

KIRSTENBOSCH NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDEN, CAPE TOWN SOUTH AFRICA

For public garden professionals and enthusiasts one name always rings a bell. Perhaps it's the world's most beautiful garden in one of the most spectacular settings on earth. It's located in the South African Cape Floristic Province, one of the most species rich areas anywhere. Moreover, most of the plants are endemic, found only in this South African, Mediterranean climate biome. Add the dramatic sandstone mountains along a rugged coast, it can only be one place- Kirstenbosch. For nature lovers and botanical garden travelers its a must-see garden.



Kirstenbosch is managed by the South African Biodiversity Institute or SANBI. A world-renowned institution that works to conserve the globally unique biota across South Africa. In many ways Kirstenbosch is the jewel in the crown. A center for education, research, outreach, aesthetics and carefully curated open space. Walking into the garden one is instantly consumed with the proximity of Table Mountain. The grayish-silver crags covered with shrubbery rise above the neatly organized plant collections. Its a bit like visiting The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew if it were in Yosemite. The magnitude of this place is all

consuming.

In 1903 staff in the Botany department at the South African College envisioned a garden on a long-neglected farm among the eastern slopes of Table Mountain. In 1913 the garden was formally established. Huge amounts of manual labor from local people made early milestones possible. Soon the Cycad Amphitheater and nearby Dell were completed. Today this area is a remarkable display of these ancient cone-bearing plants. A few dinosaur sculptures add to the primitive essences of this collection.

The entrance area and gardens are immediately inviting. A largely open-air conservatory houses a number of botanical curiosities and an interesting Bonsai collection. Signage is careful to explain that you are in an endemic kingdom where weather, geology and evolution have come together to create one of the world's greatest botanical treasures. Only a handful of areas on earth have a similar amount of endemic plants. These include the Hawaiian Archipelago, the island of New Caledonia, the Canary Islands, Southwest Australia, Madagascar and a few areas of Papua-Asia.



Further along the Fynbos Garden delights with a number of endemic species. Proteas are cultivated in a large area near the mountains base. This remarkable and ancient plant family is found mainly in South Africa and South West Australia plus a few other locations. Their floral structure is unmistakable, pincushion-like in many colors. A diversity of Erica species occupies their own garden nearby.



A relatively recent addition to Kirstenbosch is the Tree Canopy Walk. This canopy walk is among the absolute best in the world. It meanders through a forest then opens onto a breathtaking view over the entire gardens as the mountains loom even closer. The structure is meticulously engineered and fits right into the gardens sloping topography.

Built into the Arboretum section of the garden this walkway is a superb aesthetic and educational feature with excellent signage.



A center piece of Kirstenbosch is the ethnobotany garden. For many years' gardens overlooked the important contributions of native peoples to the expanding knowledge of global plant diversity. The collection and importation of new exotic species to European conservatories was paramount. Not until the mid-twentieth century did western botanist begin to realize the extensive knowledge of native peoples and the

plants they used in daily life. In Africa native knowledge of plants for food, shelter, medicine and clothing is as vast as the continent. SANBI recognizes this wealth of indigenous knowledge with an outstanding display at Kirstenbosch that interprets many useful plants and includes a traditional rondaval house.

Collectively Kirstenbosch harbors every asset a world class botanical garden has. Behind the scenes there is a robust research program, large herbarium and innovative conservation initiatives. In addition, Kirstenbosch is just one of several "conservation gardens" under the SANBI umbrella. Together these facilities (including a zoo) conserve and interpret the remarkable South African environment as whole. Sustainability at every level is an overarching theme.



As a public garden Kirstenbosch is a model of conservation and education in a truly exceptional location. Signage, accessibility and a broad offering of public programs entertains and enlightens citizens and tourist alike. Horticultural displays and curatorial excellence abound throughout the garden. There's little doubt among botanic garden professionals the world over Kirstenbosch is a garden that cannot be missed.

From the BTG Team More info at-
www.sanbi.org/gardens/kirstenbosch/