



In Africa, and loving it

ADVENTURE RISHAD SAAM MEHTA gets up, close and personal with ostriches and crocodiles and returns with his adrenalin all charged



MYRIAD THINGS TO DO The Kango Caves, a crocodile and Route 62 PHOTOS: RISHAD SAAM MEHTA

I awoke a deeply-hued African dawn at Nysna. The minute I pulled open the curtains of room at hotel St. James in Nysna, I congratulated myself once again for following accommodation advice that I had found on the travel website of the Automobile Association of South Africa. As promised, the views over the Nysna Lagoon were fantastic.

This was my fifth day in South Africa and I had already overdosed on adrenaline after swinging from tree tops, bungee jumping off a bridge and being flung out of a perfectly sound aeroplane in a thrilling skydive. Now, I was looking forward to Route 62 which is slated as one of Africa's most scenic drives. But before that I had to drive away from the Indian Ocean at Nysna, off the Garden Route and towards Oudtshoorn.

The small and charming town of Oudtshoorn found its jackpot thanks to those tall flightless birds whose brain is smaller

than their eyeball, but whose kick can disembowel a lion — the Ostrich!

So, in Oudtshoorn you can don a fine ostrich leather hat and strut around town or rub your belly in satisfaction after a lovely ostrich steak that the Kalinka restaurant's chef Olga prepares to perfection. But I blitzed through Oudtshoorn the first time I arrived there because I was headed to a place 20 minutes away, up a hill along a superb driving road, the Kango Caves.

Eerie thrill

I am borderline claustrophobic, so it gives me an eerie thrill exploring dark and deep areas like caves. But, claustrophobia was banished by awe when my guide Crystal introduced me to the first huge underground area called Van Zyl's hall.

Stalagmites and stalactites made fantastic designs and the soft yellow light added a fasci-

nating ambience. It looked like the private studio of a very talented sculptor. The caves are not brightly lit, but they aren't pitch dark either and though there are warnings that you shouldn't take the tour if you are claustrophobic, my advice is to see them. Fascination will fend off fear.

But getting a handle on fear was easier said and done as I stood in a circular cage just above a water hole in the Congo Wildlife Ranch. Carrie, the winch operator slowly cranked

the handle that lowered me into the water. The water was incidentally quite pleasant, but then it had to be like that because 'they' like it.

Croc encounter

'They' being three full-grown crocodiles. At the Congo Wildlife Ranch you can get lowered into a crocodile's water hole in a cage, but when these humongous creatures swim towards you and stick their snouts into the cage, you can wet your pants.

The solace is that they cannot open their mouths when they put their snouts into the cage, but they can stare at you with those cold beady eyes, which reflect the fact that the crocs are lusting to take a bite off you.

Besides that, you can also pet tigers and cheetahs at the ranch. My favourite was Namita the tigress who absolutely loved it when I stroked her neck. She purred like a finely tuned V8.

Another must do around Oudtshoorn is a visit to the ostrich farms where the tour is

informative and reveals a lot about the big bird. Did you know that you can stand on an ostrich egg and it will not break? It can resist weight up to 120kg. In fact, Oudtshoorn chefs always include a hammer in their array of knives and other cooking paraphernalia.

An ostrich egg needs to be pieced with a stainless steel knife which is gently tapped with a hammer. The resulting omelette will feed 24 men; the egg shells are sometimes painted to make decorative pieces ranging from ashtrays to lamp shades.

Tomorrow, I'd leave the ostriches behind and head down Route 62 to dive in a cage once more. This time, with great white sharks outside.

This is why I drove to Hermanus, the place you have to come to if you want to watch Southern Right Whales and indulge in some shark cage diving. Yes, there is some more fearful stuff in store for me, but I'm loving it.

AT A GLANCE

- South Africa is ripe for a driving holiday. People are friendly and helpful and traffic is well behaved.
- Route 62 (www.route62.co.za) and the Garden Route (www.gardenroute.co.za) are scenic and very exciting routes to drive.
- St James at Nysna (www.stjames.co.za) is the

- perfect place for a romantic and pampered interlude on the Garden route.
- Also visit www.aatravel.co.za for bookings and reviews of accommodation. Better still, grab their accommodation books which have a comprehensive listing of the best places to suit all budgets across South Africa.

getaway

MY KIND OF PLACE

VANI GANAPATHY



In the beholder's eye

I cannot zero in on one place as a favourite that I visit repeatedly. Every time you travel to a new city or town, you discover its charm and make your trip as exciting as possible. At that point of time, that place becomes your preferred destination. As an artiste you are always looking around for inspiration and travel opens your eyes to many things beautiful from the past and in the present. It may lend a new dimension to your creativity.

Wide choice

Cuisine, literature, cinema, visual art, architectural marvels...Italy appeals to me in every way. I have been to Venice a few times. I am waiting to go to Tuscany and Florence, where every inch of land is blessed by Nature. Bangkok is a nice place for eating out and shopping. Singapore, too, attracts for the same reasons but I also have close relatives living there. So, it's good fun.

Nearer home

Hampi and Belur in Karnataka, the beautiful Konark temple in Orissa (amazingly well-maintained), the colourful clothes and palaces of Rajasthan, the gorgeous beaches of Goa, the pristine backwaters of Kerala, the architecturally-rich temples of South India...there's so much to see in India, a lifetime is not enough.

Travel...

Never with a cramped schedule and without planning. I move at my own pace to be able to stop and admire places. The purpose is to make every trip meaningful and memorable.

The Bharatanatyam dancer spoke to CHITRA SWAMINATHAN

It's festival season

TRAVEL Head to Singapore for the Three Festivals Celebration

If you have a thing for culture and festivities, here's a great chance to combine them with a holiday.

Singapore is in the middle of the festivities observed by the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities — Hari Raya Aidilfitri Celebrations at Kampong Glam (till October 5) and Geylang Serai

(till October 12), Mid-Autumn Festival at China Town (till September 30) and Deepavali at Little India (From September 20–November 2). The event aims at bringing together people from different races and religions to have a better understanding of Malay and Muslim culture.

During this time, Singapore comes alive in an explosion of colour, street lights, festive bazaars, cultural performances and events. For visitors to soak in the atmosphere during the 'One City, Three Festivals' period, there are free guided walking tours organised by the Singapore Tourism Board.

Through these tours, visitors learn about the meaning, customs, practices, preparations and legends behind the festival and catch cultural performances and demonstrations at various attractions.

For more information, visit www.visitsingapore.com/in



PLENTY TO DO In Singapore PHOTO: REUTERS

TRAVEL QUIP



You define a good flight by negatives: you didn't get hijacked, you didn't crash, you didn't throw up, you weren't late, you weren't nauseated by the food. So you are grateful.
Paul Theroux

Get the favorites on your mobile. just by sending SMS

Wallpaper, Animations, Polytone, Truetone, Mp3tones & Themes download available only on GPRS enabled handsets.

Latest Bollywood	Code
Aahista Aahista - Bachna Ae Haseeno	237903
Bachna Ae Haseeno - Bachna Ae Haseeno	237904
Jogi Mahi - Bachna Ae Haseeno	237905
Khuda Jaane - Bachna Ae Haseeno	237906
Khuda Jaane Remix - Bachna Ae Haseeno	237907
Lucky Boy - Bachna Ae Haseeno	237908
Small Town Girl - Bachna Ae Haseeno	237909
Bas Ek - singh is king	230001
Bas Ek King - singh is king	230002
Bhootni Ke - singh is king	230003
Bhootni Ke Remix - singh is king	230004

For Example: To download ringtone Aahista Aahista - Bachna Ae Haseeno - 237903
 Airtel & Vodafone Users: SMS POLY 237903 to 56397 / SMS TRUE 237903 to 56397 / SMS MP3 237903 to 56397
 MONOTONES
 Reliance Users: SMS MONO 237903 to 56397
 Airtel, Aircel, BSNL & Vodafone Users: For Nokia & Samsung users - SMS RT 237903 to 56397 / Other than Nokia & Samsung user - SMS ORT 237903 to 56397

Wallpapers

Hi Vidya Balan Wall 227176	Crazy Shahid Wall 227177	Spicy Vidya Wall 227178	Ravishing Vidya Wall 227181	Shahid Iron Man Wall 227191
Ayesha Wall 222316	Couples On Top Wall 222315	Ayesha In De Taali Wall 222311	Alkshaye N Jerella Wall 221353	Alkshaye Come On Wall 221354
Sports Car Wall 72382	Metallic Silver Car Wall 72383	Red Car Wall 72786	Metallic Blue Car Wall 81434	Royal Blue Car Wall 118308
Yellow Roses Wall 118313	Sweet Rose Wall 118310	White Flower Wall 118312	Yellow Roses Wall 118314	Roses Bunch Wall 118308

For example: To download Hi Vidya Balan wallpaper, Airtel & Vodafone users, SMS WALL 227176 to 56397

Condition: *Wallpaper, Animations, Polytone, Truetone, Mp3tones & Themes download available only on GPRS enabled handsets. For more details contact your customer care.
 Download Cost: Monotone: - Airtel, Airtel, Vodafone - Rs.10, Reliance & BSNL-Rs.7 Polytone: - Airtel-Rs.15, Vodafone-Rs.10 Truetone: - Airtel-Rs.15, Vodafone-Rs.10 Mp3tone: - Airtel-Rs.15, Vodafone-Rs.10
 Wallpaper: - Airtel & Vodafone-Rs.10 Animation: - Airtel: Rs.15, Vodafone - Rs.10 Themes: - Airtel-Rs.30, Vodafone-Rs.30
 SMS Charges: -Airtel, Vodafone, Aircel, Reliance Rs.3 BSNL (Postpaid Rs.0.80 Prepaid Rs.1)
 *For any kind of feedback or suggestion please email us at: 56397/help@gmail.com

For More Details Log on to: www.thehindu.com/56397.htm

Mobile Services from THE HINDU
 Powered by iMmobile