

Coast & COUNTRYSIDE

The best hotels for a stylish winter stay

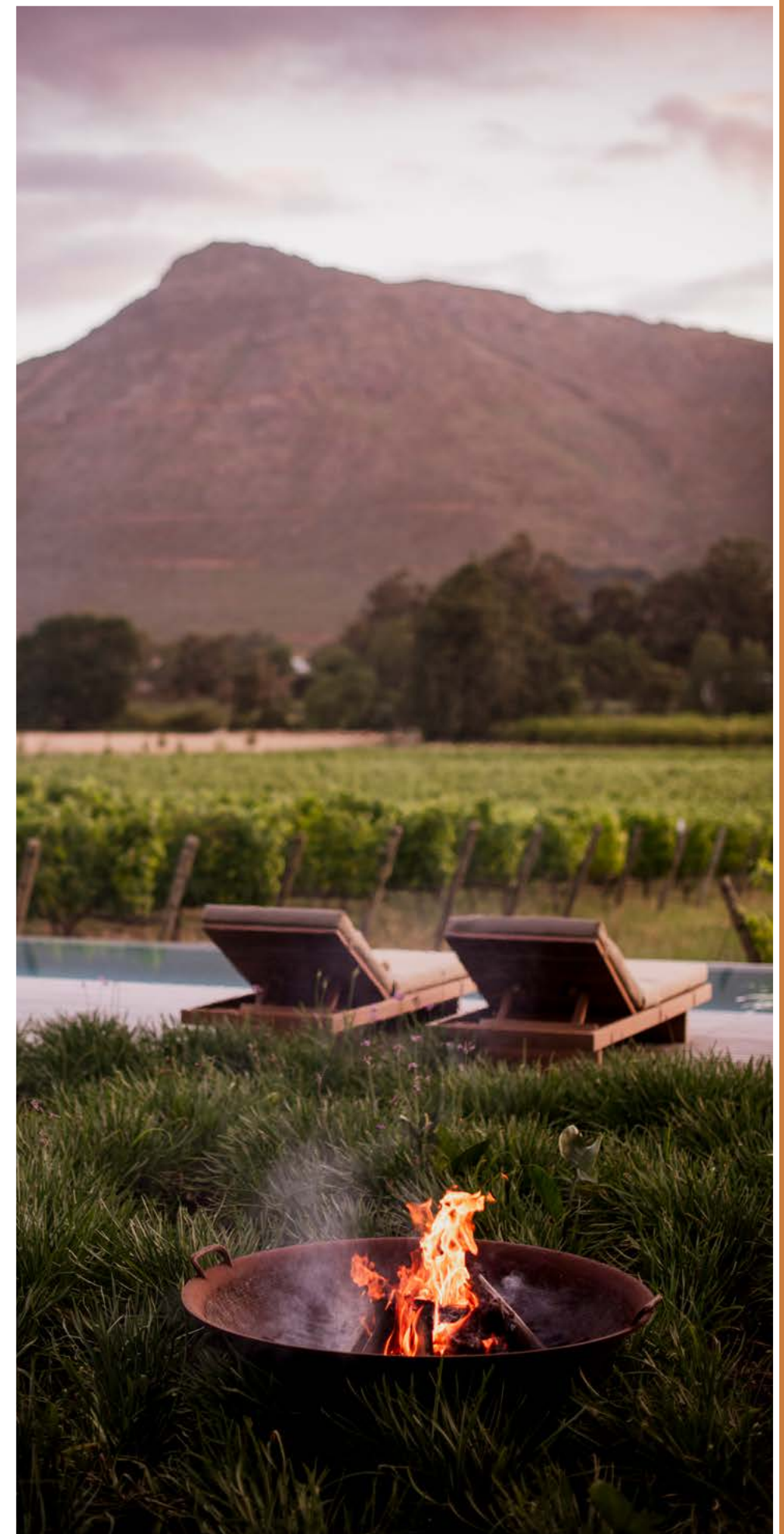
For some of us, winter is a time to turn inward – a chance to snuggle up at home in our reading nooks and quiet spaces. For others, it's a moment to pick up where summer left off and explore South Africa in their go-to winter jacket, armed with our editor-approved travel essentials and plenty of lip balm. Whether you can't get enough of long, coastal walks or resist the allure of roaring fires and big juicy reds, making the most of winter's cosy charms offers tranquility and a chance to reconnect with nature. We've handpicked the design hotels to book now.



EDITOR'S PICK:

The Residence at **MAISON**

Craggy mountains rise and fall all around the village of Franschhoek, squirrelled away in a fertile valley not far from Stellenbosch. It's not like you need an excuse to visit. Revelling in winter's creature comforts – cosy nooks, crackling fireplaces, bubble baths, underfloor heating and the deepest, darkest full-bodied red wines – really shouldn't take much convincing. But for a substantial group of family or friends, there aren't many fully-serviced villas of this scale and spec in the area. Combining the autonomy and relaxed ambiance of a private house with unostentatious luxury and outstanding service, The Residence at MAISON sleeps eight with living areas and outside space in spades. This is a clean, modernist take on Franschhoek as seen through the eyes of Seb Ackerstaff and Jessie Verdonschot, the duo behind ultra-luxury bathroom brand COCOON, who took over MAISON Estate in mid-2023. The main house offers four bedrooms, but when combined with The Stables Villa and The Botanical Suite – which have two and one bedrooms respectively – the estate can host up to 14 guests. Everything about the surroundings is authentic. You can explore the expansive grounds which feature ancient oaks,





olive groves and citrus trees punctuated by blousy heads of agapanthus and thick hedgerows speckled white with wild garlic. Orange tractors blur into the immaculate symmetry of vineyards. Miniature Shetland ponies and a donkey for company bounce around within enclosures, while chickens roam freely. Nearby, the garden grows herbs and vegetables that go into the dishes at the seasonally led restaurant, Chefs Warehouse at MAISON. Once inside, you'll find neutrals (browns, greys, creams) and lots of texture. Free-flowing shapes that mirror the beauty and complexity of nature create a fluid space where the boundaries between inside and outside are blurred. There are hardwood floors, shaggy carpets, low leather sofas, nubby linens in earthy colours and lightbulbs cocooned in wicker. Everything flows together – from the weathered pieces to the cushions, baskets and artefacts. This former farmhouse has been transformed into generous kitchen and dining spaces leading onto wisteria-covered pergolas. In the summer, they're best marvelled at from the 25-metre lap pool with a glass of something chilled to hand. With a communal table to enjoy a long breakfast delivered to your villa, you can easily never feel like leaving. Mornings start





with a spread of everything you could wish for and more. Fresh fruit, homemade granola and local yoghurt, chia pudding, pain au chocolat, waffles, cheeses and cured meats alongside breakfast classics such as avocado toast and potato rosti with poached eggs. Seb and Jessie have made sure there are all the bits and bobs a spoiled guest might expect – think USB outlets, Wi-Fi, Spotify Connect and several wide-screen HD TVs with Netflix – as well as a Nespresso machine, a well-stocked fridge and a fully kitted-out kitchen. All rooms have either mountain or garden views and balance seclusion with a feeling of being part of a larger whole. The master suite definitely deserves a separate mention. Deeply spacious and high-ceilinged, it boasts an enormous bed, an open-plan lounge and a walk-in closet. But as striking as the rooms are, the bathrooms are really the star. The master bathroom has a golden aura with natural stone, brushed gold, dual rainfall showerheads, a sunken bathtub, double vanities, heated floors and a private plunge pool. A serene sanctuary. If you're inspired to recreate any of this back at home, you can shop COCOON's bathroom collections online.

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TURBINE HOTEL & SPA

Wedged between indigenous forest and coastline, the idyllic town of Knysna isn't just a pretty face with its tree-lined streets and Victorian houses. Here, you'll find plenty of restaurants, cafes, galleries, and clothing and craft shops galore. While most tourists are directed towards Knysna Waterfront, Thesen Island offers a level of tranquility not found in more popular spots. To truly leave your troubles behind, a trip to the Turbine Hotel & Spa will do the trick. This iconic 26-bedroom hotel is a sanctuary of stillness that celebrates its industrial heritage on Thesen Island. Once a functioning power station, the super-stylish hotel retains original machinery and piping as part of its eclectic interior design. The goal? To inspire a slower pace of life, disconnection from the outside world and a chance to enjoy Knysna for exactly what it is: A protected natural environment. The Turbine Hotel & Spa has drawn on everything that makes the island unique – from its Knysna Lagoon waters to its laid-back atmosphere – for its interiors.





The overall colour palette is fresh and crisp for the most part, with flashes of colour like aquamarine, chartreuse, vivid red or charcoal. There's a Boomer-friendly level of comfort that's sometimes missing in contemporary hotels: Ample storage, unobtrusive TVs, large makeup mirrors and kitchenettes in some rooms. Bathrooms – white-tiled, no-fuss elegance – are stocked with local Charlotte Rhys toiletries. The infinity pool is a major draw, but even when it's damp and out of season, there's an indescribable romance to holing up in bed, living off room service and gazing out at the misty canals. Evenings are glamorous affairs, which might involve an espresso martini in the Gastro Pub, before venturing downstairs to the candlelit Island Café for freshly shucked oysters and linefish of the day – not to mention the best prawn aglio olio nero (squid-ink spaghetti packed with plump prawns, lemon, garlic, herbs and parmesan). It's immaculately run and much loved by locals. Breakfast can be found here too, and includes healthy options like banana spinach green smoothies and homemade granola with seasonal fruits, yoghurt and raw honey as well as eggs benedict and flapjacks. For those looking to properly indulge, head to The Turbine Spa for a one-hour stress-relieving massage.

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ABALONE HOTEL & VILLAS

Arrive in Paternoster and you're greeted by a whitewashed landscape of charming fishermen's cottages set against the rugged Atlantic coastline. It's a well-kept seaside spot dotted with breezy seafood restaurants, holiday cottages and boutique hotels hovering along the shores. Paternoster is known for its natural beauty, and Abalone Hotel & Villas maximises that in all directions. Step through the doors and you'll find exposed-beam ceilings, cool concrete floors and a blue-grey palette that exude beachy minimalism. When it comes to choosing a room, suite or villa, there's an impressive amount of options to choose from – from hotel rooms and suites, the new Oyster Villa Suites and self-catering Ocean View Villas to a two-bedroom penthouse and even a two-bedroom apartment. The adults-only Oyster Villa Suites form part of The Oyster Lounge, a stylish extension of Abalone Hotel & Villas completed last year. Guests staying in these suites have private access to the Oyster Villa wellness area, which includes a sauna and cold plunge bath.





A nearby path provides direct access to the beach, while the hotel's main reception and restaurant are conveniently located just a short stroll away. Every Oyster Villa Suite comes with a private terrace donning unobstructed views of the coast. All the five-star amenities are here: A smart television, air conditioning for when the days are hot, a Smeg kettle for making tea and coffee and a heated pool available to all Oyster Villa guests. A contemporary minimalist vibe – with pale woods and no colour except varying shades of taupe and cream – lets the surroundings do all the talking. Beds? King size, with exceedingly high thread count linens. The bathrooms follow suit. They're simple yet refined, featuring walk-in showers and gold fixtures. Abalone Hotel & Villas has some of the best food and drink offering in the area. Days begin at The Blues Restaurant, where breakfasts are genuinely noteworthy. In the day, it's a beautiful place to lunch. It serves plates of sushi and impeccable locally caught crayfish with the sound of the ocean as background noise. The finishing touch is The Oyster Lounge – a decadent affair, especially if you enjoy the freshly shucked oysters and bubbly. A vibey place to watch the sunset, its toasty fires offer the perfect respite from the West Coast chill.

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