

DESTINATIONS



**SOUTH
AFRICA**



South Africa is a breathtaking study in contrasts, from its sophisticated coastal cities to its untamed animal reserves.

BY LINDSAY LAMBERT

We began our South African sojourn in Cape Town, checking in at **Cape Grace** (www.capegrace.com) hotel, where previous guests include Bill Clinton, Nelson Mandela and Glenn Close. A member of The Leading Small Hotels of the World, Cape Grace comprises 122 guest rooms and suites and occupies one of the city's premier locations on the vibrant Victoria & Alfred Waterfront. Best to book here are two 860-square-foot Penthouse Suites (numbers 419 and 420), each of whose French doors open up to a private terrace with a Jacuzzi, and beautiful views of the waterfront and Cape Town's working harbor or yacht marina (the Penthouses are insiders' top pick for couples, as they each have one bedroom). Occupants of the Penthouse Suites are treated to unpacking services upon arrival (guests

need not pack modestly; there's an extra-spacious walk-in closet in the bedroom), and can collaborate with Executive Chef Craig Paterson to create a special menu for the duration of their stay. If you're not shopping for an extravagant suite, the Rooftop Luxury and Rooftop Terrace rooms are smaller (376 square feet), yet feature a private breakfast patio and spacious balcony, respectively, with similar stunning views. Opt for the two- or three-bedroom suites if you're booking a family trip; each has a fully equipped kitchen and spacious bathrooms (we loved the fresh-smelling Charlotte Rhys toiletries). All rooms at Cape Grace feature views of either the harbor or marina and Table Mountain and Signal Hill, so be sure to specify (despite some serious jetlag, we found the view of Table Mountain at sunrise worth waking up early to catch; your VIPs won't want to

miss the immense white blanket of fog as it spills over the mountain's famous flat top and façade, an absolutely breathtaking display). Contact Senior Reservationist Eleta Wesson (eleta@capegrace.com; 27 21 410 7041).

Clients traveling via private jet can touch down at Cape Town International Airport; private helicopters on the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront. Cape Grace offers private transfers, however distances exceeding six miles (the airport is 15.5 miles away) come at an extra charge.

The Spa at Cape Grace—which is overseen by Spa Manger Alexandra Bochnig (spa@capegrace.com; 27 21 410 7100)—is a sensory feast. Its five treatment rooms and common spaces are bathed in gold, orange, deep brown and pale cream, and are flooded with sunlight and feature views of Cape Town, Table Mountain and the yacht marina. We strongly suggest your clients visit The Spa on their first full day at Cape Grace; we felt completely

PHINDA FOREST LODGE comprises 16 glass-walled stilted suites (below and opposite) tucked discreetly within the rare Dry Sand Forest.



renewed after a mid-morning African Cape Massage, The Spa's signature treatment (be sure to request Rose). The massage—inspired by the Khoi San tradition of dancing in circular motions in preparation for healing—utilizes only circular movements, as well as one of the first recorded essential oils in Africa. Don't miss the hot spa, where we enjoyed a rain shower and relaxed with a glass of chilled sparkling water on the terrace while taking in spectacular vistas of Table Mountain. Tip: If your VIP has plans directly following The Spa, recommend a wash and blow-dry in the salon before leaving. The Spa is exclusive to hotel guests, and treatments can be booked on site, but we think it's best to book before arriving (reserve through Eleta Wesson in reservations).

Widely regarded as one of Cape Town's "it" eateries, Cape Grace's one-waterfront serves up innovative seasonal dishes that highlight fresh South African products; the Shishebab of Scallops starter we ordered even came with an edible rice-paper label (some dishes come with cheeky, yet easy-to-follow, instructions). If your clients need assistance in pairing cuisine with the perfect bottle of wine, Christopher, one-waterfront's sommelier, is on hand to offer expert advice (the hotel's Cape History and Wine presentation is the perfect precursor to dinner). All tables afford beautiful views of the marina and Table Mountain (outside seating is available). Reservations may be made on site, but we think it's best to book ahead, as the restaurant is popular with gourmand Capetonians. The hotel's more intimate dining venue, Bascule Bar, is an ideal spot for a light lunch (the fish and chips are prepared to perfection, and there's a host of fun cocktails to choose from; request a table outside by the water) or a nightcap after a day of sightseeing (the bar's



CAPE GRACE'S Penthouse Suites each feature a plush lounge area (above); their spacious terraces have a private Jacuzzi (right), from which guests can enjoy the view.

collection of over 460 whiskies is legendary).

Contact Front Office Tournant Denise van Blerk (denise@capegrace.com; 27 21 410 7100) with your VIPs' needs; she's arranged gourmet picnics on Clifton Beach and specialized shopping and helicopter trips for guests, and can assist with anything from dinner reservations to tee times (a seasoned golfer in our party was awed by the scenery at Royal Cape Golf Club). We were particularly impressed by one concierge who managed to create a packable poster tube for an oversized painting just hours before our early-morning departure.

There are myriad options for exploring Cape Town and its outlying areas, however we think the best way to go is a private customized tour with Rob Davidowitz (robair@iafrica.com; 27 84 434 3497) of **Beautiful Cape Town**



(www.capetown.cjb.net). Davidowitz, an independent guide who also works exclusively with Cape Grace guests, took us on a day-long Cape Peninsula tour, with stops including the South African naval colony of Simon's Town and nearby **Boulders Beach** (www.tmnpc.co.za), famous for its thriving colony of African penguins. Our favorite stop was the **Cape of Good**

Hope Nature Reserve (www.tmnpc.co.za), including the Cape of Good Hope (The Cape, as it's known to sailors, is the meeting place of the cold Benguela current on Africa's West coast and the warm Agulhas current on its East coast), and Cape Point Lighthouse, on the Cape Peninsula's southernmost point (the short funicular ride to Cape Point's summit is a must for



LIONS are among the wildlife guests will encounter at Phinda (above).

PEZULA LIES between the Indian Ocean and a beautiful lagoon and the Outeniqua Mountains (left).

African flora, dramatically displayed against Table Mountain's verdant eastern slopes. We hear September is the best time to visit, when the Garden's millions of blossoms are at their most brilliant. Tip: History buffs won't want to miss **Robben Island** (www.robbenisland.org.za)—where Nelson Mandela spent 18 of his 27 years of imprisonment—or the **Bo Kaap Museum** (www.museums.org.za/bokaap/index.html; 71 Wale St.; 27 21 424 3846), in Cape Town's Bo Kaap (Muslim) district, and everyone will enjoy the cable-car ride to the top of Table Mountain (ask the concierge to arrange tickets to avoid standing in line).

When it comes to shopping, recommend the **Pan-African Market** (76 Long Street) and nearby **Greenmarket Square** (54 Shortmarket Street) for hand-made jewelry and crafts, and the shops along the **Victoria & Alfred Waterfront** (www.waterfront.co.za) for more upscale purchases, from delicate African-diamond jewelry to beautiful locally made art. We especially

loved browsing the stalls at the Red Shed Craft Workshop. Tip: Guests can exchange currency at Cape Grace, but we found the best rates at outside exchange bureaus.

After conquering city life in Cape Town, your VIPs can head to South Africa's east coast for an awe-inspiring safari experience at Phinda Private Game Reserve. We hopped a flight to Johannesburg International on **South African Airways** (www.flysaa.com; we recommend SAA's plush business class on the international legs of the journey) and transferred to Phinda via **Federal Air** (www.fedair.com; the nearest airports serving private aircraft are Richardsbay and Durban). If your clients prefer the scenic route, however, suggest a luxury car rental arranged through Cape Grace and a drive along the Garden Route, with accommodations at **Pezula Resort Hotel & Spa** (www.pezula.co.za) in Knysna.

Owned and operated by **Conservation Corporation Africa** (CC Africa), **Phinda Private Game Reserve** (www.ccafrica.com) comprises nearly 44,000 acres of conservation land, four main safari lodges—Forest, Vlei, Rock and Mountain, all of which are members of Small Luxury Hotels of the World—and two exclusive-use lodges, Zuka and the Getty House. Tip: If your clients plan to stay for several nights, we suggest booking multiple lodges for a more complete experience.

Opt for Rock Lodge if you're catering to a couple of romantics (we hear Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie took up residence here on a recent visit); its six intimate adobe suites each have a private deck and plunge pool (ask for one that also has an outdoor shower). Private butler service is also offered. Max capacity here is 12, and kids aren't allowed, so privacy is practically guaranteed. We also liked the exclusivity of Vlei Lodge. Its posi-



heart-stopping 360-degree views). Tip: In Kalk Bay, stop for lunch at **Harbour House Restaurant** (Main Road, Kalk Bay 7975; 27 21 788 4133), and try the bruschetta appetizer with fresh tomatoes,

onions and diced fresh tuna. Another must-see stop, **Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden** (www.nbi.ac.za/frames/kirstfram.htm) is a veritable treasure trove of indigenous South

tion on the edge of Phinda's *vlei* (wetland) system renders it the perfect spot from which to watch a herd of grazing nyala, or, as we did, a lion passing by (our Vlei ranger, Richard Ferrier, and tracker, Mischek Fakude, expertly tracked the migrant lion to a far-off watering hole, where we watched him settle down for a nap). Each of Vlei's six thatched-roof suites features a private sun deck and plunge pool (we opted for one with a private shower), and extra-spacious bathroom

(butlers are also available here, and children are welcome). Mountain Lodge is our pick for those who prefer lots of interaction with other guests; it's the largest, with 20 suites, all of which provide views of the Ubombo Mountains. Mountain Lodge also houses one of two curio shops (the other is at Forest Lodge) where guests can shop for souvenirs and access the Internet (there's no Internet or TVs in guest rooms). Our favorite, Forest Lodge's 16 glass-encased suites are tucked

away in the Dry Sand Forest and feature sleek décor and spacious porches. Tip: If you're booking Forest Lodge for a pair of bird- and plant-loving VIPs, request ranger Quinton Samson; his knowledge is truly impressive.

If your VIP has chosen Phinda as the site of a major celebration, book the ultra-exclusive Zuka Lodge; it comprises four thatched cottages (max eight adults; children are welcome) that overlook a busy watering hole—ideal for viewing

game—and employs a private chef, butler, ranger and tracker. (Getty House is available on a more limited basis; contact reservations.) All Phinda accommodations are air-conditioned, feature ceiling fans, and offer laundry, turndown and babysitting services. There's no spa, however in-room massages and other treatments can be arranged upon request.

Each lodge serves gourmet cuisine in its respective dining room (in-room dining is an option, and staff eagerly honor special requests and dietary requirements), however at Forest Lodge we were surprised with a lavish candlelit dinner in the bush on one occasion and dinner and a Zulu song and dance performance in the *boma* (outdoor dining area) on another (advise your VIPs to try the ostrich steak).

Twice-daily game drives in open 4x4 vehicles are included (we spent quality time with a pride of lions and spotted cheetah, buffalo, white and black rhino, elephants, giraffes and plenty more), however, a selection of activities is available at an extra cost. Two adventurous guests in our group opted for an aerial tour of the game reserve via helicopter, soaring over the Indian Ocean and spotting wildlife along the way. We also spotted crocs and countless beautiful bird species on a relaxing Mzinene River cruise.

Insiders say it's best to book three months in advance, but reserve earlier if your clients plan to visit in late-September through January. As each lodge is outfitted with its own staff, all initial queries and bookings should be directed to the reservations department (information@ccafrica.com; 27 11 809 4300); on site, staff members make sure every guest's wish and whim is met around the clock. ■

PHINDA SAFARI GUESTS track cheetah on an afternoon game drive (above). Zebras graze in herds throughout the game reserve (left).



Photos by Lindsey Lambert