

# The Best of Southern Africa,

People come to southern Africa for its natural beauty, wildlife, and sunshine, and few leave disappointed. With an immensely varied terrain supporting a rich diversity of fauna and flora, the region offers a correspondingly diverse range of experiences. Whether you're here on safari, on a self-drive tour through the vast hinterland, or simply on vacation in one of the world's most beautiful regions, this chapter will help you experience the very best southern Africa has to offer.

## 1 Unique Southern African Moments

- **Spotting Zebra Grazing on the Mountain from the Highway** (Cape Town): Zebra, wildebeest, and various antelope graze on Table Mountain's slopes, literally minutes from the city center. Look out for them from the highway as you drive in from the airport. See chapter 4.
- **Enjoying the Sunset from Table Mountain** (Cape Town): From this great vantage point, you can watch the sun sink into the Atlantic Ocean, turning the Twelve Apostles a deep pink; then walk across the tabletop to the lip and watch the city lights start to twinkle and the dusky outline of the hinterland mountains under a moonlit sky. See chapter 4.
- **Feeling Humbled at Mandela's Prison Cell** (Cape Town): Tours of Robben Island are pretty restrictive, but looking into the tiny cell where Nelson Mandela spent the majority of his time in prison leaves few unmoved. Further insights are provided by guides, some of whom were incarcerated at the same time as Mandela, in what came to be known as the "University of Robben Island." See chapter 4.
- **Getting Caught Up in the Cape Minstrels Carnival** (Cape Town): Every New Year, brightly dressed troupes of "coloured" (mixed-race) men and children dance through the streets of Cape Town, singing to the quick-paced strum of banjos and the thump of drums. This tradition was inspired by American minstrels who came to the Cape in the late 1800s, but the celebration actually dates back to 1834 when slaves took to the streets to celebrate their liberation. See chapter 4.
- **Watching Whales from White Sand Dunes** (Western Cape): At De Hoop Nature Reserve's Koppie Alleen, the massive white dunes stretch deep beneath the sea, turning its blue hue into a hypnotic turquoise. This is the perfect place to watch the Southern Right whales that come to breed off the Overberg Coast—said to offer the best land-based whale-watching in the world. See chapter 5.

- **Walking Through Carpets of Flowers** (Northern Cape): In this annual miracle of almost spiritual proportions, the semi-arid and seemingly barren West Coast bursts into life after the first spring rains. More than 2,600 species of flowers literally carpet the Namaqualand plains for a few weeks before subsiding back into the soil for another year-long wait. See chapter 5.
- **Visiting the World's Largest Open-Air Gallery** (Western Cape, Eastern Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal): Created by the San hunter-gatherers, an ancient civilization all but destroyed by the migrating Nguni and white settlers, these rock-art paintings date back between 100 and 20,000 years, and document the history and spiritual beliefs of these gentle people. More than 15,000 sites are scattered throughout the country. See chapters 5, 6, and 9.
- **Jiving with Jo'burg Jollers to the Sounds of Kwaito** (Gauteng): The best place to experience the melting pot of Rainbow Nation culture, and to celebrate the emergence of a cohesive national identity, is on the dance floors grooving to *kwaito*, South Africa's own homegrown version of house. Look out for performances (or recordings) by Brothers of Peace (BO), Mandoza, Mafikizolo, Zola, M'Du, Mzekezeke, Kabelo, Mapaputsi, Bongo Maffin, or Mzambiya. See chapter 7.
- **Freezing Your Butt Off on an Early-Morning Game Drive** (Limpopo Province, the North-West, Mpumalanga, and Botswana): Winter (May–Aug) is considered to be the best time of the year to go on safari, as animals are the most visible, but be prepared: Rangers set off in their open-topped vehicles before dawn, when temperatures are barely above zero. See chapters 7, 8, and 11.
- **Seeing Virgin Maidens Dance the Zulu King's Reed Dance** (KwaZulu-Natal): Experience a scene that has been enacted for hundreds of years as you join some 15,000 Zulus, many dressed in tribal gear, to watch the virgin maidens dance for the Zulu Prince Gideon, who would traditionally pick a wife here. See chapter 9.
- **Soaking Up Victoria Falls** (Zimbabwe): The sight of more than 500 million liters of water a minute thundering into the Batoka Gorge, creating soaring rainbows and a mist of drenching spray, will never leave you. Enjoy the view with a champagne breakfast on Livingstone Island. See chapter 10.
- **Rafting the Churning Waters of the Zambezi** (Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe): There is absolutely nothing like hearing this mighty river pound past, drowning the guides' last-minute instructions as you plunge into swirling white waters, with fitting names like “the Muncher” and “Boiling Pot.” See chapter 10.
- **Drinking the Waters of the Delta** (Okavango Delta, Botswana): As you're poled along in your *mokoro* (dugout canoe), past palm-fringed islands and aquatic game, sample the life-giving waters of the delta. Simply scoop up a handful (keeping an eye out for crocs!) and take a sip. See chapter 11.

## 2 The Wildest Animal Encounters

- **Staring Down a Roaring Lion** (private game reserves in Mpumalanga, Limpopo Province, the North-West, and Botswana): Tourists are notoriously hungry for shots of big cats, and if you spend 2 nights at one of

the top private game reserves, you will certainly get close to lions and leopards, often on the first drive. If you're lucky enough to get close enough to have your vehicle shuddering from the powerful noise that erupts from the king of the jungle's gut, you are talking a truly wild-animal encounter. See chapters 7, 8, and 11.

- **Waiting for a Leopard to Finish Its Dinner** (private game reserves, the North-West, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal): Holing up in your room while a leopard gnaws its dinner outside your door might happen at any of the private game-reserve lodges that are set in the bush. Animals roam freely in this environment, and if dinner happens to be on your patio, celebrate the fact that you're not it and plunder the minibar. See chapters 7, 8, and 9.
- **Stalking a Rhino on Foot** (Kruger National Park, Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Reserve): Tracking rhino is no mean feat: They can smell humans up to 800m (2,624 ft.) away. Being on foot, with only the sounds of the bush and your beating heart as you crouch just meters from an animal as large as a tank, is unbeatable. For the best rhino-tracking experience, stay at Royal Malewane lodge, in the Thornybush game reserve. You will almost definitely track white rhino on the Bushman, Wolhuter, and Napi trails run by Kruger National Park, as well as on the Umfolozi trails run in Hluhluwe-Umfolozi. See chapters 8 and 9.
- **Swimming with Penguins** (Boulders Beach, Cape Town): This is a beautiful place to swim; large boulders create natural swimming pools shared by the only land-breeding colony of

jackass penguins. Watch them waddle and dive through the crystal-clear waters, which are slightly warmer than the Atlantic seaboard side—cold comfort, considering how icy that is. See chapter 4.

- **Baiting Great White Sharks** (Hermanus and Mossel Bay, Western Cape): Descend in a steel cage to meet Jaws up close and personal. Specialist tour operators offer controversial cage diving off Dyer Island in “Shark Alley,” where Great Whites hunt the resident seal population. Sharks swim within spitting distance of cages—not that there's much to spit when your mouth is dry with fear. See chapter 5.
- **Watching Rare Turtles Nest** (Zulu-land, KwaZulu-Natal): In November and December, the female leatherback and loggerhead turtles leave the safety of the sea at night to lay their eggs above the high-tide mark on the northern beaches of KwaZulu-Natal. Two months later, hatchlings scramble out of their nests and make a run for the ocean. Only one or two out of every thousand make it to maturity; those that do, return to the same beach to produce the next generation. See chapter 9.
- **Avoiding a Territorial Hippo** (Victoria Falls, Okavango Delta): The upper reaches of the Zambezi and the Okavango Delta's watery channels are best explored by gliding along in a canoe, or *mokoro*, but you're also more than likely to meet a hippo this way. Always treat them with respect—despite a relatively docile appearance, they are Africa's most dangerous mammal, and responsible for more deaths than crocodiles or lions. See chapters 10 and 11.

### 3 The Best Private Game Lodges & Camps

- **Singita** (Sabi Sands Reserve and Kruger National Park): Singita offers the best game lodge experience in Africa, with a choice of styles, from plush colonial to the last word in contemporary Afro-chic. Elevated private viewing decks let you immerse yourself in the tranquillity of the bush without leaving your suite. Add top-notch rangers, a roving masseuse, exquisite food, and a connoisseur's selection of wines, and you're assured an unforgettable stay—the only difficulty is deciding which lodge you prefer. See chapter 8.
- **Londolozzi Bateleur and Tree Camps** (Sabi Sands Reserve, Mpumalanga): Londolozzi is the flagship lodge of safari operator CC Africa, who set the standard in luxury bush accommodations (CC Africa also manages the recently opened Madikwe Safari Lodge, incidentally the best malaria-free option in southern Africa). While Londolozzi is not as grand or exclusive as Singita, it is justifiably famed for its leopard sightings. See chapter 8.
- **Honeyguide Tented Safari Camp** (Manyeleti Reserve, Mpumalanga): If the thought of a luxury hotel in the bush leaves you cold, Honeyguide's tented camp delivers a more authentically *Out of Africa* experience—right down to the sunken baths and cheeky local elephants. The lack of commercial activity in the Manyeleti Reserve and the relatively low rates are also extra pluses. See chapter 8.
- **Royal Malewane** (Thornybush Reserve, Limpopo Province): With privately situated suites that offer every luxury, this is all about deep relaxation, enhanced by the recently expanded spa. If you can bear to leave your private pool and large viewing deck (or in-room lounge and fireplace, lit for you in winter), the on-foot tracking is the best in the country. See chapter 8.
- **Leadwood Lodge** (Tala Private Game Reserve, KwaZulu-Natal): This reserve is not Big 5 country (it does have buffalo, rhino, giraffe, and antelope), but it is the new showcase for the team that created Singita's award-winning interiors—hardly surprising, then, that it made it onto *Condé Nast Traveler's* 2005 Hot List. It's also the most affordable option listed here, and a mere 40 minutes from Durban International Airport. See chapter 9.
- **Jao Camp** (Okavango Delta, Botswana): Not only is this camp located in one of the finest concessions in the delta, but it is also one of the most gorgeous camps on the continent, bringing elegant Balinese design elements to bear on an otherwise classic African lodge. See chapter 11.
- **Mombo Camp** (Moremi, Okavango, Botswana): At the confluence of two river systems, Mombo has long been regarded as one of the best game-viewing spots in Africa, attracting large numbers of plains game and their attendant predators—leopard, wild dog, and lion are frequently sighted here. See chapter 11.
- **Jack's and San Camps** (Makgadikgadi Pans, Botswana): Desert reserves have a very special effect on the spirit, and these classic 1940s safari camps, situated under palm trees on the fringe of the pans, offer one of the most unusual experiences in Africa. (For a more luxurious desert lodge—we're talking swimming pools and top-end service—head for Tswalu, in the Kalahari.) See chapter 11.

## 4 The Best National Parks & Provincial Nature Reserves

- **De Hoop Nature Reserve** (Whale Coast, Western Cape): A magnificent coastal reserve featuring deserted beaches, interesting rock pools, beautiful *fynbos* (uniquely diverse shrublands), a wetland with more than 200 bird species, and a number of small game. Very limited accommodations in simple huts ensure that the reserve is never crowded. See chapter 5.
- **Tsitsikamma National Park** (Garden Route, Western Cape): Stretching from Storms River Mouth to Nature's Valley, this coastline is best explored on foot via the 5-day Otter Trail. If you're pressed for time, or if the trail is full, take the 1km (just over ½-mile) walk to the mouth, or complete the first day of the Otter Trail, which terminates at a beautiful waterfall. See chapter 5.
- **Goegap Nature Reserve** (Namaqualand, Northern Cape): This is one of the best places in Namaqualand to witness the floral transformation after the first spring rains. A recommended way to explore the reserve is to hire a bike and complete the two trails that traverse the reserve. Grazing among the flowers are zebra, springbok, and the stately gemsbok, or oryx. See chapter 5.
- **Kgalagadi (Kalahari) Transfrontier Park** (Northern Cape): This is one of the largest conservation areas in Africa—twice the size of Kruger—yet because of the long distances you need to travel to reach it, this desert reserve is seldom included in the first visitor's itinerary. Pity, for it is starkly beautiful, with red dunes, blonde grasses, and sculptural camelthorn trees contrasting with cobalt-blue skies. Despite its aridity, the reserve supports a number of predators, including the famed black-maned “Kalahari” lion, hyena, wild dog, and cheetah. See chapter 7.
- **Pilanesberg National Park** (the North-West): This reserve is one of southern Africa's most accessible (just 2 hr. from Johannesburg), which is both a blessing and a drawback, depending on whether you have serious time constraints or a need for solitude. Lying on the eroded remains of a 1.4-billion-year-old extinct volcanic crater—one of only three in the world—the 58,000-hectare (143,260-acre) reserve supports more than 35 large mammal species. See chapter 7.
- **Madikwe Game Reserve** (the North-West): Rapidly gathering momentum as one of the country's most sought-after getaways, this 75,000-hectare (185,250-acre) reserve offers highly diverse ecozones (including Kalahari sandveld), allowing it to support an unusual range of species—which is why it's been dubbed the “Magnificent 7” reserve (cheetah and wild dog being added to the lineup of usual suspects). Best of all, it's malaria-free. See chapter 7.
- **Kruger National Park** (Mpumalanga and Limpopo Province): One of Africa's greatest game parks, with probably the best-developed infrastructure, Kruger is the most cost-effective, do-it-yourself way to go on safari. Most accommodations are pretty basic but clean, functional, and affordable; and the park teems with wildlife. Good news for connoisseurs is that there are an increasing number of classy private concessions, where the finest lodgings are available—at a price. See chapter 8.
- **Greater St Lucia Wetland Park** (Zululand, KwaZulu-Natal): This World Heritage Site encompasses five distinct ecosystems, including the

croc-rich estuary, the Mkhuze savanna, and offshore coral reefs. It is also close to Hluhluwe-Umfolozi, the province's largest Big 5 reserve, which supports the densest rhino population in Africa. See chapter 9.

- **The Kosi Bay Nature Reserve** (Maputaland, KwaZulu-Natal): This chain of four lakes, fringed by lush and varied vegetation (marsh forests, mangroves, giant swamp figs, dune forests, raffia palm forest) and home to rare birds (Pels fishing owl and the palm nut vulture) and tropical fish, is a delight for hikers and birders, though it takes some commitment to get to this northeastern corner of South Africa. See chapter 9.
- **The uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park** (KwaZulu-Natal): The Drakensberg in its entirety is spectacular, but if you have time to visit only one region, head north for the Amphitheatre. One of the most magnificent rock formations in Africa, it is also the source of South Africa's major rivers, the Vaal, the Orange, and the Tugela. Rolling grasslands, breathtaking views, and crystal-clear streams can be explored only on foot or horseback. See chapter 9.
- **The Victoria Falls National Park** (Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe): This

World Heritage Site offers the most stupendous views of the 1,000m-wide (3,280-ft.) falls, and the constant spray, crowned by a permanent rainbow, sustains a lush and verdant rain forest. See chapter 10.

- **Moremi Game Reserve** (Botswana): No visit to Botswana would be complete without a trip to Moremi, which makes up much of the eastern shores of the delta and offers arguably the best game-viewing in southern Africa. Covering an area of 487,200 hectares (1,203,384 acres), including woodlands, wetlands, waterways, islands, and pans, this reserve is home to lion, elephant, cheetah, wild dog, leopard, buffalo, and more than 500 species of birds. See chapter 11.
- **Chobe National Park** (Botswana): This park includes the fabulous game areas of Savuti and Linyanti—river systems that provide life for abundant game including lion, leopard, wild dog, and elephant; the Chobe River is in fact the best place to see elephant in Africa, and from the boats that operate along its shores it's possible to see dozens of them swimming across the rivers between Botswana and Namibia. See chapter 11.

## 5 The Best Beaches

- **Long Beach** (Cape Town): This 4km-long (2½-mile) stretch of sand—almost as wide as it is long—is the city's best place to go horseback riding. Even if you don't have time to ride it, stop to admire it from the overlooking cliffs of the Chapman's Peak Drive. See chapter 4.
- **Clifton** (Cape Town): The city's most beautiful beach is just minutes from the city center, and where Cape Town's most gorgeous creatures like to parade. It's also the most wind-free

area in Cape Town—handy when the southeaster, known locally as the Cape Doctor, is driving you mad. Divided by large boulders into First, Second, Third, and Fourth beaches, it is accessible only via steep steps. Other great city beaches include Camps Bay and Llandudno. See chapter 4.

- **De Hoop Beach** (Whale Coast, Western Cape): Tall white dunes sliding into the sea, coves, evocative limestone outcrops, an aquamarine

sea, and picture-perfect rock pools make this reserve's beaches the most glorious in the Overberg, if not the entire Cape. See chapter 5.

- **Noetzie** (Garden Route, Western Cape): One of the closest beaches to Knysna is also the most charming, not least because of the crenellated castles overlooking it. If the sea is too wild, take a dip in the lagoon that meanders into it. See chapter 5.
- **Plettenberg Bay** (Garden Route, Western Cape): It's a toss-up between Lookout and Robberg beaches, but safe to say that "Plett," as the locals call it, has the best beaches on the Garden Route. Pity about the monstrous houses that overlook them. Head for Lookout for a view of the distant Outeniqua Mountains, and Robberg for whale-watching. See chapter 5.
- **Wild Coast** (Eastern Cape): The entire Wild Coast is renowned for its

magnificent, deserted coastline; but since **Port St Johns** is one of the more accessible points, you may wish to head straight here and laze away the sultry days on Second Beach, a perfect uninhabited crescent, fringed with tropical vegetation. For total seclusion, head for Umgazi, a few miles south, or north to the new Gwe Gwe Lodge in Mkambati. See chapter 6.

- **Mabibi and Rocktail Bay** (Maputaland, KwaZulu-Natal): With the "Holiday Coast" surrounding Durban largely ruined by an uninterrupted ribbon of development, you'll need to head north, past the Greater St Lucia Wetland to the beaches of Maputaland. For Robinson Crusoes who like their luxury, Thonga Beach Lodge at Mabibi and Rocktail Bay lodge offer total seclusion on the coast for a limited number of guests. See chapter 9.

## 6 The Best Outdoor Adventures

- **Throwing Yourself Off Lion's Head and Landing on Camps Bay Beach** (Cape Town): It's a breathtaking ride hovering over the slopes of Table Mountain. As you slowly glide toward the white sands of Camps Bay, lapped by an endless expanse of ocean, you'll have time to admire the craggy cliffs of the Twelve Apostles. See chapter 4.
- **Kayaking to Cape Point** (Cape Town): Kayaking is the most impressive way to view this towering outcrop, the southwesternmost point of Africa. It's also the ideal opportunity to explore the rugged cliffs that line the coastline, with numerous crevices and private coves to beach yourself on. See chapter 4.
- **Mountain Biking Through the Knysna Forests** (Garden Route, Western Cape): Starting at the Garden

of Eden, the 22km (14-mile) Harkerville Red Route is considered the most challenging in the country. Its steep, single-track slip paths take you past indigenous forests, silent plantations, and magnificent coastal fynbos. See chapter 5.

- **Bungee Jumping Off Bloukrans River Bridge** (Garden Route, Western Cape): The real daredevils do the highest bungee jump in the world in just their birthday suits, leaping 216m (708 ft.) and free-falling (not to mention screaming) for close to 7 seconds. See chapter 5.
- **Surfing "Bruce's Beauties"** (Cape St Francis, Eastern Cape): Bruce's Beauties, the waves featured in the 1960s cult classic *Endless Summer*, form an awesome right-point break. They need a massive swell, however, and don't work very often; the same goes

for Supertubes, hailed the “perfect wave,” in nearby Jeffrey’s Bay. See chapter 6.

- **Surfing the Mighty Zambezi River** (Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe): Not content with merely rafting down the Zambezi, adrenaline-seekers can plunge into the churning waters attached to nothing more than a boogie board and ride the 2m- to 3m-high (6½–9¾-ft.) waves. See chapter 10.
- **Riding an Elephant Through the African Wilderness** (Mpumalanga, Victoria Falls, and Botswana): This is a great way to explore the bush, not only because of the elevated view and

the proximity with which you can approach animals, but because you won’t feel safer—no one in the jungle messes with an elephant. See chapters 8, 10, and 11.

- **Tracking Big Game on Horseback** (Mashatu and Okavango Delta, Botswana): You haven’t lived until you’ve outraced a charging elephant on the back of your trusty steed—experience Africa as the pioneers did by taking a 3- to 10-day horse safari in the Mashatu Game Reserve, or explore the western delta bordering the Moremi Game Reserve. See chapter 11.

## 7 The Best Places to Discover South African Culture & History

- **Diagonal Street** (Johannesburg, Gauteng): On one side of the street, *sangomas* (healers) enter a pungent *muti* (folk medicine) shop to purchase jars of crushed baboon skull, lizards’ feet, and crocodile fat, while on the other, accountants flashing cellphones exit the glass walls of “Diamond House,” the gleaming high-rise designed by Chicago architect Helmut Jahn. It is this kind of contrast that makes Johannesburg such an electrifying experience. See chapter 7.
- **The Hector Pieterse Memorial** (Soweto, Gauteng): When schoolchildren took to the streets on June 16, 1976, in a peaceful protest against the decision to use Afrikaans as the sole means of instruction in schools, police opened fire, killing, among others, young Hector Pieterse. This was a turning point in the battle against apartheid. Widespread riots and international condemnation followed, and nothing would ever be the same. The best way to see it is with a township tour. See chapter 7.
- **Apartheid Museum** (Gauteng): Few other museums are able to achieve

the emotional impact generated by this rich reminder of South Africa’s ugly past. The collection of images, audiovisual presentations, and intimate tales of human suffering and triumph in the face of adversity is staggering; raw and vivid, the journey from oppression to democracy is powerfully evoked here. See chapter 7.

- **Cradle of Humankind** (Gauteng): Having shot to fame in 1947 with the discovery of a 2½-million-year-old hominid skull, the region continues to produce fascinating finds about the origins of mankind. Tours with paleontologists introduce you to many intriguing aspects of human evolution, in an area that has remained unchanged for millions of years. See chapter 7.
- **Voortrekker Monument** (Pretoria, Gauteng): This massive granite structure commemorates the Great Trek—in particular, the Battle of Blood River (fought between Trekkers and Zulus on Dec 16, 1838)—and remains hallowed ground for Afrikaner nationalists. See chapter 7.
- **Robben Island** (Cape Town): A prison for political activists since the

17th century, including its most famous prisoner, Nelson Mandela, the island was commonly known as the “Alcatraz of Africa.” Today the island is a museum and a nature reserve, and a tangible symbol of South Africa’s transformation. See chapter 4.

- **Bo-Kaap** (Cape Town): This Cape Malay area, replete with cobbled streets and quaint historical homes, was one of the few “nonwhite” areas to escape destruction during the apartheid era, despite its proximity to the city. A walk through the streets should be combined with a visit to the **District Six Museum**, which commemorates a less fortunate community. Visible today only as large tracts of cleared land on the southern outskirts of town (opposite the Bo-Kaap), this once vibrant suburb was razed to the ground in the ’60s. See chapter 4.
- **Wuppertal Moravian Mission Station** (Cederberg, Western Cape): Located at the end of a long, dusty road in the Cederberg Mountains, Wuppertal remains unchanged to this day and is both architecturally and culturally a living legacy of the early missionaries. Other mission stations worth visiting are Elim and Genadendal, both in the Overberg. See chapter 5.
- **The Nelson Mandela Museum** (Umtata, Eastern Cape): A home-grown tribute to Africa’s greatest statesman, with posters, photographs, and videos documenting his life and work. Among the interesting

memorabilia are the many gifts from adoring admirers. See chapter 6.

- **Rorke’s Drift and Isandlwana** (Battlefields, KwaZulu-Natal): These two Anglo-Zulu War battlefield sites, within walking distance of each other, encompass both the British Empire’s most humiliating defeat and its most heroic victory in the colonies. At the Battle of Isandlwana, more than 1,300 armed men were wiped out by a “bunch of savages armed with sticks,” as the mighty Zulu nation was then referred to. Hours later, 139 British soldiers (of which 35 were ill) warded off a force of 4,000 Zulus for 12 hours, for which an unprecedented 11 Victorian Crosses were awarded. See chapter 9.
- **Kwa Muhle Museum** (Durban, KwaZulu-Natal): Excellent user-friendly displays explain how the “Durban System” not only exploited the indigenous peoples, but also made them pay for its administration. It’s a good introduction to the discriminatory laws that preceded apartheid. See chapter 9.
- **The Vukani Collection** (Eshowe, KwaZulu-Natal): While most Westerners head for the cultural villages to gain some insight into Zulu tribal customs and culture, Vukani is where Zulu parents take their children. With the largest collection of Zulu artifacts in the world, this is a highly recommended excursion, particularly for those interested in crafts. Note that if you aren’t venturing this far afield, the **Campbell Collection** in Durban is an alternative. See chapter 9.

## 8 The Most Authentic Culinary Experiences

- **Ordering a Cape Malay Dish** (Cape Town): Typified by mild, sweet curries and stews, this cuisine is easy on the uninitiated palate. The most authentic restaurant is Biesmiellah,

located in the Bo-Kaap in Cape Town, but many of the top restaurants in the Cape incorporate Cape Malay spicing in creative ways. See chapter 4.

- **Lunching in the Vineyards** (Winelands): Set aside at least one afternoon to lunch in the Winelands overlooking vine-carpeted valleys. Recommended options include the lovely terrace at **Constantia Uitsig** (☎ 021/794-4480), on the Constantia Wine Route, and a window table at **La Petite Ferme** (☎ 021/876-3016), overlooking the lush Franschhoek Valley. See chapter 4.
- **High Tea at the Nellie** (Cape Town): Regularly voted the top hotel in Africa, the Mount Nelson has been serving up the best high tea south of the equator for over a century. Luxuriate on sofas under chandeliers as plates piled high with cucumber sandwiches and cream puffs are served to the strains of the tinkling pianist. A graciously colonial experience, and a relative bargain at R100 (\$15) a head. See chapter 4.
- **Braaiing Crayfish on the Beach** (West Coast, Western Cape): The West Coast all-you-can-eat beach *braais* (barbecues) are legendary, giving you an opportunity to try a variety of local fish. Your best bet is Muisbosskerm, near Lamberts Bay, an ideal spot if you want to combine a trip to the Cederberg. See chapter 5.
- **Eating with Your Fingers:** You'll find that the African staple *pap* (maize-meal

prepared as a stiff porridge that resembles polenta) is best sampled by balling a bit in one hand and dipping the edge into a sauce or stew—try *umngqusho*, a stew made from maize kernels, sugar beans, chiles, and potatoes, and said to be one of Nelson Mandela's favorites. You're most likely to sample *pap* on a township tour (see chapters 4, 6, and 7).

- **Dining Under the Stars to the Sounds of the Bush** (private game reserves throughout southern Africa): There's nothing like fresh air to work up an appetite, unless it's the smell of sizzling food cooked over an open fire. Happily, dinners at private game reserves combine both more often than not. Weather permitting, meals are served in a *boma* (a reeded enclosure), or in the bush in riverbeds or under large trees. Armed rangers and massive fires keep predators at bay.
- **Chewing Biltong on a Road Trip:** *Biltong*, strips of game, beef, or ostrich cured with spices and dried, are sold at farm stalls and butcher shops throughout the country. This popular local tradition that dates back to the Voortrekkers is something of an acquired taste, but it's almost addictive once you've started.