

South Africa: Nature's showplace

Vibrant cities and untamed landscapes provide all the excitement and diversity that incentive winners seek.

Edward Iginio

South Africa's controversial political climate has attracted widespread attention in recent years, prompting public outcries from persons and groups the world over. The situation is particularly volatile today, and, despite the South African Tourist Corp's assurance that internal matters have no impact on the treatment of incentive or other travelers, it is impossible to ignore the realities of South African life. Planners who are sensitive to the issues agree that now may not be the time to visit.

Admittedly, South Africa's problems are complex and defy simplistic solutions. The government is making strides to deal with the situation, but no one knows when, or on what terms, it will be resolved. Because IT planners typically book travel arrangements and accommodations several years in advance, there is always the hope that things will improve in the interim.

Despite its difficulties, South Africa remains a destination of breathtaking natural beauty complemented by a sophisticated tourism infrastructure. With this in mind—along with the realization that political considerations may adversely influence some groups while affecting others slightly, if at all—we present the following article. We suggest that planners consider all aspects of a South African travel incentive and then make an informed decision regarding the destination's suitability for their group. —ED



Cape Dutch homestead and vineyards near Capetown.

As a highly developed incentive destination, South Africa offers not only the mystique of its heritage, but also world-class hotels, a broad range of activities, myriad opportunities for theme and special interest functions, and exciting nightlife. Five times the size of Great Britain, the African continent's southernmost nation boasts within its borders a diversity that is limited only by one's imagination.

Michael Jackson, manager—western USA for the South African Tourist Corp

(SATOUR), believes that because of this diversity, South Africa is well equipped to smoothly and successfully handle an IT planner's most demanding needs. "You don't have to give up sophistication and comfort to experience South Africa," he emphasizes. "We have the capability. The hotels have the experience. We have a large number of ground operators from which to choose, and the prices are unbelievably low right now."

Jackson also stresses that, contrary to popular belief, South Africa is a cos-

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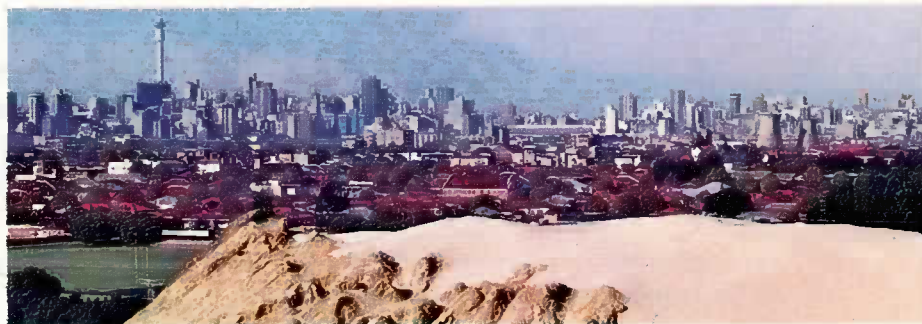
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Johannesburg, South Africa's largest city and gold-mining center.

metropolitan country with a high standard of living. Tourism is a major industry, and this has brought about heavy competition among ground operators, hotels, and restaurants, leaving a lot of room for price negotiations. "The strength of the US dollar has reduced travel costs for Americans," he says, "and in South Africa you get tremendous value for your money. That applies not only to food, accommodations, and ground arrangements, but to shopping as well."

Jackson estimates the present cost of a nine- or ten-day trip to South Africa, including air fare, at around \$2,000 per person for a first-class trip, and about \$2,500 per person for a deluxe trip. The visits incorporate several major cities and a game-viewing safari. South African Airways (SAA) makes the 16-hour flight from New York to Johannesburg five times a week.

Johannesburg

Johannesburg, the gateway city, is on the itinerary of virtually all incentive movements to South Africa. Born as a gold rush mining camp during the 1880s, the city today is a bustling metropolis of more than 2 million people. It is known for its fine restaurants, discos, night-clubs, and theaters.

A major Johannesburg attraction is scheduled to debut in April 1986: Gold Reef City, a re-creation of the city as it was in the 1890s. This living museum will faithfully follow the architecture of the era, while the staff, dressed in period costumes, will reenact life as it was before the turn of the century. Features will include tribal dances, a train ride, an elevator trip down a mine shaft, and smelting demonstrations.

Planners have a large number of hotels from which to choose in Johannesburg. Southern Sun Hotels, South Africa's largest hotel group, offers a number of options: The five-star, 311-room Sandton Sun is one of the country's finest, with a 20-story atrium, waterfalls, and banquet facilities for more than 1,000 people. Opened two years ago in a residential

Tourism has brought heavy competition among ground operators, hotels, and restaurants

suburb, the hotel is part of a 200-shop mall offering an assortment of restaurants and pubs. The five-star, 265-room Landdrost Sun offers elegant, old-fashioned charm, one of the city's best cabarets, and four in-house restaurants. And in January 1986, Southern Sun will introduce the 800-room Johannesburg Sun. Located in the central business district, it will be the largest luxury hotel in the southern hemisphere.

The five-star, 600-room Carlton, a luxurious Westin property, is geared specifically toward incentives and conventions. Part of a subterranean shopping mall, the hotel has a comprehensive tours and conventions department and conference facilities for up to 1,200 people. Its amenities include a rooftop pool and sun deck.

Johannesburg is the transportation

hub to destinations throughout the country. Kruger National Park, one hour north by plane, is a must on any incentive itinerary. A game reserve as large as the state of Massachusetts, it contains more species of wildlife than any other African game park. Adjacent to Kruger are two luxurious private reserves, Sabi Sabi and Mala Mala, offering incentive planners all the amenities and conveniences of full-service hotels. Capacity is limited, however, to about 80 at Sabi Sabi and 46 at Mala Mala. Large groups can arrange to rotate their stay, so that smaller back-to-back groups can enjoy the reserves while the others are being entertained in Johannesburg.

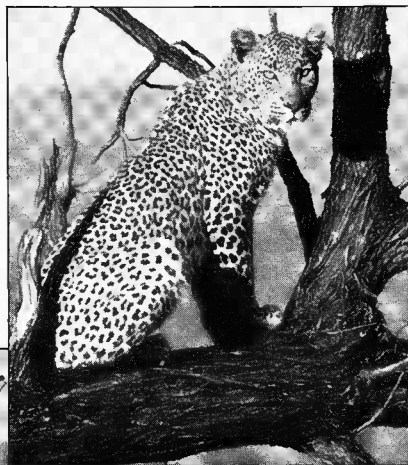
At either reserve, participants can hike, track game in four-wheel drive vehicles, and experience the excitement of night safaris. Afterward, they can enjoy fine food and a full bar, swimming pools, curio shops, and animal-viewing decks. The rooms are thatched-roof, air-conditioned chalets.

Cape Town

Two and a half hours from Johannesburg by plane, Cape Town is another

popular destination. Considered by some to be the world's most strikingly beautiful city, Cape Town is framed by Table Mountain, a gargantuan rock mesa. Accessible by a breathtaking cable-car ride, Table Mountain has been the setting for gourmet picnics arranged for incentive groups. Another intriguing

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A leopard in Kruger National Park (right); Blyde River Canyon on the edge of the Drakensberg range escarpment.



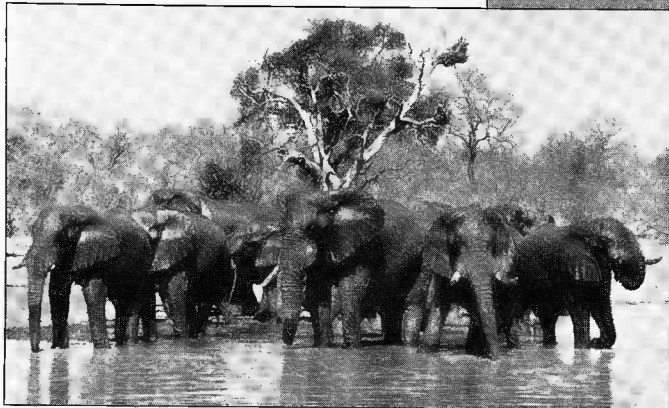
geologic formation, known as The Twelve Apostles, is a row of towering rocks rising majestically over Cape Town's seaside suburbs.

In the city, cobblestone streets and colonial-era buildings blend in nicely with high rises and big-city traffic. Cape Town's focus shifts from bustling downtown in the daytime to Seapoint in the evening, an area alive with eateries, clubs, boutiques, and night spots. Recreation enthusiasts can enjoy sailing, golfing, horse racing, and world-class fishing—focusing on yellowfin tuna, blue bonito, shad, and shark.

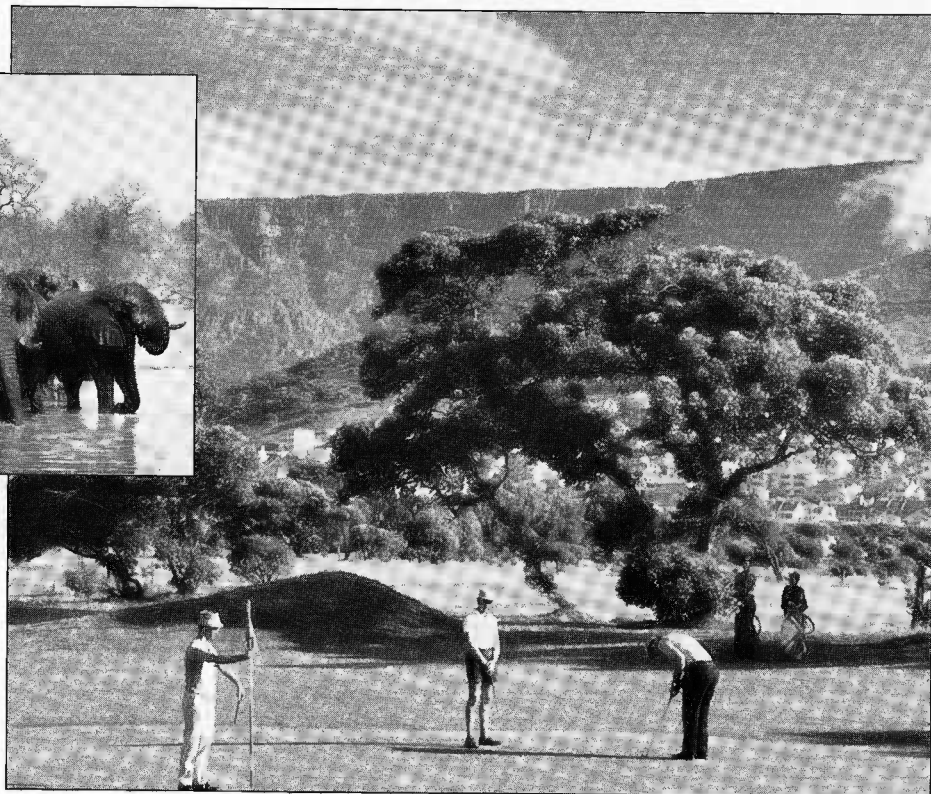
Two side trips from Cape Town should be on every incentive itinerary. The first is a tour of the Cape Peninsula, leading to the Cape of Good Hope, the southernmost point of the African continent. The excursion, which travels along the rocky, stunning coastlines of both the Indian and Atlantic oceans, can also incorporate a fishing village, Chapman's Peak, and the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve, which harbors varied wildlife from antelopes and baboons to seals and springboks. The second is to nearby Stellenbosch, site of many fine period buildings of the early Dutch settlers, 38 of which are national landmarks. Stellenbosch is the capital of South Africa's wine country, and groups can follow one of the three wine routes and enjoy such functions as a theme banquet in a wine cellar or in the winery garden.

Accommodations in Cape Town are among the best in South Africa. There are two five-star Southern Sun properties: the sleek 30-story, 334-room Cape Sun, completed in 1983, and The President, one of Cape Town's oldest and most prestigious hotels, with 127 rooms. The five-star, 210-room Heerengracht is known for its service and food as well as its popular nightclub on the 32nd floor. The 181-room Mount Nelson is rated among the top hotels in the world, offering an elegant atmosphere, fine dining, and beautiful gardens. Also notable are the four-star, 170-room Capetonian Hotel and the four-star De Waal Sun at the foot of Table Mountain.

An alternative to the 2½-hour flight between Johannesburg and Cape Town is the Blue Train. One of the most luxurious passenger trains in the world, the Blue Train accommodates 106 passengers



Elephants at a waterhole in Kruger National Park (above); Metropolitan Golf Course in Capetown, with Table Mountain in the background.



in pampered comfort. The 1,000-mile journey takes 26 hours to traverse the spectacular South African landscape. The entire train can be commissioned for an incentive group, but it is usually booked up a year in advance, so early reservations are recommended.

Durban

For fun in the sun, planners can include the Natal coast on their incentive itinerary. Durban, about an hour's flight from Johannesburg, is the bustling, colorful hub of the region. Set along a gently curving coastline with miles of fine sandy beaches, it is known as Holiday City and the gateway to Zululand. It has been compared to Miami Beach because of its many theme parks and attractions, recreational activities and sports facilities, nightclubs, discos, restaurants, and shops.

Durban has a number of top-notch hotels, including three seaside Southern Sun properties: the five-star, 32-story Maharani, the tallest hotel in Southern Africa and probably Southern Sun's most extravagant property; the four-star, 441-room Elangeni; and the five-star, 72-room Beverly Hills. Other properties suitable for incentives include the five-star Royal, a modern 292-room hotel, and the luxurious, secluded San Lemaar Resort, which is slightly more than an hour's drive from Durban on the south coast.

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Sun City

For a little pizzazz as well as relaxation, Sun City is another destination to be considered. Located in the black homeland of Bophuthatswana, a few hours' drive or a 30-minute flight from Johannesburg, this sophisticated international playground features big-name entertain-

ers, a casino, a Gary Player-designed golf course, and a full range of recreational activities.

At the heart of the complex are two lavish Sun International hotels: the 300-room Sun City Hotel, set amid tropical gardens and a man-made lake, and the Cascades Hotel, a 234-room resort with cascading waters, inside and out.

South Africa's diversity does not stop there. Groups can drive the scenic Garden Route from Cape Town to East London, rimmed by the Indian Ocean on one side and by mountains on the other; visit Pretoria, the administrative capital; take in the diamond city of Kimberley; travel to Oudtshoorn, site of some 350 ostrich farms; or experience African foods, dances, and crafts on a safari in Zululand.

The wealth of choices goes on and on, but because distances are considerable between them, groups must rely on air transportation to cover several destinations. With SAA's "Visit South Africa" fare, participants can fly from Johannesburg continuously in one direction, making as many stops as desired, for only \$175. With the exception of Kruger National Park, most prime destinations are on SAA's route system.

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Giraffes in the Mala Mala private game reserve, established in 1936.

Expert assistance

SATOUR's offices in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Toronto actively pursue the incentive market, providing planners with a great deal of support. In addition to furnishing a wide range of brochures and information about the country and its facilities, SATOUR supplies tour shells, works as a contact between planners and South African suppliers, and will put planners in touch with others who have run South African incentives.

In conjunction with SAA, SATOUR will arrange inspection tours, hosting planners or putting them in contact with suppliers who will. In addition, SATOUR can arrange for prominent professionals to present awards or speak at banquets.

Wilson Tours, part of South Africa's Micor Group of Companies, offers a brochure entitled "Your Incentive," produced in partnership with Southern Sun Hotels, Sun International, SAA, and Rattray Reserves (operators of the Mala Mala Reserve). Planners can obtain a copy by contacting Mark Sheehan at the company's New York office, (800) 221-0596; or (718) 948-2122 in New York.

A year-round destination, South Africa enjoys a pleasant temperate climate. December and January are fair and warm (the seasons are opposite those in North America) but are not recommended for incentives because this is the season of heavy domestic travel. During the spring months of September and October, the country is ablaze with wild flowers. Game viewing is at its peak during the South African winter, though Cape Town may be cold and rainy, while the weather from February through May is always warm and pleasant.

At any time of year, South Africa offers a multitude of adventures and experiences with the potential for providing a diverse, educational, and memorable incentive movement. From great nightlife to tranquil beaches, from world-class hotels to wildlife safaris, South Africa is the land of opportunity for incentive planners. ■