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FIRST CLASS AND THEN SOME, AT THE GRACE AT ROSEBANK

By Anne Z. Cooke, Tribune Media Services, [World's Fare](#)

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa -- If you're flying into Johannesburg, South Africa, the trailhead for wildlife adventure safaris here and in Botswana, there's a good reason to start and end your travels at the GRACE HOTEL in Rosebank.

Not just because this boutique hotel, in Joburg's posh northern suburbs, is both elegant and intimate. Elegance is a given. Or because the restaurant lays on a killer breakfast buffet and award-winning dinners, or because hot tea and nibbles are at hand all day in the lounge. Or even because each of the 60 guest rooms and 13 suites has wireless Internet access.

For me, the bit that tips the scale at this classic hotel is a feature that none of its more isolated competitors can top. And it is -- hold your breath -- a mall, the Mall at Rosebank, a sleek, multi-story shopping center and a haven for harried travelers. Connected directly to the Grace Hotel through an upstairs hallway door and a guarded walkway, the Mall at Rosebank is always a convenience and sometimes a lifesaver.

Now, know that I rarely rank a mall as an asset. Just the opposite, in fact. Gardens and trees are more to my taste. But when you're on the far side of the world, rushing to make connections and praying that you've ready for the unknown, it's a relief to find those important necessities two minutes away.

How about that suitcase, ripped open on the 17-hour flight from New York City? Buy a new one here in the luggage and leather shop. Did you forget to pack aspirin, toothpaste, mosquito repellent or sun glasses? These items, safari essentials, are sold at the drug store and pharmacy. Khaki shirts and shorts for your elephant encounters? Get them at the outdoor gear shop. Gifts, jewelry, toys, T-shirts? Pay with your credit card or in cash. Properly stroked, the ATM in the Mall gives South African rands.

If this weren't enough, the giant African Market on two floors of the mall, open every day, is a world traveler's dream. We shopped there before leaving the country, and found all the things we'd spotted in Victoria Falls, Botswana and Zambia, but couldn't carry (short-hop light aircraft impose strict weight limits).

- **WORD COUNT:** 734
- **POSTED** 02/01/2008 at 12:01 am EST
- **FOR RELEASE** 02/01/2008
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Just imagine. An acre or more of crowded stalls packed with colorful and exotic items:

Zulu baskets, flat Zimbabwean baskets, Central African carvings, stenciled fabrics, carved wood animals, Masai milk gourds, weavings, old books, paintings, prints, antique trade beads, costume jewelry, English and Dutch colonial collectibles and furniture.

None of this would matter, if The Grace, a family-owned property, weren't really first class. But it is. Individually decorated rooms and suites have king or twin beds, down and synthetic pillows, colonial reproduction furniture, silk draperies and patterned fabrics. Tiled bathrooms, outfitted with hairdryers, makeup mirrors and assorted lotions, are spotless. Roomy closets, electronic safes, telephones, minibars, tea-and-coffee makers, television and wireless Internet access are standard in every room. Warm colors, paintings and original prints lend a personal touch.

The area is attractive and safe, unlike much of downtown Johannesburg, where -- sad to say -- muggings are common. Not to mention that there's no historic old town for travelers to visit, no "there" there. An industrial city founded in 1886, Joburg was never a pioneer community but a hardscrabble settlement that sprang up in 1886 -- a byproduct of South Africa's newly discovered gold mines. Suburban areas like Rosebank were built later, as the city began to grow.

What's the last reason to stay at The Grace, in Rosebank? Hands-on personal service, a trained staff, a well-equipped business center and a central location in a tree-shaded neighborhood of offices, condominiums, restaurants, movie theaters and galleries. Tops for business travelers. And for adventurers, the perfect launch pad.

INCIDENTAL INTELLIGENCE:

RATES: Rooms for two start at 4,000 rands per night (about \$575). Book by email at [graceres\(at\)thegrace.co.za](mailto:graceres(at)thegrace.co.za); or call 011-27-011-280-7200; or write to P.O. Box 2639, Saxonwold, 2132 Johannesburg. Or visit www.thegrace.co.za.

CURRENCY EXCHANGES: The Grace accepts travelers' checks in exchange for Rands, but only during business hours, and NOT on weekends. Credit cards or cash are preferred.

WHERE: Forty-five minutes by car from Johannesburg's International Airport. At 54 Bath Ave., Rosebank, 2196 Johannesburg, South Africa.

Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty explore the world from Venice, Calif. They can be reached at TravelsWithAnne@cs.com.

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