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# AFRICAN STORYBOOK

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## Rolling in Undiscovered pleasures.



*The country's newest steam offering, it's got exclusivity and happy story written all over it.*

Possibly one of the most significant things one needs to know about Africa is that it is one of the few places on earth where people can really make a difference. Not only to the lives of others, but to themselves too.

I'm not necessarily talking charity here, because let's face it, in this fast-spinning, occasionally mindless world, not many out there really want to mix vacation with charity. But when it comes to personal discovery, unearthing something new and immensely beautiful - packed with story and integrity - while 'helping' others, is always welcome. Because most important to those on holiday is the opportunity to experience that which most others haven't.

That's what works about South Africa's Sisonke Stimela. The country's newest steam offering, it's got exclusivity and happy story written all over it. 'Happy' because it is designed to deliver tourism to a deeply rural, less-visited part of the country. And it is extremely well-priced, both in comparison to the country's other luxury rail offerings - the Blue Train and Rovos Rail - and in the dramatic landscape and experience that it offers.

And that's the other significant thing. Being new to the world of tourism - global and local - South Africa and Africa at large are rolling in undiscovered pleasures.



The Sisonke Stimela starts its steam-driven journey in the southern Drakensberg village of Creighton, pretty much the heart of Alan Paton country, he who wrote the South African classic, *Cry The beloved Country*.



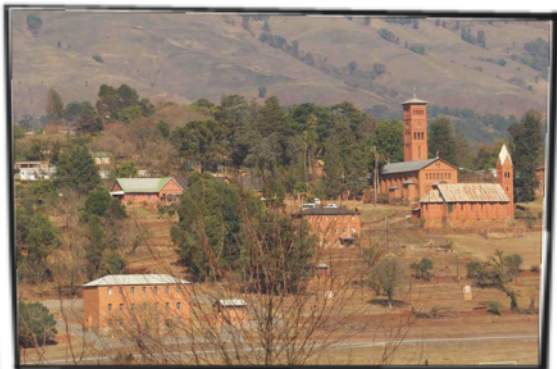
*Kings Grant is a B'nB miles from anywhere that most of us know.. Therein lies its beauty, plus excellent cuisine. And these cows across the road.*

The feel is vintage luxury, with a five-star hotel group managing the experience, or what the industry likes to call *product*. The cuisine is top-notch and the linen likewise, with a gloriously expansive king-size bed occupying most of the cabin and the bathroom boasting all the right fittings.

It's in this style that tourists are transported into the foothills of the Drakensberg and the little town of Underberg. This is where the experience really begins. The three options offered to the tourist are birding in seriously less-visited mountain habitats - with a variety of endemics to be spotted - traveling up Sani Pass to the border with Lesotho, and our personal favourite, walking into a piece of history never before told.

It's the story of an Austrian Trappist monk who in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century set himself a task of creating a self-sustaining world of beauty and education. By definition these monks aren't known for their speaking prowess, but the beauty they created cries out from this hilly countryside. Much of it remains, and - sadly - much of it has fallen to neglect. But as with many castles in Europe, therein too lies a story.

In just three days the visitor will get a taste of it all. Good for the experience, good for the future of steam trains and good for the local economy.



*Centecow mission, deep in the Umzimkulu Valley. The story behind the 19th century Trabbist missions is a combelling one.*

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*The southern Drakensberg is far off the beaten track. Natural beauty, excellent birding and a winning steam-train experience is what it offers.*



*Dudley Smith. Former dairy farmer turned local politician who sees tourism as the vehicle to fight unemployment. His story about the derelict hotel behind him is a gem. Gold-rush stuff.*