



Karoo is an arid to semiarid geographic region; an area that includes four South African provinces: Northern Cape, Western Cape, Eastern Cape and the Free State.

The Karoo is best defined by its vegetation, which consists of assorted succulents and low scrub bushes; the area is devoid of surface water, and its name is derived from the Khoisan word meaning “land of thirst.”

Its subregions include the intermontane vales of **Little Karoo and Great Karoo**; altogether the Karoo occupies about 395,000 square km, about one-third of the total area of South Africa.

Karoo Desert is acknowledged as being one of the biggest and most important fossil deposit sites in the world infact the 400,000 sq km area is internationally noted for its record of fossil therapsid “mammal-like” reptiles.

Because of its continuity of deposition, the Karoo provides not only a historical record of biological change over Earth’s history, but also a means to test theories of evolutionary processes over long periods of time.

The **Great Karoo** has the richest diversity of desert flora in the world and the largest variety of succulents found anywhere on earth; there are over 9000 species of plants in the region.

Karoo is acknowledged as one of the world’s biodiversity hotspots, and the the **Succulent Karoo Biome** covers 116 900 square kilometres of desert on the western parts of the area.

It is the most diverse semi-arid environment; this region is an extraordinary desert that harbours a range of bulb flora richer than that of any other arid region and provides a springtime display of annual flowers.

Added to this are breathtaking scenery, a huge variety of reptiles and insects, a geological paradise, and a coastal strip so beautiful.

The Succulent Karoo has staggering levels of biodiversity and is listed as one of the world’s 34 internationally recognised biodiversity hotspots, rich in life and diversity.

A combination of high levels of endemism and biodiversity means the biome is a conservation priority.

The Succulent Karoo claims its place amongst the world’s biodiversity hotspots with ease



## Karoo Desert in South Africa

and provides great opportunities for biodiversity conservation and human development; it is the only arid region recognised as a biodiversity hotspot

It has about 6 300 plant species of which 38% are endemic, it's also home to 250 bird species, 78 mammal species, 132 reptiles and amphibians species.

The diversity of succulent growth forms is greater here than anywhere else on earth, with some 40% of the world's 6 000- odd succulent species occurring in the region



Along our trip we'll visit two town in the Desert Karoo: Oudtshoorn and Nieu Bethesda

**Oudtshoorn** is situated in the **Little Karoo** and it is a centre of agricultural trade for dairy products, alfalfa, fruit, vegetables, and tobacco, but it is particularly well-known for its extensive ostrich farms and its ostrich feather industry.





The small village of **Nieu Bethesda** in the Karoo heartland was once a dusty little place no one had heard of; today is famous thanks to Helen Martins' strangely compelling Owl House and Camel Yard.

Helen Martins' Owl House, often cited as South Africa's finest example of outsider art, is an extraordinary, other-worldly home of concrete and ground glass sculptures. Her creativity conjures up an array of emotions: from wonder to excitement, curiosity and sadness.

The late Helen Martins dedicated the latter part of her life to transforming her ordinary Karoo home into a fanfare of colour and light. The result is The Owl House, and it's impact is such that visitors are variously awed, inspired, fascinated, calmed or perturbed by their visit, but never untouched.







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