

# MAKE FOR THE MAGALIES

Just an hour's drive from Pretoria is a mountain range half as old as Earth itself. The Magaliesberg offers outdoorsy fun for the whole family, ranging from zip-lining to country markets

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## **GOOD OLD HARTBESPOORT DAM**

is such a staple of weekend and holiday excursions for families from Pretoria and Joburg that you might be forgiven for thinking the adjoining Magaliesberg range is in Gauteng. In fact, although it dips a toe in the Bronkhorstspuit Dam (east of Pretoria), the majority of this mountain range runs across the North West Province, stretching 120 km west to Rustenburg. Dividing the highveld grasslands from the bushveld savannah to the north, the Magaliesberg are also among the oldest mountains in the world, according to a number of estimations – nearly 100 times older than Everest.

The Magaliesberg's story began roughly 2 500 million years ago, when life had just appeared on Earth. This was before dinos, before trees – it's so long ago, this was before *bacteria*. Much of present-day South Africa was – just like Harties today – underwater, and the granite shores surrounding this shallow saltwater sea eroded over the aeons, leaving deposits of quartzite, shale, chert, dolomite and lava on the seabed, which eventually formed the landscape. And you thought things happened slowly in Slaapstad! While this is a geology lesson and a half, it partly explains the Magaliesberg's appeal, as it laid the foundation for millennia of molten magma and erosion to create the range's trademark kloofs and ravines.

Where to stay

- Rustig Nature Reserve near Hekpoort offers accommodation ranging from a four-sleeper tent-bungalow (R1 200), complete with a kitchen and bathroom, to an elegant 1930s farmhouse (R3 000). [rustig.co.za](http://rustig.co.za)
- Mountain Sanctuary Park is another private reserve, this one south of Buffelspoort near the Magaliesberg Canopy Tour, with log cabins (adult R600, child R310), rustic chalets (R560, R285), cosy huts (R380, R200) and campsites (R200, R120). [mountain-sanctuary.co.za](http://mountain-sanctuary.co.za)



From left: The Magaliesberg Canopy Tour is a great way to see these mountain scapes; the whole Magalies range is Unesco-protected; a magnificent martial eagle perched and ready to swoop



KLOOF THE BERG

The best way to get an overview of these deep forested valleys is on the Magaliesberg Canopy Tour ([canopytour.co.za](http://canopytour.co.za)), which takes you into the wild heart of the 3 600 km<sup>2</sup> Unesco-protected Magaliesberg Biosphere Reserve. Suitable for ages seven and upwards (though tykes as young as four have tackled the ride in tandem), the guided 2½-hour zip-line tour has you flying – much like the black eagles you might spot en route – between 11 platforms. As you whizz over the treetops, look out for impala, blue wildebeest, zebra, duiker, sun-

bathing dassies and klipspringers jumping between rocks – just a few of the 90 indigenous mammal species inhabiting this geological hotspot. Top tip for nervous passengers: You will be given thick gloves and instructed how to brake so you don't crash into the next platform. Resist the temptation to brake too hard, though, or you'll end up dangling over the abyss, waiting to be hauled back to deck.

A slower way to appreciate the flora and fauna – there are four distinct habitats in the biosphere reserve, including two types of bushveld, Afrotemperate forest and thornveld

– is by hitting a hiking trail. Rather than bushwhacking into the wilderness, take the kids to a nature reserve such as Rustig ([rustig.co.za](http://rustig.co.za)). The former tobacco farm offers overnight hiking trails, with hut accommodation en route, and 3-, 5- and 13 km day trails, as well as 5- and 10 km mountain-biking routes, game drives, bush braais and comfy accommodation. Download a birding app for the trail: The Magaliesberg has well over 400 bird species, from Cape vultures and secretary birds to great white pelicans and martial eagles – almost 50% of the species found in Southern Africa.

## TRIPS ON A TANKFUL

### GORGE OF THE HARTEBEEST

The range is also popular for climbing, for which the Joburg section of the Mountain Club of South Africa is a good contact ([mcsajohannesburg.org](http://mcsajohannesburg.org)), and for scenic drives along the likes of Routes 24 and 104. For most family carloads, however, the first stop and literal gateway to the region is the Arc de Triomphe-style edifice on the north shore of Harties, where tourist attractions, restaurants and markets line the main road through Damdoryn and Schoemansville.

Adventurous families shouldn't sniff at the commercialised area, as it's home to the Aerial Cableway ([hartiescableway.co.za](http://hartiescableway.co.za)), which takes you on Africa's longest mono-cableway to the roof of the Magalies. Up top are picnic tables, a kids' play area, a 1 km interpretive trail with 360° views and, naturally, a canteen and cocktail bar. Children aged under four travel free, as do birthday boys and girls of all ages. To see the 20 km<sup>2</sup> dam up close, grab your selfie stick and embark on a two-hour cruise with the Harties Boat Company ([hartiesboatco.co.za](http://hartiesboatco.co.za)); kids under six cruise for free and those under 12 pay half price, but may be thrown overboard if caught at the bubbly on the sunset tour. While in the area, the Welwitschia Country Market ([countrymarket.co.za](http://countrymarket.co.za)) is a fun stop



*From top: Exploring the Sterkfontein Caves is a must; the conical grass-roofed Maropeng Visitor's Centre; the Aerial Cableway: running to the top of the Magaliesberg is Africa's longest mono-cableway*

with three restaurants, 40 *winkels* selling everything from Boks tops to ostrich eggs, and children's entertainment galore at weekends.

### BACK TO THE BEGINNING

Remember the dolomite from the beginning of the Magaliesberg story? Water seeped into the rock, forming underground reservoirs, which feed the range's streams, and caves – most famously Sterkfontein ([maropeng.co.za](http://maropeng.co.za)). This underground hominid fossil trove, one of the world's most significant archaeological sites, and the surrounding Cradle of Humankind ([cradleofhumankind.co.za](http://cradleofhumankind.co.za)) are located in the unbeatably ancient Magaliesberg biosphere. However, in the spirit of slow travel, we recommend leaving Sterkfontein's three million years of human history until tomorrow and trying to get through Magaliesberg's 2 500 million years of geology today. ✈



### Don't Miss

#### Upperdeck

Locals and Gautengers alike hit this beer garden at the Welwitschia Country Market to drink, dine and dance, with live bands at weekends. The menu features all the pub classics, and the enclosed play area and kids' menu ensure it's a happy meal. [upperdeckrestaurant.co.za](http://upperdeckrestaurant.co.za)

#### Brauhaus am Damm

Enjoy Magaliesberg views across the Olifantsnek Dam from this waterside microbrewery and restaurant with a German bent, where Bavarian beers accompany pretzels, sausage platters, *eisbein* and a kids' menu. [brauhaus.co.za](http://brauhaus.co.za)