



Pret *in Plett*

Plett is home to some of South Africa's best beaches and it's always packed out during summer. It's also a fantastic off-season destination, when the crowds have gone back to Illovo and Idaho. Here's your guide.

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There can't be many South African sun-seekers who haven't greased their shoulders and spread their towels on one of Plett's golden beaches. Or maybe you have childhood memories of Plett: catching your first real wave at Central Beach and dropping your soft serve into the boiling sand while running back to the broly.

Yes, Plett is a happy place where families get together and catch up on the year's events; where the stoep of the holiday house is eternally littered with boogie boards and flip-flops, covered in a gritty layer of beach sand.

The town has changed over the years. Opulent houses have sprouted on the ridge behind Robberg Beach and the suburbs have grown. Main Street is busy at most times of the year, full of boutique stores and restaurants. Wine has found its way to the Garden Route and there are a number of nearby estates to visit. Then there are the forests and the seaside trails, best explored on foot or on two wheels – or four hoofs. For the kids, there's action that will knock their socks off and wear them out by the time the sun goes down. Heck, there's even a Woolworths in Plett!

Bring the family and come get a taste of the action.



ROBBERG RAMBLE (above). For the wildest views in Plett, head to Robberg Nature Reserve and walk one of the trails on the peninsula.

GET THE WET WIPES (below). Robberg Beach is huge – there's plenty of space for the kids to run around. And afterwards? Ice lollies!



THINGS TO DO

1 Storm the beaches!

If you want a quiet spot to catch some sun, plant your umbrella somewhere along Robberg Beach – a 5 km swathe of sand between Central Beach and the Robberg Peninsula. Central Beach, in the shadow of the Beacon Island hotel, is more protected so it's good for kids. This is also where you'll find the all-important ice creams and burgers.

Lookout Beach, north of Central, is another wide expanse of sand, with the sea on one side and the Keurbooms Lagoon on the other. Lookout is good for a long walk: Start off next to the sea, turn at the river mouth and return along the shore of the lagoon.

For that completely deserted and unspoiled vibe, head to Keurboomstrand, a short drive north-east of Plett via the N2. From the main beach at Keurbooms, you can carry on walking east to the mouth of the Matjies River, where there's a rock shelter with evidence of human occupation going back thousands of years. On the other side of the river is Arch Rock – Plett's (mini) version of Hole-in-the-Wall. Make sure you do this walk at low tide.

Or walk back in the direction of Plett. The beach goes on and on: 10 km of pristine coastline, where dolphins and whales splash beyond the breakers. Swimming is not a good idea, though. There are no lifeguards and rip currents are prevalent.

2 Walk around Robberg

The Robberg Peninsula is what separates Plettenberg Bay from the Indian Ocean. It's a wild place, full of fynbos and plunging cliffs smashed by waves. In spring you're guaranteed to see whales. At other times of the year, look out for sharks, dolphins and the seal colony that gives the peninsula its name. (*Rob* means "seal" in Afrikaans.)

Hike the Point Trail (8,5 km) all around the peninsula for the best views. Set aside at least three hours. If you have small children, or less time, cut across the peninsula halfway at a big sand dune called Witsand. There's a secluded beach at the bottom, at a place called Die Eiland – literally an island connected to the main peninsula by a sand spit. Keep an eye on the tide and pack some snacks, sunscreen and plenty of water.

You can even stay overnight, Robinson Crusoe style, in a cabin called the Fountain Shack. You and your friends will be the only people in the reserve come sundown, with little more than rocks and seagulls between you and the ocean.

Where? About 5 km south of Plett via Robberg Road. Follow the signs.

Entrance fee: R40 per adult; R20 per child.

Fountain Shack rates: From R875 per night.

Contact: CapeNature ☎ 044 533 2125;

📍 capenature.co.za

3 Paddle to Whiskey Creek

The Keurbooms is a magical river and you can explore it in both directions: upriver you'll enter a gorge where turacos and fish-eagles swoop; downriver you'll discover a world of sandbanks and secret beaches.

The N2 crosses the river just north of Plett. The turn-off to the slipway is at the bridge. You can launch a boat here, or hire a canoe. The river narrows as it winds inland and there are a number of beaches with braai spots. The most famous of these is called Whiskey Creek, about 5 km upriver from the slipway, where the water is the colour of the finest single malt. Load a cool box and make a day of it.

In the opposite direction towards the river mouth, there are some nice swimming beaches and fishing spots (permit required). Keep away from the mouth itself because the currents are strong and unpredictable.

Where? The slipway is about 10 km north of Plett, just off the N2 towards Port Elizabeth.

Boat hire: You can hire a small motorboat at the Plettenberg Bay Angling Club (R800 per day), or a canoe at the CapeNature office at the slipway (R135 per day). You can also launch your own boat at the slipway – the permit fee depends on the size of the boat's motor; plus R80 launch fee.

Contact: Plettenberg Bay Angling Club ☎ 044 535 9740; CapeNature ☎ 044 533 2125

4 Ride in the forest

Plett is mountain-biking nirvana. There's a trail for everyone, from fast single track to gentle forest roads and everything in between.

For some real action, head to the Cairnbrogie MTB and Trail Park. They've got two pump tracks (for adults and kids) and various trails on the farm, from a 1,2 km forest ride to a more challenging 11 km circuit.

Then there's Harkerville, a forested area 15 km west of Plett towards Knysna. There are five routes that all start at the Garden Of Eden picnic spot just off the N2: The 13 km Yellow Route is the easiest and the 22 km Red Route is the most challenging. All the trails lead through the forest, but a section of the Red Route also goes along fynbos-covered cliffs at the coast.

Another option is to ride the 22,5 km Petrus-se-Brand Trail, which takes you through the heart of the Knysna Forest from Harkerville to Diepwalle.

And these are just the popular options! There are any number of cycling trails in the MTO forestry sections behind Plett and Knysna. Get a Trail Pass and a map and see where the road takes you. You'll find all the permit details, and a good selection of routes and ride profiles in the Plett and Knysna area, at 📍 mtbtrailpass.co.za
Cost: Cairnbrogie R50 per person for the day. Harkerville R40 per adult; R20 per child. MTB Trail Pass R240 per year.
Contact: Cairnbrogie ☎ 044 533 9163; 📍 cairnbrogie.co.za; Garden of Eden (SANParks) ☎ 044 532 7793; 📍 sanparks.org; MTO routes 📍 mtbtrailpass.co.za

5 Horse riding and wine

Hog Hollow Horse Trails offers a number of guided outrides, with the option to stop for lunch or a wine tasting. The trails run through farmland and forest in an area called The Craggs, between Plett and Nature's Valley. You needn't be a pro either – your guide will assist you as required and the Hog Hollow horses are well accustomed to amateur riders.

Ride options include the adventurous Far Ridges Trail, or the Bubbles and Beasts Trail, which takes you via Monkeyland Primate Sanctuary and Birds of Eden to finish up at Bramon Wine Estate for tapas and sparkling wine.

For a full day of wine estates, The Craggs Wine Route Trail will take you to three estates, with wine tasting and tapas at each.

Where? 16 km north-east of Plett, along the N2 towards Port Elizabeth.

Cost: From R295 per person for the one-hour Meadow Trail, to R1 200 per person for the full-day wine-tasting trail.

Contact: ☎ 082 771 3745;

📍 horseridinggardenroute.com

FUN IN THE SUN. Paddle up the Keurbooms River and spend the day swimming and fishing at a beach like Whiskey Creek (below left). Or pack a picnic and head to Harkerville (below). Harkerville also has some amazing mountain-biking trails (bottom).





WHERE TO EAT

HARKERVILLE SATURDAY MARKET



NATURES WAY FARM STALL



THYME AND AGAIN



THE HEATH



OLD NICK MIDWEEK MARKET

BREAKFAST

Le Fournil De Plett Bakery

A real French bakery, serving scrumptious breakfasts and a range of freshly baked loaves and pastries. The restaurant opens onto a vibey courtyard surrounded by boutique shops and an art gallery.

Where? Lookout Centre, Main Street
Opening times: Daily from 7 am to 4 pm.

Contact: 044 533 1390

OUR PICK! Claire's Cakes and Deli

Good coffee, great breakfasts and an even better range of cakes and delights for the sweet tooth. Try the cheesecake or the blueberry pancakes. There's also a self-service deli for lunch.

Where? Marine Building, Main Street, Plett
Opening times: Daily from 8 am to 5 pm.

Contact: 044 533 0000;
clarescakes.co.za

Beacon Island hotel

The restaurant at this iconic hotel is open to visitors and it has one of the best locations in Plett, right on the rocks at Central Beach. Order the full English breakfast or, if it's



LE FOURNIL DE PLETT BAKERY

closer to lunchtime, tuck into fish and chips or a pizza.

Where? Central Beach, Plett
Opening times: Daily from 7 am until late.

Contact: 044 533 1120;
tsogosun.com

FOR THE KIDS

The Yard

There's a good range of breakfasts on the menu, and a separate children's section. If it's lunchtime, order the ostrich bobotie burger. The farm-style setting means there's lots of space for the kids to run

around. Mom and dad can visit the antique shop on the same premises.

Where? Piesang Valley Road, Plett
Opening times: Weekdays from 8.30 am to 4 pm; Saturday and Sunday from 8.30 am to 4 pm.

Contact: 082 534 0360

OUR PICK! The Heath

A shaded spot under pine trees with a restaurant serving open sandwiches, crumpets, salads, cheese boards and more. The adjoining shop sells creative interior goods, handcrafted furniture and other local crafts. Outside is a mega

playground full of jungle gyms and foefie slides.

Where? Off the N2, 8 km west of Plett towards Knysna.

Opening times: Daily from 8.30 am to 4 pm.

Contact: 044 532 7724;

Thyme and Again

A farm stall and restaurant, with an adjoining playground in the garden. Stop here for a delicious home-made pie – we can recommend the spinach-and-feta or curried beef. Get their apple pie as a takeaway for dessert after tonight's braai.

Where? Near the N2 bridge over the Keurbooms River, about 8 km north-east of Plett.

Opening times: Daily from 8 am to 5.30 pm.

Contact: 044 535 9432;
thyme-and-again.co.za

SUNDOWNERS

Ristorante Enrico

This Keurboomstrand institution is right at the sea, with views of the beach curling back towards Plettenberg Bay. Order a sundowner and one of Enrico's famous fresh fish dishes for dinner. They also serve great pizzas – we can recommend the calzone.

Where? Main Beach, Keurboomstrand, about 14 km north-east of Plett.

Opening times: Tuesday to Sunday from noon to 9.30 pm; closed on Mondays.

Contact: 044 535 9818;
enricorestaurant.co.za

OUR PICK!

Simon's Bar at Emily Moon

Emily Moon River Lodge is an upmarket boutique hotel overlooking the Bitou River Valley just north-east of Plett. There are two food options at the hotel: an eclectic and laid-back pizza spot called Simon's Bar and the gourmet Emily Moon restaurant. The Cuban-style pulled pork, red pepper and rocket pizza at Simon's is a winner.

Where? About 7 km north of Plett; follow the signs from the N2.

Opening times: Daily from noon to 10.30 pm.

Contact: 044 501 2500;
emilymoon.co.za

CHILLED OUT

OUR PICK! The Fat Fish

Arguably the best fish you'll find in Plett, with an even tastier wine list. Try the mezze platter with a bottle of Newstead chardonnay,

or splash out on the parmesan-crumbed kingklip with smoked chilli butter.

Where? Milkwood Centre, Hopwood Street, Plett

Opening times: Daily from 11 am to 10 pm.

Contact: 044 533 4740;
thefatfish.co.za

The Table

A lively pizza and burger place, with consistently good service and food. There's a children's playroom and a good selection of craft beer – try Red Bridge Ale, brewed in Knysna.

Where? Main Street, Plett

Opening times: Daily from noon until late.

Contact: 044 533 3024

Surf Café

A chilled-out, youthful restaurant and bar, serving a mix of Indonesian and Mexican dishes at good prices. Go for the veg, chicken or beef enchilada if you're needing a good fill. The pancakes and chai milkshakes are also good.

Where? Beacon Isle Centre, Plett
Opening times: Daily from 9 am until late.

Contact: 044 533 6801

Plett Ski Boat Club

A local beach bar, right on Central Beach, serving dishes like burgers and calamari. The food is basic but tasty and well priced, and the vibe is super relaxed.

Where? Central Beach, Plett
Opening times: Daily from 9 am to 11 pm.

Contact: 044 533 2941

The Lookout Deck

"The Deck" is on the rocks above Lookout Beach, serving draft beer, cocktails, seafood dishes and burgers. The hake-and-calamari combo goes down well with a Peroni draft. Or order the mussel pot and a bottle of white from the comprehensive wine list.

Where? Lookout Beach, Plett
Opening times: Daily from 9 am to 9 pm.

Contact: 044 533 1379,
lookout.co.za

MORE THINGS TO DO

Go to sea. Paddle a kayak in the bay (dolphinadventures.co.za), go whale watching (oceanadventures.co.za) or visit the Robberg seal colony (offshoreadventures.co.za).

Go wine tasting. Plett has its very own wine route with 16 estates to visit. We can recommend Bramon and Newstead, both of which have good restaurants and tasting facilities. plettwinelands.com

Take the kids to The Craggs. The Craggs is Plett's rural action area. Go kloofing with the guys from Africanyon or check out some amazing animal sanctuaries like Birds of Eden and Monkeyland. Afterwards, have a bite to eat at Natures Way Farm Stall. (See our feature about The Craggs in *go!* #90; cruisethecraggs.co.za)

Shop on Main Street. Unlike many other towns, Plett's main drag has largely avoided the onslaught of chain stores. Instead, there are a number of independent boutique-style stores selling everything from clothing to home decor. Get the credit card ready...

Go to market. For the best bacon and eggs this side of the equator, stop at the Harkerville Saturday Market about 12 km west of Plett via the N2, which operates from 8 am to 1 pm every Saturday. There's a good spread of local produce, like fruit and veg, freshly baked bread and pastries, nuts, even fruit ice cream. The curio section includes paintings, second-hand book stalls and clothing.

For more organic, home-grown produce, visit the Old Nick Midweek Market at Old Nick Village, 2 km north of Plett via the N2 (oldnickvillage.co.za). The market runs from 10 am to 2 pm every Wednesday.

WHERE TO STAY

There are lots of holiday homes available for hire in Plett. Contact an agency like the Accommodation Bureau (☎ 044 533 2101; accommodationbureau.co.za); Plett Villas (☎ 044 535 9073; plettvillas.co.za) or Robberg Estates (☎ 044 533 2505; robbergestates.com). We can also recommend these places to stay.

IN TOWN

Piesang Valley Lodge

Set on 15 acres inland from the beach, this B&B has six comfortable suites well suited to families or couples.

Where? Off Piesang Valley Road

Rates: From R1 000 per night for up to four people.

Contact: ☎ 044 533 6283;

pvl.co.za

OUR PICK! Stone Cottage

Offbeat travellers should check out this self-catering guesthouse/backpackers' in one of Plett's oldest houses. There's a range of suites and rooms, great views of the sea and a communal deck with a hot tub. Two rooms have full-size kitchens; the others have smaller kitchenettes.

Where? Harker Street

Rates: From R850 per night for up to four people.

Contact: ☎ 044 533 1331;

stonecottage.co.za

OUTSIDE PLETT

OUR PICK! Moonshine on Whiskey Creek

Five creatively built self-catering wooden cottages, set in indigenous forest on the edge of a valley. A place to escape from the world.

Where? About 16 km from Plett towards The Craggs. Follow signs from the N2.

Rates: From R650 per night.

Contact: ☎ 072 200 6656;

whiskeycreek.co.za

The Dunes Hotel and Resort

A friendly resort right on the beach near Keurboomstrand, with suites, self-catering duplex units and villas, plus an on-site restaurant, pool and kids' play area.

Where? About 13 km from Plett towards Keurboomstrand.

Rates: From R950 for a double room, depending on the time of year.

Contact: ☎ 044 535 9606;

dunes-resort.co.za

OUR PICK! Keurbooms Lagoon Caravan Park

A neat campsite on the banks of the Keurbooms Lagoon. The stands

are well positioned and shaded, with power points. There's a shop on site, plus a swimming pool and clean ablution facilities. The kids will enjoy splashing in the lagoon.

Where? About 2 km north of Plett, off the N2 towards Port Elizabeth.

Rates: From R120 per person, depending on the time of year.

Contact: ☎ 044 533 2567;

keurboomslagoon.co.za

Plettenberg Forever Resort

Chalets and a wonderful campsite in the forest on the banks of the Keurbooms, upriver from the N2 bridge.

Where? About 10 km north-east of Plett via the N2 towards Port Elizabeth.

Rates: Chalet accommodation from R750 (four-sleeper); camping from R130 per adult.

Contact: ☎ 044 535 9309;

foreverplettenberg.co.za



SPLISH SPLASH. Take the kids to the Keurbooms Lagoon, where they can build sandcastles until the sun goes down.