



On the verge of greatness

SET DEEP IN THE HEART OF THE FAMED ZULU LAND, IS A CITY BURSTING WITH DIVERSITY, A MELANGE OF DIFFERENT PEOPLE AND CULTURES ALL EXPERTLY DISPLAYED THROUGH FINE CUISINES, BEATING DISTINCTLY TO THE RHYTHM OF THE AFRICAN DRUM. BY **NICCI PERIDES**

With the 2010 World Cup approaching, the first ever on African soil, all eyes will be on its cities and thanks to this; each will enjoy an influx of new visitors. Traditionally Cape Town has been its main tourist destination but with the expected number of new visitors to travel here, South Africa is hoping the world's eyes will be opened to its other beautiful areas. The government is confident that long after the games have come and gone, South Africa will continue to reap the rewards. Many local businesses are pumping money into diversifying their products and some 53 percent have, or will, employ more staff. The new sports stadium in Durban alone, which is set to open in November 2009, has already created over 7,500 jobs. South Africa is also improving its public transport system which is a fundamental necessity when developing a city to international standard and of course, cope with World Cup demands. Durban is taking pride of place and from 2010 she will enjoy public transport lanes on all major motorways and within the inner city. A new mode of public transport will also be trialed to encourage less private vehicles on the roads. This is great news for the South African economy.

Durban hopes to position itself as South Africa's premier sporting destination. Already being the country's third most popular city, she sits proudly on the east coast with a sub-tropical climate and a laidback, informal ambiance really makes Durban stand out from rivals Cape Town and Johannesburg. Visitors describe her as the Miami of Africa. The famous 'Golden Mile', which is a 6km stretch of yellow sand bordered by a skyscraper backdrop, runs the entire length of the city. An easy drive out of the city into some of the most spectacular scenery in South Africa certainly makes Durban an up-and-coming hotspot. The warm waves of the Indian Ocean and blue flag beach status attract a wealth of sun worshippers to its shores. The abundance of water sports means tourists will never be without something to do, and unlike Cape Town, swimmers can jump in to the water without the fear of frostbite. For those who are partial to a vibrant night scene, then casinos, bars and clubs that stay open to the wee small hours will definitely be a temptation.

The business sector

So with the tourism market firmly in place, the sporting venues in the latter stages of development, the next phase is to make Durban a destination fit for business travel. South Africa currently shares only 1.3 percent of the global business tourism, which is relatively small given the vastness of the country. However, high hopes are being raised as studies show that most returning foreign visitors in 2007 came back after a business trip. This is a niche market that the South Africans are very keen to tap in to.

Durban is looking to pave the way forward within the business sector, already famed for having the »

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Blyde Canyon in
the Drakensberg
mountains

» busiest shipping port in South Africa, but thanks to the International Convention Centre (ICC), located only 15 minutes from the airport, minutes from the hotels and bustling city scene, it will firmly mark the city on the international business destinations map. The ICC boasts to be one of the most advanced conference facility centres in the world. The diversity and flexibility of the centre ensures that whatever the business event, the building can accommodate.

ICC Durban has been voted Africa's Leading Conference Centre for six consecutive years by World Travel Awards and in 2004 was also ranked one of the best conference centres in the world by AIPC. As more and more international businesses become aware of Durban's potential and hear of its unrivalled reputation within Africa for providing seamless events within the business sector, the city will become a major international player. It has so much to offer the business traveller.

The multitude of hotel choices, range from quaint colonial bed and breakfasts to world class 5* hotels, each with their own unique appeal. Durban certainly has something for everyone; its diverse landscape means that within 30 minutes you can go from lazing on a beach to hiking thousands of feet above sea level. Inner city and beach front attractions are beyond compare and Durban now plays home to Africa's largest marine theme park, which also holds the 5th biggest aquarium in the world, Ushaka.

Historically, Durban has been plagued with a reputation of street crime. In recent years and with of course the build up to the 2010 World Cup, the city has seen an injection of life with a 'clean up' effort along its beachfront. The new stadium, 'Moses Mabhida' which is currently being erected in line with the World Cup is also a major influence in providing a positive effect on the young of the city. It will become an iconic landmark that will transform Durban's skyline.

So with world-class business venues, top hotels and an invigorating entertainment scene, Durban certainly has the right ingredients to attract the business clientele, however it doesn't end there. Team building exercises rank highly in what people want out of their trips. Durban will never disappoint in this sector.

Drakensberg mountains

Drive a few hours out of the city and enter into the wilderness. Firstly the Drakensberg Mountain range can play host to a whole range of activities. Combining sheer natural beauty with dramatic versatility; this is the perfect day trip to escape from the office. The mountain range is the highest in Southern Africa rising over 1,400ft into the African skies. The activities are endless from a spot of polo in its foothills to hiking its gigantic peaks, whatever your team's agenda you can find it here. Of course you can opt for the traditional days out such as go-karting but those that want to push your team to their limits then firm favourites are white water rafting, abseiling or even a helicopter ride to get a bird's eye view. The summer months provide hot days under the African sun where as the winter brings the



snow capped mountains and a winter sports paradise. The region also boasts two fully equipped conference centres. There are many hotels actually situated within the mountains and guests often like to extend their business trip for a week or two to explore further this vast part of South Africa.

No trip to Africa is complete without a bit of game safari, and once again the surrounding areas of Durban can deliver. Head north to the Elephant coast, an Eden for big five game reserves (Elephant, Rhino, Buffalo, Lion and Leopard), there is also sub tropical marine reefs, unspoilt beaches and the Wetland World Heritage site, formally known as Greater St Lucia. The Elephant coast boasts an outdoor paradise with the edge on eco conservation. Here you can Kayak in the lakes, spot hippos and a multitude of birds on the game shores, or simply explore the breathless beauty in the range of natural eco-systems. Dunes, swamps, forests, fresh water lakes to Savannah grassland, coral reefs, submarine canyons and mangroves are all available for you to investigate.

The KwaZulu-Natal district, home to Durban, also has a tainted history of bloody battles fought under the Zulu reign. Follow in the footsteps of famous military strategists such as Churchill, Mahatma Gandhi and General Louis Botha as you explore the Zulu battlefields. Lone Forts, small graveyards, museums and historic towns leaves little to the imagination however each reminder of a sordid past is replaced in the knowledge that the legacy of the Zulu kingdom conflicts now live in peace.

Durban is a city right on the verge of becoming a major world player within the business market, its unrivalled location mixed with world class conference and hotel facilities means the city is ready to compete in the international business arena. As more companies put their emphasis on keeping their staff happy, Durban has the capabilities to cater for even the most prestigious business event and then offer its guests wide choices in activities to provide that all essential 'downtime'. ●

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