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## Tips and need-to-know information when visiting the Western Cape this festive season

The summer festive season in South Africa usually consists of a boom of local and international tourists travelling down to the coast, especially Western Cape. The South African Weather Service (SAWS) is providing some tips and need to know information to the tourists visiting the Western Cape to ensure that this festive season can be enjoyed to its full potential, while being as safe as possible.

### What weather conditions can you expect?

The western parts of the Western Cape are in the winter rainfall region, while the eastern parts fall in the summer rainfall region. Therefore, it is not uncommon for those travelling down to the Garden Route to experience on-and-off showers, rain, and even an odd thunderstorm during the summer holidays. The Cape is also known for its windy summers, especially over the City of Cape Town, where the south-easter dominates. It is also important to note that when the wind is calm along the coast, the daytime temperature will usually be high. Occasionally, berg wind conditions may contribute to hot and dry days along the coast. Temperatures along the coast are usually mild and do not fluctuate as much as the temperature over the interior as seen in figure 1.

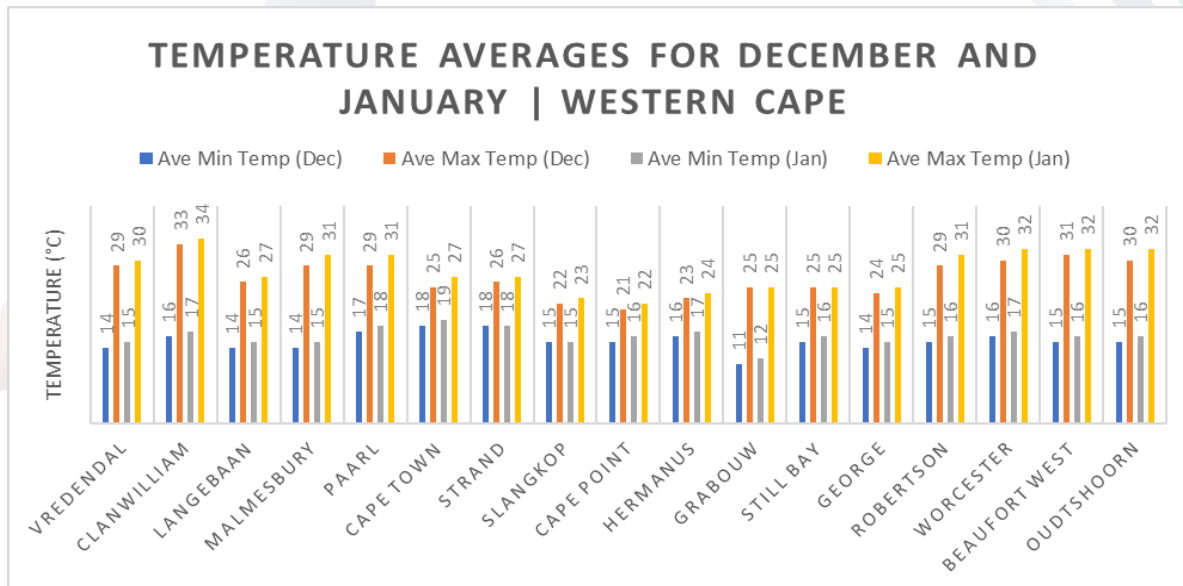


Figure 1: Average temperature for the Western Cape during December and January (source: SAWS).

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**Weather conditions to look out for when enjoying some activities in the Cape**

The City of Cape Town is one of the most celebrated destinations for summer holidays as it harbours a number of activities to enjoy during this time. The activities may be either indoors or outdoors. Regardless of the activity, tourists must always enjoy and experience with caution. As alluded, the Cape’s summer is characterised by warm to hot and windy conditions, making it susceptible to run-away veld/wild fires. Extremely uncomfortable conditions are possible during summer, especially over the interior; therefore, one must take the necessary precautions to protect oneself. The effects of these weather conditions may be exaggerated while hiking, swimming, walking through vineyards, or even when chilling on the beach. On the other hand, windy conditions may pose a risk when participating in activities such as paragliding, kayaking, rock angling and boat cruising. Always be aware of the weather conditions on the days you are feeling adventurous and are planning outdoor activities, especially if sudden weather changes are possible. Additional tips and information regarding summer holidays at the City of Cape Town can be seen in figure 2.

**Summer holidays at City of Cape Town**  
...always bring a jacket with

**Summer is also fire season!**  
Wild and veld fires, together with accidental and other fires, etc.  
Call **112** to report open fires or smoke!

**Fancy some wine?**  
Be aware of:  
Possible extremely uncomfortable weather conditions, windy at times during the day and sunburn.

**Feeling adventurous?**  
Be careful of:  
Heat exhaustion, dehydration, windy conditions that can catch you off guard.

**Planning a beach day?**  
Be careful of:  
High waves  
Rip Currents  
Sea creatures, etc.

**REMEMBER**  
Temperatures may drop significantly after sunset - always have a jacket ready.  
If you find yourself in an unsafe situation, call emergency services.  
Enjoy this summer season in Cape Town!

South African Weather Service  
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Figure 2: What weather conditions to expect during summer holidays at the City of Cape Town

**Tips for outdoor activities**

The ultraviolet index (UVI) at Cape Town is usually very high to extremely high, especially over the world-renowned Table Mountain. It is vital to protect your skin by using sunscreen regularly and wearing sunglasses, hats, and loose long-sleeved shirts. Remember to stay hydrated and to listen to your body when hiking. Exploring Table Mountain and other popular hiking routes can be fun and exciting, however, always check the weather forecast beforehand and never hike alone.

The Western Cape offers varied outdoor activities, which locals are very proud of and take pride in preserving for future generations. Tourists need to respect the rules when visiting parks and beaches. Do not start open fires; do not litter; and recycle where possible. We also encourage the public to report any fires or smoke in high fire risks areas, especially on windy days.

### **Ocean dangers and safety tips**

Due to its unique subtropical location, bounded by the warm Mozambique-Agulhas Current on the east and south coasts to Cape Agulhas, and the cold Benguela Current flowing northwards along the west coast, South Africa enjoys ideal swimming conditions throughout its coastline. The summer/festive season in South Africa generally sees an increase in recreational activities near the coast. The attractive coastal landscape frequently conceals possible hazards that require careful awareness to ensure a safe and pleasurable experience, especially during this busy season. Regardless of your familiarity with the area, always approach coastal areas with caution. Stay informed about local weather conditions before heading to the beach or any waterway (e.g., local swimming pool, river, dam). Check wave and tide forecasts when at the beach and remain alert to changing weather conditions. The following information is crucial for navigating coastal hazards during this holiday season:

### **Ocean Hazards to Look Out For:**

1. **Rip currents:** These are like fast rivers in the sea, typically occurring at breaks in sandbars at the beach, and also near structures such as jetties and piers. Identifying their signs and staying clear of swimming in their vicinity is crucial. Key indicators of a rip current include deeper or darker water, fewer breaking waves, sandy-coloured water extending beyond the surf zone, debris or seaweed, and noticeable water movement. However, these currents can change shape and location rapidly, making them challenging to spot. If you find yourself caught in a rip current, it is essential to stay calm and conserve your energy. Consider the following options:

i) Seek Help:

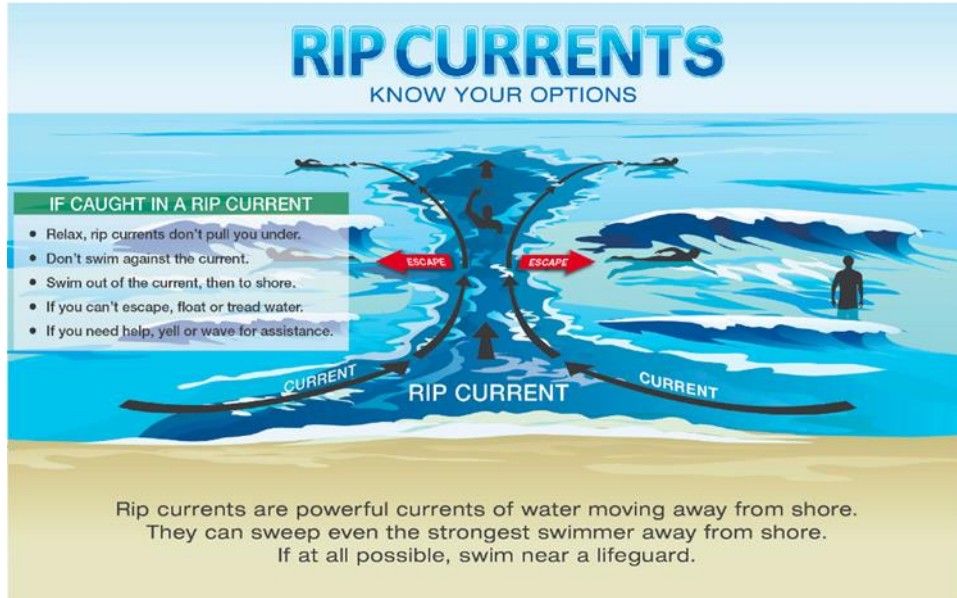
- Stay calm. If you need help wave and call out for assistance. Lifeguards may be able to rescue you.

ii) Float with the Current:

- Allow yourself to float with the current, as it might return you to a shallower sandbank.
- Swim parallel to the beach or towards the breaking waves (please refer to figure 3). This strategy may help you escape the grip of the rip current.

iii) Swim Smart:

- Before entering the sea, look for rip current warning signs and information.
- Remember, staying calm and knowing what to do can make a significant difference in ensuring your safety when dealing with rip currents. Swim alongside lifeguards on beaches and obey their directions.



**Figure 3:** Schematic showing what to do if caught in a rip current (Source: <https://www.weather.gov/images/news/232606-RipCurrentSafety.png>)

**2. Changing Water Levels:** The water levels go up and down with the tides. Swimmers may find themselves in deeper water unexpectedly, increasing the risk of accidents. Changing tide levels is the periodic rise and fall of sea levels along coastlines, caused primarily by the gravitational forces exerted by the moon and the sun on Earth's oceans. Tides are a natural and predictable occurrence, following regular cycles known as the tidal cycle, changing twice every day. When the tide is high, the water might come closer to the shore. When it is low, the water moves further out. Pay attention so that you do not get surprised by the water coming in. Look out for hidden dangers; sometimes there are things under the water like rocks. Know where they are, especially when the tide is high.

**3. Understanding Waves:** High and strong waves can pose dangers, especially for inexperienced swimmers. They can knock individuals off their feet or drag them into deeper water. Powerful waves that break directly on the shore can be hazardous, as they may cause injuries to swimmers or individuals standing in shallow water. Never turn back on oncoming waves. As the wind blows over a water surface generating waves, over time and space, the waves absorb the energy transferred from the wind to the water creating the potential to produce bigger waves. Recognise wave sets, periods of significant intensity, and exercise caution during these times. Stick to designated swimming areas monitored by vigilant lifeguards to minimise risks. Watch your step, as waves can abruptly impact water levels, altering the seabed's depth.

Avoidance:

- Before approaching the water, be aware of the wave conditions.
- Keep to approved swimming areas and be aware of caution flags.
- Teach your children to respect the ocean's strength and to never turn their backs on the waves.

**4. Wind:** It is important to always be aware of windy conditions. Windy weather can make swimming challenging, especially for weaker swimmers or those on inflatables. Wind can also affect watercrafts, making boating or other water activities dangerous. If it is a particularly windy day, keep an eye on the



water's surface and know what size waves your swimming ability can handle. (See waves section for more information).

5. **Storm surge:** A storm surge refers to the abnormal rise in sea level near the coast caused by strong winds and a low atmospheric pressure associated with a storm. A "positive" storm surge does not typically refer to a beneficial or positive situation. Instead, a positive storm surge indicates that the sea level is rising above normal levels due to a storm's influence. Always check the storm surge warnings from the South African Weather Service!

Safety Rules and Guidelines

Always seek advice from lifeguards or, for precise sea state forecasts, contact the South African Weather Service. Lifeguards stand as your allies in safety, offering guidance in uncertain conditions. In conclusion, by staying informed about coastal hazards, understanding wave nature, and adhering to safety guidelines, you can transform your beach holiday into a secure and joyful experience. Let us make this holiday season a celebration of sun, sea, and safety.

**Emergency numbers for the Western Cape**

The public is encouraged to save the following emergency numbers on their cellphones when travelling through the Western Cape or when visiting the province this festive season (figure 4).

**Emergency Numbers Western Cape**

**All Emergencies**  
 ☎ 107  
 📠 021 480 7700

**South African Weather Service**  
**DISASTER MANAGEMENT**

**Fire** ☎ 10177  
 📠 112  
**REPORT any fire/smoke when the fire danger is EXTREMELY HIGH**  
 Fire Department | 021 590 1900

**When reporting a fire**  
 Give full address  
 Use landmarks (shop or school)

**Water** Sea Rescue (NSRI) 087 094 9774  
**Don't drink and swim!**  
**NSRI SAFETRX APP**  
 live waterborne route tracking

**Road** Report bad driving and road conditions | 0861 400 800  
 Ambulance | 10177  
 Accident & Breakdown Towing | 0860 911 326

Emer-G-Med | 0861 007 911  
 Netcare 911 | 082 911  
 If tired, stop and rest...  
**Arrive Alive**  
 Don't drink and drive!

**Weather** Report bad weather and dangerous driving conditions  
 Cape Town Weather Office | WhatsApp  
 📠 084 279 1166

Western Cape Government FOR YOU | FIRE RESCUE SERVICES | NATIONAL SEA RESCUE INSTITUTE | South African Weather Service @SAWeatherServic | www.weathersa.co.za

Figure 4: Vital emergency numbers when visiting the Western Cape

Members of the public are encouraged to regularly follow weather forecasts on television and radio. Updated weather information is regularly available at [www.weathersa.co.za](http://www.weathersa.co.za) as well as via the SA Weather Service X account @SAWeatherServic or on Facebook @WeatherServic.

Compiled by Bafana Gwebu, Carla Ramjukadh, Elani Heyneke, Kanyisa Makubalo, Ramontsheng Rapolaki and Tania Daniels

**For technical and weather enquiries:**

Cape Town Weather Office: Whatsapp: 084 279 1166; Phone: 064 798 6994

**Media enquiries:** Mr Oupa Segalwe: Senior Manager: Communications and Stakeholder Relations; E-mail: [oupa.segalwe@weathersa.co.za](mailto:oupa.segalwe@weathersa.co.za) or Cell: 072 264 3273 or Ms Hannelee Doubell: Manager, Communications; Cell: 072 222 6305; E-mail: [hannelee.doubell@weathersa.co.za](mailto:hannelee.doubell@weathersa.co.za)

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