



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The Heritage Room at Taj Cape Town; Bombay Brasserie, the fine-dining Indian restaurant at Taj; stunning view of Cape Point; the Presidential Suite; FACING PAGE The hotel's grand lobby



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY TAJ CAPE TOWN



PALLAVI PASRICHA/WWW.INDIATODAYIMAGES.COM

African Excess

A luxury hotel, sparkling blue Atlantic Ocean, stunning mountain views, sparkling wine and gourmet food add up to make Cape Town an unforgettable experience. **BY PALLAVI PASRICHA**

WHEN I MET Nelson Mandela I told him that I wish we could put something in South Africa rather than take it out," says Ratan Tata. That dream has come true. The red carpets are rolled out, the champagne is perfectly chilled and the who's who of Cape Town have gathered to witness the historic opening of the Taj hotel in their city. Ratan Tata has flown down especially for the inauguration and he's glad to do so because as he puts it, "Cape Town is one of my favourite cities and this hotel will just be an excuse to visit the city again and again." Very soon, this lovely city begins to unfold its magic and becomes my favourite too.

Stepping into Taj Cape Town is like going back in time,

as two historic buildings—the South African Reserve Bank and the neighbouring Temple Chambers—have been converted to the hotel. A lot of the structure is still original, giving the hotel a regal touch. The main banking hall is now the sprawling lobby, a lovely shade of gold with the same clock and marble columns that were there back in the 1930s. There is a separate modern tower where the rooms are designed in keeping with the modern decor.

I enter my spacious heritage room on the Taj Club Floor that overlooks St. Gorge's Cathedral, the second oldest in the city and from my bed I spot the Table Mountain (something that was on my to-do list). While the butler explains the room details to me, from the corner of my eye I spy something resembling the initials of my name. I turn

to look and there it is—my name flashing on the LCD screen. 'Welcome to Taj Cape Town Ms. Pallavi Pasricha,' a rather sweet gesture. After a few minutes the doorbell rings and I am handed my very own personalised newspaper. It is a copy of a national daily in India with 'Ms. Pasricha' printed on the top of every page. I get goosebumps when I see this. The room looks royal—a floral carpet, olive green headrest, paintings and an espresso machine instead of a tea maker. I love it and this sets the perfect note for my South African experience.

How could I be in Cape Town and not indulge in the city's famous food and wine. We dine at Bombay Brasserie, the fine-dining Indian restaurant at the Taj hotel which has already become popular in the city. The food is excellent, but wanting to try something different, I head to The Twankey Bar serving seafood and

champagne. Taj also has an all-day dining restaurant, Mint, where we have breakfast daily.

There is much more in store. On a rather cold day, we head to one of the best restaurants in Cape Town, The Roundhouse, for lunch. I am awed by the sight of the sea and the hills merging at Camps Bay but being a slightly foggy day I cannot get a clear view. I am standing at a World Heritage Site. The Roundhouse is a former guardhouse, a tea room, boutique hotel and a hunting lodge too. This was the place where

men would go down on their knees and pop the question, but before their girl said yes she would test the quality of the diamond she was offered by engraving their initials on the window glass. Not a bad idea, I think. For lunch I have smoked snouk, a local fish, served with foie gras and pickled squid, crayfish risotto and butternut ravioli. For dessert it is Malva pudding

F.Y.I

SHOPPING IN THE CITY

The Victoria and Albert Waterfront is one of the most popular markets, but more on the expensive side. The Red Shed Craft Workshop and the Waterfront Craft Market located here offer a range of African crafts. You can test your haggling skills here.



1. Stunning view of Cape Town as seen from the Presidential Suite 2. The Roundhouse Restaurant at Camps Bay 3. Some of the best sparkling wines of South Africa 4. Chapman's Peak drive, one of the most scenic drives in the world

WHAT TAKES MY BREATH AWAY IS THE DRIVE ALONG THE ATLANTIC COAST. WITH ROCKY MOUNTAINS TO MY LEFT AND THE OCEAN TO MY RIGHT, IT IS A SIGHT THAT LEAVES YOU FEELING THAT THERE CAN'T BE A MORE BEAUTIFUL SPOT IN THE WORLD



4 PHOTOGRAPHS BY PALLAVI PASRICHA/WWW.INDIATODAYIMAGES.COM

HOT DEAL
ROMANTIC STAY
 Stay at Taj Cape Town for 3 nights/4 days at ₹9,500 onwards per night with sunset cruise, spa treatment, romantic dinner and airport transfers.

COURTESY TAJ CAPE TOWN

served with Amarula, a local liquor that tastes very much like Baileys.

From here on, the food and wine only get better. The next day we head to Graham Beck vineyard at the Cape Winelands in Franschhoek, a small town about two hours from Cape Town. Pieter Ferreira, better known as Mr. Bubbles shows us around the cellar and takes us to the tasting room where we sip some of the finest sparkling wines of South Africa. And these are no ordinary wines. Barack Obama toasted with a bottle of Graham Beck Brut NV when he became president and so did Nelson Mandela. I am nowhere in their league, but tasting the same bubbly makes me feel presidential for just a moment. Lunch is at Le Quartier Francais, the 50th best restaurant in the world. Needless to say, the five course gourmet lunch we tuck into is fantastic. I particularly enjoyed the perfectly done lamb served with pesto.

The next day I get up early, with the Table Mountain definitely on my agenda. Luckily it is a bright and sunny day. I get ready quickly and go to have a look at the split-level Presidential Suite sprawled on the 15th and 16th floor of the hotel. It has the best bathroom I have ever seen with tall glass windows on two sides around the tub, where you can soak in the picturesque view as you sip the finest bubbly of the continent. After quickly scanning the place, I head to the balcony. The Table Mountain and Lion's Head loom in front and the entire city is spread out below. As I soak in the breathtaking sight I realise why Ratan Tata calls Cape Town one of his favourite cities. Little do I know that this is just the beginning,

and as the day progresses, the views keep getting better. Today is my appointment with Cape Point, where the African continent ends. At school, I had read about the Cape of Good Hope in geography books, and I just cannot wait to get there. But what takes my breath away is the drive along the Atlantic Coast. It's called Chapman's Peak Drive starting from Hout Bay to Noordhoek, and is rated among the most scenic in the world. With rocky mountains to my left and the sparkling blue Atlantic Ocean to my right, it is a sight that leaves you feeling that there cannot be a more beautiful spot in the world.

Standing at the tip of the continent is a rather eerie feeling. From the lighthouse at Cape Point I get a clear view of the two oceans (Indian and Atlantic) meeting and the continent ending. Unfortunately the weather does not permit me to visit the Table Mountain, and we return many photographs later.

As I head out for the return journey, my glance falls on the plaque which stands outside the Taj Cape Town hotel with a quote of Nelson Mandela, 'It always seems impossible until it is done.' It's a good philosophy to imbibe, I think, for all the things in life I still want to do. For the time being, I decide to return some day to Cape Town—for the Table Mountain, for Robbin Island and for the sheer bliss of walking around the city. ●

FACTFILE

GETTING THERE
 Fly Delhi-Mumbai-Johannesburg on Jet Airways and Jo'burg-Cape Town on British Airways. **Fare:** ₹47,000 (approx)

WHEN TO GO
 August to March is the best time to visit Cape Town.

PLUS SAYS

STAY
 Taj Cape Town: Wale Street, 8001 Cape Town; tel: +27(0) 21 819 2000; www.tajhotels.com

EAT
 South African cuisine at The Roundhouse restaurant.

SHOP
 Pick up African tribal art paintings from the Victoria and Albert Waterfront or Greenmarket Square.

SEE
 Table Mountain and Cape Point.

