

# Wine Away Your Time

*We asked Pietman Retief, wine expert, to lift the lid on what makes Stellenbosch in South Africa's Cape region such a special place.*



Dutch Reformed church,  
Franschhoek Valley



The terroir

## FACT FILE

A two week trip to South Africa incorporating a seven night stay in the Winelands region and a tour with Pietman costs from £2,250 per person. Please call Marilyn, Jill or Sarah on 01993 838 550 for details.



**S**tellenbosch, just a 30 minute drive from Cape Town, is not just the centre of the breathtaking Winelands region, but is famous for its history, beauty and culture. The second oldest town in South Africa, it was founded in 1679 when a small island in the Eerste River was named by Simon van der Stel, the governor of the Cape. Soon, its rich soil and climate was being used to supply the vegetables and wines to the ships of the Dutch East India Company on their way to the Far East.

The best way to experience the Winelands of the Cape is to spend a lifetime there, and Pietman Retief is one of those lucky few. Born in nearby Wellington and educated at the University of Stellenbosch, he is recognised as one of the foremost wine experts in the country, and is known for his passion for all things connected with the product of the vine and the history of the area. We'll let Pietman take over at this point.

**Pietman:** Today, Stellenbosch has some 65,000 residents of which 22,000 are students at the renowned university which has helped the town remain at the centre of the South African wine industry. The heritage of this beautiful area has been carefully maintained with many of the oak-lined streets and buildings being named national monuments. With its charming hotels, restaurants and guest houses, Stellenbosch is the perfect place to spend a couple of days strolling through its historical byways, admiring the wonderful architecture and learning of its history in the museums. And of course, drinking its wine!

For those not lucky enough to live here, you are most welcome to get an inside view by spending a day on one of my wine tours. Tucked away in

these magnificent valleys between the large, well-known estates, there are so many fascinating nooks and crannies that the uninitiated will simply drive past. I believe that much of the warmth and excitement of the wine experience is focused around the people and their passion for the land and the vine. It is essential that the visitor meets as many as possible, from the owner to the wine maker or vineyard worker. You see, personalities differ, personalities in cellars differ, so cellars differ and ultimately, the wines differ! And this is all before you start to consider the land itself, its soil, its position, its rain and its sun – in fact, its *terroir*.

This is an area with something for everyone. From the 'huge' atmosphere of Ernie Els wines to the warmth and personal family attention at Kanonkop (named for the cannon fired to inform the farmers that the ships had arrived in Table Bay to collect fresh produce and wine), from the historical 'story' of Uitkyk to the educational success of Die Bergkelder, and the sensational beauty of Niel Ellis wines, hidden away in the Jonkershoek mountains, to the honesty of Johnnie Nel of Camberley up on the hill in his 'garage'.

All this to enjoy and taste and, for those who like to eat as well as drink, a fine lunch in a shady courtyard or under the vines, with the opportunity to relax, contemplate the morning's visits and enjoy the convivial atmosphere. And to round the day off in perfect fashion, a visit to the stunning Van Ryn Brandy Cellar and the opportunity to sample 12, 15 and 20 year old brandies – brandies that match 'the best in the world' according to the judges at the London Wine and Spirit Competition.



Simonsberg Mountain, home of Kanonkop Estate, Stellenbosch



Die Bergkelder

