

**At the 2<sup>nd</sup> African Youth Games, Gaborone, Botswana, held in May 2014, the South African swimmers reigned supreme. Our team – four guys and four girls – walked away with no less than 13 gold medals. An incredible nine of those medals were awarded to students from Die Hoërskool Menlopark, and we're proud to say that our own Rita Naudé won no less than five golds and two silvers!**

A few years ago, Naudé was just an eight-year-old girl who liked to swim. She started participating in some swimming galas because of her older brothers' involvement, and has never looked back. Today, she is a 16-year-old swimming sensation.

She qualified for the South African Junior Swimming Team for the first time in Grade 7.

Since then she broke numerous records set by her icon, Karin Prinsloo, participated in galas all over the world, met the qualifications for the Youth Olympics in China this year (teams to be announced soon!), and, of course, laid waste to the other competitors at this year's African Youth Games.

For the 2nd African Youth Games, the chosen team members (all between the ages of 14 and 18, and each member specialising in one of 19 different sports) gathered at a hotel in Boksburg on Monday, 19 May 2014. SASCOC equipped each of them with a suitcase, a backpack, sports gear and clothes, all blazing South African colours and emblems. The next morning, after a training session at 5 a.m., they boarded buses that would be escorted all the way to the Gaborone University Hostels, seven hours later.

On Wednesday they had two practise sessions and on Thursday, the magnificent opening ceremony took place. With thousands of people in attendance, the 2 500 competitors from 54 African countries entered the stadium, proudly displaying their country colours and flag.

"The fantastic opening ceremony made me feel like I was at the Olympic Games!" Naudé gushed.

The swimming gala held was from Friday through Monday. Naudé took part in the 50 m, the 100m, freestyle, backstroke and butterfly items - six individual items. She was also part of three relay teams: the mixed (that is, two girls and two guys) 4x50 m freestyle relay, mixed 4x100 m freestyle relay and the 4x50 m relay mixed individual medley.



rita naudé

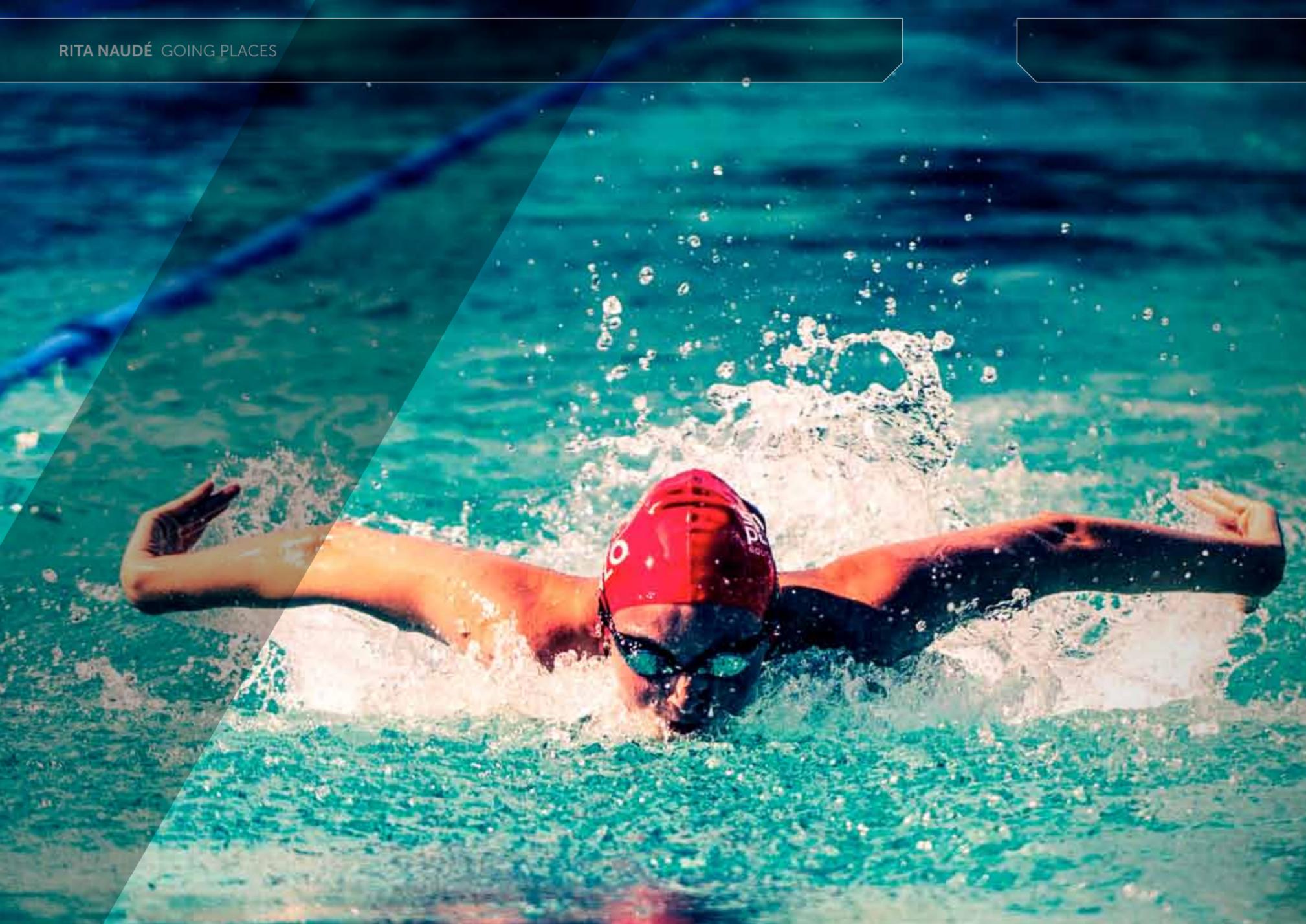
GOING PLACES

**RITA NAUDÉ**

Words by Philna van Veijeren, Photos by Bernard van Tonder



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SASCOC gave each athlete South African brooches, which they could swap with people from all the different countries, giving everybody a great way to approach new people and make friends from across Africa. On Tuesday afternoon, the swimmers flew back home to OR Tambo International. The rest of the Games continued for a week.

So far, Naudé has achieved everything she set out to do and her accomplishments have exceeded her wildest dreams, but not everything about swimming is fun and games.

She trains religiously, braving the cold water even at 5.30 a.m. Before school she has two swimming sessions as well as two gym sessions a week. In the afternoon she has cardio 'land' exercises twice a week, and she swims from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., six days a week.

Swimming like a professional also interferes with her school attendance. In 2014 alone, just up until her June exams, she missed almost 6,5 weeks of school, due to swimming competitions in Australia, Cape Town, Durban and Botswana.

Swimming means a lot to her. Going on international tours without her parents for the last four years has taught her to be independent and how to meet new people of all ages and cultures. She has learnt from early on about self-motivation and goal setting in order to improve her personal bests, which she believes will one day make her a better tertiary student.

With her positive attitude and incredible talents, Rita Naudé is sure to be a feature on our televisions in the near future, uniting us as a nation and making us proud.



*"To fall behind academically and to have to catch up each time is not fun. Fortunately, the teachers are very supportive." Yet all the trouble is worth it, Naudé says. "I love being in the water and improving my times! The international exposure I've experienced so far was not the reason I started swimming."*