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travel

update

ISSUE 1

48 HOUR
STOPOVER

Singapore •
London •
Abu Dhabi •

REASONS TO VISIT

Mauritius

The perfect tour
IS IT THE
ONE FOR YOU

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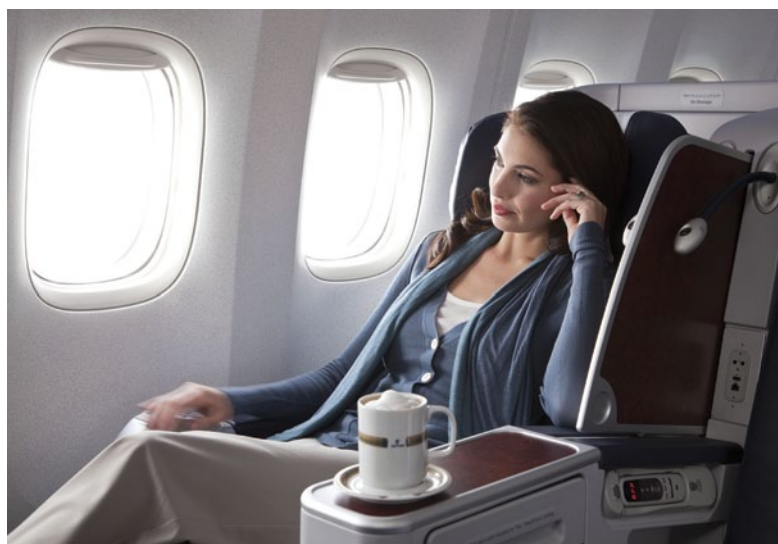
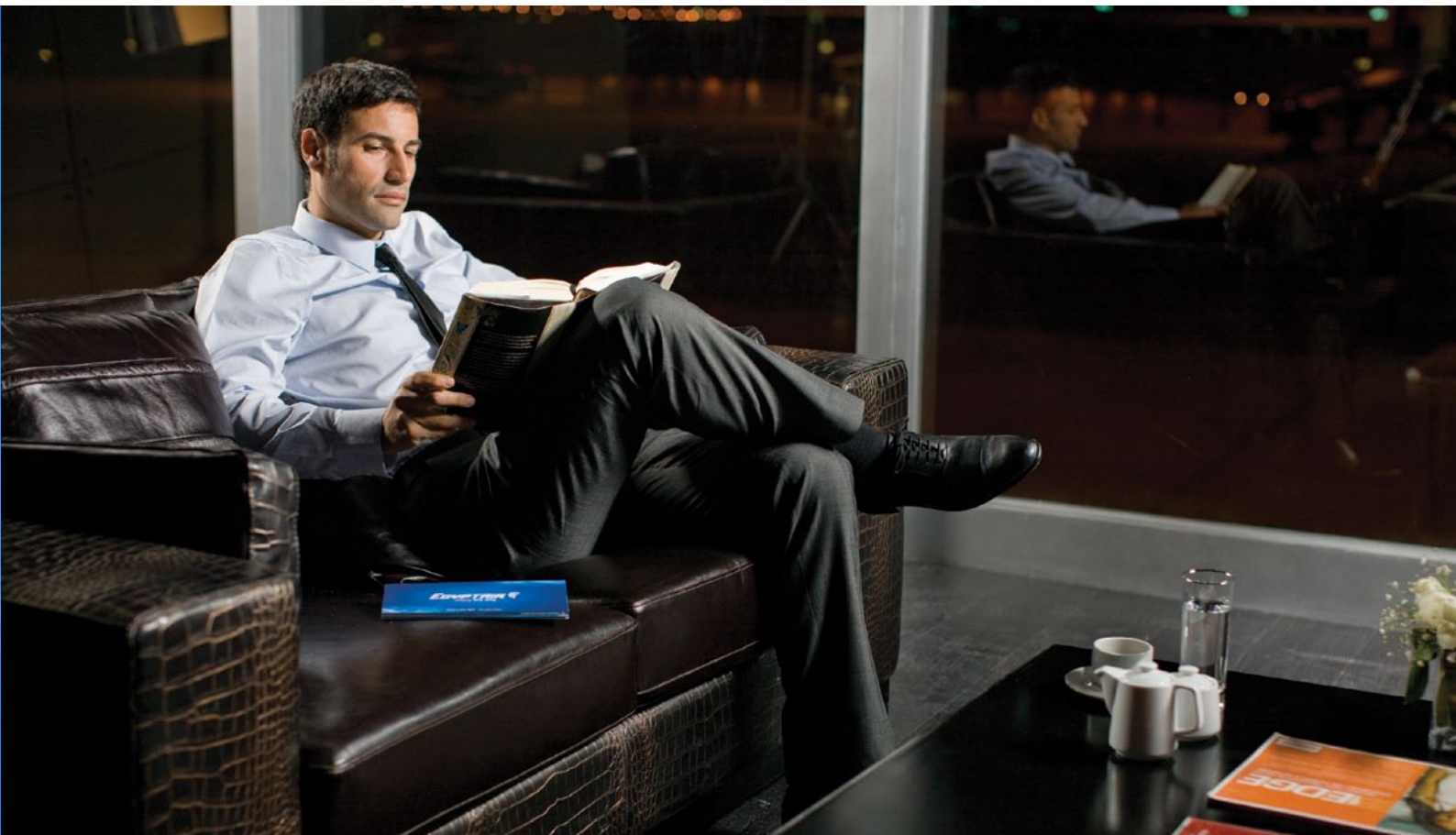
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01 Dec	4	Maputo & Portuguese Island	R 5540	R 5120	R 7300		
05 Dec	3	Portuguese Island	R 4570	R 5070	R 8410		
08 Dec	4	Portuguese & Inhaca Islands	R 5650	R 6190	R 9380		
15 Dec	4	Maputo & Portuguese Island	R 7960	R 8060	R 12100		
22 Dec	7	Portuguese Island, Anakoa & Fort Dauphin	R 13370	R 16860	R 23570		
29 Dec	11	Reunion & Mauritius	R 20840	R 25160	R 34610		
19 Jan	5	Cape Town, Walvis Bay, Luderitz	R 5450	R 6500	R 9430		
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09 Feb	7	Portuguese Island, Anakoa & Fort Dauphin	R 7430	R 8950	R 13520		
13 Mar	7	Portuguese Island, Anakoa & Fort Dauphin	R 6670	R 8690	R 13520		
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TRAVEL UPDATE

is an online marketing and media innovation as well as social networking platform for the travel trade and the end users that provides access to useful information, travel specials, competitions, promotions, on-going incentives, and product knowledge campaigns from leading travel suppliers in South Africa and around the world.

Our aim is to connect travel suppliers, travel agents and end users through the use of online marketing, social media technology and strategic brand representation. Our team of sales executives provides exposure and brochure distribution through in-store sales calls to travel agencies

throughout Southern Africa. We assist in effectively introducing, educating and regularly updating the South African travel trade and end users on the unique selling points of your products and services.

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is South Africa's first free travel directory and free travel magazine to the end user as well as the travel agents, which empowers your travel business and gives it the right exposure and the branding you are looking for. In addition to our online initiatives, our team of sales executives provides extensive exposure for our clients through in-store sales calls to travel agents throughout South Africa on a monthly basis.

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The quarterly magazine
South Africa's first free travel directory and travel magazine provides useful travel information, travel specials, competitions, promotions and product knowledge from leading travel suppliers, as well as info. on new developments, tourism news, airline news, and what you need to know before you go.

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- Post useful info, specials, incentives and competition updates in real-time to Travel Trade and end users.
- Give users the ability to interact by subgroup and special interests.
- Reach users by featuring your brand and products on the home page.

Editor's LETTER

You are holding the first free travel magazine, *Travel Update*, in your hands, and we hope that you will take an 'armchair' travel experience with us. Although the economy has taken a huge knock in the past few years, travel seems to be the only thing still going strong if I look at all the specials that travel agents and tour operators are offering on the social media and in newspapers and magazines. Just returned from a trip to the Maldives and Dubai myself, the Emirates flights were packed to capacity, not a single seat was open. This means that travel is alive and kicking, and we are going to bring you interesting travel stories and news regarding the travel, hotel and leisure industry.

A few travel tips from my side: make sure you allow yourself more than enough time to check in, go through security and passport control if you are flying internationally. Wear comfortable shoes and attire – no use wanting to look as if you just stepped off the modelling ramp and arriving at your destination with stilettos in hand as you could not get them on again after taking them off to catch a nap. Drink lots of water so that you don't dehydrate on a long-haul flight. If you can, try and take a nap. Most importantly, use good, comfortable, easy to use luggage. Sometimes you have no choice but to carry or pull this yourself, and if you have huge, bulky luggage you will be in a bad mood before getting to your accommodation.

In this first issue of *Travel Update* we would like you to discover some exotic locations through our eyes. We give you tips on where to go and what to see when you only have a short lay-over in a stunning country.

We are already busy with the next issue and look forward to hearing from you and getting your travel ideas and stories. Any suggestions that you have on travel or something you found interesting on a trip that you took – please share with us at elna@travelupdate.co.za



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Cocoa and shea butters combine with olive and jojoba to make a light, soothing body balm. The fragrance is tropical, cocoa and orange, yet there's a Balinese hint of lime and ylang ylang, floral tones of lavender, and the apple blossom scent of tanacetum annum. Lavender and tanacetum are naturally anti-inflammatory, therefore soothing for mild cases of sunburn. **R78.75** available at Wellness Warehouse and Dis-chem.



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48-HOUR STOPOVER



If plenty of razzmatazz with a side order of relaxation is what you're looking for in a stopover or exotic city break, then Singapore could be just the ticket. A shopaholic's nirvana, you can barely turn a corner without bumping into another super-mall. Throw in an awe-inspiring skyline, tropical beach, world-class theme park, gloriously green gardens, a sprinkling of temples plus colonial treasures, and you soon have a packed itinerary.

WHAT TO DO

- If you want culture, you can't go past Chinatown, perhaps the most multicultural part of the city. This vibrant hotspot is home to more shops and cafes than you can shake a stick at, but it's the history and culture that really sets it apart. The Buddha's Tooth Relic Temple is a definite must-see.
- Head to Maxwell Road Food Centre for lunch. Catch the MRT (Singapore's metro) from Chinatown station to Orchard Road – Singapore's answer to Oxford Street. More than 20 shopping malls, studded with Times Square-style animated billboards, lure you to hammer the plastic in designer emporiums and high street fashion chain stores.
- Explore Sentosa's varied attractions. Visit Fort Siloso, a World War II defence, sign up for the zip wire, brave the iFLY simulated skydive or head to Universal Studios Singapore.
- Take a taxi across town to the delightful Singapore Botanic Gardens, home to a forest of delicate blooms in the National Orchid Garden. Go local for supper, grabbing yourself a picnic table at Makansutra, Glutton's Bay.

MUST-SEES

- Sentosa Island located just half a kilometre off the southern coast is the adventure capital of Singapore. Attractions range from the Butterfly Park and Fort Siloso to Wavehouse, Maritime Experiential Museum and Universal Studios. It's easy to spend your entire trip here. Singapore Flyer, a giant ferris wheel that occupies a commanding location next to the Marina Bay Sands, offers gorgeous views of the city and surrounds. There's also a popular dining precinct on the ground level.
- Gardens by the Bay is a 54-hectare oasis that feels like a real-life version of Avatar's Pandora. From the imposing canopy of steel trees to the giant glass conservatories, it's completely out of this world.
- iFly is for those who want to go skydiving but are afraid of heights. Experience the thrill of weightlessness without the danger.

TIP

- Take a spare foldable bag along for all your extra shopping!

To truly experience a destination, people always say you need at least 48 hours to immerse yourself in the sights, sounds, smells and tastes... and even then you're only just scratching the surface.



London is often a stopover point for many before continuing on to the rest of Western Europe. Whether you have an extended layover or want to make the most of a quick trip, there's always something new to check out.

WHAT TO DO

- There is no shortage of tourist staples: Buckingham Palace, Piccadilly Circus, Marble Arch, Big Ben, the iconic red double-decker bus. London is not for the faint-hearted or poor; start off with a proper English breakfast and order a fry-up. After breakfast, make your first stop the world-class British Museum, home to the spoils of Britain's wide-ranging history. Check out the Rosetta Stone, Egyptian mummies and the Elgin Marbles, a collection amassed by Lord Elgin in the 19th century that includes sculptures from the Parthenon in Athens.
- From there head to Covent Garden for a stroll around the cobbled piazza, and then pop in to BB Bakery for tea and a macaroon. In Trafalgar Square there's often something going on, from a food festival to a demonstration. Take in the atmosphere and keep your eyes peeled for the world's smallest police station tucked away in the south-east corner of the square. Nelson's Column guards the square, with four golden lions around its base.
- As evening approaches head east to the newly opened Shard building, officially the tallest in Western Europe. At its summit is The View from The Shard, and sunset is the best time to visit. Make the trip up to the top before darkness descends to take in a view of everything within a 40-mile radius, and then watch the sun sink and the city's skyscrapers and Canary Wharf light up the night.
- Head out for an early-morning visit to Westminster Abbey, before the crowds arrive. This 700-year-old building is the coronation church (and location of Prince William and Kate Middleton's 2011 wedding).

MUST-SEE

- Madame Tussauds London is a museum and tourist attraction housed in the former London Planetarium. It is known for recreating life-size wax models of celebrities, and also houses its famous Chamber of Horrors.

TIPS

- Open-top bus tours showcase the best of London's tourist attractions. Listen to colourful tales of London's rich 2000-year history and take in famous landmarks such as Buckingham Palace, Big Ben and Westminster Abbey. Choose from a 24- or 48-hour ticket to discover the sights of London at your own pace. The hop-on, hop-off bus tour also includes a free cruise along the River Thames, a selection of guided walking tours and a Big Bus voucher booklet that offers a range of discounts at attractions, shops and restaurants. The tour offers the choice of a recorded commentary in a range of languages or a live commentary.

48-HOUR STOPOVER



ABU DHABI

Visitors looking for a mix of futuristic flair, up and coming development and historical charm might enjoy spending some time in Abu Dhabi, capital of the United Arab Emirates. Abu Dhabi is the largest and wealthiest of the UAE's seven emirates and has most of the country's oil reserves. While it's not nearly as cosmopolitan as Dubai, the emirate can be more liveable. Since the weather heats up in the summer, the best time to visit is October until April.

WHAT TO DO

- Visit Yas Island and take photos of the flash boats at the Yas Marina, as well as exploring Yas Hotel, a futuristic building next to the Formula 1 track for Abu Dhabi's Grand Prix. Try the sweet and sour chicken at Noodle Box, a contemporary Asian restaurant that boasts an outside terrace facing the track.
- Attend a live concert at the Yas Arena, which has hosted past performances by Thirty Seconds to Mars and Eric Clapton. Later in the evening go to the Skylite lounge back at Yas Island Hotel and knock back a mojito on the rooftop. Dress is smart casual.
- Soak up some morning sun by visiting Al Raha Beach, a popular public beach close to the city centre. For the ladies-only beach, head to West Corniche Road leading to the Abu Dhabi Ladies Club.
- For lunch try UAE's nationwide chain Automatic Restaurant in the Al Markaziyah area. This Lebanese restaurant offers some of the best shwarmas, shish tawouk (a traditional Arabic shish kebab) and hummus in town.
- Go to the famous Emirates Palace where world leaders meet. Have afternoon tea in the main lobby. Not only does the menu offer some of the most delicate sandwiches, but the signature cappuccino is topped with gold flakes.

MUST-SEES

- Khalifa Park, a half a million square metre area with a museum, a 3200-seat amphitheatre, sports area, water features, a monorail, and fountains, sculptures, theme parks and restaurants. Take a ride on the ferris wheel, appreciate the sculptures and take a ride on the train at Falcon Station.
- Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque can accommodate up to 40 000 worshippers. Women will be given an abaya to cover up with. Take a photo of one of the largest chandeliers in the world. ■

TIPS

- Make sure you have checked the calendar of religious holidays before your travel. Many government agencies may be closed during holidays, and restaurants and cafes suspend the sale of alcoholic beverages.
- While visiting markets, restaurants and other public places, take any items only with your right hand – this is local etiquette. Likewise when giving money to sellers, waiters and taxi drivers.



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An aerial photograph of a tropical coastline. On the left, a steep, dark mountain rises from the land. Below it, a green golf course is visible, followed by a resort complex with numerous buildings and palm trees. The coastline curves along a white sandy beach that meets a shallow, turquoise lagoon. The water transitions from light blue to deep blue as it extends into the open ocean. Several small white boats are scattered in the lagoon. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

Reasons to visit
MAURITIUS

You can go for the natural beauty, brilliant sunshine and endless beaches – but there are even more reasons to visit Mauritius, including golf, diving and snorkelling.

BOUTIQUE HOTEL MAURITIUS
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36
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Mauritius is a tropical fantasy of an island in the southern Indian Ocean, blessed with sunshine, trade winds and endless beaches. But there is a lot more to Mauritius than just swaying palm trees and soaking up the rays. Mauritius (French: *Maurice*, Mauritian Creole: *Moris*) is an island nation in the Indian Ocean situated some 2000 km from the African continent. The country consists of the islands of Mauritius, Rodrigues, Agalega and Cargados Carajos.

Mauritius is mostly appreciated by tourists for its natural beauty and man-made attractions, multi-ethnic and cultural diversity, tropical climate, beautiful beaches and water sports.

Fusion of cultures: Uninhabited in 1507, Mauritius has assimilated visitors from Madagascar, the East Indies, Netherlands, France, England, Indonesia and the Far East. Today it is a model of diversity and tolerance.

Natural history: The dodo has become synonymous with extinction, but few people realise that this large, flightless bird lived only on Mauritius. You can see its reconstructed skeleton at the Natural History Museum in Port Louis.

Golf by design: Golf legend Ernie Els designed the region's top course, Four Seasons Golf Club at Mauritius. Winding past lagoons, sugarcane fields, and along beautiful

coastline, it showcases the natural splendour of Mauritius.

Nature on display: Mauritius has nearly a dozen important nature reserves and botanical gardens to explore, in settings from the city centre to the Black River Gorge, and others set amidst tropical mountains and waterfalls. The Pamplemousses Botanical Garden, the oldest botanical garden in the Southern Hemisphere, is famous for its 85 varieties of palm trees, giant water lilies and other plant species.

Dance demonstrations: The *Se´ga*, a traditional Creole dance, is held regularly around the island. Part opera, part orchestrated group dance, the women of the co-ed *Se´ga* wear colourful ruffled skirts, and the performance builds in tempo and even involves the audience.

World-class fishing: One of the top offshore sport fishing destinations on earth, the waters of Mauritius have yielded world records for several varieties of shark and tuna. In fact, Mauritius hosts the annual Marlin World Cup, where marlin catches of over half a ton are not uncommon.

Sugar mill and restaurant: Visit the Beau Plan sugar mill to learn about the role of sugar in the island's history and then dine at the Fangourin restaurant set in the garden. The menu features seafood with dishes such as escalope of sea bream with crayfish butter and sweet potato purée,

and delicious desserts like Muscovado 'crème brulee' with lavender.

A green landscape: The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation has turned back time on the island of Ile aux Aigrettes. Cleared of non-native plants and animals, it was returned to its original wild state, where the kestrel and pink pigeon flourish along with giant tortoises.

Diving discoveries: Diving and snorkelling are fabulous on Mauritius, with many of the reefs and surrounding areas now protected by the Mauritius Marine Conservation Society. The result is a treasure trove of coral reefs, shipwrecks and marine life of all shapes and sizes.

The flavour of rum: Once almost entirely devoted to sugarcane production, Mauritius still boasts a booming rum culture. The most famous label, Green Island, is the sole export, but many high-quality and aged rums made locally can be sampled at bars. Saint Aubin Plantation located along the undulating slopes of southern Mauritius has been under sugarcane cultivation since 1819. The estate takes its name from one of its first owners, Pierre de Saint Aubin.

Pampering: Spas are to Mauritius what gambling is to Monte Carlo. Most luxury hotels have spas, but Shanti Maurice (shantimaurice.com), near Felix on the south coast, is among the best. There's a wide range of Ayurvedic and international treatments on offer, as well as stress management and weight-loss courses. Take the plunge with panchakarma (total body cleansing). For something a bit more fun, Constance Le Prince Maurice on Belle Mare Peninsula (princemaurice.com) is a private estate on an isolated peninsula with a lovely infinity pool, while the OTT Givenchy Spa at Le Touessrok (letouessrokresort.com) has been lauded for its No Surgetics Facial. Sanctuary Spa at The Residence Mauritius (theresidence.com) has just had an impressive facelift.

Stay: The impossibly glamorous resorts of Mauritius are what attracted holidaymakers in the first place. Shaggy thatched roofs, mimosa trees and private pools are the order of the day in a series of palm-fringed fantasy hideaways, while there are plenty of sleek retreats marrying modern architecture to the tropical landscape too. The Four Seasons at Anahita (fourseasons.com) has taken a modernist, designer-concept approach, while The Sofitel So Mauritius (sofitel.com) at BelOmbre has allowed Japanese designer Kenzo Takada free reign, resulting in hibiscus-motif pillows and lime-green leather beds. Also worth noting is Le Méridien Ile Maurice, particularly for its beautifully landscaped gardens (lemeridien-mauritius.com). LUX* Island Resorts (formerly the Naïade group, luxislandresorts.com), has three newly spruced-up properties, Beau Rivage, Les Pavillons and Legends, with retro ice-cream parlours and film screenings on the beach.



Just opened is the 50-suite boutique Angsana Balaclava by Banyan Tree (angsana.com), while St Regis is set to be one of the top addresses on the island (stregis-mauritius.com).

Shop till you drop: Central Market in Farquhar Street, Port Louis, is the true Mauritian shopping experience. Hot, bustling and colourful, it overflows with fresh fruit and vegetables, Indian spices and dried fish. Hagglng is essential at the souvenir stalls where you can buy wood and brass dodos, Balinese masks, Indian prints, bags of every shape and size, pashminas and the usual 'designer' labels. Outside the market you'll be greeted by travelling salesmen with mangos and pineapples strapped to their motorcycles. Or try the market at Curepipe, the Bazaar at Grand Baie or the boutiques along Le Caudon Waterfront. ■



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Tour code : KRR01

SIC English Speaking Tour Guide: Departure every Saturday

More interesting visits including the UNESCO recognised site – Penang

DAY 01 - SAT – KUALA LUMPUR – CAMERON HIGHLANDS (220 KM)

Depart by 0830 hours for Cameron Highland located at 1542 metres above sea level and noted for its tea plantations and cool temperatures. Stop on the way for a visit to see the cottage industry of basket weaving followed by Lata Iskandar Waterfall and a native settlement. Be immersed in the cool, crisp air of Cameron Highlands with its wonderful scenery. Tour of Cameron Highlands consists of the tea plantation, tea factory, market place and butterfly farm. Overnight.

Note: Tea factory operation is closed on Monday and public holidays.

DAY 02 – SUN – CAMERON HIGHLANDS – PENANG (330 KM)

Early morning set off to Penang. En route visit the Sam Poh Tong cave temple. Thereafter stop at the Royal town of Kuala Kangsar for a spell of photographing of the exterior view only of Ubudiah Mosque, Iskandariah Palace and Istana Kenangan. Proceed further to Kuala Sepetang mangrove forest, the best-managed mangrove forest in Malaysia and one that serves a very important ecological role in protecting the coastline from erosion. Delight in the novelty of walking through natural mangrove forest on a boardwalk. Kuala Sepetang produces the bulk of the nation's top quality mangrove charcoal. Visit a charcoal kiln where charcoals are produced. Cross over to Penang, better known as the "Pearl of the Orient" via one of the longest bridges in the world. Overnight.

DAY 03 – MON – DISCOVERY TOUR OF GEORGETOWN, PENANG

0900 hrs, depart from hotel for a City, Culture, and Heritage tour of Georgetown, which was officially declared as a UNESCO SITE in 2008. Visit the 3rd longest reclining Buddha figure in the world followed by Kek Lok Si Temple, also known as Temple of 1000 Buddhas that was built in 1904. It is the most beautiful and largest Buddhist temple complex in South East Asia. Next we visit Fort Cornwallis, the landing site of Captain Francis Light in 1786 when he arrived to start the first British colony in Penang. The tour carries on with a visit to the water village of The Clan Jetties at Weld Quay, so named as residents of each jetty share similar surnames. We next take you along Pitt Street, also known as "The Street of Harmony". Here churches, Chinese temples, mosques and Hindu temples are built along the same street in harmonious existence side by side for centuries. Visit the intricate Khoo Kong Si clan's house. Enjoy a breezy trishaw ride, a still popular mode of transport in Georgetown. Return to the hotel and the rest of the day is at your own leisure. In the late evening, you can explore the nightlife along Batu Ferringhi, Penang style! Overnight.

DAY 04 – TUE – PENANG – KOTA BHARU (400 KM)

Depart at 0830 hours, travelling west to east overland across Peninsular Malaysia through the main mountain range, which offers breathtaking views of the dense tropical rain forest whilst journeying through villages and plantations. En route, we will make a photo stop on Banded Island with its scenic view of the famous Temenggong lake, which is good spot for a lunch break (not inclusive in tour price) or enjoying the scenery of the calm, picturesque lake surrounded by the grand and immense tropical rainforest in the background. Further on, we will stop at the highest mountain point on this route, 1050 meters above sea level overlooking Thailand and Malaysian border, offering a breathtaking view of the famous Titiwangsa mountain range with its dense tropical rainforest. On arrival in the state of Kelantan, we will proceed to the border town of Rantau Panjang, a meeting, mingling and trading point for people of Thailand and Malaysia. From the Malaysian side of the border one can see Thai villages across the Golok River, which is the lifeline for the people on both sides, especially as a source of water supply for their daily and agricultural use. "Duty free" shops offer varieties of products to visitors. Overnight.





DAY 05 – WED – KOTA BHARU – TERENGGANU (170 KM)

At 0830 hours, we start the day with a visit to the famous and colourful wet market of Kota Bharu and the traditional cottage industries such as silver handicraft and songket weaving. Drive along the scenic coastline southward towards Kuala Terengganu, tasting some keropok, the very popular local chips made of fish or prawn. Check in at the beach hotel. Free and easy day at own leisure. Overnight.

DAY 06 – THUR – TERENGGANU – KUANTAN (250 KM)

Check out of hotel after early breakfast at 0800 hours, heading towards Kuantan. Stop in Kuala Terengganu to visit Pulau Duyong, famous for its traditional way of boat making in the region. A must is the visit to the Islamic Civilization Park at the Waterfront Heritage City of Kuala Terengganu showcasing twenty replicas of great Islamic monuments of the world such as Alhambra Citadel of Spain, Taj Mahal of Agra India, Masjidil Haram of Mecca, Saudi Arabia, Dome of the Rock, Palestine and many more. Last but not least is the visit to the Grand Crystal Mosque, the icon and the highlight of the park. We continue our visit to a brassware-making center. As we head further south towards Cherating in the district of Kuantan, we will stop at a scenic coastal fishing village and visit a turtle information centre where you can learn more about this endangered species of the sea. On route, taste the "lemang", rice cooked with coconut milk in bamboo, a popular Malay delicacy not to be missed. This is followed by afternoon tea hosted by the local community, after which the tour takes you to Cherating. Cherating's main attractions include a trained monkey plucking coconuts and the cottage industry of mengkuang leaves being woven into bags and mats amongst other things. Overnight.

DAY 07 FRI – KUANTAN – KUALA LUMPUR (270 KM)

Overland to Kuala Lumpur.

Please note above prices are based on per person sharing in double room, and including airfare on Singapore Asirline based on the lowest economy class and excluding airport taxes of R5779.00 per person. Please note that packages are subject to availability and hotel confirmation, package valid till 3 October 2014. Sphinx Travel and Tours Terms & Conditions apply.

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Departure: Daily at 9.30am – 9.45am / 2.30pm – 2.45pm

Approximate duration: 3hrs 30 min

A must for first time visitors to Kuala Lumpur!

They say the best way to get to know a new city is through a tour. This interesting tour will unveil the beauty and charm of the old and new Kuala Lumpur known as the "Garden City of Lights". See the contrast of the magnificent skyscrapers against buildings of the colonial days. The KL city tour will take you to many of the highlights that this beautiful city has to offer. By the end of the tour, you will probably feel as if you have "seen" the soul of Kuala Lumpur!

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☒ Petronas Twin Towers (Photo stop) ☒ Cocoa Boutique ☒ National Monument ☒ National Mosque (Photo stop) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☒ Handicraft Centre ☒ King's Palace (Photo stop) ☒ National Museum (Excludes entrance fee) ☒ Sultan Abdul Samad Building |
|--|---|

Note: The tour price excludes entrance fees.

Please note above prices are based on per person sharing in double room, and including airfare on Singapore Airline based on the lowest economy class and excluding airport taxes of R4879.00 per person. Please note that packages are subject to availability and hotel confirmation, package valid till 3 October 2014. Sphinx Travel and Tours Terms & Conditions apply.



Elements of the PERFECT TOUR

There are many reasons why people find themselves scheduling preplanned tours rather than arranging the details themselves. Some people simply do not have the time to do all the research needed in order to take an extensive trip. Solo travellers that are uncomfortable travelling alone may decide to journey with a group rather than forge ahead on their own. Even groups of travellers that enjoy planning their vacation may at some point or another find themselves along for a ride on a tour.





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Selecting a tour to fulfil one's requirements is almost the same as choosing a travel buddy. Finding someone that shares one's world and travel outlook is the crucial difference between an amazing trip and one that you almost regret. The same is true of tour companies. It is always best to do the research on any business before agreeing to pay in advance for a tour that may not be to one's liking. There are several ways that one can determine if taking a trip with an organisation will suit your travel objectives.

Is the tour company reputable?

A quick online search will provide vacation planners with an extensive array of travel package options, yet reviews of websites for such companies are few and far between.

Before booking any trip, first visit Trip Advisor and Hello Peter to see if you are spending your hard-earned money with the correct service provider. Recommendations from family and friends are other options for finding a reputable tour company or hiring a travel agent.

Does the tour feature the correct destinations?

One should always make sure that the tour is not only in the right country, but also takes in all the sites and locations you want to see. Travellers may not always keep in mind that destinations are further apart than they appear on the map! After spending all day in a bus, no one is going to want to rent a car and drive another two hours to see another out-of-the-way attraction. Therefore, if there is a place you deem a must-see location, make sure that your chosen tour includes it.

Considering the huge selection of travel operators, it is worth hunting for one that visits your destinations of choice. Of course some compromise may be necessary if one's trip is encompassing, say, London, Paris and the Maldives, when booking two separate tours might be best.

Does it fit your budget and time frame?

Those that are completely unburdened by time constraints and monetary issues are far and few between. Budget travel options and shorter duration packages are available if one knows where to search: just keep looking. Also consider taking day tours with local operators in various locations in order to get the most out of a short vacation.

Does it fit your travel style?

Some travellers consider five-star hotels





essential, while others would spend their time calculating just how many more days they could have existed on bread and cheese in a hostel somewhere, if they hadn't signed up for a tour. The same is true in reverse: those who prefer a more luxurious style of travel would be miserable tossed in with a group of budget-conscious voyagers.

Active people on leisure tours and relaxed people on action-packed journeys might be equally irritated. For others, having a tour that is environmentally friendly or that is completely flexible is a chief priority. Be sure that excursions you choose are compatible with what you want! Keep in mind that most tours have a target demographic, and while those that don't belong to it are often still welcome to participate, they might

not have as good a time as they otherwise would have. Be sure you can handle being around a tour's target demographic.

What about the size of the group?

Gregarious people or those that don't mind being lost in the crowd might be perfectly fine travelling en masse, while introverts and those that want a balance of personalised attention and anonymity might be happier in a much smaller group. This is a matter of personal choice, but should be carefully considered before booking.

If all of these elements are considered, it is quite likely that you will have a wonderful vacation. The only thing that remains is booking plane tickets. Just don't forget to pack the sunscreen and the camera! ■

John Ridler, Media and Public Relations Manager for Thompsons Tours says:

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HOT & HAPPENING

DUBAI'S BURJ AL ARAB RETAINS POSITION AS 'BEST HOTEL IN THE WORLD' ACCORDING TO *DAILY TELEGRAPH'S* ULTRATRAVEL READERS

The Burj Al Arab, the World's Most Luxurious Hotel, has been voted the Best Hotel in the World and Best Hotel in the Middle East in the *Daily Telegraph's* esteemed annual Ultimate Luxury Travel Related Awards (ULTRAs) Reader Survey. This is the second year Burj Al Arab has been awarded the 'Best Hotel in the World' title, a new category added to the Awards in 2013, and the eighth year for the property to win the 'Best Hotel in the Middle East'.



SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, AT THE SHARD, LONDON, NOW OPEN

Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts' first property in the United Kingdom, Shangri-La Hotel, At The Shard, London, is now open. Celebrating Shangri-La's Asian heritage, the opening ceremony began with the traditional 'awakening of the lion' and a colourful dance procession, followed by the official ribbon-cutting led by the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson.

This is the Hong Kong-based hotel group's 83rd hotel and third in Europe. Located in the tallest building in Western Europe, on floors 34 to 52, Shangri-La Hotel, At The Shard, London, is the city's first high-rise hotel. It offers

unrivalled views of London in every direction, overlooking such landmarks as the Houses of Parliament, Tower of London and St Paul's Cathedral.

The hotel is also the first luxury property to open south of the River Thames, and is conveniently positioned minutes from The City of London.

Every one of the hotel's 202 guestrooms and suites has a view, and the rooms are amongst the largest in London, averaging more than 42 m². They feature Chinese art reinterpreted in a modern, abstract way and the exclusive 'Shangri-La Bed' featuring patented body-contouring technology, complimentary Internet access, and butler service.

The hotel's Asian touches extend to its three dining and wine destinations. **Ting** serves locally sourced cuisine with a hint of Asian flavours, **Láng** is a patisserie and artisan deli on the ground floor, and **Gōng** is London's highest champagne and cocktail bar, located on Level 52, which is also home to the 24-hour gym and London's highest infinity pool.

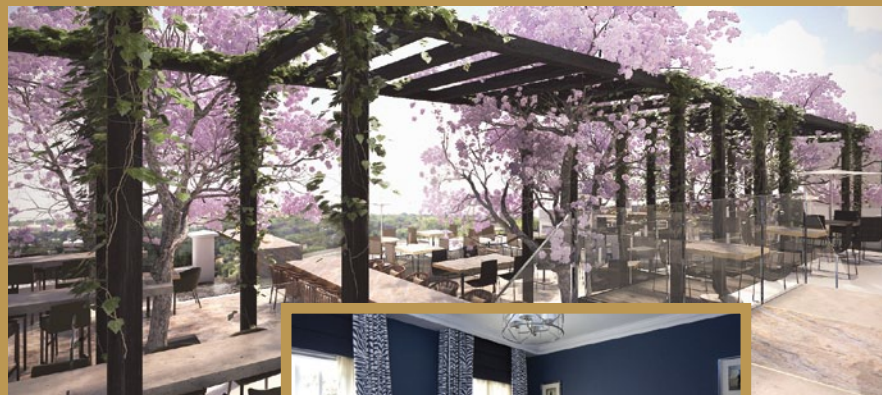
Opening room rates start from £450 per room per night, including VAT. The hotel offers an exclusive 'Room with a view' package starting from £530 per night (VAT included), based on two adults sharing with breakfast for two and two tickets to The View from The Shard.



FOUR SEASONS HOTEL THE WESTCLIFF JOHANNESBURG

The country's largest city is experiencing its own rebirth as an important business centre and a cosmopolitan destination with a wealth of leisure opportunities. The new Four Seasons Hotel The Westcliff Johannesburg is at the heart of it all. With 240-degree views across the city's famed green canopy and Johannesburg Zoo next door, the Hotel is nestled on three hectares of landscaped gardens cascading down a hillside. It is less than 30 minutes from two major airports, and ideally positioned as a gateway for international air travellers to explore the subcontinent and beyond.

Important game reserves are nearby, including Kruger National Park just 5 hours' drive away, and 36 of South Africa's top 100 golf courses are within an hour (some just minutes away).



NEW SAFARIS BY MOONLIGHT WITH MANTIS EXTREME

Mantis eXtreme, a collection of once-in-a-lifetime experiences across the globe, has unearthed one of the most unique wildlife encounters in the world – safaris by moonlight in Africa's last forgotten wilderness area, Lugenda Wilderness Camp in Mozambique's remote Niassa Reserve.

The remote location of Lugenda means there is zero light pollution, so when the moon is at its fullest visibility is impressive beyond belief. Highly skilled and experienced rangers take guests out at night on foot and in game-viewing vehicles to explore the mystique of this enchanting wilderness area. More adventurous guests are invited to sleep out in the wilds of the reserve in one of the fly-camps set atop the unique inselbergs.

Twice the size of Kruger National Park, Niassa covers more than 42 000 km² and is home to some of the largest populations of lion and African wild dog, and has a sable antelope population of over 12 000, over 16 000 elephants, over 400 bird species, and large populations of Cape buffalo, impala, wildebeest, zebra and leopards. The area has three endemic species - the Niassa wildebeest, Boehm's zebra, and Johnston's impala.

Daytime activities are also in abundance and guests can enjoy anything from canoeing the mighty Lugenda River to scaling the inselbergs. Dawn game drives also allow opportunities to view the wildlife during hunting hours while walking safaris allow guests to discover rock art.

Eight luxury tents within the reserve are situated on the banks of the Lugenda River beneath towering fig trees, each with its own patio deck with wide-angle views. The tents have a solid substructure and blend into the natural surrounds while offering every modern comfort. The elegant timber and thatch guest area is at the heart of the camp, and a shady refuge from the African sun - a tranquil place to dine, kick back with a drink or read up on the region's fascinating history.



THE BEACHCOMBER BRAND IN MOROCCO

The travelling public in South Africa is very excited to hear that the trusted Beachcomber brand has ventured from its traditional territory of the Indian Ocean and branched off into Morocco.

The group has taken its flagship name, the Royal Palm, and recreated an equally high-end hotel located in the tourist hub of Marrakech and named it the Royal Palm Marrakech. Its architecture takes its influence from the Berber tradition so the hotel blends seamlessly into its surroundings built as it is in the middle of a grove of ancient olive trees.

The hotel has limited its accommodation to 135 luxurious suites and villas to ensure that the levels of personal service, so evident at its sister hotel in Mauritius, are continued. Villas have their own swimming pools for relaxation and privacy. Central to the public area is the magnificent bar which has a view over the High Atlas Mountains in the distance. Four restaurants, two of which will open a little later in the year, are overseen by the Michelin-starred chef, Phillippe Jourdin, who brings to his job experience gained in some of the most prestigious restaurants in the world. The hotel will specialise in traditional cuisine with touches of Moroccan flavour to add authenticity.

The Spa by Clarins is the first spa in Morocco to be affiliated with the famous French cosmetic house. This follows the affiliation Beachcomber has established at its hotels in Mauritius and Seychelles. The spa, covering an area of 4 000 square metres, has an entire section dedicated to aqua treatments.

An experienced concierge is on hand to recommend sightseeing trips to the many places of interest in Marrakech. Since the hotel is only 12 km from the city centre, shopping is easily accessible. Foodies will experience authentic Moroccan food at many restaurants in the city. Golfers have the facility of the 18-hole Par 72 course in the hotel grounds. The services of a golf pro are available to guests requesting them.

Travellers welcome the introduction of a well-known hotel brand such as Beachcomber to Morocco where they know and trust the product and can book it with confidence knowing they will have a superb holiday experience. For bookings, contact your travel agent.

For Information:

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HOT & HAPPENING



HONEYGUIDE TENTED SAFARI CAMPS

Bordering the Kruger National Park and situated between the Timbavati and Sabi Sand Reserves is Manyeleti Game Reserve. Encompassing 23 000 hectares of land, Manyeleti Reserve is home to two tented camps, Mantobeni and Khoka Moya. Each offers breathtaking wildlife experiences, including the Big Five, superb cuisine and service excellence. In the company of experienced rangers and trackers you will experience two daily game drives, morning and evening.

Mantobeni Camp

Mantobeni is designed to reflect Hemingway's Africa, with 12 tents nestled in a Tambofi grove overlooking a dry river bed. The reception area comprises a large sitting area, outdoor area with splash pool and sun loungers, a bar and an extensive climate-controlled wine cellar. Game visiting the nearby watering hole can be seen from the adjoining swimming pool deck.

The tents have soft lighting and are furnished with king-size beds (can convert to twins if required), mosquito nets, soft leather couches and full en suite bathroom. Each tent is set on a wooden platform. Due to the layout and terrain only children over 12 may be accommodated.

Khoka Moya Camp

Khoka Moya is situated on both sides of a river bed, offering an authentic African experience without sacrificing luxury, safety or comfort. Guests are welcomed at the large, colourful lounge, and dining areas overlook green lawns leading to the swimming pool. There is also an extensive climate-controlled wine cellar and bar.

Each of the 12 large tents is furnished in a comfortable, contemporary style, with a king-sized bed (can convert to twins) and large day bed, plus full en suite bathroom. Children of all ages are welcomed and included in the day's activities. Younger children can engage in a variety of activities including colouring-in, bead-making and cookie-making supervised by the camp staff.



SANBONA

WILDLIFE RESERVE

Star of the Little Karoo

Set on 54 000 hectares of land, Sanbona Wildlife Reserve is paradise for animal lovers, plant experts, bird aficionados and star-gazers.

By **Helène Ramackers**

Our journey takes us to the foothills of the Warmwaterberg, where the harsh and unforgiving landscape is offset by panoramic vistas as far as the eye can see. During our sojourn we will be staying at Gondwana Lodge, one of three accommodation options at Sanbona. You can choose to stay at Tilney Manor, a historical property steeped in olden times, or Dwyka Tented Lodge, a haven of secluded luxury. There is also the seasonal Sanbona Explorer, ideal for guests looking for an authentic bush tent camp experience.

On our first game drive we are taken around by our very conversant ranger, whose sole responsibility is to take care of us and another couple. He has a penchant for cheetahs, and as luck would have it our first sighting is of a cheetah mom and her four cubs.

Sanbona isn't only renowned for its animal sightings, but also for the 600 different types of plant species. He points us towards the prevalent acacia thicket, feeding source of the giraffe and elephants. The cutest succulents are undoubtedly the Baby Bottoms. After a nice drive we stop among zebras to enjoy refreshments. Heading back to camp, we spot a rhino languidly grazing and a journey of giraffe.

Before dinner we are taken star-gazing, and see Mars, Jupiter, Orion, The Southern Cross and Cancer, to name a few. All the meals at Gondwana are a culinary delight. The menu changes on a daily basis. For dinner my husband and I both opt for the braised Springbok shanks, served with creamed potato and a *melange* of roasted vegetables, enhanced by a rosemary and red wine *jus*.

The next morning's game drive has our ranger's affinity for cheetahs paying off as he spots two brothers at the top of

the hill. They slowly make their way towards us, walk right past the vehicle and do what big cats do – mark their territory on the first tree they can find.

Our ranger is intent on finding the lions today. We head to a different part of the reserve where these elusive cats were spotted a couple of days earlier. The kudu at the top of the hill look very skittish, and he is confident that the lions must be lurking somewhere in the vicinity. He puts the tracker on and it starts beeping, indicating that the lions must be in close proximity. "Keep your eyes peeled", he instructs. I can feel my heart beating with every beep, and they seem to be getting louder. Nothing. My heart sinks. Just as we are about to leave, he sees something moving in the thicket. The outline is that of a white lion. I look up and there he stands in the middle of the dry riverbed – a male white lion looking straight at us.

Heading back, we are awestruck by the vision of a herd of elephants. On our way to a sunset cruise on Bellair Dam a few grazing buffalo make their appearance. On our last day our ranger and Roman Ndeja show us around a cave with San paintings, always fascinating. I look up from our vantage point and imagine catching a glimpse of a leopard, but it was just a very spotty rock.

Sanbona, part of the Shamwari Group, is a magical place. Don't take my word for it. Come and experience for yourself. ■

Sanbona Wildlife Reserve

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