



GOURMET SAFARI

THERE'S MORE TO SOUTH AFRICA THAN BIG GAME –
IT'S EVOLVING INTO A FOOD AND WINE WONDERLAND.



Le Quartier Francais' restaurant, The Tasting Room. Solms-Delta cellar door. Spier Estate cafe.



Delaire Graff Estate panoramic view.

VIRTUALLY ALL THE WINE REGIONS ARE WITHIN A COUPLE OF HOURS OF CAPE TOWN, ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST SPECTACULAR CITIES.

WINSOR DOBBIN

SOUTH AFRICA is one of the most exciting wine destinations on the planet - and a world leader in luxury gourmet tourism.

With the yoke of the apartheid era and trade embargoes now well and truly consigned to history, South Africa's wineries are offering an extraordinary range of experiences to visitors, and there are plenty of resorts and restaurants able to offer five-star experiences at three-star prices thanks to the current strength of the Australian dollar. Regions like Stellenbosch, Franschhoek and Paarl - all on Cape Town's doorstep - offer gourmet experiences of a quality that many Australian regions would do well to emulate, while more remote regions like Wellington and Robertson offer rustic, but equally interesting, experiences.

Winestate's Wine Tour of South Africa (from September 14-28) takes in many of South Africa's gourmet highlights, including Constantia, Stellenbosch, Franschhoek, Elgin, Paarl and Robertson. Sightseeing opportunities will also include Cape Town, the Cape of Good Hope, the Kruger National Park and the amazing Sun City resort. Wine tourism in South Africa offers much more

than just wine tastings as I discovered on a recent trip. Many of the cellar doors and wine estates have restaurants specialising in local cuisine. Expect a warm welcome wherever you go, too. The standards of service are very high and the local Cape Dutch architecture and scenery is stunning.

On February 2, 1659, Jan van Riebeeck of the Dutch East India Company and first Commander of the Cape wrote in his diary: "Today, praise be to God, wine was made for the first time from Cape grapes." That sweet wine, Vin de Constance, is still made today and 350 years on the South African wine industry is full of interesting history - and has its own flagship red grape in pinotage. The oldest wine farm, Groot Constantia, dates to 1685 and once produced sweet wines that were the toast of Europe. Spier Estate in Stellenbosch dates to 1692 but today visitors are invited to take a vineyard tour on one of those nifty Segway machines before choosing from three on-site restaurants for a pre- or post-tasting meal.

At L'Ormarins, owned by multi-millionaire Anton Rupert, visitors can combine wine tasting with a visit to one of the world's best motor museums - the Franschhoek Motor Museum with over 300 historic vehicles in

its collection. At Solms-Delta, part-owned by the estate's workforce, there is a museum detailing the 400-year history of the farm and the delightful Fyndraai restaurant serving a modern take on Cape Malay and other traditional South African dishes. Alternatively you can pick up a farm picnic basket and a guide will carry your basket and blanket and help you to select a quiet spot on the forested banks of the Dwars River. La Motte is home to a world-class art gallery and the stunning Pierneef restaurant and dozens of other estates offer attractions, including a cooking school at Leopard's Leap, glass blowing at Backsberg, KWV's Sensorium (art and wine combinations) and fabulous food and wine matchings at Grande Provence.

Glen Carlou, where Australian Georgie Prout is marketing manager, has both a world-class restaurant and a gallery of modern art featuring works from the Hess Collection. "Many of the wineries in South Africa realised years ago that you need to offer more than just a wine tasting to bring people to your door and engage with your product," says Prout. Glen Carlou, which recently launched its wines in Australia, is under the same ownership as Barossa Valley icon Peter Lehmann Wines. ▶

And there are plenty of Australian connections here with ex-Leasingham winemaker Richard Rowe now at leading South African producer KVV and former tour pro Grant Dodd the CEO of Haskell Vineyards and Dombeya, whose wines are available in Australia through Eurocentric.

Franschhoek has been dubbed the gourmet capital of South Africa and is home to top restaurants, including The Tasting Room, Reuben's, Babel, Boschendal, The Restaurant at Grande Provence and Bread and Wine at Moreson Vineyard, along with world-class accommodation ranging from the plush Le Franschhoek Hotel and Spa



and L'Ermitage to award-winning bed and breakfast La Fontaine and star wineries including Vrede en Lust (and its lovely Cotage Fromage eatery), Haut Cabriere, Plaisir de Merle and Boekenhoutskloof. Stellenbosch is an historic university town and home to the country's oldest wine route. Look out for magnificent Delaire Graff Estate, Neetlingshof, Thelema, Beyerskloof, Mulderbosch and Rust en Vrede, along with star eateries Jordan, Tokara, 96 Winery Road, Overture and Terroir, while Paarl, under the DuToitskloof mountain range, is more countrified. Home to the Afrikaans language monument, with a vinous history dating to 1867, major wineries include Backsberg with a lovely on-site eatery, Fairview, KVV, Laborie, Glen Carlou, Nederberg and Simonsvlei, while Grande Roche is regarded as the top luxury resort. Further

out of town you'll find wine routes centred on Worcester, Robertson, Wellington (try Val du Charron for a relaxing getaway) and more remote regions like Ceres, Elgin, the Swartland and Tulbagh, while Constantia and Durbanville are right on Cape Town's doorstep. Also look out for wines from members of the Swartland Collective, a loose grouping of "renegade" winemakers concentrating on "natural" wine styles. Eben Sadie from Sadie Family Wines is one of the names to watch, along with Callie Louw, who produces a dramatic and elegant syrah from boutique winery Porseleinberg; the Swartland project of Franschhoek estate Boekenhoutskloof.

Virtually all the wine regions are within a couple of hours of Cape Town, one of the world's most spectacular cities; situated at the junction of the Atlantic and Indian oceans, sitting under the gaze of dramatic

Table Mountain. With its Mediterranean climate, vibrant multiculturalism, beautiful beaches, pretty villages and gardens, Cape Town is worth several days of any visit to South Africa.

Among the great places to visit for a gourmet experience: Grande Provence, Franschhoek, is a wine estate with a history that dates back almost 320 years. In addition to 19ha of vines, it offers a superb tasting room with wine and food matchings, the fine dining The Restaurant, where chef Darren Badenhorst cooks up a storm, an impressive art gallery and sculpture garden and world-class accommodation at The Owners' Cottage. Owned by Alex van Heeren, who also owns New Zealand's Huka Lodge, the cottage, part of a complex of classic Cape Dutch buildings, comes with two staff to cater to guests' every whim and comprises four rooms, a deluxe suite, conservatory,

lounge, swimming and spa pool area. Full breakfast, with complimentary newspapers as well as a three-course dinner is included in the tariff, on a daily basis. Live like a millionaire for a couple of days; phone +27 21 876 8600. www.grandeprovence.co.za.

The Robertson Small Hotel is a luxury boutique hotel in a country wine region that was recently named South Africa's best luxury country hotel for the second straight year. There are several cellar doors within a short drive but you may also be tempted to sit by one of the two swimming pools or maybe enjoy a massage. There's a mix of sophistication and old world charm here.

from the Taj; situated near Parliament House, St George's Cathedral and the lovely Company Gardens, and just a short walk from the nightlife and restaurants on busy Long St. The hotel itself is ultra-chic; part of the refurbished South African Reserve Bank and Temple Chambers. The rooms and suites are beautifully appointed, and the staff attentive. On-site facilities include a pool and spa; the Bombay Brasserie Indian restaurant and two relaxed dining options. Many rooms have direct views of Table Mountain and the busy V and A waterfront is just a 20-minute walk away; phone +27 21 819 2000, www.tajhotels.com/capetown.

Johannesburg. Imagine if they plonked a mini Las Vegas in the middle of the African bush. Well that's exactly what they did with Sun City, which boasts four hotels, casino, showroom and two world-class golf courses, both designed by Gary Player. The Gary Player course and The Lost City course are both championship quality 18-hole, par-72 layouts. The most luxurious accommodation at Sun City is the Palace of the Lost City with lavish architecture: think Middle Eastern chic meets African style, surrounded by botanical gardens, trickling streams and hidden walking trails. Everything is opulent, from the external



The main building is the former home of a one-time ostrich baron - a gracious manor house that dates back over 100 years. Service is impeccable - and there is a world-class restaurant on site: Reuben's at The Robertson Small Hotel, an outpost of one of South Africa's highest-profile chefs, Reuben Riffel. His chilli salt squid is amazing. Each of the 10 luxury suites has a king-sized bed, mini bar and en-suite bathroom, along with thoughtful extras like iPod docks and a range of international power points; phone +27 23 626 7200, www.therobertsonsmallhotel.com.

Taj Hotel, Cape Town is beautifully situated making it easy to explore Cape Town, where there is a surprise around every corner. Table Mountain looms large over a city with beaches on both the Indian and Atlantic oceans. It is hard to beat the gracious service and spectacular views

Le Quartier Francais, Franschhoek, is part of the exclusive Relais & Chateaux group and comprises a luxury hotel and two restaurants; one of them - The Tasting Room - is regularly rated among the top 50 in the world. There's also a wine list comprised exclusively of premium Cape wines. Chef Margot Janse's African fusion food is innovative and fun, and the service is extremely professional. LQF, as it is known to locals, is in the centre of the Franschhoek wine village, with several other restaurants and boutiques just a short stroll away. There is a range of accommodation options, all luxuriously furnished; phone +27 21 876 215, www.lqf.co.za.

Then, of course, when you have had your fill of fine wine and food there is the unique Sun City, a vast sprawling resort on the border of the Piliansberg National Park (with over 200km of game drives). It's around a two-hour drive from

towers to the lavish lobby. There are 338 rooms, each with an African theme, and guests can choose from activities, including balloon safaris, game drives, gambling at a plush casino or swimming at an artificial beach with its own wave machine; phone +27 14 557 3000, www.sun-city-south-africa.com/palace-of-the-lost-city.

For more details on South Africa, visit the www.southafricanholidays.com.au and www.southafrica.net websites or call South African Tourism on (02) 9261 5000. South African Airways has daily non-stop flights from Sydney and Perth to Johannesburg. Fares from Sydney start at \$2085, including taxes and a return side trip to Cape Town. For more information call 1300 435 972 or see www.flysaa.com.au.

Above left: Boschendal Wines. *Left to right:* Art gallery at Grande Provence, Sun City Palace of the Lost City, La Motte art gallery, Val du Charron.