



THE SMOOTH GUIDE | THE LONG LUXURIOUS WEEKEND

johannesburg

South Africa's biggest metropolis is finally putting a truly metropolitan face forward - with cutting-edge art spaces, directional cuisine and a crop of diverse, world-class hotels, says **Lucia van der Post**

It's always seemed strange to me that Johannesburg is usually seen as a sort of changing post, a place to arrive at only to move on from as soon as possible. It may not have the beaches, the winelands or the Cape's famous mountain - but it makes up for it with everything else. It's faster, edgier, more alive. There's always been a whiff of authentic Africa about Johannesburg: the witch doctor down the road, the shebeens where black and white sang freedom songs together, the markets selling tribal masks and wildly coloured cloth from the far reaches of the continent.

In recent years, however, the very heart of Johannesburg - long considered a no-go zone for tourists - has become newly vibrant. The old downtown centre, once a deeply depressed area, has been revived, so it's worth a wander round West Street and Diagonal Street, where there's the *muti* (witch doctor) shop selling dried plants and herbal remedies. In the MiniMart you can buy the

traditional African seshoeshe fabric in the original colours (indigo, brown, red) for around £2.50 a panel. Many old warehouses have been turned into galleries to show the work of indigenous artists from all over Africa - clay pots, jewellery from copper or silver wire, embroidery from the Mapula Embroidery Project, fabric from Venda, isicholos (traditional Zulu women's hats) from Kwa-Zulu Natal province, leather cushions and beadwork. The Market Theatre, which has always staged lively, challenging performances, is now the centre of a big arts complex (don't miss the MuseuAfrica); and Moyo, a restaurant serving African-inspired food, is right beside it.

But it's not just the city centre that has been revived. Young entrepreneurs are restoring old industrial buildings in what were once run-down areas. Thirty-eight-year-old Adam Levy kickstarted the rejuvenation of

the old Braamfontein district, close to Witwatersrand University; its refurbished buildings house student living spaces as well as galleries, studios, restaurants and small one-off shops selling quirky goods, often of their own making. The Neighbourgoods Market (open every Saturday) hums with a mix of all races, ages and cultures perusing stalls selling food to eat on the hoof or to take home;

you could get a glass of sparkling wine and some Lüderitz Bay oysters for under £10, or buy some vintage camouflage kit for about a tenner. In the surrounding streets you might find a huge oil painting by Jason Bronkhorst at the Kalashnikov Gallery, from about £3,000, while Doktor and Misses, one of South Africa's best-known furniture designers, has a showroom on Juta Street. Orbit is one of the newest jazz clubs, bringing some of the best blues and improvised music from all over Africa - Nigeria, Chad, the Republic of Congo and beyond.

On the city's east side is Maboneng, where Jonathan Liebmann is helping to introduce some sparkle to the hitherto rundown area; it's unmissable for anybody



Top: Cameroonian prints at Amatuli's interiors studio. Left: private villa and garden at the AtholPlace Hotel



who wants a feel for where the new South Africa is at. Grittier than Braamfontein, it is also a lively hub filled with creative endeavour. There are pop-up theatres, and The Bioscope on Fox Street shows runs of classic indie films. Arts on Main mixes shops, galleries and a workspace where young artists and craftspeople produce and sell their work; William Kentridge has his studio here, open to visitors. In the courtyard is an open-air café serving fresh, gutsy brasserie-type food. On Sunday the Market on Main sells a vast range of foods from small producers, and out on the streets enterprising craftspeople peddle their wares. And – the city having the interesting notion of turning itself into a huge outdoor gallery – there is graffiti art of varying standards everywhere.

Braamfontein and Maboneng are the new face of Jo'burg, but a visit to Soweto is still full of interest. All good hotels can organise this, but one of the most enterprising ways to see Soweto is to cycle around with one of the tour companies, some of whom will take you into private houses. A visit to the Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum is a must (Pieterse was the boy killed in the 1976 uprising; the photograph of Mbuyisa Makhubo carrying him became famous around the world), as is the Apartheid Museum, which houses a harrowing photographic memorial to the Apartheid years; prepare to be deeply moved.

When it comes to shopping, most of smart Johannesburg can be found at Sandton City and the Rosebank Mall, which has a very good rooftop market selling African crafts from across the continent. The best galleries for modern African art and crafts are the Goodman Gallery, right by the Hyatt Regency, and the Kim Sacks Gallery at Jan Smuts Avenue in Parkwood. Art Africa, in Parkview, is a locals' source for presents such as beaded baskets and dolls. Amatuli is the insider address, beloved of South Africa's chicest interior designers, for decorative artefacts, tribal headrests and stools, desert "star beds" and sculptures, which the owner sources from all over Africa (and ships anywhere in the world).

Fashion isn't Johannesburg's strong suit, but for something wild and wonderful you should head to Marianne Fassler's studio/boutique Leopard Frock. It's very hip, very street, very glamorous – Biba with a hint of Africa. If, instead, you're interested in diamonds, the Wesselton Diamond Cutting Company offers tours of its factory and the chance to buy stones at wholesale



Amatuli is beloved of South Africa's chicest interior designers

prices. For other less conventional jewels, Veronica Anderson is one of South Africa's best-known designers; her shop is filled with gorgeous pendants and great rows of stones, crosses and earrings.

One of the best things about the brave new Johannesburg is that almost every district now has a selection of charming bars, restaurants and brasseries. For fine, if rather formal, food, David Higgs is the hot new chef at the Saxon Hotel's Five

Hundred. The Cube Tasting Kitchen is for serious foodies – a 10-course tasting menu (with the requisite tiny portions) takes at least three hours to work through, but is utterly worth it: expect foams and butters, purées and fashionable ingredients. The Grillhouse is renowned for serving some of the best steak in the world and it's where many a businessman seals an important deal. For Cape Malay food – a delectable part of South Africa's cultural heritage – D6 (named after Cape Town's infamous District Six) is the place to sample rich tomato bredies, boboties, samosas and fruity meat curries.

Despite its sprawling size, for many years Johannesburg lacked a really great hotel; now there is a handful of appealing

options. When the Saxon opened in 2001, it was a game-changer. Once a glorious private mansion, it's where Nelson Mandela lived after he came out of prison and where he edited *Long Walk to Freedom*. Set in the heart of Sandton, a swanky residential part of the northern suburbs (which means you can't walk to anything, but the hotel lays on chauffeured cars), it is a visual treat – an ode to African culture, its soaring rooms filled with artefacts and vintage photographs.

Set atop a hill just by the Johannesburg zoo, the Four Seasons Westcliff is for those who love the hum of grand hotels, fancy restaurants and all the services they have to offer: there's a fantastic spa with its own pool, and a fabulous view. A great addition is the series of terrific tours that Four Seasons, determined to make Johannesburg a destination in its own right, has developed to persuade guests to be more adventurous.

In the smart residential suburb of Melrose, The Peech hotel has just 16 bedrooms, a charming garden and a pool, all of which makes it a tranquil refuge to repair to after exploring the city. AtholPlace Hotel, meanwhile, built along the lines of an elegant townhouse, has just nine suites – all huge, airy and decorated in an eclectic contemporary style – and one four-bedroom villa. It too has a chic garden, a cosy library and a good pool; though it does great food, its small dining room means it lacks atmosphere, so it's best to eat elsewhere.

While Johannesburg is well worth exploring, it would be foolish not to acknowledge that it isn't without problems – acute poverty sits alongside great wealth – so common sense needs to be applied. Listen to the locals and use authorised guides (I can recommend Past Experiences, run by Jo Buitendach). The reward will be the experience of one of Africa's liveliest cities, one whose streets and citizens buzz with optimism and the hope that a better future belongs to them all. ✦

Clockwise from top left: the Koi Terrace at Saxon Hotel, Villas and Spa. A multi shop on Diagonal Street. Kim Sacks Gallery in Parkwood

THE HIT LIST

WHERE TO STAY

Prices are for a double room with breakfast. **AtholPlace Hotel & Villa**, 90 Pretoria Ave, Athol (www.atholplace.co.za), from £146. **Four Seasons Hotel The Westcliff**, 67 Jan Smuts Ave (www.fourseasons.com), from £277. **The Peech**, 61 North St (www.thepeech.co.za), from £117. **Saxon Hotel, Villas and Spa**, 36 Saxon Rd, Sandhurst (www.saxon.co.za), from £273.

RESTAURANTS AND BARS

Prices are for a three-course meal with half a bottle of wine. **Cube Tasting Kitchen**, 17 Fourth Ave, Parktown North (+2782-422 8158), from £40. **D6**, 42B Greenhill Rd, Emmarentia (+2711-

486 7226), from £15. **Five Hundred**, see Saxon Hotel (+2711-292 6000), from £30. **The Grillhouse**, The First Oxford Rd and Bierman Ave (+2711-880 3945), from £45. **Moyo**, 1 Prince of Wales Dr (+2711-646 0058), from £12. **Orbit**, 81 De Korte St (+2711-339 6645).

SHOPS, GALLERIES, GUIDES

Amatuli, 6 Desmond St, Kramerville (www.amatuli.co.za). **Apartheid Museum**, Northern Park Way and Gold Reef Rd (www.apartheidmuseum.org). **Art Africa**, 62 Tyrone Ave, Parkview (+2711-486 2052). **Arts on Main**, 264 Fox St (www.marketonmain.co.za). **The Bioscope**, 286 Fox St (www.thebioscope.co.za). **Kalashnikov Gallery**, 153 Smit St, Braamfontein ([\[kalashnikov.co.za\]\(http://kalashnikov.co.za\)\). **Dokter and Misses**, 68 Juta St, Braamfontein \(\[www.dokterandmisses.com\]\(http://www.dokterandmisses.com\)\). **Goodman Gallery**, 10 Chester Rd \(\[www.goodman-gallery.com\]\(http://www.goodman-gallery.com\)\). **Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum**, 8288 Khumalo Rd \(+2711-536 0611\). **Kim Sacks Gallery**, 153 Jan Smuts Ave, Parkwood \(\[www.kimsacksgallery.com\]\(http://www.kimsacksgallery.com\)\). **Leopard Frock**, 34 Englewood Dr, Saxonwold \(\[www.leopardfrock.co.za\]\(http://www.leopardfrock.co.za\)\). **Market on Main**, 264 Fox St, Maboneng \(+2782-868 1335\). **The Market Theatre**, Corner of Bree and Miriam Makeba \(\[www.markettheatre.co.za\]\(http://www.markettheatre.co.za\)\). **MuseuMafica**, Lilian Ngoyi St \(+2711-833 5624\). **Neighbourgoods Market**, 73 Juta St, Braamfontein \(+2711-403](http://www.</p>
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0413). **Past Experiences**, www.pastexperiences.co.za. **Veronica Anderson**, Shop 7, The Firs, Oxford Rd, Rosebank (www.veronicaandersonjewellery.co.za). **Wesselton Diamond Cutting Company**, 5th Floor, 216 Fox St (+2711-334 4868).

WHEN TO GO

Summer (December-February) brings rain but interspersed with sunshine. October-November, the jacaranda trees are in bloom.

HOW TO GET THERE

Lucia van der Post was a guest of **South African Airways** (0844-375 9680; www.flysaa.com), which flies from Heathrow to Johannesburg twice daily, from £845, and **Africa Travel** (0845-450 1535; www.africatrael.co.uk).