

THIS WEEKEND

Drink a cappuccino with a twist in Worcester, hike the Garden Route, visit Haenertsburg.

DO THIS • EAT HERE • SIX OF THE BEST • TOWN OF THE MONTH

BIRDING IN SOWETO

When Raymond Rampolokeng was a child, he and his friends roamed the wild spaces of Soweto, hunting birds with catapults and swimming in the dams and the rivers. Now that he's grown up, he's proud to be Soweto's only accredited birding guide.

We meet at Orlando Towers, a landmark in the suburb, and walk down to the wetland that also used to be part of the decommissioned power station. We greet the kids from the local canoeing club who are getting ready for a training session and we scan the horizon for birds. Right on cue, a mustard-coloured shape whizzes across the water. "Squacco heron," says Raymond. "That's one of our specials."

As we stroll along the bank towards the polluted river that feeds the wetland, Raymond rattles off species: whiskered tern, grey-headed gull, moorhen, little grebe, common stonechat, red bishop, southern masked-weaver...

Next stop is Enoch Sontonga Hill, the koppie where "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" was composed and still a sacred place for many residents of Soweto. It's so pristine and natural that for a moment I feel like I'm in the Kruger Park. As we hike towards the summit we encounter traditional healers performing a ritual and we also spot a neddicky, two kinds of mousebird, two kinds of sparrow and a black-shouldered kite.

We sit on a big rock at the top and enjoy the view. "I can sit here for hours," says Raymond. "Soweto is noisy. This is my therapy."

When: Advance booking is essential. The trip takes three to four hours and starts and ends at the secure parking lot next to Orlando Towers.

Cost: R650 per person if you drive your own car between the various sites. Raymond can provide a vehicle for an extra R200 per person. Discounts are available for groups larger than six.

Opening special: The new "birding on bicycles" tour follows a similar itinerary – on mountain bikes! It costs R450 per person, plus R100 extra per person for bike hire if required.

Remember: Wear walking shoes and comfortable, neutral-coloured clothing. Take some water, a snack and binoculars.

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– Nick Dall



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