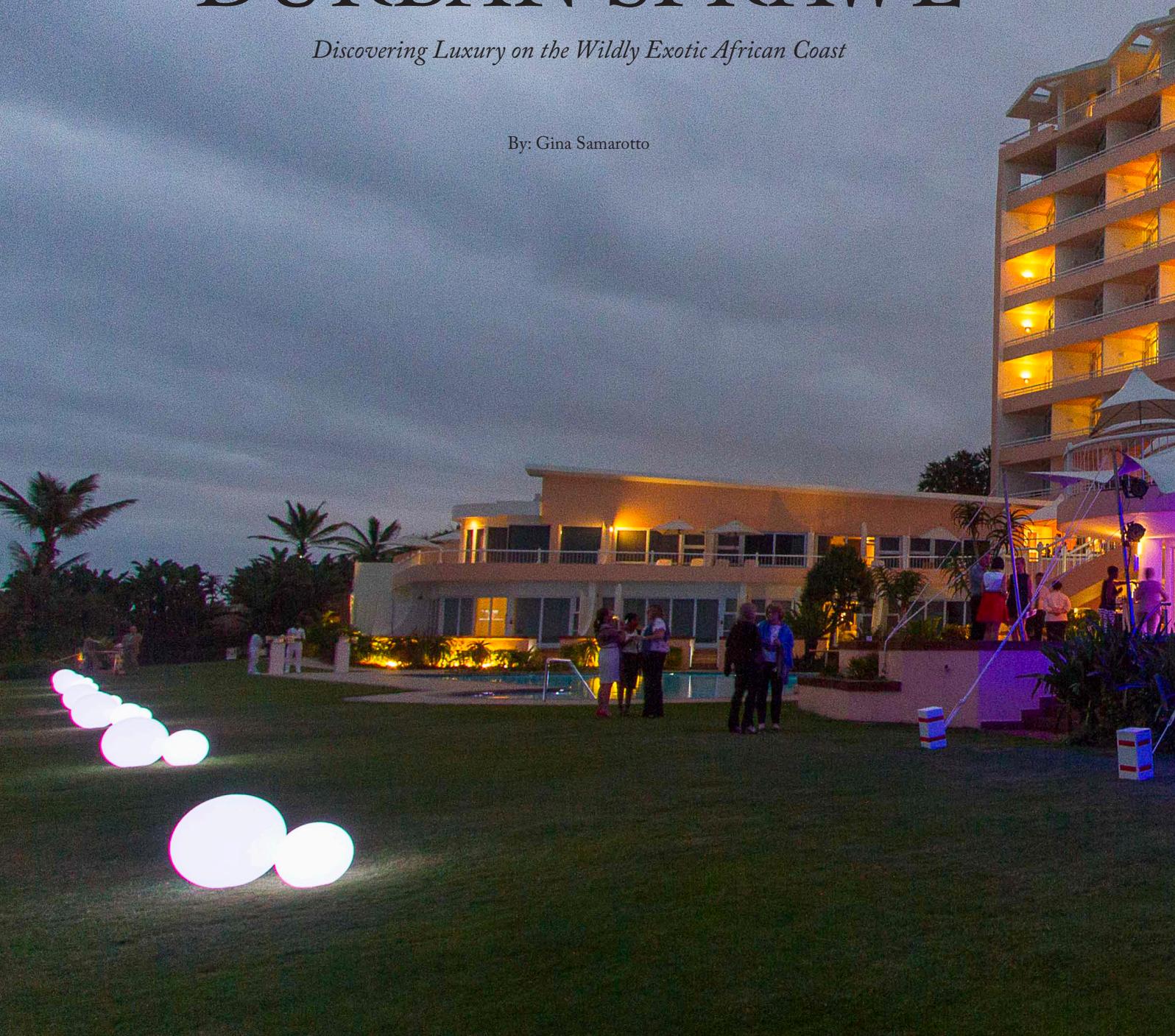


# DURBAN SPRAWL

*Discovering Luxury on the Wildly Exotic African Coast*

By: Gina Samarotto





## DEPARTURES

South Africa. It's a country rich in both history and mystery; where man and beast roam, and where each village, city, nook and plain is a place begging for exploration and discovery. It's also a country punctuated with cities that are at once exotic and familiar, where luxury abounds and - if you know where to find it - indulgence awaits. It's a side of Africa you may not have known existed but for those who do, the urban sprawl of South Africa leaves an indelible mark on the soul.

While not as famous as her legendary neighbors Johannesburg and Cape Town, Durban is a glorious gem in South Africa's crown. Named for the Zulu word eThekweni meaning 'lagoon', Durban is the largest of South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province and the country's second largest city - after Johannesburg - in terms of population. Made famous for being the busiest container port in South Africa, today Durban also offers charms that are a bit more opulent.

The Beverly Hills Hotel in Durban's Umhlanga neighborhood pays a nod to British colonial charm fused with modern day amenities all wrapped up in a one of kind South African experience. From one of the Beverly's posh, ocean front suites guests can relax over breakfast coffee or evening sundowners from the comfort of a wrap around terrace offering spectacular water views. Privacy is afforded to guests so that they may lounge away from the prying eyes of neighbors... the same, however, cannot be said of the area's resident monkeys. While admittedly a nuisance to some, for most guests the cheeky antics of the brazen tribe that make the trees dotting the the Beverly Hills Hotel's landscape their home is an endless source of amusement.

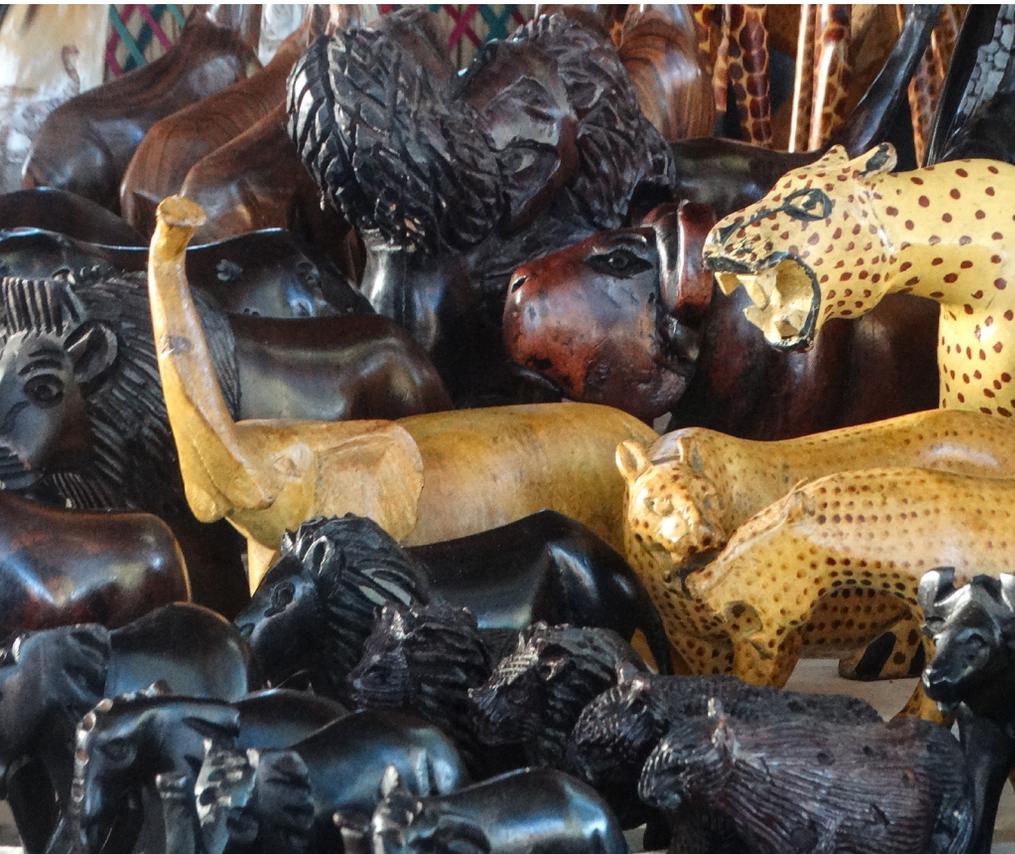


Perched on railings, set upon chaises or stealthily springing across the terraces; the monkeys show no aggression. Rather, they are far more interested in snatching away an unattended fruit basket or snapping up the odd packet of sugar that may linger on a breakfast table - much to the surprise of unsuspecting visitors.

Monkeys aside, the sprawling suites at the Beverly Hills also offer features like outdoor showers, deep soaking tubs, dual level suites, and convenient access to the pool or beach via dedicated entrances. The hotel has two restaurants, a fitness center, private beach, available valet services and meticulously groomed grounds as well, but what truly sets the Beverly Hills Hotel apart from others in the greater Durban area is their uniquely bespoke selection of spa services. Far from the de rigueur options found elsewhere, at the Beverly Hills Hotel guests may opt to have a manicure and pedicure from the comfort of their private terrace, an in-room massage or a completely hedonistic experience including an African head massage, full body massage and exfoliating foot treatment delivered on the beach and enjoyed while sipping on a flute of chilled champagne. Overall, the experience delivered by the Beverly Hills Hotel and its in-house spa is designed to







Photography by Gina Samarotto

have you feeling like royalty – apropos given the myriad princes, princesses and heads of state the hotel has welcomed over the years.

The Oyster Box Hotel is also worthy of mention when it comes to living in the lap of Durban luxury. Situated on Umhlanga's majestic beachfront, the Oyster Box Hotel offers eighty-six exquisitely elegant rooms and suites as well as a selection of venues guests may enjoy for dining, cocktails or a relaxing day of spa ministrations. An iconic grande dame in Durban, the hotel began life as a cottage called merely Oyster Lodge in 1863; an area landmark made of Burmese teak, corrugated iron and concrete. When the cottage changed hands in 1952 it was reintroduced first as a tea garden, then a restaurant. In 2006, the property again changed hands, this time to Red Carnation Hotel Group founder and President Stanley Tollman and his wife Bea. The Tollmans purchased the property proceeded to transform the once humble cottage into the Colonial charm-cloaked haven it is today.

For more 'mobile' accommodations, the Rovos Rail is an experience that transports guests into the gilded age of luxury train travel. Comprised several cars including guest sleepers, lounges and dining cars; the

incomparable Rovos Rail has the ability to carry 72 very privileged guests from Durban to Pretoria on an unforgettable three-day voyage. Featuring meals served from within the Victorian atmosphere of the dining cars, guests enjoy the endeavors of a team of chefs that create breakfasts, lunches, teas and formal dinners heralded by the sound of a gong and served alongside a selection of fine, South African wines. Eschewing modern technology to envelope guests in the railroad experience, there are no radios or televisions on board and while guests may use their own electronics from within the privacy of their suites; one view of the ever-changing landscape is usually all that's needed to have even the most plugged-in traveler mesmerized.

Despite such elegant offerings, what Durban offers goes beyond manicured grounds and impressive rooms. It's location on the shores of the Indian Ocean make this one of the world's premier beach areas, luring surfers and sun worshippers from around the globe to her warm waters and idyllic climate. On any given day, the beaches that stretch the length of Durban's Golden Mile are thick with locals and tourists enjoying the seemingly endless sunshine and enticing ocean waves. Also dotting the Golden Mile are Durban's famous, hand-pulled, rickshaws – one of the most unique ways to see the city - countless dining options offering everything from local seafood to haute cuisine as well as myriad market stalls and vendors where tourists can pick up handcrafted trinkets, freshly picked fruit or icy cold drinks with equal ease.

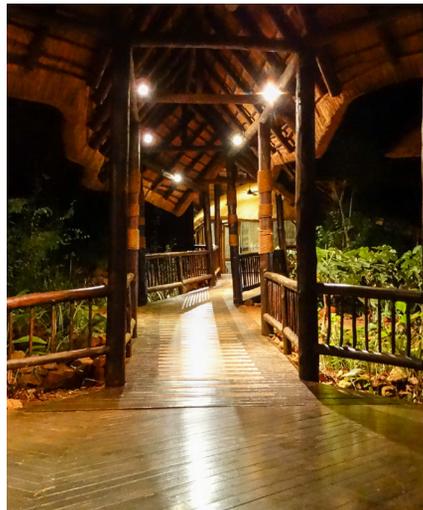
With it's beaches, cultural activities, concerts, sporting events and luxury hotels one might think there's more than enough to do in

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Durban – and they would be correct. But to truly appreciate the soul of South Africa, one needs to venture out of the city to explore the country. Less than a three-hour drive from Durban will put guests in a wonderland of adventure, transporting them into another world as they enter into some of Africa’s most magnificent game parks including Kruger National Park, the game reserves of KwaZulu Natal, the private game reserves at Nambiti and Tala and the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi game reserve in the north of Kwa-Zulu Natal – the country’s oldest park and one that has been drawing visitors for over a hundred years. In stark contrast to the white gloved service experienced in the city, a trip to the bush is an adventure that once had is never forgotten.



While unmistakably a ‘long-haul’ flight from North America, South African Airlines has made the trip less of an ordeal and exponentially more appealing by offering non-stop flights from US hubs including New York and Washington, DC as well as convenient connections from elsewhere in the States and Canada through codeshare agreements with United, Air Canada and Jet Blue. When combined

with the buzz surrounding the debut of SAA’s updated fleet slated for later this year and the strength of the US dollar in South Africa, the urge to put this bucket list destination high on your ‘To-Do’ list has risen dramatically. And given the number of chartered aviation options throughout the entire country, flying privately into and throughout South Africa is a remarkably convenient alternative as well. ✈