

Striking gold in the heart of South Africa



Thousands of visitors to South Africa make Gauteng their first stop, but most don't stay long enough to appreciate all it has in store. They're missing out. With two vibrant cities, Johannesburg and Tshwane (Pretoria), and a hinterland stuffed with cultural treasures, there's a great deal more to this province than Jo'burg International Airport, says **John Malathronas**.

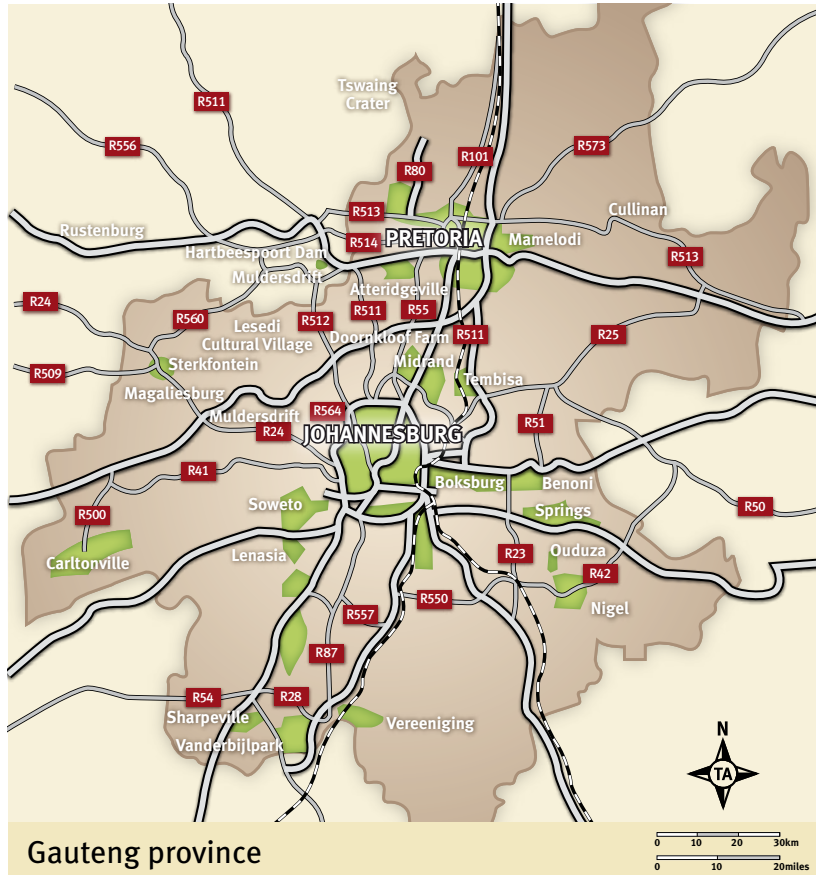
"The golf course was created in 1974," said the manager. "Eighteen holes, par 72."

It was a Monday afternoon and the tees were relatively quiet: fewer than a dozen people were swinging their clubs among the greens. "We now have 190 full-time members," my host went on. "It costs 350 rand per year to join for the first year and 250 rand per year afterwards. But day membership costs 60 rand only. Of course, now *anyone* can become a member."

This last sentence hit home. I was, after all,

in Pimville, Soweto, and the fact that 'anyone' could become a member of the previously black-only Soweto Country Club, was spoken with due satisfaction. I looked around. Some fairways were overgrown and others so dried up it was difficult to tell the bunkers from the greens. Still, the advent of a fully-functioning golf course, an oasis of tranquillity in the noisy, bustling township, was, indeed, an achievement of which to be proud.

Thirty years after the Soweto schoolboys rebelled against the apartheid regime and carved >>



its name into the annals of modern history, the township's predicament can be summed up by the word I kept hearing during my time there: 'upgraded'. Hostels that were the focus of the civil war between Inkhata Zulu and the ANC in the 1990s were being 'upgraded' to house large families. Kliptown, a stone's throw away from the golf course and the scene of the signing of the 1955 Freedom Charter, has been 'upgraded' by getting a slew of conservation orders to renovate and preserve several original shop facades. Neighbourhoods have been 'upgraded' by getting electricity, running water and proper sewage disposal. The city's football stadiums are being 'upgraded' for the 2010 World Cup, and the Kaizer Chiefs, Soweto's most popular football club, are sponsored by Nike.

Nowadays, being associated with Soweto is cool. The township itself is huge: it is diverse enough to have its own slang, *tsotsitaal*, a mixture of African languages, English and Afrikaans; it is so vast, it takes ten minutes to drive from one side of the main minibus station to the other; and its million-strong population is served by a gigantic medical institution, the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital, which I heard described as "the largest hospital in the country", "in the whole African continent", or – by someone clearly geocentric – in "the known universe".

The streets have also been ‘upgraded’, namely asphalted, and there are brand new street signs

The seeping transformation of Jo'burg is taking visitors by surprise; more and more are deciding to spend a few days in the city rather than merely using it as a stopover to the Kruger Park

aimed at the tourist buses that bring day-trippers attracted by the power of the name, for Soweto – along with the Kruger Park and Cape Town – is one of the top three tourist destinations in South Africa. More and more visitors dine in its gourmet restaurants: trendy Wandie's in Dube, that started as an illegal shebeen packs them in every day with its lunch buffet, and the modern, shiny Nambitha in Orlando West even accepts dinner bookings on the Internet. And yes, some tourists now choose to stay in Soweto: a good number of excellent value B&B's have sprung around the main tourist sites and are as safe as anything in urban South Africa. Oh, yes, *safety*.

One of the main causes of crime, unemployment, is still forty per cent but is coming down as the economy booms, precious metal prices rise and money is spent on a construction boom. If you don't believe me, believe the banks and insurance companies that started moving back into Soweto after years of shunning the place like a leper colony. Sowetans can now get a mortgage to buy a house in an 'upgraded' area, something unheard of before when investment in the township was considered suicidal. They might even become householders without entering a bank: land and houses that couldn't be bought under apartheid to emphasise that any grant of stay in Soweto was temporary were given free to sitting tenants by the government, as it was adjudged that the decades-long cumulative rent had bought their homes 🏡👉



South African children visit the Hector Pieterse memorial in Soweto. The photo of Pieterse's body in the arms of a fellow student was adopted as an emblem of the anti-apartheid struggle

Township tours: visiting Soweto

The Soweto tourist trail is well-trodden: one first pays homage at the Hector Pieterse museum, named after the 12-year-old boy who was one of the first to die during the riots of 16 June 1976. Inside, the story of the riots is being told via old TV programmes and images and there is none more famous than that of the dead Pieterse himself carried in the arms of a black teenager with his little sister screaming at his side. She now works at the museum.

Signs direct the buses to Vilakazi street, former home to two Nobel Peace Prize winners. Bishop Tutu's house stands not far from the original, unassuming Nelson Mandela bungalow – well, sort of original, as only the general structure remains: the house was petrol-bombed in 1985 and rebuilt in 1987. It is now a fascinating monument to the great man himself. Private and public photographs crowd every piece of furniture; diplomas bestowed upon him hang from the walls; a world championship belt donated by Sugar Ray Leonard adorns the kitchen; and the first pair of boots Mandela bought after being freed is displayed in the bedroom – one wonders why Hi-Tec hasn't launched an ad campaign based on his choice.

The next place of pilgrimage is the Regina Mundi Catholic church with its giant painting of a Black Madonna. This is the church where Bishop Joseph Fitzgerald gave shelter to the Soweto protesters. A broken altar and an armless Christ statue testify to the violence of the police squads who pursued the youngsters into the church itself.

No visit to Soweto is complete without venturing into a squatter camp. Being near a motorway, the easiest to get to is Elias Motsoaledi, where little boys escort tourists inside the camp for a small tip. This is where visions of the old South Africa suddenly appear like a flashback: women balance buckets on their heads; stray dogs bark and cooped roosters crow; rubbish rots on the muddy streets. At least the water from the communal taps is safe – the ANC government has seen to that. It has also provided the residents with portakabin toilets; roughly one for twenty households. Not enough, but better than before.

For tours, accommodation and sights visit www.soweto.co.za



Local women celebrate Women's Day in Pretoria

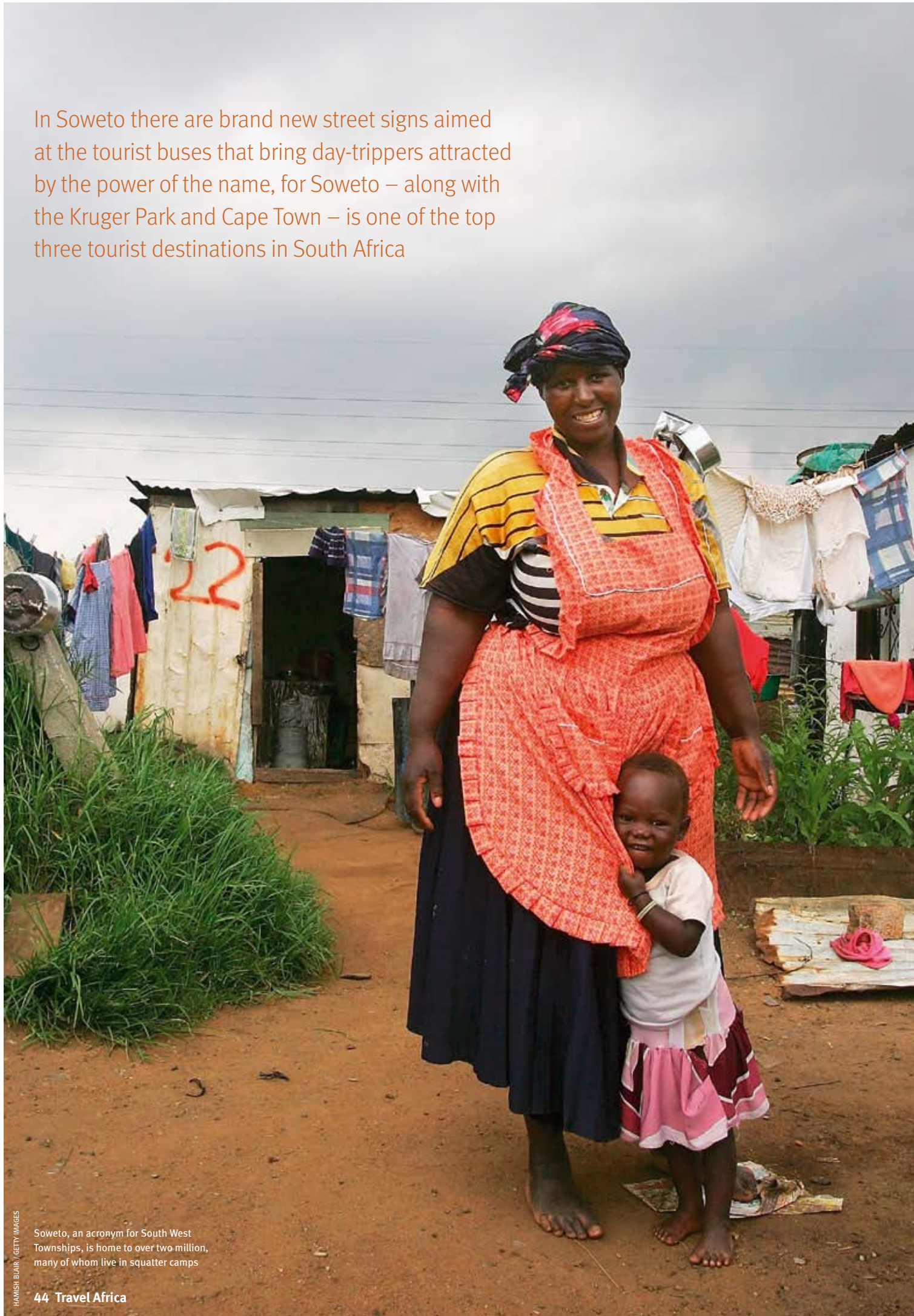


Communal toilets plastered with ANC election posters. In some parts of Soweto, there is only one temporary toilet per 20 households



Memorabilia on display in the Nelson Mandela Museum in Mandela's former house, Soweto

In Soweto there are brand new street signs aimed at the tourist buses that bring day-trippers attracted by the power of the name, for Soweto – along with the Kruger Park and Cape Town – is one of the top three tourist destinations in South Africa



Soweto, an acronym for South West Townships, is home to over two million, many of whom live in squatter camps

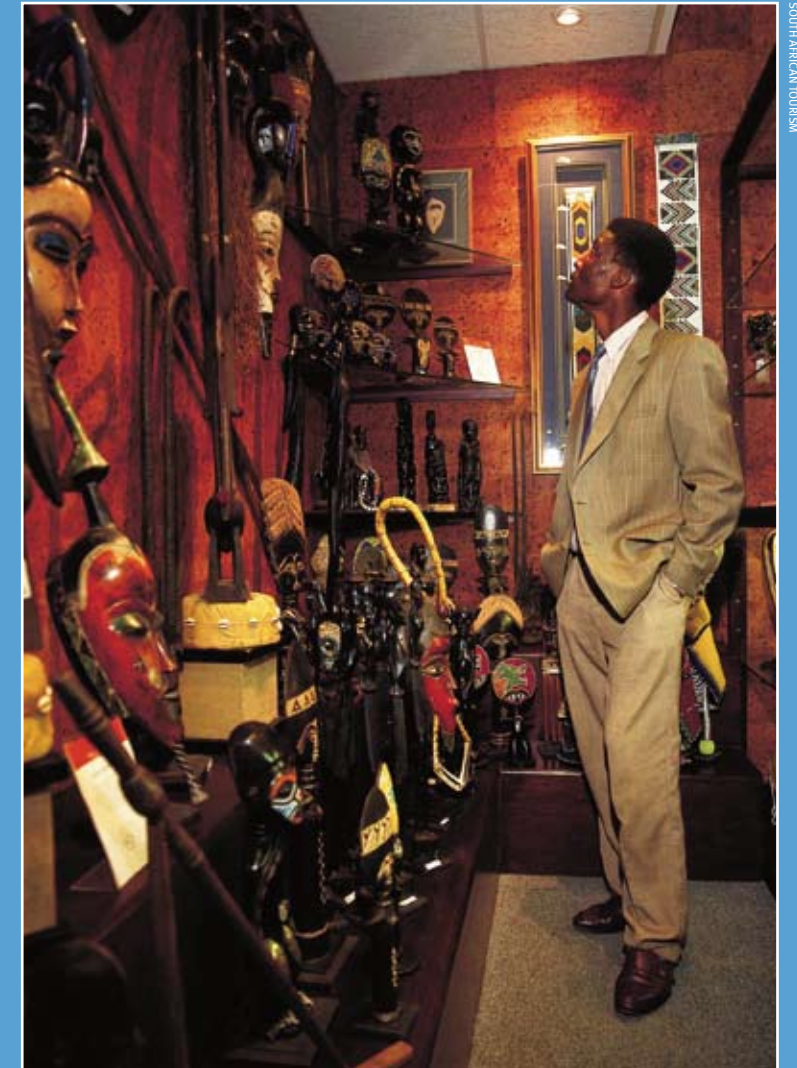
HAMISH BLAIR / GETTY IMAGES

several times over. It would be tragically ironic if some were to wake up one day to realise they couldn't afford the land they were squatting on.

Many black families choose a do-it-yourself 'upgrade'; what the golf course manager failed to tell me is that there are now only half the number of members as ten years ago. In this new South Africa, colour blindness works both ways, and members of the new black middle class are moving to the more affluent districts of Johannesburg, the once forbidden megalopolis: to trendy Melville, wealthy Sandton, or fashionable Rosebank. They fear crime as much as their white counterparts and pay for 24-hour "Pro-Tec-Sure" by private security firms.

Did I say *Johannesburg*? Call it Jozi, Joey, Jo'burg or even eGoli: no one calls the big, cheeky sprawl on the Rand by its full name any more. It may seem rather inappropriate for a place whose reputation is second only to Mordor to be referred to in affectionate terms by the locals, but the situation on the ground is changing like the face of the city itself. The white businesses – such as the Jo'burg Stock Exchange – fled around the turn of the century to the more staid northern suburbs, leaving the Central Business District (CBD) open for African traders, Indian merchants and immigrant street hawkers. But this very centre, once a no-go area, has also been 'upgraded' – which in this case means 'made safe' – by the installation of 240 CCTV cameras.

The Civic Centre Square in front of the Nelson Mandela Theatre used to be a crime hotspot with down-and-outs squatting and preying on tourists; now it's clear and clean, with children running and playing among the well-tended gardens. ➤➤



Browsing in a curio shop in central Jo'burg

Urban therapy: shopping in Jo'burg

With its giant shopping malls such as Sandton Square, Cresta or Eastgate, Jo'burg is great for retail therapy. But the **Rosebank Mall** (www.rosebank.co.za), a mini-city in itself spanning several blocks, presents the ultimate shopping experience: during the day there are beauty salons, gallery exhibitions and, of course, shops. At night there are lavish restaurants and bars, plus the unique Cinema Nouveau, an independent movie theatre showing art house films on ten different screens.

If you're not staying at the Grace Hotel, which is connected directly to the mall by a walkway, hire a taxi to Rosebank so as not to miss out on the African Craft market. On two floors, this comprises dozens of stalls selling handicrafts not just from South Africa but from all over the continent: this is where you can get hold of that Congolese mask, those bright Nigerian textiles and the Cameroonian wood carvings you've always wanted.

If ethnic is not your 'thing', then make a beeline for the Zone complex inside the mall. On the first floor is the innovative **Young Designers' Emporium** (www.yde.co.za), which showcases the latest in young South African talent: there's goth, there's punk, there's surf and there's glam for your delectation, with the satisfying certainty that back home no one else will be wearing your outfit.

In order to 'get a rail' in this exclusive shop, applicants are vetted rigorously. Once selected, they set their own prices and pay a commission and display fee to the YDE which doesn't actually buy the stock, but looks after it and takes care of sales and marketing instead. Judging from the browsing crowds, this innovative concept has struck a chord with shoppers. Its a small-scale operation, though, so size ranges are limited.

SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM



Signs of affluence in Soweto’s upmarket Diepkloof extension. Johannesburg’s black middle classes are fuelling a residential property boom
Below: A *muti* (traditional medicine) shop in central Jo’burg



Depending on the source and the time span considered, crime has fallen in the area by fifty per cent (my guide) to eighty per cent (*The Economist*), because the effectiveness of the electronic eyes has been psychologically exaggerated in the minds of the criminal underclass. And here I was to prove it: taking a stroll among the crowds on Diagonal Street, rucksack on my back, mobile in hand, visiting a *muti* shop to check out an African healer’s stock of desiccated animal parts, dried herbs and liquid potions. And surprise, surprise, nothing happened to me.

Once again, if you don’t believe me, believe the businesses. Urban renewal projects combining lottery money with private capital have been highly successful in turning around a part of town that had been written off. Corner House, right in the middle of the CBD, is one of three dozen high-rise buildings that have been ‘upgraded’ and converted into flats, offered for sale at high prices. The old City Hall is now the administrative seat of the State of Gauteng. The Carlton Tower is the surveillance nexus of those CCTV cameras: it serves as the nerve centre for the operators of the Cueincident security firm. At the corner of Sauer and Pritchard you can find the Star newspaper; at 11 Diagonal Street stands proudly the thirty-storey AngloGold Ashanti Diamond House; and, on Harrison Street, I passed by the headquarters of the First National Bank. The sophisticated Jo’burg of old has not simply disappeared at a stroke; it has mutated into a more complex beast, less refined, but a lot less lawless.

Newtown, a few minutes’ drive away, typifies this new Jo’burg. This was a large slum area – with some pockets of destitution still visible around the old Victorian railway station – which was turned into a massive cultural precinct. The silhouette of the spanking new Museum Africa dominates the central Mary Fitzgerald Square. Like all new museums in South Africa, its purpose is not expository – “here are some Tsonga carvings, there are some Zulu beads” – but didactic. I was fascinated by pictures documenting how the city was transformed from a gold prospectors’ muddy camp into a world financial centre and I was transfixed by the copies of Khoi-San rock drawings, annotated to explain their symbolism.

Next door, the restored Market Theatre complex is one of the city’s biggest nightlife draws. The productions at the Market have always played to an ethnically cosmopolitan audience, even during the apartheid era; and when I attended one performance the vast majority of the audience was, indeed, black. ➤➤



A mural close to the spot where the Sharpeville massacre occurred on 21 March 1960 depicts the rush of people caught in the crossfire

A place that changed the course of history: Sharpeville

If you are interested in South Africa’s modern history, then a trip to **Sharpeville township**, two hours’ drive south of Jo’burg, is a must. Here, on 21 March 1960, during a protest organised by the Pan African Congress, 69 people were killed and 180 injured by South African police, who fired indiscriminately into the unarmed crowd. The universal condemnation that resulted led to the international isolation of the apartheid regime. The Sharpeville massacre proved as significant a turning point in the struggle against apartheid as the Soweto riots sixteen years later. A **Human Rights Precinct** (www.sharpeville.co.za) has now been erected opposite the police station on the precise spot where the demonstrators had gathered. It incorporates a low-key museum explaining the background to the massacre, a simple memorial garden and a monument to the fallen. If you ask politely, you can even enter the police station itself and check out the old cells and interrogation rooms.

In order to enjoy what the new democratic South Africa has to offer, make your next stop the lush Vaal riverfront at Vereeniging, just outside the township. The newly-built **Riviera** 5-star hotel complex (www.rivieraonvaal.co.za) contains a barbecue grill, a top restaurant and a terrace café with a panoramic view of the river. And if you’re up for it, you can visit the famous **Zorgvliet Spa** that offers one of the best eco-friendly range of beauty services in the country including algae treatments, clay mud wraps and a unique chocolate therapy where the temptation to lick the facial itself must be unbearable.



Capital idea:
Voortrekker Monument, Tshwane (Pretoria)

When in Pretoria, don't miss the Voortrekker Monument, a massive granite dome dedicated to the pioneers who fled British rule in the 1830s and 1840s on a Great Trek to establish the two Boer republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.

Its interior is a cenotaph with a continuous 100-metre marble frieze depicting scenes from the mythology surrounding the Great Trek that verges on the biblical. It is surrounded by a protective terrazzo wall made up of 64 carved wagons forming a laager – the battle formation of the Boers. In the upper dome there is a slit through which the sun's rays shine. It is so designed that at noon on 16 December each year they fall on an inscription below that says in Afrikaans, "We for thee, South Africa". That day is the anniversary of the Battle of Blood River, when the Voortrekkers beat the mighty Zulu army.

The history of the monument reflects that of the country itself. It was originally financed by the cultural arm of the Broederbond, a semi-secret organisation that became the vanguard of Afrikanerdom, but the pro-British government of Jan Smuts agreed to fund it further and took its construction under its wing 'for the purposes of national unity'. The foundation stone was laid on 16 December 1938 (the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Blood River) but, because of the intervening war, the monument was only officially opened on 16 December 1949 by the new apartheid government, whose aggressive nationalism was high on symbolism: the anniversary of the Battle of Blood River became a major holiday and a commemorative opportunity at the Voortrekker Monument.

What is remarkable in the new, democratic South Africa is what happened next: building on the old order to construct a new future, the ANC government recognized the importance of that day to the Afrikaner consciousness, kept the holiday and called it pertinently the Day of Reconciliation.

For further information visit www.voortrekkermon.org.za.



Visiting the Voortrekker Monument

You notice these things in South Africa.

Even Hillbrow – arguably the only no-go area still left in Jo'burg – has received its 'upgrade'. The Old Fort Prison with its dreaded Number Four, the section for black prisoners, has become a very interesting museum, and the hill it is built upon has been renamed Constitution Hill, chosen as it was to house South Africa's Constitutional Court. The court itself, South Africa's first public building commissioned after democracy, is fascinating: eleven official languages proclaim proudly its name outside and, as you enter the foyer, a combination of timber, glass, concrete and black slate provide a cheerful, bright African welcome. The old Number Four section was demolished and some of its materials were used to build the Court itself, thus allowing the guides to claim that 'the bricks from the past were used to build the future'. You have to hand it to the Africans: they're very hot on symbolism that is immensely moving.

The seeping transformation of Jo'burg is taking visitors by surprise; more and more are deciding to spend a few days in the city rather than merely using it as a stopover to the Kruger Park.

The tourist authorities have been highly skilful in exploiting South Africa's modern history that revolves around the 'liberation struggle', as the fight against apartheid is dubbed. When the amusement park of Gold Reef City with its toy trains, African dancing performances and family fun rides was 'upgraded' with a new Casino complex so vast it has streets running alongside the slot machines, the consortium involved won their bid by promising to build an Apartheid Museum.

The result was an unqualified success and the museum has now become one of Jo'burg's top attractions. It is an eye-opener even to set foot inside the building as you are forced to enter via two different revolving doors as a 'White' or a 'non-White'. Newsreels, photographs and documents succeed in conveying the inhumanity of the system as starkly as the nooses hanging from the roof that represent the political prisoners executed during those dark decades. And there is always some new twist to spring upon the visitor: I was startled to discover that people >>



Exotic food and red hot nights:
going out in Jo’burg

Jo'burg's restaurants are world class but with prices half of those in London, Paris or New York. **Moyo's** at Melrose Arch (www.moyo.co.za), where you can be certain that your ostrich fillet or antelope steak will be served with the best South African wine, offers the ultimate gastronomic treat with its modern African cuisine (ca R300pp). If you can't get a seat there, try the Sunday brunch buffet at **The Grace Hotel** (www.thegrace.co.za); it attracts discerning gourmands from Pretoria to Vereeniging (ca R145pp). For a more modest experience, pop in to **Sophia's** at Rosebank, endorsed by none other than Sophia Lauren ("I owe everything to pasta"), which is as close to a perfect Italian restaurant as you are likely to find outside Italy itself (ca R100pp). And after an evening at the Market Theatre, you can dine at **Gramadoela's** next door (www.gramadoelas.co.za) where previous diners include Nelson Mandela, Bill Clinton and Queen Elizabeth (ca R200pp).

Jo'burg is a 24/7 city and Melville is arguably the hippest nightspot. On Seventh Street there are back-to-back late night bars and eateries whose individual popularity waxes and wanes with the whims of the arty crowd – with one constant: the Thursday night drum and bass sessions at **TranceSky** are renowned. On Main Road there is **Club Monaco** (relocated out of sedate Rivonia because the punters partied too hard) and **Roxy's**, the best indie rock venue with a noisy student crowd. The oriental-themed **Tokyo Star** on Fourth is the current 'in' place for the very young, and the **Oh! Bar** flies the rainbow flag proudly from a balcony close by.

Newtown has begun to give Melville a run for its money, especially after several Jo'burg institutions moved there: the legendary **Bassline**, a club that packs them in every night with the best of home-grown jazz talent; **Carfax**, a prime warehouse/rave venue; and the **Marquee Club** with its mixture of jazz, African and occasionally rock music.

Practicalities

- For Jo'burg listings visit www.jhblive.co.za
- Bar prices range for around R12 for a beer to R20 for a gin and tonic
- Most clubs have free entrance, to a maximum R50
- Use a reputable taxi firm such as the recommended Maxi Taxis (tel 011 825 727 629) to move around at night



Local-style delicacies on offer in Jo'burg's restaurants include fried mopani worms and mealies (grilled corn)

used to change colour. In 1985, for instance, 702 Coloured people turned White, nineteen Whites became Coloured, one Indian became White and eleven Coloureds became Chinese.

I spent that evening in Pretoria, the leafy, quiet town thirty miles north of Jo'burg, dining with friends and being reminded that the standard of living of upper-middle class white South Africans is astonishingly high: lawns and gardens, gardeners and cooks, indoor garages and affordable two-storey villas are taken for granted, as are the balmy Gauteng nights. Looking up, I could do something I had long forgotten about: I could observe the starry sky. I was bang in the middle of a city, yet there was almost no light pollution and, as the Dog Star shone brightly on us, any notion of violence or crime seemed grotesque, blasphemous even.

But then genteel Pretoria with its pious Afrikaner roots has never stooped down to the crime level of its larger, money-obsessed neighbour. We should all be thankful to the gold reef for turning up forty miles south and keeping Pretoria pristine and unsullied by greed. Even its absorption into the Greater Metropolitan area of Tshwane, along with other satellite towns around it, has left it unruffled, like a grand duchess whose blue blood doesn't change upon marriage. With its multitude of parks, few cars, wide avenues and luxurious malls it still is the closest you'll get to British green belt suburbia this side of the Tropic of Capricorn.

But that doesn't mean it's boring: its history ensures otherwise. It is here you can find the most stunning architectural complex in South Africa, the Presidential Union Buildings. They were built on a hill by Herbert Baker, a Kent-born architect >>



Jo'burg's Market Square, thoroughly upgraded



White lion cub born at the Rhino & Lion Park

Wild at heart:
Rhino & Lion Nature Reserve, Krugersdorp

On the way to the Cradle of Humankind take a detour to the **Rhino & Lion Nature Reserve** (www.rhinolion.co.za) that markets itself as “the nearest faraway place”. This is a 1400-hectare private game reserve situated wholly inside the UNESCO site boundaries and also contains the Kromdraai cave, one of the principal fossil excavation sites. With a vulture hide, a lion and cheetah predator camp, grazing rhinos and ostriches, hippo pools, a breeding centre and a reptile park, the site is big enough to entertain you for a whole day. Even if a visit to the Kruger Park has left you feeling blasé, this reserve has its own wow factor: it has an easily observable pack of wild dogs – one of Africa’s rarest species – and an animal crèche where you can stroke the cutest of lion and cheetah cubs. As a bonus, it proudly boasts a white lion breeding programme – no, not the red-eyed albinos that can’t reproduce, but a genuine blue-eyed, yet milky-furred, species of the king of the jungle. ■ For further interaction with lions, pay a visit to the Lion Park (www.lion-park.com)

Raise your goblets:
Greensleeves Medieval Kingdom

If you find yourself close to Maropeng on a Friday or Saturday, then you should pay a visit to the **Greensleeves Medieval Kingdom** (www.greensleeves.co.za) for an unusual dining experience. It’s easy to spot on the R-563 by Sterkfontein: just look out for the castle! The restaurant is very popular, so you may have to book in advance: for around £20 you get a five-course medieval banquet that includes “a goblet of mead, battered fysshe, and spit roste beef or chyken with earthapples” downed with a cup of coffee. All this comes with minstrel and troubadour entertainment plus optional fancy dress hire for your party.

who had travelled extensively in Italy and Greece and brought to South Africa a unique neo-Italianate style. He broke with the colonial tradition of pre-fabricated houses “made in England” and started using locally quarried materials for his neoclassical designs that were more adapted to the clear, highveld sky than to the drizzly, cold climate back home.

Just the view from the Union Buildings’ bandstand – the grand panorama of a city as green as it is paved – is worth the drive. It is a tribute to the openness and informality of the new South Africa that I could just walk into President Mbeki’s office building and be met by the receptionist who politely enquired about my business.

But the state of Gauteng is not just Johannesburg, Soweto and Pretoria. One of the most exciting excursions into the highveld is to the Cradle of Humankind, South Africa’s first Unesco World Heritage site. This is an area with one of the highest concentrations of hominid fossils on the planet; it provided scientists with the missing links between apes and humans in the 1930s and 1940s. When we were deep into the dark recesses of the Sterkfontein caves, where fossil-bearing breccia rock containing primitive stone tools is staring you at eye-level, I became furious. Why was it only recently that the site had been opened to tourists? How come its existence had been kept under wraps? My guide offered an explanation: the fact that humans originated in Africa was too much for the previous white governments to swallow.

It is no surprise that the pendulum has swung

The fact that humans originated in Africa was too much for the previous white governments to swallow

in the opposite direction. The ANC not only started promoting the site heavily but also ‘upgraded’ it by creating a grand visitor attraction at Maropeng a few miles away. It incorporates an interactive museum, a conference centre, a fast-food café, a world-class restaurant and a boutique hotel to boot. There is even family entertainment in the form of audiovisual presentations, a real boat ride through time (whatever the signs say, trust me, you will get wet) and a kids’ cave thrown in for good measure. It is not often that man-made architecture enhances rather than diminishes a landscape, but the measured unobtrusiveness of the structure – the facilities are camouflaged below a raised hillock in the shape of a giant burial mound – provides welcome relief from the desolate, barren surroundings. The fossil finds made here were so historic they were carefully named: the Taung child, the skull of Mrs Ples. My only regret was that the original fossil displays were not yet in place, but should be by the time you read this.

I suppose I’ll just have to return. 🐾

■ John Malathronas was a guest of the Gauteng Tourism Authority.



Practically everyone in Jo’burg is passionate about sport. Soweto’s legendary soccer team, the Kaizer Chiefs, are so cool that one of Britain’s leading indie bands, the Kaiser Chiefs, adopted their name



Entrance to Maropeng, the new visitor centre for the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site. Maropeng means ‘returning to the place of origin’ in Setswana



The fossilised skull of ‘Mrs Ples’, an australopithecine who lived in the area two million years ago, on display at Sterkfontein Caves in the Cradle of Humankind. The specimen is the most complete Australopithecus africanus skull ever found