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JAY WALKING

Destination JoziBy *Jacqui Zurcher*

Posted Thu, 03 Jul 2003

I love Jo'burg. It is just really good for my hair. I am telling you doll, the rainy Cape winter is a nightmare of subtle frizz and malformed curls, but in Joeys, I'm a sleek-haired diva. Just my luck that where I achieve perfect hair, the other ladies are using hairspray and teasing combs. Well, those big-haired tannies in Sandton anyway. Big curlers must be big business in Jozi.



Having never visited the city properly before, when I found out I had to go to Joeys for two weeks on business, I was excited.

I wondered what I would find.

Was the crime really so bad? Would I need to drive sitting on my handbag? Would the freezing cold winter mornings force me to buy long johns?

Would I find women selling mielies on the suburban pavements and gin-soaked grannies trying to assassinate them with cattys?

So many stereotypes to challenge.

Well, I didn't spot any tipsy grannies, but I saw some weird and wonderful things.

It has to be said; volume enhancement hair care products must fly off the shelves in Jo'burg. Big hair doesn't seem to have gone out in the City of Gold. Bouffant cool also dictates mandatory gold jewellery in abundance, most prominently bangles up to the elbows. These bracelets identify a certain breed of lady-who-lunches more accurately that those neck rings worn by traditional Ndebele women posing for tourists.

If you want to fit in with this set, a liberal make-up application technique as well as some calf-cracking stilettos are essential. Tragically, my abhorrence for uncomfortable shoes has dictated my eternal exclusion from this elite group.

JACQUI ZURCHER lives in Cape Town near a house with very noisy rottweilers. She is a freelance journalist with an honours degree in Computer Science and a Postgraduate Diploma in African Studies, majoring in Postcolonial English Literature from UCT. On occasion she has been known to dabble in IT.

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Leigh Robertson,
Highlife Editor

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Sometimes, life deals us cruel blows.

The reason for the Jo'burg neurosis about crime dawned on me one morning as I sat in my rental car in traffic. The passenger window had just been smashed and a street kid was sprinting into the distance with my handbag.

My second day in Jozi. No money, no cell phone, no hairbrush. More importantly, no drivers licence.

Now, at this precise moment in South African history, there is one thing that a driving citizen fears to be without more than anything else. Love, wealth, fame — their absence can be endured. But a driver's license, lost, stolen or misplaced, arouses raw, primal fear. Like a wounded duiker wandering a lion-infested savannah, the lone licenseless driver courts disaster.

So it happened, I was pulled over the evening of my smash and grab by a diligent police officer officiating at a roadblock.

"Can I see your license, Madam?"

"Um, you aren't going to believe this, but my bag was stolen this morning. They took everything." Eyelids batting hopelessly, pursed lips trying to smile sweetly. Lacking a Dolly Parton cleavage, I just batted my eyelids more furiously.

"Please step out of the vehicle ..."

Half an hour later, after much whining, the exasperated policeman let me go. Whining isn't attractive and shouldn't be encouraged, but sometimes, it is one's only weapon in the face of adversity. I stood in the queue for 10 hours to get my license and I made sure my problem was the policeman's problem until he washed his hands of me.

Kindly policemen aside, Gauteng is a strange place for a vaguely chilled Capetonian. In spite of bone rattling cold winter mornings, people get to work really early. I stumbled into the office one morning just before 8am feeling deeply self-righteous and a bit dizzy. To my horror I learned that many of my officemates arrived by 6am. This diligence offended me on a deep cellular level. Skulking off to find strong coffee was all I could do to restore my sense of order and cosmic balance.

Jozi is crazy, colourful and hectic. In spite of failing to be assimilated by the big-haired ladies club, being forcibly parted from my personal possessions and being a late riser, I like the place. My Capetonian friends gasp in amazement and my Johannesburg colleagues seem confused, but I think Jozi is cool.

Walking in Melville one evening I saw a dignified dog sitting at a table with his humanoid companions. Now, this was no yappy, pink-soiled poodle, but a staffie. The restaurant diners seemed unperturbed by their canine counterpart and I tried to walk past without yelping too excitedly at the delightful scene. Any city where you might spot a staffie having a cuppa is ok in my books.


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