

# **SOUTH AFRICAN** **express**

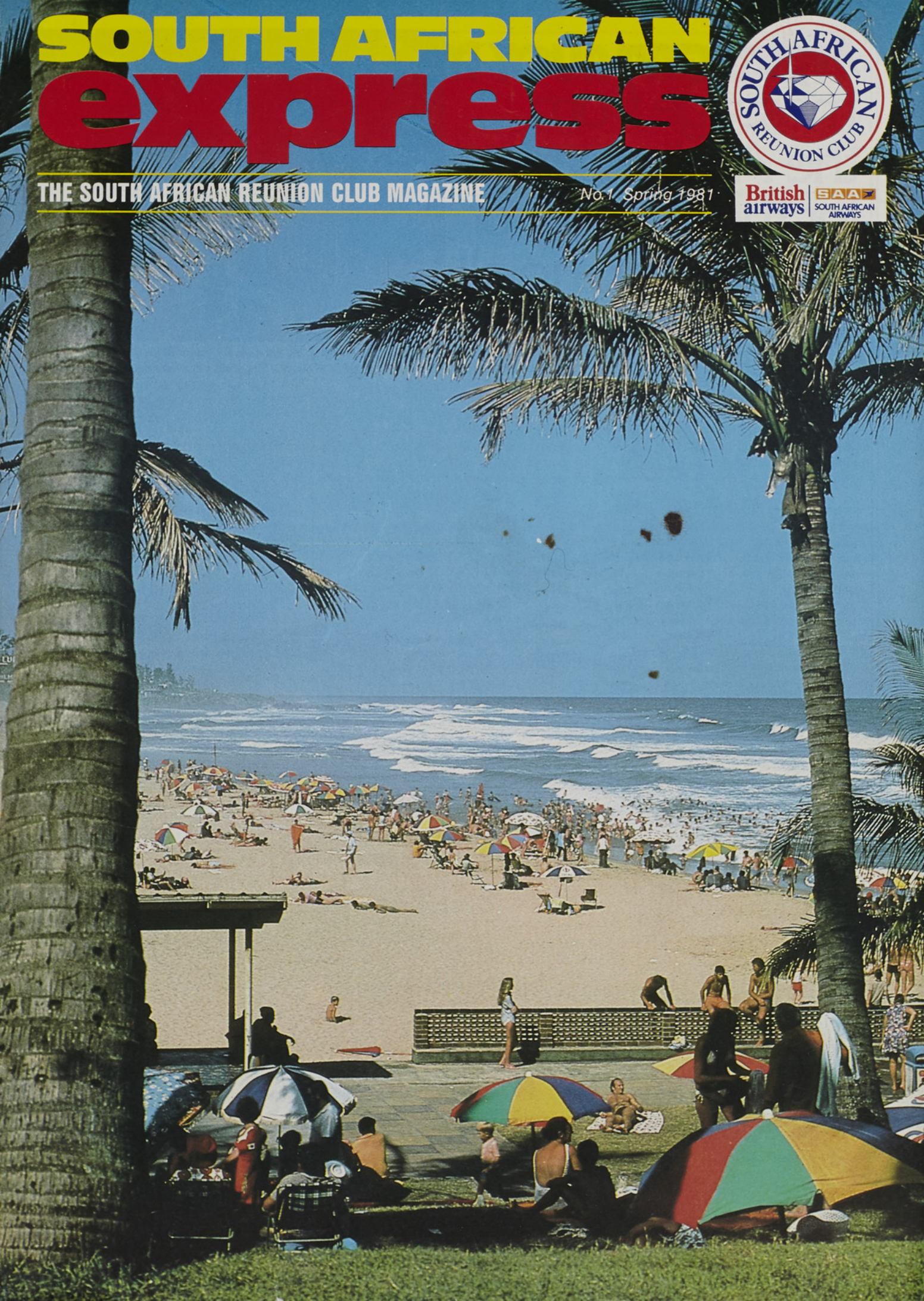


THE SOUTH AFRICAN REUNION CLUB MAGAZINE

No. 1 Spring 1981

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Durban – affectionately known as ‘Durbs’ by South Africans – has nearly as many visitors during the year as it has year-round residents. It’s the top holiday resort for South Africans; it has always been a favourite with British holidaymakers. And now it’s on a direct air route from London and quite right too.

Durban has everything for holiday-makers – I’ll tell you about that in a minute. On top of that it has a wonderful reputation for friendliness. Durbanites love their visitors and the visitors love Durbanites. People seem to matter there more than anything else. You can go as a stranger and come away with lots of new friends. South Africans are friendly by nature, but there seems to be something about ‘Durbs’ that makes them even more so.

There’s a theory that the climate on this part of the coast has something to do with it. Durbanites don’t know the meaning of cold grey weather. The temperature varies little between winter and summer. July is mid-winter there but it is a good deal warmer than Scunthorpe or most other English resorts in mid-summer. If you lived in a year-round sub-tropical paradise, wouldn’t you have a happy frame of mind? It’s not so difficult to have a warm and free-and-easy personality when you never have to muffle up and sit over the fire to keep warm. So that’s the first thing about Durban: it’s warm and it’s hospitable. People look fit and happy and relaxed. You’ll notice it the moment you arrive, and in no time you’ll be feeling just the same.

#### Walk-about ‘Durbs’

Durban has two ‘fronts’ – the Marine Parade, known as the Golden Mile, which faces the warm Indian Ocean with its non-stop surf; and the Esplanade overlooking Durban Bay where the ships come in (which reminds me that Durban is South Africa’s most important harbour).

The Golden Mile is where the action is – a string of great hotels and apartment blocks. You can’t miss the giant new Maharani hotel, 32 floors of seaweed accommodation with a spectacular outside lift for those going up to the roof-top restaurant and swimming pool (it looks a bit like a barometer). Further along there’s the popular Holiday Inn with its cheerful Mexican decor.

Between the Marine Parade and the long sandy beach there’s the Amusement Park with the famous Aquarium and Dolphinarium at one end and the equally famous Snake Park at the other. The Aquarium lets you see, through plate-glass windows, specimens of the marine life great and small that’s to be found in the sea beyond. Fascinating and entertaining as the denizens of the deep are (and they include a group of fearsome sharks), the Oceanarium serves a serious purpose for it is one of the Oceanographic Research Institute’s most important centres. Your nominal entrance fee helps finance the Institute’s work.

Half a mile up the shore there’s the Snake Park, if you like that sort of thing and most people seem to.

Sixty species – sixty – mambas and cobras and vipers and adders and others – and an intrepid attendant mowing the grass in their midst! The Snake Park too serves a useful purpose for it produces life-saving snake-bite serum (which you can actually buy if you think you might need some).

At the Fun Centre near the Aquarium there are what they call ‘thrills and laughter for all the family’ which are probably better watched than indulged in – dodgems and boat rides and the like: there is also an aerial ride in cable cars which gives you splendid views over the buildings to the city and harbour.

Up by the Snake Park there’s what they call the Minitown which consists of scale models of some well-known Durban buildings, the City Hall and the like – with little ships in the harbour and aircraft and trains and cars. This exhibit is well worth a look, and the proceeds go to charity.

Now let’s take a walk up West Street to the city centre, presided over by the 1910 City Hall which is, surprisingly, an almost exact replica



of the Belfast City Hall. Within is the Durban Art Gallery, which, like so many off-the-beaten-track galleries, has paintings which complement the great collections of the world. The library there contains one of the world’s finest collections of African art – books, maps, manuscripts and pamphlets on South Africa. A museum devoted to Durban’s own history is to be found at the back of the City Hall, while across the flower-filled gardens in front of it there is another imposing building, now the central Post Office, but formerly the pre-1910 City Hall, from whose steps Winston Churchill made a no doubt typical speech on arrival in Durban after his escape from the Boers during the South African War.

The streets of Durban are exceedingly colourful, planted as they are with hibiscus and oleander and palm trees. Adding colour is the Indian community, whose ancestors came to Natal in the 1860’s to work on the sugar estates. The Indian Market not far from the city centre is both exotic and commercial for you can bargain here for intricate jewellery, curios and also

# EVERYBODY DURBAN

it’s warm and welcome  
cosmopolitan... it’s the perfect



Above: Pony trekking in the beautiful Natal countryside showing in background the Drakensburg Mountains.

Below: A view of Francis Farewell Square, named after the founder of the city in 1824. Here can be found City Hall, Statues of famous leaders and the Cenotaph behind the ‘Gates of Memory’ opened by H.M. King George VI in 1947.





# ...DY LOVES DURBAN

...ing... it's colourful and  
...t sub-tropical playground



Above: The famous White Rhino, grazing peacefully in Hluhluwe Game Park.

Left: The colourful "Rickshaw" boys in all their finery. Take a ride along Marine Parade – in style – chauffeur driven!

Below: A view of Marine Parade, featuring South Beach, the Oceanarium, the boating pool and a few of the many hotels that stretch along the Golden Mile.



for fruits and spices. A touch of the East indeed.

Eating out in Durban tends to be dominated by the Indian community, with curries and other specialities available just about everywhere. The Durban 'what to do, when & where,' lists upwards of two hundred restaurants licensed and unlicensed, so you're assured of variety. Many like to dine at one or the other of the holiday hotels, while others like to make a discovery of their own. If you're visiting friends or relations you can be sure they'll have one or more favourites to which they are keen to introduce you. And if you're really on the tear there are several trendy night clubs to visit.

Durban has an hospitable Publicity Bureau near the City Hall which provides up-to-the-minute information about what's going on, and the Durban Municipality has umpteen daily sightseeing tours – morning, afternoon and evening. These are really the best introduction to Durban and its surroundings if you haven't got someone to show you the sights. All information about them from the Durban Publicity Bureau.

## Springboard for the Natal Countryside

Fascinating as it is, Durban also provides the starting point for tours of the north and south coasts where lie clusters of small seaside resorts of

side making intimate vistas quite unlike the wide open spaces of the highveld or the Karoo in the central parts of South Africa. At St Lucia Game Reserve there's a huge lake with watchful hippos and crocodiles pretending to be asleep to be seen, and squads of pelicans and pink clouds of flamingos. The Ndumu Game Reserve almost on the border of Mozambique is favoured by ornithologists for the amazing variety of exotic birdlife to be seen there.

## Away to the Mountains

Zululand lies north-west of Durban. To the north-east lies the road to Pietermaritzburg and beyond to the great Drakensberg mountain range.

But first you come to the happily named Valley of a Thousand Hills, the valley being that of the Umgeni river surrounded by countless grass-covered rolling hills providing, on clear days, wonderful views and at other times romantic misty vistas.

Pietermaritzburg is actually the capital of Natal, not Durban. This is an historic circumstance: the city was named for the famous voortrekkers Piet Retief and Gerrit Maritz before Durban was thought of. For all its Afrikaner roots it is a peculiarly English city with its sturdy red brick City Hall, said by some to be the largest brick construction in the southern hemisphere. Among the many buildings that illustrate the history of Maritzburg (as most people call it) is the Macrorie House Museum, stuffed with Victorian furniture and artefacts. The Botanic Gardens have a fine azalea collection: in fact azaleas are to be seen at every turn in the city.

But we must press on along the marvellous N3 highway (South Africa's roads are superb: it's a joy to drive in the absence of heavy commercial vehicles) towards the finest mountain scenery in all South Africa – the Drakensberg Mountains. We're headed for the Royal Natal National Park, 'Royal' because King George VI, Queen Elizabeth and the two Princesses (one of whom is now the Queen) stayed there in 1947. Here we see the colossal Amphitheatre 5 miles long flanked by the Sentinel and the Eastern Butresses, each of them 10,000 feet high. Mont-aux-Sources nearby is the highest peak in the country – nearly 11,000 feet – and is so called because it is the source of the Orange and the Tugela rivers.

The air in this magnificent setting is like champagne (to coin a cliché) and the countryside ideal for walking or gentle hacking. This is the place for the happy, healthy (but not too hearty) holiday and the Royal Natal National Park hotel is but one of the many welcoming hostels in the neighbourhood. It's the ultimate in 'back to nature' without any of the discomforts. A feast for the eyes, the lungs – and the food's good too!

I think I'll have to come back to you to fill you out on the joys of Durban and Natal. These sketchy notes are meant to whet your appetite and explain why everyone loves Durban. The fact is that it's got absolutely everything.

great charm and quite astonishing economy. You will be surprised to hear that Margate and Ramsgate lie on the South Coast, and very popular they are too, with lovely uncrowded beaches and comfortable hostels and restaurants. North of Durban lies the area known as Umhlanga Rocks which bristles with smart hotels. This is the most popular area of up-market tourists – though accommodation there, as in the rest of South Africa, is absurdly reasonable by Northern Hemisphere standards.

Further afield from Durban, though within comfortable reach, are the Zululand Game Parks: Hluhluwe (pronounced with a lot of shushing) where the white rhino is found in larger numbers than anywhere else, as well as various antelope, cheetahs, zebras, giraffes and your friends and mine, the warthogs. Nearby Umfolozi Game Reserve was specially established to protect and preserve the rare white rhino, saved from the brink of extinction by the efforts of dedicated Natal Game Parks conservationists. The scenery of Zululand is full of character with green rolling country-