

INSIDE GUIDE

Top 10 Weekend Getaways

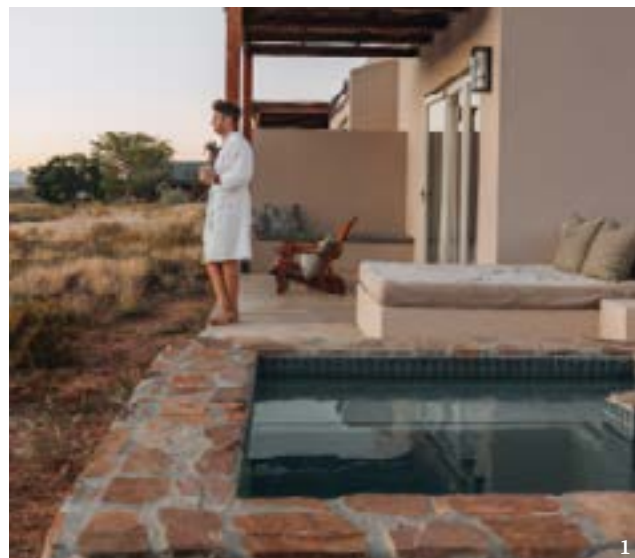
Whether you favour town, country, seaside or mountains, there's the perfect spot waiting for you. From places steeped in history or that spark the imagination to lodgings that connect you to nature, these escapes will capture your heart and open the door to unforgettable experiences.

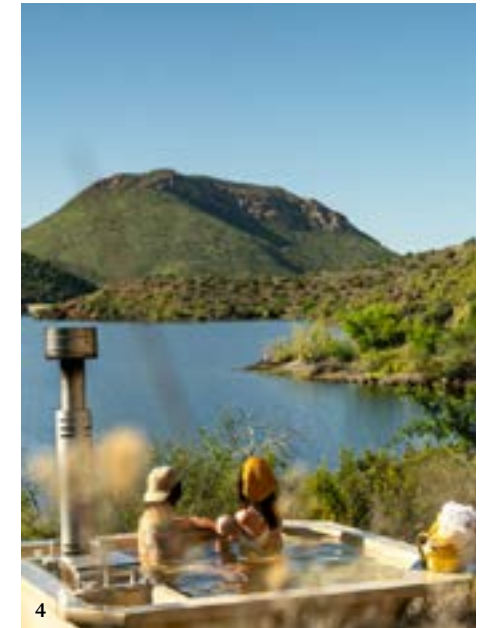
1. Simbavati Cederberg Ridge

The Cederberg has long drawn hikers and campers to its rugged, red-sandstone landscapes, but you can get the best of it without roughing it. Set on a 3 000-hectare grape and citrus farm overlooking the panorama of the Cederberg Mountains, this boutique lodge oozes understated luxury. For nature lovers hankering after fynbos-filled landscapes, brilliant sunsets and remarkable rock formations, this is a dream getaway. Guests are spoiled with three "berg-to-plate" meals a day, an extensive spa (including a sauna, steam room and ice bath), in-room spa treatments and the option of a romantic sleep-out set up on their room's terrace. There are two luxury rooms and nine suites; three with a heated hot tub/plunge pool, all with outdoor showers. After exploring the wilds – hiking, guided walks, San rock-art excursions, mountain-biking – you can return to the lodge and enjoy two swimming pools, a firepit for stargazing and a lounge, bar and dining area where guests gather for meals and drinks. There's also a cosy library with a fireplace, books and TV, and wine-tasting on site.

- Children welcome (from age 8), no pets.

Near Clanwilliam 087 151 4520, simbavati.com





2. Emily Moon River Lodge

Filled with rare finds and quirky artefacts that owners Mark and Christine Valentine have accumulated during their journeys through Africa and beyond, this lodge conjures up the adventure of travel – and adds a few adventures of its own. Against a backdrop of lush forests, mountains and river valleys, the suites (six superior, eight luxury and two for families) are utterly comfortable and beautifully adorned, and overlook the Bitou River and wetlands below. Wake up to the sound of birdsong as you enjoy a coffee on your private deck, soaking up the spectacular surroundings. Tuck into breakfast and have a dip in the pool, then toss a coin for what to do next. It's an excellent base for Garden Route exploration, but as with all the best retreats, leaving the property is very hard to do – especially with a canoe ready for river paddling, some of the best wood-fired pizzas around, and an exquisitely atmospheric bar and restaurant on site. However, Plettenberg Bay's glorious beaches and buzzy restaurants and shops are just 10 minutes away.

• Children welcome, no pets.
Plettenberg Bay 044 501 2500,
 emilymoon.co.za



3. Ballotina

The main street of Tulbagh, the fourth-oldest town in South Africa, is lined with no fewer than 32 national monuments, a parade of architecture that transports you back in time. Walking along Church Street, you'll want to experience these beautiful abodes in the way they're meant to be – and Ballotina provides just that. Attributed to renowned architect Louis Michel Thibault (who also designed Groot Constantia in Cape Town), this 1814 Cape Dutch house has been transformed into a luxury self-catering stay by two gentlemen with global backgrounds in design and hospitality. The sense of space is wonderful, the ceilings lofty, the detailing beautiful and the colour palette dramatic. The interior is lovely (dripping in chandeliers and with a library lounge for quiet repose), but the garden might steal your heart with its fountains, lawns and trimmed hedges. The dining area under the wisteria cries out for you to enjoy wine with platters of local produce; the boma firepit is the spot for braaiing and stargazing; plus there's a splendid swimming pool. The house has three bedrooms, one of them a separate "cottage" with its own lounge.

• Children welcome (from age 7), no pets.
Tulbagh 082 856 9216

4. Tula Retreat

Your adventure begins when you're ferried across a dam to your own private encampment on the water's edge – it's the only way to access this retreat, and with nothing but rolling hills behind it, you will have utter privacy. The glamping set-up (and this truly is "glamorous camping") consists of an open-plan sleeping and living area, and a separate fully equipped outdoor kitchen about 100 metres away – all of it drenched in views. It sleeps two, and each of you gets your own bathroom (including a slipper bath and outdoor shower); there's also a revamped retro caravan near the kitchen for two extra guests. It's off-grid, with LED and lantern lighting, solar power and "fire" power – think braais, cosy fireplaces indoors and out, and a wood-fired hot tub. Fill your days beside the dam, swimming, paddling (canoe and SUP board supplied) and enjoying boat cruises, or take long walks in the valley. This place has everything you need, from luxury bed linen, towels and bathroom amenities to books, board games and yoga mats; all you need to bring is food, drinks... and a favourite companion.

• No children (teens only), no pets.
Near Calitzdorp 072 610 0697,
 tularetreat.com



5. The Thatch House

All the uninterrupted beauty of the Overberg is on display at this peaceful estate, on the banks of the lagoon in the whale-watching hub of Hermanus. A stylish interior (bespoke furniture, designer textiles, wall hangings and art) and two hectares of beautiful gardens against a magnificent mountain backdrop complete the picture. Each spacious suite has its own character, but all will make you feel like a royal. There are four with water views and three with mountain views; each has a private terrace or patio and a dressing room; most have two bedrooms. Check into the Waterfall Suite if you'd like your own sauna. Chefs spoil you with delicious, seasonal cuisine to pair with fine wines (on the waterside deck in good weather). Guests can lounge at the swimming pool, play tennis, enjoy the putting green or go paddling in kayaks. And at day's end, admire the sunset colours on the water from the wood-fired hot tub. It's a sophisticated spot to indulge in some R&R, with all the creature comforts and little luxuries that make a difference.

- Children welcome, no pets.

Hermanus 028 314 0555,

6. Rivergate Guest Farm

There's country charm and understated luxury aplenty at Rivergate, on the banks of the Klein River in Stanford. It's home to chickens, geese, turkeys, ducks, dogs, alpacas, miniature donkeys, sheep, goats and cows – and the picturesque six-hectare property includes manicured flowerbeds, orchards and a flourishing veggie patch. There's plenty of space to explore on farm walks and picnics, plus swimming and canoeing in the river. The seven restored farm cottages are decorated with Cape country furniture, beautiful fabrics and collectables. Choose from circular Woodrose Cottage (a former reservoir); the open-plan Dairy Shed, Carpenter's Cottage or Gardener's Cottage (all perfect for couples); the two-bedroom Potters Shed or Stable Cottage; or, for a bigger group, the double-storey Gatehouse with its wonderful balcony. Most come with a hot tub; all have a fireplace and an outdoor dining and braai area, plus a DIY breakfast basket is delivered daily. With a farm shop and weekend lunches in the barn, and the possibility of ordering cheeseboards and braai, burger or pasta baskets, there's no need to leave...

- Children welcome, no pets.

But Stanford's wine route, craft and art shops, and hiking and biking trails await.

• Children welcome, no pets.

Stanford 064 785 7454, rivergatefarm.co.za

7. Dennehof Karoo Guesthouse

Complete with quintessential Karoo windpump in the garden and a deep front stoep, Dennehof (dating back to 1835) will grab your heart before you've stepped inside. The heritage property is beautifully furnished with a mix of heirlooms and contemporary design – although ridgeback puppies Ferdinand and Ella, the “guest liaison officers”, tend to steal the show. Rooms in the original homestead, a cottage, old dairy room, blacksmith's forge and wagon shed (which sports an outdoor Victorian bathtub) are gorgeous cocoons of luxury. Some have vintage kitchenettes, others a fireplace; all have private verandahs. Breakfast in the glass conservatory in the garden is served with 360-degree views (and owner Inga's signature sourdough loaves). The old reservoir is now a saltwater pool, with Spanish tiles and a raised sundeck with views over olive groves to the Swartberg Mountains; next to it is a sauna to beat the Karoo chill. In summer, special Veld Feast dinners are available by prior arrangement.

- Children welcome (from age 6), no pets.

Prince Albert 023 541 1227, dennehof.co.za





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8. Kokos Huis

It may look like a typical 200-year-old Cape farmhouse, but inside you'll be transported – with a suggestion of rural Spain or an island somewhere. It's serene and dreamily evocative: muted, earthy colours; natural fabrics and lots of wood; stacks of gorgeous coffee-table books; woven lampshades that cast shadow patterns on walls. This gem of a guesthouse in the arty, quirky Swartland town of Riebeeck-Kasteel has six rooms and three studio cottages (for self-caterers). Each has its own character – the Old Farm Room has a fireplace; some have a chic loft vibe, others open to the

garden. Breakfast is included, there's an all-day menu of small plates and platters, plus room service and a spicy margarita to welcome you. At the heart of the main house is a lounge with a fireplace and a cocktail bar. The verandah overlooks the palm-lined pool courtyard with its enticing cabana, and the garden has a firepit, all of which make Kokos Huis a wonderful space to just chill. However, should you wish to explore, owner Prisca Llagostella, wife of a winemaker, can open doors to authentic experiences and wine farms not available to the public.

- Children welcome, no pets.

Riebeeck-Kasteel 060 941 0084, kokoshuis.com



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9. Sunridge Aan Zee

Surveying the ocean and pristine, fynbos-flecked coastline from its slightly elevated position, a short walk from the shore, this is the ideal base for experiencing the Whale Coast. On the quieter, wilder side of Hermanus, it provides direct access to the golden curve of Onrus Beach (regularly voted the locals' favourite) and its lagoon, two tidal pools, plus neighbouring Sandbaai Beach (reached via a glorious coastal path). With its classic clapboard and stone-wall detailing, window shutters, spacious decks and balconies, this five-bedroom villa is everything you'd picture a seaside home should be. It's dressed in calming muted blues, greys, slate, white and pale wood, and everywhere you look, that glorious ocean view casts a spell. Out on the deck, sundowners and braais are sure to be a daily ritual. If you're yearning for that big fat sea-soaked family holiday, then this is the perfect spot for it.

- Children welcome, no pets.

Onrus 082 456 4519, fireflyvillas.com

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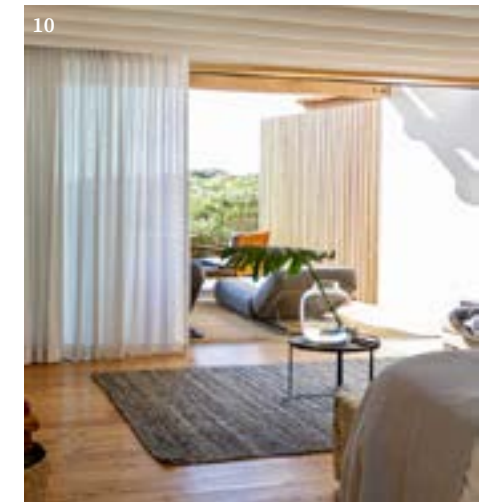
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10. Strandloper Ocean Boutique Hotel

Paternoster is a magnet for travellers in search of the West Coast's wild seascapes, and a place of pilgrimage for foodies. On the far-eastern edge of the fishing village, this hotel (whose name refers to the indigenous beachcombers of yore) is the epitome of barefoot luxury. It's both elemental and modern, designer and natural, contemporary and timeless – a mini whitewashed "village" in its own right, festooned with bright bougainvillea, where the "roads" are wooden boardwalks. Stay in an Ocean Suite and you'll have direct access to the beach 200 metres away; in a larger Nature Suite, built on a dry riverbed, an unspoilt and wild West Coast landscape opens out in front of you. This is the place to fall into a gentle daydream of sky, sea, sand and space – and to be thoroughly pampered with five-star service and gourmet meals. Indulge in a signature Africology Experience at the spa, dip in the 20-metre-long heated saltwater pool, grab a bicycle to explore the town or set off on a guided coastal bush hike, but be sure not to miss the spectacular sundowners at the bar.

- No children (teens only), no pets.

Paternoster 060 547 6308, 083 654 3001 (after hours), strandloperocean.com



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