

explore

# Wine, Waterfalls & Wildlife

## Exploring South Africa's Western and Eastern Capes

There are few places in the world worth spending two days trapped in an airplane to reach. For me, South Africa is one of them.

It's a place that requires multiple visits to take it all in; a week is impossible, two weeks is pushing it, three weeks is doable, and anything over four weeks is preferable. Last year, I struggled for two-and-a-half months to budget time for a 17-day trip in just two provinces, the Western and Eastern Capes.

And I'd been there before. Twice.

I rarely return to places I've spent a lot of time in, but South Africa tops the list of exceptions. She is my soul mate; despite her scars, bruises, and historical blemishes, I love her unconditionally. No matter how many times I say it's the last, I know I'll return, again and again.

While a safari is a must, don't make the mistake of thinking it's the only thing worth doing in South Africa. The Rainbow Nation is full of golden opportunities for fantastic food and wine, culture and history, outdoor adventures, and activities that canvass the land and ocean.



It only takes a few days in the Cape's wine regions of **Stellenbosch**, **Paarl** and **Franschhoek** before I begin teasing myself with the idea of moving to South Africa. Maybe it's the never-ending vineyard landscapes or the impossibly perfect goat cheese at the **Fairview** estate or one too many glasses of Pinotage, but I'm seriously considering it.

It taunts me again during our private lunch at 1693 at **Bellingham**. It's here, in a 17th century aboveground cellar, I realize I might be having the best meal of my entire life. I look across the wooden banquet table at my boyfriend and, without speaking, I know the thought is mutual.

In our case, it is soured and pulled rabbit rolled in leek ash, served next to a smoldering Protea, South Africa's national flower. Our eyes and stomachs stretch through Chef Guy Clark and Samantha Nolan's creative seven-course menu. Each dish is paired with an estate wine, but the cuisine is the clear winner – exquisite, thoughtful, sublime, and gluten-free.

Our stomachs and livers barely get 24 hours' break before we're on a blanket spread out on a shady corner of the lawn at **Boschendal**, one of South Africa's oldest wine estates. I nosh on the gluten-free picnic we order, soaking up the breeze between sips of Chardonnay-Pinot Noir blend. Before we leave, I pick up a few bottles as souvenirs, a benefit of visiting countries with outstanding yet inexpensive wine.

We cover 425 miles over the next three days traveling through the Western Cape. We manage casual (and unsuccessful) whale watching along the coast of **Hermanus**, a hike and hot springs soak in **Montagu**, and squeezing through claustrophobic crevices of the 20-million-year-old **Cango Caves**, rewarding ourselves with ostrich kebabs for dinner.

As we head south from **Oudtshoorn** toward the **Garden Route**, we zigzag through limestone and granite mountains rung with dark red dirt, ride up and down grassy hills still yellow from winter, and swirl down roads cut into seaside cliffs. We stop in **Plettenberg Bay** to meet friends and hike the absolutely-can't-miss beauty of the **Robberg Peninsula**.

We spend two days outside the city with friends in the tourist village of **Stormsriver** in the Eastern Cape, drinking fireside ciders, ziplining over waterfalls in the **Tsitsikamma National Park**, and debating blackwater tubing. The mix of nature and adrenaline is the perfect precursor for our next adventure.







It's 25 minutes into our first game drive on **Shamwari Game Reserve** and I can't believe our luck. Two white rhinos, a mother and calf, are blocking our path. White rhinos aren't as rare or elusive as black rhinos, but, with an average of 2.8 rhinos poached each day in 2016, catching sight of either is a true honor.

Over three days, thanks to our guides, Wayne and Phillip, we have unfathomable luck with sightings. We watch a herd of elephants bathe at a breath's length; we scour the nighttime bush to spot warthogs, giraffes, and zebra; a cape cobra glints across our path; we see every single lion on the reserve, including cubs; we wait patiently to see if a wounded antelope will survive past dusk – and all but once, we are the only vehicle around.

Considering people are usually on a schedule, fighting for time and space at a sighting, I know how rare our intimate experience is. It turns out to be an unexpected and priceless perk of staying at the newly opened Founders Lodge by Mantis.

A repurposed 1940s manor house formerly used as the private family vacation home of Adrian Gardiner, one of the founding fathers of Shamwari, the Founders Lodge is now a five-star, six-room boutique hotel with a unique residential feel.

Rooms are comfortable, steeped in luxury, and feature soaking tubs, private patios overlooking the reserve, rainfall showers, fast Wi-Fi (but no TVs) and luxe toiletry kits.

There's a pool, onsite "museum" of African collectibles, *braai boma* (barbecue fire pit), small gym, and upscale lounge area for pre- and post-dinner drinks by the fire. But for us, the small kitchen is the star, where they whip up delicious gluten-free dishes from scratch. Highlights include quiche surrounded by a remarkably flaky and buttery pastry shell, wild game *potjiekos* (a one-pot dish cooked over fire), delectable lemon poppy seed muffins, and traditional curried *bobotie* that is so stunning, I *must* have the recipe.

The lodge is located on its own private, predator-free acreage within Shamwari, giving us both vehicle access to one of the country's top 10 "Big Five" reserves and the privilege to explore on foot in the lodge's private backyard.

As we quietly walk over to a few young giraffes snacking on leaves, I'm already planning my next visit.

**(Editor's Note: 1693 at Bellingham is now closed. Chef Guy Clark is now at Cape Town's Tintswalo Atlantic restaurant.)**





### Recommendations for Cape Town

- Take an early morning hike up Lion's Head for spectacular views of Table Mountain and a bird's-eye-view over the city.
- Check out the open galleries and local artists during the city center's First Thursday Art Walk.
- Spend a day exploring the V&A Waterfront and catch the ferry for a tour of Robben Island where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for 18 years.
- Stroll through the Company's Garden; bring a blanket, book, and snacks if it's sunny.
- Sip cocktails at sunset at a bar along the Camps Bay strip.
- Visit museums like Iziko South African Museum and Planetarium, District Six Museum, and Iziko Slave Lodge.
- Eat at restaurants that understand the gluten-free diet, like Lola's, Baia Seafood Restaurant, Nonna Lina Ristorante Pizzeria, Savoy Cabbage Restaurant, Hudsons the Burger Joint, Ocean Basket, and Addis in Cape Ethiopian Restaurant.

### Tips for Eating Gluten-Free

- Cider is popular in South Africa and you can find it at every bar; there's no gluten-free beer.
- Ask for a "banting" menu at restaurants. This is a popular grain-free diet that is usually gluten-free.
- Gluten-free is often only thought of as grain-free or wheat-free, and may not cover hidden, non-grain gluten. Always ask about popular gluten-containing ingredients like soy sauce, Worcester sauce, Aromat seasoning, Maggi seasoning, and non-distilled vinegar, and use your best judgment if they hesitate when answering.
- Most casual restaurants and cafes, especially those without a professional chef, tend to use processed ingredients with poor labeling and the cooks often do not know what is in them.
- Woolworths stores are a mecca for fantastic gluten-free foods.





# You can safely dine GLUTEN FREE in Italy



This guide to gluten free dining in Italy includes dozens of restaurant recommendations near major sites in Rome, Florence, and Venice.

Available on Amazon from  
The Publisher of  
GlutenFreeTravelSite.com

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Read on any e-reader, tablet, smartphone, or computer with the free Kindle app.

## South African Bobotie

(Gluten-free, Grain-free, Soy-free)

*Bobotie (pronounced as a quick bo-boor-tee) is a traditional Cape Malay dish introduced by the Dutch in the early 1600s. Though you can find several variations throughout the kitchens of South Africa, it's traditionally a dish of curry-spiced ground beef mixed with milk-soaked bread and golden raisins, baked with a creamy egg-based topping sprinkled with sliced almonds. Often considered the national dish of South Africa, it is a must-try while in the Mother Land. Recipe courtesy of the Founders Lodge.*

Serves 4-6

Preheat the oven to 350°F.


3-4 tablespoons oil  
2 large onions, chopped  
2 garlic cloves, minced  
1 teaspoon crushed ginger  
2 red chili peppers, chopped  
2 medium tomatoes, peeled and chopped  
½ teaspoon brown sugar  
1 medium Granny Smith apple, peeled and coarsely grated  
1 tablespoon finely grated lemon zest  
1 tablespoon sesame seeds  
½ cup seedless golden raisins  
1 cup flaked almonds, divided  
7 ounces ground beef  
Kosher or fine sea salt  
Freshly ground black pepper  
2 tablespoons apricot jam  
1 large egg  
½ cup heavy cream

Heat oil in a large pot. Fry the onion, garlic, ginger, and chilies over medium heat.

Add the tomatoes, sugar, apple, lemon zest, sesame seeds, raisins, and half the almonds, and stir to combine. Fry for a minute, then add beef. Season with a pinch of salt and pepper and stir often, combining the ingredients and breaking up the meat. Add the apricot jam and stir to melt.

When the meat is close to medium doneness, remove the pot from the heat and transfer the mixture to an oven-proof dish. Stir, and let cool slightly.

In a small bowl, whisk the egg and cream. Pour over the meat mixture and top with the remaining almonds.

Bake until firm and golden brown, about 20-30 minutes. For a traditional meal, serve with a side of yellow rice and green vegetables. 



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

**Katherine Alex Beaven** is a writer/photographer and world traveler. Whether on assignment or on vacation, Alex can usually be found at the nearest food cart or restaurant sniffing out the local gluten-free goodies. Her photography site, [katherinealex.com](http://katherinealex.com), features photos of the wildlife, landscapes, and people she's seen along the way.