

Free-wheeling SA

SA is home to some of the most exquisite and unique fauna and flora in the world – and it sometimes takes a road trip to experience the thrill of wide-open spaces.

CHRISTOPHER BAKER TAKES THE **INDIAN ROADMASTER** WHERE IT'S NEVER BEEN BEFORE

Arriving at Bucklands Private Game Reserve conjured *Jurassic Park* déjà vu. An electric fence loomed overhead and the massive metal gate bore a huge sign: "Warning! Wild animals crossing and no fence". I pushed the gate closed behind

me, slammed the bolt shot and then hauled myself back into the saddle. The 2015 Indian Roadmaster is a rhino of a bike, but the chance of encountering a real rhino had me spooked. My nerves tingled as I eased out the silky-smooth clutch for the 3km run to the lodge.

"Many of our visitors come by motorcycle," owner Michele Stewart had assured me. Barely 100m along the track, I hit pools

of gravel and sand. Soon I was crawling the behemoth uphill over scree-covered rock ledges. The suspension sponged up the hammering and the controls proved perfectly calibrated, light and fluid, as I feathered the electronic drive-by-wire throttle and clutch to maintain momentum. But I sensed I was riding the full-dress tourer close to its off-asphalt limits.

I was soaked in sweat

when I finally pulled up to the quaint farmstead lodge.

"Oh, look!" exclaimed guide Owen Ackerman as I dismounted, pointing towards two white rhinos lumbering out of the bush.

Five days into my 10-day tour of SA, I was awed by my sleek cherry-red-and-cream ride

with looks to induce cheetahs' envy. The Roadmaster's graceful handling belied its weight as I explored Cape Town from my base at the Taj Cape Town hotel. Superbly balanced thanks to a low centre of gravity, the bike made effortless U-turns courtesy of a short wheelbase, a steep front rake and precise steering.

Acres of wrap-around fairing had shovelled aside the chilly autumn air as I headed south from Cape Town to the Cape of Good Hope. The torquey, 111-cubic-inch V-twin engine powered effortlessly up through cliff-face curves, then traced graceful arcs as



Clockwise: The Indian Roadmaster near Addo Elephant National Park. Lions with an eland kill, Kwandwe Private Game Reserve. Chef Robyn Stein at Phantom Forest Eco-Reserve, Cape of Good Hope. Gorah Elephant Camp.

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the road drilled down to Hout Bay. I was amazed by the bike's responsiveness and magical cornering. I threw it more aggressively into the curves. Then the scraping of a floorboard on tarmac warned me to ease off for less switch-back lean.

Arriving at the wind-whipped Cape headland, I turned east for the Garden Route and savoured the lion's growl of the thumper engine as the Roadmaster soaked up the miles. The six-speed shift proved

seamless and the ride smooth and solid, courtesy of a cast aluminium frame and perfectly synced suspension. The wide, deep-cushioned leather saddle was sumptuously comfortable; the ergonomics near-perfect. By sundown I arrived, still feeling fresh, at Phantom Forest Eco-Reserve nature lodge, cocooned in dwarf forest outside Knysna. Vervet monkeys scampered among the branches as I headed to the lantern-lit restaurant.

Beyond Port Elizabeth, I cut

north along the N10 and turned west for Addo Elephant National Park. SA's third-largest national park is a pachyderm paradise, with the world's densest population of tuskers. Barely a mile up the sloping dirt road, I spotted the jumbos, plus giraffe, ostrich and zebras.

"Yesterday two lions chased away a cheetah," said the gatekeeper at the entrance to Gorah Elephant Camp. "Right here, by the gate!" So I parked the bike and transferred by 4x4 vehicle to the de luxe-tented camp, centred on a converted Victorian farmstead adorned with animal heads and antiques.

After two days, I left Gorah and rode through a veil of cold rain, barely feeling a drop thanks to the electronic windshield, vast fairing and leg shields with knee-guard cubbies – ideal for storing my raingear (the R450 000 Roadmaster offers enough luggage space for the kitchen sink). I zig-

zagged over Edda Pass and arrived in sunshine at the entrance to Kwandwe Private Game Reserve.

"Are there lions?" I asked the guide sent to escort me at high speed along the corrugated dirt road leading to reception. "Yes, of course.

Don't stop!" she replied. Adrenaline fuelled my ride.

"Motorcyclists must resemble antelope to apex predators," I mused that evening on safari, as I watched three lions rip apart a freshly-felled eland against a blood-soaked sunset fit for a Hollywood epic.

No road ever felt as lonesome as the dirt track that led me to neighbouring Bucklands the next day.



The Indian Roadmaster at Grand Roche. Above left: A meal at Gorah Elephant Camp.

Useful information

- **Bucklands Private Game Reserve:** Tel: 072 736 3681. Visit: www.bucklandsreserve.co.za
- **Phantom Forest Eco-Reserve:** Tel: 044 386 0046. Visit: www.phantomforest.com
- **Gorah Elephant Camp:** Tel: 044 501 1111. Visit: www.gorah.hunterhotels.com
- **Kwandwe Private Game Reserve:** Tel: 046 603 3400. Visit: www.kwandwe.com