

From Cape to coast

VOLANTE **Elyse Glickman** goes beyond South Africa's usual tourist spots, discovering Durban, Bloemfontein, Cape Town and Franschhoek

PHOTOGRAPHED BY THE AUTHOR



MORE THAN 25 years after Nelson Mandela laid the groundwork for a democratic multi-cultural nation, South Africa still has cache as one of the world's great "trip-of-a-lifetime" destinations, and not just for its posh safari camps and excursions along the Western Cape.

'Township tourism' is now a thing in Johannesburg and the country's other major cities, providing visitors interest-

ing insights into the daily lives and personal histories of black South Africans during and post-Apartheid. One cannot help but admire the way entrepreneurs across the country have made it their business to educate, enlighten and entertain visitors, not only with reminders of troubled times, but also art, performance, food and fashion. Even with South Africa's current political climate, it's moving to see Mandela's legacy in action through

people trying to do what they can to tell South Africa's story while making their areas a better place—and having fun in the process.

Near Durban (the nation's third largest city) there are compelling day trips an hour from downtown that weave together the country's past, present, and future. Programmes offered at Valley of a 1000 Thrills (1000thrills.co.za) make the townships, culture, and natural





Sights in Durban, including the Kwa Muhle Museum, and distinctive art at Durban Station (above).

highlights of the Valley of a Thousand Hills region (zulu.org.za) accessible to people of all ages. The company, locally owned and operated, specializes in guided tours into the homeland of Zulu tribes and villages that include traditional performances, buffets with local dishes, hands-on cooking demos, biking, hiking, and interaction with residents. In Umlazi-Kasie Township, just outside Durban, nightlife destination Max's Lifestyle (maxlifestyle.mobi) is a patchwork of patios, live entertainment areas, a car wash, and restaurant serving 'brie' fare (barbecued meats) and traditional side dishes that received attention on CNN and other international television, online and print outlets.

The Indana Heritage Route (venues.com/things-to-do/kwazulunatal/inanda-heritage-trail/), which includes ANC founding president John Dube's Ohlange Institute, presents a fascinating timeline tracing the lives of Mohandas K. Gandhi and Mandela. Gandhi's 20 years in South Africa, beginning in 1893 to serve as legal counsel to a local merchant, included founding communal Phoenix Settlement and began his lifelong campaign of peaceful protest. The Ohlange Institute, along the route, is the first educational institution founded by a black person in South Africa and modelled after Tuskegee University, Alabama.

Although Durban is still in the process of getting on equal footing with

Cape Town when it comes to all things trendy, fashionable, and lifestyle-driven, it succeeds as a destination on its own merits. The waterfront, vegetation, and climate are reminiscent of Miami and south Florida, though chances are you won't be greeted by a family of free-range monkeys during your morning walk along North Beach or the city's colourful and family-friendly beach promenades. History museums include the Old Courthouse Museum, Kwa Muhle Museum, and the Durban Natural Science Museum. The Phansi Museum beautifully displays art from across Southern Africa, while the Durban Jewish Holocaust and Genocide Centre (dbnholocaust.co.za) offers a



glimpse into the city's small but resilient Jewish community.

Over the course of its history, Durban became home to the largest Indian community outside of India, with 60 per cent of recruited labourers in the 19th and early 20th century staying and setting up communities. Their descendants define its culture, deliciously hybridizing African and Indian flavours and ingredients at restaurants at all prices. Victoria Market (victoriastreetmarket.co.za) in Central Durban is a showcase for the Indian community's influence, which can be experienced in a sensory way through its vendors, who sell alongside merchants offering African artwork and souvenirs. Other interesting landmarks, such as the Jama Masjid Mosque, Emmanuel Cathedral, and Gandhi Library—all playing roles in the struggle for South Africa's Democracy—are within walking distance.

Durban's trendier enclaves, including Florida Road, Morningside, and Station Drive, are not easy to access without the assist of an Über or a friendly local,

but well worth the effort. Station Road is an emerging treasure trove of street art, boutiques, vintage shops, and cafés. Highlights include s43 (station43.co.za) for live music, and daytime pleasures from the exquisite Momenti Gelato, Parkside Coffee, and Khuluma Coffee. Upscale Umhlanga, a half-hour north, features two of Durban's finest beachfront properties, the Oyster Box Hotel (oysterboxhotel.com) and the Beverly Hills Hotel, both with exceptional food that attract many locals—particularly the Oyster Box's famed Curry Buffet and the excellent seafood at the Beverly Hills.

The more budget-friendly Southern Sun Elangeni & Maharani twin hotels fronting North Beach (owned by Tsogo Sun, the same firm overseeing the Beverly Hills Hotel) also have excellent food and drinks. However, if you don't mind a bit of Miami-style kitsch (albeit replacing Latin with African influences), head to nearby Ushaka Marine World (ushakamarineworld.co.za), where you will find a variety of food and entertain-

ment venues, including Moyo-Ushaka, a fun African theme restaurant (moyo.co.za/moyo-ushaka), and Mini-Town (minitowndbn.co.za), an old-school beachfront attraction with scale models of KwaZulu-Natal and international landmarks. A morning stroll or bike ride along the paths may end up being a mini-safari, thanks to the presence of monkeys and ocean birds.

Bloemfontein (bloemfonteintourism.co.za), the country's seventh largest city, has a rural-agricultural feel to it, and therefore, is not an obvious choice as a destination—even for many South Africans. However, if you are interested in learning more about South Africa's most influential historical figures and events (as well as some interesting parallels to US history), this conversation-starting town is worth the visit.

The Anglo-Boer War Museum (wmbr.org.za), which also includes the National Women's Memorial and beautifully maintained gardens) is Bloemfontein's best-known attraction, and puts the period



between 1889 and 1902 into geographic, sociological, and personal contexts which break down the causes and effects of key battles. Thoughtfully displayed personal and military artefacts tell the story of soldiers as well as non-enlisted men, women, and children caught in the literal and political crossfire. There is a separate room focused on black indigenous communities—including those from a solid middle class—and how the outcome of the war would later contribute to the creation of Apartheid and the anti-Apartheid movements decades later. Another room detailing the hows and whys of Americans, Canadians, Australians, and New Zealanders getting involved in this war effort is also enlightening.

The immediate fallout of the war for black South Africans led to Bloemfontein becoming the birthplace of the African National Congress, which would later gain headlines worldwide in the second half of the 20th century. The adjoining museum next to the Waaihoek Wesleyan Church (freestatetourism.org/anc-history/), birthplace of the organization Mandela helped put on the map internationally, details the leaders and activities of the ANC after its renaming in 1923.

Naval Hill, a strategic position for the British during the Anglo-Boer War, is today a place more focused on peaceful pursuits. The roads to the Naval Hill Planetarium (ufs.ac.za/planetarium), which has a long-standing academic affiliation with the University of Michigan) and one of the world's largest Nelson Mandela statues cut through the Franklin Game Reserve. Unlike lushly pack-

aged safari resort tours, the in-town nature preserve delivers surprising and spontaneous sightings of zebras, ostriches, giraffes, and several bird and antelope species as well as panoramic city views and sunset watching spots.

Entrepreneur Keke Supi, a Botswana native who adopted Botschabela, Manguang (just outside Bloemfontein) as his adult hometown, decided to do his part to make it a better place. His vision, K-la-K Carwash, was the vehicle to make that happen. It combines his passion for cars and car design, via a car wash, with his admiration for his father's cooking leading to a cafeteria-style restaurant and live entertainment stage. Though it seems humble at first glance (certainly less flashy than Max's Lifestyle back in Durban), it provides a variety of jobs for the community. Stews, salads, and other dishes are hearty, comforting, and finished with African spices and seasonings (turmeric, allspice, cilantro, cumin, and fennel). During the week, the show that goes with the dinner are the washes in progress, done by young men and women who love cars as much as he does. On the weekend, the suds provide the opening act for local musicians and DJs.

Every trip to South Africa doesn't seem complete without a Cape Town (capetown.travel) stay, especially as it

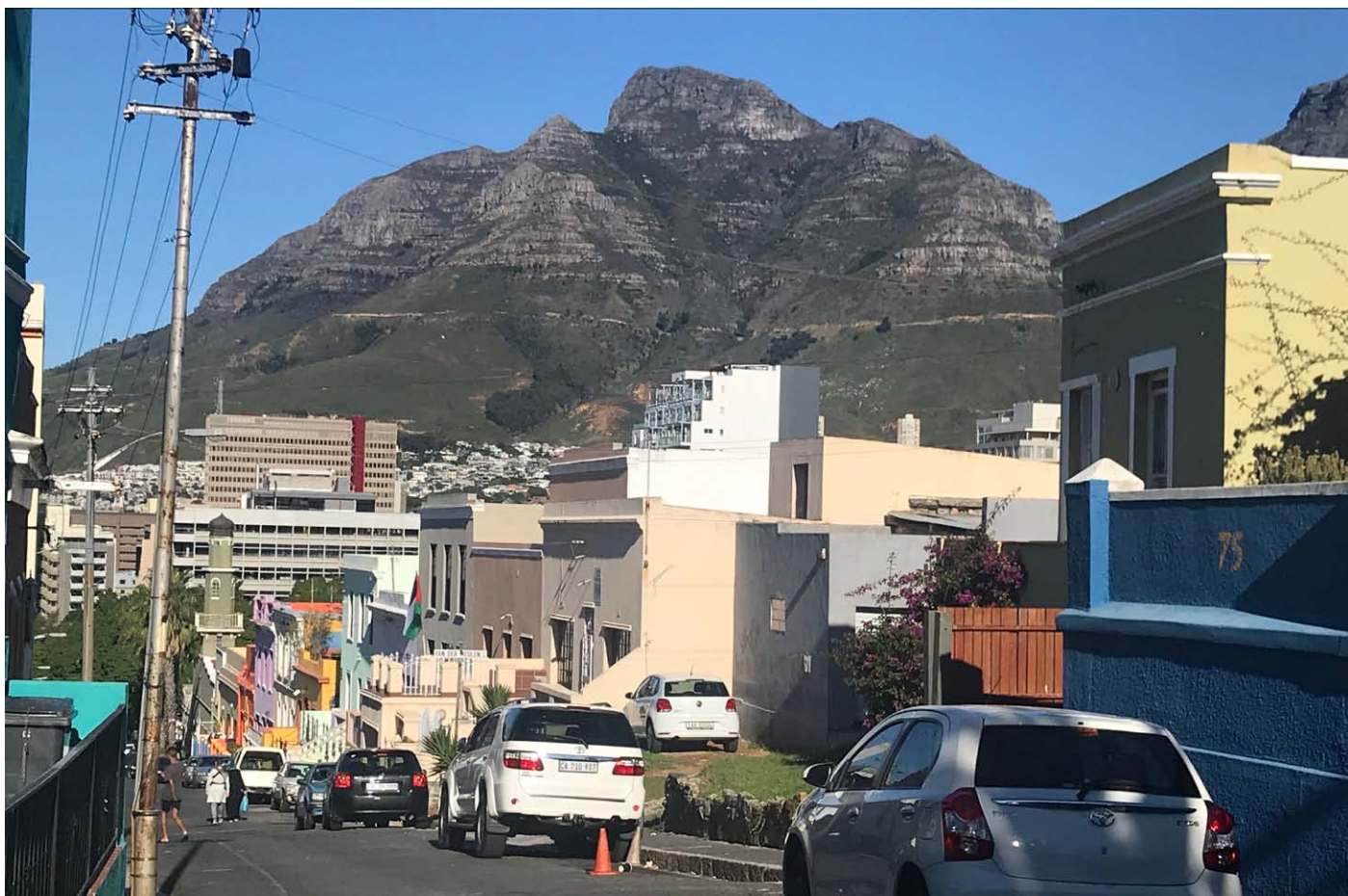
has been so heavily covered by writers and influencers over the past 25 years. However, there are plenty of things to savour beyond Table Mountain and posh neighbourhoods like Camp's Bay with mentioning. A few years ago, it was a new wave of internationally renowned restaurants (most notably, the Test Kitchen and the Potluck Club) that garnered media exposure. However, newer cultural and fashion hotspots definitely deserve a shout-out. Must dos include the spectacular and moving Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art (zeitzmocaa.museum) and the Crypt Jazz Club (thecryptjazz.com) at St George's Cathedral, a key historic site and former spiritual home of Bishop Desmond Tutu, which also features a hall with historic photos documenting the anti-Apartheid struggle.

Fashionistas may observe that several smaller shopping enclaves have proliferated on the waterfront, including the v&a Market Food Hall (waterfront.co.za/markets/va-food-market), with numerous concept coffee and tea joints



Opposite page:
Observing history,
and nature, in
Bloemfontein.

This page: Views
from the Cape
Town waterfront,
including Table
Mountain.



and several stalls covering a variety of farm-to-table and ethnic food specialties. However, the most ambitious destination by the docks is the Watershed, a warehouse transformed into a year-round art fair with 150 tenants stocking desirables from 365 local brands. Highlights include Jane Valkan, Spin Knits, Non-European, and Mille Collings.

While some locals will point out prices at the Watershed run a little higher than souvenir spots, discerning customers will get what they pay for whether they are searching for kids' clothing and toys, interesting décor items that read local but don't scream 'souvenir', and ethnic chic clothing and jewellery running the gamut from subtle everyday basics

to girly floral dresses, to sharp tailored menswear crafted with African fabrics, to statement pieces updating traditional tribal influences.

On its own, Woodstock represents urban renewal at its best, with its mix of galleries, distilleries, restaurants, and shops in upcycled buildings adorned with vibrant murals. The Old Biscuit



Opposite page and above: Enjoying the sights and shopping of Cape Town, including local fashion label Jane Valken. **Top left, far left and left:** Franschoek in the Western Cape.

Mill (theoldbiscuitmill.co.za) continues that vibe with more one-off boutiques and restaurants occupying the one-time flour mill. The coolness factor of the place magnifies every Saturday with the Neighbourgoods Market, which assembles more up-and-coming design talents in the décor and fashion realm as well as a farmers' market and kiosks that showcase come of the city's top bistros, casual eateries, and food trucks at affordable prices. Rain or shine, the market also features live entertainment and prime people watching.

The beach-chic Camps Bay neighbourhood is noted for its beaches and delightful, low-key cafés. While it is not known for its shopping, you will find locals selling handcrafts including one family who have been selling their own beautiful ceramics for years. And speaking of home-grown art, it is worth mentioning that the Zeitz Museum's gift shop is stocked with beautiful jewellery, pillow covers, ceramics, and toys that actually do allow shoppers to bring home something special that represents South Africa's greater artist community.

If you are already visiting Cape Town, there will probably be that pull to

dedicate a day or two to the 'Winelands'. Although Stellenbosch is the best-known foodie destination in this expanse, Franschoek (which translates to *French town* in Afrikaans) has its own fair share of B&Bs and foodie havens. Nothing epitomizes this more than Babylonstoren (babylonstoren.com), a complex of Cape Dutch houses and barns dating back to the 18th century. Guests are greeted by geese, chickens, ducks and turkeys at the edge of the parking lot, and once inside, will spot tortoises and donkeys, native wild steenbok and some of the 78 bird species that have been spotted on the property over the years.

The heart and soul of Babylonstoren, however, is its exquisitely landscaped garden, modelled after the Company's Garden of Cape Town, established in the 17th century to supply the crews of passing commercial ships with food. The garden tours, which begin at 10 A.M. on most days at the chic Farm Shop, are led by a knowledgeable gardener-guide who will not only explain the practical organization of the expanse (which today supplies the farm's two restaurants, Babel and the Greenhouse). Tasting or smelling certain things in season is often

encouraged, as the guides discuss the origins and uses (culinary, aesthetic, and medicinal) of the different fruits, vegetables, and herbs.

The Boschendal Wine Estate's (boschendal.com) Werf Restaurant provides the perfect backdrop for a special occasion family dinner. Every diner gets to craft their own three- to five- course menus. The space, built into the original cellar of the winery's manor house, overlooks the Werf Food Garden. Here, executive chef Christiaan Campbell and his team pick and choose seasonal ingredients at their peak of flavour (proteins and vegetables). The regularly changing menu features three to five dishes per category (garden, ocean, pasture, and sweet) so everybody can enjoy the local bounty on their own terms.

Mullineux & Leeu and Leeu Estates (leeucollection.com/sa) offer another luxurious slant on the winery as lifestyle experience. The Dining Room and spa restaurant inside the Manor House at Leeu Estates are feasts for all of the senses between the Dassenburg mountain and valley views, and statue and rose gardens lining the property. •