

## **Cape Times: 28 December 2006: Escape Times - Paragliding**

Ask most people if they had one wish in life, what it would be and many would answer to be able to fly. And for many people the only flying they'll be doing is on an aeroplane complete with huge engines, uncomfortable seats and inedible food. But for a few adventurous souls, flying is more than just a dream.

O.k lets be honest, flying like a bird is unrealistic but flying without the use of power of any sort other than the wind is very much a reality, a fantastic one at that. Paragliding is one of the simplest forms of flying us land-bound humans can attempt and it's a relatively safe one as well. A high tech wing, a comfortable harness and a good instructor and you're on your way to solo flight. It's that easy. If you're not brave enough to fly by yourself, Cape Town has many expert tandem pilots willing to give you the ride of a lifetime. All you need to worry about is focusing your camera, enjoying the view and experiencing the thrill of un-powered flight, and what a thrill it is. Completely quiet except for the wind rushing through your face, rising to heights you would have thought unimaginable without an engine. Of course with our bounty of mountains and spectacular views, Cape Town is blessed with a range of flying venues. In fact one look at Greg Hamerton's Site Guide to Flying in South Africa, will get you booking your first tandem flight, or lesson for that matter. Published by Eternity Press you can order this excellent book complete with superb photographs of great flying sites all over our beautiful country at [www.eternitypress.co.za](http://www.eternitypress.co.za). South Africa has over 1000 flying sites and almost a 1000 licensed pilots.

### **Where to fly in the Western Cape:**

With Cape Town's variable winds and many mountains its almost always possible to find a flying spot suitable to the prevailing conditions. Except when the South Easter is howling when it's best to keep your feet firmly on the ground. But when it's good it's good. The most popular flying site in Cape Town is Lion's Head, with the stiff 20 minute walk to the launch quickly forgotten as you rise high above the slopes, the trees getting smaller by the second and the ocean glimmering in the distance. Landing is at the field in front of La Med Restaurant in Clifton, enjoy a well deserved drink afterwards as you contemplate you next tandem flight or getting your own wings. Signal Hill next to Lions Head is also a good spot without the walk.

Further from the city, Franschoek (about one hours drive from Cape Town) offers superb flying over a stunning valley launching from the top of the Franchhoek Pass. Even further afield is the very popular flying site of Porterville (90 minutes from Cape Town), where just taking off gets you 500m off the ground looking down on acres of farmland. This is a popular cross country site for those daredevils looking to cover some distance but soaring along the ridge is excitement enough for some and climbing a thermal with eagles is sure to get anyone hooked. Wilderness on the Garden Route is blessed with gentle winds and a range of flying sites with quite a few schools to learn or tandem with.

You need some wind to paraglide but on those perfectly still days when flying seems impossible it is possible to get airborne with a motor on your back and skim the oceans, almost getting your feet wet. Of course the thrill of un-powered flight is gone but you're still flying!