

Illustration: PIET GROBLER



Mustang Safari

With a red convertible and California's open road, all you wanna do is ride

For 24 hours we were living the California dream. With one hand on the wheel and the wind in my hair, I was the star in a Red Hot Chili Peppers song, cruising Highway 1 in a glossy red racer Mustang, sucking a cherry lollipop on the Pacific Coast at 100m/ph, chasing the sun.

The journey began on Christmas Eve in the hustling jostle of the Los Angeles airport at a car-rental agency, with management's earnest apology for our having to forgo the cream Chrysler convertible due to malfunction and downgrade to a red racer Mustang.

Forcing the gear into drive mode, my boyfriend and I blasted off into the dead of night, heading towards Sunset Boulevard, where all we found beneath fallen leaves were the Walk of Fame's tarnished stars, lit up by the flashing neon lights of LA's Church of Scientology.

We spent the night at a Hollywood condo and hit the road the next morning, driving in cruise control to Green Day's *Boulevard of Broken Dreams*. There would be many stops along the way but our final destination would be the Golden Gate Bridge in foggy San Francisco.

For miles, we traversed windswept terrain that dipped into the ocean below, past our streamlined red reflection, a shimmering fish, in oil trucks' aluminium drums. We swallowed the aftermath of hillbillies' Harley Davidson's sonic boom before arriving in Santa Barbara to fill 'er up.

ACCIDENTAL TOURIST



Shani Raviv

We parked near a crowd of people queuing up in the blistering sun outside a blue-and-white-striped shack with vines creeping up a canvas awning. The line stretched around the sidewalk corner and people held up one hand over their brows as a visor as though they were eager to spot their docking Grecian yacht.

One couple told us they had driven two hours from LA to stand in line for another hour so they could sit for half an hour at California's signature Mexican eatery. A native Texan raved about the *huachinango* and *quesadillas*, saying La Super Rica was not your average "Americanised Mex". We believed him, but the road ahead bellowed like a sailor's ahoy.

Hours later at the San Luis Obispo sign, we swerved the car off the highway to pull into the parking lot of a stone-

and-log cabin the size of an estate manor.

The massive motel looked like a family-owned brothel with a cabaret theme in a Swiss Alps style.

The iconic Madonna Inn is a pit stop for horny honeymooners, underage adulterers and all-American families who forgot to save up for their annual theme-park vacation. All patrons must come equipped with a sense of humour and no aversion to all things lipstick-pink and gaudy fluff.

The inn's 109 bedroom suites are decked out in outlandish, individualised themes. Krazy Dazy has a pink shag rug; Yahoo a genuine buckboard as a bed; and Pony Room has a carousel horse in the middle of it.

The Safari suite with its wood-carved bed's four-posters, the size of elephant legs, and jungle-green carpeting was more Florida's Disneyland than Africa's wild. The brochure reads: "Safari" is a Swahili word for 'journey' that usually refers to a trip by tourists to Africa to watch and photograph big game and other wildlife."

We wanted to stay in the Madonna Suite, famous for its rock-face urinal, but it was booked out a year in advance.

So we left the inn to continue our tourist-trap trip, photographing our own wildlife in the big game of adventure. I decided the next time I did Highway 1 in a red racer Mustang, I would wear fishnet stockings, have a pink feather in my hair and pop Swiss champagne, toasting to my American Safari.