

Each resort also has a tour operator through which excursions and shopping trips can be organised. And never fear, you'll not eat alone – the resorts host live entertainment and dinner parties where singles can meet, mix and mingle. (Le Coco Beach keeps the music going until 2am.)

For more info www.kerzner.com or call ☎ (011) 285-2511.

Best time to go? Spring and autumn, says Kerzner International regional sales manager Marina Hirst.

GET BIKING It's a great way to see your country, meet like-minded people, and (bonus!) get really fit and toned. Cycling is a fast-growing sport: from spinning classes at the gym to the Karoo-to-Coast endurance race, it's attracting a mass of followers. Pack light and start touring... but beware, you could get hooked.

If you love the wild nature around Sabie in Mpumalanga, call Bikedoc ☎ (013) 784-1034 to book day trips, overnight or longer tours (from 40–120km) through the forests surrounding Sabie. Stay overnight in forestry huts.

If you prefer to be pampered, book yourself into one of Krivna's deluxe guest houses and phone Mountain Biking Africa ☎ (044) 382-0260. Owner Tony Cook will pick you up every morning to join a group on one of the area's many rides around cliffs, through forests or to the coast, and return you safely each evening (or overnight in a hiking hut when available).

For more info Regularly updated ride reviews, by province, are available from SA Cycling magazine ☎ (011) 293-7400.

Best time to go? Depends on seasonal weather conditions in each province (see above).

IN YOUR DREAMS

Been wanting to do something different and adventurous, but not sure if you dare? Come on! If you've saved up the dosh, just do it.

SHOP TILL YOU DROP There's nothing like a good spending spree for escapism, and it's one pursuit best done solo. If you can face days of pure commercial satiation, set your sights on these fine shopping destinations: Hong Kong, Singapore and Dubai. What can be better than burning plastic far away from home, not having to justify buying your third red skirt to anyone else? And where else can you afford to get Gucci sandals and a Joop bag? (But watch out for those fakes.)

These cities offer a huge selection of malls, department stores and designer boutiques (with exotic street markets scattered among the skyscrapers for contrast) and really good deals. Hotels are situated within walking distance of the central shopping districts.

For more info www.discoverhongkong.com or www.godubai.com. Singapore hosts an annual shopping festival each year (the next one is from 24 May to 7 July 2003) – visit www.greatsingaporesale.com.sg for details.

Best time to go? September to April. These exotic destinations can get very hot and humid from May to August.

POINT 'N' SHOOT Is that Bigfoot? If it is you could be in serious trouble, but most likely the biggest thing you'll be shooting on this holiday is a mountain through a wide-angle lens. Alaska has some of the world's most incredible scenery, and if you would like to learn photography it will be hard to take a bad picture here.

Pack your camera and running shoes and get ready for glaciers and old Russian settlements, the big-city lights of Anchorage (well, relatively big compared with the rest of Alaska) and boat tours. Share your happy snaps with the group (up to 10 people) each night during slide editing, critiques, lectures and discussions.

For more info Contact Barefoot Confessa on www.BCAtrips.com.

Best time to go? August 2003... because that's when the next tours are planned.

MURDER, MYSTERY AND MAYHEM Ever felt like you're being stabbed in the back? Take yourself off to the countryside on a murder mystery weekend and you may well be! If life's been a bit mundane lately and you prefer living on the edge, pack that suitcase and head for a whodunnit weekend in Ireland or the UK (think Gosford Park). A surprising number of 30-somethings are doing the same. Your chances of meeting a true friend are pretty slim, but if you're ready for some serious mind games this is the perfect solo holiday.

Each weekend (if you're going all that way you might as well make it a longer holiday) is themed (a wedding, will reading, award ceremony); so be prepared for thorough escapism. Enjoy the food (have someone else taste it first), spend the weekend with fellow guests and actors, and get the chance to yell 'Halt! Who goes there, friend or foe?' a lot.

For more info www.amazingdays.com or www.rpleycastle.co.uk (book via e-mail: reservations@boarsheadrpley.co.uk).

Best time to go? Any time, as long as you can handle those northern winters.

SOME FINE WINE, MADAME? It's a beautiful country, you'll drink exquisite wine and you'll hopefully come back more cultured than when you left. Do you need any other excuse to head directly to France and spend this year's well-earned bonus getting elegantly (we hope) tipsy?

Join a group of other vino-loving 30-somethings on a wine tour of top French wine estates, with experts who will tell you all you need to know and probably a bit more. And if you can't speak French? C'est la vie – tastebuds speak their own language. (Don't forget to eat... the food's apparently pretty good too.)

For more info www.wine-tours-france.com

Best time to go? Anytime you're thirsty.

GREAT EXCUSE TO WEAR THAT HAT Always been a Bonanza fan? Think you look terrific in cowboy boots? If you've always wanted to be a cowgal, pack your lasso, practise those flying horse-mounts and head west – to the American Midwest. (Now this is something you'll really want to do on your own – how many people do you want to see you lose that herd of cattle?)

Learn to lasso, round up cattle, drink like a cowboy and swear a lot on a ranch holiday in Arizona, Texas, Wyoming or New Mexico. Or if you'd prefer to be a healthy cowgirl (what next?), head for the Hills Heath Ranch in Canada for some pampering (on horseback).

For more info www.gorp.com for a range of ranches or e-mail info@hilshheathranch.com (for the healthy alternative).

Best time to go? After watching plenty of old Westerns. Ranch holidays offered all year.

TRAVEL TIPS

- Pre-book all your accommodation, flights and transfers. Don't leave anything to chance.
- Ensure your travel plans are door to door.
- Find out everything you can about your destination. Is it singles friendly – does it offer activities specifically targeted at singles, such as dinners, dances and group activities and outings?
- Avoid large, impersonal hotels. Opt for more intimate B&Bs and guest houses, and get to know your hosts and fellow guests.
- Join a walking tour wherever you are. You'll learn plenty about the culture and natural surroundings of your destination, and it's a great way to meet people.
- If you are travelling to a foreign country (both in language and culture), register your name with the nearest South African embassy or consulate.