

## On the radar Rare chance to see 'almost human' fossils in South Africa

Pretoria ●  
● Cradle of  
Humankind  
Johannesburg ●



Gateway to pre-history ... Maropeng visitor centre at the Cradle of Humankind

At first glance, it may seem there is not much there. The Cradle of Humankind, a remote spot 30 miles north-west of Johannesburg, has only plains, trees and a visitor centre. But over 200,000 years ago, a species of hominin similar to homo sapiens called this place home. It's one of the world's most important sites for paleoanthropologists, and from this week it is also the place for visitors to see fossilised remains only recently brought to light at an exhibition called Almost Human, as well as a permanent display on human evolution.

The remains were uncovered in November 2013 during a three-week expedition, called Rising Star after the local cave system. The chamber where the remains were found is 30 metres below ground, and access is via gaps so small that team members had to extend one arm in front of their bodies, superman-style, to get through. For this reason, the six-strong group was composed of small, slim women, who earned the nickname the underground astronauts.

If they had slipped while climbing down the rocks, they could have dropped 20 metres to their deaths. The expedition was so dangerous that a medical team was on hand, with doctors trained to go underground to treat any broken bones. The results were 1,550 bones unearthed, from 15 individuals, more than all previous Africa expeditions combined. They are the ritually buried remains of an extinct species scientists hadn't known

existed: *Homo naledi*, shorter than homo sapiens and with a smaller skull, who lived about 236,000 years ago.

Getting their hands on this kind of collection is a dream for paleoanthropologists. Fossilised hominid skeletons are extremely rare, and most scientists go their entire lives without uncovering a single bone. And now these finds are on display not only for scientists but for the wider public.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," said Professor Lee Berger, who led the initiative. "Our last exhibition [of the first *homo naledi* remains, from late 2015] drew 3,000 visitors a day, with people waiting in line for up to four hours."

The visitor centre, called Maropeng – meaning "return to the place of origin" in the local Setswana language – also houses a permanent exhibition taking visitors on a journey through human evolution. It uses the standard museum tools: replicas, interactive displays and photographs, but no actual fossils. During this special exhibition – which will run for at least a month – partial skeletons of a child and an adult male, and an almost intact skull, will be on display.

As well as seeing the exhibition visitors can tour other caves, go on guided hikes, stay at the 23-room boutique Maropeng Hotel (doubles from £53 B&B, maropeng.co.za) and eat at a restaurant with views of the Witwatersberg and Magaliesberg mountains – pausing perhaps to raise a glass to *Homo naledi*.

● maropeng.co.za, open daily 9am-5pm, adult R120 (£7), 4-14 years £3.80  
Alyson Krueger

## A great little place I know A cafe in India where Dylan is Forever Young

### Charukesi Ramadurai

On an evening stroll along the hilly roads of Shillong, in India's north-eastern state of Meghalaya, I came across a sign for Dylan's Cafe. Given Shillong's reputation as the rock music capital of India, I was not really surprised. The staircase up to the first-floor cafe is lined with vinyl, while rare framed



posters of the American musician greet visitors from the wall.

Set up just over a year ago, this cafe is a homage to the man in every imaginable manner: cushion covers have his face on them, and there is themed merchandise, poetry readings and live music nights.

The theme was a natural choice: Shillong is Dylan-mad, holding celebratory concerts each year on his birthday; and 69-year-old musician Lou Dajaw is a living local legend thanks to his renditions of Dylan's songs.

The eclectic menu features comfort food from across the world, from Manchow soup to fiery hot chicken wings and all-American pancakes. Diehard fans can tuck into Bob's Burger and let Dylan's gravelly voice, constantly ringing out from the speakers, soothe their soul.  
● dylanscafeshillong.com

## Snapshots Alex and Madie on Bogotá street art



**Colours of La Candelaria**  
We are a French-American couple from San Francisco wrapping up our year-long trip around the world. La Candelaria is a historic yet youthful district full of energy and colourful street art that reminds us of our neighbourhood back home.



**Graffiti revolution**  
The street art movement in Bogotá took off six years ago, following the shooting of graffiti artist Diego Felipe Becerra by police. After graffiti protests across the city, the mayor decided to promote and finance artists within designated zones.

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**Cultural echoes**  
Colombian street artist Guache is known for combining ancestral imagery with geometric patterns and shapes. His vibrant work can be found throughout Bogotá.  
● Follow Alex and Madie at [instagram.com/alexandmadie](https://www.instagram.com/alexandmadie)



## World view Searching for a signal in Kenya

For once, the aerial adjustments aren't about getting a clearer television picture. Instead, Maasai warrior Kamunu Saitoti scans the Kenyan rangelands for a signal from a number of lions that have been fitted with radio collars. Saitoti is part of an organisation called Lion Guardians, a conservation initiative started in 2007 to find ways for the Maasai and lions to coexist. Scientists estimate that lion populations in Africa have fallen by more than 40% in the past 20 years and the 20,000 or so wild lions that remain occupy just 8% of the species' historical range.

Photograph by Marcus Westberg/  
Life Through A Lens

**Transatlantic Ryanair**

Ryanair has started selling flights to the US and Latin America in a new partnership with Air Europa. The flights, to 20 destinations, will depart from Madrid. [ryanair.com](http://ryanair.com)

**Here for the bier**

Germany's original beer festival, Bergkirchweih, (it's 55 years older than Munich's Oktoberfest) runs from 1-12 June in Erlangen, near Nuremberg. Cheers! [berch.info](http://berch.info)

**The foodie traveller ...****Cools off in Melaka with Malaysia's favourite dessert**

Malaysia's Unesco world heritage city of Melaka, better known by its old colonial name of Malacca, draws visitors not just for its melting pot history of Malay, Chinese, Portuguese, Dutch and British influences, but as a foodie paradise symbolised by the local *nyonya* cuisine.

While signature dishes include the rich laksa soups and spicy assam fish, Melaka boasts its own unique version of Malaysia's favourite dessert, *nyonya cendol*, pronounced "chendol". A mountain of shaved ice is piled into a bowl, topped off with red beans, green jelly-like rice noodles flavoured with fragrant pandan leaf, and creamy coconut milk. And then comes the special hometown ingredient, lashings of dark brown, syrupy *gula melaka*, made from palm sugar, which is more smoky than saccharine sweet.

It is wickedly delicious, and a great

thirst quencher in the sweltering temperatures. And a bowl costs three Malaysian ringgits, just 50p. The most popular place to try cendol is at a street stall in Melaka's heritage Red Square.

Most cendol stalls use modern kit to make the shaved ice, but it is worth tracking down one of the few remaining spots that still use a cast-iron contraption to shave rough blocks of ice into wafer-thin flakes. The hole-in-the-wall Min Chong Hygienic Ice Cafe (on Facebook) has been going for over 70 years, and the owner, whose father founded the business, refuses to change anything about the way cendol is made, proudly insisting: "Once you try my cendol, you will immediately taste the difference."

● *Min Chong Hygienic Ice Cafe*, 43 Jalan Bunga Raya, open daily 11.30am-6pm, on Facebook

**John Brunton**



Melting pot ... cendol mixes syrup, noodles and beans with ice shavings

**Travel in numbers**  
**Bailang bridge ferris wheel, China**

145m

Height of world's largest spokeless ferris wheel, opened in Shandong

10m

Higher than the London Eye

4,600

Tons the 36-carriage wheel weighs

**Five of the best**  
**Restaurants near**  
**Rome attractions****Trevi Fountain: Al Moro**

One of Rome's most historic trattorias and a favourite of well-heeled travellers who love the sort of dishes that have virtually vanished from the city's tables: sweetbreads with mushrooms (€28), calve's liver (€24), and tagliatelle with tomatoes and chicken giblets (€22).

● [ristorantealmororoma.com](http://ristorantealmororoma.com)

**Castel Sant'Angelo: Sorpasso**

Sorpasso is in three distinct zones: standing and seated customers sipping wine outside; a bar flanked by hanging cured meats; and a dining room serving a full menu. The first two are ideal for snacks such as cheese or salami plates (€9-10) or salads (from €6.50).

● [sorpasso.info](http://sorpasso.info)

**Spanish Steps: Antico Caffè Vitti**

Retreat from one of the most congested areas in Rome to Vitti's outdoor tables on a relatively tranquil, elegant piazza. The 120-year-old family-run cafe serves coffee and pastries at breakfast and sandwiches at lunch. In the evening, tables fill up with workers.

● [vitti.it](http://vitti.it)

**MAXXI: Enoteca Mostò**

The Flaminio district around the MAXXI gallery attracts culture vultures who stick around in the area's casual bistros. Among them is Mostò, a spartan wine bar serving steak tartare and beef carpaccio (both around €15), and buffalo mozzarella (around €13).

● On Facebook

**Pantheon: Armando al Pantheon**

In spite of its location, this Roman institution is dedicated to serving soulful classics, such as spaghetti alla gricia (€10.50). Armando opened in 1961 and now his children and grandchildren run the place.

● [armandoalpantheon.it](http://armandoalpantheon.it)

**Katie Parla**

See the full list of 10 Rome restaurants on Tuesday at [theguardian.com/travel](http://theguardian.com/travel)