

Travel... the world's finest culinary destinations

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If, like me, you've never been to Gloucestershire, you'll still have seen pictures of it – as any English garden calendar worth its... [read more](#)

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On a foggy November morning, we left Paddington station and headed to Cornwall for two days of... [read more](#)

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Grenada is one of the least spoiled islands in the Caribbean and at only 34 x 18kms, it is small enough to explore thoroughly. The people... [read more](#)

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Think of Morocco and images of old city walls, camel caravans and tagines spring to mind. So when you arrive in Tangier, a city on... [read more](#)

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South Africa

Written by Emily Hirschmann

Quick look

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I should be disappointed. An eleven hour flight and what I really want to write is a fable; *South Africa: In Search of a Mythical Mountain*. Cloud cover! Who's ever heard of a mountain, a whole flipping mountain, being swallowed by cloud cover? For a week I should, as I said, be disappointed. However, my main destination is the Banhoek Valley and it is hard to imagine a region more beautiful, nesting as it does amidst the purple peaks of the Western Cape. You can keep your Table top; here, one imagines, there really may be dragons.

Only an hour's drive northeast of Cape Town is some of the most magnificent countryside you're ever likely to see. Breath-taking mountains look down beneficently upon luscious green valleys; vineyards roll out in all directions, interspersed with picturesque white-washed Cape Dutch homesteads and the occasional history-laden township. This is picture-postcard territory, a photographers delight, the only challenge to know when to stop.

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What To See : [Back to top](#)

Although Zorgvliet provides a fantastic base for any visit to the Western Cape, it is its Wine Experience Holiday* that sets it apart from many of its local contemporaries. The Wine Experience offers guests the chance to participate in viticultural activities rarely available to Joe Public. Activities are necessarily seasonal, so don't expect to arrive in winter and partake in grape-picking, but whatever the time of year there is always something going on, from planting to pruning, culturing to consuming. You don't need to know a lot about wine to enjoy these pursuits and even if its ingestion is as far as your interest in wine takes you, you'll find yourself drawn into the world of Bacchus by the sheer enthusiasm of the Zorgvliet team. This truly is a unique opportunity.

In the unlikely event that you should find yourself at a loose end and tiring of Zorgvliet's charms, there are plenty of sights to see and excursions to go on, both in the immediate area and within easy driving distance. Just a short drive away you have the attractive town of Stellenbosch – roughly the size of a medium city, with the character, appeal and atmosphere of a small country village. Founded by Simon van der Stel in 1687, Stellenbosch was one of the first inland white settlements in South Africa and has all the accompanying historical interest you would expect from such a claim. Despite three savage fires during the first two hundred years of settlement, many of the original buildings still stand, adding a palpable sense of old-Holland to the township. Although easy enough to navigate alone, a trip to the local Tourism and Information Bureau, where you can join the Historical Stellenbosch on Foot tour, is a fantastic way of orientating yourself before embarking on your own exploration. Full of galleries, boutiques and sidewalk cafes, Stellenbosch is a great place to while away a day.

Throughout the year, Stellenbosch and its neighbouring town, Franschhoek, are also home to various foodie-festivals, celebrating everything from from cheese and wine, to olives and Kreeffees (local cray fish), not to mention Mardi gras, jazz, the arts and agriculture, so do check the local what's on guides while you're there.

A little further afield, but still within an hour or so's drive of Zorgvliet, the idle tourist can entertain themselves with a wealth of activities, from whale-watching (June- November), scenic flights in either helicopter or light aircraft (a ludicrously cheap afternoon offered by a variety of operators, starting from approximately £35 with the current exchange rate), any number of fantastic beaches (great for surfing, even better for lounging!), Cape Town and it's many amusements only an hour away and of course, what visit to South Africa would be complete without a trip to that resident (occasionally invisible) monolith, Table Mountain?

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Back to Banhoek, no visit to Zorgvliet is complete without a meal at Herenhuis. The Zorgvliet restaurant is housed in the original 1685 Dutch farmhouse. Lovingly restored to an exceptional standard externally, while internally a menu of equal quality is presented, with, it seems, almost equal love. The chef here plainly cares about what he puts on his diners plates. The menu is varied, almost fusion in style, and incredibly well thought-out. As a picky vegetarian I was thrilled with the selection presented to me, all perfectly cooked, perfectly matched and perfectly presented by a cheery waiting team, lacking all the dour gravitas one comes to dread in serious restaurants. Oh, and the house wine is, of course, fantastic.

For a less formal dining experience the restaurant at Le Pommier is also worth a visit. With knickknacks covering every available surface, a massive freshly-prepared menu catering to pretty much every taste and a lively bar area, Le Pommier offers a relaxed alternative for those nights when you just can't be bothered to go for the full push-up. It's also a great place to head for breakfast, or a hearty pre-flight lunch.

As a tourist destination, I wasn't really sure what to expect from South Africa. I grew up at a time when Nelson Mandela was yet to be freed and political horror stories were rife, in my mind I wasn't entirely sure Brits were openly welcomed still and certainly wasn't expecting any degree of sophistication amongst the hoteliers, but I came away hugely pleasantly surprised. This is a truly remarkable country; naturally beautiful, recently re-invented, comfortably safe, amazingly good value and incredibly diverse. Ok, so I didn't get to see Table Mountain, but hey, at least that gives me an excuse to go back... *You listening Editor? It gives me an excuse to go back!*

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Right in the heart of this glorious wineland lies my destination, the Zorgvliet Wine Estate Lodge and Spa. The literal translation of Zorgvliet is 'let your sorrows flee' and indeed, once you step through the doors of this viticultural paradise, holding on to your sorrows becomes very difficult indeed.

The Zorgvliet Wine Estate is very much a family business, with each of the three composite hotels being managed by one of the children of the estates owners, the charming and elegant Mac and Marietjie van der Merwe. Each of the residences has been furnished to the highest standard, employing taste and delicacy, to create three sumptuous retreats with three unique signatures.

Although children are welcome at all of the hotels, Le Pommier Country Lodge is probably the most family-orientated, while Alluvia Specialist Winery & Guesthouse is perfectly designed for a cosy romantic getaway. However, with views to take your breath away, a bathroom I could spend my life in, classic-yet-comfy decor and service with a very genuine smile it was the eponymous Zorgvliet Lodge & Spa that stole my heart.

Small, but perfectly formed, with six suites, each including a panoramic view of the vineyards and Simonsberg mountain range, this hotel is more than a little bit special. Adding to the allure, the on-site spa epitomises relaxation (and value for money, with an autumn offer of mini-facial, manicure and pedicure for the jaw-droppingly good price of £30).

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South African Airways operate daily flights to Cape Town from Manchester, Glasgow, Birmingham, Edinburgh and Newcastle.**

*For £730 The Zorgvliet Wine Experience holiday includes: 3 nights accommodation at the 5 star Vineyard Lodge, a vineyard walk & talk with the viticulturist, including seasonal activities, a cellar tour & wine tasting session with the wine maker, sampling the estates award-winning vintages, a food & wine pairing gourmet dinner, sunset picnic at a mountain spot and a couples spa treatment.

** For more information, or to book a Zorgvliet Wine Experience holiday contact St Andrews Travel on 44 (0)1204 397367/373322, or visit www.zorgvliet.com

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