

Indagare Magazine

Larger than Life: South Africa

There are some destinations that completely enthrall us. They loom so large and burn so brightly that we can't help but feel a bit humbled by their majesty, in awe of their sheer spectacle.

[South Africa](#) is one of these places. A country full of spirit, wisdom and ferocity, the nation has a magic that comes in many forms: a sunset over the verdant winelands—a storybook paradise of mist-engulfed mountains—or a morning game drive on safari where elephants splash in the watering hole and lions snuggle in the sun. The country overwhelms and encompasses visitors, be it their first or fiftieth visit. It's a feast too large to consume; a sight too spectacular to take in; and offers an unmatched breadth of experiences. South Africa is truly larger than life.

[Cape Town](#) is a vibrant metropolis brimming with soulful culture and a thriving dining scene. Travelers are spoiled for choice here, as mountains, beach and city conspire to create a dynamic urban center whose affable spirit is infectious. And as South Africa's seaside gem has quickly topped the list of global foodie and design capitals, Cape Town—which has been compared to a gawky adolescent who has just discovered her beauty—is swiftly becoming a must-visit destination. The most buzzed-about news in the city this year is the opening of the Silo Hotel. Located in the V&A Waterfront, the hotel is part of a large-scale urban development involving the restoration of Cape Town's historic grain silo, which will also house the much-anticipated Zeitz-MOCAA art museum. Here, in the shipping port-cum-trendy downtown hub, the Silo is the fourth venture of hotelier Liz Biden, who transformed the industrial factory into a masterpiece of Art Deco design. Its opening marks an important moment for Cape Town, breathing life into the city's waterfront and ushering a new era of tourism to the colorful capital. This news alone is enough to generate international excitement, and with this year's opening of several trendy restaurants and shops, it's safe to say that the Cape Town is having a moment. And it shows no signs of stopping.

Some 150 miles west of Cape Town, towering mountains and winding roads reveal the [Cape Winelands](#), a bucolic valley that is another of South Africa's extraordinary charms. Here, in a dreamy countryside setting, visitors can spend days exploring the pastoral landscape (whether hiking, cycling or on horseback) and strolling through picture-perfect villages filled with Cape Dutch architecture. But beyond its scenic beauty, South Africa's wine country has risen in recent years as a culinary epicenter boasting innovative wineries and farm-to-table restaurants (such as [Babel](#) and [The Tasting Room](#), two culinary experiences that should not be missed). Indeed, it's only fitting that in this exquisite location there is an equally exquisite retreat, [La Residence](#), whose opulent interiors were also created with Liz Biden's design wand. Originally the Biden family's home, the property enjoys an utterly stunning setting, where fragrant rose gardens are shaded by towering pine trees; dramatic cliffs cascade into vibrant green vineyards; and peacocks roam the immaculately kept grounds. Best of all, the 11-room property feels just as palatial as it does intimate.

Then there is [safari](#), which, like most experiences in South Africa, is unforgettable. Heading out into the bush, wrapped in cozy blankets, hot chocolate in hand, makes everyone feel like a kid again. You hang on the guide's every word as you bounce over rough terrain, gliding through the sunset and spotting giraffes and hyena along the distant horizon. On safari, no two interactions with animals are the same. You could see a cantankerous zebra staring you down, a leopard protecting its young, or two impala—graceful and gorgeous—going head to head. Senses are on high alert as you listen to the hum of the wilderness, take in the glorious landscape, strain your ears and squint your eyes; your state is joyful, exhilarated and completely alive.

South Africa boasts some of the world's best game viewing, especially in Kruger National Park, where guests can get up-close-and-personal with the Big Five (unlike in East Africa, where the safari experience is characterized by larger herds of game seen from farther distances). The area is also known for having a number of sumptuous lodges that transport guests to a Hemingway-style era of glamour. Chief among these is Royal Malewane, the uber-stylish, 'six-star' retreat and a member of the Biden's Royal Portfolio Collection. Between the delightful staff, breathtaking interiors and top-notch safari experience, this jewel of a property is nearly impossible to leave.

Then there are the intangible elements of South Africa that fuel and ultimately define each visitor's experience. Indeed, the country is one of the world's most popular to visit, as its incredible diversity—of landscape, culture and style—is awe-inspiring. But unlike other destinations, South Africa's multidimensionalism leaves us truly humbled. Its proud, powerful spirit comes in many forms: it's the beautiful optimism in the air, that makes us remember the country's heartbreaking history but rejoice in its signs of renewal; it's the committed conservationists who stop at nothing to save those who cannot save themselves; it's the land itself, vast and dramatic, whose varied landscapes are home to ten percent of Earth's known plant species; it's the innovative designers, artists and chefs who embrace Cape Town's global sophistication with a distinctly South African edge.

But above all, what leaves us in awe is the country's spirit—a beguiling mix of beauty, strength and wisdom. Visit, and you will see too.

– *Blair West on August 7, 2017*

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