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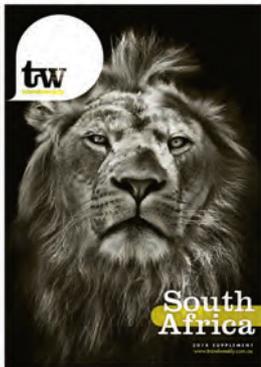
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CONTENTS



On the Cover

THE REGAL LION IS A SAFARI FAVOURITE FOR ANY VISITOR TO SOUTH AFRICA
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- 04 EXPERIENCES 15-12
- 06 EXPERIENCES 11-8
- 08 EXPERIENCES 7-6
- 10 EXPERIENCES 5-4
- 12 EXPERIENCES 3-2
- 14 EXPERIENCE 1
- 16 SAFARI FOUR WAYS

- 22 CITY GUIDE: JOHANNESBURG
- 24 CITY GUIDE: CAPE TOWN
- 26 TOURING GUIDE: WINELANDS
- 28 TOURING GUIDE: GARDEN ROUTE
- 30 CITY GUIDE: DURBAN
- 32 PRACTICAL GUIDE
- 34 SPECIALISTS LIST



MEET SOUTH AFRICA

SOUTH AFRICA IS A MASSIVE COUNTRY WITH A WEALTH OF CULTURAL, NATURAL AND ADVENTURE EXPERIENCES FOR VISITORS TO IMMERSE THEMSELVES IN. READ ON AS TARA HARRISON TAKES YOU THROUGH THE 15 MUST SEE SPOTS



15. KLOOFING BETWEEN CANYONS

There's no rush quite like the one that comes from climbing cliffs and jumping without a parachute or a bungee cord. When you kloof the biggest adrenaline surge comes from a freefall undertaken in the hope that the water beneath is deep enough to cushion your landing.

Kloofing is an extreme sport that combines rock-climbing with diving and swimming. It is also definitely as much fun as it sounds. You're guaranteed to get wet on a kloof expedition, so the best time to make the leap of faith is in summer. Kloofers make like the river they are following by using all methods necessary to work their way down or upstream.

Kloofing began life in the Western Cape however the most thrilling kloof is said to be in Kwa-Zulu Natal at the Mfongosi River, which has a number of rock slides. Unlike other kloofing trails at no point along this river are you forced to either jump or be stuck mid-river. So for the indecisive among us, this is a great option as there's always an exit strategy for those that suddenly come over height phobic.



14. MEET A GREAT WHITE SHARK AT CLOSE QUARTERS

Are you game to stare down a shark as it comes swimming toward you under water at high speed? While it sounds extreme, many who do the dive report a feeling of peace and serenity when they are in the sharks' domain.

Shark cage diving operates along the Garden Route drive, with the dives mostly taking place in Hermanus and Gansbaai. And you can rest assured that it is a strictly controlled activity. On a Marine Dynamics trip, a marine biologist onboard will educate divers about distinguishing between a male and female as well as between different species. An expert bait handler places a lure into the water that is smeared with tuna. Two platforms above the cage allow handlers to keep the sharks near to the divers.

If you want a tamer experience, try a sea safari of the big marine five. It still incorporates sharks but the other four species are somewhat gentler – dolphins, seals, whales and the hardly intimidating penguin.

13. HORSE RIDE THROUGH BATTLEFIELDS

There can be no better way to experience battlefields than from the same vantage point as the cavalry of centuries past. In the 19th century the land of KwaZulu-Natal was fiercely contested as the Zulus and the British waged war in the world's most devastating battles.

In 1879 the Isandlwana battlefield saw the British forces suffer their worst ever defeat at the hands of a native force. It was a gamechanger in the Anglo-Zulu War and a day after that defeat, reprisals occurred in the Battle of Rorke's Drift.

The horse trail rides through history are run by two lodges of the same name as the two battlefields – Rorke's Drift Lodge and Isandlwana Lodge. From your steed you can quietly contemplate the horror that unravelled in the *velds*, or open plains, that typify this region of South Africa. While there are historical monuments, museums, memorials and graves in this region the best way to see it is on a guided tour so you get a feel for the conditions faced by all combatants and the military tactics deployed in an unnerving but fascinating study of conflict.

To experience it, African Travel Specialists has a 16-day South Africa Wanderer itinerary with prices starting from \$10,995.



South African Tourism

12. MEET THE BIKIES OF THE CAPE

Rev through the supermodel of a city that is Cape Town and explore her curves on another potential love affair – a vintage Harley Davidson sidecar. With the strong Atlantic winds on your face, blowing in from Antarctica, all cares are banished by open-road freedom.

The vintage Harley Davidsons purr like a lion before leaving in a procession that is more sedate than the hard-core leather biker get-up would have you believe. From the sidecar there's time enough to take photos and with stop-offs along the way this is a relaxed and quirky opportunity to see and photograph the showstoppers of the city.

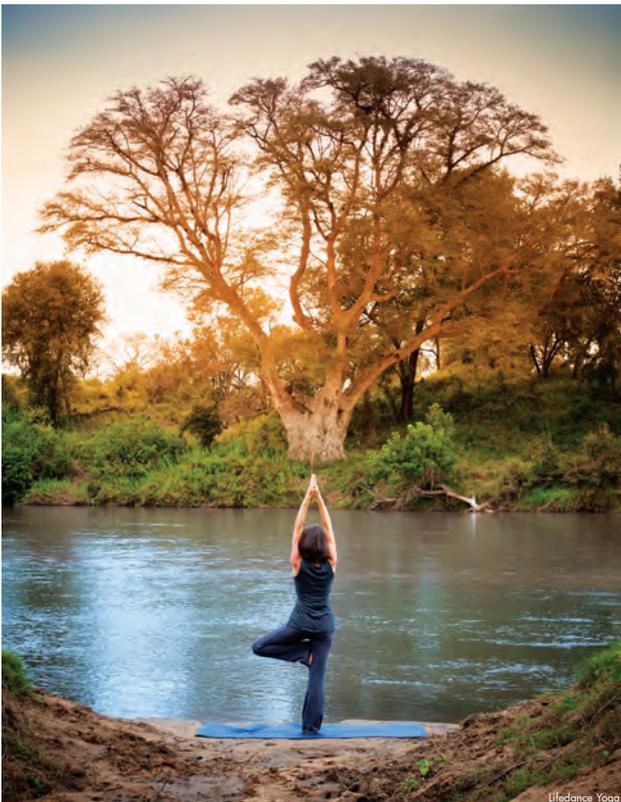
These include Camps Bay, Hout Bay, Clifton Beach and Fish Hoek, which has a popular takeaway fish and chip shop by the water, so you can tuck into some newspaper wrapped fried foods for the return leg of the journey in the comfort of your metal vestibule – no hands required.



11. MARVEL AT HUMAN HISTORY

The indigenous people of South Africa are the San, or Bushmen, and their beliefs can be found remarkably well-intact in the Drakensberg mountain range – the location of about a third of the San rock art found in South Africa. That boils down to an overwhelming 35,000 images at 600 sites. Translating as the Dragon Mountains, the Drakensbergs have a history as awe inspiring as the mythical creature itself.

It serves as a border, an artefact and a natural wonder. The cluster of green peaks rise out of otherwise flat surrounds like stalagmites in an ever-dripping cave. In fact, the Zulu name for the formations translates as battlement of spears, which aptly describes the imposing fortress structure, impenetrable enough to forge a country within South Africa – the kingdom of Lesotho is a product of this domineering mountain range in an example of topography determining sovereignty.



10. FIND YOUR ZEN ON A YOGA SAFARI

Safari in a game vehicle is meditation in itself, but combine the bush immersion with yoga and your body will be in blissed out euphoria. Renshaw Travel can make this holistic holiday a reality on an 11-day Bush to Beach Safari itinerary.

You still enjoy the regular dawn and dusk game drives that come with staying at a safari lodge, but the downtime between 10am and 3pm involves one yoga class with the intensity dependent on the mood of the guests. Five days is spent in the bush and on the sixth day guests move up to Sodwana Bay for an ocean safari and yoga sessions on the beach. The final stop is a hilltop guest lodge where the yoga takes place as the sun rises over the Indian Ocean.

9. JAZZ UP YOUR TRIP

This would be amazing as an experience in your home city, let alone in a country that is as dynamic and musical as South Africa. If you need any evidence of this, just look at the way the nation embraced vuvuzelas at the 2010 FIFA World Cup. South Africans need little excuse to make a tuneful noise and dance along with the beat. So when high quality jazz musicians come along it's quite the party.

Tour operator Coffeebeans Routes offers a Cape Jazz Safari that takes guests into the personal lounge rooms of jazz maestros around Cape Town. It feels like a privilege to be welcomed into their homes and combines all the elements of a great night – music, conversation, home-cooked food, intimacy, history and dance. Cape jazz is a genre all to itself, combining the American jazz we are most familiar with and melding it with local African Khoisan rhythms. The tour takes in the townships and ends at a local jazz club. This is not an experience you could ever hope to find without the insight of an astute tour operator. The tour takes a maximum of twelve but will take just one if you are travelling solo.



8. RUN WITH SARDINES

Imagine being one among millions in a movement so immense it can be seen from space. You can when you swim with, or should we say be swamped by, sardines in their annual migration. Between May and July tens of millions flee the cold waters off Cape Point for the warmer waters of the KwaZulu-Natal coast. Proving the metaphor of being packed in like sardines, the shoals travel in clusters that reach up to 15 kilometres in length, three kilometres in width and forty metres depth.

But that's just the sardines. Imagine the predators that see this as one giant bait ball. Massive squadrons of birds wheel overhead while dolphins, sharks and seals arc through the water for the easiest feast on record. You can snorkel, surface view or scuba dive with an operator like Seal Expeditions during this unrivalled experience. If you're lucky you will see with your own eyes what others have only seen on David Attenborough documentaries, as schools of dolphins cunningly deploy the tactic of herding the sardines from deeper water, trapping the fish at the ocean's surface before closing in for the coup de grace.

7. EAT AND SLEEP UNDER THE STARS

South Africa is the destination du jour if you want to spend your evenings al fresco.

The safari lodges are geared towards lantern-lit dinners, campfire suppers and drinks in the dark. Dinner will most likely be in a *boma*, the African term for a round corral that protects the diners and the campfire from the elements. The food is cooked to perfection on a *braai*, the African term for barbecue, and the meat more often than not comes served with salad, soup, vegetables and curries. One of the best meals I've had was a rack of lamb cooked to medium rare perfection as smoke clouded the stars overhead as I ate seated on curved canvas at a table lined with lanterns.

And if you can't get enough outdoor nocturnal action, a tree house is the place to spend a night. Safari staff will drive you to a far-flung part of the property where lions and leopards roam just before sunset, leaving you with dinner to quiet the belly, wine to bolster bravery and a just-in-case walkie talkie.

It has all the accoutrements of luxury and no barriers to the wild – walls and roofing are not included. In fact, at Lion Sands Tinyeleti Treehouse the protection you are afforded comes via the four-poster bed under mosquito net so you can see the stars as you lie back. The noises of the bush are dramatic and disconcerting but there is no thrill like it. A night in a treehouse may not provide your most restful sleep but it will be your most unforgettable.



Lion Sands Tinyeleti Treehouse



6. VOLUNTEER TO SAVE THE RHINO

Rhinos have existed for 40 million years and yet may be extinct by 2040. Public awareness has grown about the plight of these charismatic mega-herbivores – that’s an official classification by the way – and yet poaching is hard to combat. The reason? Highly organised international crime syndicates that carry it out are not necessarily perpetuated by locals. Staff at &Beyond Phinda Game Reserve, at the coalface of rhino protection, said that the poachers are not dirt poor as many may assume. “They are almost like a gangster, involved in underground crime,” a park ranger said.

Come the full moon tensions are high. They call it the poacher’s moon, and a neighbouring game reserve lost a rhino the night before my visit. But all is not lost. The conservation fight continues, with some success. Volunteers can visit Phinda Game Reserve for a week or six months and they will work with the monitoring team. “The volunteer program is like a gap year but not just for young people. We’ve had post-doctorates here,” the park ranger said. The opportunity is organised by African Conservation Experience and the work includes behaviour observation, population monitoring, tracking and identifying the black and white rhinos of Phinda. The ecosystem around the rhinos is also crucial, and volunteers will help with elephant, big cat and predator monitoring, including the three lion prides and cheetah colonies. Elephant contraception, spotted hyena identification as well as leopard camera trap surveys are all par for the course too.

5. TAP INTO HIPSTER JO'BURG

Johannesburg has become a creative hub as well as the nation's financial capital. Cape Town might have the beauty, but Jozi – as the locals call it – has a gritty street-inspired creative scene that extends to architecture, fashion, design, performance and art.

The Maboneng precinct is a trendy neighbourhood of street-level independent design stores, eateries and galleries like Arts on Main. Here you will find Black Coffee, a renowned local brand with one-off designs and LoveJozi, which is a socially aware unisex t-shirt brand. For the ultimate in hipster chic, there's even a bicycle shop called Whippet Cycling Co that specialises in obscure vintage parts. Then there's the cheeky gallery space that is I was shot in Joburg, a community project that arms street children with disposable cameras and displays their work. "We learnt how to search for beauty, composition and interesting subject matter where we thought there were none," founder Bernard Viljoen said.

Market on Main is a weekly market also found in Maboneng. Plus there are free weekly art tours in the precinct of AREA3 taking in street art as well as the historic Jewish suburb of Doornfontein. The Orbit Jazz Club, meanwhile, is one of the trendiest nightspots in town, serving up local jazz performances to audiences from Tuesday to Sunday.



South African Tourism



4. CHECK OUT DESIGNER CAPE TOWN

Cape Town is a World Design Capital for 2014 and is pulling out all the stops to woo the designer crowd, from hipster hangouts to arty spaces. Cape Town was awarded the design honour thanks to a campaign to use design for social transformation with the tagline “Live design. Transform life.”

The city will run 460 change-themed projects throughout the year. A way to get to grips with the large-scale event is to take a tour with Coffeebeans Routes who were part responsible for Cape Town being chosen for the honour. They packaged an itinerary for the World Design Capital judges and now offer a four-day tour that visits the city's creative nexuses. Guests can see the design projects and then meet the minds behind them as part of the tour.

One project that epitomises design as change is the Lynedoch EcoVillage which is sustainable and socially aware. The village has subsidised housing, a school for the children of local workers as well as an environmental institute. The Old Biscuit Mill is literally that; with the shops and restaurants needing to pass the criteria of being original and innovative. Then there's The Exposure Gallery, a store dedicated to quirky photography brands like Lomography. On Saturdays the Mill holds the Neighbourgoods Market, which has more than 100 stalls serving up fine-food, organic fare and baked goods. It's very much a paddock to plate philosophy embraced by the Cape Town community.



3. CONNECT IN THE TOWNSHIPS

You have two options when choosing a township tour. The first is a drivethrough visit and the second is a real connection with the community.

The latter is offered by Jorvan Tours, where you can give back on a cultural township experience with funds directed to the not-for-profit Jorvan Community outreach organisation, which supports shelters for abused children, a community soup kitchen and many other worthy programs. "You won't be doing a human safari today. Our tour is very interactive and very real," my Jorvan tour guide Brian said.

On our tour we visit the Dare to Stand Out educational program which Brian founded to help gifted school children from the townships enter university. Brian and his wife, a local teacher, operate a shared house for students from single mother families to study during the week and go home over weekends. "The focus of the program is children from single mother homes and child-headed families – a personal crusade for Brian, who grew up without a father. "We used to pray someone would help us and our mum," Brian said. Past students have gone on to university, the most recent as a chemistry student.

The township visit I take also includes a trip to an Educare centre that looks after young children and nurtures a youth choir for township children. All the Educare centre income comes from selling CDs of the choir's music. We are treated to a performance by the girls, and their joyous faces, clapping, dances and powerful voices provided an emotional climax that was a stand-out of the trip.

You see, the purpose of Jorvan Tour's township itinerary is not to depress the visitor but to show the realities and engage on a real level. I left feeling thoroughly uplifted.



2. GET TO KNOW YOUR GUIDE ON SAFARI

Your safari guide will be your personal encyclopaedia, entertainer, and all-round outdoor enthusiast. They are the intrinsic link between a safari-goer and the bush of Africa, brimming with know-how but also the ability to engage with all. They serve you coffee and rusks at 6am before a morning drive and will regale you with tales of Africa over a campfire dinner at night.

A great guide picks up on group dynamics and caters the drive to make the safari special for each person – even when you have a ten-time safari tripper and a first-timer in the same vehicle. Or a wife desperate to see the big cats and a husband interested only in birds. It has to be said that their expertise and excitement is infectious. “You become a guide because you’re passionate about the bush, the people and conservation,” &Beyond Phinda game reserve guide Devon Myers said.

Safari company &Beyond trains its guides to the highest level. Our guide Warrick has the ability to drive while looking at us and not the road – that’s how well he knows this terrain. To become an &Beyond safari guide new recruits are challenged to lone bush survival for ten days. Warrick bumped into a pride of lions on his first day. You’d have to be committed to a guide career if you are prepared to stare down one of these fearsome big cats. The lioness came at a standing, unarmed Warrick with a stiff-legged, low to the ground run, tail flicking. He yelled and walked backwards 40 metres until she backed away. “Looking back it was scary but at that particular time your adrenalin kicks in and I remember being so calm,” he said. It would have to be one of the more gruelling training programs to become a safari guide but it produces high quality bushmen.

When planning your safari, be sure to speak to the lodge to ensure you have the right guide for your needs. Some specialise in walking safaris, while others are expert cat-spotters. Safari is an experience that bonds everyone in the vehicle so be prepared to leave with new friends and stories aplenty.

1. ADMIRE MADIBA'S LEGACY

It's hard to imagine another man so integral to a modern nation's identity. Revered in life, Nelson Mandela's death united South Africa and the world in grief and veneration for his teachings.

Understanding Madiba's lifework is crucial to understanding South Africa. While no country is a utopia, in South Africa indigenous tribes live side by side with Afrikaans, Malays, Indians, Cape coloured and European whites. "I detest racialism, because I regard it as a barbaric thing, whether it comes from a black man or a white man," Mandela said. At the end of apartheid, when racial tensions escalated into violence, it was Mandela who made this multicultural country unite. "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others," he said.

Today visitors can track Madiba's life journey in four provinces – Western Cape, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. The Western Cape is the place to visit for Madiba's incarceration sites, such as Robben Island and Pollsmoor prison, where the physical long walk to freedom took place. Gauteng province, home to Pretoria and Johannesburg, is where the majority of Mandela tributes and history is to be found. There's his former home on Vilakazi Street, the Mandela House museum, the Apartheid museum as well as a square, statue and bridge named in his honour. KwaZulu-Natal is where he was taken into custody while the Eastern Cape is home to his university and a striking voting line sculpture that silhouettes the coast of Port Elizabeth.

"There is no passion to be found playing small – in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living," Mandela said. It could be an invitation to visit his home country, a place where daily life is amplified beyond measure. South Africa is geared toward the exceptional, whether it's the people, the pursuits or the places. It is a country as warm and welcoming as you'd hope to find with a backdrop of grand scale nature. So do as Mandela encouraged and play big on a trip to South Africa.





 IMAGE CREDITS
Nelson Mandela Foundation/Matthew Willman



SAFARI SPLENDOUR

SOUTH AFRICA HAS WORLD-RENOWNED GAME RESERVES AND NATIONAL PARKS. TARA HARRISON PROFILES FOUR OF THE BEST SPOTS TO EXPERIENCE NATURE AT ITS BEST



KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

PICK IT IF: You want to see the Big Five for the first time

Kruger is the name you associate with safari in South Africa. The largest national park in the country, it is located to the far north-east, covering territory in both Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces.

While you can self-drive the public roads as a budget option, the experience offered by safari lodges cannot be compared. The best lodges border their private reserves in Kruger National Park so the specialist rangers and spotters can go off-road on their own land. In Kruger you are restricted to what you can see from the road. The best perk of private reserves is in the name – you experience the sightings in privacy.

Jock's Safari Lodge is located in the borders of Kruger and offers rustic bungalows with roll-top baths, outdoor showers and a view over the riverbank, which reels in roaming wildlife.

SABI SANDS

PICK IT IF: You want to spot a leopard

Sabi Sands is the oldest private reserve in the country and it is the largest conservation region in South Africa thanks to a link to the Limpopo Transfrontier Park. The environment is managed according to best practice with community involvement and anti-poaching patrols.

Sabi Sands is also renowned for its sightings of the elusive leopard. It is also home to some of the most exclusive safari lodges in South Africa. The lodges are never ostentatious, mind you, and they aim to integrate nature into the design. Londolozi's Tree Camp puts you at leopard height in canopy-top bungalows with private swimming pools and contemplation decks.





Madikwe Game Reserve

MADIKWE

PICK IT IF: You want to see wild dogs
This private reserve is the place to be for wild dog sightings, with three packs marauding the plains of Madikwe. These endangered animals are rare but if you see one, you see many, making for an enthralling sighting.

Madikwe is not as well known as those previously listed and yet it is the fifth largest game reserve in the country, covering 75,000 hectares. It is a malaria-free zone, with the land bordering Botswana, near the Kalahari desert.

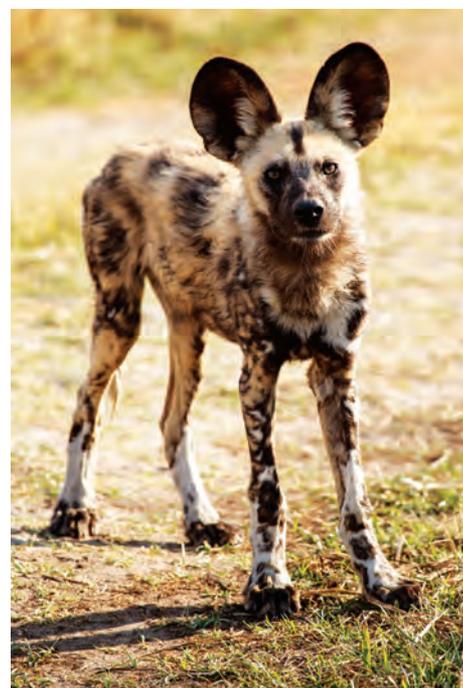
Today the reserve sustains 66 mammal species and 300 bird species. Madikwe Game Reserve caters perfectly for families and couples.



Madikwe Hills



Madikwe Game Reserve



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PILANESBERG

PICK IT IF: You have a tight time frame

Acknowledged as the most accessible national park in South Africa and the most frequented, Pilianesberg is three hours drive from Johannesburg.

Sandwiched between wet lowveld terrain and the arid Kalahari, you will find the big five and over 360 bird species. The park is smaller than others but this means the concentration of wildlife is higher, offering better sighting opportunities.

The landscape is striking as it is the site of a volcano crater and there are unobtrusive photographic hides scattered throughout the park for guests devoted to securing a perfect shot. Elephant back safaris are also available for those who eschew vehicles for a close-up with one of the big five. Shepherd's Tree Game Lodge and Buffalo Thorn Lodge are both great options for an action packed stay.



Tropoover

On your way to South Africa



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For more details contact your Travel Agent or Air Mauritius. *Airfare includes taxes and is subject to availability and change.



JOHANNESBURG

SOUTH AFRICA'S LARGEST CITY IS BECOMING ITS MOST VIBRANT AND CREATIVE. HERE'S YOUR CHANCE TO EXPLORE ITS HIGHLIGHTS



THE TOP 5

1. Cycle through Soweto and visit Mandela's house or bungee jump off Orlando Towers
2. Explore the boutiques and bars of Parkhurst and Maboneng Precinct
3. Experience South Africa's history firsthand at the Apartheid Museum
4. Visit Joburg's progressive heart at the Newtown Cultural Precinct
5. Shop your way through the trendy suburbs of Rose Bank, Sandton and Melrose Arch



SLEEP

54 on Bath is a stylish hotel that combines the convenience of a business hotel with the artistic flourishes of a boutique property. Located in Rosebank, it is close to the famous markets and, for those after some extra retail therapy, is connected to the shopping centre.

The Residence Boutique hotel is a different perspective on Johannesburg, located in the historic district of Houghton, a suburb that Nelson Mandela resided in. Tailored to be a home away from home, the property has extensive bougainvillea-strewn gardens.

The 12 Decades Art Hotel is an avant-garde affair with 16 rooms that are themed around the 12 decades of the city's history, from 1886 to 2006. There's a room devoted to the randlords, the gold rush, apartheid, 80s fashion and fledgling democracy. It's an entirely new way to understand the city from the comfort of your pillow.

EAT

Cube Tasting Kitchen is a 30-diner restaurant that experiments with food, offering a ten course seasonal menu that involves three hours of consumption. You can also bring your own bottles of wine at no extra charge.

District Six Eatery is a must for South Africa's speciality fusion cuisine Cape Malay. Enjoy a traditional serve of *bredie*, a stew of meat and vegetables. Follow it up with a native milk tart and a *koesters*, a syrup twisted doughnut with spice and coconut.

The Leopard is a restaurant where the ingredients rule. Fresh, sustainably sourced and seasonal are the buzzwords that ring true at this dining establishment. Think steak tartare, local mussels and a dessert of halva and rose syrup.



Main:
Johannesburg's
Apartheid
Museum

**Above and
bottom left:**
The trendsetting
54 on Bath
Photos: 54 on Bath

Below:
Johannesburg's
multi-faceted
culinary scene
Photos: Market on Main



CAPE TOWN

CAPE TOWN IS ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL CITIES IN THE WORLD. BLESSED WITH A COASTLINE THAT RIVALS RIO'S, YOU DON'T NEED TO LOOK HARD TO HAVE AN UNFORGETTABLE STAY



Main: More Quarters apartment hotel
Photo: More Quarters

Above right: The funky interior stylings of Blackheath Lodge
Photo: Blackheath Lodge

Centre left: Cape Town's unmistakable Table Mountain

Centre right: Action from the Old Biscuit Mill
Photo: South African Tourism

Bottom right: Penguins roaming the beaches outside Cape Town



THE TOP 5

1. Climbing Table Mountain is a must-do, while you can also scale her neighbour Lion's Head, for a great view over the city
2. Flex your credit card at the Victoria and Albert Waterfront and the boutiques of Kloof and Long Street
3. Meet one of Robben Island's former political prisoners on a tour of the infamous penitentiary
4. Sunbathe with the beautiful people at Camps Bay and Clifton Beach
5. Take a day trip to Cape Point and visit the penguins at Boulders Beach



SLEEP

More Quarters is an apartment hotel in the heart of Cape Town's hip Kloof Street. You check in at a Cape Dutch terrace and the rooms are either terraces, lofts or cottages with street-front access, so you feel like a local.

The Table Bay Hotel has a plum position at the end of Cape Town's Victoria and Alfred Waterfront. It is a decadent property styled like an English manor house, with floral wallpaper and upholstery. You can't forget where you are, however, as all views are dominated by the great Table Mountain.

Blackheath Lodge has rave reviews on Tripadvisor and has pushed its ranking to the second best hotel in Cape Town. This is an intimate Victorian guesthouse with just 12 rooms that offers personalised service and excellent value for money.

EAT

The Test Kitchen is part of the Old Biscuit Mill in Woodstock. Heston Blumenthal no less has lauded chef Luke Dale-Roberts for his work. "If there is no immediate smile as we create a new dish then we are on the wrong track," Dale-Roberts said.

The Roundhouse is the place to go for a meal with a stunning backdrop. Situated atop Camps Bay it was once used as a maritime lookout. The restaurant uses locally sourced ingredients such as Saldanha Bay black mussels with oak smoked butter to produce cracking fare.

Gold restaurant offers diners a pan-African experience, from Cape town to Timbuktu, complete with music and a hand-washing ceremony. The 14-course meal includes dishes from Namibia, Mozambique and Morocco as well as Cape Malay fare. Speaking of which, Bo-Kaap is also an excellent spot for traditional Cape Malay fare.





THE TOP 5

1. Stroll through the town centres of Stellenbosch, Franschhoek and Paarl with their gorgeous eateries and shops
2. See the vineyards from a different perspective. Why not go horse riding, quad biking, or jump on the hop on hop off wine tram?
3. Have a picnic lunch at Boschdental or Rickety Bridge estates
4. Taste a wine and chocolate pairing at Waterford Estate
5. Visit the Spice Route for a sensory journey through food, spice and wine



WINELANDS

VINEYARDS MEET MOUNTAINS AND WHITEWASHED DUTCH ARCHITECTURE IN THE SERENE CAPE WINELAND REGION. SCENERY AND VITICULTURE HAVE NEVER SAT SO WELL TOGETHER





SLEEP

Left and above:

Babylonstoren winery and hotel
Photos: Babylonstoren winery and hotel

Above right: Dutch architecture in Franschhoek

La Residence in Franschhoek is Elton John's home of choice in South Africa. He even has his favourite room, furnished with oriental antiques and complete with a silver framed photo signed by the man himself. This is luxury so relaxed that guests were dining in their dressing gowns and slippers at midday when we arrived. It certainly is five-star without the pretension.

Akademie Street Guesthouse has rave reviews from guests and hotel reviewers alike. You can walk into village-like Franschhoek from the boutique hotel which offers rooms and cottages that feel intimate and homely from the get-go. Like La Residence it is filled with one-off antiques and furnished to an award-winning standard.

EAT

Fairview might be a winery but its food is as highly regarded as its vintages. Whet your appetite with a fromage and wine pairing – half a dozen cheeses served on a wooden board that perfectly match each wine, from dry white to sweet red. Then dine in the Goatshed restaurant to sample even more of Fairview's cheeses on a platter.

Babel Restaurant is found at Babylonstoren winery and hotel. Set on a farm, the food you eat at the restaurant proves the notion that less is more. Emphasis is placed on high quality ingredients mostly sourced from the farm itself. Vegies are served skin-on and guests can dine indoors or under a plane tree outside.



GARDEN ROUTE

THE ULTIMATE SELF-DRIVE JOURNEY, THE GARDEN ROUTE IS 300 KILOMETRES OF UNFORGETTABLE SURF, FOREST AND BUSH FROM MOSSEL BAY TO KNYSNA



SLEEP

Start your road trip with a good kip at the Protea Hotel Mossel Bay. It is one of the oldest buildings in the town and many rooms have views over the ocean and harbour. Don't leave without trying the restaurant, which is held in as high a regard as the hotel itself.

Knysna is a forest-lovers paradise, so spoil yourself with a treetop cabin overlooking the lagoon and ocean at Phantom Forest Eco-Reserve. There are three tree suite choices: classic, camp or Moroccan style. They are romantic retreats with outdoor spa baths, four poster beds and natural fibres.

You're near the end of the line at Plettenburg Bay so spoil yourself at the Grand Cafe and Rooms. This hotel is what happens when *Phantom of the Opera* styling meets Morocco and the Indian Ocean. Buckets of red roses and dripping candelabras are littered throughout the property of only seven guest rooms and it is framed around the ocean of Plettenburg Bay, the Tsitsikamma Mountains and Keurbooms lagoon.

EAT

Nguni restaurant in Plettenberg Bay offers proper South African fare, which means plenty of meat. Try the smoked ostrich, springbok carpaccio, biltong salad or a steak with coriander and caper salsa. The restaurant is set in a century-old dairy and you can choose to dine inside or out.

The TransKaroo restaurant in the Great Brak River requires a turn-off from the Garden Route, but it is well worth it. Located in an historic train station, this eatery is full of character with food to match. Must-tries include the sashimi and the Transkaroo lamb neck. The menu is seasonal and you can even enjoy dinner on the train platform.

Those wanting to opt for a casual meal in laid-back Knysna should head to Freshline Fisheries. Eat outside at tables on sand with campfires and blankets at night. You can get battered hake for less than three dollars, freshly sourced from the ocean that day.





THE TOP 5

1. Mossel Bay – Try South Africa's longest sand boarding ride, the Dragon Dune, then sail to Seal Island to spot these amazing mammals
2. Knysna – Take a sunset champagne cruise to Knysna Heads then dine at a Knysna Oyster specialty restaurant
3. Oudshoorn – Visit ostriches and explore the amazing Congo Caves
4. Plettenberg Bay – Try skydiving, or if you're not game, visit one of the many picturesque hiking trails
5. Tsitsikamma Forest – Zipline through the forest, try tubing along Storms River Mouth, or bungee jump off Bloukrans Bridge



PORT ELIZABETH

If you travel further east from the Garden Route you will reach South Africa's fifth largest town, Port Elizabeth.

It is known as the friendly city and aside from welcoming locals, Nelson Mandela Bay has 40km of beaches so there are water sports aplenty. Addo Elephant National Park, meanwhile, trumps every other game reserve with the Big Seven. Here the Big Five sees the addition of some marine heavy hitters including the great white shark and the southern right whale.

World renowned surfing haven Jeffrey's Bay is also nearby. Wave catching purists cannot afford to miss this hallowed site.

And you can forget Route 66 – Port Elizabeth has Route 67 – one for each year Nelson Mandela dedicated to public service. And in a fitting touch to the political giant, for each of these years there is an artwork influenced by his life and work.



Above: The Garden Route is a vibrant and colourful natural expanse that never fails to delight visitors

Left: Evening descends on attractive Port Elizabeth



AFRICAN WARMTH MEETS SURF CULTURE AND INDIAN FLAVOUR IN COSMOPOLITAN DURBAN. CHECK OUT THE BEST OF THE CITY'S EXPERIENCES

THE TOP 5

1. Visit Durban's premier beaches along the Golden Mile including North Beach, South Beach and if you want to catch a wave, try Bay of Plenty and Dairy
2. Check out the boutiques and bars of Florida Road
3. Visit Ushaka Marine World for a day of family fun or for some great restaurants
4. If you feel like a permanent holiday vibe visit Umhlanga Rocks
5. Take a day trip to the Drakensberg Mountains or visit Shakaland for an authentic Zulu experience



SLEEP

The Oyster Box Hotel combines colonial style with a beachside chic. It's a surprise find, and feels like a hotel in Panama or the Caribbean plucked from a century ago. A lipstick red lighthouse in front of the hotel steals the limelight while all the ocean view rooms have white plantation shutters and are as romantic as they come.

Suncoast Towers is an art deco hotel that you cannot miss in Durban, as it is the only high-rise along Durban's Golden Mile that is lit up by neon lights. This property is the perfect option for a relaxed city stay.

Then there's St James on Venice, an historic boutique hotel that has just 15 rooms. The feel is more intimate guest house than hotel and it is located in Morningside, which means guests will experience suburban Durban life.





EAT

House of Curries is a Durban institution, with a pub-feel that belies the quality of its food. Here they serve mini Bunny Chows, Durban's dish of hollowed out soft white bread stuffed with spicy curry and served with three sides. The Chip Chow of chips smothered in curry and cheese is also a crowd pleaser.

The Grill Room at the Oyster Box hotel is a fine dining restaurant with a vibrant atmosphere. Remarkably busy on a Monday night, the restaurant attracts locals and travellers alike. Opt for the oysters, which are harvested from the hotel's own oyster beds.

The Pot and Kettle is the perfect lunch destination for a road trip to the Valley of 1000 Hills. One of the signature dishes is a salad with the usual suspects – plus banana and bacon. The fare is wholesome and comforting and comes with a great view.



Main:

Durban's shimmering Golden Mile skyline

Photo: South African Tourism

Below left:

Interior and exterior views of the Oyster Box Hotel in Durban

Photos: Oyster Box Hotel

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A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO SOUTH AFRICA

CAR HIRE

South African roads are easy to navigate and of a high standard. They also drive on the same side as Australia which makes self-drive a cinch. Global car hire companies such as Europcar and Avis operate throughout the country.

CURRENCY

One South African rand is worth roughly 10 cents so knock off the last digit for an estimation of the price in Australian dollars. South Africa offers great value for money, with a main meal at a good quality restaurant averaging around \$10 and a one night stay in a five-star hotel averaging \$150.

CRIME

Take the regular precautions and be aware of your surroundings. In an emergency call 10177 and for police dial 101 111.

POWER

You will need to take a round three-prong adaptor with you although some of the high-end hotels have international adaptors built into the wall power outlets.

TAXIS

Taxis in south Africa are safe and affordable. Your hotel concierge can order your transport, otherwise consult the taxi numbers below to the right.

TAX RETURN

VAT of 14% on goods totalling more than 250 rand in one transaction can be claimed back at the airport. Keep the purchase in your carry-on luggage as you will have to show it along with the receipt.

TIPPING

Tip around 10% to 20% at restaurants, for taxis, safari guides and spotters. Tip car guards and petrol attendants 10 rand. Luggage porters are content with 10 rand per bag.

VISA

Or should we say no visa – those staying less than 90 days do not require a visa.

SPEAK THE LINGO

“Braai” means barbecue and South Africans take their braai-ing very seriously

“Cooldrink” needs no further explanation. Ask for it and receive a soft drink

“Eish” is a drawn out response to shock or surprise

“Ja” is how South Africans say yes. It’s oddly catchy

“Just now” is not quite now but could be never

“Lekker” is Afrikaans for all that is great and good

“Robot” is a traffic light of the red, green and amber variety

“Yawellnofine” is pretty much a way of saying it’s not fine

GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND

Getting to South Africa is easy. The country boasts three international airports – OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg, Cape Town International Airport, and King Shaka International Airport in Durban. The lion’s share of international airlines flying to South Africa fly into OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg. A direct flight to South Africa takes 14 hours there, and 11 hours to return.

Airlines from Australia and New Zealand:

South African Airways (direct from Australia), Qantas (direct from Australia), Emirates, Singapore Airlines, Thai Airways, Cathay Pacific, Air Mauritius.

South African domestic airlines: South African Airways, Mango, SA Express, SA Airlink, Kulula, British Airways, Com Air and Fed Air.

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