

# SOUTH AFRICA on the quiet

*Andrew Hunt, Audley's Africa Programme Manager, recounts some finds from a recent research trip to South Africa.*



The PortWine Guesthouse

South Africa has many fine hotels, but less well-documented is its excellent network of quality guesthouses and B&Bs. In May of this year I spent three weeks adding to my knowledge of the many options available. I was really taken aback by the quality of these small properties, and how perfectly they fit the Audley ethos of turning left when the tour parties are turning right. They also offer a superb opportunity to get under the skin of the country as they are all owner-managed, by sociable and knowledgeable locals.

Franschhoek was already my favourite Winelands' town, and it now has my favourite Winelands' guesthouse as well, the Plumwood Inn. On the edge of town, it manages to combine views of the surrounding countryside and vineyards while being literally a minute's walk from the restaurants and shops at the heart of Franschhoek. It encapsulates the appeal of these properties, being small (with just five rooms), stylishly decorated, and gives you the feel of being a guest at a friend's house.

As well as discovering new properties, my trip was also designed to give me time in the Overberg and Little Karoo regions. These form the ideal bridge between the Cape region and the Garden Route and are much less travelled than their better-known neighbours – yet they are now firmly ensconced as my favourite area of the country, perhaps because they are that bit off the beaten track.



The Swartberg Pass

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My favourable impression was also helped immeasurably by the owners of two guesthouses. In Swellendam, a great base for exploring places like De Hoop Nature Reserve and the mountains around Montagu, I was greeted at Rothman Manor by an enormous Rhodesian Ridgeback hound, thankfully as soft in character as he was large. Apparently when Henry goes for his daily exercise, he does so chasing a pick-up truck driven by Andreas (the owner of both Rothman Manor and Henry). Rothman Manor itself has a lovely small estate, complete with ostrich and antelope, and the rooms are superbly well-furnished in a modern, African style. Andreas and his wife Franziska are full of ideas for your time and know the region incredibly well.



Swellendam mountain scenery

My favourite discovery of the trip was Calitzdorp and the PortWine Guesthouse. Part of it was the location: Calitzdorp is missed by most tourists, who zoom through in their hermetically sealed coaches, so it has a wonderfully sleepy small-town air. Part of it was the guesthouse itself, quite rambling and rustic, with simple pine furniture and large rooms. But most of it was Andrea Nel, the owner of the PortWine. She was entertaining and engaging, and if something was worth knowing in Calitzdorp, she knew it. As we sat at the restaurant cum shop on the dusty main street, she greeted each and every person who came through the doors. I learnt about the newly arrived Capetonian who'd come to escape the rat-race, and the eccentric Englishman, once a leading light amongst London theatre costumiers who now owned a guesthouse some six hours into the Karoo itself – he was having problems with the sharp practices of local estate agents, so the modern world has not completely bypassed Calitzdorp!

I came back totally won over to the concept of B&Bs and guesthouses in South Africa. They are intimate, stylish, friendly and are the perfect way to complement your travels round the country.



Farm, Oudtshoorn



## Travel file

A 10-night self-drive itinerary taking in the Cape region, Little Karoo and the Garden Route, staying at guesthouses and B&Bs costs from £1,295 per person based on twin share. For further details please call Cate or Melissa on 01869 276 250.



Rothman Manor, and the hosts Andreas, Franziska and Henry