

Start celebrating Madiba's birthday

Contributed by Lucille Davie
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Nelson Mandela turns 90 this month (Photo: Enoch Lehung, City of Johannesburg)

PUT your party hat on to celebrate Nelson Mandela's 90th birthday this month, and take in a tour, an exhibition, or other events, to acknowledge our famous resident.

The Parktown and Westcliff Heritage Trust has organised three day-long bus tours in July, Madiba's birthday month, to four of the famous places he is connected with in the city.

Visit the tiny backroom in Alexandra township where Madiba stayed for a while when he first arrived in Johannesburg in the early 1940s. He describes the room, which he rented from Mr Xhoma, in his autobiography, Long Walk to Freedom. "He had built a tin-roofed room at the back of his property, no more than a shack, with a dirt floor, no heat, no electricity, no running water. But it was a place of my own and I was happy to have it."

The township came to mean a lot to him, as the first place he lived after leaving his home in the former Transkei. "Alexandra occupies a treasured place in my heart," he recounts. The address is 46 Seventh Avenue.

From there the bus goes to Liliesleaf in Rivonia, recently opened as a museum and resource centre.

Nelson Mandela, approaching his 90th birthday (Source: Gary van Wyk, Oryx Media/ courtesy Nelson Mandela Foundation)

It was at Liliesleaf Farm that Mandela lived for several months, moving there in October 1961, masquerading as the gardener and cook, under the alias of David Motsamayi. The top leadership of the ANC was arrested at the farm in July

1963, leading to the Rivonia Trial, which resulted in them being locked away on Robben Island for up to 27 years.

Mandela has fond memories of the time he spent at the farm, particularly when his then wife, Winnie, and their two daughters came to visit. He says in *Long Walk to Freedom*, "The loveliest times at the farm were when I was visited by my wife and family." They were times of more privacy than they ever had at their tiny home in Orlando West, Soweto. "The children could run about and play, and we were secure, however briefly, in this idyllic bubble."

The farmhouse and the outbuildings, where the arrests were made, have been meticulously restored and two new buildings have been built on the site, one the resource centre, the other, the Liberation Centre, with an auditorium, coffee shop and crèche.

From there the bus goes into the CBD, to the Old Fort, where Mandela spent time as a prisoner. He describes it as "a bleak, castle-like structure located on a hill in the heart of the city".

The bus then goes down south, to Vilakazi Street in Orlando West, where Mandela lived with his first wife, Evelyn Mase, and his second wife, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.

Although this house was much larger than the room where he stayed in Alexandra, Mandela had greater emotional attachment to the Alex residence. "Even though I was later to live in Orlando, a small section of Soweto, for a far longer period than I did in Alexandra, I always regarded Alexandra township as a home where I had no specific house, and Orlando as a place where I had a house but no home."

But this doesn't mean he wasn't proud to have his tiny Soweto house. Although rudimentary, with a tin roof, cement floor, narrow kitchen, and a bucket toilet at the back, it was his first home. "It was the very opposite of grand, but it was my first true home of my own and I was mightily proud. A man is not a man until he has a house of his own," he recalls.

The four-roomed house is now a museum, currently undergoing restoration, to be opened to the public again in October this year.

Tickets for the bus tour cost R390, and are available from Computicket, on 083 915 8000 or 011 340 8000, or through the Computicket website. The tours are conducted on 12, 19, and 26 July.

Other events

Other celebrations include an art exhibition at the Constitutional Court, running until the end of July, called *Mandela @ 90*. Artists include Billy and Jane Makhubele, Johannes Maswanganyi, Roy Ndinisa, Beverley Price and Susan Woolf. Works are in metal, beads, and sculptures in a range of different materials. The court is open from 9am to 5pm every day.

On 5 July the book, *Hunger for Freedom: The Story of Food in the life of Nelson Mandela*, is launched at Constitution Hill, at 11am on Constitution Square.

Then, on 2 August there is a mass ANC rally to pay tribute to Madiba at Loftus Versfeld in Tshwane.

On 9 August, a test match is planned between the Springboks and the team they beat in the semi-finals of the 2007 Rugby World Cup - Argentina - in Johannesburg, in celebration of Madiba's 90th.

In September a retrospective exhibition on Mandela's life opens at the Apartheid Museum.

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