

# TRAVEL

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fantasies twice on my African adventure.

Surrounded by five cheetah cubs, in their enclosure at Spier Wine Farm and Game Reserve, it was a dream come true to get so close to such spectacular animals.

In the end, despite their fearsome claws and teeth, the fastest land animals in the world purred gently and rubbed themselves against my legs.

Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine cheetahs could be cuddly!

And it certainly knocked spots off visiting the zoo back in Dublin.

Hours earlier, I had been lazing by a pool in the posh Aubergs Rozendal, sipping fine wines - courtesy of a real 007 type: wine-grower Tony Hindhaugh.

The suave Englishman was shaken, not stirred, when a TV producer offered him the chance to fulfil his dream of owning a vineyard in South Africa - providing he does it on TV.

Opening and running the Eaglevlei Wine Farm near Cape Town has been a real Discovery Channel adventure for the former pub owner, as the channel will be featuring him in their series, *The Grape Escape*, to be shown next autumn.

I tasted Tony's first harvest (which can be bought in Superquinn) and can definitely say it's worth walking into a lion's den for.

Which is exactly what I did - well, sort of.

Surrounded by three fully-grown lions, we all did the wise thing and stayed in the car.

Not that it would have protected us if the lioness and her two adult male cubs had decided to vary their menu.

Our ranger, Graeme, warned: "They have not eaten people before - but there's always a first time."

The lions would need to be gourmets, as the posh Shamwari estate near Port Elizabeth is popular with celebs.

As if it was not enough to have a lion that looked like the MGM mascot scowling at us - and his mum growling - I was chuffed to find out that other beautiful animals - Brad Pitt, John Travolta and Tiger Woods - had stayed in my room, possibly even slept in the same bed.

But celeb-spotting paled in comparison to leopard-spotting.

The previous night, a lone female leopard had watched us, less than two metres away from our car.

Ranger Graeme said: "She could eat us without a second thought."

He put her laziness down to pregnancy.

But I guessed a creature that could carry off the Bet Lynch look in style would not degrade herself by tucking into a bunch of sweaty tourists covered in mosquito repellent.

But we seemed to be entertainment for the giraffes, who gazed at us with those big femme fatale eyes.

Across the plain, we saw a herd of stampeding wildebeest, a family of baboons loping along, funny little warthogs scurrying in front of our car, a rhino that mooned at us, gazelle, springbok - you name it, we saw it.

Most people look for the Big Five - leopard, lion, rhino, elephant and buffalo - but daredevils will want to add great white sharks to the list of must-sees.

You can see Jaws up close in cages lowered from boats off Dyer Island.

Far less scary are the whales you can see from a trawler off the quaint fishing village of Hermanus, or jackass penguins in Betty's Bay.

And some game reserves offer elephant and horseback safaris.

# A lion's share of fantasy

## EAGLEVLEI WINE

Eaglevlei is now open to the general public complete with a cosmopolitan wine tasting area; the largest jungle gym in the Western Cape; a restaurant headed up by up and coming chef, Herbie van Schalkwyk and an art gallery displaying art created by township children.

100 per cent of the profits raised from art sold at the estate will be ploughed back in to the education of the township children.

Eaglevlei Sauvignon Blanc and Merlot can be purchased at Superquinn, priced 11.99 per bottle

The complete range of Eaglevlei wines can be purchased direct from the website. Visit [www.eaglevlei.com](http://www.eaglevlei.com) (0027 21 8844713)

## SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS

Direct flights to Cape Town and Johannesburg from London Heathrow. South African Airways (SAA) offers a distinctly African world class service from the UK to South Africa and beyond

Two hour time difference and overnight flight mean no jet lag, making South Africa the perfect holiday destination for Irish travellers. To book or check out the latest offers. Visit [www.flysaa.com](http://www.flysaa.com) (0870 747 1111).

## SHAMWARI GAME RESERVE

Tiger Woods, Brad Pitt, John Travolta and Nicholas Cage have all stayed there. South Africa's leading, private game reserve with a selection of luxury lodges and world-class service. Visit [www.shamwari.com](http://www.shamwari.com) (01483 425465).

## ROZENDAL

Rozendal red wine vinegar and Classic Bordeaux style Rozendal Blend. Visit [www.rozendal.co.za](http://www.rozendal.co.za) (0027 21 809 2600).

## STELLENBOSCH WINE ROUTES

Visit [www.wineroute.co.za](http://www.wineroute.co.za) (0027 21 886 4310).

## SPIER

To purchase Spier wines, call 0027 21 881 3690 or visit [www.spier.co.za](http://www.spier.co.za)

Spier wine estate, where I cuddled the cheetahs, also has a buzzing bar which is popular with Cape Town's It crowd.

Dancers from the Congo perform during the evening buffet. It's ideal for a date, as you take your meal up to the tree-houses which provide a spectacular view of the estate and snuggle up under the specially-

provided blankets. Impressive in a different way is Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned.

It's more fun to help the economy - by going shopping.

I spent a few hours haggling for crocodile handbags in the markets, justifying it on the grounds that the crocs were dead and the traders needed the cash.

But you can have a real Sex and the City experience in Johannesburg, which is dripping with diamonds. As I flew in at night, even the lights of

the skyscrapers twinkled beguilingly.

I was tempted to poach myself a millionaire, but I had been warned that the country also has plenty of rough diamonds. In a country with a rainbow of skin-shades, 11 languages and every religion on earth, the people in SA are proud of their race, their tribe, their culture.

I checked out two nightclubs in the town of Stellenbosch.

The posh town with its Dutch-style colonial architecture is miles away from the shanty town in every sense, but I still found myself dancing with Xosas and Zulus.

There were just three white people in the Catwalk club: me, another journalist and our host, Tony Hindhaugh - the Englishman who had

treated us to the first harvest from his Eaglevlei winefarm.

Sandwiched in between all those hip dancers, it was easy to feel the rhythm. Black Africans like dancing - and, unlike virtually every white man I know, the black blokes knew how to dress for a night out.

Earlier that evening we had been dancing in a club full of students from posh Stellenbosch University, which is almost exclusively white.

The club's giant screens showed surfing and quad-bike racing.

The nightlife is just one of many surprises in this big, brave frontier land.

Just when I thought I had got a handle on South Africa, it amazed me again. Such as when the air hostess