

Where the Karoo Begins – The Three Sisters

I have so much to share from the past 6 months of travelling that I could honestly keep writing for days. After sorting through what felt like millions of images lately, I've decided to step back and try to relive memories from our trips so far in 2026.

There were incredible sightings, unforgettable moments, and plenty of stories along the way. But every journey has a starting point, and this one began in the best possible way, with a wonderful Christmas spent with our nearest and dearest.

Those festive days always seem to pass far too quickly. Between laughter, good food, and the familiar chaos of family gatherings, there's always that quiet awareness in the background that another adventure is just around the corner. For us, that meant preparing for a long road trip, our destination for the next sixteen days being one that never really needs an introduction.

Cape Town.

The evening before departure is always a bit of a circus. No matter how organised you think you are, there are always those last-minute "must take" items that somehow need to squeeze into an already packed car. Extra camera gear, binoculars, jackets for unpredictable weather, snacks for the road, and a hundred other small things that suddenly feel essential. Somehow everything eventually finds a place, even if it means a bit of creative packing.

Our alarms were set for a very early start. At 4am the house was quiet, the streets of Vereeniging still dark, and the rest of the world fast asleep. There's something special about leaving while everyone else is still dreaming. With coffee in hand and the car packed to its absolute limit, we pulled out of the driveway and pointed the nose of the vehicle south.

Anyone who has done a long road trip in South Africa knows that the journey itself quickly becomes part of the adventure. The early hours passed in a blur of headlights, quiet conversation, and the gentle hum of the road beneath us. As the sky slowly began to lighten, the landscape started to change. The greener scenery of home gradually gave way to something drier, wider, and more open.

You can almost feel the moment when you've entered Karoo country. For many travellers heading south along the N1, that moment is marked by one very recognisable landmark, the Three Sisters.

Rising from the vast plains along the highway, these three distinctive dolerite-topped koppies have become something of an unofficial gateway to the Karoo. Standing proudly against the horizon, they immediately catch your eye. Even if you've seen them before, they have a way of making you slow down and take notice.

Because we had left so early, we arrived in good time, just as the morning light was beginning to soften the landscape. The Karoo has a way of playing with light that photographers quickly learn to appreciate. The colours aren't loud or dramatic. Instead, they are subtle and layered, shifting gently as the sun climbs higher. Pale yellows, dusty browns, and muted greys stretch endlessly across the plains.

Stepping out of the car after hours on the road felt like pressing pause for a moment. The air was fresh and crisp, carrying that dry Karoo scent that's difficult to describe but instantly recognisable once you've experienced it.

For birders, even a quick roadside stop becomes an excuse to scan the surroundings. The Karoo may look sparse at first glance, but it hides a surprising amount of life if you take the time to look. Fence lines, rocky outcrops, and scattered shrubs can all hold activity. Familiar roadside companions like Pied Crows patrol the open spaces, while chats and larks occasionally appear if you keep your eyes sharp.

But more than anything, the Three Sisters stop offers something else entirely, a sense of scale.

The Karoo has a remarkable way of reminding you just how vast South Africa really is. Standing there, with the Three Sisters rising quietly from the plains and the N1 stretching endlessly in both directions, you realise you've crossed into a very different kind of landscape.

For us, this stop wasn't about ticking off a destination or spending hours exploring. It was simply about marking the moment where the trip truly began. The coffee somehow tastes a little better, the air feels fresher, and the sense of adventure starts to settle in.

With a few photos taken and legs stretched after the long drive, we climbed back into the car and carried on south, leaving the Three Sisters standing quietly behind us in the wide Karoo plains.