

Condé Nast

# Traveller



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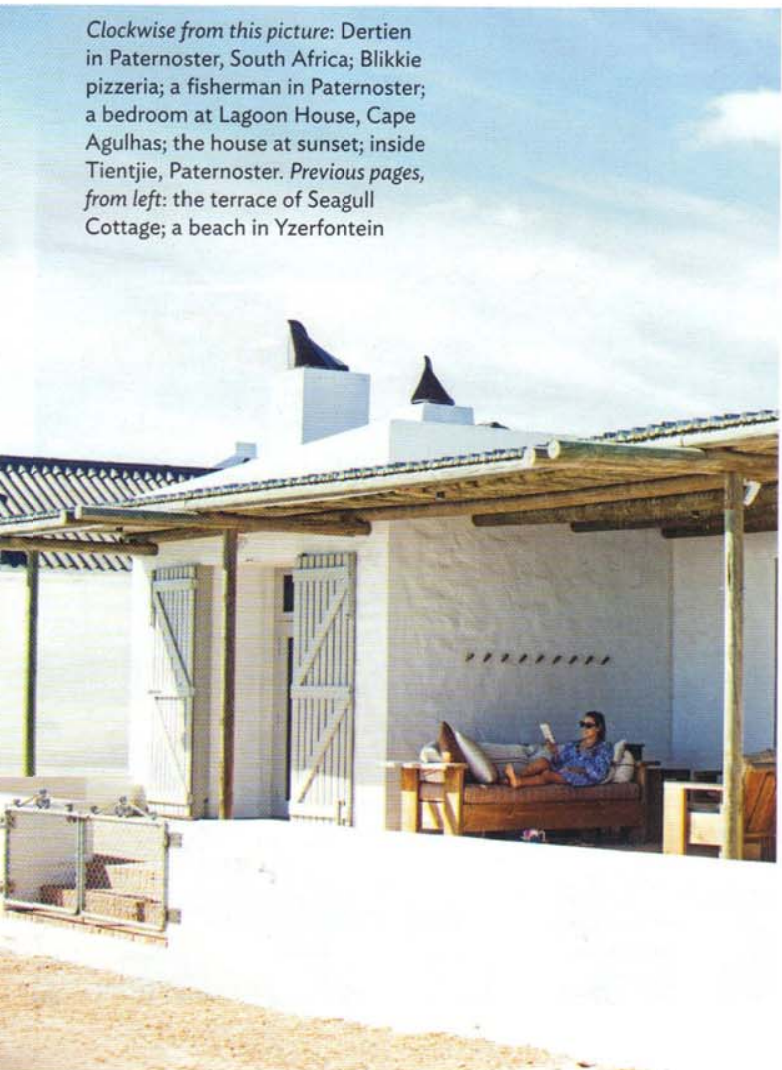
# Cape crusaders

With their insider savvy, South African couple Nicola Jackson and David Crookes go straight to the owners to unlock the doors, explore and photograph the best secret beach houses on the country's hottest coast - from sleek party pads to cool, hippy shacks





*Clockwise from this picture: Dertien in Paternoster, South Africa; Blikkie pizzeria; a fisherman in Paternoster; a bedroom at Lagoon House, Cape Agulhas; the house at sunset; inside Tientjie, Paternoster. Previous pages, from left: the terrace of Seagull Cottage; a beach in Yzerfontein*





## WEST COAST TIENTJIE, Paternoster

In Paternoster life has always revolved around either catching fish or eating it. In the smoky morning light men still launch wooden boats from the sandy shore, seagulls reel optimistically in the salt mist and dogs chase waves. When the gulls and boats return, run down to the beach and bargain for the ingredients of a seafood supper, or see what will be served on the plates of the best restaurants that day. Your home is Tientjie, on the edge of the village, and it used to be a drug den. The owners, architect Johann Slee and his wife René, have cleverly kept the original features of the house while enhancing all its best bits: the corrugated-iron roof, exposed beams and chunky walls layered with blue, sienna and burgundy paint that hint at its history. Inside, velvet, corduroy and floral cushions crush together on eclectic chairs; colours clash and textures vibrate. This is the opposite of kitsch. Tientjie only sleeps two adults, but if there are more of you, book a neighbouring house, Dertien, and your group can spill across the street. Johann and René designed both houses so they have the same modern, honest appeal. Stroll to the Noisy Oyster restaurant and eat spiced steak tartare, nip out for a pizza at Blikkie just a few doors down, or sit under dappled shade at Oep ve Koep and sample Kobus van der Merwe's adventurous menu of foraged sea greens and sensational watermelon and *bokkom* (locally salted fish) salad.

**Sleeps** two adults, and two small children on a daybed

**Costs** from about £95 per night

**Book through** the owner René (rene@slee.co.za)



## SOUTH COAST LAGOON HOUSE, Cape Agulhas

A lot of people think Cape Town is at the southernmost tip of Africa, but of course the Atlantic and Indian oceans collide at Cape Agulhas, south and east along the coast. It is a wild and windy place of legends and shipwrecks and dreams of fortunes to be made and lives lost. Ancient mariners faced their biggest challenge trying to navigate around it on their way to the Far East, and the treacherous sea has cast ship-skeletons ashore for centuries. Lagoon House, which sits on its own peninsula, was built in the 1880s. The land around it has a truly wild feel; the sea appears to boil with rage and even on a quiet day it seems as if you are on the prow of a ship spinning forward across the globe. The house itself is solid and innocent-looking, with beautiful old stable doors unlocked with big, clunky keys. Inside, it's basic but delectably raw, with a high thatched roof built from huge tree boughs; the smell of wood smoke lingers from more than a century of cooking in the kitchen fireplace. Everything is simple and very clean, with the white bed linen and rolled-up green towels (topped with a little bar of soap) you find in all South African National Parks properties. It makes an honest base for a beach holiday, with incredible coastal walks through herb-scented foliage, past historic shell middens and amazing birdlife. Plus, the lagoon just behind the house has a sandy shore and warm, clear water to swim in.

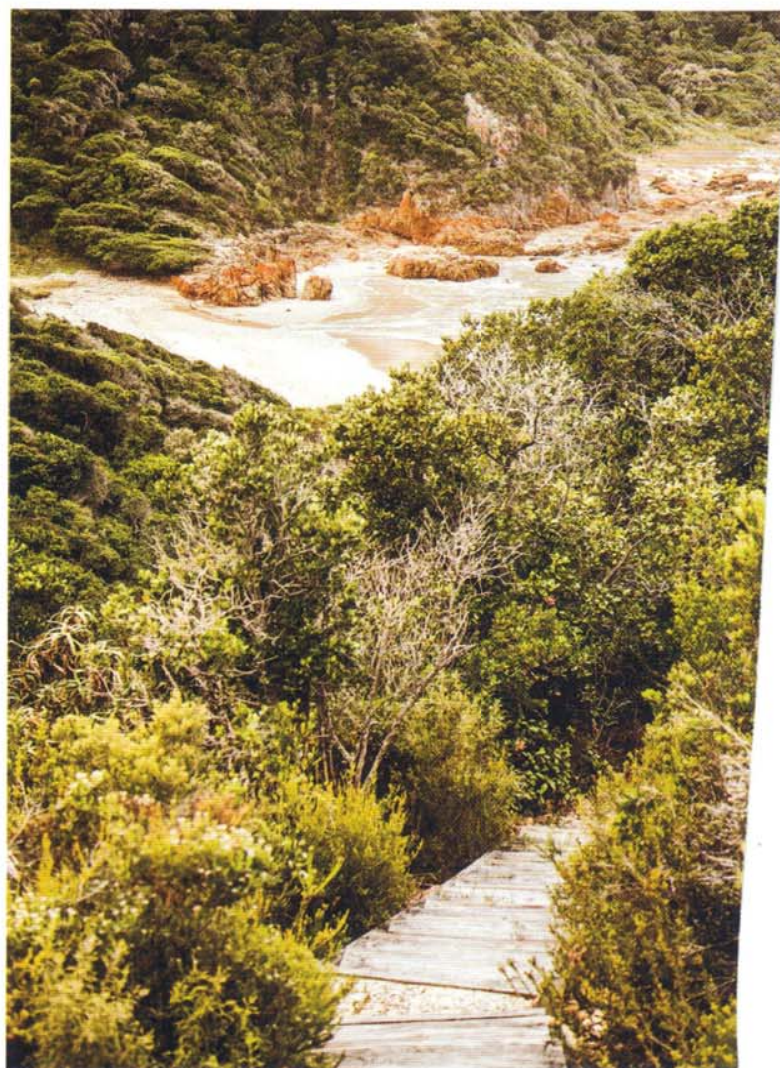
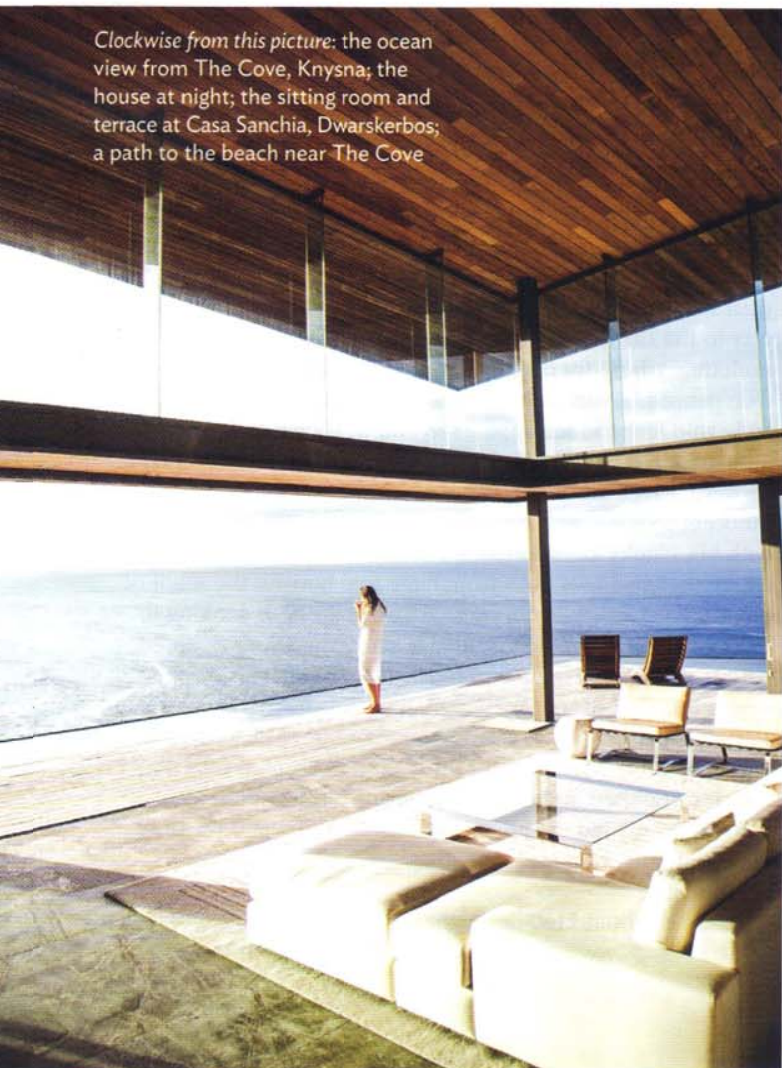
**Sleeps** eight

**Costs** from about £160 per night

**Book through** [www.sanparks.org/parks/agulhas](http://www.sanparks.org/parks/agulhas)



*Clockwise from this picture: the ocean view from The Cove, Knysna; the house at night; the sitting room and terrace at Casa Sanchia, Dwarskerbos; a path to the beach near The Cove*





## EAST COAST THE COVE, Knysna

From this vantage point, high above craggy, rust-coloured rocks, it feels as if you're hovering over the sea at cloud level. Below, seabirds nest in impossible places, the massive surf makes lace patterns in the water and southern right whales migrate past like fleets of peaceful submarines. The building's angular lines, stairs that spiral around an internal lift and infinity pool are worthy of a cocktail dress and a pair of Manolo Blahniks, although there's something pleasingly decadent about padding barefoot around a slick space like this. The master bedroom is on a vast mezzanine above the living area and there are no dividing walls; instead, thick curtains on a circular track enclose the bed at night with the kind of restrained glamour seen only in old Bond films. The staggered path down to the beach pushes through long grass and flowering *fynbos* until, after about 20 minutes, you reach a private cove where the sand is the colour of cinnamon. It is possible to spend many hours here, happily sunbathing and rock hopping, without seeing another soul. The sleepy town of Knysna is 20 minutes' drive away. Go there for the best breakfast at Ile de Pain and a simple fish lunch of grilled prawns in garlic-and-lemon butter at East Head Café, where you watch yachts navigating past the treacherous Knysna Heads.

**Sleeps** eight

**Costs** from about £1,150 per night

**Book through** [www.perfecthideaways.co.za](http://www.perfecthideaways.co.za)

## WEST COAST CASA SANCHIA, Dwarskersbos

The owners found this virtually unknown part of the Western Cape after taking a wrong turn while on holiday, and it's easy to see why they bought a plot of land the same day. The extraordinary house they built is a whitewashed seaside home with a modern African interior that looks almost loft-like. Outside, it is connected to a 16km-long beach by a wooden walkway suspended over the dunes. The raw wood, stone, white walls and muted colours work elegantly with the intense blue of the sea, the sky and wild greens of the succulents that miraculously thrive on this coastline. The house has been designed with an understanding of intense sunlight, so there are places to hide in different depths of shade: billowing curtains veil a built-in seating area; circular wicker chairs hide beneath collapsible canopies; a knotted hammock swings into the sun, then out. Everything here is effortlessly comfortable for a remote, quiet escape where whales calve in the shallows and wildflowers bloom magically on sand-dunes.

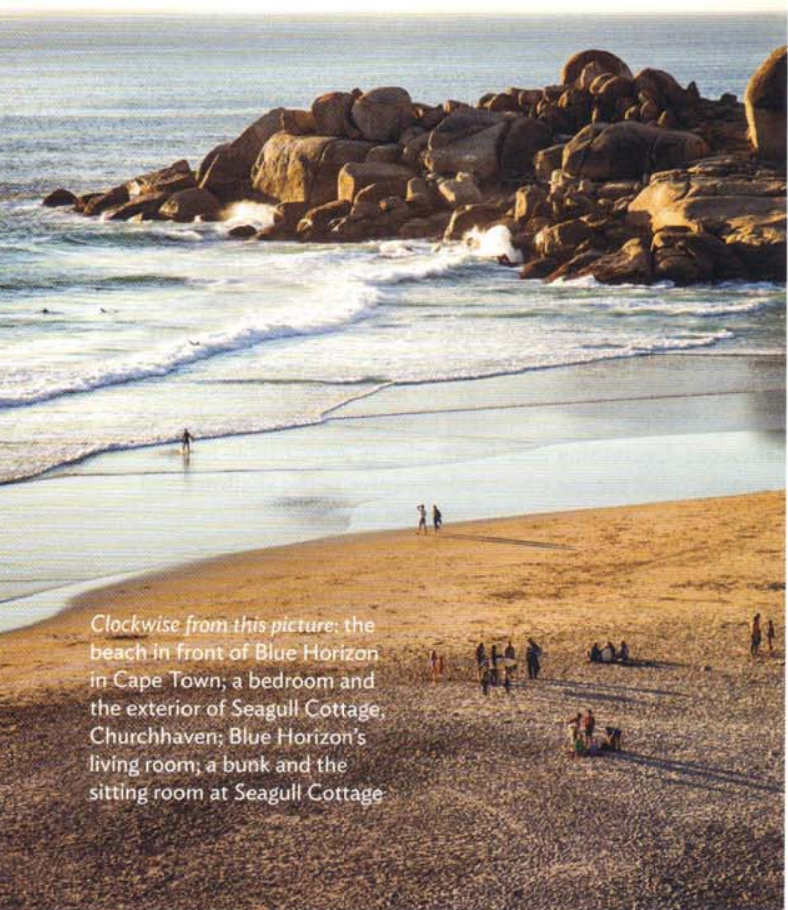
**Sleeps** six

**Costs** from about £375 per night

**Book through** the owner Renee ([reneeds@telkomsa.net](mailto:reneeds@telkomsa.net)) or [www.casasanchia.com](http://www.casasanchia.com)

## WEST COAST SEAGULL COTTAGE, Churchhaven

Locals try to undersell Churchhaven, an hour's drive north of Cape Town. They swear blind the wind blows like mad most



*Clockwise from this picture: the beach in front of Blue Horizon in Cape Town; a bedroom and the exterior of Seagull Cottage, Churchhaven; Blue Horizon's living room; a bunk and the sitting room at Seagull Cottage*





of the time, and on other days it's so hot the tar roads melt. But take no notice. It's far too beautiful to miss. Seagull Cottage is part of a community of whitewashed houses surrounded by the soft, sage greens of the West Coast National Park. The buildings overlook a tidal lagoon with fine-sand beaches, resident flamingos and water so warm you can wade into its shallow reaches in winter. Bright-painted boats and gentle waves make it feel like a remote island retreat, and then an ostrich lopes into view as a vivid reminder of where you are in the world. The house is a visual pleasure, as though a magpie has filled it with much loved things: objects, paintings and mirrors cluster on walls; little mosaics create details in bathrooms; tiles are pushed into the plasterwork. Vibrant, contrasting colours are collected together in ways that don't normally work, but here pink, orange and turquoise simply reflect the flamingos, sunsets and water outside. It is all so easy; the cottage casts a languid spell. Breakfasts magically turn into long, boozy lunches, followed by hours lying in the sun reading; long walks are followed by a swim and the next day progresses in exactly the same way.

**Sleeps** 10

**Costs** from about £245 per night

**Book through** [www.perfecthideaways.co.za](http://www.perfecthideaways.co.za)

### CAPE TOWN

#### BLUE HORIZON, Llandudno

This place is like a great-looking surfer with a doctorate: it's sexy and clever and right where it should be, on Cape Town's favourite sundowner beach, Llandudno. The building was engineered to sit in harmony among the wild olives and willowy indigenous bush that surround it, and it has genuinely eco-friendly credentials. Grey water drains into the foliage; rainwater is captured and stored; solar power regulates the temperature inside. The whole design is super-efficient, with minimalist interiors that make heroes of the carefully selected architectural materials. The living space is spread over two levels, with separate kitchens, decks and pools, so Blue Horizon is great for multi-generational holidays. When you're in the building, its ecological intelligence is invisible and what registers is the dynamic, changing land, sky and seascape outside. Sitting on the folding church benches on the long decked balcony in front of the house, your view is of people tanning, surfing, laughing and playing. To join them, follow the private track that leads to a coastal contour path and then onto the sand below.

**Sleeps** six

**Costs** on application, minimum one week; house swaps considered

**Book through** Mel Miller (+27 836 29 0836; [mel.miller@telkomsa.net](mailto:mel.miller@telkomsa.net))

### CAPE TOWN

#### WATERLINE, Noordhoek

This low-slung, double-storey building behind the gnarled shrubs and windswept dunes of the widest, longest beach in Cape Town is understated but alluring. The four uncluttered bedrooms on the ground floor have outside showers and electric blinds. Glass, metal, concrete, Eames chairs and a sliver of a pool all work together to create a slick, mid-century vibe with a masculine sensibility. But it's the views from the upstairs living room that really give this place drama: straight ahead are the dunes and then the crashing Atlantic waves; behind are the lush, mountainous peaks of Chapman's Bay. Follow the horses down the white-sand track opposite the house, through the





Clockwise from this picture: floating stairs at Waterline, Noordhoek; Seahorse in Cape Town; Waterline; the sitting room at The Lighthouse, Yzerfontein; Eames chairs in Waterline; a view of Fourth Beach from Clifton Bungalow





grasses and onto the eight-kilometre beach. This is where racehorses are exercised and other riders take their steeds to gallop alongside the peeling waves. A few minutes' drive away, under the slopes of Chapman's Peak, one of the world's most scenic drives, you'll also find one of Cape Town's best surf breaks. After riding horses or bikes or waves until the harsh sun softens, head to The Foodbarn restaurant for chef Franck Dangereux's elegant food and wine pairings or simply try the *bouillabaisse du cap*. On a balmy night, collapse on the grass at Cape Point Vineyards overlooking the bay, drinking the wine grown in the ancient earth around you.

**Sleeps** eight

**Costs** from £400 per night, minimum four nights

**Book through** the owner Matthew ([matthew.hodgson@me.com](mailto:matthew.hodgson@me.com)) or [www.villawaterline.co.za](http://www.villawaterline.co.za)

## CAPE TOWN

### CLIFTON BUNGALOW, Clifton

The Clifton beaches have magnetised sun-seekers since the first settlers arrived in the Cape. A lot of the houses here were built as beach huts in the early 1900s, but they have become more and more sought after (and stupendously priced), even though the best are a hike down from a busy road and don't have parking spaces. The beaches themselves are a string of four ridiculously pretty miniature bays reached by steep paths that weave drunkenly past the houses until, abruptly, they you drop onto the squeaky sand. Each Clifton beach has a different personality: Fourth is for families; Third is wonderfully camp; Second is sporty and First is seriously sporty (if you haven't gone pro, don't play beach cricket

there). Clifton Bungalow, newly renovated, straddles Fourth and Third, and is a perfect mix of homely comforts and good taste. The industrial edge of rolling metal shutters, sliding glass doors, wood, cement and sharp lines are softened with piles of pillows in elegant prints, neutral bed linen and massive white bath sheets. You have the choice of four beaches, but there is also a pool and a daybed with views of the sand. It is a lovely place to be at sunset, when the light slants across the sea through the house, uniting inside and outside with startling clarity.

**Sleeps** eight

**Costs** from about £750 per night

**Book through** [www.perfecthideaways.co.za](http://www.perfecthideaways.co.za)

## CAPE TOWN

### SEAHORSE, Little Beach

Anyone who stays here will feel smug. Firstly, not a lot of people know the tiny, shell-strewn shore of Little Beach. Secondly, as the sun-baskers pack up to go home, this secluded place is entirely yours: the view, the inky sea and the monolithic boulders on which your house is built, lapped by the waves. Inside, the deep-varnished wooden floors and red oriental rugs are unexpectedly grown-up for a seaside home and somebody has added layers to the decor to make it feel like a much-loved place. It may be seriously comfortable, but it also has all the playful things that make a holiday work, such as two decks with sun-beaten benches and a cheeky outside spa-bath clad in wood. Plus, it is just 15 minutes' drive to the city centre and about seven steps from the sea. If you want to stay put, there is always something beautiful to watch: a man paddle-boarding at sunset;



*Clockwise from this picture: the open-plan sitting room and exterior of The Lighthouse; a path to the private beach in front of the property*





laughing lovers splashing into the icy Atlantic; the sun dropping in splintered shafts behind the weathered rocks. At night, lie listening to the shifting sand and gulls jostling for position on boulders, figuring out how you could buy this house and live here.

**Sleeps** eight

**Costs** from about £250 per night, minimum five nights

**Book through** [www.capeportfolios.com](http://www.capeportfolios.com)

## WEST COAST

### THE LIGHTHOUSE, Yzerfontein

Once you've gone beyond the odd concoction of architecture that is the beach town of Yzerfontein, the road traces a route closer to the coast and the houses get progressively more beautiful. And there, in the front row, sits The Lighthouse, a truly eccentric structure with a dramatic, octagonal upper floor. The sea washes into the view from every room and the open-plan layout means everything is filled with light bouncing from white ceiling to white walls and white floors. Built by a dreamer who lived on-site throughout its construction, this is a perfect fantasy beach house of wood, sea mist, fabrics worn soft by the sun, striped deckchairs, big baths and two huge fireplaces. It is an unfussy place with a relaxed feel: there is no need for shoes. Come here with friends after a big gourmet shop in Cape Town and only leave the house to set up camp on the crescent of private sand just 50 metres away.

**Sleeps** 10

**Costs** from about £310 per night

**Book through** the owner Andrej ([andrejbrandt@mac.com](mailto:andrejbrandt@mac.com)) or [www.lighthouselocation.com](http://www.lighthouselocation.com)

