

Port Elizabeth to Nieu Bethesda



Nieu Bethesda

From the minute you leave Port Elizabeth to the moment you arrive in the dusty Karoo village of Nieu Bethesda, this journey is all about a farmstall food safari, a trip back into the Victorian-era frontier days, trout fishing and zebra spotting in the mountains, and the search for Harry Potter's resting place.

DID YOU KNOW?

A polar explorer and a Boer general lie buried in the Cradock cemetery.

Please take note its 304 Km – Distance from Port Elizabeth to Nieu-Bethesda.

The Port Elizabeth to Nieu Bethesda route is about 380 km and could be done in a morning or an afternoon, but offers a world of choices and experiences that make dwelling a little longer worthwhile.

The drive will take us through classic Eastern Cape settler country into the vast landscapes of the Karoo Heartland, where we'll meet the locals, who are nothing if not friendly and welcoming.

We leave Port Elizabeth early in the morning and head out initially on the N2, but divert onto the N10 Cradock road after Nanaga Farm Stall. Keep a lookout for the mighty meaty pies at Nanaga – they're a full meal by themselves.

Carefully negotiating the Olifantskop Pass, we drop down into the fertile Karoo biome called the Smaldeel (Afrikaans for 'narrow part'). Soon we find our first farmstall stop of the day: Oom Theuns se Winkel (Uncle Theuns's Shop). Soft drinks all around?

Presently, we reach Middleton and look, there's another farm stall. This one sports lots of crafts made by residents and is hard to miss because they painted the shop a jolly red colour.

At Cookhouse, we detour off the N10 to Somerset East, where we lunch at Hobson's Choice Deli and check in at the Angler & Antelope. After the meal and some down time, Alan Hobson takes us off for a sundowner at a local dam and perhaps a quick fly-casting lesson.

Somerset East is a great little Eastern Cape town, with a deep history and museums to match. The next day we do a quick tour of the Walter Battiss Museum – this is, after all, where the famous South African artist who created 'Fook Island' grew up.

Now we're back on the N10 and, about 50 km south of Cradock, we stop for lunch at the Daggaboer Farm Stall. This prize-winning roadside establishment contains a rich hoard of crafts, foods and local books. We sit on the porch, drink some really good coffee and have a quick chat with Isabel or Charl Pansegrouw, the shop's owners.

By the early afternoon we've checked in at Die Tuishuise in

Cradock, a series of Victorian-era cottages in Market Street, and are on our way to the Mountain Zebra National Park. This is one of South Africa's most scenic national parks, and once you're up there on the Rooiplaat Plateau you'll know why. This is where, in the winter months of June and July in particular, you can often photograph springbok, black wildebeest and mountain zebra in a landscape surrounded by snow-capped peaks.

We dine at the old-style Victoria Manor, and it is classic Karoo fare. Leave space for the malva pudding, a rich South African specialty. A quick nightcap in the hotel bar and we're off to bed.

In the morning, we venture out for a good long walk to look at the Karoo architecture of Cradock and to track down a grave with the name 'Harry Potter' in the cemetery, and then we cross the Wapadsberg ('wagon-road') mountains to Nieu Bethesda.

Passing a colony of blue cranes, we turn left onto the N9 and then right again onto the tar road leading into this fascinating little village in the mountains. And only once we're strolling around the famous Owl House do we catch our breath and let the sensations of the past two days flow over us...