

# SIMPLY STELLENBOSCH

*When is a trip to Cape Town not a trip to Cape Town? When it's a trip to its nearby country cousin. **ANDREW DENT** discovers a different way to do South Africa*

“THE TOWN IS JUST 30 MINUTES FROM THE COAST AND STUNNING WHALE WATCHING”

**W**hat are the variables you look for in a family holiday? Might they include incredible value for money, balmy blue-sky days, lots of activities for all the family, leafy landscapes, no jet lag and outdoor experiences to satisfy the ever-increasing thirst from inquisitive children? Backed up by family-friendly vineyard homesteads and varied, healthy food options? Perhaps throw in a spa and golf course to make sure everyone is getting some of what they like?

It's a long list to satisfy, but we might just have found the answer – Stellenbosch, a historic town 40 minutes outside of Cape Town in South Africa. Add the fact that you are only 30 minutes from the beach and whale watching, and we think this is a great destination for a year-round family holiday. Stellenbosch offers off-season sun for us

Brits at Christmas, but it is perhaps best for both October and February half terms, when average temperatures are a pleasant 23C.

Cape Town itself is a buzzing destination, but if you're not looking for the big-city vibe 24/7, and you prefer a more serene backdrop to your holiday, by basing yourself in Stellenbosch, you can experience all the wonders of Cape Town and the surrounding area from a beautiful environment just a short drive away.

Yes, the flight is long at 12 hours, but it is overnight and, all being well, you and the family might hope to sleep. Thanks to the small time change (one or two hours) you should land feeling human. Hire a car (Cape Town airport is on the Stellenbosch side just half an hour away), and before you know it, the kids will be in the pool and you'll have a glass of famous South African wine in hand.

We can't talk about South Africa without bringing up the exchange rate and the

incredible value it represents. Right now, a single Queen's Pound buys you no less than 20 SA Rand. Meaning a fancy dinner for four with good-quality local wine and juice will set you back £30 or so. In fact, once you've invested in the flights from the UK (which can be expensive), everything else is a steal. You will often find yourself doing mental arithmetic and comparing things to back home and going, 'Really?!' And it makes it much easier to say yes to the kids when they pester for food, drinks and activities.

Stellenbosch is, at its heart, a university town, with one of South Africa's most prestigious and oldest seats of learning historically forming the main buzz of the town. However, increasingly, the town has seen an influx of interesting types setting up home and business here – ranging from arts and crafts to boutique hoteliers and outdoor experience operators. The neighbouring towns of Franschhoek, Paarl



and Somerset West have all been attracting the family crowd, meaning there is a real commitment to ensuring all ages and activities are catered for.

The area is well known for its plethora of award-winning gourmet restaurants and wineland estates – but have no fear about taking the little ones along; the ever-increasing local family residential population has meant that many of the best are fully set up for kids, with healthy menus, adventure play areas and picnic spots – after all, this is South Africa, and the

going is easy. One of South Africa's oldest and best-known wineland destinations is the renowned 17th-century Spier Wine Farm ([spier.co.za](http://spier.co.za)). This sprawling estate offers a huge variety of activities for kids of all ages, from grape-juice-tasting to fun educational factsheets about the roles of insects in vineyards, bird-of-prey displays and even teen Segway tours. Meanwhile, wine and olive farm Tokara's newly revamped deliCATessen is a child-friendly spot for a delicious breakfast or light lunch. This arty deli has a play area outside, which includes a 'birds' nest' in a large tree that kids can climb into. If you're travelling on a budget, the whole family can be fed and watered for less than £20.

The coast near Stellenbosch is nature-rich, too. From July onwards, visitors can witness one of the country's most unmissable wildlife spectacles – the arrival of the migratory Southern Right whales. A mere 30 minutes drive from Stellenbosch, this makes for a great day trip, offering some of the best land-based whale watching in the world. Keeping on the nature tip, Butterfly World ([butterflyworld.co.za](http://butterflyworld.co.za)) is a walk-through experience of tropical butterflies, reptiles and smaller animals.

Stellenbosch's accommodation



TAKE A BIKE TOUR THROUGH THE PICTURESQUE VINEYARDS

#### SUCH GREAT SIGHTS

Clockwise from top left: The lush countryside of Stellenbosch; the 17th-century Spier Wine Farm has activities for kids; migrating whales are a common sight from July onwards







## STELLENBOSCH: THE LOWDOWN

### GETTING THERE

Flights from London Heathrow to Cape Town with BA start at £1,092 return, including taxes and charges. For further information, visit [ba.com](http://ba.com). Flight time 12 hours

### WHERE TO STAY

**Majeka House** – Rates in a Poolside Suite start from £102pp sharing. Children under 12 are free when sleeping in the same room, otherwise interconnecting rooms have to be booked. [majekahouse.co.za](http://majekahouse.co.za)

**The Homestead at Oldenburg Vineyards** has six bedrooms and sleeps up to 12 people. Rates start from £700 per night and include exclusive use of the homestead and its facilities, continental breakfast, free wifi, daily housekeeping and concierge service and a wine tasting at the Oldenburg cellar door. [oldenburgvineyards.com](http://oldenburgvineyards.com)

**Victoria & Alfred Hotel** – Rates from £224 per night for a piazza-facing room with bed and breakfast. (All rooms only accept a maximum of one child per room, they do not take two children and two adults.) [newmarkhotels.com](http://newmarkhotels.com)

options cater for all budgets. For the boutique hotel experience try Majeka House ([majekahouse.co.za](http://majekahouse.co.za)), a seriously cool property in the suburbs of the town. The setting is tranquil and the gardens and pools beautifully laid out; the rooms are super trendy, with unique painted ceilings and furnishings. Children are welcome here and the rooms are so spacious that they can accommodate both an extra bed and a cot, if required, for no extra charge, as children under 12 stay for free if sharing with parents. If you prefer the children close but not too close, interconnecting rooms are available, with up to three children able to share a room at the adult sharing rate. The award winning Makaron Restaurant is a gourmet feast for the senses. With different wines matching each of the courses, it is perhaps one for an extended evening, and the babysitter booked in.

For luxury with a more private bespoke family feel, The Homestead at Oldenburg Vineyards ([oldenburgvineyards.com](http://oldenburgvineyards.com)) is the latest addition to the Stellenbosch experience. The original homestead dates back 200 years, but the renovation job has transformed the property into one of contemporary luxury. The house can accommodate up to 12 guests, across six ensuite bedrooms, and various large outdoor areas offer exceptional views of the surrounding mountains and vineyards.

We would still recommend one night staying over in Cape Town before flying back to the cold. The V&A Waterfront is a buzzing shopping and leisure area with lots for all the family. Stay in The Victoria &

Alfred Hotel ([newmarkhotels.com](http://newmarkhotels.com)). It's located perfectly on the quay, with stunning views of both Table Mountain and the harbour.

Like so much of South Africa, the hotel is incredibly accommodating for children – extra beds and cots are no problem, interconnecting rooms are on offer and reduced rates for kids are standard. ■

### AFRICAN ADVENTURE

Clockwise from top left: Stunning views at Beyerskloof winery; Spier Wine Farm offers Segway tours; Table Mountain towers over the city; the Waterford Estate vineyard; kite flying on the coast; the world-famous Boulders Beach penguins; the magnificent Homestead at Oldenburg Vineyards

## CAPE TOWN TOP SIX FOR FAMILIES

**1 TABLE MOUNTAIN** What could be more thrilling for little explorers than catching the revolving cable car to the top? Pack a picnic. And the kids will love spotting the dassies (rock badgers) – they're the closest relative to the elephant, believe it or not! [tablemountain.net](http://tablemountain.net)

**2 ROBBER ISLAND** The kids may/may not be much into history, depending on their ages – but even so, they will enjoy the 3.5-hour round trip to Robben Island, if only to

enjoy spotting the African penguins from the ferry. This World Heritage Site is where Nelson Mandela was held prisoner and makes for a memorable visit. [robben-island.org.za](http://robben-island.org.za)

**3 TWO OCEANS AQUARIUM** This attraction has real 'wow factor', showcasing sealife from the two mighty oceans (Atlantic and Indian) that meet at Africa's southern tip. These include sharks, exotic fish, turtles and seahorses, as well

as an impressive kelp forest. [aquarium.co.za](http://aquarium.co.za)

### 4 KIRSTENBOSCH BOTANICAL GARDEN

Families will love exploring this incredible park, full of South African plant life, streams, paths and hiking trails, picnic lawns, cafés and restaurants. In summer, it hosts sunset concerts. [sanbi.org/gardens](http://sanbi.org/gardens)

**5 WORLD OF BIRDS** There are over 3,000 birds and other small animals of 400

different species in Africa's largest wild-bird park, and over 100 walk-through aviaries of varying sizes. Kids will love the monkey jungle, too. [worldofbirds.org.za](http://worldofbirds.org.za)

**6 BOULDERS BEACH** Three thousand jackass penguins can't be wrong! This is an amazing beach – and you can even swim with them. Simon's Town is worth a visit in itself, and its Scratch Patch gemstone outlet is world famous, and promises hours of treasure-hunting fun.



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