

KZN Pizzazz

Although Durban's in clean-up mode, with plans for a newly-paved walkway from North Beach to The Point, compared with glamorous Umhlanga, the city's still Cinderella before the ball

With more sex appeal than a New York catwalk, Umhlanga and its Ridge are where it's at. Given a recent boost from the launch of the new King Shaka Airport just 15 minutes away, Umhlanga is set to become the commercial epicentre of the North Coast.

First made famous by Sol Kerzner's Beverly Hills Hotel, and now again in the headlines with the lauded lighthouse red and white-striped makeover of five-star hotel The Oyster Box, Umhlanga's rivalling Cape Town as SA's premier holiday destination.

With a wonderfully temperate climate (which gets positively sweltering in summer), its bronzed beaches entice visitors. And at just two hours' flight from Cape Town, and one from Jo'burg, it's the ideal location for a break.

Making the *Condé Nast Traveller* magazine's 2010 Hot List in two categories, The Oyster Box debuts with listings under Hot Hotels and Hot Spas, following its two-and-a-half-year, R500 million revamp.

Mother-and-daughter team Bea and Toni Tollman of Red Carnation Hotels, who purchased the landmark

hotel in 2006, have taken everything good and glamorous about the original and expanded it with consummate style. And although each room's individually decorated, it's the public areas that are most alluring.

The Oyster Bar is decorated in champagne off-white, with shades of mother-of-pearl reflecting its renowned oyster shells (shucked on request and grown in the hotel's own oyster beds).

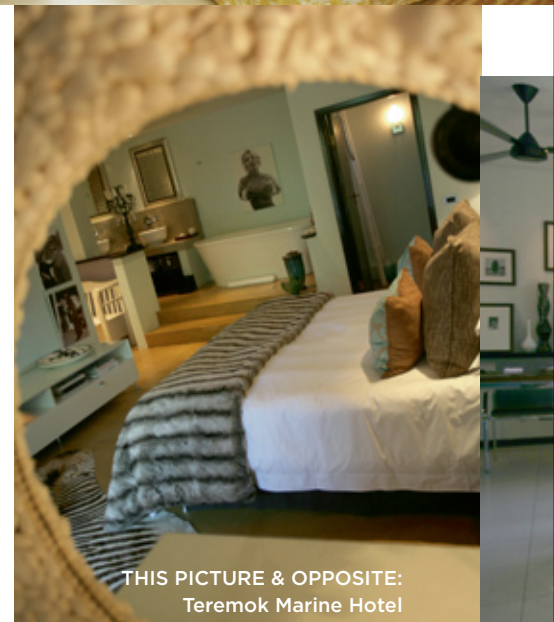
The gourmet Grill Room's white leather armchairs and plush blue and white checked carpets transform on Saturday nights into glam dinner and dancing to the Simon Kerdachi Trio. And at the Lighthouse Bar, you can listen to Adrian Beecham while gazing out to sea and connecting to the free Wi-Fi.

At around R5 000 per room per night, it's not the cheapest accommodation in Umhlanga, but certainly the most fabulous option.

Down the road at the eight-roomed Teremok Marine Hotel, you pay approximately half these rates, but still get loads of luxury and space (as well



THIS PICTURE & BELOW: The Oyster Box



THIS PICTURE & OPPOSITE:
Teremok Marine Hotel

Licorna Beach



as breakfast).

Managing owner Kim Davidson brings a wonderful energy and gracious hospitality to all guests. Although top-floor rooms have sea views, I recommend a ground-floor suite like the Douglas, with its garden outlook and large stoep near the pool.

Each room has its own soundtracks, fragrance and decor, to further personalise the experience. Our room featured mounted black-and-white portraits of Marilyn Monroe.

The wellness centre and gym were recently enlarged and upgraded and two full-time therapists offer Derma-logica and other treatments. If you're feeling slothful, there's a vast selection of classic and new DVDs to enjoy in the privacy of your own suite, while iPod dock-

ing stations and separate WC with bidets are standard.

For a luxury, but very affordable self-catering option, Licorna Beach offers superbly maintained, serviced apartments, plus all the mod-cons (satellite TV,

laundry, covered parking, fully equipped kitchen and stunning sea views from most suites) – ideal for family holidays. Safaris to nearby game reserves, golfing expeditions, white river-rafting, microlight flights, swimming with dolphins and visits to casinos in the region can all be arranged from here.

If beach bathing isn't your scene, the magnificent downstairs pool-cum-braai area provides freshwater swimming with the sound of the breakers a few metres away. Stock up on groceries at Buxton's shopping centre, just up the road, or visit one of the many restaurants in the area.

For more selective retail therapy or extreme sports, the Gateway Centre is nearby with its double-point break-wave machine, movies and loads of shopping options.

Last but certainly not least is Southern Sun's new Garden Court Umhlanga, which doubles up nicely for both corporate and leisure trips.

Styled with a fresh, contemporary feel, yet another dynamic woman designer was behind the look – Jessica White, Partner at Louis Karol Architects.

The hotel's restaurant, Mnandi, offers delicious a la carte options, while the Afro Fusion Action Bar has a comprehensive tapas menu. In addition, private functions are well catered for in the beautifully decked-out meeting rooms. **D**

Garden Court Umhlanga



USEFUL CONTACTS

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