

SAWUBONA


SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS
A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER

JUNE

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2019

RHYTHMS OF

RIO

A NIGHT OUT IN BRAZIL'S SAMBA CITY

40

ART OF THE HAT
SA
MILLINERS
SIMON
AND MARY

74

AFRICA
FIVE ECO-FRIENDLY
LUXURY LODGES
MAKING A POSITIVE
IMPACT

132

AUSTRALIA
WHAT TO DO
WITH
48 HOURS
IN PERTH

134

EGYPT
A FULL PREVIEW
OF FOOTBALL'S
AFRICA CUP OF
NATIONS



L I T T L E - K N O W N L I M P O P O

Stray away from SOUTH AFRICA'S more popular
places and discover a province full of rhythm,
heart ... and art

Opposite page: view of Lake Albasini from the Shiluvu Lakeside Lodge.
This page: Deon Pienaar, Rhulani Gift Mkhari and Pilato Bulala take a spin inside one of Pilato's early scapture creations, a VW Golf.

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THE LIMPOPO PROVINCE USUALLY ENTERTAINS VISITORS WHO LIKE TO SPEND TIME IN NATURE

during their trips, with walks along the Olifants River in the Kruger National Park, or birding trips to Pafuri camp. This time, enlisting the help of Deon Pienaar from Love Limpopo, we are on a mission to meet the creatives and makers in Limpopo's under-the-radar art communities. From her studio perched atop an old tea estate, Merle Payne and Virginia Ramohlola, the team behind Barok, are first on our art-inclined agenda. An eccentric, fashionista force, one can't help but like Merle immediately. "We all brainstorm together to get ideas. It can take a week in total to make one handbag," says Virginia. Using different embroidery and embellishment techniques from various cultures, this refreshing team creates bags, cushions, skirts and more. "For example, this border is a Venda thing," Merle explains pointing to a wrap-around skirt, "decorating with studs is typically Zulu, and using buttons as a creative technique is more Xhosa."

Salvation Chauke, another team member, specialises in the finer embroidery. "I knew nothing about sewing before I arrived here one and a half years ago," she says. I ask which her favourite work is. "I think the leopard-shepherd one is my favourite."

Merle divulges how a meeting at a birthday party with the late iconic singer Brenda Fassie inspired it. "She had on these very tight leopard-skin pants and those cheap nails from Clicks. We were all very well behaved until they brought out the wine. She started dancing, and chanting, 'The Lord is my Shepherd and I am his Leopard.' I just never forgot it. I nearly fell off my chair laughing! Now we make these to keep her quirkiness alive."

Deon then joins us on the drive from Magoebaskloof, passing the ZZ2 tomato farms, on towards Elim and the Ribola Art Route. "Majozi is from here and Ray Piri," he says. From Fassie to hit single "Fire", a musical magic current runs through these mountains.

In keeping with the theme, we follow a lumpy track in Tshivhuyuni Village to meet the Vutshila Indigenous Band. An extraordinary bunch, they take turns in playing different instruments for each song. From marimba to drums to the timing of a well-dinged cowbell, they perform perfectly and invite me to join their rehearsal. Vutshila means "talent", and there sure is a lot around here. Not only are the band's instruments all handmade, but their craft extends to sculpture too. One band member, Kenneth Nonyana, shows us the small exhibition space where his slender, finely chiselled works line the shelves.

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Forested tunnels in Magoebaskloof; Merle Payne, Virginia Ramohlola and the team behind Barok; this beaded creation takes several days to complete; Kenneth Nonyana poses with his sculptures; create your own clay pot under the expertise of Florah Randela; Sequoia Garden Retreat; Sequoia's cosy interiors; Limpopo's traditional healers are listed as governmental health practitioners.



VUTSHILA MEANS 'TALENT' AND THERE IS A LOT AROUND HERE





Left to right: golden sunrise on Albasini Dam; set aside a few hours to properly explore the various rock art sites of the Makgabeng Plateau; Pilato Bulala at his roadside gallery in Tshivuyuni village near Elim.

“First, we study the wood and find the grain. Then, we follow the nature of wood. You have to cut out the story that is already lying in the wood,” he says, pointing to a thick stump of crocodile lying in the shade, adorned with scales that trademark his work. There is a close relationship between the vhaVenda and crocodiles. It is believed that the brain is very poisonous, so crocs are always given right of way and not hunted for food. Another interesting connec-

tion is with the zwidutwane, or water spirits, that live at the bottom of pools and waterfalls. When spotted, it seems like they have just one eye, one leg and one arm. Half the figure existing here in the physical realm, and the other half remaining in the spiritual world. The Western equivalent would be a mermaid, and various sculptures allude to legends like these. “I mix tradition and lifestyle, so each artwork has a story,” Kenneth continues.

THE ZWIDUTWANE'S WESTERN EQUIVALENT IS THE MERMAID

THE ESSENTIALS

GETTING AROUND

- **Love Limpopo** A high-clearance vehicle is best for navigating Limpopo's backroads. If you are apprehensive on what to do first and how to get there, check out Love Limpopo for hands-on advice from experts who have been there and done that. lovelimpopo.com
- **Toerboer** This is another local tour operator that arranges a ten-day “Discover Limpopo and Botswana” tour package with access to the Ribola Art Route, the traditional world of the Venda, Mapungubwe and the Tuli area. toerboer.co.za

STAYING THERE

- **Magoebaskloof** Kurisa Moya offers several eco-friendly accommodation options, from fairy-like forest cabins to hillside farmhouses with epic views. They also organise several cultural excursions, including a visit to a traditional healer and Northern Sotho lunch with Ivy Ramoraswi at her home just outside Polokwane. krm.co.za
- **Sequoia Garden Retreat** Closer to Haenertsburg, this is true to its name. Enveloped in foliage, flowers and consisting of just two cottages, it is a true sanctuary. sequoiastay.com
- **Elim** Shiluvuri Lakeside Lodge provides the easiest access to the Ribola Art Route. Set on the edge of the Albasini Dam, there are sensational views, and peace that only comes with the proximity of water. shiluvuri.com
- Other awesome things to do on the Ribola Art Route include clay-pot making with Florah Randela or cloth design and dye workshops with the women of Twananani Textiles. lovelimpopo.com
- **Soutpansberg** Zvakanaka Farm feels totally removed from civilisation despite it being so easily accessible from the N1. There are affordable private campsites, and beautiful self-catering cottages too. zka.co.za
- **Makgabeng** For the easiest access to the rock art of the Makgabeng Plateau, book a stay at the eponymous Makgabeng Farm Lodge. The lodge can arrange for a guided archaeological tour with Jonas. makgabenglodge.co.za



GETTING THERE

- **FLY** SAA's codeshare partner SA Airlink flies into Polokwane, Phalaborwa and Skukuza – all in the Limpopo Province. Visit flysaa.com

saasawubona.com

The subject of storytelling flowed straight into our next visit with Pilato Bulala. Famous for his “sculpture” creations, Pilato works by day as a mechanic, but his passion lies in devising incredible scenes using old metal parts, welding them together into “stories of democracy”, as he calls them.

A confident, ever-smiling host, he carefully explains every artwork, from South Africa’s coat of arms to giraffes made from spanners, cogs and bicycle chains. “It is about imagination. I go to my brother’s house to plan, where he has electricity to weld. I also sell my work on Facebook and Instagram. I started in 2010, and evolved from earrings made from old cans to bigger sculptures.”

From contemporary bands, sculptures carved according to local legend, and more modern sculptures, it is then time to delve even deeper with a visit to the art of the ancients.

A real time capsule, walking with Ngoako Jonas Tlouamma, the tourism officer for the Blouberg area and excellent archaeological guide, we embark on a memorable outdoors history tour. “I love heritage with all my heart,” says Jonas. His passion is palpable as we sit in a shallow overhang, below a stone canvas in Thabananthlana just outside of Polokwane.

Jonas was part of a team of interpreters that worked to document Makgabeng Plateau’s rock art, which consists of over 800 separate sites. “We are all settlers up here,” continues Jonas. The paintings at one standout site depict these different eras. First, the fine lines of the San share the story of shamanism, where man and animal become one. Other pigments represent the subsequent settlement of the Khoikhoi (and the ensuing displacement of the San). Thicker white markings of the Northern Sotho relay the most recent stories of Afrikaans settlers.

Stretching several metres, the mural is a spectacle, artistically imbued with the turmoil and tragedy befitting a tale of war. Several Boer commandos of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek had worked their way north, bringing guns in caterpillar-like monsters that belched smoke as they crawled the railways deeper into Africa. Using the paintings to illustrate, Jonas shares the defiance of the then chief, King Leboho, who refused to submit. It is a story I wish was taught back at school.

Exploring Limpopo’s brilliant (and admittedly bumpy) backroads reveals the unexpected... something not anticipated. How enriching it was to encounter people so willing to share; share their news, jokes, joys, histories, difficulties, heritage and, most impressively, time. That crucial, selfless thing that so few of us have in the cities. Time enough to sit together, so that I could peer over the walls of my neighbouring province and see how deep the plucky world of rural Limpopo is.

There’s a saying in these parts, “zwakala”, which means “come closer”. I suggest you try it too.

LUXURIOUS ATLANTIC RESIDENCE

The **ELEMENTAL** development team is the first to make available penthouse-sized units with premium luxury finishes at affordable rates on the Atlantic Seaboard. With its exceptional panoramic ocean and mountainscape views and rooftop garden with swimming pool, it makes for the perfect holiday home.

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