

Cuttings

BLACK TOMATO

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

DESTINATION ZULULAND

South Africa suffers from an embarrassment of riches. Just like all the best things in life, the more you put in, the more you'll get out...

FROM OUR MAN ON THE STOEPE

Do these words sound familiar? "There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it." They are the opening sentences of the anti-apartheid novel *Cry, the Beloved Country*, by Alan Paton, and they describe an area of KwaZulu-Natal province, near Carisbrooke, that few tourists are ever likely to see - merely because they require that little bit more effort to get to.

Even now, after years of living here, I find a trip into South Africa's less explored regions - its soul, so to speak - utterly beguiling. KwaZulu-Natal's interior is a case in point: rising vigorously from the Indian Ocean, it undulates through ranges of hills, valleys and forests of barely credible beauty, up to the interior plateau. The people here are Zulu, the soul is that of Isandlwana, where the Zulus inflicted the first defeat by a native people on the British empire in the spring of 1879. Yet they are, for the most part, utter Anglophiles; stop for tea and you will be assailed not by assegai

spears but by questions about London and how on earth you can stand the climate.

Or what about Namaqualand, 1000km north of Cape Town, which becomes an ocean of desert wildflowers every spring, and whose wild mountains make you wonder what life is like on a distant planet.

Or, there is a part of Mpumalanga province, in the far northeast of the country, as far as you can get, physically and metaphorically, from the SoHem St Tropez that is Camps Bay, where the topography drops so rapidly between the different climatic zones that you can go from savannah to rainforest to Alpine meadow to tea plantation to tropical garden to bushveld (phew) within a few miles, and the same line of sight, like one of those cutaways in a school textbook.

And once you do all that, and visit all the new and fabulous game reserves in all corners of the country, you could do worse than drive that road from Ixopo to the hills around Carisbrooke.

★ *Black Tomato makes a donation to the charity Uthando with every trip sold.*



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IT'S NOVEMBER. GO HERE.



1 Iceland

What? Snowmobile through the drama of Thingvellir National Park. Then jump into the Blue Lagoon, the world's warmest naturally heated pool. **Where?** Hotel Borg in the centre of Reykjavik. **Splash out:** The ultra-sleek 101 hotel was home to Iceland's boomtime party bubble.



2 Prague

What? Go backstage at the National Theatre after a Don Giovanni performance and enjoy a glass of champagne with the man himself. (Or the actor, anyway). **Where?** The design hotel Josef is a minimalist bolthole with great views. **Splash out:** The new Augustine is inside a working monastery. Tour with the monks.



3 Paris

What? One of Europe's most prestigious photography exhibitions, Paris Photo, 19th - 22nd November, with parties galore surrounding it. **Where?** Choose a design-led room at the Keppler overlooking the Eiffel Tower. **Splash out:** Stay in a suite in the super-hip Murano with one of the only two private pools in the city.

BY OUR MIDDLE EAST STAFF

It was the 'Paris of the Middle East'. It was ravaged by civil war. It's full of cosmopolitan, stylish people who love to party. All these are true. **Beirut** has modern buildings alongside arabesque Ottoman and Haussmannian French architecture, a thriving arts, fashion and cultural scene, mountains, the Corniche, and some of the hottest nightspots in the world. Le Gray's, the city's first boutique hotel, has just opened, with a 17m pool and sundeck.



SPEND SPEND SPEND

THE SPLURGES Head to Antarctica via Argentina

See cute penguins and mile upon mile of dramatic ice formations. Discipline yourself at Dr Joshi's wellness retreat in Marrakech and get thin and happy. Really. Maybe. See tigers in comfort in Banjar Tola's lux jungle tents (you, not the tigers).

THE SERIOUS BIT

2009/10

This space isn't big enough to do a full review of the year for Black Tomato, and let's be honest, those kind of Christmas letter reflections often do a very good job of replicating the post lunch snooze that hits you on the 25th.

Wow, it's been an interesting year. Challenging? Certainly. Scary? At times, a little. But fulfilling? Undoubtedly. A lot has happened with Black Tomato over the last year, too much to put here, but in short, it's been a good one and here are 5 things I have learnt.

1. You'll find the best beaches in the world on the Maraú Peninsula, Brazil. Biased of course and likely to change my mind after my next trip but right now I can't think of a better stretch of coastline in the world to laze your days away.

2. Everyone can be a director. Hmm...quality may be questionable but the ability to shoot footage with the cheap and robust flip video has allowed us to add colour and show greater insights into what we do in a way that we had never thought possible. Video is now a key feature of the site and no Black Tomato member heads abroad without one. Video will be leading us into and throughout 2010.

3. Travel is the new paracetamol. The amount of requests from people

looking for an experience to 'pick me up' has been staggering and we have been more than happy to play doctor. I've said it before, but travel lifts the spirits like nothing else and when away from the stresses of work the old adage of 'out of sight out of mind' has never rung truer.

4. Some of the best adventure in the world can be found in inspiring Alaska. *Grizzly Man* and *Into The Wild* built the intrigue (for the masses at least) and the country delivers on it magnificently. It seems that every returning visitor has already planned when they are going to return by the time they get back.

5. One live music event you have to experience is watching a known British band playing a New York gig as they are introduced to the States. Trade soulless arenas in the UK for smaller venues where the live experience is something you would only have been able to enjoy years ago before the band made it. Stood two yards from the stage at Webster Hall, New York watching Glasvegas told me that. It's a perfect excuse for a great weekend away as well and live music and New York are perfect bedfellows. Pick your new favourite band that it's impossible to get tickets for and find out when they are playing in New York. Music heaven awaits. *Tom Marchant.*

Rant

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Frustration here at the 'enhanced' images prevalent in the travel world. While it's accepted in the fashion and celebrity worlds, we never thought it would work its way into travel. But sadly it has. Rooms jump closer to the sea, eyesores disappear from landscapes and the colour of the sea and scenery has become postcard perfect. We can cope with slimmed down celeb thighs on magazine covers, but when you are travelling for a view and it's a little bit (or sometimes massively) misleading, then you're getting into serious disappointment and misrepresentation/refund territory. The camera can lie, as anyone with Photoshop can tell you, but the world has enough beautiful views not to have to create false ones.

AUSTRALIA

'Under the Skin of Australia' is the latest project from Black Tomato. Experience this vast country guided by the experts who reveal all the best bits, insider tips and hidden gems. If you haven't experienced this stunning country let us arrange the perfect trip for you. Read more at: www.blacktomato.co.uk/category/australia/

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4 things to do in Reykjavik right now

Swing

Wallop golf balls off a glacier after a champagne breakfast. And how do you reach this remote spot of iciness? By helicopter, of course.

Drink

at Boston, the cool and cosy bar where locals and local celebs mix, candles flicker and beer is the libation of choice.

Snooze

at the cutting edge 101 hotel: Cow-print chairs, monochrome walls and home to one of the hippest bars in town. Cocktails anyone?

Pose

at Kaffibarinn, Reykjavik's trendiest bar and hangout for the media darlings. Drink brennevin, the speciality 'burnt wine'.

NEED TO CHILL?

Why wait?

There's plenty of snow and ice awaiting you already. Hop to Scandinavia for **husky sledding** and the **swirling wonder of the northern lights**. Spot **moose in Alaska**, where cars plug into the pavement to keep warm (a bit like Westminster then) and the wilderness is unbounded. Or **party hard in Moscow**. After a day visiting the Kremlin and other dazzling sites in the crisp winter air you'll welcome **some Russky Standart Platinum vodka** to warm you up at the end of the day, before a bit of clubbing at GQ Bar or Most.

BULLETIN

All going swimmingly

Our current favourite pools? First, the salt-water lagoon at the San Alfonso del Mar resort at Algarrobo on the coast of **Chile**. At eight hectares (that's the equivalent of 6,000 standard pools), it's the world's largest. You'll need your Weetabix before those morning laps. Then there's Nemo 33, the world's deepest pool, in **Uccle, Belgium**: purpose-built for scuba diving, it's 33 metres deep. We suggest you DON'T LOOK DOWN AAAARGH

STOP PRESS THE ULTIMATE NEW YEAR'S EVE - DO IT TWICE

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