON LAGOON BEACH



Milnerton's Lagoon Beach is a great sunset location that offers sandy foregrounds for beautiful reflections with the setting sun. The advantage of using this beach is that it's closest to the city which is really helpful in rush hour traffic. The disadvantage there are no rocks for

foregrounds and the mountain isn't a straight-on shot. But it's still pretty.

Both these images are taken just north of the lagoon mouth, which means you have to wade across (knee to thigh deep) water depending on tides to get there.

Alternatively if you walk left (or south) of the lagoon mouth you will get reflection options as



the waves pull back but I personally prefer north of the lagoon mouth.

KLEIN BAAI TO BLOUBERG

This is the most popular photographers stretch as there's over a kilometer of rocks, tidal pools & sand ripples for foreground interest, meaning you have great opportunity to create unique pics. Tides and swell will greatly affect compositions as rocks appear and disappear- which keeps it interesting - any tide will offer opportunity.



This is both a sunset & sunrise location as the sun sets/rises to the side of the mountain, never directly behind or in front of it. But is most popularly shot for sunset, both these shots are sunsets!

As the sun is off to the side you'll want clouds for colourful skies, which can happen any-time of year but is most frequent during the shoulder seasons of Autumn and Spring.



USEFUL INFO

TIME: Both sunrise and sunset are great options (any time of day actually) the only downside is when the mountain is covered in cloud which happens with strong south easterly

winds or when the cold front weather systems roll in. Best to check these [webcams](#) before you make your way out there.

GETTING THERE: The Myciti buses are the most affordably public transport option, they have stops all the way from Milnerton to Blouberg alternatively Uber or Taxi are best to take you to the exact beach but can be a little pricy as it's approximately 20km one way from the city. Avoid rush hour if possible (6-8:30am) & (4-6:30pm) read more below.

TRAFFIC/SUNRISE/SUNSET: Unfortunately the best light hours often tend to coincide with the heaviest traffic times; it can take 1-2 hours in peak traffic to get from the city to Blouberg and much longer if there's an accident!

For sunrise it's easy - no traffic getting there, afterwards you can have breakfast in one of the beach side restaurants and wait till about 9am

for the traffic to ease off. For sunset it's a little trickier as you either need to leave before traffic (3pm) or after 6:30/7pm and depending on time of year this can mean a long wait or a stressed rush getting into location on time.

Best to leave early and plan something to do while you wait, a coffee while going through edits or take your time to really scout locations by walking all along the shore line.

PHOTO TIP: The south-easterly wind brings sea spray from the ocean towards the shore! It's essential you have a cleaning cloth and use a UV filter so that sea salt doesn't get directly onto your lens.

In really strong winds it's impossible to even set up a tripod so check [wind guru blouberg](#) to be sure of conditions before you go.

Note winds can be very different to the city!

Tip 2: If you're close to the water's edge be sure to keep a constant eye on the waves to keep both yourself and your gear dry!

We've had a client get their camera drenched by a rogue wave - this is something you never want to experience!

Tip 3: Explore! 'Africa Rock' is a unique



composition but there are many opportunities to find your own unique composition you just need to explore.

Of course we've keep a few secrets up our sleeves - we invite you join us for an full insider, local knowledge photography experience!

WE OFFER

Private Cape Town Day Photo Tours [Info Here](#)

Scheduled Cape Town Photo Walks [Info Here](#)

Best of Cape Town 4 Day Photo Tour [Info Here](#)

Namibia Dreamscape Photo Tour [Info Here](#)

Photo Holidays & Safaris [Info Here](#)

TripAdvisor Reviews [here](#)

Our Email: info@photographerstours.co.za

Happy Shooting!

You're going to love Cape Town!