

# The Loneliest Bachelor

Perfect for picnics, functions, family get-togethers, or simply taking time off from your busy schedule to spend time with loved ones – or maybe indulging in some me-time – the Durban Botanic Gardens (DBG) is a must-visit.

Established in 1849, the DBG was originally on the south bank of the Umgeni River. In 1851, the gardens relocated closer to town on the slopes of the Berea forest to its present site. It is hard to believe that this place is so old, as it is beautifully well-maintained, with gigantic trees, brilliant blooming flora, and lush, meticulously groomed lawns.

The tree-lined pathways welcome you to the well-manicured gardens. Staying strictly on the pathway does not deprive you of taking in the scenery. The layout is such that everything is still in full view. The beauty and the grandeur of the gardens provide a perfect backdrop for weddings and even modelling shoots.

As succinctly described by Kerry Philips of the DBG, the gardens is a "library of plants". A plethora of exotic plants can be found in the gardens, and you won't be left guessing, as all are identifiable with plant labels that also contain their places of origin.

Cycads have been around since the Jurassic Period about 200 million years ago. The DBG is home to one of the rarest cycad plants in the world – the *Encephalartos Woodii*. Amazingly, the *E. Woodii* survived the

catastrophe that wiped out the dinosaurs. This plant is so rare mainly because there is no known female version. The rare cycad was named after a British botanist, John Medley Wood, who discovered it in 1895. If no female plant is found, the *E. Woodii* will eventually go extinct, hence, this cycad has been dubbed as the "loneliest bachelor" on Earth.

The *Ziziphus mucronata*, more commonly known as the Buffalo Thorn, is about 160-years-old – older than the gardens, and the only survivor from the original site. There are over 80 heritage trees which could be well over a century old.

The DBG has a vast collection of over 860 palm trees of 130 species. There is a centenarian palm called the iLala which is documented to have been planted by one of the curators back in 1867.

Ernest Thorpe, who was the curator in 1962, was the driving force in starting the orchid collection, which now boasts over 8,000 orchids. The Ernest Thorpe Orchid Display House was opened in his honour and is still in pristine condition.

The Butterfly Habitat Garden is a newcomer to the DBG. This dome-shaped structure is divided into modules, each meeting the specific needs of any particular butterfly group. Most importantly, the butterflies are not confined to cages or tanks – the environment mimics nature in its unique layout.

Elegant Egyptian geese can be seen waddling around the gardens. And, if you're lucky enough, terrapin turtles can be

spotted lazing in the sun, in the pond, or on the water's edge.

Less mobile visitors can also enjoy seeing the gardens via a golf-cart tour. Engaging a tour guide is a great way to explore the gardens, discovering every nook and cranny which you could have otherwise overlooked.

Even if you are not passionate about botany, you can still enjoy the serenity of the gardens. Benches, donated in loving memory of many loved ones lost, line the walkways.

The Music by the Lake Concert Series is a memorable experience in the garden. It is so-called because the concerts are held at the beautiful lake's edge of the garden.

Bring along your little ones to join in the Easter Eggsplorer Egg Hunt closer to Easter, where they hunt for eggs that the Easter Bunny has hidden in the gardens. Once they have found them all, they can then claim their chocolaty surprise and DBG's Eggsplorer Certificate.

For a quick bite you can visit the tea garden, well known for its delectable scones.

To relax and enjoy the simple pleasures of life, bring along a picnic basket, a blanket, and enjoy the tranquillity of the DBG.

For more information, please visit [www.durbanbotanicgardens.org.za](http://www.durbanbotanicgardens.org.za).

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