

Like nothing else

Been trying to choose between South Africa and some other place for a holiday? Allow me to convince you...

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OVERDRIVE is going to lose an employee soon and there is only one organization to blame – Mahindra Adventure. Why? Because I have decided to sell everything I own, move to South Africa and live in a nice beachside villa near Simon's Town riding and driving on some of the most scenic roads I have ever seen. Sorry Bert, if you have any bones to pick I suggest someone with the initials BKY is the one to get a hold of.

Why am I so obsessed with this place suddenly and seemingly out of nowhere? I attribute it to the most memorable trip I have had as a motoring journo till date. It all started with a missed flight. Thanks to our baggage coming late (Really? -Ed), Soumi (from M&M) and I missed our connecting flight taking us from Johannesburg to Cape Town. By the time we landed in Cape Town a good three hours later, our guides Sue and Dave had decided to split us up. The rest of the group had already left for Franschhoek with Dave and our photographer Rob, while Sue waited for us at the airport. This time we grabbed our luggage and ran to catch up with the rest. Not exactly the exciting start to the trip I was hoping for.

Franschhoek is a small town in the Western Cape Province around two hours from Cape Town. It is famous for being quaint in the way French villages are. It is also home to some of South Africa's best vineyards. But that's not what is most important about this place. What I find most interesting, and you should too, is that Franschhoek is home to the Franschhoek Motor Museum which in turn is home to some of the most beautiful and historically significant examples of automotive engineering in the world. Not convinced? Do the words Moto Morini 3½ ring any bells? How about the Model-T? Cord 810? Studebaker President? Honda NSX? Ferrari F40? Ferrari F50? Ferrari Enzo? That's right. These are the kind of cars and few motorcycles that are on display at the museum. All in dehumidified 'barns' with beautiful rolling green hills in the background. We caught up with the rest of the gang at the museum and after Sue and Dave dragged us away we hit the road to get to our hotel – Le Franschhoek.

The sun gets up way faster than I would like it to in South Africa this time of the year. We had to be on the road by nine in the morning. And that is not a bad thing. Tarmac in South Africa is an uninterrupted, smooth,





black ribbon curving its way around mountains with the ocean on one side and green hills on the other. The kind of surface that keeps any car and driver equally happy. The XUV felt at home on these roads and was more than happy being chucked around corners. Even on the small offroad stretch that we passed, the car flew through, leaving a huge dust trail in its wake. And it's not just the roads that had gotten us all excited. It was everything that the roads came with. The rolling green hills, the immaculate vineyards, the well behaved traffic, the incredibly blue skies, all come together to become a driving experience of a lifetime. Everywhere we went, people wanted to know about the XUV. Most of the reactions we got centered around how good looking the car was. And when we spoke to some of the folks who are in our line of work in South Africa, they too told us how impressed they were about this SUV. They were all praise for the fit and finish levels in the car. But most of all they were astounded by the amount of gadgetry this car came kitted with. The only problem was that thanks to customs duties and taxes in South Africa the car is not quite the bargain it is here in India. A real shame that.

We were soon passing the Theewaterskloof Dam and reaching our first stop for the day –Dassiefontein. Right by the side of the N2 highway, is this small curio shop cum restaurant offering everything from handicrafts, to preserves and antiques as well as some lovely food. You might want to pick up some hand puppets, some Land Rover scale models, tin garage signs or even some funny looking pots and pans. It's easy to lose track of time looking at and contemplating buying the entire store itself. So much that we, in fact, had to be herded out of there by Sue and Dave.

Our lunch stop was in Hermanus, at the Harbour Rock Seafood Grill and Sushi Bar. Known locally as the Rock, the restaurant is quite famous for their seafood and sushi (as if you didn't figure that out from the name). The Rock site is on a, er, rock and overlooks the

Above left: This little cottage on the N2 highway is Dassiefontein, a restaurant cum curio shop. You can find everything from pottery to barbecue grills and preserves here.

Above right: The road from Hermanus to Cape town is known as the whale-watcher's route and is famous for being one of the most scenic places

ocean. If you're lucky you might even be able to see a few whales playing in the water since Hermanus is famous for whale watching. As I said before, seafood is the main highlight of this restaurant. The waiter will come up to your table with a blackboard with the day's specials written in chalk and if you do not try the mixed seafood platter and the chocolate fudge cake, you're just being inconsiderate. And if you're in South Africa and don't try Windhoek lager, the popular Namibian beer, you ought to be hanged.

So after shamelessly feasting on all manner of sea creatures and chocolate fudge cake and having washed it all down with some Windhoek, we hit the road again. (In case you were wondering I wasn't the one driving post lunch, hence the beer. Seriously, you ought to give me some more credit, sheesh!) We had seen some whales in the distance while we were having lunch, but there was no way of making sure they were actually whales. For all I know it could have been a floating tyre, a drowning diver or even an overturned boat. So just to

make sure we headed a bit further up along the coast to Marine Drive. All we had to do was stand around for a few minutes to spot at least twelve different whales splashing around. Everywhere you looked there was a whale. Some jumping, some racing each other, some blowing (that's what the spray of water from their, er, blowhole is called) and other just chilling in the water. After an hour or so of taking pictures of and gawking at the whales we pushed off for our stop for the night – the Cullinan Hotel in Cape Town.

Cape Town is the second biggest city in South Africa. It is surrounded by Table Mountain, Devil's Peak and Lion's Head on each side. Then there is the mighty South Atlantic Ocean covering whatever is left. Next to the ocean is where all the action is. The place is called the V&A Waterfront or just the Waterfront. It is Cape Town's harbour and primary shopping area. If you hit a long pier with a Ferris wheel on it, you'll know you're there. This is also where you can catch a ferry to take you to Robben Island (where Mandela was imprisoned).

The V&A Waterfront is one of the most popular areas in Cape Town. You can find everything from designer stores to the city's finest restaurants here. Note the giant Ferris wheel that you can use as a landmark

TARMAC IN SOUTH AFRICA IS AN UNINTERRUPTED, SMOOTH, BLACK RIBBON CURVING ITS WAY AROUND MOUNTAINS WITH THE OCEAN ON ONE SIDE AND GREEN HILLS ON THE OTHER





Crumb fried calamari in peanut sauce anyone? If you're in Cape Town, be sure to check out the wine collection at the Sevruga restaurant on the Waterfront. Great selection of local wines here. If I ever had to retire somewhere it would be in Simon's Town

The Waterfront is like any other shopping district – always bustling with activity and people running in and out of the various stores/eateries with bags/tummies full. If you are the kind who has food among their top three priorities in life, you must dine at the Sevruga restaurant here. And if you do check this place out, then you must try their crumb fried calamari in peanut sauce. You must also sample their sizeable wine collection. And I mean SIZEABLE. Their wine rack is three walls long! Oh, and let's not forget the ostrich meat. And the springbok. And the crayfish. And the lobster. Oh man, I'm gonna cry.

The next day kicked off with a visit to Table Mountain. Table Mountain is a flat topped mountain that overlooks the city of Cape Town on one side and the South Atlantic ocean on the other. At over 3500ft above sea level, it

offers a spectacular view of the city and its surroundings. On a clear day you can even see all the way to Robben Island. To get to the top you can either take the cable car or hike for two and a half hours. I took the cable car. Because of the lack of time, of course (Really? – Ed). Now about that cable car. The original cableway was started in 1929. In 1997, a new cablecar system was installed with all new Rotair cars that carry 65 passengers and rotate 360 degrees to give a full view of the mountain, the city and the ocean as you climb up. The mountain is part of the Table Mountain National Park and once you are up there do not be surprised if you see Rock Hyrax, Redwinged Starlings, Cape Verreaux's Eagles, Rock Kestrels and Sunbirds having a good time with the tourists. If you want a guided tour of the place, which I suggest very strongly, spot a certified guide (they usually wear badges that say so) and ask them nicely.

By the time we were done at Table Mountain it was time for lunch. Our lunch stop for the day would be the Mariner's Wharf Fish Market at Hout Bay. And no, it is not an actual fish market. It was at one point. But not anymore. Now it is a popular restaurant that serves some incredibly awesome food. It is also a popular boutique with some very interesting curios and souvenirs that you can pick up. The restaurant itself is quite something by itself. The founder of the Mariner's Wharf, Stanley Dorman, has travelled the world collecting maritime artifacts ranging from miniatures of ships to anchors and even masts from ancient ships. And the food. Oh, the food. Let me tell you this. I ordered a steak and when it came, it was one and a half inches thick, evenly cooked and covered

in some of the most heavenly cheese sauce I have ever tasted. All this while sipping on Rock Shandy the local favourite drink. Such should be life.

Once done with lunch we hit the road again. Our stop for the night would be the Simon's Town Quayside Hotel in Simon's Town. Much like most of the roads we were on, the route from Hout Bay to Simon's Town is a beautiful coastal road that has the ocean on one side. There are several places where you can stop and watch the sun set en route. We were doing exactly this when we saw a Bolero Camper passing by. Then it struck me. This wasn't the first time I had seen a Mahindra in South Africa. We had crossed many a Scorpio on our little road trip. And for good reason too. Mahindra has 55 dealers in South Africa each of them selling XUVs, Scorpions, Scorpio pickups, Genio pickups, Xylos and Bolero pickups. Pretty impressive if you ask me.

We reached Simon's Town just as the sun was setting. Simon's Town is home to the South African Navy. In fact, the day we arrived there one of their submarines was docked in the harbour. It got away before we could take pictures however.

The next morning we decided to explore Simon's Town. The highlight of our exploration was the the local toy museum. If you like scale models you will never leave Simon's Town. The toy museum has everything from old Dinky cars to pre-world war toy soldiers. All managed by the sweet old man who will smilingly look through catalogues to find the exact scale model that you are looking for. Once most of us had emptied a sizeable chunk of our bankroll buying miniatures of Land Rovers, Morris and Ferraris we headed out towards

the last stop of the trip – Cape Town. But not before a quick stop at the Cape of Good Hope for the mandatory photographs.

We checked in to the Protea Hotels Fire and Ice! in Cape town by late afternoon. We were being rushed away to dinner. Sue, Dave and Rob promised that we were in for a treat at dinner that day. And boy, were they right. We were dining at a restaurant called Gold. Their tag line read 'opulent African cuisine'. And opulent it was and then some. The menu was fixed, but with fourteen courses to go through nobody even uttered a word of protest. The meal included food from all corners of Africa with springbok, ostrich, chicken, spinach, lentils, couscous and different kinds of fruit. And if you think the food was spectacular, which it was, then you should have seen the service. Aside from serving you, the waiters and bartenders also double up as performers. In between your meal they will break into several song and dance routines providing you an insight into African arts and culture. For those reading this, take my advice. The perfect way to end your holiday in South Africa is by dining at Gold as you sip on Klipdrift brandy and watch your friendly waiter perform for you.

After close to a week well spent in South Africa I have only one thing to say to those who have been thinking about taking a holiday here – what are you waiting for?

There is also one other thing I would like to say. But this time it is to Bert. If you find me AWOL one fine day, please realise that I have sold my ancestral property, packed all my clothes and boarded a South African Airways flight to Cape Town. Totsiens.

Look ma, a boat. And another one. And another one. This is the view that you have from your room at the Simon's Town Quayside Hotel

IF YOU LIKE SCALE MODELS YOU WILL NEVER LEAVE SIMON'S TOWN. THE TOY MUSEUM HAS EVERYTHING FROM OLD DINKY CARS TO PRE-WORLD WAR TOY SOLDIERS

