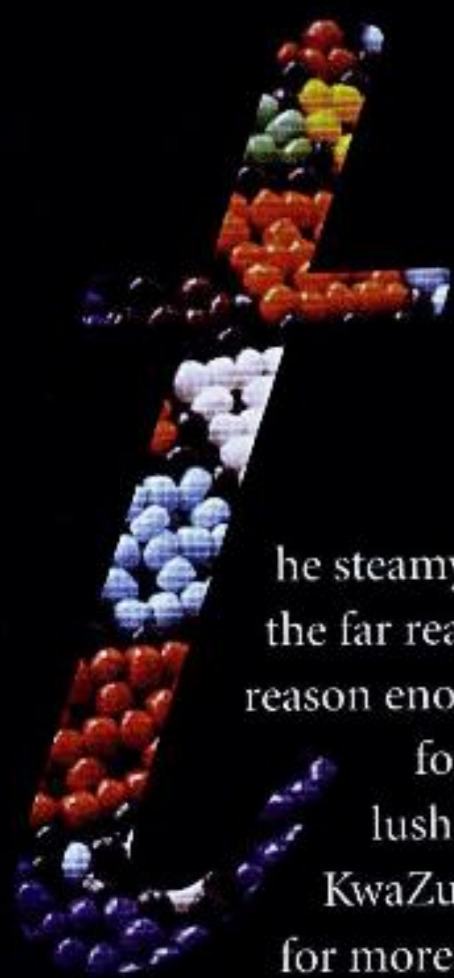


WELCOME TO the Kingdom of the Zulus

Richard Holmes



The steamy tropical climate in the far reaches of Zululand is reason enough to head straight for the beach, but this lush north-east corner of KwaZulu-Natal is famous for more than powdery white sand and secret beaches you'll have all to yourself.

The ancestral lands of the famous Zulu king Shaka offer everything from historical landmarks and bloody battlefields to luxurious Big Five escapes. It's no wonder he defended the rolling hills and sub-tropical coastline to the death!

A good, if unashamedly touristy, place to start any tour of Zululand is Shakaland.

And by the way, it's more dramatic when you say it like James Earl Jones and throw in a drumbeat or two.

"Shakaland! Doo-doom!"

Originally built as the set for the 1986 movie 'Shaka Zulu', Shakaland is a re-creation of the king's Great Kraal overlooking the Phobane Lake. Although assegai-wielding warriors will turn up the cheese to welcome you to Shaka-Disney, it's still a good place to learn a little about the Zulu nation. The Nandi experience is a worthwhile display of Zulu culture and customs, while tourists are never disappointed by the foot-stomping displays of traditional Zulu dancing.

It's certainly not for the jaded traveller, but if you want to learn a little about the man and people that once ruled these hills with an iron fist then Shakaland is the place to start. And if all that beer-drinking and spear-throwing has you tired out, there's even a hotel on-site cleverly designed as 55 traditional bee-hive huts. With all the

mod-cons thrown in, of course.

Shaka was famous as a warrior king, and the battles between English soldiers and the Zulu impis are the stuff of legend. While the far western reaches of Zululand – areas such as Isandhlwana and Blood River – draw most of the Battlefields tourists, there are a number of historic sites nearby worth visiting.

From Shakaland the road north to Ulundi is your best bet, with diversions to Coward's Bush and Dingaan's Kraal possible if you have time. There's not much to recommend the town of Ulundi itself, but the region is famously home to the site of the battle that finally ended the bloody Anglo-Zulu war.