



THE MOTHERLAND

South Africa is a wellspring
of life, hope + adventure

[ON LOCATION] Lisa Loverro

IT'S MIDNIGHT AT THE **ULUSABA PRIVATE GAME RESERVE** IN SABI SANDS. SIR RICHARD BRANSON'S UBER-LUXE LODGE CONSISTS OF MULTIPLE GRAND TREEHOUSES, PERCHED ON THE SLOPE OF A *KOPPIE*—A ROCKY HILL TYPICAL IN THE AFRICAN VELD. WE'RE SLEEPY, FOLLOWING A LONG DINNER OF WILDEBEEST BY OIL LAMP, SO WE CRASH HARD. BUT NOT FOR LONG.



Previous: Sabi Sabi
Left: Paragliding
Opposite: Ulusaba

CAPE TOWN RACES

Charlotte Smith, senior consultant for **Gilt-Edge Travel** based in Cape Town, says, "South Africa has a universal appeal to a broad audience, capable of attracting people of all ages, backgrounds and cultures." She adds the country is a fantastic value, with dinner and a good bottle of wine in a top restaurant running \$30 pp. "And Cape Town is one of the most picturesque regions on this planet."

The most recognizable landmark in this coastal cosmo capital is Table Mountain. It offers a gamut of hiking/biking trails for group outings, with stunning views of the city.

Axel Zander, director of **Downhill Adventures**, is our kind of people. He helps people step off Table Mountain backwards from 1,000 feet in the air for *The Abseil Adventure*, where participants use mountain climbing gear to abseil (rappel) 350 feet down the vertical face of a cliff. If that's too extreme, there's *Shark Cage Diving* and *Paragliding*.

"We provide themed adventure events incorporating many activities while taking in the natural beauty of the Cape," he says. One of his most popular is the *Amazing Race* program. Different members from each team are required to rappel

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down a building, race down a hill on mountainbikes, operate a high-speed powerboat and finish fighting a big fire.

Not your cup of Tazo? Try a leisurely *Winelands Biking Tour* through the Cape for close sightings of ostrich, baboons and mountain zebras. After lunch, the group visits the Constantia wine region's Uitsig and Groot vineyards.

MANDELA WAS HERE

In Johannesburg, the Apartheid Museum reconciles South Africa's past divisions and provides a platform for discourse about unity and the power of the human spirit. The many various exhibits provide indepth insight into the rise and fall of Apartheid through award-winning films and photography.

"If groups want the history of South Africa, the Apartheid museum is very well done, along with visiting Soweto and the Cradle of Humankind," states Laura Saeger, CMP/CMM, business tourism manager for **South African Tourism**. Both close to "Jozi," Soweto examines the struggle for racial

I bolt up from the loud thumping on the roof. One, two, three thumps...more followed. Where am I? What the bejesus is happening? Then I see them outside the glass doors—30 or so baboons, their curious eyes reflected in the moonlight. Once breathing returns, I grasp the awesomeness of Africa.

"The biggest draw for travel to South Africa is the safari and wildlife experience we have to offer—it's a once in a lifetime experience," says Yolanda Woeke-Jacobs, director of sales/marketing for dmc **Dragonfly Africa**. "The raw, real African nature experience really touches people."

For large groups, "We split them in smaller groups using various lodges. We've combined the lodges of **Sabi Sabi, Singita, Londolozi** and **Ulusaba** for groups up to 300." The above lodges are located in Kruger National Park, one hour and two bush flights out of Johannesburg.

At Sabi Sabi, there are four upscale camps including the Bush Lodge, with 25 suites and meeting space for 100 theater-style. For teambuilding, they put together an animal spotting competition where each team is given a list with a certain amount of points for each animal spotted. Some get luckier than others. One guide says his group watched a female leopard attack a warthog before a lioness swooped in and stole the live prey. Then a dominant Mapogo male lion storms in and makes short work of the cat fight and the warthog. Everyone knows who's boss in the veld.

Over at Singita Game Reserves, we're on safari with our 26 year-old guide, Jared. I ask about his high-powered rifle. He says it's for the off-chance an animal charges the Land Rover, although bush law requires he can't shoot until an animal is within 11 yards. Seems a little close. We see impalas, gazelle, zebra, giraffe and some baby elephants, until one of the older elephants goes postal. The giant beast stomps toward us, flapping his ears and bellowing. Jared laughs, saying, "He's just trying to intimidate us."

equality, while the Cradle for Humankind is a UNESCO World Heritage Site marking this place on the planet with the earliest fossils tied to the beginning of mankind.

Saeger also highly recommends the District Six Museum in Cape Town. "While the Apartheid gives you an overview of the history and what actually happened along with the timeline, the District Six is so personal," she says. "It's small and very moving but people don't know about it." Just as moving, the Robben Island Museum in Cape Town served as a prison from the 17th century to 1996. Also a World Heritage Site, this is where Nelson Mandela was incarcerated from 1964-82. Former political prisoners guide groups through the facility, telling anecdotes about their time here.

Social programs are of paramount importance to the residents says Woeke-Jacobs. "We have a variety of options from building schools, interacting and giving time to orphanages, schools, etc," she explains. "Africa is a destination that is still very poor and it needs assistance in sustainable upliftment and support from western countries."

Saeger suggests we're all invested in some degree to the well-being of Africa, the world's oldest civilization. "There is something very grounding about South Africa," she says. "I feel myself lapsing more into my better self."

LIVING WELL, I PRESUME?

In the late 1800s, **The Blue Train** carried everyone from British royals to the De Beers boys from Cape Town to Pretoria, north of Johannesburg. Today, groups can book the same 27-hour journey through South Africa's most spectacular scenery, for up to 74 guests in 37 suites.

Jackets are suggested for supper while diners enjoy the Soweto String Quartet and the "reassuring weight of Sheffield Cutlery." Stops along the route include important museums, while afternoons are spent playing cards and reading Kipling.

Daily flights to South Africa depart out of JFK and Dulles aboard **South African Airways**. "Once you get on a South African Airways plane, it's like you've already arrived in South Africa," says Gregg Truman, vp of marketing. "The crew is South African and the food represents the flavors of Africa, as does our wine cellar-in-the-sky."

South Africa Tourism; southafrica.net

South African Airways; flysaa.com

Dragonfly Africa; dragonfly.co.za

Gilt-Edge Travel; gilt-edge.com

Blue Train; bluetrain.co.za; trumarketing.com

Downhill Adventures; downhilladventures.com

