

Episode 60: Cape Town

Summary

Our guest Ted talks about his current home city of Cape Town, South Africa. He talks about Cape Town's incredible natural beauty, its cultural mix and its level of infrastructure.

Transcript

Nick: Today I'm talking once again with my friend Ted. Uhh, Ted, as we said before, you're very well travelled, you've worked in lots of places, travelled in lots of places.

Ted: Thanks for having me back on your show Nick, I appreciate it! Always a pleasure to pass by and, uhh, have a chat with you.

Nick: Thank you very much. So you live in Cape Town now, which is a famous city in South Africa.

Ted: It's a very beautiful city. On many rankings, uhh, most beautiful city in the world, often lumped with cities like, uhh, Rio de Janeiro or San Francisco or Paris, you know, all beautiful for different reasons.

Nick: OK, and so what's the reason why Cape Town is beautiful?

Ted: Well, for most people it's probably the nature. Uhh, there's a thousand-metre mountain basically looming¹ right over the centre, the downtown, uhh, city. And this chain of mountains run all the way to the Cape Point which is the ... well, many people consider it the end of Africa, the last ... it actually isn't the southern-most point in Africa but it feels like it, it's so remote. Uhh, and this ridge goes down for maybe forty kilometres, uhh, from the downtown all the way to the end, where there's a reserve. Uhh, it's quite historical. It used to be, uhh, it used to be called the Cape of Storms, that was the original European name when the first European sailors came and they settled in the area. Uhh, but it ended up ... but they needed more settlers to come to, uhh, to participate in the farming and to contribute to the society, so they decided to rename it to the Cape of Good Hope, which sounds a little more optimistic. And it worked apparently, and a lot of people, uhh, settled - uhh, first the Dutch that came, the English came later, the English Empire came much later, uhh, there were African, local African tribes that came down and mixed

¹ looming: coming into view with great size

with them over many centuries, I mean, probably, uh, three centuries. Uhh, so there's a very ... there's quite a deep culture on many layers and many levels. But I would say that most people, they love the spectacular cliffs. There's some animals. There's two of the five, umm, African penguin colonies in Africa are in Cape Town or in the immediate Cape Town area. Uhh, you still see baboons, there's wild ostriches running around. [There's a hilarious video on YouTube](#) of ostriches chasing cyclists at full speed around the Cape. And they run fast, I'd be terrified if that happened to me. Uhh, there are beaches. The water's a bit chilly, but there's lots of beaches, umm, uhh, there's great white sharks. People go diving, cage diving down there to see them. There's whales that come by. Uhh, there are spectacular viewpoints, there's sunsets, the light quality is so beautiful there, the sunrises and sunsets are quite magic. Uhh, it's a, you know ... and apart from the nature, the culture is quite interesting, it's a very mixed culture, different races, different cultures. Uhh, different influences, quite a cosmopolitan city. I mean, I've lived in very cosmopolitan cities in my life - Paris, San Francisco, uhh, Boston, uhh, Singapore and, you know, I'd put Cape Town right up there² with that. The mix of people, the kinds of people, are maybe a bit different, uhh, but people are quite tolerant in the same way that they just accept you as an individual as much as your tribe or your race or whatever, you know. There's plenty of interesting people to meet, it's basically up to you as a resident to go out and find interesting people and activities that you want to do. You don't feel trapped there.

Nick: And so I've just come back from Rio and it's also a city like you mentioned with this kind of beautiful, uhh, setting, like Cape Town. In Rio the way the city is developed in terms of buildings and everything is dictated by the nature. Is it a similar kind of thing in Cape Town with these cliffs?

Ted: Yeah, very much so, yeah. I mean, they're not so far apart but there are very narrow roads that run along the cliffs on both sides. There are two oceans, so the Cape Point divides the Atlantic Ocean from the Indian Ocean, and the water temperatures are quite different, they can be up to five degrees different on the two sides of the Cape. And, yes, uhh, demographically, they're quite different. Some areas are very expensive. One area called Clifton, which is on the Atlantic Coast, is the most expensive real estate in Africa, uhh, because it's sheltered from the wind. The wind can be fierce³ in Cape Town. Although it rarely gets that cold, the weather's quite temperate, it's a Mediterranean climate. Very pleasant and, again, the water's quite cold, usually between twelve and eighteen degrees, so not that many people spend time in the water, except kids. Uhh, but it's just a very pleasant place. And some of the viewpoints are spectacular. If you like hiking, there are endless trails. There's hundreds and hundreds of kilometres of trails that you can do, going, cross-crossing, going up and over or across the different mountains or the ridges. There's the wine, the wineries are on the flatlands east of the mountains, so a bit inland, and that's where all of South Africa's wine industry, uhh, is hubbed (has its hub). I think there's two hundred some-odd wineries in an area

² right up there: at the same level, among the leaders

³ fierce: strong, violent

where you could drive across maybe in twenty to thirty minutes, so it's, uhh, it's quite intense.

Nick: Right, because it's quite ... I mean, South Africa's reasonably famous for wines, but it's all really just in this one area?

Ted: Yeah, well in some areas. I would say maybe in Britain or Australia, more in the English Empire, they're probably well known for their wines. Uhh, maybe in Europe, a little less so. Uhh, maybe ... there are many, many, many Germans. That's probably the dominant, uhh, European population that goes down there. Many have bought second homes to live down there and they're quite familiar with, uhh, with South African, uhh, wines and products. Uhh, but maybe less so the western hemisphere and North America. Umm, in Asia, probably less as well.

Nick: And you've travelled obviously all throughout Africa and, you know, all throughout the world really. In terms of infrastructure and things like that, how would you kind of rate South Africa or Cape Town?

Ted: Fabulous. South Africa has fabulous infrastructure. The roads are as good as in Europe or North America, far better than what you get in most of Asia. But again, South Africa is a multi-layered world, so there are people that live like ... before the end of apartheid, for example, I think the average per capita⁴ salary in South Africa of the whites was higher than in Europe, the average salary. So there's very wealthy people and there's very good infrastructure and systems in place. And then there are people that have nothing. There is ... there are people that get by⁵ on maybe five dollars per day and they have to spend two dollars of that on transport just to get to and from work. And they're barely surviving, the unemployment rate's very high. It's very much, uhh, you know, a have and have-not, versus have-not, kind of society - like Brazil, I'd say there's a lot of similarities there. Culturally they're very similar. My boss in South Africa is a Brazilian, and he thinks it's very comparable. I have another friend who's a British, uhh, economist. He works for the World Bank, and he has lived a long time in Brazil and is now spending time in South Africa. He thinks they're virtually identical. They're as close to each other in a socio-economic way as any, as each ... there's no closer country to each of them in that, on that theoretical level.

Nick: That's really interesting. And do you think the gap between the rich and the poor is getting bigger?

Ted: Uhh, no, because I'd say that everyone overall ... the economy is slowing down, uhh, which is normal. Because in the past, there were ten per cent of the population that was pocketing all the wealth. And now that laws, equality laws, have levelled that playing field, so the rich aren't getting richer. Uhh, it's ... some of

⁴ per capita: for each person (from Latin)

⁵ get by (phrasal verb): to just manage, to do OK but no better. See also: Episode 23: Learning Chinese.

the poor are getting richer but a lot of them are not. So overall, if you had to add everyone up in a mishmash⁶, I'd say probably the gap is closing, but slowly, and, uhh, these things don't change quickly, certainly not fast enough for the poor, who are hoping for overnight changes which will solve their problems, which won't happen. That's just not how it works, and it's very difficult, and that's part of the political problems that you have today. Uhh, people see things from different viewpoints and some people have a more pragmatic⁷ view or more educated view or a kind of more realistic view of what can happen, and others have maybe more ideological views which, uhh, you know, everyone has to play their role. I mean, every country's got problems, every society's got problems and they'll have to work it out, uhh, in the best way that suits the society. It's quite a unique society. There's no other fusion culture I'd say, of European and African cultures, that you have in Africa - or anywhere in the world. I can't think of any off-hand⁸. There are cultures where, umm, uhh, there are different cultures that are mixed, like Madagascar in the Indian Ocean, where there's different historical influences, from Africa, from, uhh, India, even China or Indonesia and they've kind of created their own culture over the years. But it's quite different than the situation in South Africa and Namibia, which used to be, uhh, South West Africa, which used to be a German colony and then it became a South African colony. So these places have had European colonisers come in, and they stayed, so unlike the European colonisers in other African countries that left, or the ones in Latin America, let's say, that mixed in with the local populations and stayed, there in South Africa, they've stayed pretty much apart. There is some mixing, uhh, but it's just, it's a quirky⁹ kind of place. It's not a place that's easy to explain. People who come in with black-and-white categorisation in their head aren't going to see the truth. It probably hinders¹⁰ the truth more than it, uhh, enlightens, let's say.

Nick: Alright, very interesting, thank you very much.

Ted: Yep, you're welcome.

⁶ mishmash: a confused mess

⁷ pragmatic: practical

⁸ off-hand: at the moment; off the top of my head

⁹ quirky: unusual, strange, weird

¹⁰ hinders: prevents, impedes

Comprehension Questions

1. What is the main attraction of Cape Town, according to Ted?
2. Which country does Ted compare South Africa with, and why?
3. What does Ted think about South African roads?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. The country has a small population but is still wealthy. _____, it's one of the richest countries in the world.
2. I can't think of any good books about Africa _____, but if I think of one later, I'll let you know.
3. With those dark clouds _____ on the horizon, I don't think it's a good idea to go sailing this afternoon.
4. The Hagia Sophia in Istanbul is one of the greatest buildings in the world. I'd put it _____ with the Pantheon in Rome and the pyramids of Egypt.
5. In some cities, having a car sometimes _____ you more than it helps you, because parking and traffic can be so bad.
6. She moved to France without knowing any French and had a lot of difficulty at the beginning. Now, after a few months, she's starting to _____ with her French, but it's still a struggle.
7. Hurricanes in the Caribbean bring _____ winds and torrential rain. They often cause incredible amounts of damage.
8. The restaurant menu was a bit of a _____. There were Indian, Italian and Mexican dishes all jumbled together.
9. One candidate tends to take a _____ approach to campaign promises, while the other promises the world to everyone but will never be able to deliver on those promises.
10. She wasn't a typical girl and not everyone understood her _____ personality. Some people thought it was charming but others were put off by it.

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Have you been to Cape Town? If so, did you like it? If not, would you like to go? Why or why not?
2. Nick and Ted mentioned Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro as cities whose layout is dictated by the nature around them. Can you think of and describe other cities like this?
3. Ted mentions Cape Town, Paris, Singapore, Boston and San Francisco as cosmopolitan cities that he's lived in. Which other cities do you think are cosmopolitan, and why?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. The nature, and more specifically, the cliffs, the animals and the hiking.
2. Brazil, because the two countries are similar on a socio-economic level.
3. He says they are as good as the roads in Europe or North America.

Exercises

1. per capita
2. off-hand
3. looming
4. right up there
5. hinders
6. get by
7. fierce
8. mishmash
9. pragmatic
10. quirky