

Escapes

Edited by *Saska Graville*

Sunshine ON AN AUTUMN DAY

It may be cooling down but don't pack away your swimsuit – not quite yet. Before you snuggle into the cooler months, book yourself an end-of-year, warm-weather fix. And we know where the sun is

Cape Town

Words *Saska Graville*

I think I've found my happy place. I've just arrived at Cape View Clifton, and its rock-star, cliff-top views of turquoise sea, white sandy beaches and jagged mountain peaks are leaving me giddy. Add to that chic interiors in soothing shades of black, white and grey, that look like a 'how to style monochrome' Pinterest board brought to life, and you can see why Cape View has leapt to the top of my favourite check-in list. Did I mention that it's a guesthouse? No five-star price tags here, rates start at £156 a night for bed and breakfast. I'm blown away, and I haven't even got to my room yet.

Cape Town has been surprising me like this since I arrived. A first-time visitor, I've been seduced by the city's mountain-meets-beach geography and sunshine >>

The decked terraces at Cape View Clifton boast spectacular sea views



FROM TOP: The vineyards at La Clé des Montagnes; Table Mountain cable car; Bo Kaap; looking out over the Atlantic at Cape View Clifton

lifestyle. And the astonishing value for money - it must be one of the few remaining holiday spots where the exchange rate doesn't make you gulp.

My advice to any newbies in town? Take yourself on a Cape Insights design tour (capeinsights.com), an instant immersion in the more creative and bohemian side of the city. Thanks to my dynamic guide Marion Ellis, I'd only been in town for 24 hours, but I'd visited inner-city community art projects, emerging design areas (think Cape Town's answer to Shoreditch) and seen the colourful Bo Kaap area, home to former freed slaves and now a multicultural regeneration success story. I had also spent far too much money in my favourite shop of the trip, the interiors mecca that is Africa Nova (africanova.co.za). Do not miss it.

But for a Brit exile in November, a large part of Cape Town's appeal is, of course, the weather. This is springtime, and the sunshine is glorious. It's hard to think of a nicer place to be than on a lounge on one of Cape View Clifton's two terraces, staring out to sea. Bleached wood decking, giant tubs of succulents and an icy blue plunge pool - it's like hanging out at your own dream beach house. And if you do want the actual beach, the white sands of Clifton are a short walk away.

If Cape View Clifton is the ultimate urban oasis, then La Clé des Montagnes is a rural getaway that

redefines country-cottage luxury. A collection of four villas, each sleeping between four and eight, in the heart of a working wine estate just an hour from the centre of Cape Town, it gives another - equally lovely - perspective on Cape Town life. The local town, Franschhoek, is, as its name suggests, filled with the spirit of the Huguenots who fled prosecution in 17th-century France and settled here, leaving a legacy of delicious wine and some of the best food I've eaten in a long time. My La Clé villa, La Galerie, was a pretty, colonial two-bedroom house set in beautifully tended gardens. Breakfast by the pool came with glorious views across to the red rock hills in the distance, and was served by my very own butler - yes, really. This is true luxe living.

If you only do one thing in Franschhoek, book the garden tour and lunch at nearby Babylonstoren (babylonstoren.com). Just as Marion Ellis gives an instant insight into the cultural complexity of Cape Town, Babylonstoren's head gardener Gundula immerses you in the history of this 1690 Cape Dutch farm, and its gorgeous vineyards and gardens. She knows and loves every leaf and blade of grass. While you're there, pop into the farm shop (it makes Daylesford look shabby), then have lunch in restaurant hot spot Babel (booked out for months in



Cape View Clifton's deck at night
BELOW: Redefining country-cottage luxury - one of the bedrooms at La Clé des Montagnes



advance). To make a whole day of it, have a treatment at the farm's tucked-away spa, and then spend the afternoon hanging out by the wonderful saltwater pool.

After the perfect town and country Cape Town trip, I am well and truly smitten. And with a minimal time difference, I can forgive the 12-hour flight - winter sun with no jet lag. That Cape View Clifton decking is beckoning...

Trip Notes

Cape View Clifton, from £156 per night b&b. Villa accommodation at La Clé des Montagnes, from £422 per room, per night, for the two-bedroom La Galerie, including breakfast, welcome drinks on arrival, butler and concierge services. Scott Dunn organises luxury tailor-made trips to South Africa from £2,950 for a seven-night itinerary including b&b, accommodation, international flights, car hire and some tours and excursions; 020 8682 5070; scottdunn.com. South African Airways offers return flights to Cape Town from London Heathrow via Johannesburg from £883; 0844 375 9680; flysaa.com.



CLOCKWISE: The luxury pool at The Residence Tunis; the beautiful Moorish-Andalusian lobby; Roman villa at Carthage; a traditional blue and white house in Sidi Bou Said

Tunisia

Words Cathy Levy

Up above, against cloudless, azure skies, palm trees tower majestically. I can hear waves gently lapping against sandy shores, the sun is warming my bones and I am thanking my lucky stars that this is not another Monday morning dream I'm being woken from.

Actually, I'm at The Residence Tunis in Tunisia, a member of the Leading Hotels of the World and an Andalusian/Moorish mix of understated elegance, set on its own private beach. Here by the large, meandering pool, with

enough loungers to not have to bagsie them early morning, staff quietly buzz, providing chilled water, snacks, a fresh towel. It's all very stealth; friendly and non-invasive.

Tunisia is just finding its place again on the tourist map, having been understandably sidelined since the Arab Spring kicked off here in 2011. Times have been hard all round and when you venture into the city centre you can see signs of the crisis, but I'm told time and again by locals I meet that things are looking up. There's a positive vibe in the air and it really is worth coming.

Least of all because at just a two-and-a-half-hour flight from London, the weather is sunshine-bright and soothingly warm, even now; around 20°C in November. And there's a good deal to see in-between the sun-worshipping and unwinding in the hotel's excellent Thalasso spa. A short taxi ride takes you to the heart of the city, where you can wander around the ancient Arab Medina, bartering for gold and traditional, colourful slippers. Dip into some wonderful restaurants, too, like Dar El Jeld, hidden behind a bright yellow arched doorway. Set in the covered courtyard of an elaborate



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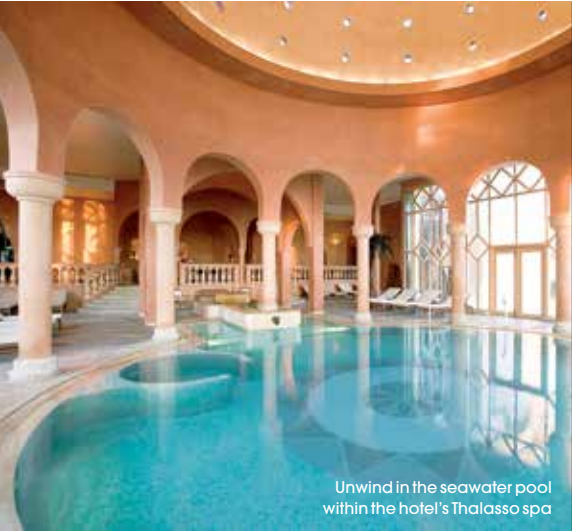
18th-century mansion, it's worth it just for the spectacular interiors.

History is rich in Tunis, and nowhere more than in the ancient city of Carthage, not far away. This was home to Hannibal the Great, responsible for almost defeating the Romans in a most violent and horrifying way. Now, it's a pretty residential suburb, but you can still find Roman ruins here to enable some grisly retellings.

We didn't stay long, we had shopping to do at nearby Sidi Bou Said, a picture-perfect village of blue and white painted houses. Unsurprisingly it's attracted many artists (Matisse and Klee both visited) and is now home to wealthy Tunisians. Spend some time here - you'll want to explore, browse the local wares and cafés, and soak up the sparkling views.

I was starting to miss my sea view, from a lounge and accompanied by >>





Unwind in the seawater pool within the hotel's Thalasso spa

something cold to sip, so it was back to the comfort of The Residence. With its indoor heated seawater pool, hammam, and luxury spa using ESPA products, you could happily spend half your time inside. I treated myself to a full body Abyanga massage using warm sesame oil to relieve stress that had me skipping back out again. I also tried reflexology, a hydro-massage in the multi-jet bath, and a soothing facial - it was hard to stay away.

Everywhere is designed to have a calming effect, the decoration in softly neutral tones with smatterings of terracotta, crimson, gold, traditional mosaic, interspersed with decadent displays of fresh exotic flowers. And then there's the incredible food at its six restaurants - from a breakfast of Tunisian bread with honey and fruit at L'Olivier to Li Bai for one of the best Chinese feasts I've tasted and El Dar with its traditional tagines in clay pots and impressive belly dancing. Oh, and the Golf Club House, too - yes, there's an 18-hole professional golf course across the way. I'm settling in for the winter I think.

Trip Notes

Stay seven nights at The Residence Tunis, pay for five, with ITC Luxury Travel (01244 355 527; itcluxurytravel.co.uk), from £1,085 per person based on two adults sharing a Garden View Room, including breakfast, return flights with Tunisair and private transfers.



FROM TOP: Patara Beach; one of the many historic ruins; the harbour town of Gocek

Turkey

Words Marianne Power

As a pale and pasty redhead, I don't do very well in the sun. My last beach holiday was a July trip to Corfu with girlfriends five years ago. They spent their days capturing every ray they could, while I lurked under beach umbrellas in long dresses and big hats. But this year, a friend convinced me that I'd be fine in end-of-year sun, and that Turkey was the place to go. A balmy 20-25°C in late October, it would be warm enough to loll around the pool, but cool enough to suit my Irish skin.

We booked a villa, The Watermill, about 8km outside of Gocek, a small picturesque harbour town on the Turquoise Coast in south-west Turkey - and I packed my long dresses and big hats. As its name suggests, the villa's main feature was a (very noisy) gushing waterfall next to the villa pool. Beautiful, but probably not ideal for someone who really does want to spend seven days sun-worshipping. Which suited me fine.

The villa was starkly modern in contrast to its rustic setting - all statement wallpaper, flat-screen televisions and wet rooms. There was even a sauna by the pool - presumably for those who *really* love the heat.

With three large double bedrooms as well as a small sofa-bed, the villa slept seven of us comfortably, with plenty of space for us to spread out and do our own thing. Inevitably, the first day was spent doing very little: dipping in the pool, snoozing by the pool, then eating by the pool using supplies bought from the local market - figs, olives and traditional cheese and spinach pancakes.



The next day we visited the local beach, where the sand was the colour of charcoal and the Aegean sea was the temperature of a warm bath after a summer of sun. Afterwards, we drove on to Gocek to have dinner at a local favourite, Kebab Hospital - apparently so named because they ran out of space on the sign to spell out 'Kebab Hospitality' - for a feast of meze: minty yoghurt sauces, houmous and fried aubergines drenched in olive oil, served with puffed bread the size of a balloon.

Then, for the next few days, we braved the Turkish roads (or rather the Turkish drivers, who are either going at incredible speeds or stopping in the middle of the road for no apparent reason) and explored. There is so much to see in Turkey, from historic ruins and market towns, to epic coastal scenery, and the joy of going there >>





Sit back and relax at The Watermill villa

in the autumn, is that it's cool enough to sightsee in comfort.

The tombs carved into cliffs at Dalyan were about an hour's drive away. One of the most photographed attractions in the area, they're a spectacular sight. As is Patara, which has been described as one of the most beautiful beaches in the world, where we found 14km of pure white sand and turquoise sea. I decided I might have got it wrong about hating beach holidays.

On the way home we stopped at the ruins of a village called Xanthos, which dates back to Roman times. It was a prosperous place, judging by the remains of a grand amphitheatre and mosaic floors, but the villagers committed mass suicide rather than submit to invading Persian forces. The men gathered their wives, children and possessions and set fire to everyone and everything.

For our final day we lightened the tone with a day trip on a gulet, a traditional wooden boat - diving off it and swimming in crystal-clear water. No surprise I've decided from now on, autumn will be the time for my summer holiday: no sunburn, no crowds... just fun in the gentle sun. And while I know there's a whole world to see, I really fell in love with Turkey and I want to go back.

Trip Notes

Exclusive Escapes (020 8605 3500; exclusiveescapes.co.uk) offers seven nights at The Watermill from £1,045pp based on six sharing, including return flights to Dalaman from the private terminal at London Stansted, Heathrow or Manchester, transfers, seven days' car hire, a welcome hamper and daily cleaning. A day's luxury gulet cruise costs from £55pp including lunch, drinks and afternoon tea.



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1 ESSAOUIRA, MOROCCO From £399pp for seven nights*

With golden sandy stretches, whitewashed seaside buildings and a laid-back, peaceful vibe, it's hard to believe that Essaouira is just a stone's throw from the fantastically chaotic souks of Marrakech. Staying at the Sofitel Essaouira Mogador Golf & Spa, which has been described as having an 'air of nomadic chic', you'll be waking up to spectacular views of the ocean Mogador golf course. Includes a choice of board type, discounted spa treatments and transfers to the hotel.



2 VALENCIA, SPAIN From £24 per room per night b&b*

Valencia is a lively and characterful city with excellent eating (paella was invented in these parts), drinking and parks to wander in. It's the perfect destination for a colourful Spanish break. Vincci Lys is a four-star hotel on a quiet pedestrian street in Valencia, a 10-minute walk from the city's cathedral and just off the Carrer Colón shopping street.

3 SHARM EL SHEIKH, EGYPT

From £669pp for seven nights*


Buzzing Sharm el Sheikh is a 15-minute drive away, where you'll be able to swim in the calm waters of Naama Bay and wander the Old Market before settling in a chic bar to watch the sun set over the Red Sea - a cocktail in one hand and a forkful of fresh seafood in the other. Includes a choice of board type and transfers to the hotel.



4 SOUSSE, TUNISIA From £499pp for seven nights*

Hotel El Mouradi Palm Marina is a relaxing five-star spa hotel. It has an enviable location on the seafront in Port el Kantaoui, on the shimmering coast of Tunisia. With access to a private beach and a full-service spa, there's no shortage of places to stretch out, take a deep breath and relax. Includes all-inclusive board, discounted spa treatments and transfers to the hotel.

5 LYCIAN COAST, TURKEY From £798pp for seven nights*

Spilling down the pine-speckled slopes of the Lycian Coast, the Nautical Hotel is an idyllic base for the perfect blend of relaxation and adventure. Your home for the week will be a sumptuous two-floor suite with a private wraparound infinity pool. The resort is within easy reach of the Lycian Way, one of the world's best trekking paths, as well as Butterfly Valley and the famous Blue Lagoon. Includes accommodation, breakfast, a duplex suite with a private pool and transfers to the hotel.  Sign up at Redescapes.com for our exclusive holiday offers



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