

BERKSHIRE JEWISH VOICES

TRAVELING WITH JEWISH TASTE

South Africa: Country of Great Contrasts

By Carol Goodman Kaufman / Special to the BJV

It took a week to get over the jet lag, but our journey to South Africa was well worth the exhaustion, and definitely merits the term “trip of a lifetime.” A country of gorgeous landscapes, magnificent flora, and majestic fauna, South Africa is also a nation of many contrasts, even some surprising ones.

Although the country suffered the horrors of apartheid for 46 long years, we saw numerous examples of blacks and whites doing business together, dining together, and walking hand-in-hand on the streets.

There's great wealth, with mansions lining tree-shaded avenues. But still, about 85% of property remains in the hands of whites. There's also devastating poverty, with a 30% unemployment rate (closer to 50% for Blacks). Thousands upon thousands of tin shacks line the roads, and the homeless population is overwhelming the country's meager resources.

Johannesburg is so dangerous a city that virtually every home is surrounded by a barbed wired-topped wall. We were instructed not to leave our hotel at night unescorted – even though it was across the street from a police station. Because we had chosen to dine at one of the kosher Israeli restaurants, we had to take a hotel-owned van in both directions to the Jewish neighborhood.

Despite all the problems, people flow into South Africa for better opportunities than they can find in their home countries. Virtually every booth in Cape Town's city's open-air market is populated by vendors from across the continent. We met people from Namibia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Mozambique, just to name a few. The most compelling story we heard was from Michael, the man who drove us to the airport. A native of Rwanda, he lost his entire family in the genocide during that country's civil war. At the age of eleven, with nothing holding him there, he walked 2,800 miles to Cape Town in pursuit of a better life. Now an adult, he has his own business driving a cab and has a family.

Our visit was planned as a sandwich. The first and last days of our 19-day trip were devoted to South Africa's turbulent social history. We visited the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, where we were randomly classified as “White” or “Non-White.” Those categories determined the first experience we would have. For example, the entrance for White visitors is brightly lit, while that for Non-Whites is narrow, steep, and dark. This experience was chilling.

We then paid our respects at the Hector Pieteron Memorial and Museum in Soweto, where in 2002, 12-year-old Hector was shot to death at a peaceful protest against the forced of teaching in the Afrikaans language. Hector's now elderly sister described the horrific scene for us at the memorial. We ended the tour on Robben Island where, surrounded by shark-infested waters, Nelson Mandela was held for 18 of his 27 years of imprisonment. Former inmates led the tours, and their stories were both bone-chilling and inspiring. Finally, we dined at a private home with a family whose lives were upended when they were forcibly removed from their homes in a mixed-race neighborhood and driven into Soweto, the Black township.

A cultural highlight of the trip was a visit to an authentic Zulu village. Although we didn't get to meet the king, we did meet one of his two wives and their combined brood of 25 children. I was surprised to learn that a large part of the village's revenue comes not from agriculture, but from entertainment. The villagers performed ceremonial bridal dances and sold CDs of their songs, many of which will be performed on their European tour.

Aside from these (and more) cultural and historical visits, it was all nature. South African President Paul Kruger was a visionary in 1898 when he set aside enormous swaths of land for nature preservation. Kruger National Park alone is the size of Portugal, and it's not the only national park.



Cango Caves

Even away from the parks, we saw wildlife. Warthogs meandered in front of our lunch table, and impalas accompanied Joel on a walk from the dining room.

Because we had a late-night return flight, our very last day in the country was free, so we headed to Cape Town's Jewish Museum, situated on a campus that also includes a Holocaust center, library, synagogue, and kosher café. Many of the exhibits focus on the Lithuanian community, given that 80% of South Africa's first Jews immigrated from that country. A highlight of the displays is a reconstructed shtetl.

A significant portion of the museum is dedicated to the Jewish community's support of anti-apartheid activity. Among the video displays is testimony by Nelson Mandela himself.

We're still sorting through the hundreds of photos we took over the three weeks of our journey, and will probably savor the memories forever.



Under the name Carolinda Goodman, **Carol Goodman Kaufman** has just published her third picture book for young children. *Detective Bears and Friends* introduces readers to the whimsical names that various animal groups are called. In addition to her work for children, Kaufman also writes under her “real” name about food history (including for the *Berkshire Jewish Voice*). Her first novel, *The First Murder*, is set in the Berkshires.



South African Malva Pudding

Malva pudding, best described as an apricot based sticky toffee pudding, is considered the iconic dessert of South Africa. It's obviously popular since we were served at least a dozen different versions of it during our visit. Some places serve it with a custard sauce, while others add a scoop of vanilla ice cream or a dollop of whipped cream.

INGREDIENTS:

2 tablespoons butter	2 teaspoons bicarbonate of soda
1 cup sugar	baking soda
2 tablespoons smooth apricot jam/ apricot preserves	<i>For the syrup:</i>
2 teaspoons white vinegar	1½ cups sugar
2 cups flour	½ cup boiling water
2 cups milk	4 tablespoons honey
2 eggs	1 cup unsalted butter
pinch of salt	1 teaspoon vanilla extract

DIRECTIONS:

To make the pudding, pre-heat the oven to 350°F and grease a 10-inch square baking dish.

In a saucepan set over medium-high heat melt together the butter, sugar, apricot jam and vinegar until the sugar has dissolved and the mixture is smooth. Remove from the heat and allow to cool for 5 minutes before pouring it into a large mixing bowl.

Sift the dry ingredients together, then add to the butter mixture, alternating with the milk, mixing well after each addition.

Stir in the beaten eggs.

Pour the batter into the prepared dish and place in the oven.

Bake for 30 minutes until the pudding is dark brown and baked through (a skewer inserted should come out clean).

While the pudding is baking, prepare the syrup.

Bring all the syrup ingredients to a boil and reduce the heat. Allow to simmer for 5 minutes.

Pour the syrup over the pudding as it comes out of the oven.

Allow to stand for 20 minutes then serve with whipped cream or vanilla ice cream.

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