

THE BIG THRILL

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With a name like Hazyview, this South African town may not conjure up images of nerve-wracking adventure. But that's exactly what brings thrill seekers here. From riding rapids to zipping over forested slopes, it gives you every chance to flirt with danger.

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Over the course of three previous trips, we have perceived South Africa as a first world country in an African setting; a country blessed by nature's bounty and an abundance of wildlife; a savage paradise studded with luxurious game lodges. This time around we discovered that South Africa has a wild (and we are not referring to its animals), adventurous streak. And there is a heady cocktail to choose from: abseiling, mountain biking, horse riding, mountain boarding, hot air ballooning, kayaking, river rafting and more.

FROM JOBURG TO HAZYVIEW

The drive from Johannesburg to Hazyview takes around six hours. However if you have the time to spare, take the longer, yet spectacularly scenic Panoramic Route. Consider a stopover at Walkersons at Dullstroom and try fly-fishing in the many trout ponds.

The road winds through the little town of Pilgrims Rest where the first great gold rush in South Africa took place. Try your hand at panning for the yellow metal at The Diggings Site and keep what you find.

Along the country's long coastline, one can go on a whale watching cruise, snorkel and scuba dive in reefs teeming with marine life, swim with the dolphins, and descend into shark-infested waters in a steel cage. In fact, Plettenburg Bay along the Garden Route that traces the tip of the African continent is referred to as the adventure capital of the south.

The wild and wet outing, which started off gently enough, with us pushing off in an inflated raft from the banks of the river, shifted into high gear when we heard the roar of water thundering down a rapid ahead of us. The next moment we were riding the back of an angry river. A surging current hurled our raft towards the heavens and for a brief moment we were suspended in heart-stopping eternity. Curtains of icy cold water drenched us as we came crashing down on the raging torrent.

Once we had passed the cascade we were able to sit back and savour the joy of coasting along the molten waters with rugged landscape on both sides. But these moments were brief, for we could hear the roar of another rapid ahead of us. Flirting with danger had become addictive and we could not wait to battle the churning water once more. We had been on the river for around an hour, rafted over seven major rapids and a number of smaller ones before pulling up along the banks.

The Balloon flight we declared, while admitting that the crazy sport required nerves of pure steel.

The balloon flight, of course, fell into the category of soft adventure and we welcomed it like ancient mariners would a quiet port after sailing through a raging storm. Early in the morning, we drove to a little clearing opposite the Induna campsite where a colourful Balloons over Africa balloon was rolled out. Controlled blasts of hot air from gas burners

forced it to rise like a towering dome above us. We climbed into the basket; four in each of the four compartments, with the pilot manning the burners from the central slot.

The pre-flight instructions were brief: on smoking. This was followed by a series of short bursts of hot air and we were off. Gently we floated up into a dusky sky that was soon washed by the flaming colours of the rising sun. The landscape below us was painted with farmlands, fruit orchards, quaint homesteads and lush forest draped across rolling hills. Occasionally a flight of birds would wing across the vast tapestry.

All too soon we started to make our final descent; our time in the sky was almost over. When we finally landed in an open field, we had covered five km, reached a maximum speed of 25 kmph and soared up to a height of 3,700ft. Included in the package was a champagne breakfast at the end of the flight. We, however, stayed off the bubbly; the hot air balloon flight was vintage stuff.

HOW TO GET THERE

South African Airways operates direct flights between Mumbai and Johannesburg (fare: \$1000 approx). Alternatively one can fly Emirates via Dubai. From Johannesburg, drive down to Hazyview (six hours by road).

WHEN TO GO

Between May and November

EAT

Book a romantic candlelit dinner in the wine cellar of the Jatinga Country Lodge & Restaurant.

SHOP

African masks, animal figurines, woven baskets, rugs you will find them all at Perry Bridge Trading Post in Hazyview.

SEE

Kruger National Park, just 10km from Hazyview.

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