

CITY LIFE

JOHANNESBURG



Leafy Jo'burg's treasures extend well beyond its historic gold mines, from arts districts bedecked with murals to a rejuvenated inner-city park and exciting dining venues

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Johannesburg was built upon a reef of gold. The lustrous treasure pulses through the city's veins — it's what brought European prospectors to this part of South Africa in the late 19th century. Today, it's still the draw for many new settlers who see themselves as Dick Whittingtons in a city of opportunity. But for all the gold that's passed through the city, Jo'burg's enduring colour is green: while there may be no sea here, no mountain or grand river to draw the eye, the city is awash with trees. So many, in fact, that they're estimated to outnumber humans more than two to one, making the city one of the most wooded in the world. Yet, even this urban forest is a byproduct of the gold rush: mineshafts needed wood; homesick colonialists wanted garden suburbs.

These days, the parks provide pockets of shady peace amid an eclectic mix of buildings. In the inner city, Edwardian and art deco buildings squeeze between imposing modern structures. The architecture in Sandton (dubbed the 'richest square mile in Africa') is sky-high, and the lavish properties of Sandhurst stand in contrast to gritty apartment neighbourhoods like Hillbrow or sprawling townships such as Soweto. Looked at from afar, the houses of the latter — once home to a young Nelson Mandela — appear like matchboxes compared to the thrusting buildings of downtown.

Encircling the city like a fortress wall are the mine dumps, the landscape's most defining geographical feature, glowing golden against cloudless blue skies. Guide Tumi Mokgope, a resident of Melville (one of the city's hippest nightlife areas), reminds me on a tour that the dumps are a-glow because of chemicals. "Miners used cyanide to get down to the gold," Tumi says. "Now the earth beneath us looks like Swiss cheese; the soil is bleached out and just about no plants grow here. Only the hardiest survive."

This resilience applies to the people that call the city home, too. Jozi, as it's known, is constantly reinventing — negotiating its way out of a past marred by colonialism and Apartheid. People-powered projects are constantly bringing rejuvenation to deprived areas. And this has continued despite the pandemic. Street artists have daubed murals in trendy Jewel City, Maboneng and Braamfontein; The Wilds, a park in the suburb of Houghton, has been enlivened with wildlife sculptures; and entrepreneurs are setting up shop in buzzy redevelopments such as Victoria Yards and 44 Stanley.

So, Jo'burgers always say the city doesn't need a mountain, an ocean or a grand river. Because it has its people. And that's their real treasure.



SEE & DO

APARTHEID MUSEUMS: Visits to the Apartheid Museum and the exhibits at Liliesleaf — the former headquarters of South Africa's underground liberation movement — are key to understanding the system of racial segregation that operated in South Africa from 1948 until the early 1990s. The Hector Pieterse Museum (named in honour of a schoolboy shot by police during student protests in 1976) in Soweto is worth a trip, too. While here, walk down Vilakazi Street, home to Nelson Mandela from 1946 to 1962 and now the Mandela House museum. liliesleaf.co.za mandelahouse.com mandelahouse.com

CONSTITUTIONAL COURT: Built on the site of a prison that incarcerated Apartheid activists, the Constitutional Court is a symbol of transformation that also houses a humanitarian-themed art collection. Be sure to look through the 'ribbon of light', a wide, narrow, ground-floor window designed with the symbolic purpose of allowing the judges to see the feet of passers-by, reminding them of their accountability to the people of South Africa. ccac.org.za

JEWEL CITY: This residential and commercial development is packed with murals, fascinating architectural rejigs and history. It's also next to urban creative hub Art on Main. Visit on a walking or cycling tour with Past Experiences or Joburg 360. artsonmain.co.za pastexperiences.co.za joburg360.com

GREEN SPACES: Artist James Delaney has 'hidden' 100 animal sculptures — monkeys, a pangolin, ostriches and owls — in Houghton's once crime-ridden park, The Wilds. Other parks worth exploring include Johannesburg Botanical Gardens and Zoo Lake Park.

KEYES ART MILE: Some of the city's best art galleries are in Rosebank and Parktown North, along the Keyes Art Mile. Everard Read, the city's oldest gallery, and Circa Gallery display the country's art heavyweights, the latter significant for its curvy, postmodern design. A short walk from the Art Mile, you'll also find contemporary art at Stevenson, Gallery MOMO and the Goodman Gallery. keyesartmile.co.za

CRADLE OF HUMANKIND: Some of the earliest settlers in these parts can be traced back over three million years. Early hominids, including 'Little Foot' (a fossilised *Australopithecus africanus* skeleton), were unearthed in the Sterkfontein Caves. Twenty-five miles north west of Johannesburg, this a fossil-rich area known as the Cradle of Humankind, is home to a museum. maropeng.co.za

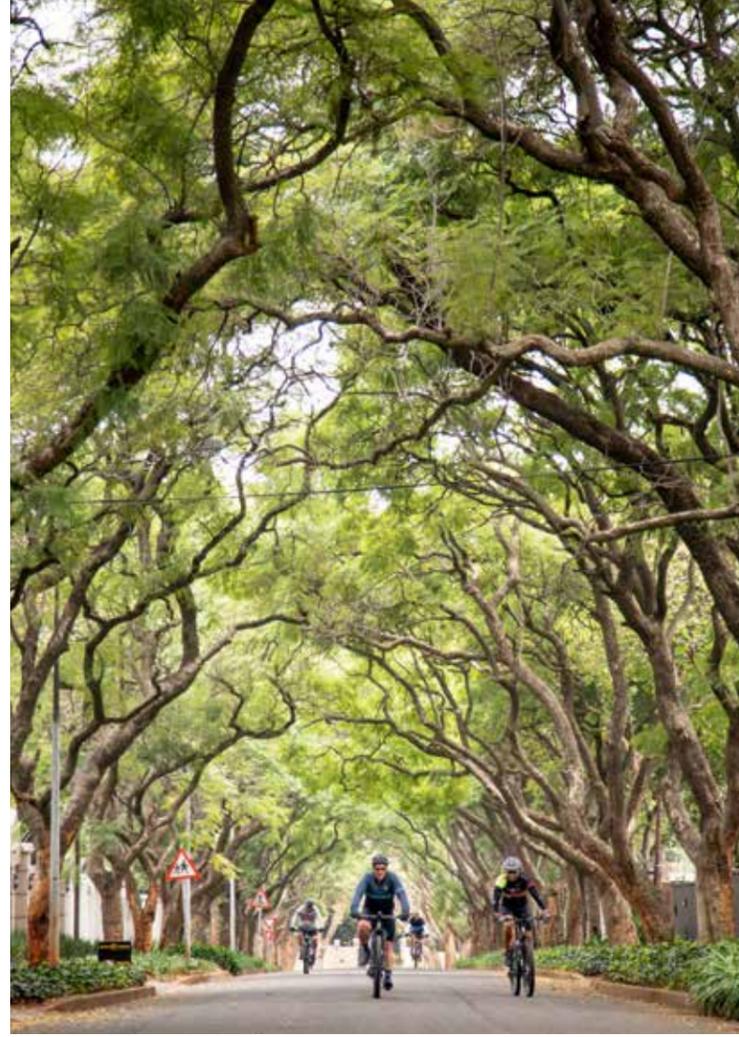
OPPENHEIMER TOWER: Climb 49 steps (one for each Soweto township) for views across the township and mine dumps. Poignantly, the bricks of the tower were pulled from the rubble of Sophiatown, a township demolished in the 1950s. Triomf, a whites-only neighbourhood, was built in its place.

Mandela Day // *In recognition of Nelson Mandela's unique contribution to the pursuit of democracy, peace and equality, the former South African president's birthday is marked every 18 July with a public drive for volunteering and good deeds*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A pile of books at the Mandela House museum, filled with memorabilia relating to the former leader; Guide Tumi Mokgope; a corridor in Mandela House museum

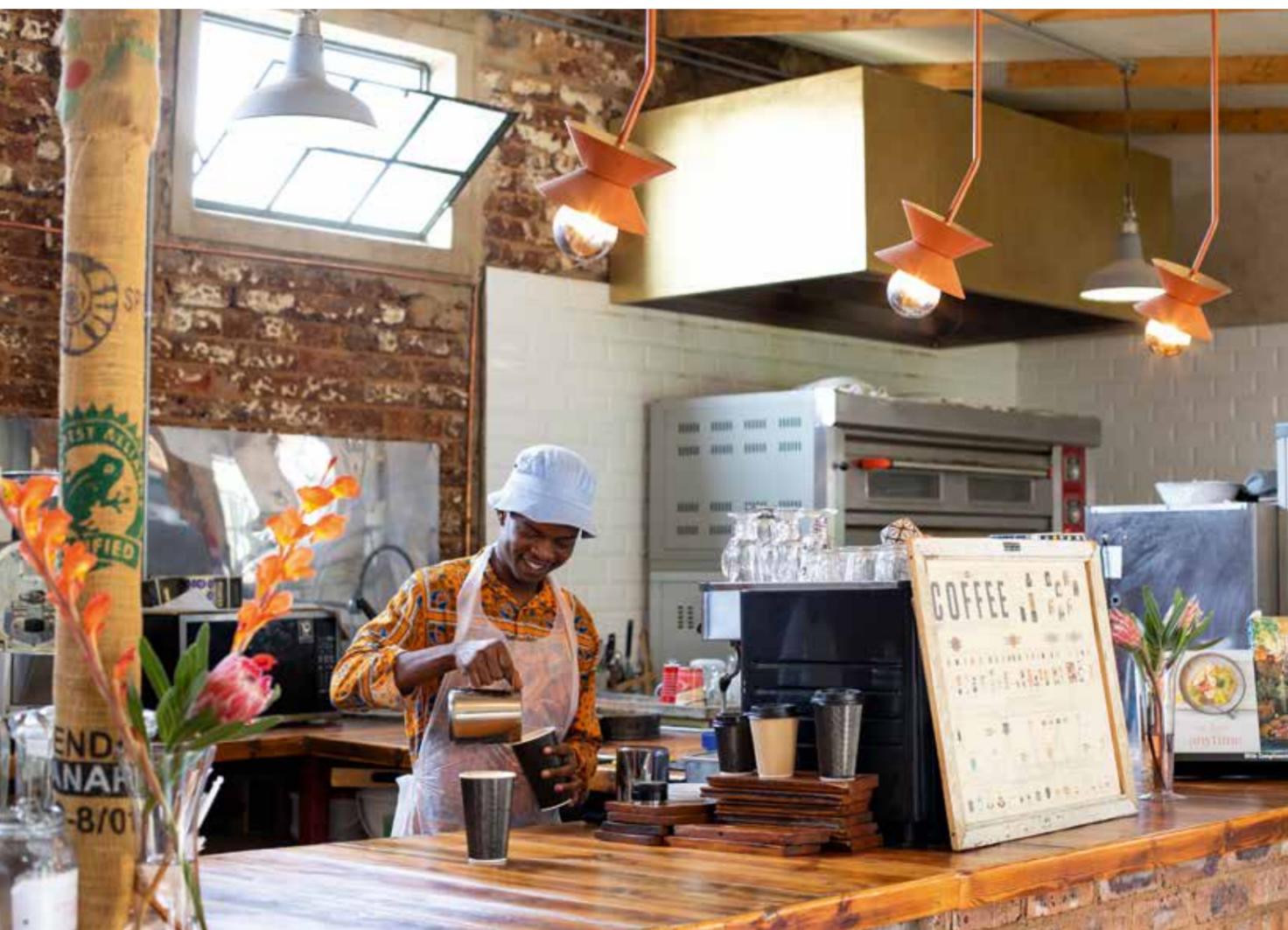
PREVIOUS PAGES: Melville Koppies Nature Reserve at dawn, overlooking the Central Business District





'In Johannesburg, the Venice of the South, the backdrop is always a man-made one... We do not wait for time and the elements to weather us, we change the scenery ourselves to suit our moods.'
// Portrait with Keys, by Ivan Vladislavić

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Coconut masala mussel hopper from pop-up restaurant Glory; jacaranda trees lining a city street; artisanal bread at urban complex Victoria Yards; a barista at Foakes Coffee Roastery and Bakery, which serves market-goers in Victoria Yards



BUY

44 STANLEY: Meet some of South Africa's top creators and shop for vinyl, haute couture, graphic design, chocolate, natural wine, bread and coffee in the shady courtyards and studios of 44 Stanley, a downtown shopping precinct in repurposed warehouses. 44stanley.co.za
VICTORIA YARDS: It's tempting to pick lettuce to eat from the pathways of Victoria Yard's urban farm while browsing jewellers, bakers, designers and beer-brewers. Conceived to provide jobs, food and healthcare to residents, as well as to clean up the Jukskei River, this is pretty shopping complex with a strong social conscience. victoriayards.co.za
DAVID KRUT BOOKSTORE: Taxi Art Books, a series focusing on local artists, offers a great crash course in South African art. Find these and other excellent publications at David Krut Bookstore. Alternatively, browse the artworks at the adjacent gallery, David Krut Projects, also part of arts hub Arts on Main. davidkrutbookstores.com
SANDTON: This glitzy suburb is famous for luxury shopping. International high-end brands can be found at Nelson Mandela Square, a vast mall that's also home to Kobus Hattingh and Jacob Maponyane's 20ft-tall statue of the former South African leader.

EAT

TROYEVILLE HOTEL: The Troyeville has won awards for its no-nonsense Mozambican food. Expect specials such as *feijoada* (pork and beans), *dobrada* (braised tripe) and peri-peri chicken, washed down with catembe, a red wine and cola concoction rumoured to have been invented so that Mozambicans could tolerate the rough Portuguese wine. troyevillehotel.co.za
YEOWILLE DINNER CLUB: Chef Sanza Sandile spent lockdown perfecting his art — now, he says, he's ever more determined to get the first Michelin star for pan-African food. He's as interested in ingredients, sourced from Yeoville's markets, as he is in the people eating them, so each meal is a lively, colourful conversation — and the chef himself will even arrange your transport home. Expect dishes such as a vegan twist on Nigeria's egusi soup, in which no part of a pumpkin is spared. Booking is essential. [instagram.com/yeovilledinnerclub](https://www.instagram.com/yeovilledinnerclub)
MARBLE: South Africans love their *braais* (barbecues) so much that Heritage Day, a national holiday, is nicknamed Braai Day. For devotees, charcoal and gas won't do, it must be a wood fire. At glamorous Marble, expect smoky pesto, perfect steaks and *boerewors* (beef sausage). marble.restaurant

SLEEP

LEBO'S SOWETO BACKPACKERS: Known for its participatory African food experiences — including the cooking of *potjiekos* (stew) and drinking of sorghum beer (a challenge for some palates) — its huge vegetable garden, cycle tours and responsible community spirit, staying at this backpackers' lodge is an immersive way to get to know Soweto. There are camping pitches, dorms and single and double rooms, plus shady courtyards and communal areas. sowetobackpackers.com
PABLO HOUSE: Built into a hill in the highest part of Melville, this guesthouse has a pool, great food and large, modern bedrooms. Don't miss the spacious terrace or the lounge, with wonderful views over one of the few ridges in the city left untouched by mining. pablohouse.co.za
PEECH HOTEL: Crickets chirp good night and birds sing good morning from the trees and shrubbery surrounding Peech Hotel, in central, chic Melrose. Private patios, balconies and two pools ensure there's space to cool off on summer days, and the restaurant is a dining destination in itself. Across the road is yet more greenness: the James and Ethel Gray Park extends for mile after lush mile. thepeech.co.za



Lebo's Soweto Backpackers, which has been offering beds and bicycle tours since 2003

AFTER HOURS

7DE LAAN: Many of Jo'burg's neighbourhoods have a village atmosphere and a central street lined with bars, music venues and restaurants — all boasting a distinctive, local identity. Hip Melville has a diverse and friendly vibe, and 7de Laan is the place for late-night partying.

RAND CLUB: The oldest private members' club in the city was founded in 1887, and while it's been appallingly exclusionary for most of its existence, it's thankfully now welcoming to all. The opulent building contains what's reputed to be the longest bar in Africa, at 103ft, which serves a large selection of excellent South African wines. There's also a great library, for a more sedate soiree. randclub.co.za

THUNDER WALKER: Listening to tales of Johannesburg and its migrant cultures and cuisine from the depths of a former bank vault is a sumptuous way to take it all in. Storytelling and jazz evenings at this astonishingly revamped former building society need to be booked in advance. joburgplaces.com

LIKE A LOCAL

THE BIOSCOPE: This fun venue is set within former warehouse complex 44 Stanley. It hosts film festivals and standup comedy, as well as screening independent films (many of them African). thebioscope.co.za

GLORY: Chef Nick Scott's pop-up dining events were a smash during lockdown. Focusing on farm-grown surplus ingredients, he and his creative director, Caroline Olavarrieta, advertise their latest culinary ventures via Instagram. [@gloryjoburg](https://www.instagram.com/gloryjoburg)

AASVOËLKOP: On clear evenings, armed with blankets and picnics, locals flock to Aasvoëlkop (Vulture Ridge), in the northern suburb of Northcliff, to watch the sun set and the moon rise over the city.

THE CENTRE FOR THE LESS GOOD IDEA: South African artist William Kentridge opened this cultural space to allow artists to engage with the concept of failure through experimentation. Check the calendar for regular theatre and art happenings — you may well witness something gloriously awful. lessgoodidea.com 

ESSENTIALS



Getting there & around

British Airways and Virgin Atlantic fly nonstop from Heathrow to Johannesburg. One-stop flights are also available from the UK with airlines including Air France, Lufthansa and Emirates. ba.com virgin-atlantic.com airfrance.co.uk lufthansa.com emirates.com Average flight time: 11h. Use a hire car or Uber to get around the city, although it's best to use the Gautrain or a registered taxi to get to and from the airport. Inner-city areas are best explored with a guide, on a walking or cycling tour. Excellent options are Past Experiences and Joburg 360. pastexperiences.co.za joburg360.com

When to go

Johannesburg is beautiful in and around October when the jacaranda trees are in bloom. The city has pleasant weather all year round. Summer (December-February) temperatures hover around 26°C, with occasional storms. Winters (June-August) are mild (13°C) and dry.

More info

southafrica.net
The Joburg Book: A Guide to the City's History, People and Places, by Nechama Brodie. RRP: £16.
Portrait with Keys, by Ivan Vladislavić. RRP: £5.
Joburg Noir, by Niq Mhlongo. RRP: £10.
Cry, the Beloved Country, by Alan Paton. RRP: £12.
 Johannesburg In Your Pocket is an excellent online resource to help keep up with what's on. inyourpocket.com/johannesburg

How to do it

BRITISH AIRWAYS HOLIDAYS offers five nights at Fairlawns Boutique Hotel & Spa, including flights from Heathrow, from £1,304 in December. ba.com/holidays