



ARTS, CULTURE & HERITAGE



Garden Route, South Africa

GEORGE
WILDERNESS
UNIONDALE

GEORGE
naturally



Arts, culture and heritage

History for breakfast, trains for lunch and theatre by night.

Experience the opulence of a bygone era in George's remarkable performance space. Adventure through history on a vintage rail trolley or browse the antiques of our town's forefathers at the George Museum. A wealth of culture and history await you in the sixth oldest town in South Africa.

George's antiquity is written in its forests, timber and saw dust. Originally established as a trading post for the timber industry in the eighteenth century, the town of George grew around the demand for wood for building, transport and furniture. One can sense the hardship of these early woodcutters and experience their skilled craftsmanship in the George Museum. An exhibition about the historic timber industry includes a display of traditional woodworking tools, furniture crafted from the indigenous Yellowwood Tree as well as original photographs of the woodcutting communities. An outdoor display shows a reconstructed yellowwood cottage from the 1890's as well as plantings of fynbos and forest trees. Smaller children will enjoy the Toy Exhibition on the first floor displaying antique train sets, Kewpie dolls and model aeroplanes. Community members are invited to aid in the identification of activists depicted in the photographic exhibit about forced removals in George.

There isn't a better way to experience George's bygone days than to relax on the Outeniqua Power Van and chug back in time. The power van remains one of George's most popular tourist attractions. It leaves daily from the Outeniqua Transport Museum. This rail trip is an absolute must for train fans of all ages and offers an unbeatable insight into our fascinating local rail heritage. Climb aboard the vintage rail inspection trolley and ascend the Outeniqua Mountains. These mountains were originally inhabited by the Khoi San. 'Outeniqua' means 'man laden with honey' and alludes to the rich bounty nature provided to these indigenous hunter gatherers.

The swaying motion of the carriage and the hypnotic clacking of the tracks transport travellers back in time. Over the honking blast of the horn and the squealing of the metal tracks, the guides explain the history of the route. The bench at the front adjacent to

the driver offers uninterrupted panoramic views of the sheer mountain slopes, dripping forest, cascading waterfalls and purple heather.

The building of this railway line over the precipitous Outeniqua Mountains, between George and Oudtshoorn, began in December 1908 and was officially completed in 1913. Thousands of sticks of dynamite were used to blast the track out of solid rock. The line required the excavation of seven separate tunnels, the longest of which is Topping Tunnel at a length of 230 metres. Some 2 500 mostly convict workers were employed in its construction. The total cost came to a staggering £465 000. The rail tour takes about two and a half hours with a 30 minute picnic break close to Power Station. Booking is essential. Bring some snacks and a drink and enjoy some Instagram opportunities.

The Outeniqua Transport Museum itself holds an epic collection of trains, ox-wagons, vintage fire engines and even a funeral hearse from the last century. The enormous museum also houses a fantastic array of private collectors' vintage cars, all in beautiful condition, including a Model T Ford, restored Italian supercars, as well as the MG Midget! A visit to the train museum is a brilliant idea for the rare rainy day in George. Energetic children can climb aboard some of the superbly preserved locomotives and even sit in the dining carriage of the Royal White Train.





George Arts Theatre has a local reputation for show-stopping acts. The playhouse features two performance spaces, including an outdoor amphitheatre. The building once accommodated the young ladies attending Miss Christina's First-Class Public School for Girls. The quaint and cosy theatre has recently been lovingly restored, with luxurious seating, Moulin Rouge style murals and romantic lighting. The theatre is a cultural gem boasting old-style charm with a few modern twists. The Backstage Lounge Café is a coffee bar by day, serving light lunches, and a vibrant chandelier-lit lounge by night. Catch a fringe film festival, pantomime, drama or a live music gig.

The green lungs of the town are located on Caledon Street at the Garden Route Botanic Gardens. The garden was the site of the first irrigation scheme in the town in 1811 by the then Mayor Adriaan Geysbertus van Kerval. One of his first acts as mayor was to redirect water from the Rooi River via furrows to the 'Van Kerval' storage dam to supply the original 36 plots in the hamlet. These historic furrows and weirs are still visible in the GRBG. The main purpose of the gardens is to protect the local indigenous flora, according to manager; Finn Rautenbach.

"We are in danger of losing our medicinal and edible plant heritage," he explains, "the Koi San had an in depth knowledge of indigenous plants". This incredible floral resource was their larder, pharmacy, bedding and part of their spiritual and cultural legacy. Much of their invaluable heritage was passed down orally, from parent to child or from one shaman to another. Much of this plant knowledge is being lost.

The Medicinal Plant Mound is a vibrant example of the preservation of our traditional medicines. This exhibit features segments planted with a variety of folk remedies to education and local people to harvest. Smell the potent Wild Garlic with its tiny purple flowers. Spot the African Potato, it's said to be a treatment for tuberculosis. Sample the bitter tasting African Wormwood. Wildedagga, Sour Fig and many more folk remedies are displayed. Children will enjoy reading the sign boards and discovering the different illness treated by each remedy. Smaller children will enjoy the different scents, from the strong smelling Vick's Plant, the garlic scented Knoffelbuchu to the aromatic Wild Rosemary. Inquisitive guests will quickly associate the names of the plants with their interesting shapes – the Elephant Ear has thick fleshy leaves and can be consumed for parasitic infections. The Slaagblad's flower resembles the head of a snake. Herbal remedies such as Pelargonium sidoides have now reached far outside SA, their antiseptic and immune boosting effects have lead it to become the main component of cold and cough medicines as far away as Germany and the USA.

Tourists can stroll the spiralling path to the summit of the Medicinal Plant Mound. A quick rest on the memorial seat offers a view of the Koi San Maze and the lush slopes of the Outeniqua Mountains. This is one of the best views in George and is wheelchair and stroller accessible. Entrance to the garden is very affordable and guests can pick up a map upon arrival.



Enjoy Nature

Garden Route
Botanical Garden

