

THE MALOTI ROUTE

The Maloti Route is the longest signed tourism route in South Africa. This route follows the scenic Highlands of the Free State and over the border (passport essential) into the magnificent Maluti Mountains of Lesotho and ends at the Seekoeivlei Nature Reserve.

It starts in Harrismith and proceeds through the Free State to the Orange River after which it crosses the Eastern Cape to the N2 on the Wild Coast. It also includes Lesotho from the north to the south.

In the Free State it passes through **Ladybrand, Hobhouse, Wepener, Vanstadensrus and Zastron** on the R26 Route. It is dominated by the Maluti Mountain Range in the Kingdom of Lesotho and constitutes a scenic route covering art, culture, history, rock art sites, sceneries and a host of cultural experiences.

Accommodation varies from traditional huts, to B&B's and to luxury hotels. The diversity provides an opportunity to contrast the two countries which have different histories but are intertwined geographically, socially, culturally and economically.

Ladybrand forms the northern starting point in the Free State of this breathtaking route. This historical town can be reached taking the N8 east from Bloemfontein. Subsequently travelling to Ladybrand forms part of the popular Active N8 route - also a must-see.

From Ladybrand you take the R26 south-west and after about 56km you'll find **Hobhouse**, a town that also deserves a visit. This little town is named after Emily Hobhouse, famous human rights fighter during the Anglo-Boer War. Hobhouse was founded in 1912 and the farming economy centres around dairy, cheese, maize and wheat.

As you move further south on the R26 you'll find the little town of **Jammerdrif**. Here you'll cross over to the R702 and move south-east for about 11km to find the lovely town of Wepener.

Wepener is right on the Lesotho border and is home to the Caledon Nature Reserve. It has many game species and a flourishing birdlife. The town offers various historical and cultural heritage sites.

Travelling about 29km south on the R702, you'll find the relatively young town of **Van Stadensrus**. The Egmeni or Egmont Dam offers a caravan park and camping sites and can be used for water sport.

Another popular attraction is the Ou Mook Guest House which was the original home of Marthinus van Staden, founder of the town. Beautifully restored and tastefully decorated, all rooms have en-suite facilities and full meals are available. Request "*boerekos*". The Ou Mook is fully licensed and also offers farm fresh products and an open fire place in winter.

Zastron is located approximately a further 39km along the R702. The town lies at the foot of the Aasvoëlberg which is the highest peak in the Free State (2207m). Its close proximity to Lesotho is immediately discernible in the landscape, as the hallmark prairies and yielding slopes of the Transgariep offer themselves up to the magnificent mountains of the Eastern Free State.

A striking landmark, the "**Eye of Zastron**" is a hole nine metres in diameter in one of the cliffs of the Aasvoëlberg. From the caravan park in Eeufeeskloof, roads lead to view sites high in the mountains. The caravan park is also the starting point of the two-day Aasvoëlberg Hiking Trail. The area is notable for its caves and Bushman paintings.

From Zastron visitors have the choice of exploring further east into the mountainous Lesotho, or moving south-east with the R726 towards Sterkspruit in the Eastern Cape or moving south-west towards Rouxville and Aliwal North (also in the Eastern Cape).