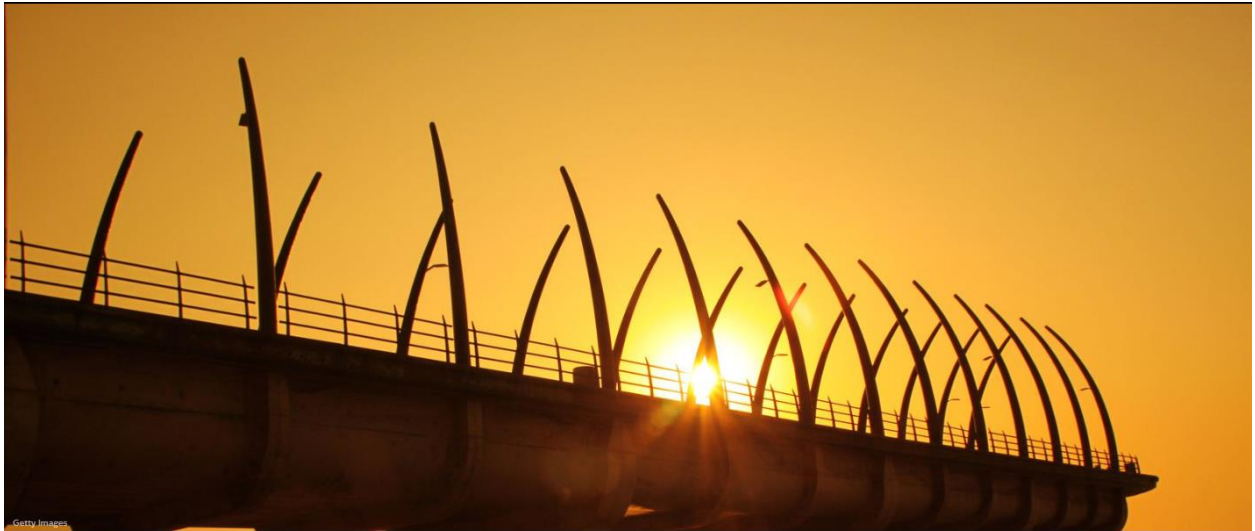


# ELLE DECOR



## TRAVEL GUIDE: THE SOUTH AFRICA CITY YOU'VE BEEN OVERLOOKING

Durban is one part beach town, one part bustling urban hub, and everything an ideal weekend getaway is made of.



BY [JESSICA CUMBERBATCH ANDERSON](#)

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There are many ways to describe Durban, South Africa: It's the country's third most populous city, a melting pot of African, Indian and colonial influences, and in 2015, it was one of seven cities named the [new urban wonders of the world](#).

But Andrew Rall prefers the Destiny's Child analogy. "Someone once described Durban to me as Michelle," he jokes, likening the city, which is often overlooked in favor of historic Johannesburg and cosmopolitan Cape Town, to the singing group's underrated third member.



#### *Durban Tourism*

Rall, the founder of [Distillery 031](#), a craft spirit brand and hangout spot in the city's burgeoning Station Drive precinct (once a rundown warehouse district and home to a former Lee Jeans factory), is among a group of creatives on a mission to broaden the reputation of their hometown, and ultimately its ranking as a destination in and of itself.

One way they're doing it: A monthly "First Thursday," series where block party meets happy hour meets studio tour that puts not just the precinct's but the city's vibrancy and creative spirit on full display.

Here's how to make an entire weekend out of it.

#### **THURSDAY**

Before the sun sets and [Station Drive](#) lights up, head next door, onto the grounds of the former Lion Match factory, where "white bread doesn't exist, the bacon comes crispy, and the coffee to perfection," according to [The Digs Kitchen](#) crew. In other words, it's the perfect spot to grab a light lunch (try the grilled chicken wrap with halloumi) and some caffeine to help you power through the night's festivities.

Back on the main drag, food trucks and street vendors start to assemble just before dusk, while precinct tenants, like the fashion designers and artisanal [gelato makers](#) housed inside **The Warehouse Artisan Studios** open their doors for friends and visitors to pop in throughout the night.



#### *Durban Tourism*

Not to be missed on your Station Drive crawl: The [African Art Centre](#), which features the work of art students and local craftspeople as part of a bigger mission to create opportunities for self-employment for some of the most disenfranchised populations in the province.

**Where To Stay:** Just a five-minute Uber ride from the Station Drive precinct and built on the site of eight heritage-listed buildings, the [Concierge Boutique Bungalows](#) feature an original 1920s façade with interiors by the Durban-based design firm [Egg](#). The feel is elevated quirk (think: modern cage pendant lights and mismatched nightstands) with the feel of a micro-hotel and touches of luxury that include printed robes and Japanese soaking tubs.



From \$89 per night.

[CHECK AVAILABILITY](#)

## FRIDAY

What the Concierge may lack in square footage, it certainly makes up for in charm, most notable in Egg's use of a shipping container to house the hotel's eatery, [Freedom Cafe](#). Stop in for trendy breakfast staples and remixes, such as a caprese toast with Roma tomatoes, fior di latte, basil pesto and two poached eggs. Or, if you're off to a late start, the city's Indian influences truly shine through in the form of "bunny chow," a hallowed-out loaf of bread filled with curry.



*Durban Tourism*

Then, lace up your walking shoes...

According to [Culture Trip](#), "**street art** has recently found new life in redevelopment projects across different Durban neighbourhoods, forming part of the urban aesthetic of this changing city, and giving voice to young locals who have something to say."



### *Durban Tourism*

Start at the now-familiar Station Drive — where illustrator and graffiti artist Shaun Oakley, AKA Damn Vandal, was commissioned to design several of the warehouse exteriors — and then make your way past these colorful [installations](#) for some visual storytelling and an Instagram opp.

Once your appetite is back in tact, hail a cab and venture out to the Umlazi township for an afternoon at [Max's Lifestyle](#).

It's hard to describe Max's in a word. The restaurant and lounge also features a barber shop and beauty salon, a men's and women's boutique, a car wash and an event space. And then there's the butcher shop, where you can pick out your favorite cut of meat to "braai" or barbecue. It is, in essence, a one-stop shop for a good time.



*Getty*

**Where To Stay:** If you're in need of a little weekend indulging, book a stay at [The Oyster Box](#) hotel, located on the Umhlanga beachfront overlooking the Indian Ocean and the iconic Umhlanga Lighthouse. The five-star pampering begins the moment you enter the lobby, just beyond which you'll find a 24-seat cinema with complimentary treats, an indoor-outdoor restaurant with a nightly curry buffet and afternoon teatime that Lewis Carroll would approve of, and a spa featuring a Turkish Hammam.

From \$300 per night.

[CHECK AVAILABILITY](#)

## **SATURDAY**

Prying yourself away from the lap of luxury will be tough, but worth it for a visit to the once-a-month [I Heart Market](#) set up just beyond the entry gates to the Moses Mabhida Stadium (a centerpiece of the Durban skyline, built for the 2010 World Cup).

The pop-up shopping experience offers a sampling of local flavors, both of the edible and the fashion variety, as well as fresh flowers, decor and the most adorable kidswear.

Just be sure to get there before 2pm, when the market closes up.



### *Durban Tourism*

Saturday nights in Durban are best spent with a perfectly crafted cocktail, the most delicious flatbread pizza, and the sounds of live jazz from across the African continent. It's a formula architect Ndabo Langa arrived at when he took over a former pub next to his office, outfitted it with curios, artwork and, well, chairs from his travels around the globe, and created [The Chairman](#) jazz club and lounge.

Live music starts around 11pm Friday through Sunday, but you'll want to arrive before the lights dim and the crowds pack in for a closeup of Langa's eclectic interior design.

### **SUNDAY**

The Station Drive precinct reinvents itself once more on Sunday mornings when the weekly [Morning Trade Market](#) takes over The Plant with a mix of fresh produce and artisan goods — welcome prospects after a night of imbibing.





*Lar Glutz*

And though Durban's modern edge makes it easy to overlook the region's Zulu roots, keep things in perspective by paying a visit to the [Phansi Museum](#), home to one of the largest collections of African arts and crafts in the world, including more than 4,000 artifacts, traditional attire and paintings you can buy off of the walls.