

BEST OF AFRICA

SENSATIONAL
TRAVEL
EXPERIENCES

WE ASKED FOUR OF SOUTH AFRICA'S MOST WIDELY TRAVELLED WRITERS – AND CONSULTED OUR OWN FOND MEMORIES – TO RECOMMEND THIS CONTINENT'S MAIN ATTRACTIONS: SOME FAIRLY FAMOUS ALREADY, OTHERS SOMEWHAT UNSUNG. THERE'S A DISTINCT BIAS TOWARDS SA, OF COURSE, BUT IT'S A GREAT PLACE TO START ON THIS EXPEDITION LIST

AFRICA TRAVEL EDITOR RICHARD HOLMES**1 KAYAK THE QUIRIMBAS**

Arabian, Portuguese and local fishermen have plied the waters of northern Mozambique for centuries, and the kayak adventure that sets off from Ibo Island Lodge is my favourite way to explore the Quirimbas Archipelago. Mornings are spent paddling between islands, with afternoons whiled away on lonely beaches or meeting the friendly local fishing families. Or perhaps birding in mangrove forests, followed by snorkelling on quiet reefs. Come evening, a bucket shower washes off the salt before a feast of local seafood. Then it's time to turn in for canvas 'glamping' beneath the boughs of a star chestnut tree. What's not to love? 021-702-0285, kayakquirimbas.com

2 HIKE THE CEDERBERG

Pay homage to the arch. Not that sprightly chap in maroon robes – there's spirituality of a different sort to be found in the Cederberg Wilderness Area, my favourite hump of mountains in South Africa. It takes a sturdy pair of legs and decent kit – temperatures plummet in winter – but the otherworldly rock formations, endemic cedar trees and perfect silence of the flat-topped Wolfberg are enough to still the thumping heart of the most stressed-out city slicker. A night spent beneath star-spangled skies and the soaring arch of this iconic rock formation is the best way to realise one's true place in the universe: insignificant. 0861-227-362-8873, capenature.org.za

3 SWIM IN THE OKAVANGO

It took me a while but I wore down the guides from our safari lodge (which shall remain nameless). For four days we'd been floating above the crystal-clear waters of the Okavango Delta; above channels carved by wandering hippos and deep eddies where crocs lurk in the shadows. But I wanted to get wet, and a sundowner stop at a clear shallow pool was my chance. I swear I heard something close to permission, and I was in. Swimming. In. The. Okavango. Delta! It's admittedly a good way to lose a limb, but what's life without a little danger? And besides, it beats the hell out of a hotel pool. botswanaturism.co.bw

4 SEE A TURTLE GIVE BIRTH

Turtle-spotting tours abound in northern KZN, but the loggerheads and giant leatherbacks that nest on the beaches of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park don't stick to tour schedules. A sunset walk either side of low tide is the best time for seeing turtles heave themselves up the sands to dig their gourd-shaped nests. Turtles have been nesting here for hundreds of thousands of years, so it's the easiest way to meet a real-life dinosaur. Those lucky enough to find one must remember to keep their distance so as not to disturb her nesting. 035-590-1633, isimangaliso.com

5 WHALE WATCH IN SOLITUDE

We all know whales head to South Africa's coastline in springtime. Unfortunately, so do tourists and in 'whale season' one can barely move in Hermanus or De Kelders for all the cetacean-spotters. But not at De Hoop Nature Reserve, an hour-and-a-bit to the southeast, where the aptly named Koppie Alleen is my favourite spot for some of SA's best whale-watching all on your lonesome. Spotters will need to borrow a few fingers to count all the whales cavorting in the bay, and in just a few hours there'll be plenty of tales to swap around the braai fire at the wonderfully upgraded Opstal cottages. 021-422-4522, dehoopcollection.co.za

6 RELIVE A BIG SA BATTLE

Call us the Rainbow Nation all you like, but South Africa's history is pockmarked with bloody battles. Anglo-Boer, Anglo-Zulu ... the list goes on. While most history buffs flock to the killing fields of Isandlwana, my favourite is the forlorn Spioenkop on the Drakensberg side of the N3. The hillside is dotted with graves of the soldiers – Anglo and Boer – who fell here on the morning of 24 January 1900, and Omri Nene, our guide from Three Tree Hill, brings the pointless battle beautifully to life. On this lonely hill it's hard not to remember the words of Nobel Laureate Albert Schweitzer: 'The soldiers' graves are the greatest preachers of peace.' 036-448-1171, threetreehill.co.za ▶

We settled in below the sweep of Cape Columbine lighthouse, the first to greet ships arriving from Europe, and watched the sun fall into the Atlantic. **Just another bloody perfect day in Africa**



THIS PAGE (clockwise from top left) De Hoop Nature Reserve on the whale coast; a turtle nesting in iSimangaliso Wetland Park; the Okavango Delta; wild horses in Namibia; the ghosts of battles past at Spioenkop; paddling in the Quirimbas Archipelago
OPPOSITE Twinkle twinkle at Cape Columbine

7 WALK THE OTTER TRAIL

Those who've tackled The Otter (its name is always spoken in caps) will nod knowingly when talk of the trail comes up around the braai. With 42km of aching uphill and knee-jarring downhill, and half a dozen river crossings, it's a tough old so-and-so of a walk. But all that sweat is not without reward. Such as Scott hut and its loo with a view and Oakhurst hut rattling to the pounding swells; the pods of dolphins in morning light and cliff-top vistas shared by just 11 fellow hikers. The Otter is the *real* Garden Route: rough, raw and breathtaking in more ways than one. 044-302-5600, sanparks.org

8 SEE THE WILD NAMIB HORSES

Some say the German *Schutztruppe* cavalry left these supreme steeds behind when WWI drew to a close. Others will swear the horses came from Baron Hansheinrich von Wolf's desert stud farm south of Maltahöhe. Yet others will suggest they were shipwrecked near the Orange River mouth and simply wandered north into the desert. Wherever they may have come from, the herds of wild horses that wander out of the Namib dunes to drink thirstily at the Garub waterhole (near the village of Aus) are one of southern Africa's most humbling animal attractions. It's an unforgettable piece of pure Namibian magic on the lonely B4 that runs from Lüderitz to Keetmanshoop. 011-702-9602, namibiatourism.com.na, namibia-travel.net

9 BRAVE THE CAPE POINT

'The most stately thing, and the fairest Cape we saw in the whole circumference of the world.' Sir Francis Drake was right, Cape Point truly is a 'most stately' thing, and all the more so when seen from the seas that rush around the southern tip of the Cape Peninsula. We took the fast-boat from quaint Simon's Town (itself worth a visit) with the affable Dave Hurwitz and were beneath the towering cliffs in under 30 minutes. There are no tour buses out here, no flag-carrying guides and no marauding baboons. It's the only way to really experience the fairest Cape. 083-257-7760, boatcompany.co.za

10 WATCH THE PERFECT SUNSET

Everybody has their favourite sunset spot – Clifton Fourth or Camps Bay are the usual suspects. They're both a little crowded for me, but happily one rarely jostles for a seat on the granite boulders of Cape Columbine. We hit the R27 from Cape Town north to Paternoster, continued through town to the Cape Columbine Nature Reserve, pitched our tent at Tietiesbaai and then wandered up the hill behind us with our favourite tippie. We settled in below the sweep of Cape Columbine lighthouse, the first to greet ships arriving from Europe, and watched the sun fall into the Atlantic. Just another bloody perfect day in Africa. 022-7522718, saldanhabay.co.za



PHOTOGRAPHS RICHARD HOLMES

