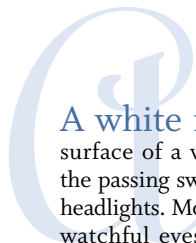


PRIDE OF THE SOUTH

Whether you plan to stalk a lion or enjoy a latte, from the wild to the urbane, South Africa sets the scene for adventure...

WORDS BELINDA JACKSON





A white mist rests heavily on the surface of a waterhole, illuminated by the passing sweep of a four-wheel drive's headlights. Momentarily revealed are the watchful eyes of a herd of submerged hippopotamuses. The vehicle passes, and the night becomes theirs once again.

It's hard to believe that just a couple of hours away is the vibrant city of Cape Town, where people stroll by waterfront shops, take cable cars to the summit of Table Mountain and sip coffee without a care in the world. Don't they realise there are lions roaming about?

Cape Town is South Africa's largest city, and there's still quite a bit of wildlife right on its doorstep. Out the front of its shopping hub on the Victoria & Alfred >



PHOTOGRAPHY (TOP LEFT) BELINDA JACKSON
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One of the world's most beautiful cities, it's worth exploring for a dose of city life in Cape Town before answering the call of the wild

<Waterfront, sleek grey seals sun themselves on hot cement. In the national park on Table Mountain, which seems to hover protectively over the city, fallow deer run free. And it's just a short drive along the Garden Route, past vineyards and ocean vistas, to the penguin colonies of the Cape of Good Hope.

But these pale in comparison with the abundance of animal life outside South African cities. Visitors driving along the country roads outside Port Elizabeth, a short flight from Cape Town in the Eastern Cape, will spot an elephant park on one side of the road, and it's not uncommon to see a school bus trundle past a road sign reading 'Beware Lion'.

Also in these parts is the stunning and private Shamwari Game Reserve, home to black rhinos, buffalo, elephants, leopards and lions. Collectively, they're known as the 'big five' – a term coined by hunters to describe those animals most difficult and dangerous to hunt and kill. But, shooting with a camera is a whole different (and vastly superior) game. For visitors, there are just as many adrenaline-inducing moments to be had snapping numerous other species that dot the African landscape, such as zebras, giraffes, cheetahs, and many types of elegant antelope. Plus, animals the rest of the world has probably never heard of – caracal, boomslang or aardwolf, anyone?

A visit to Shamwari is an experience you'll never forget. Our safari is guided by three rangers – David, an enthusiastic Afrikaner boy; Ryan, with a dry-as-a-bone sense of humour; and Lucky, a Zulu. From the vantage point of an open-topped four-wheel drive, all three happily impart a wealth of information. Did you know that male giraffes are nomadic? That hippos can hold their breath for >

hot hotels

BUDGET-FRIENDLY The Rock @ 2

Oceans, Fish Hoek. Set in a pretty town, a spectacular 30-minute coast-hugging drive from Cape Town, this self-catering villa and apartment can be rented separately or together for groups of up to 10. From \$39/person/night, (0011) 27 21 789 2516, www.therockat2oceans.co.za

MID-RANGE **Metropole**, Cape Town. A cheeky boutique hotel in the centre of the city, the Metropole (right) has an irreverent attitude to decor – just check out the M Bar. Its walls are a vivid devil-may-care red that matches the bright-red ostrich leather furniture. The hotel's 29 rooms are

decked out in a more sedate palette of taupe and mauve. It's worth upgrading from a standard to a superior room with a chic little Juliet balcony at the front of the hotel. From \$172/double/night, (0011) 27 21 424 7247, www.metropolehotel.co.za

BLOW THE BUDGET **The Bay Hotel**, Cape Town. The backdrop to this Mediterranean-style hotel is majestic Table Mountain, and to the front is the perfect blue strip of Camps Bay. Its located in one of the city's most exclusive beachside suburbs. From \$213/person/night, but check the website for specials. (0011) 27 21 430 4444, www.thebay.co.za





The coast is clear: the pristine white sands of Cape Town's beautiful beaches are another of the city's top tourist attractions.

< around five minutes? And, of course, much of the information is about sex – what animals are doing it, how often, and whether we can catch it on film.

A lot of South Africa's game animals, including elephants, giraffes and lions, don't have a specific reproductive season, so junior giraffes, elephants, lions, zebras, rhinos, and litters of fleet-footed warthogs, running for cover with their antennae-like tails in the air, can be spotted all year round.

Scattered across Shamwari's 20,000 hectare concession, rangers in trucks gossip on their CB radios in a mix of English, Afrikaans, Xhosa and Zulu. A couple of male rhinos have been in a scrap and one is injured. A leopard was up on a ridge before a hyena chased her off. And two cheetahs, a lethal mother-and-son team, have passed out under a tree beside a half-chewed blesbok (a species of antelope).

The South African landscape and wildlife is inspiring and contemplative, a place to forget petty concerns and (non-animal-related) trivia. Brad Pitt visited after his marriage to Jennifer Aniston broke down, while Tiger Woods popped the question to his Swedish girlfriend on a wilderness walk back in 2003. The rangers have lost track of the non-celebrity proposals that have taken place here as people embrace the romance of the landscape.

But more interesting than the human activities are the lives of the animal families that move across the concession. Two elephant mothers hustle their young calves, no more than a few months old, through the shrubs. They are tactile, touching each other gently as they walk. A herd of shy zebras swarm up a hillside, startled by the call of a bird of prey. A rhinoceros basks in the warm morning sun by her favourite waterhole. The scenes are endless, ancient and absorbing. Our cities change and evolve, but on the southern African plains, time stands still. ■

dining out

BUDGET-FRIENDLY Local fare Eat like a local and grab some samosa or a bobotie, which is a tasty wrap stuffed with mince that you can eat on the go while cruising through the shops. Try the little cafés along Long and , Cape Town.

MID-RANGE Caveau Wine Bar & Deli, 92 Bree Street, Heritage Square. Wine lovers, make this your first stop for the best wine from South Africa, Europe and Australia. See if you can coax them into letting you take a peek in the cellars. On the food front, specials include springbok pie, but there's

always safe and sensational pastas and standard café fare for more conservative diners. Call (0011) 27 21 422 1367, or visit www.caveau.co.za

BLOW THE BUDGET Capella, 21 Somerset Road, Green Point. Worth it for the decor alone. Coral chandeliers hover above antique Rajasthani doors, exposed brick walls and retro 1960s flock-covered banquettes – sounds odd, but it works. The inventive menu dishes up kudu (a type of venison) and ostrich in a new-world-fusion style that'll keep you guessing. Call (0011) 27 21 425 0439, or visit www.capellarestaurant.co.za

don't miss out on

SAFARI Small reserves such as Shamwari Game Reserve focus on conservation and provide private access. There are five lodges on the 20,000-hectare property.

From \$445/person/night, including meals and two game drives daily. Call (0011) 27 42 203 1111, or visit www.shamwari.com

MARKETS Scoop up an armful of African artifacts at the Green Point flea market in downtown Cape Town, every Sunday.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION Exchange rate: \$1 = 5.8 South African Rand.

Coffee = \$3, one-litre bottle of water = \$2.

TRAVEL FACTS South African Tourism, 1800 238 643, www.southafrica.net