

Things to do in Montagu, South Africa



Excerpts from Article by Roxanne Reid

Taste the fruit and wine. Listen to the sound of birdsong. Feel the hot water of a natural spring on your skin. Smell the fynbos as you hike among ancient rocks. See a star-dusted sky. These are just a few of the pleasures that await you a two-and-a-half-hour drive northeast of Cape Town. Here's my pick of things to do in Montagu, South Africa.

The Klein Karoo town of Montagu lies near the wine farming areas of the Robertson Valley and Breede River Valley and forms the western starting point the engagingly eccentric Route 62. Drive through the rock tunnel at Cogmanskloof and you'll find the town stretching out among the Langeberg mountains and between the Keisie and Kingna rivers. It was founded in 1851 and named after John Montagu, the colonial secretary of the Cape at the time.

It's perhaps best known for the hugely popular Montagu hot springs, although the main economic activities are farming of fruit, wine and table grapes. Tourism has grown by leaps and bounds, with a wide range of activities that focus on the fun to be had from history, food and wine, and adventure sports. Here's my pick of some of the vast raft of Montagu activities.

1. Drive the Cogmanskloof Pass



The rock tunnel on the Cogmanskloof Pass

Cogmanskloof Pass connects Ashton with Montagu so if you come from Cape Town via Robertson, it will be along your way. The nearly 7km pass winds through towering reddish rocks. It was built by Thomas Bain, the same engineer who built the Swartberg Pass between Oudtshoorn and Prince Albert. Cogmanskloof Pass took him five years and was completed in 1877. The route was extensively refurbished between 2015 and 2021 but some of Bain's original stone walls are still there today despite the many floods they have seen over the years.

Pass through the oldest rock tunnel in South Africa then stop at one of the lay-byes to look back at the old English fort on top of the tunnel. It was built by the British in 1899 at the start of the Anglo Boer War and is now a national monument.

Look out for the concrete flood monument on the Montagu side of the tunnel, indicating the dramatic flood levels of 1981, 2003 and 2008.

2. Discover Montagu's old buildings on foot



Cape Dutch building on the corner of Long and Church streets

Visit the tourism office inside the Montagu Country Hotel in Bath Street to get a copy of the historical walking tour of Montagu or [download it here](#). Set out to learn about the Cape Dutch, Victorian, Cape Georgian and Karoo-style architecture. You can see all four styles come together on opposite corners where Long Street meets Church Street.



Discover the story behind the 1886 Poesieshoek in Montagu

Discover interesting stories along the way, like how when Paul Kruger visited Montagu, Montagu Hotel's owner reneged on the planned reception for him because he didn't like his politics. Kruger slept at Joubert House (see point 6) instead.

Another Montagu story I enjoyed was that of Poesieshoek in Mill Street. Built in 1886 in a Karoo Cape Georgian style, it was used as a temporary hospital during the Spanish Flu pandemic. Afterwards, it stood empty for a long time, believed to be haunted by the many people who had died there. Then twin sisters moved in to run it as a brothel – hence the name (you have to understand Afrikaans or Dutch to appreciate it). Today it's a private home painted an electric blue.

There are 26 buildings along the historic route. You'll also see the Spanish Flu plaque that commemorates those who died in this pandemic between 1918 and 1920, Joubert House (see point 6), the large Dutch Reformed Church and tiny St Mildred's Anglican church, designed by [Sophy Gray](#), wife of the Bishop of Cape Town, and completed in 1871.

3. Enjoy a classic car experience



Feel like a film star in this 1956 Cadillac Sedan De Ville

Feel like a film star on a chauffeur-driven orientation tour of the highlights of Montagu with [American Dream Cars](#). This experience is a member of [Cape Country Routes](#), offering the chance of a lifetime to travel in style in a 1956 Cadillac Sedan De Ville with its tail fins and white-wall tyres to recall times gone by. Do the rounds of the Montagu hot springs, Cogmanskloof, see some notable historic buildings, and remember places you want to return to on your own to explore in more depth. This car has automatic transmission, air conditioning, electronic windows and amazingly comfy seats - not bad for a car that was built more than 60 years ago. There's also a red 1964 Cadillac Sedan De Ville in the American Dream Cars stable, but this blue wonder stole my heart. The cars belong to P-J Basson of the Montagu Country Hotel and he often acts as chauffeur and guide. Our guide was Cas Groot, who gave us a fun and informative experience.

You can also book a wine tour in the area with American Dream Cars – a great way to have fun while not having to worry about drinking and driving.

4. Let your feet fly on an art bicycle

A third way to experience a town tour is to ride around on a Dutch-style bicycle with a single gear and back-pedal brake. Each bike is individually hand-painted with colourful art designs. Hire one to explore the town on your own, or join a historic town tour with [Flying Feet](#) to learn the stories that make up the town's history.

Flying Feet also hires out e-bikes and mountain bikes (see point 15).

5. Visit the Montagu Hot Springs at Montagu Springs or Avalon Springs

Multiple thermal springs were discovered at Montagu in the 1800s. They bubble up to the surface at temperatures of up to of 42 degrees Celsius and the mineral-rich water is thought to have healing properties.

360on62 Note: Day visits are allowed. Our preference is Avalon Springs. Both have various swimming pools varying in head, water slides, lovely gardens and picnic areas and are open from around 08h00 until around 20h00 etc. Avalon Springs also has a restaurant, a lovely bar area and a spa. *Note: Some refurbishments were still being completed in January 2023 at Avalon Springs, so please confirm beforehand if the day visitors section is available.*



A few photos at Avalon Springs

6. Visit a museum



The kitchen at Joubert House in Long Street with its peach-pip floor

Visit Joubert House on Long Street to explore the past. Built in 1853, it's the oldest town house in Montagu (although dwellings on surrounding farms predate it). It's a house museum that shows how people lived some 160 years ago. I particularly enjoyed the toy collection and a large collection of dolls, from handmade rag dolls to porcelain dolls with historically correct clothing.

There's a voorkamer with wide-planked wooden floors, furniture from the era and pictures of the Joubert family who lived here. There's also a bedroom with a ghost story, and a kitchen and pantry with rietdak ceilings and peach-pip floors. I'm always fascinated by the gadgetry of old-fashioned kitchens. Riempe chairs, ceramic kitchen jars and old tins add to the mid-19th century ambiance.

Walk out the back door and wander around the indigenous medicinal plant garden. Read the info labels to find out which plants the Khoikhoi, San and settlers used for specific illnesses or conditions. There's also a tiny square building called the Tronkie, which was used as the local jail.

A small fee gets you entrance to Joubert House as well as the Mission Church Museum just a short walk down Long Street, which depicts the history of the church and community.

7. Go wine tasting



Montagu Wines & Spirits' famous red muscadel under the John Montagu label

Experience a wine tasting at [Montagu Wines & Spirits](#) (not to be confused with Montagu Kelders, which is a different company). This is the original maker of Montagu muscadel, which dates back to the 1930s and for which it is best known. The muscadel comes in two types – white and red – the second being their flagship. If sweet wines are your thing, you'll want to taste them. They also make a range of normal white and red wines. If you enjoy local gins, ask to taste the two Tahlia gins made from prickly pear leaves and flowers. Montagu Wines & Spirits sells them but doesn't make them; they come from a farm between Montagu and Barrydale.

Also remember that Montagu is only about 25km from a treasure-trove of Robertson wineries like Van Loveren, Weltevrede, Excelsior, Bon Courage and Springfield (the last one my absolute favourite both for its wines and its laid-back tasting deck overlooking a dam).\

360on62 Note: You can also try tasting local Mimosa Winery wines who [do tastings at the Blu Vines District](#). Our favourites in the Robertson area are Bon Courage, Zandvliet and Springfield, but also highly recommend Weltevrede Winery near Bonnievale. For great MCC's (sparkling wine made by the traditional method), try Silverthorn and Paul René which are both boutique wineries that specialise in sparkling, but Bon Courage and van Loveren also have excellent MCC's.

8. Browse the art galleries



This late-Victorian building used to house a bank, now it's home to an art gallery

If you appreciate art, there are quite a few places in Montagu to indulge your passion. They include Hicks Fine Art Gallery, the Ibis Gallery, THE Gallery, The Vault, and the Montagu Country Hotel's gallery space, which hosts local artists in temporary exhibitions lasting two months each.

If you prefer a guide and fancy the idea of exploring on two wheels, join [Flying Feet](#) on a bike tour of the town and its art, including local art galleries, the Francois Krige collection at the KWV Museum and a private tour of one of the resident artists' studios.

9. Pop in at the Montagu Village Market

If you're in town between 8:30 and 12:30 on a Saturday morning, pop in at the village market in Euvrard Park, Bath Street. You'll find a good local vibe with stalls selling everything from fresh veg, breads, cakes, honey and preserves to toys, plants, bric a brac, jewellery, pottery and other crafts.

10. Stroll through a nature garden



Stroll among the plants in the Montagu Nature Garden or relax on a bench

On the southern edge of town is the 12ha [Montagu Nature Garden](#) where you can enjoy the flowers and plants of three Western Cape regions – Fynbos, Succulent Karoo and Renosterveld. In early October when we visited, there were plenty of purple, yellow and orange flowers still in bloom, many of them vibrant vygies, but also fynbos, flowering shrubs and trees. There's a pretty dam with water lilies and a wooden bridge over it.

There's an almost negligible fee to enter, which you drop into the slot in the wall of the entryway. Take an energetic walk along one of the paths or relax on a bench and listen to the birds. The garden is open from 8:00 till 17:00 daily. You can enjoy tea and cake between 10:00 and 11:00 on Tuesday mornings between April and October.

11. Take a hike

For some fresh air, a smattering of birds and plants and great views, walk one of the trails in the mountains surrounding Montagu, such as the Bloupunt trail (15.6km, 5-9 hours), Cogmanskloof trail (12.1km, 4-6 hours) or the Aasvoëlkrans trail (3.2km, 90min). You need a permit, which you can get from the tourism office. Read more about the hiking trails [here](#) if you want to tackle them as self-guided trails. Just remember to take sunscreen, hats and lots of water in summer when it can be brain-meltingly hot.

If you'd prefer to go with a guide to ensure you have an informative and safe experience, book a hike with a local operator like [Montagu Outdoor Adventures](#) or [Route 62 Mountain Adventures](#).

12. Pamper yourself with a spa treatment

Visit the [Montagu Country Hotel Spa](#) in Bath Street. Choose from a range of face or body treatments, mani-pedi, and Swedish, aromatherapy or hot stone massages. There's also a sauna and a relaxing jacuzzi that makes use of mineral-rich thermal spring water from deep below ground. Make a booking beforehand.

360on62 Note: [Avalon Springs](#) also has a spa

13. Eat out at one of the Montagu restaurants



The terrace behind at Blu Vines

There's a bunch of restaurants in Montagu to choose from. They include The Barn on 62 (the best flat whites in town, also a pretty garden and a collection of about a dozen local and imported gins), 22 Church Street (menus change according to what's freshly available), The Blu Vines District (Truth coffee, fabulous apple crumble, and Mimosa Wines to taste), Die Boord/The Orchard (a relaxing garden at the back), The Rambling Rose (very popular with friendly service though our meals on a busy Sunday were disappointing), amongst others.

Montagu is also within about 25km of a slew of Robertson restaurants and winery eateries to the west, or Greenlands Farm Table on the R60 south of Montagu towards Bonnievale. Read more about our experience at the fabulous Greenlands Farm Table [here](#).

360on62 Note: Our favourite restaurant in town is 22 Church, but we highly recommend the Ban on 62 for breakfast or lunch too. We also suggest Leon's Bistro for old fashioned home cooking and The Grill Room at Momosa Lodge.

14. Go bird watching

Spend some time in the bird hide at the leiwater dam on the corner of Barry and Bath streets. To be accurate, it's less of a 'hide' than a small open deck overlooking the dam. This is home and breeding ground to nearly 20 bird species like sacred ibis, herons, egrets, weavers and cormorants. Some 50 species have been recorded visiting the dam. Birders will also enjoy time spent at the Montagu Nature Garden (see point 10).

360on62 Note: or simply spend time down at our dam or walking around our farm. There is magnificent birdlife in the area.

15. Ride a mountain bike trail

Get into the saddle of your mountain bike to explore some of the non-technical or more technical routes in the area – depending on your level of expertise. Whether you're using your own bike or need to hire one, you can join a ride with [Route 62 Mountain Adventures](#), who know the routes well. You can also hire mountain bikes from [Flying Feet](#). Ask the activity centre at the front of the Montagu Country Hotel for a free map and guide with descriptions of seven of the mtb trails varying from 18km to 53km. It's put together by [Montagu-Ashton Tourism](#), and describes the trails as 'from flat and easy for families, to mountain goat heaven for hard-core masochists'.

16. Go rock climbing



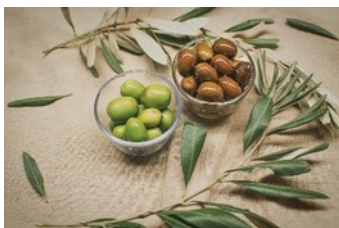
Tony of Montagu Outdoor Adventures climbing at Bosch Crag (photo: Patsy Lourens)

For those who get a kick out of rock climbing, the Montagu area is paradise. There are tons of single and multi-pitch sport and traditional routes to explore. The difficulty levels range from easy enough for beginners to routes that will challenge experienced climbers. To make your rock climbing adventure happen, talk to the experts at [Montagu Outdoor Adventures](#) or [Route 62 Mountain Adventures](#).

17. Meet Montagu's ghosts

Want to experience something different and maybe get a shiver down your spine at the same time? Join a ghost tour with [Flying Feet](#) to winkle out a few of the town's characters and spooky stories. Some of the ghosts you meet might give you goosebumps, but most are simply up to a little harmless mischief like turning lights on and off to mess with your head. The tour starts in front of the Montagu Country Hotel at dusk and takes around 90 minutes.

18. Taste olives



Taste olives and olive products at Olijvenhof just outside Montagu

At [Olijvenhof Olive Farm](#) 17km from Montagu on Route 62 you can learn more about the farm and the olives, try out their extra virgin olive oils, table-olives and pestos. They offer platters and picnics too. It's open Wednesdays to Saturdays from 10:00 till 16:00.

36on62 Note: A visit to [Marbrin Olive Growers](#) not too much further than Ashton, is also highly worth a visit. They have award winning olives and olive oils. Tastings by appointment only though.

19. Take a tractor ride to the top of a mountain

Kids of all ages (even those over 21!) will enjoy this Montagu [tractor ride on a protea farm](#) in the Koo Valley 29km outside town on the R318. Load yourselves into the trailer for a ride to the top of Arangieskop in the Langeberg mountains 1500m above sea level. From there, you can see the Breede and Keisie rivers, as well as look down into the Robertson Valley. Enjoy a glass of muscadel before starting the descent. The trips are scheduled for 10:00 on Wednesdays and Saturdays, but you need to [book ahead](#) because they need a minimum of 25 passengers. And of course it all depends on good weather. Groups of 30 or more are welcome to book ahead on any other day except Sunday. They also offer an optional three-course potjiekos lunch on the farm afterwards and you need to prebook this as well.

36on62 Note: Your kids may also enjoy the [tractor rides at Cape Dry every Saturday at 11h00](#). The trip takes about 30 minutes and makes its way through La Providence Dried Fruit farm, showing the orchards, drying lanes and the plant itself.

20. Munch on dried fruit



Cape Dry's factory shop has a wide range of dried fruit, nuts and seeds

Fruit is one of the mainstays of Montagu's economy so it's almost compulsory to enjoy some of it. At the [Cape Dry](#) factory shop, prices are lower than you pay at home and the selection much wider. You'll find everything from dates, raisins and sultanas to dried peaches, apricots, pineapple, cranberries, kiwi fruit, mango and banana (not all of them grown here, of course). They also sell nuts, seeds, caramel popcorn and a selection of jams. There's a playground outside to keep the kids amused, and a wine shop and bistro next door.

21. Go shopping

Apart from shopping for wine and dried fruit, you can indulge in some retail therapy at other places in Montagu too. You'll find all the usual shops like supermarkets and pharmacies, where you can get anything you need for your stay. There are also some small gems like Montagu Local in Bath Street, which sells locally made cheese, cold meats, olive products, breads, veggies and herbs, and Fijn Botanicals' aromatic toiletries and body products that you can buy from the Kogman & Keisie farm's shop in Kloof Street. It's also fun to browse an antique shop or bookshop, or visit one of the farm stalls in the area.

Note that this isn't a full list of all there is to do in Montagu. Other activities include an alpaca farm, horse riding, a guano cave with a San rock painting, a private model Ferrari collection, a craft

brewery, stargazing, golf, and so on. Two websites you'll find useful for more info are <https://www.montagu.org.za/> and <https://www.montagu-ashton.info/>.

Getting to Montagu

Drive along the N1 from Cape Town towards Worcester, then take the R60 to Robertson (about 160km). Continue along the R60 to Ashton (about 18km) and then turn onto the R62 to Montagu (about 14km).

Best time to visit Montagu

My favourite times to visit Montagu are in spring (September/October) or autumn (April/May) because I prefer to avoid cold winter nights and scorching summer days. Not everyone agrees, of course, and the hot summers are by far the most popular time for tourism in the town.

June and July are the coldest winter months, with temperatures ranging from around 0-5 degrees Celsius at night to 14 degrees at midday (good for visitors who love sharing a glass of wine or hot chocolate around a log fire). Some snow may fall on the high mountains in July and August. Average temperatures in summer are from the high 20s to mid 30s, with some days in January and February tipping over into the 40s.

Montagu doesn't get loads of rain; it is, after all, part of the Klein Karoo. Rain falls mainly in May to August, with June being the wettest month. The driest months are from November to March, making these months popular with hikers and adventure sport enthusiasts.

When pushed for an opinion on the best month to visit Montagu, a local in the tourism business picked April (the start of autumn) because average temperatures hover around 25 degrees Celsius, there's little wind, and it's just after the busy summer season so a little more peaceful.