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BABYLONSTOREN

South Africa

In search of a truly authentic farm-to-fork experience, **Nikki Wallman** travels to Babylonstoren, a beautifully preserved farmstay in South Africa's breathtaking Cape Winelands.



CHECK IN.

Babylonstoren is one of the best-preserved farms in South Africa's bucolic Cape Winelands, reimagined as a kind of 21st century Garden of Eden; the formally designed gardens (Roos worked with French architect and landscape designer Patrice Taravella, citing his understanding of "how to make a garden hold you and calm you down") divided by trickling water canals and pathways gravelled with the pits from its stone fruit orchards. Each section boasts a botanical bounty: succulents and sweet-smelling roses, carpets of Cape fig, glossy-leaved citrus trees, olive orchards, quince and juicy strawberries. The place is heavenly; a paradisiacal world unto itself, it makes you want to live better, more simply and more in tune with Mother Earth and her seasons.

Visitors from around the world beat a steady path to Babylonstoren to share in this joyful tribute to nature. From the Scented Room, where wafts of lavender and rosemary fill the air as they're distilled into essential oils; or the cheesery, where milk from water buffalo is magicked into the dreamiest, creamiest cheese, yoghurt and gelato; to the waddling white Pekin ducks that keep the vineyards and orchards free from slugs and snails – you can't help but smile from the inside out here.

There really is nowhere else quite like Babylonstoren. This symphony of sybaritic pleasures anchored in the soil will redeem and refresh you in ways few other places can. It is gloriously old (the farm dates back to 1692), with deep roots and magnificent terroir. The current incarnation, owned and nurtured into being by former magazine editor Karen Roos, opened its doors – and garden gates – in 2010, with restaurant Babel quickly becoming the stuff of farm-to-fork legend. And now, happily, there are new reasons to visit.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Fynbos Cottages are nestled at the foot of Simonsberg Mountain; Babylonstoren garden; bees can check in to their own on-site hotel; late afternoon sunlight streams into Babel restaurant; a Babel breakfast



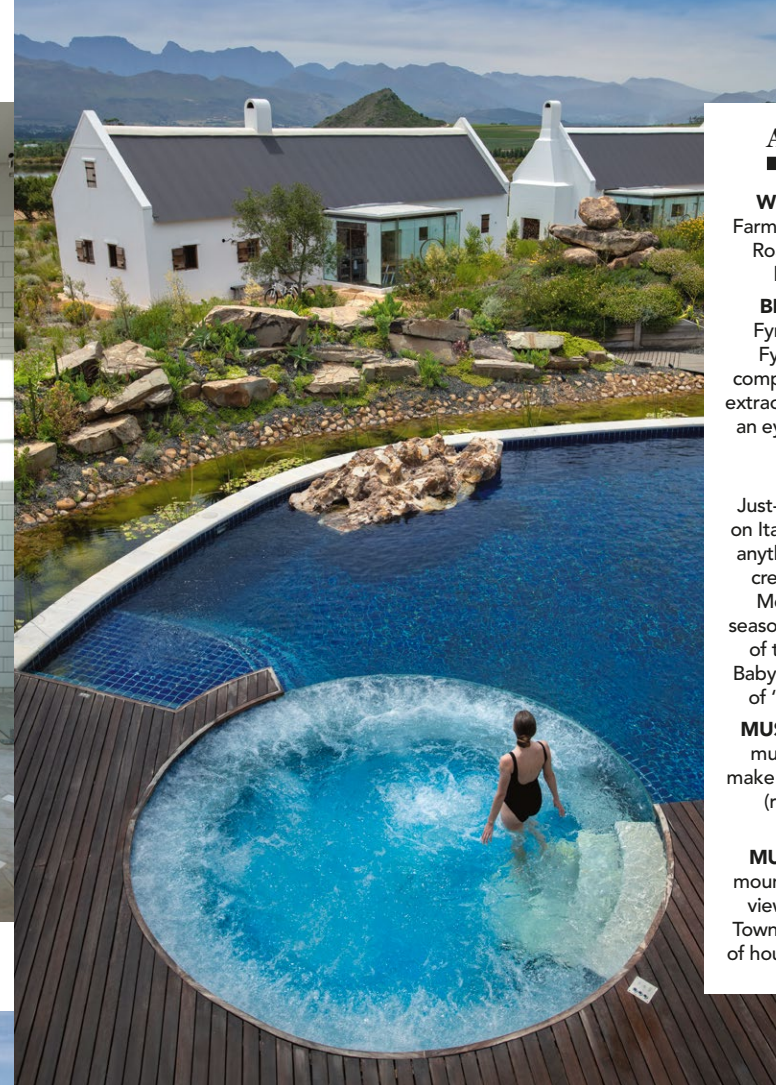
CHECK IN.

At famed restaurant Babel, a trickling water trough in the sun-dappled courtyard is the soundtrack to wondrous, murmuring devourment: think tart-sweet rose plums with clouds of honeyed ricotta and freshly grated almonds; chilled soup of fresh garden peas with fresh white strawberries, spring blossoms and lemon balm; and roasted local pork – all salty, tender, herb-crusting goodness.

Throw in rustic-luxe accommodation – we stay in the further-afield Fynbos Cottages, high-ceilinged havens of thick white-walled contemplative splendour, partly comprised of glass cubes that offer views across the rolling flora and mountains – and it's a true feast for the senses.

Just like the abundant gardens that form its beating heart, Babylonstoren continues to evolve and grow. Larger groups can now enjoy the new five (ensuite) bedroom Fynbos Family House, sprawling around a central courtyard with a pool, and plenty of nooks for time with wine and books. Meanwhile, the Garden Spa is as restorative as ever (my anti-ageing collagen booster facial instils a preternatural glow), the wellness offering bolstered by the new Hot Spa. This cathedral of calm offers serene self-guided wellness rituals: move between the pink-blocked Himalayan salt room, sauna and steam room (there's also a Rasul chamber and hammam) and slide into a heated vitality pool before moving seamlessly into the stunning indoor-outdoor swimming pool to float blissfully, face upwards toward the South African sun.

Also newly opened is an immersive, interactive wine museum that brings the history and techniques of winemaking to life via everything from virtual reality and 'sniff tests' to beautiful, carefully curated displays of centuries-old wines, myriad corkscrews and an enormous vine – roots and all – hanging from the ceiling. Don't miss the wine tastings, held underground as shafts of sunlight illuminate glasses holding the 10 wines produced here, encircling a cluster of impossibly green



AT A GLANCE

WHERE Babylonstoren Farm, Klapmuts - Simondium Road, Simondium, 7670; babylonstoren.com

BEST ROOM The new Fynbos Family House or Fynbos Cottages, for a complete immersion into the extraordinary landscape. Keep an eye out for the gorgeous tooting turtles!

MUST-ORDER Just-picked garden crudites on Italian night at the Bakery; anything buffalo-related (ice cream, cheese, yoghurt).

Menus change with the seasons, highlighting the best of the garden's bounty in Babylonstoren's dining ethos of 'pick, clean and serve'.

MUST-VISIT The new wine museum (education, but make it fun) and new Hot Spa (relaxation, but make it next-level).

MUST-DO The afternoon mountain drive for sweeping views all the way to Cape Town's Table Mountain, glass of house chenin blanc in hand.

vine leaves holding complementary morsels: melon for chenin blanc, macadamias for the Cap Classique, dark chocolate for Babel red.

The Bakery hosts themed menu evenings in sweetly rustic surroundings. Italian night celebrates produce divine in its simplicity: garden crudite of knobby carrots and shaved zucchini with homemade buffalo cheese, ruby-red cherries and shaved coppa ham. Artichoke and ricotta ravioli is slick with sage butter and snow-drifted with parmesan. Buffalo gelato flecked with dark chocolate and almonds is served with ripe apricots like little orange sunbursts. Artful lighting makes the place gleam, jewel-like, as the mountains beyond the gardens are set afire by the setting sun. Like I said: there really is nowhere else quite like Babylonstoren.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: High wooden ceilings bring light into the living spaces; Fynbos Cottages luxurious ensuite bathroom; Fynbos Cottages pool; a bird's-eye view of the farm; a canopy of roses in the garden



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