Mossel Bay on a Shoestring budget

When was the last time you explored your own region? Be a tourist in your own town without breaking your budget...

SO MUCH TO SEE, SO MUCH TO DO...

Mossel Bay and its surroundings have an array of exhilarating adrenaline activities, exquisite sight-seeing possibilities, balmly sandy beaches and an interesting history that will keep you busy for hours, days, even weeks!

The area boasts numerous hiking and mountain bike trails, as well as excellent bird watching spots. The 528 White Road along the contour path, starting at the point, has some of the most spectacular views of the ocean. Walk the whole 13.5 km route to Dana Bay or only as much as you want to.

At Hartenbos, there is a lovely walkway along the beachfront and in Little Brak, Great Brak and Groot Brak, you will find a number of interesting hiking routes. Pop in at the new tourism office at De Dekke for info.

Offroad and 4x4 lovers are spoilt for choice, and game lovers can visit a number of game farms within a 50 km radius from town.

For fishing enthusiasts there are rock and surf, river, as well as deep sea angling opportunities. Make sure you have a licence before you cast your line.

Meet Mossel Bay’s famous sharks from inside an underwater cage or from the top of the White Shark Warrior boat, or board the Romanza boat for a trip around Seal Island. There are numerous exquisite diving and snorkelling sites to feast your eyes, or try a helicopter ride or skydiving for a bird’s eye view of the area.

Culture vultures have numerous museums and historical buildings to tickle their fancy. At the Dias Museum Complex, there is a life size replica of Bartholomeu Dias’ caravel, the largest collection of shells in Africa and the Historical Post Tree. Visit the ATKV Hartenbos Museum (Great Trek 1836 – 1938), the Janine Iron and Washing museum (with more than 640 rare and unique iron and the Great Brak River Museum with its human origin exhibitions.

There are also many art galleries and curio shops in Mossel Bay and Great Brak River, or look out for farm stalls where you can buy local handmade products.

HERBERTSDALE – a magical day trip

Pack your picnic basket and head out to Herbertsdale for the day. This little town, which is about 40 km from Mossel Bay, boasts beautiful churches, homes with paintings on their porches and a quaint storehouse once used as a mortuary.

Take the N2 in the direction of Cape Town, turn right just before the PetroSA entrance, onto the R327. Look out for wildlife at the Gondwana game reserve, adjacent to the road.

On top of the Du Plessis pass you’ll have a breathtaking view of the meandering Gourits River. The ‘ Irene’s shot’ turn in the pass is the ideal spot for bird watching.

About 1 km north of Herbertsdale is a gravel road that turns out to the right. This public farm road leads you through beautiful scenery and smaller passes via Hapkekrans and eventually back on the R327 tar road. Herbertsdale is known for its dairy products, excellent wine and fruit.

Visit the Janine Iron and Washing museum (with more than 640 rare and unique iron) and the Great Brak River Museum with its human origin exhibitions.

There is plenty to do along the R328 road between Mossel Bay and Oudtshoorn. Nyaru Game Lodge offers quad bike safari, while Oosteriaquana Moon is home to South Africa’s largest horse breed, the gentle Percheron. Lewalkloof Cheeses is a solar powered micro cheeseery that can be visited on appointment (look at info@leeukloof.co.za or 082 464 7381).

VLEESBAAI, BOGGOMSBAAI & FRANSMANSHOEK, here we come!

If you’re into fishing, a visit to Vleesbaai, Boggomsbaai and Fransmanshoek is a must. Only 34 km west from Mossel Bay, take the N2 towards Cape Town and turn left at the R325 turn-off just past PetroSA.

There are multiple fishing spots along the beach. You do need a fishing permit, available at any post office.

The Fransmanshoek peninsula is a paradise for rock anglers and a beloved picnic spot.

Adventure sports like surfing, kayaking, sand boarding and kite surfing will thrill adventure seekers and surfers can check out a place called Toads, which provides a beautiful right-hand break when conditions are right.

Stroll along the unspoilt beach between Vleesbaai and Boggomsbaai, and look out for the endangered Oystercatcher bird. With its black feathers and distinctive red feet, it lives between 30 and 40 years and chooses a partner for life.

For 4x4 enthusiasts the Vleesbaai sand dunes offer a popular 12 km route.

BRANDWACHT & RIUETERSBO – take a drive on the wild side

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HARTEBOSCH – a celebration of local culture
Hartenbos is the destination of choice for thousands of holiday-makers every summer. A large portion of Hartenbos forms part of the Afrikaans Taal en Kultuurvereniging (ATKV) Beach Resort.
Collect shells along the 5 km blue flag beach, or walk along the 2 km promenade along the coastline, that features Afrikaans poetry ‘stones’. Photograph the birdlife at the Hartenbos River estuary, or try your hand at fishing between Hartenbos and Little Brak River.
The Hartenbos Boardwalk, held in front of the Carney building, usually on the second and last Saturdays of the month, is a treat. During school holidays, there are permanent stalls on the sidewalks.
Museums
See a real ox-wagon at the Hartenbos Museum, then pop in at the Janine Irving and Laundry Museum – dedicated specifically to the history of this everyday household chore.
Station
Board the Diaz Express for a fun rail experience. Depart from Hartenbos Station and go on an excursion to Santos beach, Little Brak River or Great Brak River.
FRIEMERSHEIM – follow the scent of lavenders
Follow the Fragrance Route towards Friemersheim, a small agricultural community about 15 km from Great Brak River.
The town can be reached via Long Street, past the Great Brak River Museum (also worth a visit). On your way you will also pass a lion farm and two private game reserves.
The town has a magnificent 1884 Cape Dutch inspired church. The only slave quarters originally serving Great Brak lies at the intersection of the roads leading into Friemersheim. The original famous Volksvlei stairs were made here before being moved to Cape Town. On the main road, you can buy sweetums or eggs at the tiniest Spaza shop around, Auntie Poppy.
A massive lavender project sustains this small community. Farmers grow the flowers in their own gardens. In season, fresh stems are distributed and sold across the Southern Cape, and entrepreneurs also make value added products such as infused soaps, candles and biscuits.
GREAT BRAK RIVER: Stok en Hoed – short village walks
Explore the beautiful town of Great Brak River on foot. Grab a map at the tourism office at The Dekke, which gives you a choice of seven Short Village walks.
• 103 Steps Walk
This route takes you from Pepperboom Restaurant in Long Street to the beautiful ‘103 Steps’ garden in Sandhoogte Road, and back. This private land art garden is open to the public and its main attraction is a labyrinth.
• Velindle & Nature Walk
Explore the bird and plantlife of Great Brak River by embarking on this hike. It starts at the Ellen van Rensburg Library in Long Street and takes you through marshlands, past water lilies, and a small cottage garden named ‘Die Rondebak House’.
• History Walk
Take a walk back in time and see the heritage homes, Fairhill, the Sarel Memorial Church and Westbank. You’ll also pass the Great Brak River Museum and Bolton’s Shoe Factory – home of Grasshopper shoes. The factory shop is open to the public.
• Pepper Tree Walk
The widest pepper tree in South Africa (11.2 m) can be seen on this route. You’ll also pass Belhambra House (Post Office), the old Biscope, two local church buildings, the original factory workers’ cottages, as well as a Hydro-Electrical pump house.
• The Southern Cross Walk
Walk through the suburbs of Southern Cross, starting at De Dekke. Pass the beach and go for a quick dip too, if you wish.
• The Island Walk
Explore The Island by crossing a single lane wooden bridge – still the original – that connects The Island to the mainland. This suburb has an abundance of indigenous milkwood trees.
• The Circle Walk
The trail involves walking around the river and village along Long Street and Station Road, crossing the two bridges at either end of the village.
DANIA BAY – flora and fauna on your doorstep
The suburb of Dana Bay is located on the outskirts of Mossel Bay and a protected conservancy. The Conservancy supports one of the highest numbers of endemic species in the Cape Floristic Region and a variety of wild animals also call it their home.
Dana Bay has three sand beaches with many fishing spots and dunes to climb, or you can explore the rock formations on the beach during low tide.
At First Beach you can start the St Blaize hiking trail towards the lighthouse at the Point. This 13.5 km hike is marked with the sign of the Oystercatcher. Remember to wear hiking shoes, hat, sunscreen and bring plenty of water.
MIDBRAK – a hidden gem
Nestled between Little and Great Brak River, Midbrak offers a plethora of interesting attractions and places of interest. For the hikers, there is a two hour long 10 km walk along the beach – preferably during low tide. Along the way, stop for a bite at Sepalas, which also showcases the art of Ken Matonney. Sepalas is accessible from the beach, as well as the R102 just outside Great Brak River. This road also leads to the famous De Vette Mossel restaurant. Here you can dig into mouthwatering seafood while your toes are buried in the sand. Little Brak River boasts a number of famous enterprises. Koekiester Queen Letitia van Zyl’s ‘koekisters’ have even featured on national television, while several South Africans enjoy a Oca Bakhuys nuk with their morning coffee.
Make sure you visit Cool Bay at the Klipheuwel padstal, just off the N2 for a range of Portuguese wines, as well as locally produced organic vegetables and baked goods. Just around the corner you find Cape Oysters, which are unique in shape and taste, but worth trying a sample.
MOSSEL BAY – explore the town by foot
If history is your forte, Mossel Bay’s array of beautiful sandstone buildings will enchant you. Most of the sandstone used in these magnificent buildings came from the old quarry at the Point.
Put on your walking shoes, collect a brochure at the tourism info office and start your tour from here. The brochure highlights nearly 70 historic buildings, which were built between 1786 and the early 1900s.
At the start of your tour is the Granary, built in 1786/7 to store grain brought in by farmers until there was enough for a shipload. The building was demolished in 1951, but reconstructed in 1987. It is part of the Dias Museum complex.
Close by you will find the Ostreer Bann and the original municipal buildings that later doubled up as dance hall, library, auction house, stage coach stop and telegraph office. Today the old Municipal building houses the Craft Art Workshops.
The Prince, Vintcent & Co. building in Blou Street has a large arch, which originally allowed ox-wagons to enter the building to unload goods. These snippets are just to get you going. If you would like to find out more about Mossel Bay, pop in at the Information Centre.
Mossel Bay’s endless kilometers of sandy beaches and balmy waters is a firm favorite with residents, as well as tourists and holiday makers.
A new addition is the exciting hub of activities on the harbour wall, Quay 4.
Enjoy a meal at the Sea Gypsy restaurant. Enjoy the amazing view while you feed the seagulls and enjoy the friendliest, funnest spot in town with the freshest hake. Other dishes are also available on the menu.
Take a stroll and discover a bright red double decker topiary bus – the London Bus Fish & Chips Company. Here you can indulge in freshly baked crisp hake, calamari and chips. Reviews on TripAdvisor rate the food as the best in town, and the most reasonably priced. Take it away or enjoy the breathtaking view from the top deck.
Right next door is another seafood outlet, The Mossel Bay Oyster Bar where sparkling wine and oysters are served, as well as a wide variety of sushi.
Sit inside or enjoy the fresh air on the deck.
Check out Kaai 4 braai restaurant for traditional South African food. The menu includes spitsbraais, braaiwors, potjiekos and freshly baked roosterkoek, made on an open fire and enjoyed informally at sleepy wood tables.
The last restaurant on this stretch is the Cafe on the Bay, located inside the Mossel Bay Yacht and Boat Club, where you can enjoy a light lunch or drink. Just ring the bell at the gate.
The harbour wall is also abuzz with Things to Do activities. Try some scuba diving or snorkelling at Elektrode or do a deep sea fishing trip with Go Fish.
During holiday season, the adrenaline pumping Waterliner is a firm favourite, but if you prefer a leisurely cruise, you can take a trip around Seal Island or a sunset cruise with either the Romanza or the Seven Seas. Romanza, which has been operational for more than 25 years, is the official whale watching boat in this area. Trips are done on a regular basis during the day.
THE HARBOUR WALL – explore Quay 4
Mossel Bay has two roads running parallel to the Point – visitors’ and locals’ favourite place to hang out. Both Marsh and Bland Street have a wealth of beautiful sandstone buildings and history, which fuses with more modern elements.
Several streets connect the two and Cull Street has been transformed into a strollng and meeting area. Around the corner, in an amazing stone building, is the brand new The Merchant coffee shop.
A number of buildings have their roots embedded in the railway history. The Goods Shed indoor market, a 1902 historic sandstone building at the harbour entrance, was once used as a workshop. Today this landmark is once again used as an activity, with 80 shops selling a variety of quality products.
Down the road is the Blue Shed Coffee Roastery. This eco-friendly coffee shop used to be an old workshop for railroad trucks. The long table, that forms a focal point, crosses a pulmonary with larger than life photos (also worth a visit). On the boat yard under the trucks. Further down the road is Bizarre Baraza; a culture shock of kitch, eclectic, outlanded and special finds. A large collection of 35mm films in their tin containers is available for movie lovers.
The Monroe Theatre in Marsh Street regularly screens old classics, as part of a dinner theatre concept. This venue is adjacent to Deja Vu, which specialises in anything vintage.
The lower part of Marsh Street has a wealth of interesting art shops, antique havers, esteries and watering holes. Pop in for coffee at The Coffee Club, Frybios, Arabesque and CoffeeWillWork or visit Delicious Cakes on the corner of Field and Marsh Street.
So don your walking shoes and start exploring!