

WINTER *wanderlust*

5 fabulous winter weekends away

Winds are whipping and grey clouds are threatening. So, there's nothing for it but to recharge with a compact winter break. Beat the chill by revelling in winter's creature comforts – whether you're after the cottagecore atmosphere, bracing walks on crisp and frosty mornings or picturesque snow-covered mountain peaks that glisten in the sun. With stellar views, open fireplaces, hot toddies and gorgeous candles aflame, these are the best weekend getaways without leaving the country.



EDITOR’S PICK: CRAGS COUNTRY LODGE

Best for: *Calm and calmer*

While many believe the most notable South African wines come from Stellenbosch, Paarl and Constantia, the Garden Route has wine regions of its own that shouldn't be overlooked. Just a few hours outside Cape Town is where you'll discover a different crop of wine land that sits within a colder climate and is known for a robust production of Méthode Cap Classique sparkling wines. For those in search of a fresh wine scene, foodie heaven or a break from the city grind, The Craggs – just 20km beyond Plettenberg Bay – holds the key to a perfect weekend getaway. Dramatically situated on the hill overlooking the rolling green countryside is the

spectacular Craggs Country Lodge. The architecturally designed property was built to provide an all-season, luxury escape from which you can enjoy all the region. The experience starts as soon as you enter the lodge. The coolness of the soothing, minimalist décor (the lobby is all blonde wood on blonde wood) is offset by a roaring fire and a warm welcome. Every staff member you encounter is dedicated and passionate about what they do – and it's easy to see why. The eight clean-lined, super-spacious freestanding suites sing of contemporary cool. Our suite had a modern lodge vibe with lots of natural light, cream-coloured walls, light-wood furnishings a vague splash of

grey, the odd single-stem vase here and there, pendant lights, jute rugs and black tapware. All the basic requirements got A-grades – Nespresso machine, speedy c, satisfying shower and big wardrobe. Prepare for bedtime with a soak in the deep-set bathtub before collapsing into the giant king-size bed. Food is no afterthought at Craggs Country Lodge, either – it houses one of The Craggs' best restaurants. At Craggs Country Lodge Restaurant, the approach is refined and the attention to detail is high. Head chef Alice Burnham-King (previously of Singita's award-winning safari lodges) celebrates local and seasonal cuisine through tasty, thoughtful and inventive dishes served up in the sunlight-strewn





dining room. It's lovely to have a long, coursed dinner. Each dish is more magical than the last, from the red wine poached pear salad and seared tuna steak (melt-in-your-mouth brilliant), to a superb Moroccan-inspired m'hanncha – pastry filled with almond and date paste, then shaped into a snake-like form and served with saffron and orange blossom syrup, vanilla Chantilly cream and citrus segments. The expansive deck is an idyllic setting for an afternoon wine sampling while enjoying the breathtaking views. Cocktails? Also terrific. Breakfast, which is included, is a glorious multi-course affair including piping-hot cappuccinos, fluffy croissants and oozy-yolked eggs. On a cool misty morning, there's nothing better to warm up your bones.

From R3,350 per night

N2, The Craggs, Plettenberg Bay

072 608 9467

reservations@cragscountrylodge.co.za

www.cragscountrylodge.co.za





PLAISIR WINE ESTATE

Best for: Starry-eyed bliss

Romance means different things to different people, but few can resist the allure of a romantic escape for two. In a valley just outside Cape Town, the appeal in summer is obvious. Rolling green and sun-dappled vineyards, rugged mountain ranges and star-covered skies inevitably backdrops summertime romance. But it's equally atmospheric in the off-season mist and drizzle, when the solitude of the mountains acts like a soulful reset. It will come as little surprise that chilly staycations at Plaisir Wine Estate are well-catered for, with cosy living spaces and crackling fires that invite hunkering down. Set in gentle farmland, the 974-hectare property is an impressive sight. This estate is grand but hugely welcoming, consisting of five self-catering cottages and a stately manor house dating back to 1823. The architectural style is Cape Dutch – wooden and white with square-paned windows and distinctive gables, as well as elegant courtyards. It's vivid green in the growing season, but in winter the last grapes are coming off the vines and the mountains are wreathed in cloud in the mornings. The air smells of lavender. Occupying the vast Manor Suite is a promising start – with two bedrooms, a well-equipped kitchen, old-school dining areas and a private terrace, it's some suite! You'll be swept away by



the enchanting gardens. The Manor Suite has all the makings of an intimate escape. Floor-to-ceiling wood, flames flickering in the Victorian fireplace and a creek in the winter – it’s hard not to be enamoured. The bedrooms combine original features with 21st-century cossetting with sensitive lighting, neroli-scented Amanda-Jayne bathroom toiletries and king-size beds perfect for sinking into deep sleep. After a long day of wine tastings and fine meals, this farm stay is one you’ll want to come back to. Plaisir Wine Estate is surrounded by endless greenery waiting to be explored. There are plenty of walking routes and mountain bike trails which are magical in winter – especially when there’s the promise of a well-earned glass of wine at the end of it. The charming indoor-outdoor tasting room provides a multitude of ways to experience the wines in a way that’s comfortable to you, from the express tasting to the chocolate truffle and red wine pairing. Feel like sipping your way at a leisurely pace? Then grab a bottle and a charcuterie board featuring locally sourced delicacies to sit and while away an afternoon. The estate is also conveniently close to the historic town of Franschhoek. This is ideal for those wishing to explore the spoils of the region including celebrated restaurants, craft breweries, historic houses and public artworks. Whether you’re an outdoorsy couple seeking to reconnect with nature or a pair that would rather hop between cellar doors, Plaisir offers romantic getaway bliss.

R4,050 per night during low season (June to August) or R4,450 per night during high season (September to May) with a minimum two-night stay required.

***R45, Simondium
021 488 9977
bookings@plaisir.co.za
www.plaisir.co.za***





SIBUYA FOREST CAMP

Best for: A digital detox

The changing of seasons is always a good time to hit the reset button and take some of that elusive ‘me time’ – something best found in a glamping moment on the coast. More than ever, safari camps are developing innovative ways to move tourism towards a more sustainable future. Ecolodges are challenging travellers to be more thoughtful and responsible when choosing where to stay. Sibuya Game Reserve, near Kenton-on-Sea in the Eastern Cape and a member of Cape Country Routes, is at the forefront of this movement – identifying ways to celebrate and respect nature, from solar-powered stays to anti-poaching measures. An escape from the mundane in pursuit of inner and outer serenity is so often what we seek, yet struggle to find in the everyday. So, for those in need of a mental recharge, the homely, unpretentious Sibuya Forest Camp is for you. The off-grid location has neither electricity nor mobile signal – just lanterns to guide you as the night draws in. But at least some home comforts are close by, as the communal area has Wi-Fi, practical charging points, coffee and tea-making equipment, and a fridge well-stocked with beer and Val du Charron’s exclusive wine for Sibuya Game Reserve. The only parenting that goes on is in the hands of Mother Nature – there’s a strict no children under 12 policy. The camp is set in the 36 square-kilometre Sibuya Game Reserve, home to almost 400 species of birds, elephants, Cape buffaloes, rhinoceroses, lions and leopards that occasionally lounge in the trees. Game drives reveal baboons sprawled on a rocky escarpment, grunting hippos wallowing happily in the water, and a pride of lions frolicking and snoozing in the pampas grass. On the water of the Kariega River, which wiggles its way through the reserve, pied and half-collared

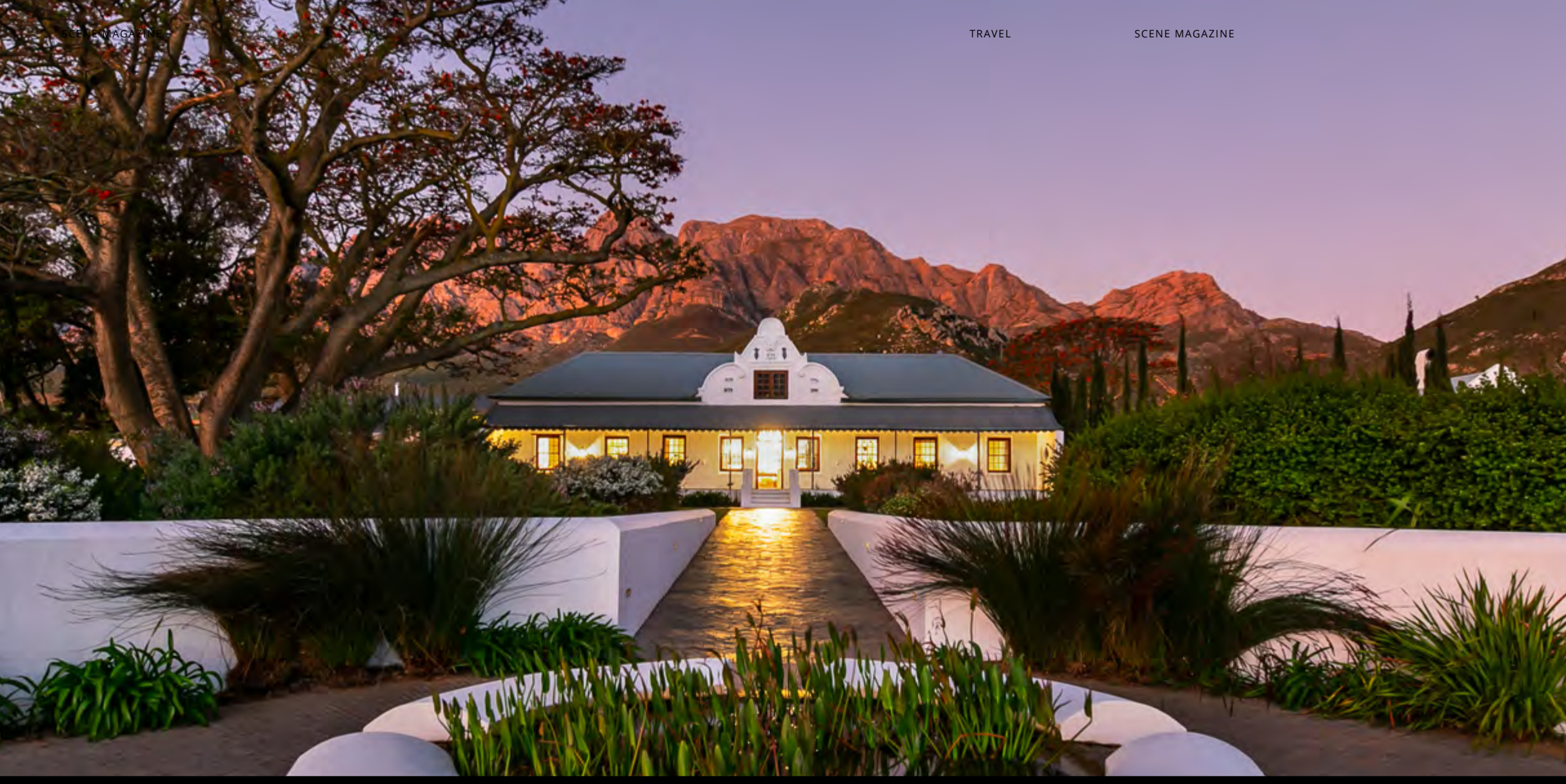


kingfishers pose next to water lilies. The iconic African fish eagle can be spotted from the camp's canoes, the sun-drenched deck and the eight classically styled canvas tents linked by wooden platforms. Inside the solar-powered tents, jewel-bright colours enliven everything from rugs to scatter cushions. Designed to flow, not fight with the natural environment. You can fall asleep to the tune of the surrounding bush wrapped in luxurious cotton sheets, without an iPhone in sight. In camp, sunlight floods in during the day. By evening, Sibuya Forest Camp is an enchanting place – it's transformed into a cosy lantern-lit dining area and bar as chefs prepare dishes of fire-cooked beef, grilled kingklip, garlic prawns and cheese platters. The forest and river provide a hypnotic backdrop to fireside drinks and evening feasts. Breakfast is a treat of, say, yoghurt,

poached eggs, bacon and fresh coffee served on canvas chairs outside. This is a transportive experience – with a real sense of intimacy with the wild, vast landscape.

From R4,931 per person sharing per night.
39 Eastbourne Road, Kenton-on-Sea
046 6481040
res2@sibuya.co.za
www.sibuya.co.za
www.capecountryroutes.com





BOSJES

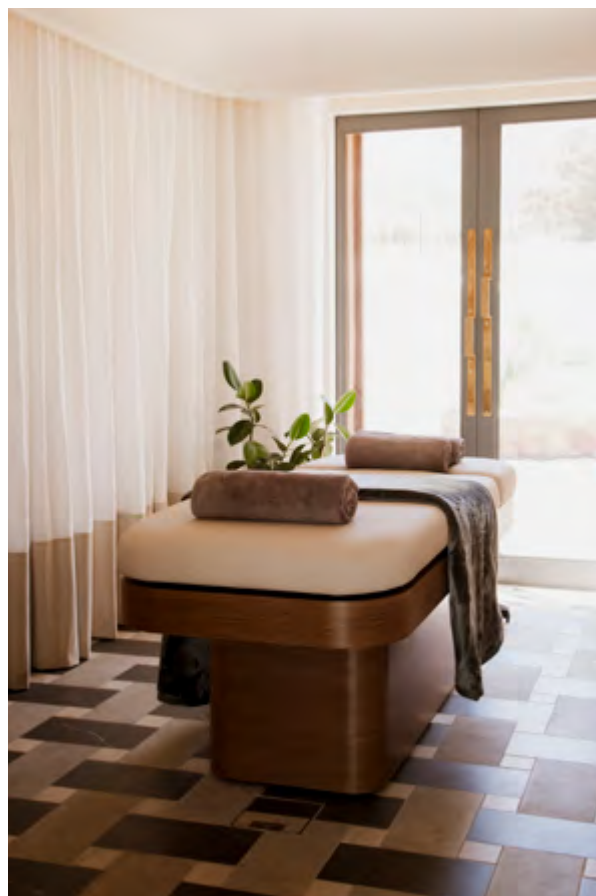
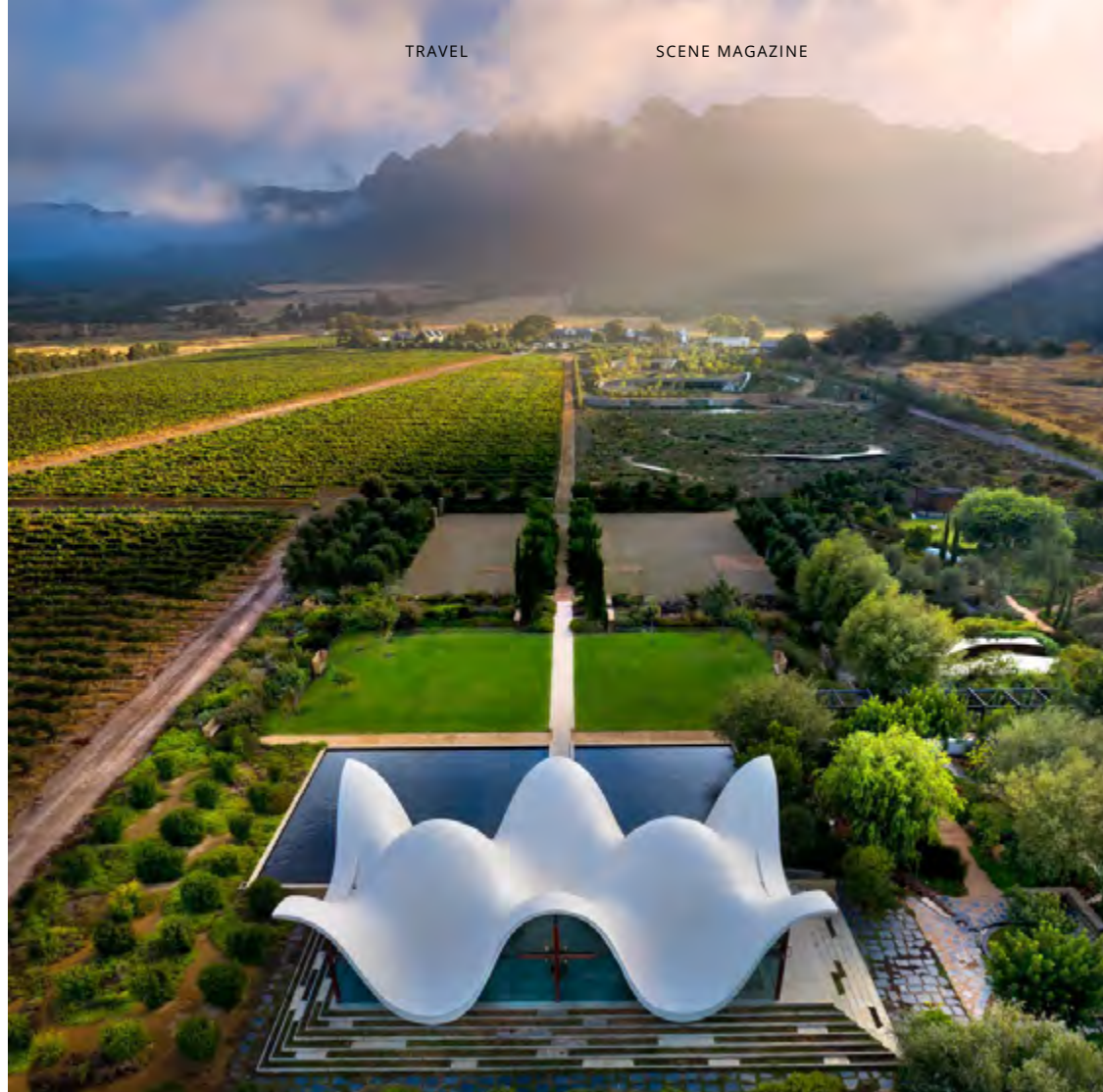
Best for: Five-star frills

Staying on a farm has never been so tempting. The sublime natural beauty of the Breedekloof Valley is matched by the stealth-luxe of BOSJES – set on 300 hectares of fruit and olive groves about an hour's drive from Cape Town. The setup here isn't just inspired by its location; integrating with the landscape is the entire point. A setting of such pastoral perfection, you'll pinch yourself. The 200-year-old Herehuis is the farm's original manor house with gorgeously quirky bedrooms – warm and familiar yet contemporary and design-led. Although immaculately updated, traces of the past remain. The 12 rooms and suites take their lead from interior designer Liam Mooney's smorgasbord of decorative interiors that characterise the public areas, but with a considerably calmer sensibility for private chilling. They're a celebration of colour and pattern, awash with herbaceous-referencing greens and burnt orange. In our Master Suite, a canopy enveloped the four-poster king-size bed, sitting alongside crafty modern extras including





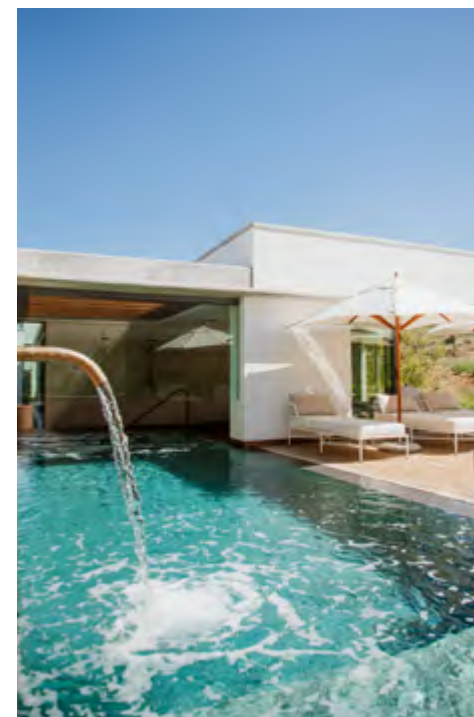
a Nespresso machine and slick flatscreen TV. Light also plays an important role – it's designed to lift spirits during even the darkest mid-winter days. But it's the social spaces that really supercharge BOSJES. Relaxed, all-day dining is served throughout the various restaurant spaces, from the lush, plant-filled Eetkamer to Spens, an architectural marvel. Breakfast and dinner are included in the room rates, and you'll likely be eating on-property for the entire stay. After breakfast, venture outside for a skin-tingling swim in the heated pool, sink into an armchair with a volume plucked from the library shelf or help yourself to a drink at the honesty bar, within convenient reach of the sunroom. The hotel is proudly staffed by a team of locals, all eager to please and easy to chat with. Service is attentive for the most part and relaxed without being imposing. Kombuis hopes to raise BOSJES's culinary profile even further with locally sourced meat, fish and vegetables, simply but stylishly dished up. The pan-fried sea bass served with beurre blanc, braised leeks and pomme purée is simply divine. And just when you think the experience can't get any



better, the expanded Die Stalle Spa is for those seeking the restorative nature of holistic healing. Hosting six treatment rooms in the historic confines of the original stables, it's utterly decadent. Taupe-flecked linen sofas, raffia lamps and gold accents offer a sense of calm. Picture yourself enjoying a full-body ginger and lavender poultice massage as the sun sets, dousing the space in golden and orange hues. Priceless. Treatments use products from local brands TheraVine and TheraNaka. It's hard to pass up the Balancing Facial, which offers a comprehensive step-by-step journey to getting rid of all the toxins of metropolitan life.

From R5,800 per night

R43, Worcester
023 004 0496
stay@bosjes.co.za
www.bosjes.co.za





GÎTE

Best for: *Privacy*

Want to hibernate in style? Though we might love the buzz of city love – the hustle and bustle, the never-ending supply of things to do and see – it’s the fantasy of just about every city dweller. A change of scenery. And we’re not talking about a remote timber-clad cabin. We’re talking about the best of both worlds: Cutting-edge design and delicious isolation. If you’re looking for a cosy weekend holed up in perfect comfort and solitude, Gîte is the ideal spot to wind down, toast marshmallows or soak in the hot waters of the wood-fired hot tub. This Franschhoek retreat balances the charm of a rustic property with modern comforts, creating a truly welcoming space. There are actually four thoughtfully clustered gîtes (a French term referring to a holiday home or vacation rental, typically in a rural area)

on site, each with their own full-sized bed, bathroom, kitchenette and sectioned seating areas. Inside Gîte 1, you’ll find open-plan living areas with an inviting bedroom and a fully equipped modern kitchen, complete with a full set of handy amenities to ensure your stay is nothing less than exceptional. The bathroom is spacious with a walk-in shower, and there’s a private garden area. The aesthetic is minimal and elegant, yet it retains a homely feel – particularly at dusk, when the evening light scatters a warm glow through the glass-fronted designer cabin. Take a breath, can you feel that? Bliss. On the outside terrace, there are sunbeds, a hot tub





big enough for two and a Weber braai for suppers eaten under the stars. Wake up, draw back the thick curtains and drink in the view from the most comfortable queen-size bed. You see nothing but nature from the bed, which is simply dressed in soft white with pillows that yield to the touch. Be sure to enjoy the unbelievable mountain views outside with a cup of coffee, too. It might be difficult to convince yourself to venture outside of the cabin itself, but the grounds beg to be explored. Spend days saying hello to the farm's cows, soaking up the all-natural vibes of the area and taking advantage of the paths that wind between the vineyards. In the winter, when snow blankets the Franschhoek Mountains, this cabin becomes a snug haven. And if you can't leave the digital world behind, fear not. There's a TV and fast Wi-Fi available. Gîte is right in the centre of town, but magically peaceful at night. Evenings here are for cosying up with hot chocolate and a good book. There's everything you need for a self-catered stay – from a kettle and toaster to a fridge and crockery – but if you'd like to take an evening off, nearby drinking and dining holes are within walking distance. For all-star gastronomy or a local ale, Franschhoek's huge variety of restaurants are full of charm and roaring fires. Can you imagine a more idyllic escape? We certainly can't.

From R2,750 per night
Cabriere Street, Franschhoek
082 820 9216
info@gitefranschhoek.co.za
www.gitefranschhoek.co.za