

"Walk gently, breathe peacefully, laugh joyfully"

don't normally quote fridge magnets, but that line on a souvenir purchased at Cape Town International Airport perfectly sums up my recent experiences in South Africa. They included being up close and very personal with elephants and cheetahs, tasting magnificent wines in sublime surroundings, cruising in a luxury motor yacht and spending an uplifting day in the townships.

In June and July, the eyes of more than a billion people will be focused on South Africa for the 2010 World Cup Finals. If you're planning on heading to South Africa for the World Cup, particularly Cape Town, here are some of my experiences.

Cape Town is an absolutely stunning city and the imposing Table Mountain keeps a watchful eye over it. The city has a fascinating history, wineries and beaches within half an hour's drive, fabulous restaurants and great people.

An African ENCOUNTER

Steve Williams goes on a fascinating tour of South Africa

One of your first stops will have to be the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront — South Africa's most visited destination. It's an interesting mix of a working harbour, restaurants, 11 hotels and more than 400 retail outlets. The Victoria & Alfred Waterfront has some excellent dining options — which my wife and I took advantage of. We enjoyed the relaxed vibe in the area, watching seals bask in the sun on a wharf. A nearby busker was suggesting

that we "Don't Worry, Be Happy" — we didn't, and we were.

Wine country

After a visit to the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront, you may want to catch a cable car to the top of Table Mountain (the revolving floor is a unique twist), visit infamous Robben Island (where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned) and explore the spectacularly beautiful Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden.

The winelands are also on the to-do list, and we spent a fascinating day on a private, exclusive tour organised by the delightfully named Racontours.

Lisa Griggs, who has been involved in the wine industry for many years, gave us an interesting insight into the history of winemaking in the Cape and the characters. Griggs knows everyone and has access to people and places not found on regular tours. We visited three wineries. First was Klein Constantia, where we were taken on a private tour of the estate with winemaker Adam Mason and Chico the Jack Russell. It's not every day you taste grapes off the vine while hearing baboons screeching over the ridge.

The estate is set in the verdant Constantia valley, which first produced wine in 1689. It was an experience tasting wines in "Duggie's Dungeon", a magnificent subterranean room housing four individual cellars with ornate wrought-iron gates depicting the four seasons. Make sure you

sample their signature Vin de Constance — a re-creation of the Constantia unfortified sweet wine of the 18th and 19th centuries, released five years after the vintage. The wine is presented in a replica of the original half-litre bottle.

Next, we had lunch in the Constantia Uitsig wine estate, at the magnificent La Colombe, recognised as South Africa's best restaurant. We dined al fresco in the courtyard garden, and the food and service was exceptional. La Colombe is so popular that bookings are quite difficult, but it helped that Griggs was the sommelier! We adjourned to taste Constantia Uitsig's wines under a sun-filtered canopy of trees overlooking a quaint cricket oval.

De Grendel Wines was our last stop, 20 minutes from Cape Town in Durbanville. It is another spectacular estate, with panoramic views of Table Mountain and the sea. Charles Hopkins is the cellar master and, again thanks to Griggs, we had a private tasting with Hopkins in the cellar, his passion and character coming through as he told us of the history of the estate and the intricacies of harvesting. It was a great day with Griggs, and I would strongly recommend booking a tour with Racontours. It offers a range of experiences – from discovering the ecology of the Table Mountain range to a ramble through Cape Town's fascinating streets.

Constantia has some excellent accommodation options and we had a very pleasant dinner at The Constantia boutique hotel. With only eight suites, it has a very comfortable, homely, yet exclusive ambience.

Game time

One of the best experiences in South Africa was two nights at the Shamwari Game Reserve. Many visitors drive from Cape Town along the famed "Garden Route", but it is also accessible via a one-hour flight to Port Elizabeth, and then a one-hour drive to the reserve. The place is amazing — 25,000ha with seven luxury lodges scattered throughout. Luxury is the word:



Captivating scene at the Shamwari Game Reserve

Shamwari has hosted celebrities such as Brad Pitt, John Travolta, Tiger Woods and Nicolas Cage, to name a few.

As you would expect, the service is first class, with five magnificent meals a day, including high tea. All the lodges have a unique personality. We stayed in the Chief Suite at Lobengula Lodge. Tastefully decorated *Out of Africa* style, it had a huge separate living room with fireplace, and the spacious bedroom featured a timber four-poster bed. The suite also had a private plunge pool and outdoor shower on the back terrace.

There are only five suites at Lobengula, so it is all about refined exclusivity. Even Wendy the warthog and her piglet had an air of distinction as they wandered around the grounds of the reserve. We stayed two nights, which is the recommended minimum to enjoy Shamwari's hospitality. Some guests stay for only one

night, which is amusingly dubbed a "Ferrari Safari".

Each lodge has several rangers who take you on the two "drives" each day—at sunrise and sunset, when Shamwari's four-legged residents are most active. The rangers also dine with you, so you build up a good rapport.

Our ranger, Jannie, followed up his 5am wakeup call with coffee and croissants, before we headed out at 5.30am. The drives were fantastic. The converted Land Cruisers seat a maximum of six people, and you cover a lot of territory in the four hours or so. The landscape itself is absolutely spectacular — endless bushveld of forest, scrub and savannah — but, to be parked on top of a ridge, watching a herd of elephants drinking and bathing at a watering hole, then for the herd (with disobedient calves in tow) to lumber towards and around you, close enough to touch, was

incredible.

During our drives we encountered everything from wildebeest, ostrich, buffalo and mongoose, to lions that had obviously recently made a kill, one licking blood off his paw, their extended stomachs looking like they had just come from a hotel buffet. We also witnessed impalas the supermodels of Africa — incredible bird life, giraffes, zebras, rhinos and hippos, or just their eyes poking above the water line, that is.

So many exhilarating moments, but getting out of the Land Cruiser and approaching two (thankfully) very relaxed cheetahs lazing under a tree merely metres away was something that will stay with me for a long time.

It was fascinating listening to Jannie express his obvious love of the bush and knowledge of its inhabitants, flora and fauna, while exploring the immense African landscape. As I said to him, he has a pretty good office. It was a truly memorable few days and we look forward to returning.



Back in Cape Town, we rounded off our luxury experiences on board the lavish motor yacht *Princess Emma*. She is 85ft of highly polished and sleek-lined opulence. We enjoyed a magnificent seafood lunch, cruised the harbour past cavorting seals and headed out to deeper waters, against the stunning backdrop of the cityscape and Table Mountain. We even encountered whales — which must not have consulted their calendar, as it wasn't "whale-watching season".

Down from the fly bridge, we had a Captain's tour of the yacht. She is magnificently fitted out — there are four en-suite staterooms, including the spacious master stateroom with granite bathroom. There is also the aft deck, which can seat eight for



Children at the Kiddies Educare Centre in Cape Town

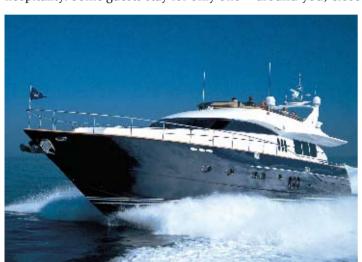
al-fresco dining in style. *Princess Emma* can be chartered for up to five days, which would be a fairly nice way to explore the Atlantic coast off Cape Town.

The townships of Cape Town are a part of the fabric of the city. To experience them, don't do one of those awful, voyeuristic "township tours". We spent a fascinating day with James Fernie from an organisation called Uthando, which helps provide funding for community projects in the townships. We visited an Old Aged Home, child day-care centres, an urban market garden and a theatre company. All in, it was a truly uplifting experience and highly recommended.

Capturing the world's people and places in words and images is what Steve Williams is all about

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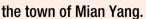
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La Zi Ji offers refined authentic Sichuan dishes like La Zi Ji (spicy chicken), Shui Zhu Yu (water-cooked fish), and Mutton Pot, whipped up by top Sichuan chefs from



The interior of the restaurant is decorated with colourful Chinese figurines of famous characters from ancient Chinese tales and face masks from Sichuan.

Ask the friendly service staff what the expression on each mask means and they will be glad to reveal it to you.







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