

Fascinating walk along St Francis' dunes

A new slack packing trail between Oyster Bay, St Francis Bay and Cape St Francis started in March this year when the first group of nine hikers from Oudtshoorn complete the Chokka Trail.

This 56km trail, to be done over 4 days, has already been listed as one of the top slack packing routes in Southern Africa. The trail showcases the diversity of the greater St Francis area - on foot, at your own pace and with overnight accommodation at top class guesthouses.

Since March more than 100 hikers, some from as far as the United Kingdom, have completed the trail and bookings for 2015 are filling up at a rapid speed.

The trail spans over four days and three nights. It is fully catered and includes a calamari tasting, a visit to the working harbour, the penguin rehabilitation centre and a canal cruise. Hikers only carry a lunch pack and enough water, while their luggage is transported to the next overnight stop.

The first day's hike is a 14km warm-up walk on the Oyster Bay coastline, using old fisherman's footpaths, jeep tracks and the beach. Dolphins playing in the waves, southern right whales and cape clawless otters are expected to be seen on the route while ancient shell middens and Khoisan fish are visible during low tide. Dinner and accommodation is at the Oyster Bay Beach Lodge with an unimpeded view over the ocean.

The second day hikers traverse the unique sand sea and dune bypass system, the Sand River. Hikers are surprised when they realise the entire 16,8km system is dunes. There are wetlands in the dunes towards the end and spectacular views over the Baviaanskloof Mountains to the north and the ocean to the east. This is the longest and potentially toughest walk of the trail, but an amazing feeling to have finished it.

Hikers are collected at the Sand River Bridge, and taken to Brisas B&B on the Canals for a canal cruise and their overnight accommodation.

The third day's hike starts at Mosterts Hoek and includes the rocky Wild Side shoreline where unique fynbos species, prolific birdlife and small game such as grey duiker, mongoose, porcupine and bushbuck can be found. After exploring the blow hole, an unknown grave, a shipwreck and more middens, the first stop is at the Sanccob African Penguin and Sea Bird Rehabilitation Centre for



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a guided tour. A walk along the spectacular main beach leads to Port St Francis, the unique private working harbour, where hikers enjoy a calamari tasting.

Accommodation is at Cape St Francis Resort, with dinner and breakfast at Joe Fish Restaurant. On the last day hikers explore the nature reserves in the area and enjoy a farewell lunch at St Francis Links, where they enjoy the view over the village before it is time to say goodbye.

For more information contact St Francis tourism or visit the website on www.chokkatrail.co.za

