

Robben Island Museum Walking Tour



Experience the Rich History and biodiversity of Robben Island Museum while walking in the footsteps of South African Legends.

Requirements:

Comfortable clothes and shoes

Cap or hat

Sunscreen

Physical ability to walk long distances

Water



Walking distance 5km

www.robben-island.org.za

Sites en-route:

1. Visitor's centre

Situated on the edge of the Murrays harbour, the Visitor's centre was the space where political prisoners had contact with their families and their lawyers. One section of the Visitor's Centre contained the visitor area where prisoners were separated from their visitors by plate glass and communicated with each other through an invariably faulty sound system. People were forced to shout to each other in this confined space and one can imagine the noise and confusion, with several people shouting simultaneously to each other in different languages.

2. Banishment Site

Since the end of the 17th century, Robben Island has been used for the isolation of mainly political prisoners. The Dutch settlers were the first to use Robben Island as a prison. Its first prisoner was probably Autshumato in the mid-17th century. Among its early permanent inhabitants were political leaders from various Dutch colonies, including Indonesia, and the leader of the mutiny on the slave ship Meermin and the Xhosa chiefs.

3. Ou Tronk

The Ou Tronk was initially made up of five long WW II wooden barracks, a kitchen and ablution facilities. In the 1950s the buildings were converted to a medium security prison and in the 1960s eight new plastered brick buildings were erected to serve as the temporary maximum security prison.

As described by ex-political prisoners who were kept in the Ou Tronk and attended the Ou Tronk reference group in 2002 - the Ou Tronk was the place where extreme cases of brutality, humiliations, torture and assaults in a form of "carry on" (a form of punishment where a group of warders would physically assault the prisoners). Jimmy Simon was the first political prisoner who died 18 days after his arrival due to hard labour and inhumane treatment by warders.

4. Kramat

This is a Muslim religious shrine dedicated to the memory of the Prince of Madura. This shrine was erected to mark the death of the Prince of Madura on the Island. His body was sent back to his place of birth. After 1722, political and religious leaders from the East Indies were sent to Robben Island by the VOC (Verenigde Oost Indië Compagnie). The influence of Islam is manifest in the Kramat and the unmarked graves of many Muslim exiles who died there. In 1967 the original simple structure was replaced with a Kramat of similar design to the one on Lions Head in Cape Town and was built by prisoners. The frame of the building is clad with slate in a style occurring on many buildings erected on the island during the Apartheid prison era. The Kramat is a place of pilgrimage for Muslims and forms part of five kramats forming the "Holy Circle" of Islam surrounding Cape Town.

5. Maximum Security Prison (MSP)

MSP is popularly known as a prison where hundreds of political activists were sentenced in the 1960s and 1970s. The prison was built by political and common law prisoners in the early 1960s, utilising stones and stone aggregate from the Jan Van Riebeeck and Blue Stone quarries.

In 1963 the Zink Tronk was constructed from corrugated iron and comprised of general cells, a small section of single cells, library, ablution facilities and clinic. The Zink Tronk was demolished in early 1970s and the space was used as the sport field.

6. Leprosy Graveyard

On the way to harbour from Sobukwe Complex lies Leprosarium Graveyard, also known as Leper graveyard. The graveyard date back to the 1800s, it was used to bury people with leprosy disease during the outbreak.

On site, most graves are identifiable and have headstone while others are unidentifiable. It is believed that the graves stretch to MSP, this is based on the human bones found there in the 1960s when its trenches were being dug.

7. Limestone Quarry

Situated inland South West of Murray's Bay Harbour, the Limestone Quarry was first mined during the Dutch colonial period. In 1963 political prisoners from the general section were forced to work at this quarry.

8. Sobukwe House

This complex consists of four buildings that were erected during WW II for various purposes including barracks, mess facilities and a hygiene office that became the house in which the charismatic leader of the PAC Robert Sobukwe was held in solitary confinement.

After spending 3 years in prison on charges of incitement, Robert Sobukwe was sent to Robben Island immediately after his release. Parliament had passed an act known as the "Sobukwe clause". This clause allowed for his sentence to be reviewed on an annual basis at the discretion of the Minister of Justice. It was renewed every year until he left the Island in 1969. Upon his release he was banished to Kimberley, where he was allowed to live and work, while he remained under a banning order which prevented him from participating in any political activities.

Later after Sobukwe left the Island, 2 dog kennel blocks, an ablution block as well as an open bath for the dipping of dogs were erected. A well that captured rainwater which was used to water the grass in the area was also erected.



- 1 - Visitors Centre
- 2 - Banishment Site
- 3 - Ou Tronk
- 4 - Kramat
- 5 - Maximum Security Prison
- 6 - Leprosy Graveyard
- 7 - Limestone Quarry
- 8 - Sobukwe House

- T Ablution Facilities
- S Seating Area

WALKING TOUR EXPERIENCE PRICING

South Africans R1000 per adult	South Africans R620 per child
Non South Africans R1400 per adult	Non South Africans R820 per child