

Forgotten Towns of the Eastern Cape

Often overlooked as a tourist destination, the Eastern Cape is steeped in a rich and diverse history. One of the primary conflict zones between the 1820 Settlers and the traditional Xhosa people, it also featured prominently during the country's struggle against apartheid.

There are numerous small towns scattered throughout the province each with its own quaint character and forgotten place in history.

Jewels to Discover

Nieu Bethesda is often described as the '*village that time forgot*'. This picturesque Karoo town has indeed managed to remain largely untouched over the years.

While it started out as an important farming community, the popularity of surrounding towns resulted in Nieu Bethesda being largely abandoned in the 1940's and 1950's.

The town is perhaps most famous for Helen Martins and her Owl House. This is an astonishing monument to the creativity and vision of 'Miss Helen' as she was fondly known. The Owl House is well worth a visit, with its fascinating Camel Yard full of unusual sculptures.

In addition to the Owl house, Nieu Bethesda also boasts several art galleries, shops and restaurants, as well as the Nieu Bethesda Theatre. As far as accommodation is concerned, there are a variety of options, from a converted water tower to 3 star guest houses.



There are two things that **Bathurst** is famous for: the annual Ox-Braai party in December and the Giant Pineapple.

The Ox-Braai brings over 10 000 people from the surrounding areas to the Bathurst showgrounds in December for an evening of socializing, entertainment and good South African food. Visitors camp on the showgrounds and the party usually continues for up to two days.

Bathurst is one of the biggest pineapple growing areas in South Africa and as a tribute to its agricultural success, the town is home to the "*biggest pineapple in the world*." Standing 16.7m high with three floors, the Bathurst pineapple is a great family experience. The ground floor houses a gift shop full of pineapple goodies such as jams and chutneys and locally made pottery. The view from the top floor is also spectacular.

The Bathurst Agricultural Museum is also a great place to visit. It boasts a collection of more than 1400 unique items of interest ranging from antique household utensils to ox-wagons and horse drawn vehicles, to ostrich incubators.



When one mentions **Aberdeen**, Scotland might come to mind before the Eastern Cape does, but there is indeed a little gem of a town called Aberdeen, situated in the Karoo.

The town has been declared an architectural conservation site and includes a sight-seeing trail. Aberdeen's other claim to fame is its thriving wool and mohair industry which is the biggest in South Africa. Visitors can also enjoy a trip to the Fonteinbos Nature Reserve which is about 1km out of town. There is a 15km cycling and hiking trail marked out, which can also be used by motorists, and guests can also sleep over in a chalet.

Another interesting sight is the collection of Biblical Art Panels in the Dutch Reformed Church hall which have been created using a unique method of gluing textiles and lambswool onto hessian. This original idea was devised by Johanna Konig, who also designed the panels.



Situated only 164 km outside of Port Elizabeth, the small town of **Steytlerville** was established in 1876. The town offers a wide selection of outdoor activities including hunting, bird watching, hiking and camping. It is also home to a large farming community including sheep, angora goat and geese farms.

A unique place to stay is the Karoo Theatrical Hotel. This charming hotel is located 4km outside Steytlerville and promises a unique holiday experience. Visitors are entertained with cabarets and enjoy quality dining with beautiful views.

Filled with history and beauty, these unassuming towns are well worth a visit for both tourists and Eastern Cape locals.