

# WILD PLANET

SOUTH AFRICA

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## INTRO

South Africa’s eastern landscapes unfold in dramatic contrasts, where soaring mountain peaks yield to the rugged rhythms of the Indian Ocean.

The Drakensberg Mountains—uKhahlamba, the Barrier of Spears—rise like ancient sentinels, their basalt cliffs etched by wind, water, and myth. Within their shadowed folds, San rock art whispers across the ages, painted on cave walls hidden beneath towering escarpments. Mornings here are shrouded in mist, slowly revealing golden light that spills across alpine meadows alive with endemic flora and the circling flight of the elusive bearded vulture.

As the highlands fall away, the land transforms—rolling eastward into the subtropical mystery of the Wild Coast. This untouched shoreline, where green hills tumble into the sea, holds a deep connection to the Xhosa people and their ancestral rhythms. At Luphathana, the raw force of the ocean meets sculpted volcanic rock, where waves explode through jagged blowholes in a mesmerizing symphony of sea and stone. Just inland, Magwa Falls drops in a thunderous 144-meter plunge into a narrow gorge, wrapped in the green of one of South Africa’s last tea plantations. Along the coastline, Hole In The Wall emerges like a vision—an immense sea arch shaped by millennia of waves and legend. Locals call it esiKhaleni, “the place of sound,” named for the haunting echoes that rise when tides rush through the hollow rock. Further south, Port St Johns rests peacefully at the mouth of the Mzimvubu River, its easy rhythm framed by jungle-clad cliffs and the haunting cry of fish eagles. This vibrant village is both a threshold and a sanctuary—a place where time softens and the senses come alive. The wildlife here mirrors the landscape’s wild spirit: dolphins ride the breakers, whales breach just beyond the surf, and kingfishers flash through mangrove shadows. Coastal forests and wetlands teem with life, from tiny bushbuck to rare birds and butterflies that thrive in the region’s rich ecosystems.

But beyond its spectacle, this coastline offers moments of rare stillness—where footsteps trace ancient paths and silence carries the stories of the land. Traditional huts dot the ridgelines, cattle graze near cliff edges, and children wave from sunlit trails. Here, freedom is not emptiness but immersion—a way of life rooted in land, tide, and tradition. Every footstep, every breeze, every golden hour reveals a deeper sense of place. This is a South Africa that lives and breathes in harmony with the elements—raw, rhythmic, and soulfully real.

The journey captured in these pages is not only one of landscapes, but of feeling—of moments held in light, in wind, in memory. Whether hiking through mountain passes, standing at the edge of the sea, or sharing stories beneath stars, each experience becomes part of the land itself. These images invite you to witness a world where nature speaks in silence and beauty unfolds in every direction.

May you feel the breath of the Drakensberg, the salt of the Indian Ocean, and the pulse of the Wild Coast. ||||





# DRAKENSBERGE

The northern Drakensberg Mountains rise like a cathedral of stone, where vertical cliffs meet endless sky. This section of the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg range is dominated by the iconic Amphitheatre, a colossal rock wall over 5 kilometers wide. Its sheer cliffs soar to heights above 3,200 meters, creating one of the most impressive cliff faces on Earth. The Amphitheatre forms part of the Royal Natal National Park and is a gateway into one of South Africa’s most dramatic wilderness areas. Seen at dawn, the mountain glows in warm hues—pinks, oranges, and golds—before disappearing into shadow as clouds roll in. This is a land where weather changes quickly, transforming light and landscape in minutes.

The Amphitheatre is not a single peak but a curved escarpment that resembles a natural fortress. From its summit, water from the Tugela River spills over the edge in five distinct tiers, forming the majestic Tugela Falls. At 948 meters tall, Tugela Falls is among the highest waterfalls in the world. The falls are most powerful in the rainy season, fed by summer storms that sweep across the plateau. A hike to the summit reveals not just the waterfall but a vast, windswept world of alpine grasslands and endless views. To reach the top, many begin at Sentinel car park and follow the trail toward the edge of the escarpment. The final ascent involves steel chain ladders that cling to the rock face—a thrilling climb for the adventurous.

At the summit, the air is thinner, the silence deeper, and the sense of scale overwhelming. To stand atop the Amphitheatre is to feel suspended between sky and Earth. The landscape here is shaped by volcanic forces and ancient erosion, revealing layers of basalt and sandstone. The dramatic elevation change supports a rich variety of habitats in a relatively small area. Alpine plants such as spiral aloe and Drakensberg everlasting thrive in the harsh conditions near the summit. In the valleys below, forests, wetlands, and grasslands form a patchwork of ecological diversity. The area is home to many endemic species found nowhere else on Earth. Birdlife is especially rich, with over 300 species recorded in the northern Drakensberg alone. Bearded vultures—also known as lammergeiers—glide on thermals above the cliffs, searching for carrion. Cape vultures, Verreaux’s eagles, and jackal buzzards are also commonly seen circling overhead. Small mammals like dassies (rock hyraxes), porcupines, and mongooses hide among the boulders. The elusive caracal and shy mountain reedbuck roam the highlands, rarely seen but always present.

Lower down, the Tugela Gorge Trail offers a completely different experience of the Amphitheatre. This scenic path follows the river upstream through woodlands and boulder-strewn valleys. As hikers wind their way toward the base of the cliffs, they pass clear pools, water-

falls, and rock overhangs. The sound of the river and birdsong replaces the silence of the high plateau. The gorge reveals the Amphitheatre’s full vertical face, rising nearly a kilometer above. Photographers find endless inspiration in the ever-changing light and textures of the rock. Dramatic cloud formations often cling to the cliffs, casting shifting shadows over the valleys. Sunsets are especially powerful here, with the escarpment catching the last golden rays before darkness falls.

The northern Drakensberg is more than a natural wonder—it is also a cultural landscape rich in history. The San people once roamed these mountains, leaving behind thousands of rock paintings. Their artwork, some over 2,000 years old, tells stories of hunting, ceremony, and connection to the land. Painted in ochre, charcoal, and animal fat, these images are sacred links to the past. The San believed the mountains were alive with spirits, and their art reflects a spiritual worldview deeply tied to nature. Many caves and overhangs in the area protect this fragile heritage, accessible through guided cultural walks. Conservation efforts have helped

preserve both the art and the biodiversity of the region. The Drakensberg is part of a transfrontier conservation area that extends into neighboring

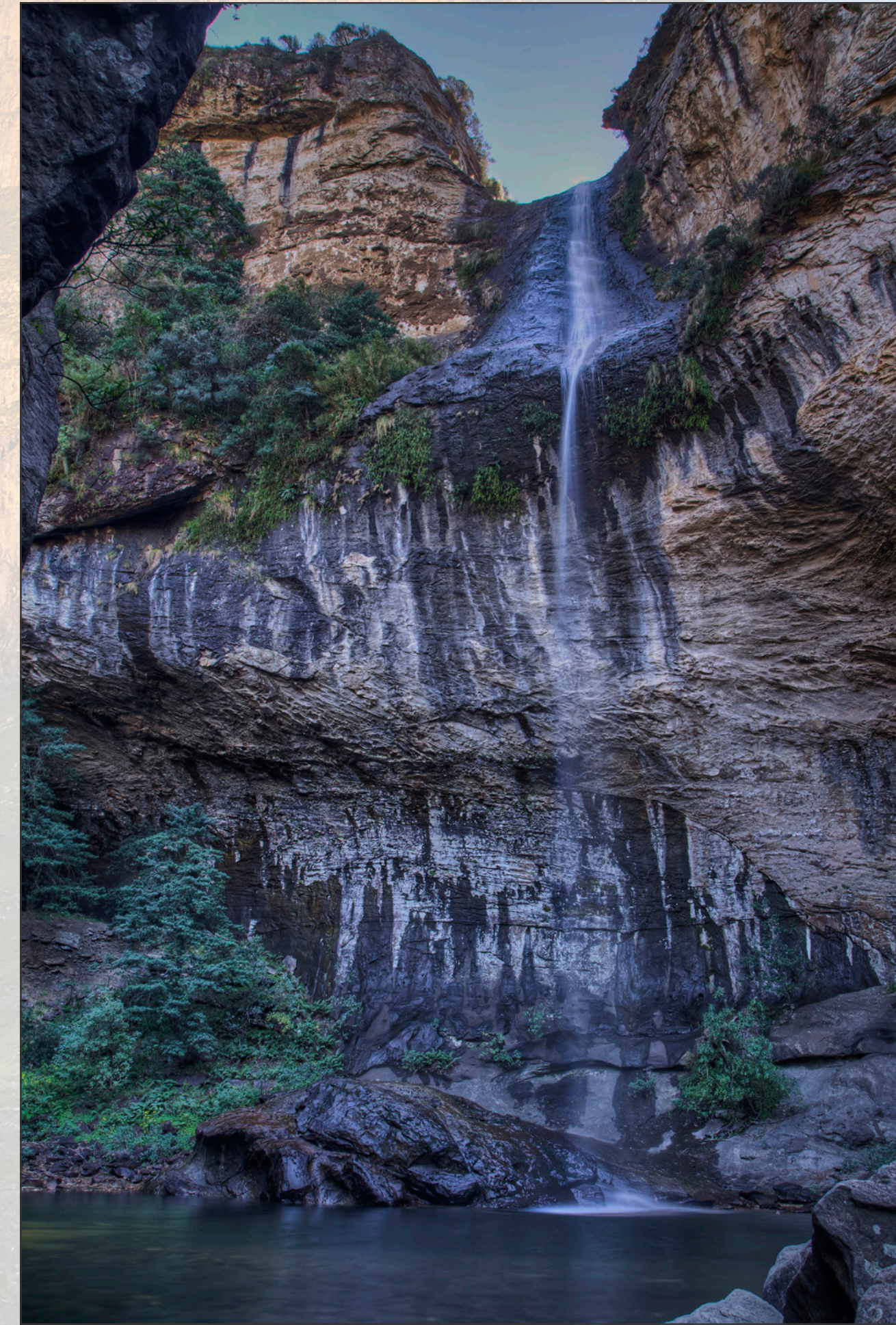




Lesotho. It is also a vital water catchment zone, feeding rivers that supply much of KwaZulu-Natal and beyond. Because of its elevation and rainfall, the region is often called the “roof of KwaZulu-Natal.”

Visitors to the northern Drakensberg find a variety of accommodation options, from eco-lodges to rustic camps. Witsieshoek Mountain Lodge offers stunning views and close access to the Sentinel Trail. In every direction, paths lead to discoveries—hidden waterfalls, rock pools, wildflowers, and panoramic lookouts. Many trails are suitable for day hikes, while others can be extended into multi-day trekking adventures. At night, the sky opens into a spectacle of stars, undisturbed by city lights. The Milky Way is clearly visible, stretching across the blackness in a luminous arc. Campfires crackle under the stars, while hikers share stories of the day’s climbs and sights. This is a place where time slows, where silence becomes a companion, and where each moment feels unfiltered. The Drakensberg’s seasons are distinct and dramatic.

Summers are green and stormy, with vibrant flowers and afternoon downpours. Autumn brings clear skies and golden grasses waving in the breeze. Winters are crisp, sometimes snowy, with deep blue skies and icy mornings. Spring erupts with wildflowers—orchids, irises, daisies—in every color imaginable. Whatever the season, the Amphitheatre offers a new face, a new mood, a new perspective. Its weathered walls echo with wind, rain, and the cry of birds. Sometimes, mists roll up from the valley and swirl around the cliffs like breath from the earth. Other times, the mountain stands stark and silent under brilliant sunshine. For many, the Drakensberg is not just a destination, but a revelation. Its beauty is not merely visual—it’s visceral, something felt in the lungs, the skin, and the spirit. To walk its trails is to move through layers of geology, history, and wildness. Every rock, every stream, every shadow carries meaning and mystery. The Amphitheatre reminds us how small we are, and yet how connected we can feel to the land. Its grandeur is humbling, but its details—lichen on stone, a flower in bloom, a hawk in flight—are equally profound. This is a mountain that invites not just exploration, but reflection. It asks you to listen: to the wind in the grass, the rush of the falls, the hush of the dawn. It’s a place for those who seek wonder—not just in what they see, but in what they feel. Whether you’re here for a day or a lifetime of visits, the northern Drakensberg leaves its mark. Its peaks and valleys become more than scenery—they become a memory, a presence, a part of you. The soaring cliffs, the hidden trails, the golden light—each photo a window into something timeless. Once you’ve seen the Amphitheatre, it never truly leaves you—it lives on in your breath, your steps, and your dreams. ||||



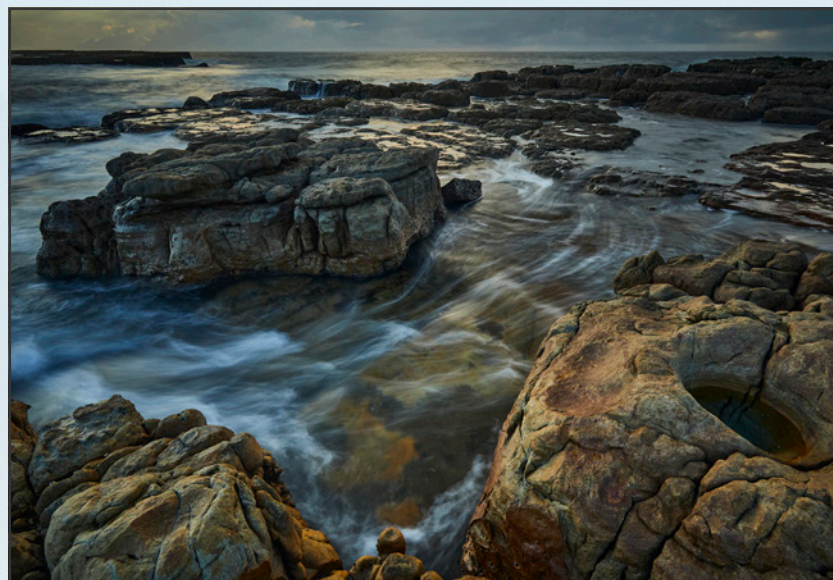


# LUPHUTHANA

Luphuthana, nestled along the Wild Coast, is one of the region’s most remote and mesmerizing coastal treasures. Situated within the rugged East-ern Cape, this untamed destination offers a striking collision of land and sea where powerful waves crash relentlessly against jagged volcanic rocks.

The shoreline is sculpted by time, with surreal rock formations that resemble otherworldly sculptures rising from the surf. At low tide, tide pools form in the crevices, reflecting the sky and revealing bursts of marine life. The soundscape here is thunderous—waves pounding, wind rushing, and distant gulls echoing through the salt air. Unlike many beaches, Luphuthana is not about sunbathing but about awe and energy. It draws those who seek solitude, raw nature, and un-filtered connection to the elements. The black rock shelves are slick with ocean spray, creating dramatic contrasts with the green coastal hills beyond. Nearby, small waterfalls tumble directly onto the rocks from hidden springs, adding to the sensory richness. Luphuthana lies within a landscape deeply woven into Xho-sa culture, where stories of ancestral spirits and sea creatures live alongside dai-ly rural life. A short hike from Luphuthana leads to the awe-inspiring Waterfall Bluff, one of the few waterfalls in the world that plunge straight into the ocean. Along the way you encounter grazing cattle, barefoot children, and views that stretch for miles along the cliffs. The area is accessible by rough tracks that re-quire determination and sometimes a 4x4, preserving its wild isolation. There are no towns or modern conveniences nearby—only the wind, the surf, and the call of nature. At sunrise, the rocks glow orange while waves shimmer with gold;

at dusk, mists roll in and cloak the headlands in soft grey. The coast is dotted with simple huts and homesteads where locals live with little electricity or infrastructure but deep knowledge of the sea and land. The remoteness of Luphuthana invites reflection, photography, and quiet exploration. Its textures—rough stone, smooth water, brittle grass—tell a story of resilience. Unlike more polished tourist spots, this is a place of elemental power and timeless rhythm. Every visit to Luphuthana feels like a step back into a South Africa before roads and resorts, where silence still speaks and nature still reigns. ||||









## MAGWA FALLS

Tucked away in the rolling hills near Lusikisiki, Magwa Falls is a dramatic natural wonder. The waterfall plunges an astonishing 144 meters into a narrow, rugged gorge, its waters slicing through ancient rock with a roar that echoes for miles. Surrounded by a landscape of vivid green tea plantations, Magwa Falls feels like a hidden oasis suspended between cultivated land and untamed wilderness. The gorge itself appears suddenly, a jagged crack in the earth that reveals the sheer drop and the churning pool far below. Unlike many major waterfalls, Magwa remains largely undeveloped and uncommercialized, offering an unfiltered and intimate experience of nature's raw force. There are no guardrails or paved walkways—just wind-blown grass, open cliff edges, and the deep thrum of cascading water. On misty mornings, the falls vanish into clouds, creating an ethereal atmosphere that shifts with every breeze. During the rainy season, the volume of water increases dramatically, transforming the waterfall into a roaring column of whitewater. In the dry season, the reduced flow reveals more of the rock layers and vertical striations of the gorge walls. The edges are often fringed with wildflowers and long grasses that sway in the wind, adding color and movement to the stark cliff face. The remote setting means few tourists venture here, and those who do often find themselves alone with the view. This solitude enhances the feeling of discovery, as if stumbling upon a secret that belongs more to myth than map. The silence around the gorge is broken only by the sound of water and the occasional rustle of leaves. Locals tell stories of the river's spirit and the sacredness of the gorge, connecting the falls to centuries of Xhosa oral history. The falls are part of the broader Pondoland region, known for its biodiversity and cultural richness. Paths around the falls invite careful exploration, revealing hidden angles and photo opportunities with every step. At sunset, the cliffs turn golden and shadows stretch deep into the canyon, offering a breathtaking close to the day. Magwa Falls is not just a sight to see but a place to feel, to breathe deeply, and to marvel at the sheer scale of untouched South African beauty. ||||





# HOLE IN THE WALL

Located near Coffee Bay, Hole in the Wall is a place where geology, legend, and nature converge in a landscape both untamed and profoundly spiritual. This massive sea arch, formed by the persistent erosion of sedimentary rock by wind and waves, stands as one of the Eastern Cape’s most iconic features. Isolated from the mainland by a narrow strip of land, the arch appears like a gateway carved through time, with the ocean continuously roaring through its opening. At high tide, waves crash through the hole with deep, thunderous echoes, inspiring the Xhosa name “esiKhaleni,” meaning “place of sound.” According to local legend, the hole was created by a sea people who rammed the cliff to claim a beautiful maiden from a nearby village, a tale that adds mythic depth to the site’s striking beauty. The surrounding coastline is equally dramatic, with towering cliffs, rolling green hills, and secluded beaches where cows wander freely across the sand. The nearby Whale Rock, a large curved boulder at the water’s edge that resembles the back of a breaching whale, adds another layer of visual intrigue to the coastal scenery. This rock, often drenched in sea spray and framed by crashing waves, is a favorite among photographers and a quiet symbol of the life that teems beneath the surface of the Indian Ocean. From the clifftops above Hole in the Wall, sweeping views reveal the rugged coastline stretching endlessly in both directions, a raw and powerful reminder of nature’s force. Tucked just inland, a rare patch of ancient milkwood forest thrives in the sheltered valleys near the coastline, offering a stark contrast to the wind-swept cliffs and open ocean. These gnarled, evergreen trees form dense canopies that filter the light, creating a quiet, almost sacred space filled with the calls of forest birds and the scent of damp earth. The milkwood forest is ecologically significant and spiritually revered, protected by local custom and treasured for its beauty and biodiversity. Footpaths wind through the forest, connecting local villages and providing access to hidden viewpoints above the sea. Traditional Xhosa huts, often painted in soft pastels, dot the surrounding hills, blending into the landscape and reflecting a lifestyle that remains closely tied to the rhythms of the land. Getting to Hole in the Wall involves a rugged drive or a rewarding hike from Coffee Bay, where each step is accompanied by birdsong, ocean breezes, and encounters with friendly locals. At sunrise and sunset, the entire scene transforms as warm light casts long shadows and illuminates the arch in tones of amber and gold. There is little in the way of infrastructure—no fences, no gates—

just the elemental forces of rock, sea, and sky. The ocean sounds vary throughout the day, from the gentle slap of retreating waves to the thunder of stormy surf funneling through the arch. Nearby beaches are perfect for long walks, shell collecting, and moments of quiet reflection. The rock pools teem with life at low tide, revealing starfish, anemones, and small fish darting between the stones. The area is part of the Pondoland Centre of Endemism, which hosts unique flora found nowhere else in the world. Locals continue to live with a deep understanding of the land, fishing from the rocks and telling stories that stretch across generations. The Whale Rock, the milkwood forest, and the arch itself form a triad of natural and cultural significance, each rooted in the landscape yet shaped by different elements—stone, sea, and soil. As the stars rise over the coastline, the sea continues its timeless dance through the arch, whispering secrets to the shore. Hole in the Wall is not just a scenic stop but a profound encounter with South Africa’s wild heart, captured here in images that speak of motion, myth, and memory. ||||













# PORT ST JOHNS

Port St Johns, set along South Africa's Wild Coast, is a coastal town defined by its striking natural setting, cultural richness, and timeless rhythm, where the Mzimvubu River cuts a deep path between towering green cliffs before meeting the vast Indian Ocean. The town is nestled between two dramatic mountains—Mount Thesiger to the north and Mount Sullivan to the south—creating a deep, cinematic river gorge that shapes both the

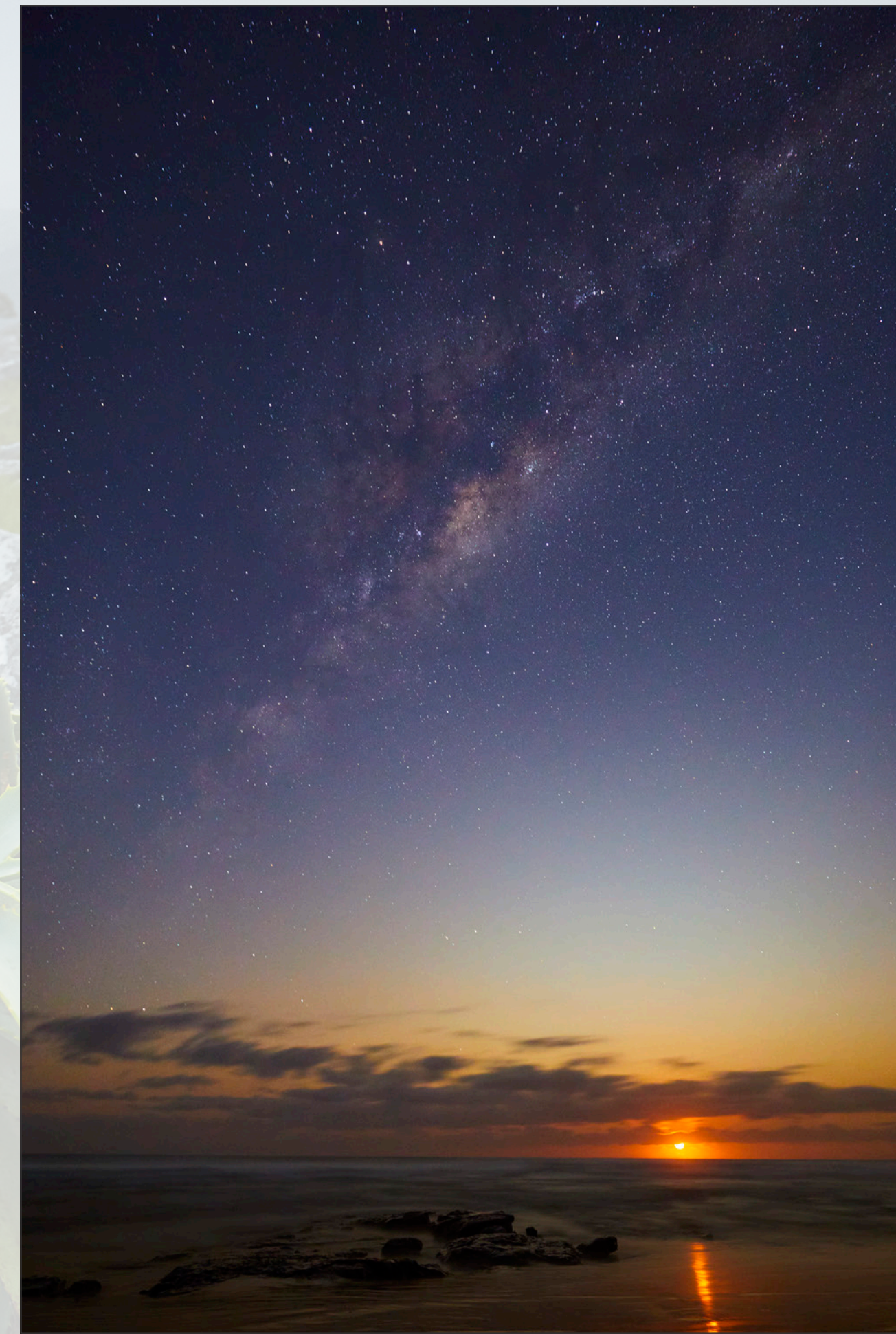
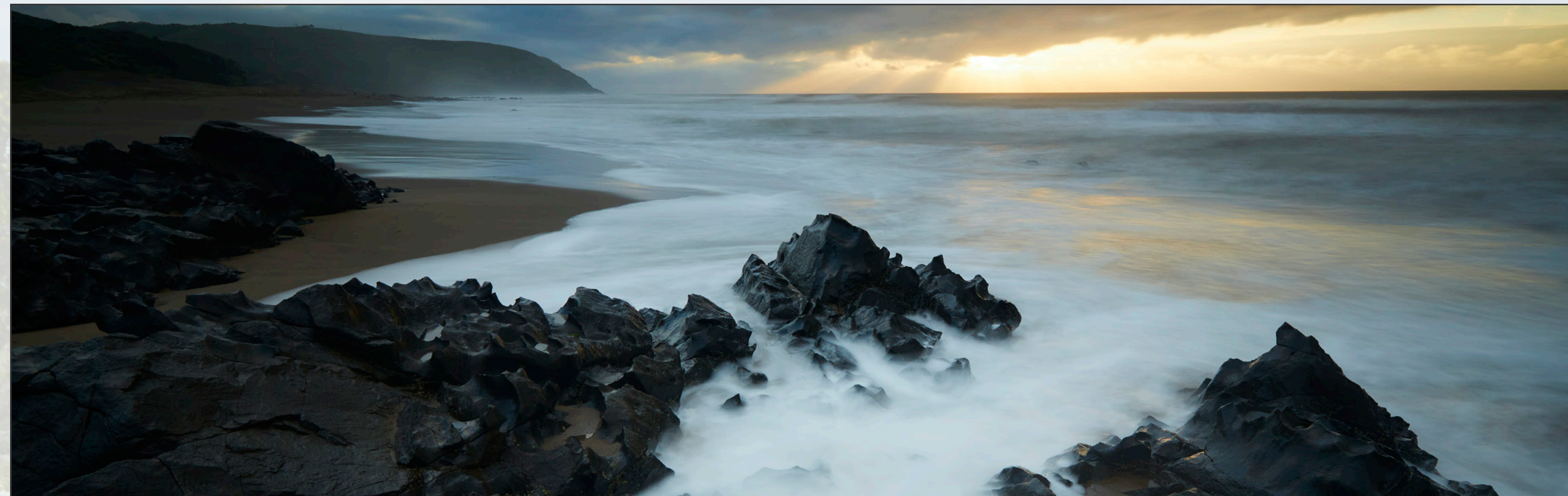
landscape and the way of life here. Mount Thesiger, known locally for its spiritual significance and panoramic views, offers one of the most breathtaking vantage points in the Eastern Cape, especially at sunrise or sunset when the cliffs glow in soft amber light. From its summit, the ocean stretches endlessly eastward, and the meandering river can be seen glinting like a silver ribbon through the dense forest below. The mountain is often used for traditional Xhosa ceremonies and initiation rites, adding a layer of cultural gravity to its already powerful presence. Just below the slopes of Thesiger lies Agate Terrace, a quiet, elevated neighborhood where lush vegetation, flowering gardens, and colonial-era cottages overlook the mouth of the river and the wild coastline beyond. Rugged rock formations rising from the sandy beach create a breathtaking contrast between

the raw, immovable strength of stone and the soft, shifting texture of sand. These coastal landscapes feel ancient and elemental, where towering cliffs and jagged outcrops loom above crescent-shaped bays, their edges weathered by centuries of wind and wave erosion. Further along the coast, Poenskop rises as a rugged headland of black rock and wind-sculpted cliffs, renowned among fishermen for its productive waters and loved by nature lovers for its raw, wild beauty. Poenskop is reached by a scenic and sometimes challenging drive through coastal bush that bursts with life. On calm days, the waters here shimmer in shades of turquoise and emerald, but when the wind rises, waves slam into the rocks with breathtaking force, sending spray high into the air. Mount Thesiger casts long shadows across the town as evening falls, and the last light of day touches the ocean in tones of fire and gold. The view from Agate Terrace becomes quiet and meditative at dusk,

with only the distant crash of waves and the rustling of trees in the breeze. At night, the sky reveals a canopy of stars, unspoiled by city lights, adding another layer of magic to the Wild Coast experience. Port St Johns is not a place of fast movement but of deep immersion, where travelers are invited to slow down, breathe with the tides, and listen to the stories in the rocks, forests, and waves. The convergence of mountain, river, and sea creates a landscape of raw power and quiet beauty, captured in this photo book not only as a visual journey, but as an invitation to feel the pulse of a place where time expands and nature speaks. ||||









# WILDLIFE

The wildlife of the Drakensberg Mountains and the Wild Coast reflects a rich tapestry of ecosystems, from high-altitude grasslands to subtropical coastal forests, where an incredible diversity of species thrives in their natural habitats. In the northern Drakensberg, the Mountain Reedbuck is often seen grazing on steep grassy slopes, its tan coat blending into the golden ridgelines while always alert for predators. These elegant antelopes prefer rocky outcrops and high ground, often standing silhouetted against the skyline in the early morning light. The skies above shimmer with flashes of color as the Amethyst Sunbird darts between protea blooms and aloes, its iridescent plumage catching the sun in shades of deep violet and green. Along wooded valleys and rivers, the haunting, liquid call of the Brown-hooded Kingfisher echoes through the canopy, its brilliant turquoise wings a flash of brightness above shaded pools. In denser thickets, the flamboyant Purple-crested Turaco moves with stealth, its deep purple body and striking green crown hidden until it bursts into flight with a flash of crimson wings. The Cape clawless otter is perfectly adapted to life in both mountain streams and coastal pools, moving fluidly between freshwater and marine environments. Often elusive and mostly nocturnal, it can be found slipping silently through clear mountain waters or weaving along reed-fringed coastal lagoons in search of its preferred prey—crabs, frogs, and small fish. With its webbed hind feet and sensitive whiskers, it navigates its habitat with stealth and precision, leaving only faint ripples in its wake. Its absence of claws on the front feet allows for remarkable dexterity when foraging under rocks and in muddy banks, making it one of South Africa’s most secretive yet fascinating mammals. Along the Wild Coast’s beaches, tiny Ghost Crabs scurry across the sand with astonishing speed, their pale, almost translucent bodies nearly invisible except for the movement they betray. These creatures dig deep burrows above the high tide line and emerge at twilight to feed, often disappearing instantly when approached. At night, the haunting “good lord deliver us” call of the Fiery-necked Nightjar rises from the coastal bush, its mottled plumage providing perfect camouflage against the forest floor. During the day, rocky outcrops are often dotted with Southern Rock Agamas, their blue heads and vivid bodies basking on sun-warmed stone as they guard their territory with animated head bobs. In riverbeds and on the edges of coastal streams, wagtails flit restlessly, bobbing their long tails and picking insects from the mud with precision. The African Pied Wagtail, in particular, is a common sight near village water sources, adding rhythm and motion to the edges of human settlement. Near estuaries and rivers along the coast, the Pied Kingfisher hovers like a small helicopter above the water before diving straight down to snatch small fish, its black-and-white plumage flashing against the green reflections. This highly adaptable bird is one of the few kingfishers that hunts by hovering, and its chattering call is a signature sound of South Africa’s waterways. The blend of mountain and coastal wildlife makes this region unique, as species from two vastly different ecosystems coexist within a relatively small area. High in the Drakensberg, lammergeiers and jackal buzzards glide over dramatic basalt cliffs, while dassies huddle in crevices below, their social calls echoing through the crisp air. The rich birdlife spans habitats and colors—from the vibrant green and gold of weavers nesting above rivers to the subtle beauty of cisticolas and larks calling from the grasslands. Frogs, butterflies, and insects add detail and sound to the landscape, with seasonal rains triggering choruses of amphibians and bursts of winged color. Every environment—from the high Drakensberg cliffs to the tidal pools of the Wild Coast—holds its own community of life, adapted to terrain, climate, and rhythm. This wildlife is not just seen but heard, from the rustle in long grass to the distant cry of a raptor or the splash of a startled otter. Together, these species form a living network that defines the essence of this wild, unspoiled part of South Africa, captured not only through observation but through deep presence and patience. In this photo book, the story of the land is told through its creatures—each one a unique expression of place, season, and survival. ||||













# WILD PLANET

SOUTH AFRICA  
- 50 photographs on 32 pages -

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Where earth meets sky in silent grandeur, the Drakensberg Mountains rise like ancient sentinels—timeless, still, and steeped in myth. Towering cliffs hold the memory of stone and spirit alike. Mist coils through jagged peaks at dawn, veiling the landscape in silver whispers, as if the mountains are drawing breath. In hidden caves, San rock art tells stories not written but dreamt—shadows of hunters, animals, and stars painted in ochre and ash. The wind carries the voices of ancestors, echoing softly across high passes and fern-filled ravines. Rivers born in crystal springs tumble downward, carving paths through time-worn valleys, feeding the life below.

And as the land softens, the mountains dissolve into the rolling hills and rugged cliffs of the Wild Coast, where green pastures meet the wide, breathing ocean. Here, the earth opens in dramatic gestures—rock formations sculpted by tide and time, waterfalls that vanish into gorges, and sea arches like portals to another realm. The Wild Coast is a place of story and silence, where Xhosa legends live in the landscape and each wave is a whispered memory.

The Drakensberg and the Wild Coast are more than landscapes—they are living myths, sacred geographies where the boundary between seen and unseen is thin. To walk here is to listen, to witness, and to remember. Each rock, each wave, each whisper of wind becomes part of a deeper story—one that unfolds not only across the pages of this book, but within the quiet corners of the soul.