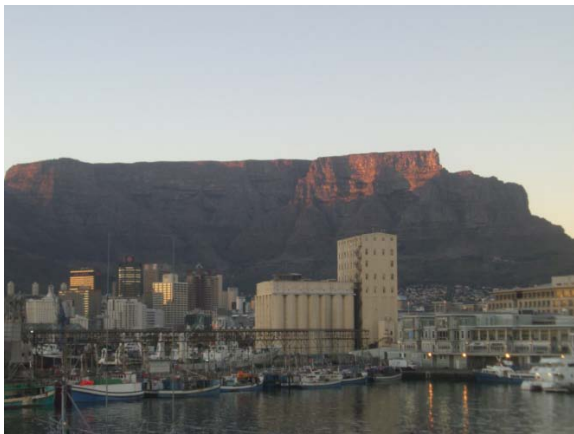


## CAPE TOWN

After our early morning arrival in Cape Town, we step off the ship directly into the Victoria and Albert Waterfront Development. This is a newly built dockside area with a large shopping mall, and lots of restaurants, cafes and bars. Our first stop is at the "Incredible Connection" computer shop, where we buy a replacement laptop for our dead Fujitsu Siemens, and lots of computer supplies.

Last year we had our lunch in "Harry's Pancakes" on the waterfront, and we enjoyed it so much that we have decided to return there, and even order the same meal! The fillings for the large pancakes are varied - both savoury and sweet, and we again choose the "Bobotie" filling, which is a sweet curried meat with raisins and almonds. Delicious!



Our trip this afternoon is to Stellenbosch, out in the Cape Winelands. The journey here involves travelling through Cape Town, and out into the unlovely outskirts, where millions of people live in the many "townships" that sprawl over the flat plains. After several miles, the squalor is gradually replaced with modern government housing, and eventually privately owned houses. Further out again, and the houses give way to large mansions in beautiful grounds, surrounded by acres of Vineyards.



The vineyard we are visiting today is the Blauwklippen Estate, where we are shown the wine making process, including the presses, barrels and wine cellars.

Afterwards, there is a wine-tasting, where we are given samples of 5 different wines. Our guide shows us how to taste the wine, and explains the different characteristics of each one. Most people buy some wine to take back to the ship and at £2 - £3 a bottle it is very good value. Needless to say we are very sleepy on the onward journey to the town of Stellenbosch!



The museum in the town has 4 preserved houses which you can walk through, covering the period 1709 - 1850. They are all in the traditional Cape Dutch style, and we are fascinated by the period artefacts in each room. The ceilings are very high, presumably to keep them cool in summer, although the windows are small and the rooms are dark. We wonder how they managed to see in here before electric lights were invented. The gardens are also fascinating, and have many herbs, flowers and plants that would have been grown here at the time.

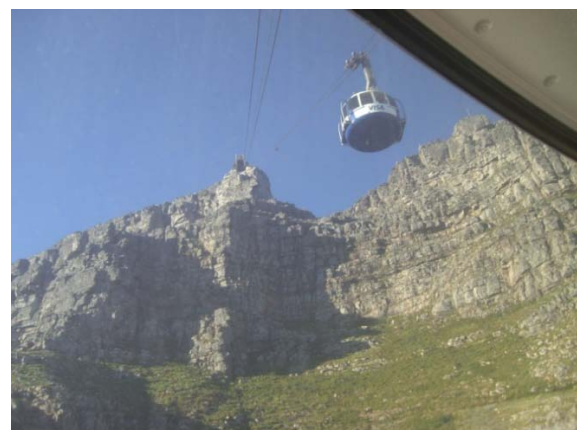


We are then taken on a walk through the rest of Stellenbosch, seeing the many other Dutch-style houses in the town. There are many eating houses here; some are offering Ostrich, Springbok, Kudu and Crocodile!



Back at the ship, and we choose to eat out in the V & A centre, this time a Chinese restaurant where a meal and drinks for 3 people, (Sheila comes with us), costs just over £30. The ship is not sailing until tomorrow afternoon, so we do not need to rush back.

We are up early the next day, because we want to take a taxi up to the cable-car station at the foot of Table Mountain. Last year we were unable to visit the Mountain because of the weather, and we are really looking forward to getting there early today. The taxi is an ancient, noisy one and smells strongly of petrol. However, we do get safely to the station in time for the first car of the day at 8am. There are only 20 or so people in front of us, and as the cars take up to 65 people, there is no queue at all.



We are whisked up to the top of Table Mountain at 10 metres per second, the cars rotating as they ascend, so that everyone has a good view of the rock face,

and the views of Cape Town below. The Mountain is over 1,000 metres high, and the 360 degree views from the top are amazing.

As we are the first people on the mountain this morning, we can see a number of the shy Dassies perched on the rocks. These mammals, also called Rock Hyrax, are similar to Beavers, although their nearest relative is in fact, the Elephant! Other animals seen are the girdled lizard, red-winged starlings, and bright orange and brown butterflies.

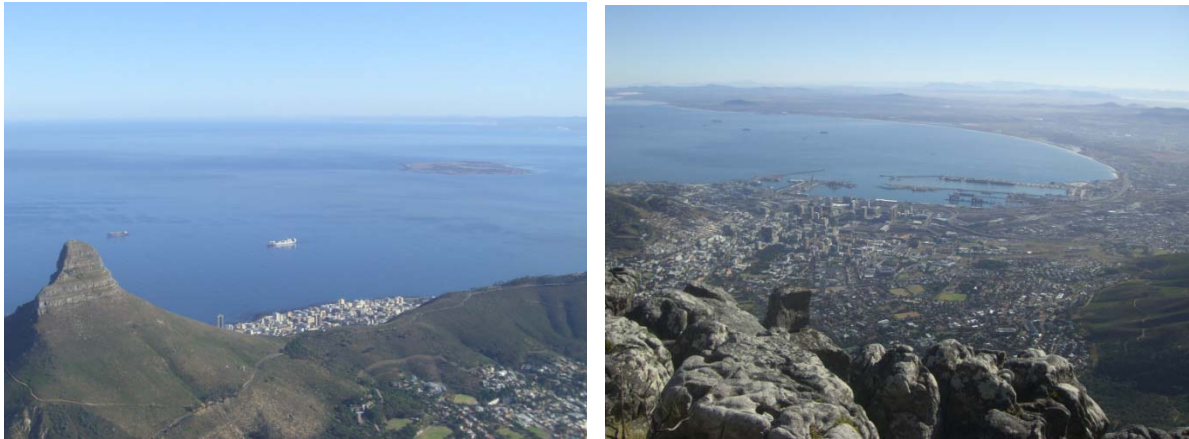


The natural vegetation here is called the "Fynbos", and is made up of 1,460 varieties of heathers, reeds and proteas, with the occasional blue orchid-like plant. The natural sandstone rocks have been eroded into fantastic shapes, and are covered in lichens. Paths have been made by cementing in the gaps between the boulders, and there is even a wheelchair friendly path.



We walk for around 2 hours, taking in the scenery at every turn. There are lots of places to admire the views, and to sit and rest awhile. We can see the famous landmarks of Lion's Head, Signal Hill, the 12 Apostles mountain range, Robben

Island, Platteklip Gorge, and far below us the V & A Waterfront and the Van Gogh.



Every 100 yards or so, there are signposts showing the number of minutes needed to return to the cable car station. This is necessary for the times when high winds threaten, and the cable car needs to shut down. When this happens, a hooter sounds, and everyone is asked to return at once to the upper station. There are no winds today though, in fact, the weather could not be better, the sun is shining, the visibility is excellent, and there is no mist or wind at all.

When we finally return to the base station, the queue for the cable car is enormous, and we are very pleased that we came up here when we did. Our aged taxi and driver is waiting patiently for us, and we set off, still leaking petrol, back towards the ship. We ask our driver to take us to a locksmith in Cape Town, because we need to have a couple of keys cut, and also to a cash machine so that we can get some Rands out to pay him for his excellent service.

When we arrive back at the V & A Waterfront, we find a bar on the waters edge, where we enjoy a light lunch of fishcakes and salsa, washed down with a pint of Guinness, - after all it is St Patrick's Day!

