

# From the heart of the city

News from the heart of the city where JoburgPlaces operates the Thunder Walker on Gandhi Square.



Never a dull moment in the city! While some regeneration projects are steaming ahead, the city council, provincial and national government, with various law enforcing authorities, seem to be at war with the city and its people.

We are appalled by the raids and attacks on the migrant communities of Johannesburg that even resulted in South Africans being profiled as 'foreign' and jailed. The failure by our authorities to understand what asset our migrant communities are to the city is disappointing to the extreme. Headlines such as 'city locked down' (while 95% of the city was fully functional) only served to scare customers away from the thousands of legitimate businesses in town, resulting in another cycle of urban decline as businesses give up and abandon their premises.

My wishes for the city are simple:

1. Please can we have a mayor and city council that focus on basic public services and management of public space? Rather than trying to run campaigns targeting national politics. Our city council should be working on a proper waste management system that involves waste collection points and recycling stations for the densely populated parts of the city where wheelie bins are in short supply and where waste piles up as it is left for collection but not collected. We also desperately need functional streetlights and external lights on all sidewalks and building facades. It does not help at all that a project such as Jewel City precinct is rising, yet most streetlights in the area are off at night, leaving it dodgy and unsafe.
2. Please can our authorities understand that Johannesburg is a city of migrants? It is its unique selling point. Where else in the world can you eat cuisine from so many African countries? Where else in the world can you enjoy foods from so many countries from other continents too? We should embrace our migrant communities and help them formalise their residence and businesses. Imagine we could position Johannesburg as a Pan-African culinary delight where you can enjoy foods from more than 50 African countries and at least another 50 from around the world? Imagine what a tourism, travel and hospitality industry we could build right here in downtown. Imagine travellers could buy traditional clothing and craft as well as contemporary fashion, art and design from all over African and the world here in downtown Johannesburg – and without having to worry about a police raid trying to chase out the 'foreigners'!

It is time for Johannesburg's people to embrace its diversity and migrant culture and to make most of it – and to speak out against politicians, be they DA, ANC or any other party who are openly campaigning against immigration!

Now let's see what else is happening in the heart of Jozi.



## Town Square coming on stream

Our new 200-seater Town Square Banqueting Hall at the Thunder Walker is almost complete, and we will be ready to host our first wedding on 7 September. We will post pictures of this beautiful venue as soon as the sealant on the glistening 115-year old timber floors are dry!

If you are looking for a space to host a function, a year-end party, a wedding or conference then Town Square is the space for you. It can also be combined with Scatterlings Restaurant and Zwipi Underground for a bigger event. There simply is no other more astonishing event space available in this city!



## Migrant teas at Scatterlings

Scatterlings Restaurant is operating again as the bulk of the Town Square construction work is now complete. Scatterlings boasts a brand-new glass door at 110 Fox Street and serves the most exciting menu of migrant teas, migrant cuisine and cocktails from its tea bar. Scatterlings is open 6am-3pm on weekdays and 9am-3pm on Saturdays. Eating at Scatterlings is an exciting experience of migrant infusions. Try it, you won't be disappointed!



## Zwipi Undeground proves popular

It is certainly Zwipi Underground, our dinner restaurant in the old bank vault, that is attracting the most attention. Zwipi Underground is currently open to the public on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday nights. Both for formalised storytelling dinners and normal table bookings for set-menu experiences.

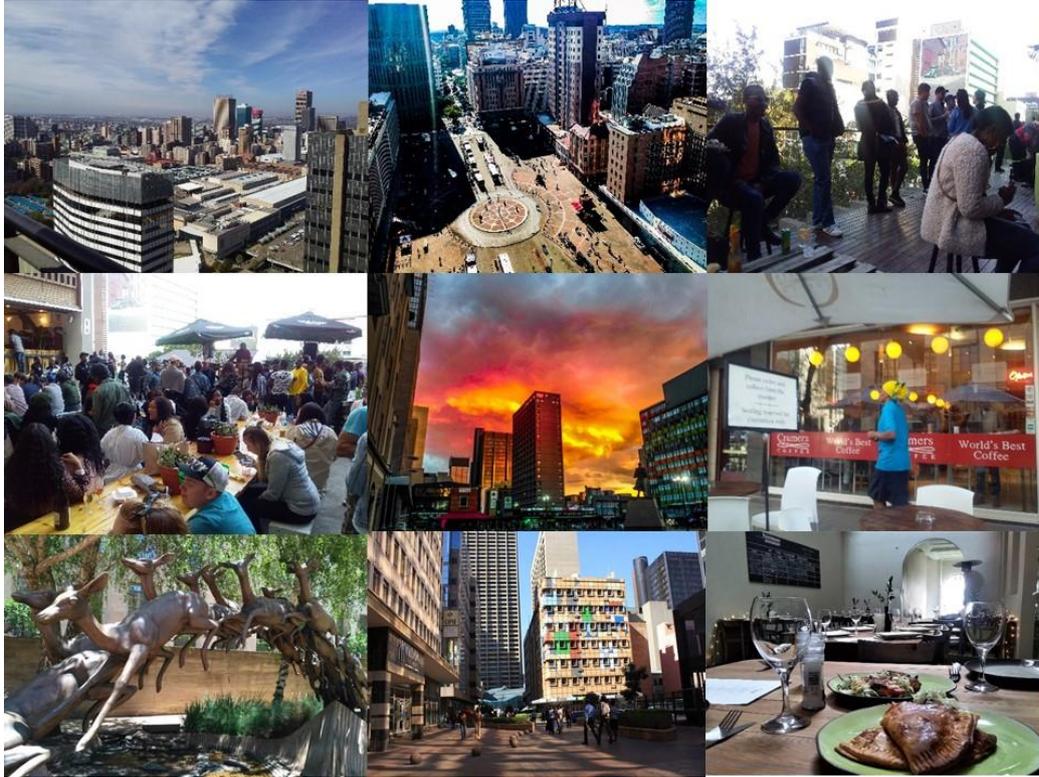
We are already fully booked for Saturday 24 August so be sure to book your table for any other night now! More info on storytelling dinners and set menus available on [www.joburgplaces.com](http://www.joburgplaces.com)



## Wednesday Wealth SPECIAL OFFER!

Now you can feel wealthier on a Wednesday as you get more bang for your buck! JoburgPlaces is offering a special deal for all storytelling dinners at its Zwipi Underground restaurant at the Thunder Walker on WEDNESDAY nights: 25% off on all bookings made for Wednesday nights for the remainder of August and September. The special offer is conditional on the booking being paid before 30 August 2019.

Migrant Cuisine Storytelling Dinner at R375 per person instead of R500 per person. Secret Underground Storytelling Dinner at R446,25 per person instead of R595 per person! For more information and available dates visit [www.joburgplaces.com](http://www.joburgplaces.com)



## Tours remain our core

Without tours, we never would have discovered so many hidden gems in the city and we probably never would have embarked on creating the Thunder Walker out of the historic Somerset House either.

JoburgPlaces remains a tour business first and foremost and our wide variety of tours offer a whole gamut of options to explore the city. There is simply nothing better than walking in the city, taking in the astonishing history, architecture, people, places and vibe!

We have regular speciality tours on weekends that include the following:

- Viewpoints & Watering Holes (next up on 14 September)
- Money, Banks & Vaults (next up on 21 September)
- Urban Farming (next up on 14 September)
- Fashion District & Little Addis (next up on 31 August)
- Or Origins & Migration (next up in October)
- Craft Breweries & Distilleries (next up in October)
- Regenerating Inner-city Tour (next up in October)

We also do daily public morning walking tours of the city that you can join at a per person rate, while weekday afternoons are available for private tour bookings (any route). Our daily public tour schedule is as follows (9am-1pm):

- Monday: Marshalltown Tour
- Tuesday: City Centre Tour
- Wednesday: Fashion District & Little Addis
- Thursday: Maboneng
- Friday: Thunder Walker Origins



## Why our future is in the city

The dream of urban regeneration in the Johannesburg inner-city is both dead and alive. This dream has seen countless false starts and even more false stops. Town is littered with fantastic successes and tragic failures.

In the early 2000s, carefully planned interventions produced positive results. While businesses continued to abandon the city centre throughout the 1990s, the move of the Gauteng Provincial Government into town stemmed the tide. It brought new, upwardly mobile and economically active people to the office spaces of the city. New cafes and shops opened consequently. Property entrepreneurs started converting derelict buildings into renewed office spaces for start-up businesses and into trendy apartments for urban entrepreneurs.

The then provincial government and city council both understood the need to stop the rot of inner-city decline and to spearhead a new inner-city economy. The focus was on the improvement of public space to bring attention to the potential of the city. The hope was that the private sector would follow and invest in the renovation of many derelict buildings. The concept succeeded spectacularly – from projects such as Constitution Hill to the Nelson Mandela Bridge and the upgrades of Newtown around Mary Fitzgerald Square. Also, the Fashion Kapitol and the general improvement of sidewalks, parks and squares from Braamfontein to the Fashion District and Marshalltown. Street art transformed the sides of dreary, brutalist brick and concrete buildings as hundreds of buildings got converted into thousands of new, affordable rental apartments. The city was on the up.

One of the most spectacular transformations of the time, involved the pedestrianisation of Main Street, initially only on the Anglo American campus around 2002 and later extending all the way to Gandhi Square. The square itself also got a remake around 1999, creating a far safer and cleaner space. By the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Joburg inner-city was back on the map.

By 2010, private sector investment resulted in the conversion of countless office and industrial buildings into affordable rental apartments, appealing to the emerging middle class. The city became easier accessible through new public infrastructure such as the Gautrain station at Park Station, as well as Rea Vaya routes and bus stations. In Braamfontein an entire student village mushroomed overnight. In Jeppestown and City & Suburban, Maboneng shined the way for a reimagined city with everything from art to apartments and astonishing owner-operated retail businesses.

With its incredible history, heritage and melting pot of people, cultures, ideas and creativity, downtown Jozi made it back onto world tourism maps and traveller 'must visit' lists. "It is the place to be. The new Berlin where an entire city core is being repurposed and remade by a young, creative generation", the travel media enthused.

During the same time, migrants continued to stream into the city from all over Africa and the world. In the process remaking city districts into distinct villages with the Ethiopian Quarter probably the most astonishing and surprising of all. Entrepreneurs began to view town as the place to launch new ventures. A new brand of destination establishments opened all over the city. From Arts-on-Main and the Museum of African Design (MOAD) in Maboneng to The Sheds@1Fox in Ferreirastown. From The Forum at Turbine Hall in Newtown to Che Argentinian and Origins Coffee in Maboneng. From the Orbit jazz club and Love Food Kitchen in Braamfontein to Hangout Jozi and Joziburg Lane at One Eloff. Joburg city centre was the place where entrepreneurs' dreams flourished. It was not unlike the 1880s when migrant entrepreneurs poured into the new city of gold.

But Joburg always had an underlying reality of broken dreams and phantom gold rushes. Things often did not work out as envisaged. Yet over its 130 year-short history, Joburg and its people survived every boom and bust the city had seen. Those who adapted to the trends of the time, always succeed and it would be no different this time.

Those who attempted to remake the city during the 2010s faced many new and often unforeseen challenges. The initial impetus to improve public space soon waned. City council-led initiatives continued to roll-out, but the quality of projects deteriorated at an alarming pace. Mary Fitzgerald Square was repaved once again. Yet, this time it destroyed the unique character and sense of place. Beyers Naude Square (Library Gardens) got 'upgraded' but subsequently looked worse than before many millions were spent. Atwell Gardens, a small park immediately south of Park Station, was first spectacularly upgraded; only to deteriorate into a camping ground for homeless people, the desperate and destitute.

During the 2010s, a lack of care at all levels of government cost the city dearly. The failure to renovate provincial government-owned buildings and allowing other provincial government buildings to deteriorate to the point where they had to be abandoned, created a new set of structures standing derelict in the best parts of town. At the same time, basic city council services such as maintenance of public space, street lighting and waste management began to fail. Private residential developments also often maximised rental returns at the expense of creating living spaces that would appeal to the emerging middle class.

By 2016 a new local government took power. The new council appeared hellbent on abandoning any policies or plans of their predecessors. The focus shifted from improving public space to the city council itself tackling the issue of hijacked and derelict buildings. Many tenders for the remake of these buildings have been awarded since. Yet, very little has happened in terms of actual construction and improvement. The city seems focused only on affordable housing (which is much needed) but the risk is to create a low-income slum instead of a mixed economy that presents opportunities to the people living in the city.

At the same time, the city has abandoned the concept of public space improvement, maintenance and management. Especially noticeable in the past three years is a perceived increase of crime and grime. Most prominent is the total lack of a workable waste management system with the city becoming significantly dirtier. Infrastructure appears to be deteriorating by the day. Street- and public space lights are out of order throughout the city. Sidewalks have more open manholes than they have walkable surfaces. Homelessness has skyrocketed and observers wonder if it could be due to evictions from buildings earmarked for the city-led renovations. It is easy to drive or walk through downtown Jozi today and to become totally despondent. The regeneration dream is indeed dead it seems.

The recent decline has resulted in some of the most prominent 'poster' establishments of the initial regeneration drive giving up on town. There was the much-publicised liquidation of Propertuity, the driver behind the initial Maboneng transformation. There was the Forum Company abandoning the spectacular Turbine Hall, MOAD closing and Origins Coffee, Soul Souvlaki and Che Argentinian packing up in Maboneng. In Braamfontein, Love Food Kitchen and Orbit Jazz closed their doors. Some moved to the 'safety' of the suburbs while others simply seized to exist.

Yet a city operates in cycles. New initiatives depend on visionary entrepreneurs who are often the initiators and who later make way for more sustainable concepts. In the case of Jozi, all is not lost, new establishments are still opening. People are still trying their luck in the City of Gold, even if it is an ongoing struggle.

From Urbanogoli at 1Fox to Marabi Club at Hallmark House in Maboneng. From the Ginologist Distillery and Little Fox Bar at 1Fox to Time Anchor Distillery and Agog in Maboneng. From Food Lovers Eatery and the Artist in Braamfontein to Hillbrewed Coffee in Ellis Park. From Urban Backpackers and Café Noir in Marshalltown to the Thunder Walker with its Zwipi Underground on Gandhi Square, the dream of reinventing the city is very much alive.

A whole gamut of different property investors has bought up Propertuity's buildings. Hallmark House will soon reopen a high-end hotel with a spectacular rooftop space too. Around Absa Campus and the erstwhile Jewel City, Divercity is developing thousands of new apartments. Around Gandhi Square OPH Properties continues to bring improved office space onto the market. In Braamfontein, South Point is building a brand-new 17-storey residential tower.

Around Marshalltown, long-established businesses from Cramers Coffee to the Reef Hotel, City Perks Café and the Mapungubwe Hotel continue to trade. Around Main Street, a few old offices buildings have recently been converted to apartments too. And the retail businesses are beginning to adapt to the reality of a city that is not only alive during office hours, but over weekends and in the evenings

too. The Spar on Gandhi Square is now open 24 hours a day as is MacDonald's. Woolworths Foods on Main Street is now open on Saturday afternoons and Sunday mornings as people living around there need groceries.

In the vicinity a new Dischem, Clicks and Shoprite have opened too. In the heart of Marshalltown, the Rand Club has seen many improvements and renovations – having opened its bar to the public for drinks and lunch and a new map museum and bookstore in the basement. The Club even boasts some hotel rooms again. Diagonally across the street, Bridge Books continue to delight the literary folk and the Gentleman's Barber does steady trade. In fact, town's regeneration dream is very much alive and still on the up.

Bank City is expanding with cranes standing over a new parking garage while the old Natal Bank building has been spectacularly renovated into offices for Ornico, showing off the most creative flair. At Corner House and National Bank House, coding companies and advertising businesses operate from prime office space while a once derelict banking hall now advertises space for events, parties and weddings.

But the regeneration dream is at the cusp. It can go either way. For it to survive - and eventually to thrive - two major interventions are needed. First a better commitment by all spheres of government and secondly, steadfast support from the people of Jozi.

The city council needs to do much better at managing and maintaining public space, infrastructure and services. The provincial government needs to take responsibility for its derelict, empty-shell buildings littering the skyline. On the other hand, Jozi's upwardly mobile people need to give up on the mundane suburban lifestyle and invest in their city – not necessarily in property but most importantly in frequenting town and spending their money locally. But for this to happen the city needs to provide the public space in which people feel comfortable and safe. In this regard it is encouraging to notice sidewalks in Eloff Street being repaved and sidewalks on Main Street east of Gandhi Square being significantly widened.

The city council needs to provide much better leadership and a clear vision for what the city core should become in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is the era of African urbanisation. Massive cities will rise all over this continent in the next 50 years or more. Migration will increase as people flock to centres of opportunity and where resources can be shared efficiently and sustainably.

Joburg is desirable. This is clear from migration, travel and tourism trends. Joburg is also a very wasteful, inefficient and unsustainable city where the middle class believe they are entitled to suburban homes, pollution-causing highways and cheap coal-fired electricity.

Joburg needs a mindset change. Joburg city centre needs to be re-envisioned into a Wakanda of sorts. A city where people of mix income live in the same buildings: luxury penthouses and affordable rental apartments side by side. Where people can walk and use public transport rather than commute on a highway. Where wealthier residents can create business and job opportunities right where they live. Where poorer people can get access to jobs and opportunities. Where schools, clinics, hospitals, parks and public gathering spaces are readily available and easily accessible. Where businesses stay open day and night, running double and triple shifts, increasing turnover and creating jobs in the process.

A city where we utilise solar power and gas from landfill. Where we recycle waste and generate less waste. Where we grow food in urban farms and generate electricity from rooftop solar panels. Where we embrace and celebrate our migrant diversity. Where we build a tourism and hospitality industry that makes the most of our Pan-African nature. Where you can eat food from over 50 African countries and experience the richness of African cuisine, music, culture, performance, storytelling and much more – not only from African but from all over the world. Joburg inner-city should be positioned as a melting pot of the world's people and cultures. A place that people want to visit and want to live in.

It is ironic that the city council planners and managers (and that of the province and national government) still view the inner-city as a place where people commute to for work, only to commute home again. The metro and national police are nowhere to be seen patrolling the streets and keeping people safe. Instead corporate-sponsored private security line the streets during peak-hour traffic during the week, keeping commuters safe from smash-and-grabs. But there is no security lining those same streets on weekends when travellers and locals alike come to town to revel in the history, culture, nightlife and more.

I often wonder if it is only the upwardly mobile, corporate-employed who deserves safety and security in town? What about the rest of us? Are the people of the inner-city too black, too poor or too foreign to deserve to be kept safe? While any of these excuses would be a shocking admission for the lack of

safety officers in the streets, we the people of the inner-city are none of that. We are not black, young or foreign. We are all of those and much more. We come from all races, creeds, colours and backgrounds and we come from all over South Africa, Africa and the world. We create and sustain a mesmerising city of diversity!

Our local and provincial government should embrace us in our diversity and provide us with a better platform from where to thrive, live, play, work and create businesses. We can and want to regenerate the city and make it the place it is supposed to be!

So, Mr Mayor. Please switch on the lights on the pylons of the Nelson Mandela Bridge and along the Kerk Street Market. Mr Premier, please save the vacant buildings such as the Hanging Tower in Fox Street from deteriorating completely!

Despite the significant challenges, especially in terms of a quality public environment, we believe in the future of our city. We believe this future will arrive despite the successes or failures of today's politicians. We believe that we must start and continue with regeneration by investing in our city!



## Invest in the city

Become part of the regeneration plans for our city. Make an investment that will not only yield attractive returns but also have a meaningful impact on the city. Invest in a hotel apartment and help us realise the complete renovation of the Thunder Walker building while also boosting travel and tourism in the city. We are already busy with plans to develop the **Balcony Gardens Boutique Hotel** on the top two floors of the Thunder Walker building. We are creating seven beautiful apartments with wooden floors and pressed ceilings, but a modern, loft-style character. Investors can buy a raw shell and then pay an additional fee for the renovation of the space to completion. JoburgPlaces will then sign a lease to rent the apartment back for five years in order to operate the Balcony Gardens Boutique Hotel.

Interest is already significant. Investors are standing ready to sign for apartments so if you want a part in this fantastic opportunity, be sure to contact us during August 2019. We are hoping to start building before the end of this year and to open the hotel by mid 2020!

For more information email [gerald@joburgplaces.com](mailto:gerald@joburgplaces.com) or send a whatsapp to 082 894 5216.