Losing The Fear of Flying

Ziplining through the ancient foliage of the Blue Grotto forest in South Africa, charukesi ramadurai experiences flight of another kind

had never thought I would find myself 65 metres above the ground, hanging on for dear life. And doing this of my own volition. I'm not the particularly adventurous type, preferring to get all cultured out through museums and concerts while on holiday.

SUNDAY **24-30 AUGUST 2014**

Though it is a bit of an overstatement to say that I was hanging on for dear life. After all, I was tethered in three places nervous state, I as I zipped across the steel cables in the heart of the dense Blue Grotto forest.

Here, in the midlands of had been doing South Africa, they call it the this for five years, 'Canopy Tour,' a nod to the lush a woman with canopy formed by the venerable a gentle smile trees of this forest located in the and (as I discov-Khahlamba-Drakensberg Park, ered later) end-This UNESCO World Heritage less reserves of site encompasses the Drakens- patience.

berg mountain range, roughly translated as Dragon's Back from Afrikaans, which stretches on for 200 kilometres.

The canopy tour site was a short walk away from the Drak-I was staying. At the site, we went through a detailed safety briefing, after which we were kitted

A vista of lofty trees

casional glint off the

thin ribbon of river

way below. The

novel sensation of

flying straight on

to a waterfall.

all around. An oc-

took it as a divine signal. Promise was a local who

Then there was the bumpy ieep ride into the forest, followed by a long walk to the starting point. Sharp sunlight was soon lost to us, as we found ourselves surrounded by ancient yellowensberg Sun Valley resort, where woods, cape chestnut trees, red pear trees and tall pines. The two accompanying guides kept up a constant comforting chatter but out and harnessed. My guide's I was preoccupied with morbid name was Promise; in my super thoughts of the adventure ahead.

Let's get this over with already.

The first slide, aptly called the Rabbit Hole, was very short and easy, meant to lure me into a sense of false security. At the next stop, reached over a wobbly hanging bridge, I I found that the toughest thing found that I could barely see the other end of the zipline on the other hill. There was no turning back. This was just the beginning. And there were 12 such platforms perched on treetops and cliff faces to cross before reaching the end.

We had been toldall this before, but seeing it on a map and doing it were two different things.

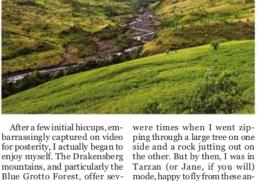
My guide Elijah went first, performing all kinds of tricks to reassure us of how utterly effortless and safe the whole thing was. "Easy for him," I muttered under my breath, as he waved both his hands while mid-air and turned somersaults in harness. He whistled and sang, even as I found it difficult to take normal breaths.

When my turn came, I got harnessed again and brought longthrough a walk forgotten prayers to my mind. say, I am not a monkey.

here (as in life, chimed my inner philosopher) was to let go. I had to assume a sitting position, stretch my legs and just launch myself into thin air.

Trouble struck at the end of the third slide. That was when I braked too early by pressing on the cable. I misread my guide's signal and went sliding back

We had been given clear instructions on what to do in such situations. We were to turn back and crawl our short way back to the platform, monkey style. But panic took over and I just hung on screaming for help till my guide came and towed me to safety. I admit that this is not a moment I am particularly proud of, but what can I



eral popular hiking trails for all cient treetops. levels of walkers. The canopy I lingered at the end of the

tour, however, offered something Sharp sunlight was no hike could: a soon lost to us, as bird's eye view we found ourselves of the spectacular mountains. A surrounded by anvista of lofty trees cient vellowwoods. above, below and all around. An occape chestnut trees, casional glint off and tall pines. the thin ribbon of river way below.

The novel sensation of flying lin rush, I wondered why I straight on to a waterfall. And had fussed so much. Bring it of course, the company of birds on once more! at eye level; there are over 150 avian species in this forest alone, including the Greater Doublecollared Sunbird and the much rarer Bush Blackcap.

waterfall, tree trunk. So, there for more information.

last slide, on the circular platform built on a 300vear-old Outeniqua Yellowwood and affectionately nicknamed Madiba by the crew. It was at that moment that, on a lingering adrena-

The Canopy Tour

The entire activity takes approximately three hours and costs R495 per person, including all equipment, guides, transport Each of the platforms has been to the starting point and refreshbuilt to harmonise with the ex- ments afterwards. Visit www. isting natural feature: cliff face, drakensbergcanopytour.co.za