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ISSUE 5

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REUNION

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FRANCE

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COVER PICTURE
Allen Walker Photography

Allen Walker specialises in underwater, wildlife, landscape and sport photography. Visit www.awphotosa.com or send an email to allen@awphotosa.com.

A girl snorkels with sharks during a Blue Wilderness excursion on the South Coast in KwaZulu-Natal. (p.28)



EDITOR'S LETTER

On a recent trip to Mozambique, I realised that certain adventures and I do not go hand in hand. Trying to dune board, I didn't even make it past the slip face before wiping out, while five-year-olds whipped past me, shouting in glee.

The idea of facing foaming rapids of death or throwing myself off a cliff gives my stomach a turn, and not in a good way.

However, in this issue we've tried to give you a good combination of adventure activities. Some will only raise your pulse a bit, others will flood your blood with adrenaline.

If the idea of a tropical vacation sipping cocktails next to the pool bores you to bits, read about **Reunion** (p. 18). Here you can jump from waterfalls, paraglide or hike on the edge of a volcano.

We've also selected a few **slackpacking routes** (p. 35) that will get you right in the middle of nature, but also guarantee a soft bed, warm meal and porcelain under your bum at the end of the day.

Home Affairs may have eased visa regulations, but the damage is done, especially when it comes to **Chinese tourists** (p. 44). We look at why South Africa is ignoring this market, at its peril.

In this edition, we're also launching a new **MICE section on meetings, incentives, conferences and entertainment** (p. 54), with some great ideas on where to book your next conference and some real-life functions to inspire you. Happy travels!
Carla



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Dawn Jorgensen

'Wild Island'

Dawn Jorgensen is a travel writer, beauty seeker and earth advocate who finds herself very much at home on an Indian Ocean island.

The most important ingredient for a Reunion rum punch is... the locally produced rum arrangé. It's created when fruit, spices and herbs are left to macerate in the spirit for at least six months. Heady but delicious.



Iga Motylska

'48 hours in Maputo.'

Iga Motylska is a camera-wielding traveller who has wandered across four continents, exploring 28 countries: one for each year of her life.

The best place in Maputo to have a beer is... on the beach at Praia de Peixe. Just make sure that beer's a 2M.



Katarina Mancama

'Pick up the slack...pack.'

Katarina Mancama lives and breathes her passion for slow travel, both in her professional and private life. As a consultant for sustainable development in tourism, she helps tourism businesses be a bit more kind to Mother Earth.

One of the best hikes in the Drakensberg is... the one to the top of the Amphitheatre. The views are unbeatable!



Herman Scholtz

'Flight plan'

Herman is a traveller with the expensive taste of a lawyer but the salary of a full-time journalist. (At least he loves his job!)

The most extreme thing I ever did to score some loyalty points was... to fool my sister into believing I ordered her an iPhone in my name to spare her the admin. It was to get eBucks tier points!



Yolandi Groenewald

'Umkumbe'

Yolandi Groenewald is an award-winning environmental journalist. When she isn't taking big companies to task on their environmental policies, she's exploring the world with her two boys.

The best ingredients for a successful family safari is... Patience, a sense of wonder and the ability to see nature through your kids' eyes. And red wine for the parents at sunset.



Jo Kromberg

'Why are Chinese tourists skipping South Africa?'

Jo Kromberg is the travel editor for *The Beijing Review* magazine and freelances for *Conde Nast Traveller* China and India. She

has covered over a third of the world in her quest for adventure, new cultures and discoveries of all kinds.

Dumplings or vetkoek? No question – dumplings, even though that probably makes me a traitor to my Afrikaner roots!

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SELFIE CONFIDENCE

The Kaiser Baas Selfie Pole (R699) will help you get that great shot, every time. Available exclusively at The Gadget Shop.



GIFTS and gadgets

Here are some gadgets that will make the season much more jolly

DRAW IN THE AIR

The 3Doodler (R1999) allows you to draw in 3D by extruding heated plastic filament that cools almost instantly into a solid, stable structure. Available at The Gadget Shop and New World.



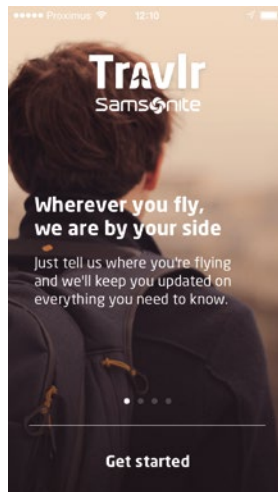
BRAVE NEW SOUND

The BRAVEN 805 wireless speaker (R3299) has mobile device charging and 18 hours of continuous play, when fully charged. Available at the iStore, The Gadget Shop and New World.



TOP TRAVEL

Luggage giant Samsonite's new app Travlr is an interactive app that acts as your own personal travel guide. From booking to packing, this clever app offers useful travel advice and tips. Available for free in the App Store and on Google Play.



FOR THE RECORD

This portable record player from Typo (R1799) will give your hipster credentials a serious boost. Beard not included.





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TERRIFIC TENT

Keep the kids busy for hours with this tent (R399) from Cotton On Kids.

It's also great for some extra shade on the beach.



COLOUR ME BEAUTIFUL

American Tourister's Bon Air zipped polyprop collection is made of ultra-tough material. It's injection moulded to produce a modern, contemporary look that's very strong and won't get brittle. From R1499 for the 55cm spinner.



BEACH GAMES

Get your blood flowing with this racquetball set (R99) from Cotton On Men.

SUPER SHADES

These sunnies from Cotton On (R119) will keep your eyes protected on the beach. And they're super stylish as well.



Festive FINDS

Here are some travel-inspired gift ideas for the festive season.

THE DARK SIDE

Your kid will love the Samsonite Star Wars Ultimate luggage collection. All models feature a 3D design inspired by Darth Vader. From R1295 for the backpack.



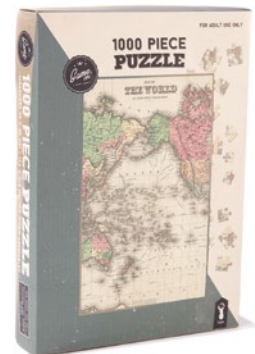
C'EST CHIC

We love this laptop bag from Parisian brand Lipault, with a padded compartment for a 17" laptop and a front compartment for your mobile phone. From R800.



BEST BUBBLES

The special edition J.C. Le Roux Scintilla 2008 is presented in a cylindrical gift pack that doubles up as a cooler. Available at The House of J.C. Le Roux, Makro and Norman Goodfellows at R190 while stocks last.



WORLD OF WANDERLUST

Rainy days will be twice as much fun with this 1000 piece puzzle (R199.99) of a world map from Typo.



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Mozambique's capital city is as famed for its culture and architecture as it is for seafood and nightlife. Here's how to make the most of your stay.

By Iga Motylska (@igamotylska)

MUST SEE

Tie your shoelaces in a double knot and lather yourself with sunscreen as you head out for a walking tour of Maputo's Top 10 sights with Jane Flood of Maputo a Pé (+258 82 419 0574). This introduction to the city will give you insights into the country's colonial past, civil war and life in post-independence Mozambique, as well as a peek into its **red light district**. You'll explore the famed **railway station** with its wrought iron dome – named one of the world's most beautiful by Architectural Review – as well as the **Samora Machel statue** and **City Hall**. Then there's **Casa do Ferro**, or Iron House, designed by Gustave Eiffel (yes, the Eiffel), and the Portuguese **military fort museum**. The intriguing **central produce market** and **Jumma Mosque** will add colour to the tour before you end at **Feima craft market**.

Alternatively, immerse yourself in a time gone by during an architectural walking tour with architecture student Walter Tembe, also from Maputo a Pé. You'll learn about the eclectic and exuberant architectural styles of Pancho Guedes and José Forjaz as you walk with your eyes gazing skywards, admiring the mosaics and

intricate building facades of the city.

Highlights include the yellow **Smiling Lion** building and the **San Antonia de la Polana** church, dubbed The Squeezer due to its spectacular shape. By the end of the tour, you'll be able to distinguish between modern, Bauhaus and Art Deco architecture.

If it's sand and sea you're after, take a short trip along the newly opened road to Macaneta, the closest blue-water beach to Maputo and Johannesburg. Taking the short ferry ride across the **Komati River** to get to **Praia de Peixe** is part of the fun. After you arrive, head straight for the beach with a drink in hand – the beach is known for margaritas. Also, climb the dunes for the best panoramic shots of the colourful fishing boats resting along the azure shores.

MUST DO

The **Maputo Southern Sun** is the only hotel in the city that's located on the beachfront. Take a walk along the beach to the stone pier before bidding farewell to the day with a sundowner. The views as you look out over the infinity pool and palm trees towards the calm waters are second to none. Later, indulge in a seafood feast of succulent crayfish, prawns, calamari, mussels and fish, all prepared in an authentic Mozambican manner, at **Evolve Restaurant**. If you enjoy more than one meal here, you'll notice that the decor changes all the time.

Maputo is famed for its dance-'till-dawn nightlife, so do as the locals do and party the night away at Coconuts Live. Just don't expect to get to bed before 4am. ■

TOP TIP

While travelling in Mozambique is affordable, local **Phil Baker** has some money-saving tips. Maputo is a popular destination for business travel, he says. So as a tourist, head for the city during the weekend, when hotel prices are cheaper, and visit the islands during the week, when prices there are lower. Also, remember to carry your passport wherever you go.

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STANFORD

Stanford has to be one of the Western Cape's most beguiling small towns. It's less than 2 hours' drive from Cape Town and the perfect place for a weekend break.

MUST SEE

The Panthera Africa predator sanctuary (www.pantherafrica.com) does amazing work with big cats that have been abused or bred for the bullet. Many of the lions that were taken in by the sanctuary were so-called canned lions, while the tigers were bred to be harvested for their bones. Luckily for these animals, they can live happily ever after at Panthera. The enclosures are massive, and all the animals have ample space to run around and enjoy the rest of their lives. As with all ethical sanctuaries, there are no interactions with the animals nor is petting allowed. The best way to get a feeling for Stanford's rich history is through an **historical walking tour**, led by local Bea Whittaker (+27 83 293 5512). You get to see all the historical sites and heritage buildings, including the Dutch Reformed Church and the old Anglican Church. Tours are conducted from the Stanford Tourism office. Take a meander through **Platbos** (www.platbos.co.za) Africa's most southern indigenous forest located between Stanford and Gansbaai. The forest is more than a thousand years old and an anomaly in the region – with no river feeding it, low rainfall

and sandy alkaline soil. Yet it is a flourishing forest. The old Milkwood trees are covered in old man's beard and lichens and resemble something straight out of a *Lord of the Rings* movie. Eco-friendly overnight accommodation is available.

MUST DO

If you have children, take them on a picnic at the **Klein River Cheese farm** (www.kleinrivercheese.co.za). Picnics are held from October to May and available from 11:00 to 15:00 daily. Visitors can order one of their gourmet picnic lunches or create their own from the Picnic Deli. The setting is beautiful, so bring a checkered cloth and enjoy a spread on the banks of the Klein River or under the trees on the extensive lawns. Can't decide whether to visit a wine farm or a microbrewery? At **Birkenhead brewery** in the Walkerbay

Estate (www.walkerbayestate.com) you can have both. They run a small but flourishing vineyard, winery and microbrewery. After your beer and wine tasting, you can have a long, languid meal while looking over the Klein Rivier Mountains. Stanford is well known for its birdwatching, and what better way to do a bit of twitching than on a river cruise. **Platanna Cruises** (www.platanna.com) offers two-hour excursions on the aptly named Platanna boat. They also do sundowner cruises. The Overberg region, where Stanford is located, is one of the best areas to **spot South Africa's national bird, the blue crane**. There are only around 25 000 blue cranes left in the world, about half of which can be found in the Overberg. The Overberg Crane group (+27 82 676 1734) will keep you up to date with the best sightings. ■

TOP TIP

Locals are divided about where to find the best breakfast, but the breakfast harvest table at the **Harvest Cafe** (+27 83 409 8126) comes highly recommended. Your breakfast is purchased according to its weight and the sprawling lawns outside make it an ideal place to take the whole family. For a treat, try the slow-roasted lamb wrap at **Yum Café** (+27 79 468 9060). The portions are generous and the lamb soft and fragrant.

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No excursion is complete without a memorable meal. At Monate Game Lodge the dining experience is designed to tantalize your taste buds – specializing from venison to vegetarian dishes – served in different settings such as our unique, natural cave, in the bush or around the lodge camp fire. For a special occasion we also offer a picnic basket, to enjoy in a romantic setting with an unsurpassed view.

The private game reserve is set in 2000 hectares of bush, open plains and a variety of interesting koppies. It is home to leopard, cheetah, buffalo, hippo, crocodile, zebra, giraffe as well as a large

variety of antelope. Birdlife is prolific, with Monate Game Lodge

being only 10 km from the Nylsvlei Reserve (a RAMSAR site), which is home to 46% of Southern Africa's bird species. Monate Game Lodge is also proudly recognized a Birder Friendly Establishment by Birdlife South Africa.

Start off your day with a breathtaking sunrise, or admire the golden sunset, from the back of our game viewing vehicles. Our professional rangers aim in making your experience an unforgettable and enjoyable one, by providing educational information on both fauna and flora. Enjoy a drink and snack from one of our spectacular vantage points, and simply soak in the beauty of nature, as our rangers show you as much of our breathtaking gem as possible.

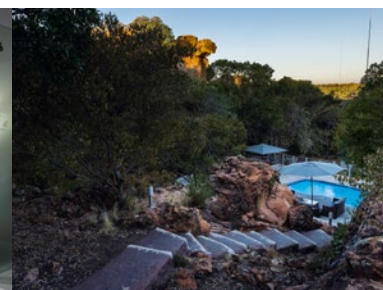
Extra activities include guided bush walks and clay pigeon shooting, or opt for something less active and lounge around one of the two sparkling swimming pools. You could also soak away your stress in the Jacuzzi, or enjoy a drink at the bar. The lounge is a haven of peace and quiet if you want to hide away with a book, and the bar area is a buzz of activity on a weekend with the sport on the big screen television.

Monate Game Lodge offers a state of the art conference centre – situated close to the lodge, so the discerning delegate can enjoy the tranquility of the bush whilst conducting business in a productive atmosphere. The centre can accommodate all seating styles to a maximum of 60 pax sharing with breakaway rooms. The conference centre includes a data projector, TV, sound system, air-conditioning and WiFi.

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TRAVEL INSURANCE

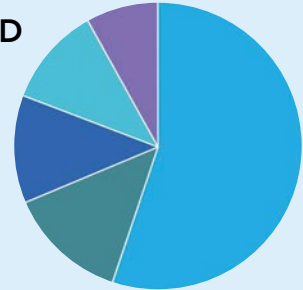
Here are some interesting facts and figures from Regent Travel Insurance.

2400

The total number of claims Regent Insurance paid out between July 2014 and September 2015.

THE MOST COMMON CLAIMS FILED

- Loss or damage to luggage **55.2%**
- Pain to back, knees and joints **13.5%**
- Delayed luggage **12.1%**
- Cold, flu or bronchitis **11.1%**
- Cancellation of journey or flight **8.1%**



USA

The country with the most claims filed. In that period of 14 months, Regent paid out 455 claims filed by travellers that travelled to the USA.



The average amount of days that Regent Insurance takes to pay out a claim, provided that all the documentation is in order.

R1 100 000

The largest travel insurance claim Regent Insurance ever paid out. A 21-year-old student went to the USA for a year and contracted pneumonia. She had to be hospitalised and her expenses added up to over R1 million.



Data based on a report by Regent Insurance from the period July 2014 to September 2015.



POLANA SERENA HOTEL

The grand dame of the tropics

The Serena Hotel Group is known for their luxury properties located all over East Africa. One of their most iconic ones is the Polana Serena Hotel, which ranks way up there with legendary grand dames such as Raffles in Singapore, the Savoy in London and the Taj Mahal Palace in Mumbai.

The hotel, located in Maputo, Mozambique, was designed by renowned architect Sir Herbert Baker, who also did South Africa's Union Buildings. Its list of guests reads like a who's who of history's most iconic figures, with even Queen Elizabeth counting among its illustrious visitors.

It was during World War II that the hotel achieved perhaps its greatest fame. As part of the Portuguese empire, it made the ideal neutral meeting place for spies and secret agents from both the allied and German and Italian forces. Here, both sides were free to indulge in complex espionage and counter espionage deals, free from the constraints found elsewhere on the continent.

Today, it's the hotel of choice for businessmen, politicians, raconteurs and travellers looking to relive the glory days of old. It looks over the bay of Maputo and was always known for its elegance, beautiful decor and fabulous cuisine.

The Polana Serena stands at the very heart of Maputo, on one of the city's most prestigious avenues and within easy reach of embassies, government buildings, the presidential complex, shops, restaurants and sidewalk cafés. Mavalane International Airport is a 15 minute drive away. ■

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FLIGHT PLAN

Looking to earn some discount on flights through loyalty programs, but can't figure out the fine print? **Herman Scholtz** shows you the way to cheaper flights.

Airfare isn't necessarily your biggest expense to have an overseas holiday, but to many people it remains the biggest cost barrier for travel, albeit a psychological one. That's why I always start out by researching the airfare for a destination when I dream about travelling.

For this reason, loyalty programmes changed my travel life. For the first time, it became more affordable to take that first step that would commit me to a trip.

FNB's eBucks is my reward programme of choice. I earn on average eB10 000 (R1000) per month. I must confess that I'm a bit of a loyalty programme junkie. I drive myself insane studying the ever-changing programme rules to ensure that I reach the highest reward level. But it pays off. If you can reach the 18 000 points mark to be on reward level 5 (and keep sane until you get there), you'll earn 15% back on all fuel purchases, 5% on online purchases and 2,5% for all other credit card swipes.

Once you've earned those eBucks, hold on to them, because you can get up to 40% discount on travel benefits with eBucks. For every R100 (eB1000) of petrol you're tempted to buy at month's end, you can contribute R140 towards your airfare.

I managed to get a massive reduction on my airfare on a trip to Spain recently. After the discount, the return airfare for two people was R12 905. I settled this with eB52 329 (5 months' savings) and a credit card payment of R7672. And the best part? I earned a handsome amount of eBucks on that credit card payment!

NOT MARRIED TO YOUR TRAVEL COMPANION?

One of the smartest features of the eBucks travel benefit is that the same discount applies to other people in your travel company, regardless of your relationship with them.

In fact, up to nine passengers can benefit from one person's reward level, says Deirdré van Zyl Smit, head of corporate communications at eBucks.

There are rules, of course: All the members of the travel company must have a qualifying FNB/RMB Private Bank account (e.g. cheque account), and the main member needs to travel along for the discount to apply. But the other travellers don't have to meet any other criteria. It

doesn't have to be their primary transactional account nor do they have to be eBucks members, says Van Zyl Smit.

It's also possible to send eBucks to others to pay for a trip – just pool your eBucks in the account of the person with the highest eBucks reward level and you're set for great savings.

For local flights, you need to pay the entire amount in eBucks, and you need a minimum amount of eB5000 for international flights.

The balance can be settled with your credit card, which means you'll earn more eBucks *and* most likely qualify for comprehensive travel insurance, as you paid for the ticket with your credit card.

All flights are discounted by up to 40% on the reward level 5 tier, but taxes are excluded from the deal. The local airline partner is kulula.com and the international partners are British Airways and Emirates.

TIP: When searching for your flights on eBucks (visit www.eBucks.com and click on eBucks Travel), it automatically compares



several airlines whose flights may be cheaper than the discounted flight. Consider saving your eBucks in that case, as they are very valuable.

VITALITY LINKS FAMILY AND TRAVEL NEEDS

Discovery's Vitality programme works on a family basis. If your entire family belongs to the medical aid, for example, the entire family qualifies for the Vitality travel benefit. You have to apply for a Vitality membership and it costs R185 per month in membership fees, explains Taryn Candice Kerr, spokesperson for Vitality. In essence it's a wellness programme with a travel benefit, not a loyalty programme. Discounts are also tiered according to status (diamond is the highest).

Nonetheless, you can benefit through travel partners kulula.com (domestic), British Airways, Emirates and Qantas (international), though the number of flights per year are limited. The maximum discount is 35% (tax portion excluded).

I prefer to use my Vitality benefits rather than eBucks for local flights for the simple reason that I am stingy with the latter. Furthermore, the Vitality benefit is not transferable from year to year and simply disappears if not utilised.



TIP: Membership is R185 per month per family. This can be offset by using other Vitality benefits such as Healthy Food, where you get up to 25% of healthy food purchases back in cash.

GET MORE MILEAGE FROM YOUR JOB

Most companies allow employees to accrue the 'miles' or points of the respective airlines when travelling for work. For those travelling extensively, this is definitely an option – especially since membership of the two largest reward programmes in South Africa, SAA Voyager and Avios, is free.

SAA Voyager has changed its miles structure to offer better value for money, spokesperson Tlali Tlali announced in January in a press release. From 2015, passengers are not earning miles based on the distance flown anymore, but rather according to the actual amount spent – a huge relief for passengers on routes that may be expensive, but short.

“Under the new SAA earning structure, you will receive 1 SAA Voyager Mile for every R1,60 spent when travelling on SAA-operated flights,” says Tlali. There is also no cap on the number of miles you can earn.

TIP: In my experience, Voyager miles offer much better value when redeemed for regional and longer international flights than domestic flights. The few times I tried to redeem Voyager miles for the popular Johannesburg-Cape Town route, it cost almost the same as the low-cost airline tickets. This is because you still need to pay tax for your “free” Voyager ticket.



MORE SMART PROGRAMMES

Avios, owned by British Airways, is one of my favourite airline programmes, since you can earn Avios without using an airline-aligned credit card or even using the airline at all.



Another loyalty programme, Pick n Pay's Smart Shopper, allows you to switch Smart Shopper points to Avios (8 points = 1 Avios). Furthermore, you earn Avios by filling up at BP stations, and ABSA Rewards also allows you to switch points into Avios.

I take a bull's eye approach: Make up your Vitality membership by shopping for healthy food at Pick n Pay while you earn Smart Shopper points in the process.

If you buy, for example, R600 worth of healthy food from PnP, you will get R150 deposited into your bank account by the end of the month as this is the 25% cash back from Vitality. With that, your Vitality membership - R185 - can pay for itself. The double benefit is of course that you still earn PnP Smart Shopper points for the full R600. Switch those points for Avios as a holiday project and fill up with your FNB card at a BP.

Although you earn up to 15% eBucks back for fuel purchases at any filling station, BP will also give you 1 Avios for every 2 litres of fuel you buy. By doing that, you'll earn Avios on a regular basis and avoid any expiry of Avios. Bull's eye!

TIP: Combine airline loyalty programme points. Voyager will credit your account for flights taken with a list of partner airlines. Ditto for Avios. For our trip to Spain, we used Vueling Airlines for a domestic flight ,which allows you to earn Avios with Iberia Airlines' program. All those Avios can later be combined in your local Avios account. ■

A vibrant tropical landscape featuring a large, gnarled tree in the foreground on the left. The tree's trunk is thick and textured, with some moss or lichen visible. The background is a dense, lush forest covering a hillside, with various shades of green foliage. In the middle ground, a rocky riverbed flows through the forest, with clear, turquoise water reflecting the surrounding greenery. The overall scene is bright and natural, suggesting a wild, untamed island environment.

WILD ISLAND

Looking for adventure *and* a tropical island experience?
Dawn Jorgenson found it in Reunion, one of the
Indian Ocean's more untamed islands.





REUNION ISLAND

The French island in the Indian Ocean

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blog.welcometoreunionisland.com



AIR AUSTRAL



A year ago my knowledge of Reunion island was limited. I knew it was located in the Indian Ocean, that it was an overseas department of France and that I wanted to visit it. The Marquis de Montevergues already fell in love with this island in 1666, when it was proclaimed a French colony.

‘Bourbon Island’ – as it was first known - ‘may appear rather primitive with its mass of mountains and impenetrable forests, but there are some exceedingly beautiful places, fresh air and clean water, and such a large amount of game, fish, turtles, wild cows and pigs that anyone ought to be overjoyed at the prospect of living there...’ he wrote.

Today Reunion is an adventurer’s paradise, where the magical mix of relaxed island living blends with an array of outdoor activities.

Palms trees stand tall alongside trendy shops, bistros, and *boulangeries*, and the local Creole spirit floods the streets with a casual multi-ethnic atmosphere. This is French flair at its best, infused with a bit of multi-cultural island vibe, almost like a coconut and saffron flavoured macaroon.

Seen from the air, this UNESCO World Heritage site looks like a primordial wonderworld with deep gorges, fertile valleys, steep cliffs and cascading waterfalls. The island is also home to one of the world’s most active volcanoes, the Piton de la Fournaise.

Best of all, it’s only a four-hour direct flight from Johannesburg. And whether it’s gentle exploration or adrenalin pumping highs you’re after, you’ll find it here.

GET WOWED BY A VOLCANO

Are you tired of your brother-in-law gloating about his Mauritian honeymoon?

When you visit Reunion, you can obtain bragging rights for walking right next to the mouth of Piton de la Fournaise, one of the world’s most active volcanoes. No beach cocktail braggie is a match for a selfie taken next to the mouth of this volcano.

Piton de la Fournaise’s eruptions are predictable and slow flowing, so it’s completely safe to visit the island. The area around the volcano resembles a stark moon landscape, and you can follow the lava path of the Great Eruption of 2007.



HIKE YOUR BOOTS OFF

As a volcanic island, the topography of Reunion is rugged and craggy. The island’s three valley heads (or cirques), Salazie, Cilaos, and Mafate, are all calderas that were formed when the volcano imploded.

From the sky, they look like huge natural amphitheatres.

A guided hike to La Nouvelle, one of the villages inside the Cirque de Mafate, is highly recommended. The locals have opened ‘gîte’ holiday homes and small guesthouses where hikers can stay for the night. The villages remain quaint and unspoiled, as there are no roads leading into town.

Most avid hikers would view Reunion as a premiere destination for their favourite activity, with many guided and self-guided trails laid out across the terrain.

CLIMB A CANYON

Canyoning involves a bit of light rock climbing, swimming, tobogganing down rapids on your back and jumping from cliffs into a river below. If that sounds like your cup of tea, head over to St. Benoit, a popular spot for this adventure activity on the northeast coast of the island. The Riviere de Roche has carved old lava flow into a canyon, with high walls on each side and tranquil pools interspersed with

rapids and waterfalls that you can cascade down.

The Takamaka canyon also comes highly recommended. It's situated on one of Reunion's highest plateaus, overgrown with tropical plants and boasting one of Reunion's biggest and most beautiful canyons. Some of the waterfalls and natural rock pools look like something straight out of *The Blue Lagoon* (but without a half-naked, pre-pubescent Brook Shields, of course.)

TAKE TO THE SKIES

Reunion is one of those places that you have to see from the sky. Opt for a helicopter flight with Coraill Hélicoptères or Helilagon or take a microlight tour with FelixULM, who operate out of Le Port.

The thermal drafts of the island make it the ideal place for just about any kind of gliding sport, including skydiving. And if you haven't tried skydiving before, there couldn't be a more beautiful place to make your

first jump than here.

SAY HELLO TO NEMO

Let's not forget Reunion's palm fringed beaches and turquoise waters. The west of the island and its postcard-pretty town Saint Paul is the perfect place to stay over if you want to participate in some aquatic activities. You've heard about a see-through glass bottom boat. But what about a see-through kayak or see-through paddleboard? There are numerous companies in Reunion that offer you the opportunity to discover the marine life without getting wet by exploring it from a translucent kayak or paddleboard.

The snorkeling around Reunion is also great. Due to controlled tourism, the coral reefs aren't as damaged, and the amount of marine life you will encounter is amazing. You may even see a turtle or two while simply snorkeling from the beach. ■



REUNION IN A NUTSHELL

Understanding Reunion: Reunion island is a *département d'outre-mer* or overseas department of France, found just off the coast of Madagascar. The island covers an area of 2500 square kilometers. It falls under French rule and the citizens hold mainland residency. French is the official language and the Euro the currency.

Getting there: Air Austral offers direct four-hour flights between Johannesburg and St Denis on Thursdays and Sundays. South Africans passport holders do not need a visa to visit Reunion. You can hire a car and drive yourself, but as an advocate for local knowledge I recommend you contact Tours Reunion (www.toursreunion.com) to book a guide. Allow yourself at least a week to explore the island.

Weather: Pack for all seasons, its very hot and humid on the coastline yet it can be cool inland and in the mountains. Summer is from November to April and temperatures peak in the high 30's. Winter (May to October) is slightly milder. The water temperature stays at around 25°C all year round.

For more information or to plan your holiday, visit www.welcometoreunionisland.com or read their blog: blog.welcometoreunionisland.com. Atout France will also help you plan your holiday, send an email to info.za@atout-france.fr or call +27 10 205 0201.



Make a break for Romantic Reunion

Romantics who want to do more than lie on the beach during their island holiday should put Reunion Island at the top of their list for an adventure-filled romantic getaway, wedding or honeymoon destination.

Recognised widely for its adventure offering; captivating Reunion Island is a dramatic landscape of volcanic terrain, lush green forests, tropical gardens, white, black and green beaches and warm Indian ocean.

Spirit of Adventure Whether hiking through the natural UNESCO heritage regions (covering 42% of the island), canyoning down waterfalls, gliding along in a glass-bottom boat or having a go at SUP (stand-up paddle); there are plenty of activities to keep couples entertained.

Beach Bums It's not all about action though; no island sojourn is complete without some time spent lazing on the beach, cocktail in hand, and there are plenty of spas to visit for pampering treats.

Sights and Tastes After dark, the island's nightlife is a blend of local bars and beach restaurants peppered with regular music and culture festivals. By day, there are temples to explore as well as visits to vanilla farms, perfumeries and historic buildings that unfold 351 years of diverse civilisation on this 3 million-year-old island.

Union in Reunion South Africans are not able to legally marry in Reunion, but the fascinating island is an unforgettable place to enjoy a special ceremony with close family and friends. Options for couples looking to celebrate their marriage in Reunion include hiring a large home for a group of friends and family or marking their special occasion with a reception at one of the island's top-end hotels.

Authentic Island Reunion Island has less large resorts and hotels than many of the Indian Ocean islands, but this won't stop adventurous newlyweds from booking their honeymoon in paradise. While some of the hotels offer honeymoon packages, guesthouses also have honeymoon suites and romantic views from French colonial rooms.



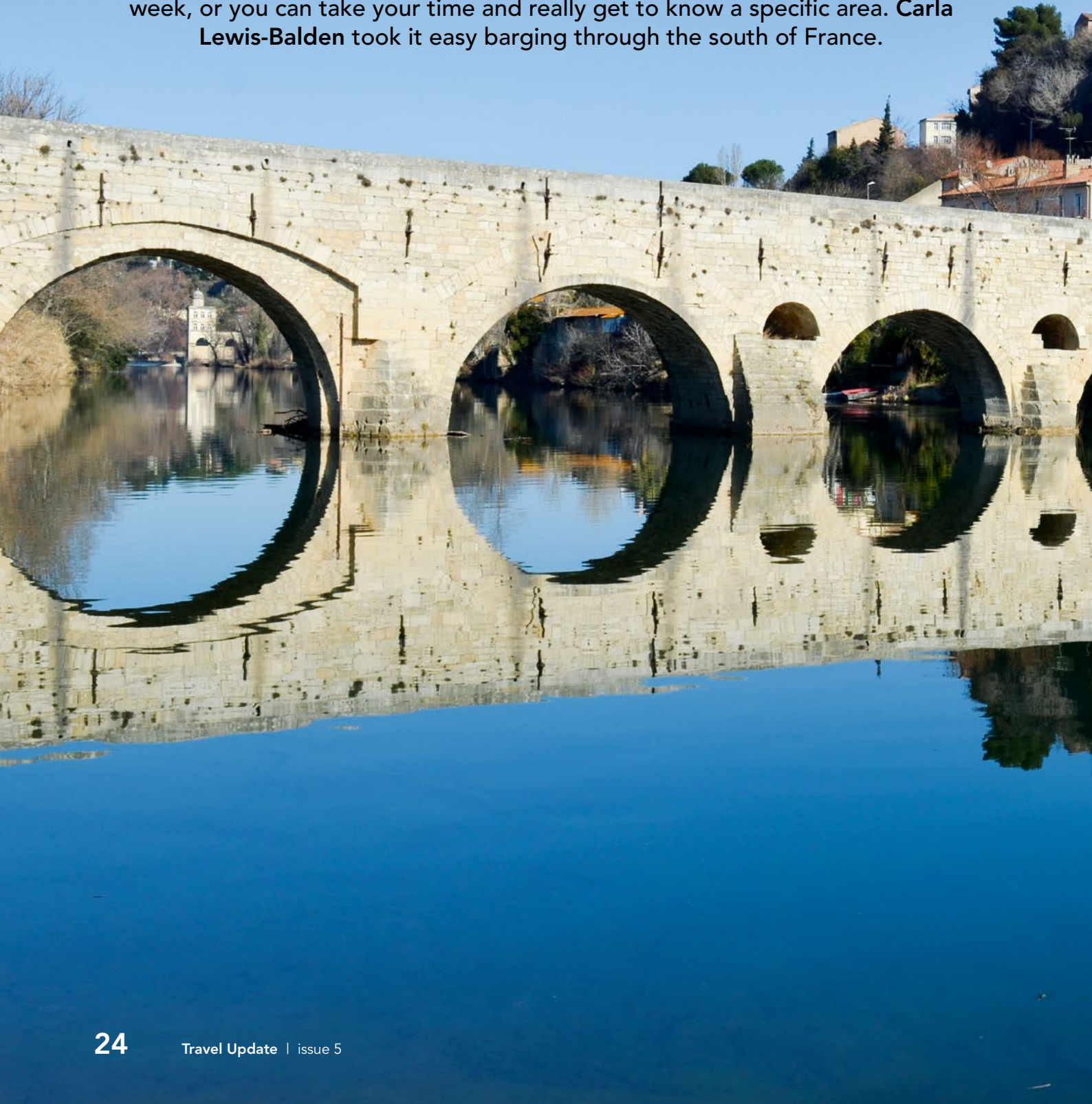
To fly to Reunion, contact AIR AUSTRAL at: Johannesburg@air-austral.com

Tel. (011) 326 4443 / 326 4388 / 326 0626 / 326 3837

For more on Reunion Island: blog.welcometoreunionisland.com email: reunionisland.za@atout-france.fr

CANAL CULTURE

There are two ways to travel: You can rush your way through ten countries in a week, or you can take your time and really get to know a specific area. **Carla Lewis-Balden** took it easy barging through the south of France.





The whole landscape of the Languedoc-Roussillon-area in the south of France showed the start of spring. Magpies chimed a happy jingle in the plane trees and the fruit orchards had more blossoms than a hipster at the Coachella music and arts festival.

However, the weather wasn't playing along. I was sitting on a Le Boat barge on the Canal du Midi, getting whipped by the Tramontane, an icy wind that gathers its bite from the frosted tips of the Pyrenees mountains.

It was gloomy and overcast, and even though it was technically spring, I was covered up in a thick parka, woolly boots and a beanie.

Then, as if by a great, benign conspiracy of the weather gods, the wind lulled and a shard of sunlight broke through the clouds. Only then did I understand why this is a great time to sail the Canal du Midi.

When barging at the beginning of the season, you have the silver waters of the canal almost completely to yourself. You don't queue when passing through a river lock and on some stretches there isn't a single boat in sight.

So you just drift along, watching the calm water, the plane trees passing by and the farm workers preparing their vineyards and orchards for the summer.

BONJOUR, HOMPS

Our first point of departure is a small hamlet called Homps, situated about two hours' drive from Toulouse. We arrived with frayed nerves after we got lost and had to navigate the country roads of France on the 'wrong' side of the road. With a megalomaniac Madame barking orders in French from the car's GPS.

However, it was nothing that a big decanter of local

red wine and a hearty bowl of duck cassoulet at the local bistro couldn't fix. The Languedoc region is duck country, by the way, so if you want to sample a good duck confit, this is the place.

I also swiped a tiny bite of Foie Gras from our skipper Jean-Michel's plate. Feelings of guilt about the poor ducks wasn't enough to stop me from moving in for a second bite, either. I said my prayers to Daffy and Donald and washed it down with a rich, robust glass of Minervois, a locally produced red wine.

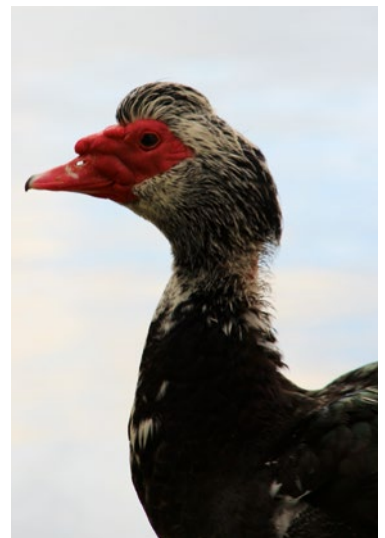
Before departing on your Le Boat vacation, it's a good idea to get a crash course in Locks 101. The Canal du Midi has a number of locks that you need to pass through and although it can be quite exciting, you need to keep a good grip on the boat and its passengers. When passing through a lock during windy weather, the boat must be tied to the canal banks and it helps if you know the difference between port and starboard.

The distances between the little towns and the locks are short, and you can always get off at one of the locks and take a stroll next to the canal. It also helps you work off some of that duck and red wine.

For lunch, we stop at Argens-Minervois, a town that looks like it could have been the setting for the film *Chocolat*. This is one of the great things about a Le Boat vacation – if you see an interesting town or attraction, you just dock your boat, tie it up and go explore. Argens-Minervois' attractions include the crumbling ruins of an old church and narrow cobblestone streets.

LA VIE BELLE

One of the other things that I enjoyed, and possibly enjoyed most, was the long, languid lunches on the boat. We bought supplies at the market in Homps, where the



fresh produce and baked goods put Woolies to shame. The variety of cheeses is enough to make your head spin (France has over 360 types, almost enough to taste a different cheese every day for a year).

French cheese seems to work on a perverted sliding scale: The smellier the cheese, the better the taste. Even the Camembert wasn't for beginners and we had to ban a particularly musty cheese to the top deck after it stank up the inner cabin.

Jean-Michel also has insider knowledge on where to get the best bread and baked goods in the villages. Every morning we ate french baguettes, flaky croissants with soft, doughy centres and pains aux chocolat. If you're a Noakes disciple, you're sure to fall off the wagon here.

It's dusk, the golden hour, when we sail into the town of Le Somail. In the French countryside, this is probably the most alluring part of the day. Sandstone houses next to the river bank glow in the late afternoon light. It almost feels like every town is competing with its neighbour to be more picturesque, more quaint than the former one, but Le Somail is one of the frontrunners.

Just before dusk, everyone and their dog takes a stroll next to the canal to catch up with the latest village gossip on the square. Old men sit at cafés, drinking a pastis, while others amuse themselves with a game of petanque. I can almost hear that braying accordion in a Richelieu ad.

The highlight of Le Somail is the antique bookstore, filled with that beguiling, dusty smell of old books. My eyes fall on special editions of Victor Hugo's *Hunchback of Notre Dame* and the adventures of Alexander Dumas' *Three Musketeers*. Bookshelves sag under the musings of French philosophers such as Voltaire, Camus and Satre. And even though you can't understand a word, it feels like you're standing in a holy temple of knowledge. ■

BEFORE YOU GO

Can I charter a Le Boat barge?

You don't need a special license to rent one of Le Boat's barges, but I suggest you hire a skipper for a day or two to show you the ropes. It may be tricky at first, especially when you have to pass through one of the locks. Having an expert on board will make your vacation a little more relaxed (and they have all the inside knowledge on where to buy the best croissants).

How much will it cost?

The barges from Le Boat range from basic and comfortable to huge boats fit for a Russian oligarch. It all depends on the number of bells and whistles you require, as well as the time of year. July and August are the busiest and therefore also the most expensive. Visit Le Boat's website for a more comprehensive list on the boats and their prices.

Is it comfortable?

The inner cabins are cozy without feeling cramped. Some boats have benches that convert into beds, ideal for families with small children, but I wouldn't recommend it to a group of friends or teenagers looking for privacy. If you're traveling with couples, try to get a boat where every couple has their own toilet and shower.

Plan your journey

For more information or to book, contact +27 21 200 1838, send an e-mail to sales-zaf@leboat.co.uk or visit Le Boat's website at www.leboat.co.uk.

Atout France, the French Tourism Authority, will help you plan your holiday. Call + 27 (0)10 205 0201 or + 27 (0)83 200 4444, send an email to helene.bezuidenhoudt@atout-france.fr. Visit their website at <http://int.rendezvousenfrance.com>.





GOING COASTAL

Heading to KwaZulu-Natal's South Coast this summer? Get your adrenaline pumping with these adventure activities.

SWIM WITH SHARKS

Does the idea of swimming with sharks without the protection of a cage sound like something only Chuck Norris would do? Think again. The people at Blue Wilderness believe this is the best way to have a shark diving experience.

“At Blue Wilderness our goal is to replace people’s fear of sharks with respect. To achieve this, we allow our guests to interact with them outside the confines of a cage. It’s an incredible, perfectly safe and wonderfully intimate encounter,” says Ryan Johnson, shark scientist and owner of Blue Wilderness.

His company offers a rewarding expedition that allows both snorkelers and scuba divers face-to-face encounters with the blacktip shark of the South Coast’s Aliwal Shoal, a reef 45 minutes’ drive from Durban.

If you’re a bit hesitant to get into the water without any barriers, they also have a cage. “We know that not everyone is ready to encounter free swimming sharks. Or at least, not straight away. Guests who are a little nervous can enter the sharks’ realm within a secure shark cage. And once they see their friends and guides swimming around safely outside, they can grab a pair of fins and slip out of the cage to join us.”

The expedition launches daily from Rocky Bay near Scottburgh, followed by a quick boat ride out to the shoal, where blacktip sharks are attracted to the expedition vessel. Once the sharks are present, Blue Wilderness’ experienced marine scientist guide will accompany you into the water for the experience of a lifetime.

The blacktip sharks are quite curious and will come right up to you, sometimes even bumping into you. The marine biologist on board constantly monitors the situation and makes sure that you are safe at all times.

The company has a strong science and marine biology background and conservation forms the core of their business.

The expedition lasts about two hours and includes lunch, a drink and hot showers afterwards. For more information, visit their webpage, www.bluewilderness.co.za, or call +27 (0)71 705 8518 to book.



CATCH A WAVE

A private lesson is the fastest and easiest way to learn to surf. At the Umzumbe Surf House and Surf Camp, you can soak up the sun while getting amped about catching your next wave.

It's the brainchild of Rich Walters, owner and surf instructor, who has surfed all over the world. He founded Umzumbe in 2013 to bring a bit of the South African Surfari experience from his surf trips to the South Coast.

Umzumbe's surf lessons are designed to fit your specific surfing needs. Your coach will work with you to help you get accustomed to the mechanics and timing of the waves, and teach you the skills to enjoy riding them.

Umzumbe also offers accommodation in their quaint beach house. It's been in Rich's family for decades and is almost a century old. The house has five bedrooms and an open-plan common area with a lounge, dining area and kitchen, all with a sea view. For more information, visit www.surfumzumbe.co.za or call +27 (0)39 684 5019.

GO RIVER RAFTING

You start your adventure at Oriibi Gorge Hotel, where you are transferred to the Umzimkulu river. The Oriibi section has some of the most beautiful scenery on the South Coast. You have a choice between a one-day rafting adventure, which is about 7 km long, and a 25 km expedition – a two-day trip.

The rapids you'll face range from 1 (quite easy) to 4, which may be a bit more challenging. The scenery is magnificent, with the river running through a steep valley with high gorge-like cliffs. The area where you camp during the two-day adventure is also quite remote and gives you a chance to reconnect with nature.

After a fun-filled day of rafting, you get to enjoy a real South African braai at camp, followed by roasted marshmallows. And after a good night's rest and a hearty breakfast, you can look forward to another half day of rafting before being collected and dropped back at Oriibi Gorge Hotel. A fair amount of fitness is required from participants and you should be able to swim. For more information, visit www.wild5adventures.co.za or send an email to info@wild5adventures.co.za.





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Who's on board?



STEP OFF THE EDGE

With a drop of 165 meters, the Wild Swing near the Oribi Gorge Hotel is the highest gorge swing in the world. Imagine the setting: You are standing on a platform, looking over a view of deep gorges, high cliffs and an emerald green forest beneath your feet. Adrenaline pulses through your veins, but you can also hear the faint rush of a waterfall next to you.

You take a step off the platform, and fall, and fall. Then the spray of the waterfall envelopes you in a cloud of mist.

But because it's a swing and not a bungee jump, you swing into a graceful arc, drinking in the scenery. Afterwards, you also don't hang upside down like a bat, but end in a comfortable sitting position.

"With this experience you get to break out of your comfort zone, bust through your barriers and conquer your fears," says Luke Williamson, operations manager for Wild Five Adventures, who runs the swing.

"The saying goes: If you're not living on the edge, you're taking up too much space. But at Wild Five Adventures we say: Why live on the edge, when you can jump off?!" For more information, visit www.wild5adventures.co.za or send an email to info@wild5adventures.co.za.



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PICK UP THE SLACK... PACK

Who said adventure has to involve heavy backpacks, lukewarm instant noodles and only basic accommodation? Take a look at these slackpacking trails.

LIMPOPO PROVINCE: THE PAFURI TRAIL

After hiking the Pafuri Walking Trail, in the Makuleke Concession in the more remote northern part of the Kruger, I've come to the conclusion that this national park is best explored on foot.

It's a seasonal trail and only runs between April and October. Accommodation is a rustic campsite. Guests stay in spacious tents, which are furnished with army beds and big fluffy feather duvets. There's an "en-suite" toilet tent with a portaloos, but the camp has no running water. The rest of the ablution facilities are big bush showers with water warmed over a camp fire.

The camp is not fenced and it's not unusual for a lone buffalo or herd of elephants to come wandering near or through it.

You hike twice daily. In the morning the party leaves between 6:15 and 6:30, depending on the light, and returns for lunch and a siesta around 13:00. You go out again at 15:00 and return just after dusk.

You don't have to be super fit to do the trail, but some of the terrain can be challenging. The hike includes dry flood plains that were trampled by elephants and hippo, and we climbed several hills. You cover about 8 to 10 km daily, at a leisurely pace.

You see less big game here and don't get to see them up close (due to safety reasons and the animals' instinctive fear of man). But you get to experience other things, like lingering under a mammoth baobab or watching the antics of a fork-tailed drongo. A reward in itself.

TAKE NOTE:

The Pafuri Walking Trail was recently taken over by Return Africa. For more information, visit their website at www.returnafrica.com or call +27 (0)11 646 1391.

-Carla Lewis-Balden

WESTERN CAPE: THE WHALE TRAIL

The Whale Trail combines the very best of De Hoop nature reserve in the Overberg: stunning fynbos, dramatic coastlines and, of course, the majestic whales. The hike starts over mountains clad in their fynbos finest, with white sand dunes and the blue ocean in the distance.

Towards the afternoon of day two, we could smell the salt in the air. Suddenly, a small bay came into view where a playful whale calf was frolicking in the waves. From there, the trail followed the coastline, with steep cliffs and the ocean on one side and rolling green hills on the other. Over the five days of the walk, we saw more whales than we could count, large pods of dolphins, flocks of birds and a few shy antelope.

The Whale Trail is an excellent getaway without too much hassle. The hikes are not overly strenuous and anyone that's moderately fit will manage easily.

You sleep in well-equipped huts with hot showers, flushing toilets and gas cookers. The overnight huts are in almost impossibly beautiful settings; perfect places to greet every sunset and sunrise.

Every day, your gear is transported to the next hut, so you only carry a daypack. But you are still far away from everything. There's no cellphone reception and you need to plan supplies around no refrigeration or ovens along the way. It's like camping, but with basic comforts.

TAKE NOTE:

The Whale Trail must be booked well in advance, for either 6 or 12 hikers. The route stretches over 55 km from Potberg to Koppie Alleen and includes five overnight stops. Visit www.dehoopcollection.com/whale-trail/ for more information or call +27 (0)21 422 4522. -*Katarina Mancama*

KWAZULU-NATAL: THE NORTHERN DRAKENSBERG

One of the best ways to explore the Berg is to base yourself in one of the many comfortable guesthouses in the area and do day hikes from there. The most dramatic one is without a doubt the summit of the Amphitheatre, from where you will have magnificent views of the mountain range. This is also where Tugela Falls, the second highest waterfall in the world (948 metres), drops off the escarpment. Some of the chain ladders may prove challenging if you don't like heights, but it's considered the easiest summit in the Berg.

At the bottom of the Amphitheatre is the Tugela Gorge hike. Here, you make your way along the meandering river through cool forests towards the impressive Amphitheatre and the base of the Tugela Falls.

This is a fairly flat hike, but once inside the mighty gorge you do some boulder hopping and you may get your feet wet.

We based ourselves at the Berghouse & Cottages, situated within reach of all these hikes. They bring breakfast and dinner to the stoep of your cottage and can also provide lunch packs for your hikes. Visit their website at berghouse.co.za or call +27 (0)82 8048 784.

TAKE NOTE:

The Amphitheatre starts at Sentinel Car Park, close to Witsieshoek Mountain Lodge. The hike is 12 kilometres long and takes 6 to 8 hours to complete. The Tugela Gorge hike starts at Thendele Camp, near Giant's Castle Game Reserve. It's 14 km long and takes about 6-7 hours to complete. Booking isn't necessary but hikers need to pay a conservation fee of R30 and a hiking fee of R60 per day to Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.

-*Katarina Mancama*

EASTERN CAPE: AMADIBA EXPLORER

The three-day Amadiba Explorer from Mtentu Lodge is a Liquorice Allsorts kind of adventure. On top of hiking you get to go horseriding, canoeing, swim in rock pools and jump from waterfalls.

The adventure starts at the Wild Coast Sun Casino in front of the beach (there's safe parking for your car). The first day, you explore pristine beaches and isolated rural communities. You will also go horse riding, ending at Mtentu Lodge, your base for three days of exploring.

Mtentu is an untouched paradise. Accommodation is in rustic cabins which sleep up to four people. The eco-lodge is owned in partnership with the local Amadiba Community.

The next few days, visitors can look forward to hiking next to rivers, swimming in crystal clear pools and doing a canoe trip up the Mtentu Estuary. If you're lucky, you may

spot turtles, kingfishers, baboons, fish eagles and vultures.

A highlight of the trip is a hike through the Mkambati nature reserve, where you will see herds of eland and zebra. This is also the home of Mkambati Falls, one of only a few waterfalls to plummet directly into the sea.

The best part, however, is that you only have to carry a daypack. Mtentu will transfer all your luggage to the camp and back to the Wild Coast Sun on your last day.

TAKE NOTE:

On the first day, you hike 14 km and ride 10 km on horse back. The next two days, the hikes aren't longer than 8 km and there's plenty of time allocated for swimming and relaxing. The hike is also fully catered and includes three meals a day. For more information, visit www.mtentulodge.co.za or call +27 (0)83 805 3356.

- *Carla Lewis-Balden*





ROCK OUT

A holiday at Rocktail Beach Camp will spoil you so much, conventional beach holidays will never feel the same again. But **Carla Lewis-Balden** wouldn't have it any other way.





It was my second day at Rocktail Beach Camp, a luxury, low-impact beach lodge in Maputaland, KwaZulu-Natal. Engrossed in a crime thriller, I hardly heard the faint plop next to my head. When I looked up to identify the culprit, I saw a tiny flesh coloured leg followed by a tail disappear behind the wooden beams of my luxury tent. Lying next to me was a perfectly round ball of gecko dung.

HIDDEN PARADISE

Rocktail is situated in a lush coastal forest in the iSimangaliso wetland area, in the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal. The luxury tents are either hidden in the coastal forest or perched on wooden stilts, looking over the treetops at the indigo blue water of the Indian Ocean.

Be warned, it's highly unlikely that you'll be sharing your tent with your partner only. As I discovered, tropical geckos are quite fond of Rocktail's tents. And Wilderness Safaris, who owns the beach camp, believes in low-impact tourism, or as I like to call it, bush karma. Live and let live.

The beach camp is a sanctuary for people who hate conventional beach resorts and the forced fun that usually accompanies such properties. Rocktail is quite isolated, so you won't be trampled by hordes of travellers. The nearest shopping mall is probably in Richards Bay and except for the TV at the kiddies' club, there are no other televisions at the lodge.

But you can still sit around sipping lurid coloured cocktails next to the swimming pool, sleep late and gorge yourself on fine food. Rocktail has plenty of that. Every night, you have a choice of three main courses, one of which is vegetarian. Expect simple but hearty fare presented in a beautiful way.

My favourite part of Rocktail, however, was the unspoiled wilderness and wide open spaces. Golden beaches sprawl for miles without a soul in sight. The camp also resembles a safari lodge, but instead of bush activities, you keep yourself busy with marine activities.

TURTLE SAFARI

One of the most exciting activities at the camp, and a must do if you're here, is a turtle safari. The beaches of the iSimangaliso wetland area are a nesting ground for leatherback and loggerhead turtles. November to March is nesting season and researchers conduct tours of the beaches, giving you the opportunity to watch a turtle laying eggs or a bale of baby turtles hatching.

As with a game drive, there is no guarantee that you'll see any action, and after an hour on an open Land Rover it seemed like Lady Luck was letting us down, too. Then all of a sudden, Gugu Mathenjwa, one of the researchers, hit the brakes. There they were, the slowpokes of a nest

of leatherback turtles. Their siblings had already been massacred by an assortment of crabs and seagulls but they were soldiering on.

A hatching nest of turtles is an all-you-can-eat-buffet for predators, and the chances of survival are slim for these baby turtles. However, it seemed like these slowpokes had an advantage as they dragged their tiny bodies towards the ocean. The predators had gorged themselves and the massacre was over.

In the spotlight, they gleamed like polished opals. I asked Gugu if we could give them a helping hand to reach the waves, but he shook his head.

The journey they make from the nest to the waves helps them set their internal compass. Should they survive, they will return to this very beach to nest one day.

REEFS AND FORESTS

Another thing I liked about Rocktail was being able to sleep late. Most activities here are set by the tides, so you don't have to get up by the break of dawn to look for lions. The camp also has a fully accredited dive centre and diving operation on the premises, and the reefs here are world class.

We, however, settled for guided snorkeling at the nearby tidal pools at Lala Nek. Having a guide with you when snorkeling is a whole other experience. Usually, I just stare at the schools of colourful fish, with the clownfish being the only ones I can identify. But our guide helped us identify various other species, like triggerfish, zebrafish and lionfish.

Few things put you in a Zen state of mind like floating in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. Schools of fish in psychedelic colours dart underneath you while the tentacles of anemones and strings of kelp lazily wave to and fro. The only sound is your rhythmic breathing through your snorkel.

A guided tour through the dune and coastal forest is another unmissable experience here. We went with Gibson Mkhize, the Bush Google of northern KwaZulu-Natal. We hiked through the twilight of the forest, with milkwoods and waterberry tree branches forming a thick canopy above our heads.

Gesturing to various plants, Gibson proved to be an encyclopedia of the medicinal and practical properties of each tree. We crushed soap-nettle between our fingers, the "Omo of the bush", and Gibson showed us curry bush, an alternative to toilet paper. "When I'm in the bush, it's my three-ply," he told us with a grin.

SOOTHING SIBAYA

Rocktail also lies near Lake Sibaya, the biggest freshwater lake in South Africa. On our way there, we drove



through a tiny Zulu village, Mabibi. It smelled like the end of the day in rural Africa. The air was thick with the aroma of burning wood fires and cow dung, as the women prepared fires for the evening and the *umalusi* ushered their cattle back to the kraal. All that was missing was a marimba soundtrack.

Lake Sibaya is home to crocodiles and hippos, but

we only spotted a few terns, an egret and a malachite kingfisher. When you close your eyes, all that you hear is the soft trill of the kingfishers and the shoosh of the small waves breaking on the beach. Motorised watersport or boats are not permitted on the lake, which adds to the tranquility of the setting.

A word of warning though. After visiting Rocktail, you are spoiled for life. Conventional beach holidays will be ruined. Your most rowdy neighbours will probably be a breeding pair of purple crested turacos getting a bit frisky in the morning or a troop of curious vervet monkeys. And your view – better than anything on a giant flatscreen TV. ■

BEFORE YOU GO

Rocktail Beach Camp is a family-friendly property with 17 units of which seven are family suites sleeping four people. The beach is about 20 minutes' leisurely stroll from the camp. If you're feeling lazy, they will organise a shuttle service for you.

Wilderness Safaris is trying to phase out the use of PET bottles. Every guest receives a water bottle during their visit which they can refill with filtered borehole water, free of charge.

Rocktail can only be reached by 4x4. However, if you don't have one, they will pick you up at Coastal Cashews, a cashew farm about 40 km away.

For more information or to book, visit www.wilderness-safaris.com or call +27 11 807 1800. You can also send an email to enquiry@wilderness.co.za.

Wilderness Safaris runs a special loyalty program for African residents, called The Wilderness Safaris Residents Programme. Members of this program enjoy preferential rates and special offers. For more information, send an email to residents@wilderness.co.za or visit www.wilderness-residents.co.za.

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T&E spend is often fragmented and challenged by all the various suppliers and the lack of a centralised system to control this complex spend category. TraveluXion understands this challenge and has built a robust solution that can span across multi TMC and ERP environments, to offer the Corporation total control and assist in mitigating risk.



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Service levels, monitoring of traveller and approver behavior, all impact on an organisation and in some way affect the costs associated to T&E. It is imperative that organisations have the back up of a robust audit and approval cycle, that will take the emotion out of managing this spend category.



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TraveluXion are experts in the T&E space, coupled with many years of research and speaking to hundreds of corporations, our solutions based approach ensures that we cater for most of the challenges experienced in this spend category.



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The ability for your business to remain agile, and for your approvers to stay on top of expenditure before it is incurred, is one of our cornerstone features. We place the control back in the organisations hands, allowing you to make informed decisions before the costs are incurred.

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Email: enquiries@traveluxion.co.za Tel: 011 548 7300

Ask for Debbie or Shirley or email Debbie.duncan@traveluxion.co.za or Shirley.leroux@traveluxion.co.za

TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR BUSINESS TRAVELLING COSTS

The costs associated with keeping your business travellers mobile and generating revenue for your organisation can be reduced with one simple solution, says Shirley le Roux.



We have all heard, and often experienced, that business travel is one of the biggest expenses within a corporation or organisation.

It would be logical to conclude that this cost should be controlled internally within a corporation and that no portion of this cost control should be left in the hands of a third party. I am not suggesting that services should not be outsourced, but the actual control mechanisms have to be maintained by the organisation.

A vast majority of organisations still attempt to control their travel and entertainment costs with manual processes, or a combination of manual and automated ones.

They rely on their enterprise resource planning technology to generate the purchase order, but the actual requisitioning and quoting of a business trip is all manual. This is not an ideal scenario and leaves the organisation open to manipulation, potential abuse of company funds and no line of sight over any cost components until the costs have been incurred.

Some organisations have now adopted self-booking tools that focus on providing rich content to the end user.

This enables organisations to control the booking of their travel and entertainment expenses. However, the rest of the controls are weak and the approval workflow is not synchronised with the company's procurement workflows and delegation of authorities. The organisation still has very little insight into budgetary impacts at the time of approvals. Deviances from company policy or changes to approved orders can also be left untracked or unreported.

In effect, self-booking tools have merely catalogued the inventory of a business's travel supplier, and include an element of travel policy that can be built into the selection and approval process.

Corporations usually adopt this type of technology tools from their travel service providers, as the costs are not high. In some

instances, they are offered for free or as a value added service by travel management companies. This works for some organisations who want to provide their users with freedom of choice and reduce the service fees associated with traditional agency services. However, for those organisations who wish to maintain control, drive policy and financial compliance and have ownership over their travel data and reporting, this is not an ideal scenario.

TraveluXion is an independent provider of procurement software that focuses on controlling and reducing costs for travel and entertainment.

The software is provided independently and can control behavior, track costs throughout the entire lifecycle of the transaction, provide robust audit trails, ensure financial compliance is achieved and provide a robust reporting platform that allows corporations to control their expenditure. It will also help companies reduce their reliance on travel suppliers and third parties. Organisations that are serious about controlling costs and enforcing compliance from travel and entertainment expenditure will benefit from TraveluXions' seamless features.

WHAT IS TRAVELUXION?

TraveluXion is the new direction of procurement technology solutions, specialising in travel and entertainment spend management that is independent of your travel management company. Travel spend management, online booking technology, expense management and financial controls are all rolled into one comprehensive solution. TraveluXion helps organisations to own their travel technology while providing a convergence of big data, real-time reporting and visibility. Visit www.traveluxion.co.za or call +27 (0)11 548 7358.

WHY ARE CHINESE TOURISTS SKIPPING SOUTH AFRICA?

Outbound Chinese tourists spent billions of rands in 2014, but South Africa is missing out on its slice of the pie. The reason? Bureaucratic red tape, writes Jo Kromberg.

By the end of this year, the amount spent globally by outbound Chinese tourists is expected to rise to \$180 billion, despite the recession in the Chinese economy. It sounds like a lot – and it is. To put it into perspective, it is almost half of the Gross Domestic Product of South Africa, the second biggest economy in Africa.

China moved from being South Africa's ninth largest tourism source market to the fourth largest in 2013, after a 30% increase year-on-year in tourist arrivals, according to South African Tourism.

According to the Skift Travel Report, outbound tourism from China continues to rise yearly, climbing globally by 8% in 2014 from 2013. The problem is, of the entire 47 million international tourists that visit Africa, only 3% are Chinese.

As a continent, Africa is still woefully behind in the scramble for the Chinese tourist's yuan, and no country more so than South Africa.

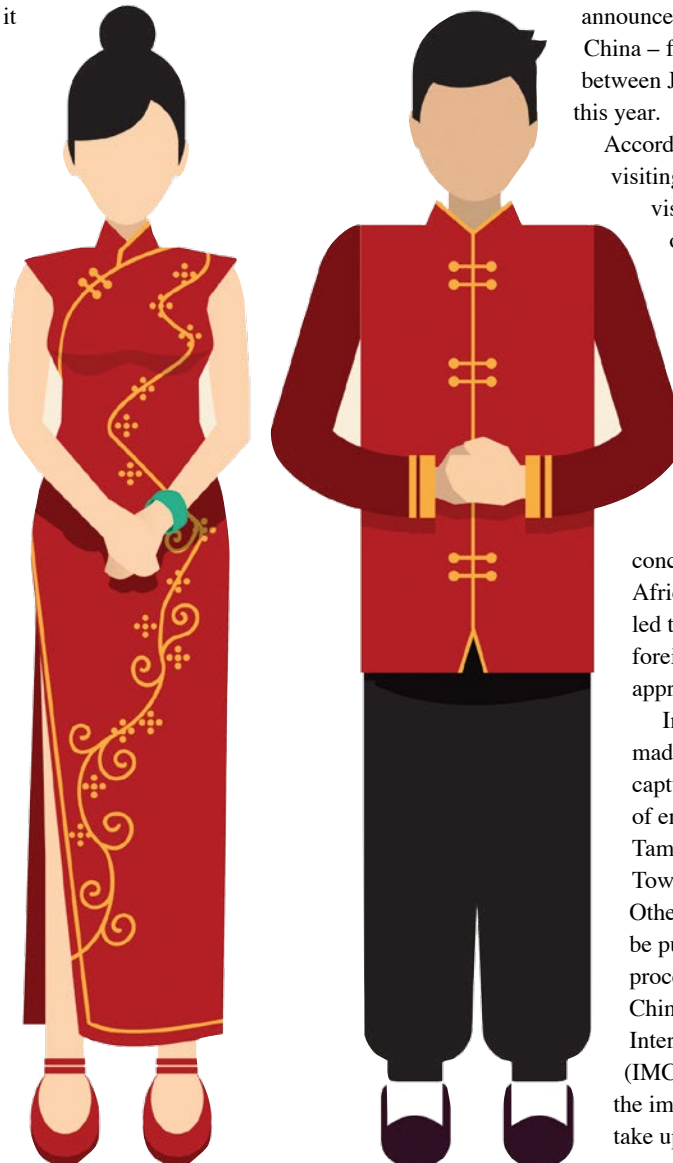
According to the 2012 Euromonitor Report, numbers from China to South Africa were set to grow by 22.5% in the period 2013 to 2018. Now this optimistic picture has changed considerably due to politicking and short-sightedness on the part of the South African Home Affairs having implemented restrictive visa restrictions for Chinese visitors. Although the government is in the process of easing these regulations, it seems like a case of too little, too late. Grant Thornton,

one of the world's leading organisations of independent audit, tax and advisory firms estimates that these regulations cost the economy R2,6 billion this year and a potential 5 800 jobs.

Three months ago, STATS SA also announced a decline in tourism from China – from 30 000 to 19 000 between June last year and June this year.

According to the new rules, before visiting South Africa all Chinese visitors were required to obtain a bio-metric visa in person. Unfortunately, there are only two visa facilitation centres in a country eight times the size of South Africa, one in Shanghai and the other in Beijing. Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom conceded in July that South Africa's new visa regulations led to a "worrying drop" in foreign visitors, and a new approach may be needed.

In October, a decision was made that biometrics can be captured at pilot site ports of entry. These include OR Tambo, King Shaka and Cape Town International Airport. Other measures will also be put in place to ease the process for applicants from China, but according to the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) tasked with evaluating the immigration rules, it can take up to three months for these measures to come into effect.



VISA WOES

Jacky Liu, Managing Director of the China International Travel Agency of South Africa, has lost quite a few clients in the past few months. “Frankly, none of our clients in China knew exactly how this new rule for the bio-metric visas worked. The travel agents I work with have almost stopped promoting South Africa as a favourable tourist destination as they are afraid of any unknown issues. We have seen another 20% decline from outbound Chinese tourist since the beginning of the year,” says Jacky.

“In China, 1.4 billion people are living on 9.6 million square kilometres, which is eight times bigger than South Africa. Just

by looking at city scales, compared to South Africa, there are 17 major cities much bigger than Johannesburg and 150 cities similar to Cape Town. The two current visa facilitation centres were definitely not enough for the Chinese market.

“Chinese tourists prefer to go to a destination with fewer visa

hassles, and a lot of countries have realised that China is a great market for tourism.

“Australia and the United States, for instance, have reduced their visa application processes from China to attract more tourists. But South Africa’s biometric visa regulations hindered the interest

of Chinese tourists coming to South Africa,” Jacky says.

He hopes that the new biometric visa systems at each point of entry will boost tourism numbers from China. “This will not only be in line with South African national security requirements but will also help to reduce unnecessary expenses and time for visa applicants.” ■

“IN CHINA, 1.4 BILLION PEOPLE ARE LIVING ON 9.6 MILLION SQUARE KILOMETRES, WHICH IS EIGHT TIMES BIGGER THAN SOUTH AFRICA. JUST BY LOOKING AT CITY SCALES, COMPARED TO SOUTH AFRICA, THERE ARE 17 MAJOR CITIES MUCH BIGGER THAN JOHANNESBURG AND 150 CITIES SIMILAR TO CAPE TOWN. THE VISA FACILITATION CENTRES ARE DEFINITELY NOT ENOUGH FOR THE CHINESE MARKET.”

Jo Kromberg is the founding editor of the Africa Travel section for The Beijing Review, owned by the China International Publishing Group (CIPG), the biggest publishing company in China. She also contributes regularly to Conde Nast Traveller China.

WHAT ELSE KEEPS CHINESE TOURISTS OUT OF SOUTH AFRICA?

EBOLA

“The world, including China, was terrified by Ebola. Although there were no outbreaks anywhere near Southern Africa, Chinese tourists didn’t want to take the risk. Our agency alone lost almost 80% business from August to December 2014 compared with the same time in 2013,” says Jacky.

XENOPHOBIA

A total of 40% of Jacky’s groups cancelled their trips to South Africa due to xenophobic attacks making global headlines. At the end of May, Air China also announced they will delay their direct flights to South Africa as a result of xenophobic attacks. Air China spokesperson Jane Hu told Traveller24 in May: “Flights have been cancelled due to xenophobic attacks last month. China issued a travel warning to citizens not to travel to South Africa at that stage.”

SCARCITY OF DIRECT FLIGHTS

Currently, the only direct flights from mainland China to Africa is by China Southern Airlines. Based in Guangzhou, they started thrice weekly flights to Nairobi in August as a second destination in Africa along with Mauritius from Shenzhen. Following suit will be Air China, headquartered in Beijing, with direct flights to Addis Ababa from the 26th of October this year.

TRANSIT VISAS THROUGH SOUTH AFRICA

The South African government requires Chinese tourists to hold a transit visa through South Africa to neighbouring countries Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

This cuts off some, if not all, of the tourism blood supply to these countries as well. Airlines like Cathay Pacific and Emirates circumvent South Africa altogether by flying from Hong Kong and Dubai to Mauritius.

WHY YOU SHOULD EX SEX TOURISM



Visiting a “ping-pong” show in Thailand or taking a stroll through a red light district in Amsterdam is never just innocent fun, writes **Carla Lewis-Balden**.

If you mention that you recently travelled to Bangkok or Amsterdam, people tend to get a sneaky tug around the mouth, followed by the same questions. Did you go to a ping-pong show? Did you attend a live sex show? Because when in Rome, you know.

However, it isn't the locals trawling through the streets of Amsterdam looking for cheap thrills and legal drugs. It's gap year teens, dodgy-looking Russians and curious tourists like me. Because as a tourist, you tend to feel you have a certain immunity against the smut.

WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS

“What happens in Vegas” seems to be a tourist's mantra for any suspect behaviour outside of his or her country's borders. As soon as you get your passport stamped, you believe you're free to indulge in behaviour that would be frowned upon back home.

And besides, like the word “tourist” implies, you're only here to look, right?

Most people I know who have visited Thailand have been to a ping-pong show. It seems like one of those “must do” experiences. Eat a green curry. Check. Have a Thai massage. Check. Watch a woman pop ping-pong

balls out of her nether regions. Check.

I've been to Thailand three times and I've never attended a ping-pong show. And judging by the comments and stories I hear from friends and (yes) family, it's something I can happily go without seeing without any FOMO.

“THE PROBLEM I HAVE WITH PING-PONG AND SEX SHOWS IS THE SAME PROBLEM I HAVE WITH EUROPEANS WHO USED TO GAWK AT SARA BAARTMAN'S ELONGATED LABIA AND LARGE BUTTOCKS.”

The term ping-pong is used quite loosely, I hear. Several sources have told me the object being expelled can be anything from a goldfish to a drowsy looking canary. In Phuket's Bangla Road and Bangkok's Patpong district, touts wave menus at you, promising anything from razorblade to eel shows. I don't even want to know what it would do to my psyche to watch a lady remove these strange objects from her nether bits.

FREAK SHOW

The problem I have with ping-pong and sex shows is the same problem I have with Europeans who used to gawk at Sara Baartman's elongated

labia and large buttocks. In 19th century England, she was considered a freak, a circus sideshow. People could pay to go gape and point at her “exotic” bits, thrilled and aroused by this strange creature from Africa.

I don't see how a ping-pong show is any different from Baartman's

“circus freak show”.

A fascination with her body has simply been replaced by a fascination with a small, “exotic” Thai woman and the strange objects she can cram into herself.

I'm also mildly amused with how easily people can chat about their ping-pong show experiences. You wouldn't tell me how you and the wife stared into the gynaecological depths of some lady called Svetlana at Teazers in Belville, would you?

So why share your ping-pong experience abroad?

Yet I've had to listen to several recounts at dinner parties in almost pornographic technicolour. Every detail is salaciously recounted. Always followed by a naughty wink or an absolving shrug with the words “You know, when in Rome.” I guess they feel it's important for keeping their dignity intact.



But let's face it. The only difference between Baartman and a ping-pong show is that the men in white wigs and top hats are replaced by tourists in cheap Singha beer singlets.

JUST LOOKING?

In Amsterdam's Red Light District, the "freak show" continues. Like the Thai ping-pong show, it's one of those must-do Dutch experiences, they say. Drink a craft beer, smoke a joint and go look at women on display like mannequin dolls.

"We're going to the Red Light District," I messaged my husband back in South Africa. "Going to do a bit of window shopping." A reference to the sex workers that display themselves from little windows.

I didn't last 30 minutes. This time I was part of the audience, and even though the "window shopping" remark was made in jest, I quickly got depressed after seeing the women on display in real life.

Their faces wore the same dull expressions as the paper pushers at Public Works, playing Solitaire on the computer when they should be working. Row after row was illuminated by neon lights – white girls, black girls, Asian girls, all tinkering on their cellphones, waiting for a John to pitch.

One of my friends told me I was discriminating against their freedom of choice by feeling sorry for them. Because if you're going to work in the sex industry, it seems like the Netherlands is the best place to

carve out a career. Sex workers are protected by unions and even pay tax.

"The woman sitting in that window is exercising her free right to work as a sex worker. She could have been waitressing or working as a cashier. She's probably making more money than you are," I'm told.

Another friend accused me of imposing my privileged middle class thoughts on different cultures. "It's different there. People aren't so uptight about sex as back home." Women have been using sex for ages as a weapon and a way to survive. If they can squeeze a few extra baht or Euro's out of a hapless, curious tourist, why not?

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

But I still find it hard to think that anybody would choose to have sex in front of a live audience or pop ping-pong balls as a career.

Even the retired call girls take offence when you perceive them as victims, though. Mariska Majoor, a former sex worker who now runs Amsterdam's prostitution information centre, vehemently denies that Dutch sex workers are victims.

"The visitors project all their negative thoughts onto us, so in their eyes we are victims. They can't believe that we are working in the sex industry out of free will," she said on an interview on Youtube.

Mariska concedes, however, that although the sex industry in the

Netherlands is strictly regulated, some women do slip through the cracks. "There are still some forced to work by their boyfriends or being trafficked." So, no matter how open-minded people are, it remains an industry where women are too easily exploited.

I wouldn't try to impose any type of morality on sex workers, and visiting a red light district on holiday remains a personal choice.

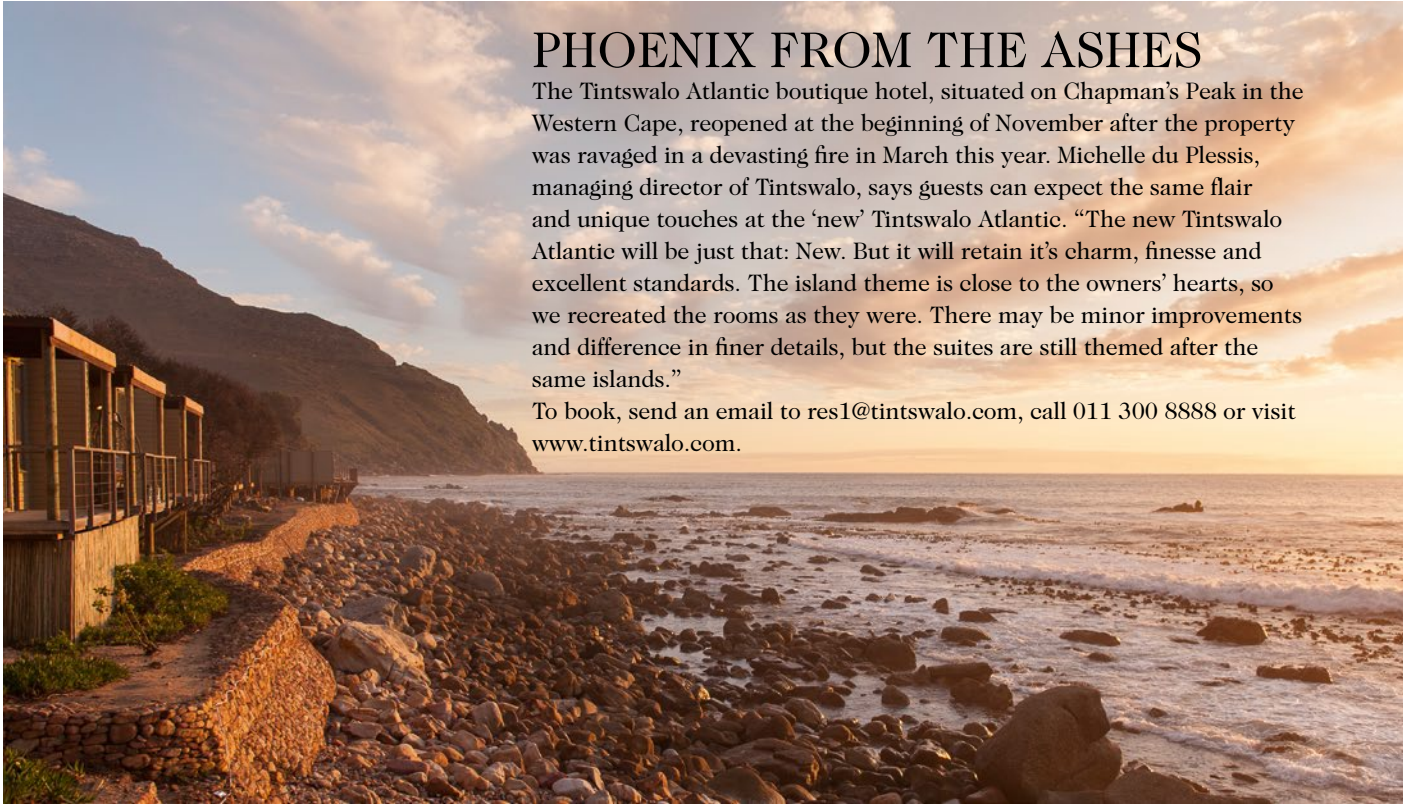
But I base my feelings on whether it excites me or makes me feel uncomfortable. And the so-called audience, the tourists and the Johns in Amsterdam, leave me with a feeling of unease.



In Phuket's Bangla Road, it's the old men sitting lined up at go-go bars, gaping at young Thai flesh that's barely legal. And it's me "doing window shopping," gaping at the women on display.

I'm part of the gaze that's objectifying these women. I'm part of the smut. And it does not make me feel kinky, sexy or sexually adventurous. Truth be told, it just makes me a bit sad about mankind. ■

TRAVEL NEWS



PHOENIX FROM THE ASHES

The Tintswalo Atlantic boutique hotel, situated on Chapman's Peak in the Western Cape, reopened at the beginning of November after the property was ravaged in a devastating fire in March this year. Michelle du Plessis, managing director of Tintswalo, says guests can expect the same flair and unique touches at the 'new' Tintswalo Atlantic. "The new Tintswalo Atlantic will be just that: New. But it will retain it's charm, finesse and excellent standards. The island theme is close to the owners' hearts, so we recreated the rooms as they were. There may be minor improvements and difference in finer details, but the suites are still themed after the same islands."

To book, send an email to res1@tintswalo.com, call 011 300 8888 or visit www.tintswalo.com.

KNOW THE LINGO: HAPPINESS HALO

The glow that envelopes a person anticipating a holiday, or one who has just come back from a fabulous vacation. Experts believe that an emotionally connected customer is worth nearly

twice as much as a customer who's simply satisfied, said Rick Wise, CEO of creative consultancy firm Lippincott, at this year's Skift Global Forum.

According to Wise, anticipating a trip is typically better than the travel experience itself. He described a scenario where a guest daydreams of lying on a secluded beach versus actually being on the beach, sunburned and uncomfortably sandy. The same is true when a customer looks back on a trip. Wise says customers rarely remember their travel experiences as they occur, which is why it is so important for the trip's final memory to be a good one.



BLOGGER WE ❤️

Iga Motylska, the brain behind Eager Journeys, has visited 28 countries, one for each year she's spent on earth. Although Eager Journeys is a new kid on South Africa's blogging block, it has already attracted quite a following, due to Iga's excellent writing and content curation skills.



Iga is the former chief sub-editor of Forbes Africa and an internationally published travel writer. And it shows. Her blog posts are meticulous, entertaining, and can stand

their ground next to any article in a glossy magazine. For more information, visit www.eagerjourneys.com

760 MB A DAY

That's the average amount of data a business traveller uses per day on a business trip.

Source: iPass

HISTORIC PORT ALFRED HOTEL REOPENS AFTER MAKEOVER

One of the Sunshine Coast's best-known hotels, the Royal St. Andrews in Port Alfred, reopened in September, as part of the Mantis Collection.

The investment by owner Martin Bekker has seen the historic 10-room lodge built in 1924 being transformed into a 60-room up-market hotel, conference centre and spa, which blends tradition with modern design.

It is one of the biggest investments in the Sunshine Coast tourism sector in the past decade.

All 10 of the original "heritage" rooms in the hotel have been upgraded, with a new wing housing an additional 50 rooms. The St. Andrews Lodge has retained the Highlander Pub – one of the best-known taverns on the Sunshine Coast.

Now with a combination of "gastro-pub" and traditional dishes, Highlander caters for the whole family, according to Wessel Benson, general manager of the hotel.

The hotel is being marketed as part of the Mantis Collection, which will include The St. Andrews hotel in the group's global marketing campaigns.

A modern 180-seat conference facility, which is the biggest in Port Alfred, will attract national conferences to the town with, a spin-off for other accommodation establishments and restaurants, he says.

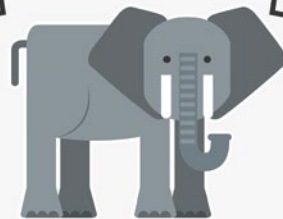
ANIMAL RIGHTS COME FIRST, SAYS THE TRAVEL CORPORATION

Trafalgar, Insight Vacations, Contiki Holidays and Uniworld Boutique River Cruises recently adopted a new TreadRight Animal Welfare Policy in collaboration with the TreadRight Foundation.

The TreadRight Foundation is a joint initiative between The Travel Corporation's family of brands. The ensures that all their experiences meet globally recognised animal welfare criteria.

Based on the Five Freedoms, a compact of rights for animals under human control, the Animal Welfare Policy asserts that animals under human control should have freedom from hunger and thirst, freedom from discomfort, freedom from pain, injury, and disease, freedom to express normal behaviour, and freedom from fear and distress.

"By signing the pledge, we commit not to sell, offer or promote venues or activities involving elephant rides and shows. We commit to offer only those with a high standard of elephant welfare and conservation, with responsible viewing of elephants in wild or semi-wild habitats," says Theresa Szejwallo, managing director for The Travel Corporation.



**SAVE THE
ELEPHANTS**



KADIZORA CAMP
OKAVANGO DELTA ~ BOTSWANA

The Okavango Delta represents one of the last truly unspoilt wilderness areas in Africa, and remains one of nature's marvels. On the bank of an expansive lagoon is where the magnificent Kadizora Camp has been created.

Beneath a majestic stand of trees and along a peninsula, commanding uninterrupted panoramic vistas of the delta, the camp has been set out to afford each of the luxury tents absolute privacy. Kadizora Camp presents 10 luxury tents, each with generous living spaces, and surrounded by sophisticated furnishings and full en suite bathroom.

In addition to open vehicle and walking safaris, mokoro excursions will provide the ideal position from which to explore the endless flow of rivers and tributaries. This tranquil experience permits close encounters with an abundance of bird and wildlife.

The camp is reached after a short 40 minute flight from Maun, and Maun is connected to the major hubs in South Africa and Zimbabwe making access relatively seamless. Kasane International Airport is also used as a hub and gateway.

AirVentures Hot Air Ballooning in conjunction with Kadizora Camp and An African Anthology is proud



to announce the commencement of operations of AirVentures Okavango Balloon Safaris, who will be offering balloon safaris over the iconic Okavango Delta.

Operations began this year (2015), in August, and will continue until the end of November, thereafter re-commencing in May 2016 until the end of November. In keeping with the intimacy of Kadizora Camp, a four passenger balloon will be operated, giving the flight a personalised touch, combined with one on one interaction with the pilot. Balloon safaris will be offered daily and will launch at sunrise.

Due to the remoteness of the operation, combined with the balloon safaris launching at sunrise, a night's accommodation may need to be booked at Kadizora Camp.

A hot air balloon adventure over the Okavango Delta presents a unique opportunity to drift above one of the natural world heritage sites. Whether on honeymoon or sharing an anniversary or just for the fun of it, this is an incredible experience that shouldn't be missed.



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MANDELA RHODES PLACE

The Mandela Rhodes Place Hotel and Spa in the Cape Town CBD is the perfect place to combine work and pleasure. **Carla Lewis-Balden** stayed there during a recent business trip.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

The Mandela Rhodes Place Hotel is located right in the middle of Cape Town's central business district, opposite the St George's Cathedral. If you're conducting business meetings in the city, you're walking distance (or maybe just a quick Uber ride) from your next meeting. There is also a MyCiTi bus station about ten minutes' walk from the hotel, at Thibault Square, should you need to travel further. Got a bit of time left for sightseeing after that last meeting? Stroll to the Company Gardens in five minutes or visit the Castle of Good Hope, a ten-minute walk away.

COOL POOL

A pool is a make or break point for me when visiting a hotel, especially during business trips. I usually try to work in a few laps in the morning or unwind in the water after a stressful day of meetings. The pool at Mandela Rhodes Place looks like something straight out of a *Top Billing* photo shoot. It's large enough

for a few morning laps and flanked by buildings, giving it a slick urban glamour. In the evening, order a bottle of Méthode Cap Classique for a sundowner, get comfortable on one of the loungers and watch the sun disappear behind Cape Town's concrete giants.

PERFECT FOR LONGER STAYS

If you are going to be staying in the Cape for a bit longer, the spacious rooms and apartments are the perfect base. The décor is stylish and minimalist and the fully equipped kitchens are great for whipping up a home-made meal. There is a Food Lover's Market right across the road, should you want to stock up on supplies. Book a two-bedroom apartment, should you want to bring your partner and kids over on weekends.

FOODIE HAVEN

The Mandela Rhodes Place Hotel is walking distance from some of Cape Town's best restaurants. They

also have an agreement with their neighbour, The Taj Hotel, where you get to sign your bills at their restaurants and bar onto your room account. The Bombay Brasserie is famed for their curries while the Twankey Bar has a quaint old-world charm. Other restaurants in the area include Bukhara, Society Bistro and Carne SA, a paradise for meat lovers.

WORK AND PLEASURE

Mandela Rhodes knows business travellers. During my stay, I had access to the Regus Business Centre, with lightning fast Wi-Fi and all the office amenities that I needed. Working away from your desk, it's the perfect virtual office. The hotel can even organise a butler or secretary to look after your needs. Dry-cleaning to be picked up? Done. Need to schedule an important conference call to Mumbai? What time's best? ■

For more information or to book, call +27 (0) 21 481 4000 or visit www.mandelarhodesplace.com.



UMKUMBE

The cost of most of the accommodation in Sabi Sands equals a small king's ransom. Yet if you know where to look, there is a host of small lodges that offer a more affordable option. Yolandi Groenewald visited one of them.

A game drive in the exclusive Sabi Sands Game Reserve never fails to enchant. While the Kruger Park is a fantastic experience on its own, it can be quite an ordeal to search for animals among the troves of vehicles that visit the park every year, with only fate as your guide.

At Sabi Sands, expert guides not only know the stomping grounds of the most elusive rhino or cheetah, but they can also delight you with tales about the smallest spider or dung beetle. The park shares a 50km border with the Kruger. Thus, you experience the Kruger on steroids. And the reserve is large – 65 000 hectares – and one of the best places in South Africa to see the Big Five.

Unfortunately, the cost of most of the accommodation here is equal to some people's monthly mortgage, but there are exceptions. One of them is Umkumbe Safari Lodge, which won't cost you an arm and a leg yet includes all the bells and whistles. Unlike some of its lavish neighbours, Umkumbe radiates a quaint, rustic charm that will make you feel right at home. Even the bar operates on an honour system – you simply help yourself and write it down in a

logbook. Also, the drinks are quite affordable – a bottle of Zonnenbloem Shiraz costs R80.

The seven chalets are spacious and luxurious. The “superior” ones even have an outdoor shower. The beds are huge and each chalet is decorated in an animal theme. We were allocated a ‘rhino’ chalet – appropriate as a crash of rhinos was grazing just beyond our porch in the river.

The lodge's location on the edge of the Sand River and looking into the Kruger ensures that visitors see an abundance of game, without even leaving the lodge. While sipping a cocktail in the pool, a herd of about 100 elephants had their own swimming party right in front of the lodge's infinity pool. And while enjoying breakfast, a cheetah strolled past, probably enticed by the smell of bacon.

The intimate lodge is located on 700 hectares of the Sabi Sands reserve, but benefits from both the Sabi Sands' and Kruger's game.

Although Umkumbe's vehicles don't deviate from their own property, the lodge is a great place to enjoy watching wildlife. If you have not seen the Big Five within two days, you're really just unlucky.

Our late afternoon drive did not waste any time in finding a large herd of elephants, with a particularly plucky bull calf way too big for his shoes. As the day turned into night, we were lured to a pride of lions, clearly on the hunt.

We had built up quite the lion's appetite ourselves by the time we gathered in the boma to enjoy our dinner, and were soon digging into an impala lasagna and a game curry of sorts.

The next morning, we took another game drive. Bleary eyes were soon brightened as we spotted hyena, leopard and buffalo – without even breaking a sweat. And on our return we were in for a real treat – a herd of 700 buffalo right in front of the lodge.

Like most lodges in the area, Umkumbe's rates include game drives, all meals, and even coffee and tea. You pay only for your drinks at the lodge, while those on the game drives are included. ■

For more information or to book, call 021 421 8433, email reservations@sundestinations.co.za or visit www.umkumbe.co.za.

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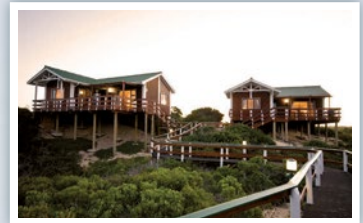
Pine Lodge Resort offers a variety of accommodation options including 3-star self-catering or B&B accommodation in unique log-cabin chalets as well as the only 4-star graded caravan park in Port Elizabeth.



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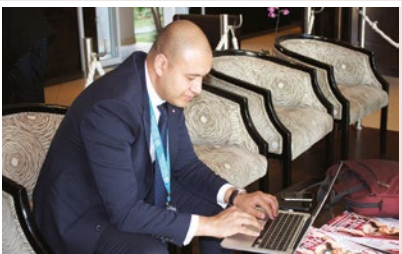
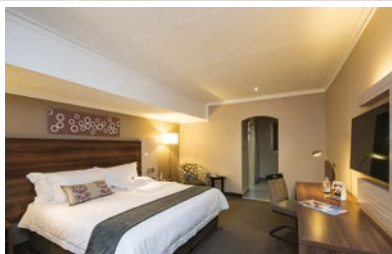
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EVENT

GET READY FOR WTM AFRICA

World Travel Market Africa (WTM Africa), the largest pan-African tourism and travel event on the African calendar, will take place from 6 to 8 April 2016 in Cape Town. "As the largest business-to-business show of its kind on the African continent, we have put effective measures in place to attract a wealth of travel and tourism professionals across Africa as well as globally. We are positive that the show will continue to grow from strength to strength as it provides many strategic business opportunities that will help grow the tourism and travel sectors in and out of Africa," says Sugan Pillai, commercial director of Thebe Reed Exhibitions.

Vital to the success of the show is the unique and exciting Hosted Buyers Programme which allows carefully selected travel industry buyers with direct purchasing power the perfect opportunity to attend WTM® Africa and experience VIP treatment across a three-day, tailored programme.

WTM® Africa 2016 will also offer an impressive show line-up, with conference programmes taking place daily, focusing on relevant and upcoming trends in travel and tourism such as technology in travel and responsible tourism. A full schedule of show events is available on www.wtmafrica.com as well as on the convenient WTM® App.

SOUTH AFRICA

RIVERSIDE SUN REOPENS

Looking for a hotel or venue for a business event? The Riverside Sun hotel, between Vanderbijlpark and Sasolburg, is a beautiful venue spread out along the banks of the Vaal River, with immaculate gardens and perfectly landscaped lawns sloping down to the water's edge. While it's only 45 minutes from Johannesburg, the hustle and bustle of the city feels distant and delegates are able to fully experience the tranquillity and country atmosphere of the hotel.

After a four month hiatus, the 169 room Riverside Sun

reopened early in September with even more thrilling and unique choices to enthrall guests.

Businesses get the opportunity to host clients or team events in a country setting, where they can focus on the issues at hand while being 'just around the corner' from their offices. With 11 conference venues and numerous team building activities on offer, business and corporate guests are spoilt for choice. The benefits of a business event at the Riverside Sun include convenience at a fraction of the price, mouth-watering cuisine, various dinner venue options and comfortable, spacious accommodation.

MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT

For their annual leadership conference, Regent Insurance followed a holistic approach to gain inspiration and rejuvenation.

When Michelle Abrahams, general manager of marketing and corporate affairs at Regent Insurance, started to plan their annual leadership conference, she wanted to stimulate Regent's leaders in an experiential way.

"Creativity is created when you package and execute your delegates' experience at the conference in an

original and innovative manner." Michelle was looking for a holistic approach, something that would captivate the imagination of Regent's delegates, get their creative juices flowing and their blood pumping. And most important of all, they had to have fun.

Together with Laura Falkenburg, a senior conference coordinator at Network Conferences Incorporated,

they conceptualised an event that focused on a well-rounded leader, a hard worker with great ideas, but also paying attention to emotional and spiritual well-being.

The result was a two-day getaway where delegates attended a concert in the park, brainstormed in boardrooms and got the adrenaline flowing during an In the Zone event.

WINELANDS ON THE HIGHVELD

Regent settled on Kievits Kroon, a country estate on the outskirts of Pretoria. Laura liked the tranquil setting of the venue, saying that it felt like it was on a Cape wine farm, yet only an hour's drive from Johannesburg.



BAMBOO AND BONSAI

The centrepieces consisted of bonsai trees, bamboo shoots, orchids and stacked pebble arrangements.



HEALTH NUT

Because the focus was on health and rejuvenation, Regent requested a menu that was healthy yet exciting. The caterers drew inspiration from the Banting and Paleo diets and delegates feasted on healthy food right through the conference.



VERY BERRY

For breakfast, one of the courses was blistered berries, served with Greek yogurt.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RIKKI HIBBERT

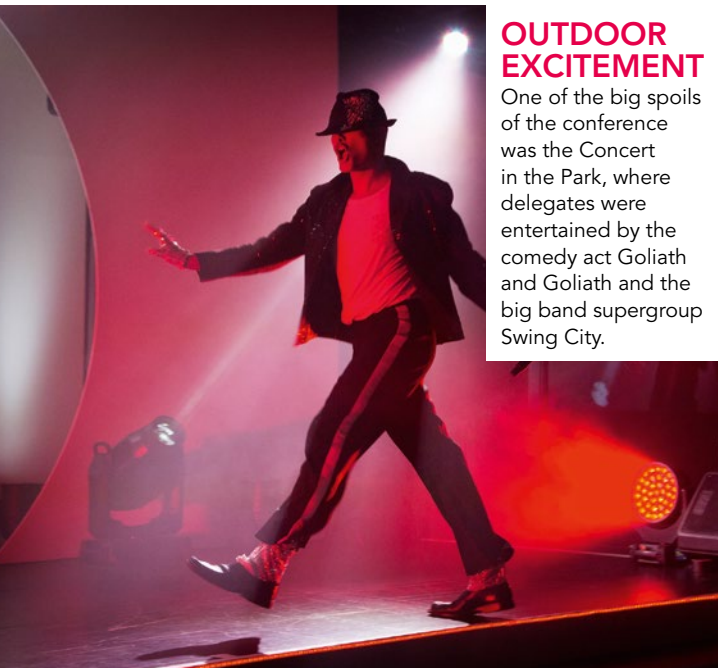


CHILL AREA

A big Bedouin tent was erected on Kievits Kroon's sprawling lawns, with comfortable chairs where delegates could chill out.



FUN! FUN! FUN!
Regent's employees busted some cool moves on the black and white chequered dance floor.



OUTDOOR EXCITEMENT

One of the big spoils of the conference was the Concert in the Park, where delegates were entertained by the comedy act Goliath and Goliath and the big band supergroup Swing City.



ONE MOJITO, POR FAVOR

The drinks at the concert were a big hit. Delegates sipped on Martinis, Cosmopolitans and virgin Mojitos.



BRAINTEASER

The Dream Team, a corporate team-building company, challenged delegates with their In the Zone program. In The Zone is an innovative teambuilding product that transforms any location, indoors or outdoors, into a high-tech adventure activity. Every team is provided with a tablet which unlocks a host of interactive challenges via GPS or Image Recognition technology.

SUPPLIERS

FUNCTION COORDINATORS

Network Conferences Inc.
Laura Falkenberg
Senior Conference Coordinator +27 (0)11 782 6595
email: laura@networkconferences.co.za

CONFERENCE PHOTOGRAPHER

Rikki Hibbert: www.rikkihibert.co.za

TEAMBUILDING ACTIVITIES

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VENUE

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THE PENINSULA HOTEL CHAMPIONS RHINO PROTECTION INITIATIVE

South African hotels encouraged to follow Peninsula's lead



The Peninsula, known for its commitment to social development, and Adrian Gardiner of Wilderness Foundation has pioneered a rhino conservation initiative. They have challenged hotels across South Africa to join in supporting the Wilderness Foundation's Forever Wild Rhino Protection Initiative.

Championed by The Peninsula's staff, the Forever Rhino Initiative provides guests with an opportunity to "adopt" a fluffy toy rhino by adding R150 to their bill, thereby contributing to the Forever Wild Rhino Protection Initiative, launched by the Wilderness Foundation in response to the rhino poaching crisis and the plight of the endangered animal.

"After two months of 'Project Rhino' at the Peninsula, we have been able to donate

R20 100. Ultimately, we aim to encourage other Hotel Groups to follow our lead – so far, Dream Hotels & Resorts have accepted the challenge and placed an order for 250 rhinos, with a total value of R37 500.00 going straight to the Wilderness Foundation," says Chris Godenir, General Manager at The Peninsula.

It is estimated that a rhino is killed every 8 hours in South Africa, which means that commitment to this cause is more necessary than ever before.

The Wilderness Foundation is a not-for-profit international conservation organisation that began in Africa over 60 years ago. Since its inception in 2011, the Forever Wild Rhino Initiative has the two-fold function of supporting dedicated anti-poaching rangers in South Africa and other rhino range

states, as well as lobbying for politicians and decision-makers to address the issue of illegal trade of rhino horn and wildlife products.

"Cape Town's Hotel community has the opportunity to make a real difference by supporting this initiative – all donations go toward funding vehicles for anti-poaching purposes, security and surveillance equipment to monitor rhino hotspots, training workshops, awareness and advocacy presentations to key government officials, and various other activities," continues Godenir.

The Peninsula All-Suite Hotel, a celebrated landmark on the picturesque Sea Point Promenade Platinum Mile, has shown its commitment to various social and environmental initiatives – earning its reputation as the Cape Town's Hotel with a heart.

Hotels that are interested in participating in the Forever Rhino Initiative can email Nadine Rose at marketing@nadinerose.co.za or phone 083 455 2010.

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On The Go Directory



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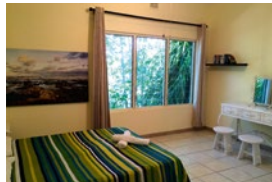
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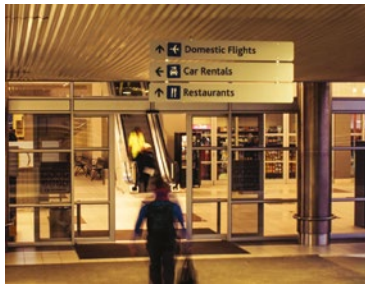
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