

Tackling Tulbagh with tents and kids is child's play

 By [Ilse van den Berg](#)

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About 30 minutes out of Cape Town en route to Tulbagh, I look in the rearview mirror and see my sister's face, happily stuck between my two nephews on either side of her. But, we all know these moments don't last very long.

Not long before they both start getting unsettled and a toy comes flying past my head from the back. The toddler wants out like a Pollsmoor prisoner and the baby wants... well, who ever knows what a baby really wants?

We however, are enjoying the luxury of the 3.2l Ford Everest Limited with coffees in hand and wish the kids, too, could just appreciate the ride. Is that too much to ask? Clearly. The total amazement of their first experience of a sunroof opening above their heads only lasted about ten minutes.



So we start singing. What else?

"The wheels of the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round..." And so it goes.

We stop for a quick shop in Malmesbury: braaivleis, salad, rolls, *potjie* ingredients, marshmallows - the usual camping foods. Off we go again. A snack and juice in hand seem to keep the kids happy until we arrive at the farm just outside of Tulbagh, about 45 minutes later.

Tulbagh – the fourth oldest town in South Africa

I was shocked to learn that Tulbagh is the fourth oldest town in South Africa (after Cape Town, Stellenbosch and Swellendam). The quaint town dates back to the early 1700s!

Even though the main road (Van der Stel St) is nothing to write home about, charming Church Street, which is just one street down and parallel to the main road, boasts the largest number of Cape Dutch, Edwardian and Victorian provincial heritage sites in one street in South Africa.



[By: Church Tulbagh - Hannesvos, CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

We stop at the farmhouse where my bro-in-law chats to the owners and gets some directions - we'll be camping on their private grounds up in the mountain for the weekend.



Just us, the mountains, and the stars. No fellow campers. No waiting for a shower or a loo. You get the picture. Pure bliss.

Without the 4x4 Everest, I doubt we would have made it. We follow a man on a quad bike through the vineyards and up the mountain. The terrain changes quickly but when the going gets tough, the tough get going. I easily switch the dial out of 'normal' mode and the Everest does what it does best. In less than a second, we have maximum traction and stability to effortlessly stay in control.

The 3.2l TDCi diesel engine delivers 147kW of power and 470Nm of torque and the five-cylinder Duratorq engine is the

perfect complement to the smooth six-speed automatic gearbox.



We finally arrive and are impressed with the Everest's performance as well as the picturesque remote camping spot in front of us.

Groot Winterhoek Mountains

Such an intense backdrop, I think to myself as I pitch my tent, mesmerized by the gigantic mountain in front of me. These are the Groot Winterhoek mountains with altitudes of 1000 to 2077m above sea-level.



I'm shaken out of my day-dream by my almost-three-year-old nephew (let's call him G) tugging on my leg: "What do you think lives up there?" he asks with big, bright green eyes.

"I think there's definitely some baboons..." I say. "Oh" he replies. He internalises for a mere second, then his eyes catch the sight of his fishing rod and he's off.

The Groot Winterhoek area is rich in history, with ancient rock paintings by the San and Khoi people, and the oldest farm established in 1875.

Not long after, the final four of our party arrive: my other sister, her hubby and their two boys (C and B). The fire already

crackles as they set up their tent. Soon enough, three of the four boys climb up a tree – the five-year-old (C) like a real monkey and the two toddlers trying their best to keep up, both dads trying to catch when feet slip.



In the first hour of arrival, we're already met with disasters of all kinds. First, a huge scorpion hiding in the toilet and not long after, B slips off a hill and falls face-first into a bramble bush. As we pull thorns out of the poor bud's head and clean up his bleeding lip, we decide it's definitely time for food and an early night.

And then, it starts to rain. Fabulous.

I wake the next morning, not from a drenched tent, but rather from the smell of fresh coffee being brewed on the fire. The kids have had their Ouma *beskuit* and are ready for a walk.

A mountainous wilderness

The Groot Winterhoek Wilderness Area comprises a conservation area of 30,608 ha and falls under [CapeNature](#). There are waterfalls, swimming holes, rivers and everything else a mountainous wilderness could offer. The greater Groot Winterhoek conservation area is particularly important for protecting mountain fynbos and wildlife. It is also one of Cape Town's sources of fresh, clean water, and is a World Heritage Site.



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Winters here are cold and wet and during the night, temperatures can drop to below freezing. Summers are moderate, but campers and hikers should always be prepared for sudden cold and mist. We found February to be the perfect climate for camping in this area (even though there was some unusual rainfall on the first night).

After a walk and some ball play, we eat lunch and everyone soaks up the chill time as the kids nap. Not for long, though.

B decides that he actually doesn't want to sleep. We're in the wilderness, hello!

I quickly remember that we forgot to buy ice, so I propose to take the little man for a ride to town to go and buy ice (with the hopes of him falling asleep, of course). The Everest is all too happy to get more dust on it and help us to solve our ice and toddler troubles.

Upon our return, B is knocked out in his child seat. It's clear that the 4x4 driving rocked him into a deep sleep.

With ice cold drinks now in hand, kids rested and fed, it's time for fishing, swimming, slingshot practice and 'foefie sliding' followed by more games and a delicious *potjie*. The kids' send-off to bed is a couple of marshmallows braaied over the fire.



On our way back to Cape Town on Sunday, we're refreshed and relaxed, almost too relaxed. Just as well the Everest is equipped with adaptive cruise control with collision warning to help us keep our distance from the traffic ahead. If it senses slow-moving traffic, it slows down. When traffic clears, it goes back to our pre-set speed, or maintains a pre-set distance from the car in front. It can even detect the potential for an accident to occur, alert you with a brake-light warning on your windscreen, and pre-charge your brakes.

Sure, camping with kids might require some extra planning and definitely the right vehicle. But it's worth it. Keep planting wild roots in those young'uns. They will thank you for it one day.

For more about Tulbagh, go to www.tulbaghtourism.co.za. Unfortunately, you won't be able to visit our particular spot, but Tulbagh and the surrounding areas have many beautiful campsites such as [Secret Falls](#) (which definitely requires a good 4x4 vehicle). Thanks to [Ford](#) for lending us the Everest without which none of this would have been possible.

ABOUT ILSE VAN DEN BERG

Ilse is a freelance journalist and editor with a passion for people & their stories (check out [Passing Stories](#)). She is also the editor of [Go & Travel](#), a platform connecting all the stakeholders in the travel & tourism industry. You can check out her work [here](#) and [here](#). Contact Ilse through her website [here](#).

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