

A LITTLE R&R

Need a break from people over the long December holiday? Swap the festive small talk for scenic walks, fresh country air and craft beer

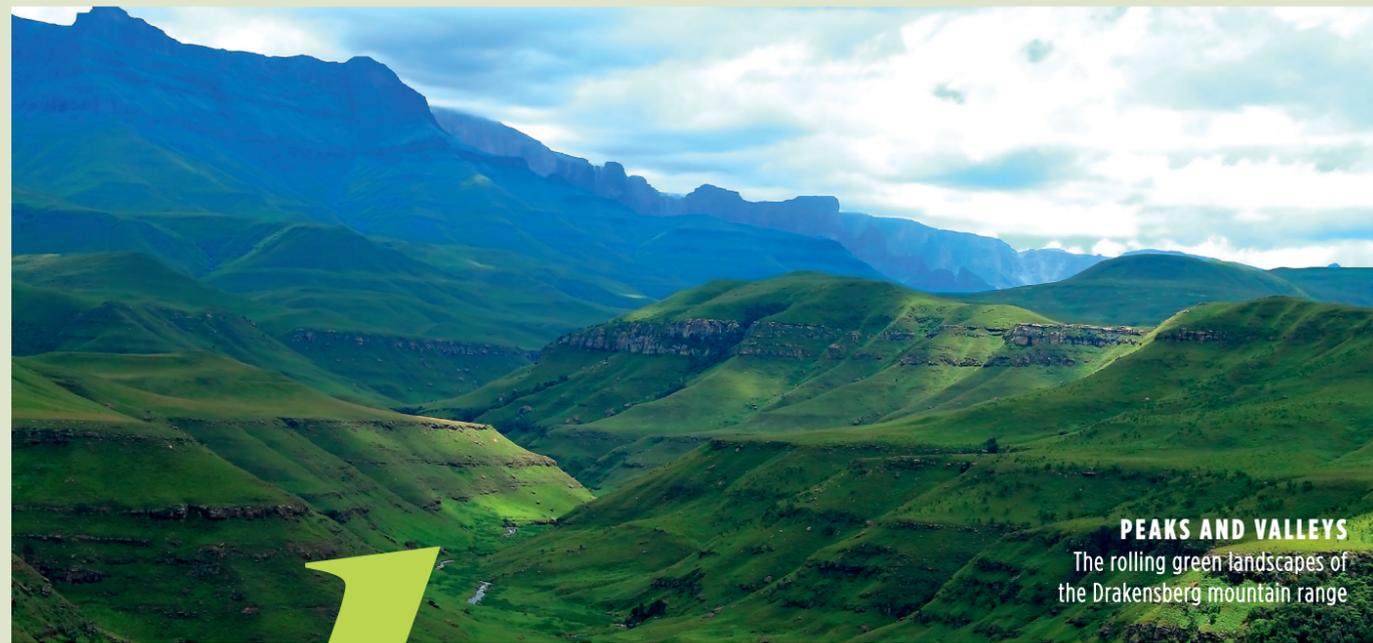
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Details on page 63



PEAKS AND VALLEYS
The rolling green landscapes of the Drakensberg mountain range



DRAKENSBERG *(from Durban)*

Flee the beach crowds by heading inland, where you can beat the heat atop the mighty Drakensberg range. With many of the campsites and lodges geared towards hikers, it's best to book ahead, but there are lots of choices in the reserves and towns beneath those 3 000 m-plus peaks. If you only have a long weekend, the Royal Natal National Park

(kznparks.com) in the northern Drakensberg has some wonderful day walks with views of the Amphitheatre (*see opposite*). The king of them all is the 12 km Sentinel Peak hike which involves scaling cliffs on chain ladders, starting from a car park south of Phuthaditjhaba in the Free State. There is accommodation inside and outside the park. Don't miss a wood-fired reward at Tower of Pizza (*towerofpizza.co.za*).

Get there: take the N3 110 km north to Howick, then branch south towards the Underberg area or continue north to Winterton and Bergville. Royal Natal National Park is 280 km from Durban.



HEMEL EN AARDE *(from Cape Town)*

With Capetonians traditionally hitting the West Coast or the Garden Route, Hemel en Aarde seems to be hiding in plain sight. This heavenly valley of a dozen boutique wine farms is popular for tastings of its signature Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, accompanied by lunch at spots such as Creation (*creationwines.com*; book ahead). Many visitors overnight in Hermanus. This seaside town makes for a heaven-on-earth spot and a quiet getaway, where hikers and mountain bikers might have the vineyard trails all to themselves (*hermanusadventures.co.za*).

Accommodation options includes self-catering cottages at Spookfontein Wines (*spookfontein.co.za*) and apartments at the equestrian Hemel en Aarde Farm (*heafarm.co.za*), while Ataraxia's chapel tasting room is also well worth a visit (*ataraxiawines.co.za*).

Get there: Hemel en Aarde is a good 115 km east of Cape Town via the N2 and/or R43. For some coastal scenery, take Clarence Drive. And before all that wine, stop for a local microbrew and a burger in The Brewery beer garden (*facebook.com/thebrewery.HemelenAarde*) located at the valley's southern entrance.

OUT AND ABOUT

CULLINAN

(from Pretoria)

With most Gautengers heading west to Harties and the Magalies, a tactical sidestep in the opposite direction takes you to the historic diamond-mining town of Cullinan. As you'll discover on a mine tour, the famous sparklers unearthed here include the 3 106-carat Cullinan Diamond in 1905. You'll also see the whopping 1 km-by-500 m hole that is bigger than Kimberley's Big Hole. The picturesque surrounding streets are home to a Herbert Baker church (see left, bottom) and browse-worthy shops and galleries. Stay amid quirky decor at the Gastehys JanHarmsgat (gastehys.co.za) and enjoy some meze at As Greek As It Gets (asgreekasitgets.co.za).

Get there: Cullinan is 45 km east of Pretoria via the N4 and R515 or the N1 and R513. Stop en route at the tea garden of the 19th-century mansion preserved as the Sammy Marks Museum (ditsong.org.za).



ENDLESS SHOPPING
Browse for treasures at quirky stores and galleries



HAENERTSBURG

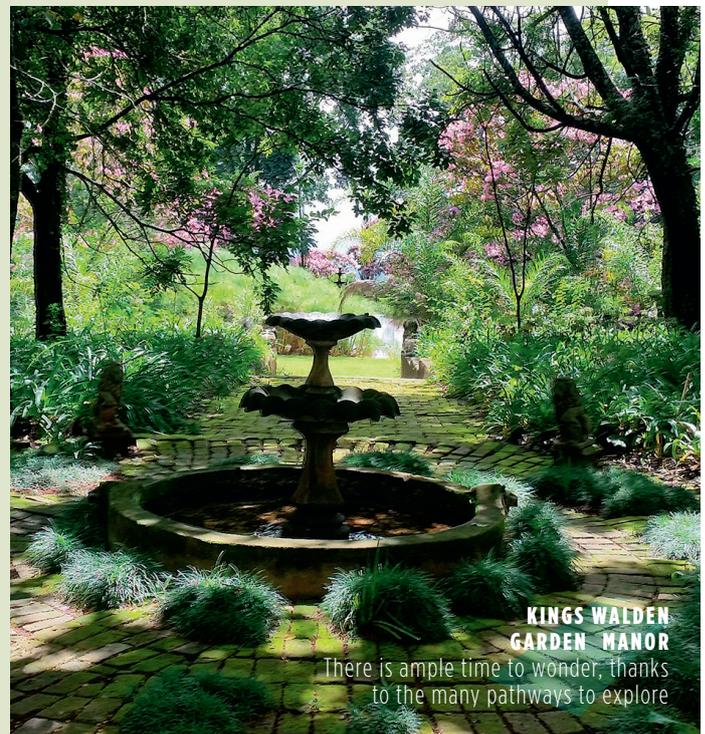
(from Polokwane)

Welcome to the mountain, as the locals call this cute little dorpie amid pine plantations, waterfalls and trout-filled rivers. The cool-climate village will make you feel like you've landed in the Scottish Highlands or the Pacific Northwest. From here, the Magoebaskloof Pass descends 450 m to Tzaneen in the subtropical Letaba Valley, passing Afromontane forest where trails lead through ferns and lianas to picnic spots such as Debengeni Falls (magoebaskloof.co.za).

Haenertsburg itself is lovely for a wander, with paths in and around town, while the Magoebaskloof Canopy Tour (canopytour.co.za) and Kings Walden Garden Manor country garden (kingswalden.co.za) are nearby. Stay in a Pennefather

cottage (thepennefather.co.za), grab a bite to eat at Red Plate (redplate.co.za) and a drink at the Pot n' Plow.

Get there: Haenertsburg is 60 km east of Polokwane via the R71.



KINGS WALDEN GARDEN MANOR

There is ample time to wonder, thanks to the many pathways to explore