The Flavors of Cape Town

One of the most beautiful cities in the world is waiting to welcome delegates to the World Ophthalmology Congress 2020. Cape Town, with the famous flat-topped Table Mountain overlooking a gorgeous bay, is a cosmopolitan blend of African exuberance and European sophistication. It has all the attractions of city life with the pleasures of beautiful beaches, rolling vineyards and wild nature reserves on its doorstep.

There's always something exciting happening in Cape Town's food scene, whether it's a renowned new chef opening their own restaurant, or an unassuming little joint suddenly being catapulted into the global spotlight.

The city boasts the best restaurants in the country, so prepare to dive in and enjoy. South Africa's history of European settlers and indentured Indian workers mingling with the local African population has created some unique offerings to tempt the taste buds.

Much of the local food is still tinged with the exotic flavor of history. Cape Town's large mixed-race population has traditional dishes which include Bredies, which are mutton stews made with tomatoes, cabbage, or local water-bloemmetjie plants. Indonesian slaves brought over in the 17th century enriched the food scene with bobotie, a delicious dish of minced beef studded with sultanas and spices and topped with an egg custard in a delicious sweet and savory blend.

Capetonians of Indian descent can take credit for Bunny Chows, an inexpensive and filling meal where half a loaf of bread is hollowed out and filled with curry.

For something quick and delightfully down-market try a Gatsby, which originated as a low cost and filling meal in the townships. It's an enormous submarine-style sandwich where a long roll is sliced open lengthwise and crammed with chips (French fries), processed meat, vegetables, cheese and sauces. It's perfectly acceptable to order a half portion or share it with a friend or two.

Cape Town's beautiful location on the tip of Africa sees the Atlantic and Indian Oceans delivering an abundance of seafood. Climate change and overfishing have now put the focus on sustainability, and many restaurants support that by only serving fish approved by the Southern African Sustainable Seafood Initiative. For the freshest seafood, head to the V&A Waterfront and pick one of the harborside restaurants.
Foraging from the bounty of the sea has become a high-class art at Wolfgat, a tiny restaurant that shot from quirky obscurity to global fame by being named as both the Restaurant of the Year and Best Off-Map Destination at the inaugural World Restaurant Awards. It’s a couple of hours’ drive along the coast in the picturesque fishing village of Paternoster, and if you book now you might just secure a table during the Congress in June! Chef Kobus van der Merwe serves a 7-course tasting menu featuring wild herbs, seafood and seaweed straight from the sea and the garden to just 20 diners at a time.

Another current sensation is Riverine Rabbit, offering “a conscious fine dining experience in the heart of the city.” Young and vibrant chef Ash Heeger serves vegan, vegetarian, pescatarian and regular menus using locally sourced ingredients like fresh fish and foraged herbs to create artistic dishes that look as fabulous as they taste.

For top-notch Japanese flavors head for Nobo One & Only at the V&A Waterfront, which specializes in sushi, scallops, langoustine and salmon. If you can’t make your mind up, go for one of the set menus. Leave room for the unusual and extensive dessert menu too but be prepared for a pricy experience.

Many of the wine estates further inland also have award-winning restaurants, so if you’re staying for a few days before or after the congress, it’s definitely worth planning a fine wine and dining trip.