

5 top Western Cape Winelands winter specials

 By [Shellee-Kim Gold](#)

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Catering to budgets across the board while remaining warm in winter in the Winelands is all the sweeter when specials apply. My top five include creative spa specials, a discounted exotic tea and paying one night for two at a five-star estate.

Babylonstoren

'You've missed your calling – you should be stock car racing', shouts the visibly anxious Trev. He grips the golf cart's seat as I aim at another ding in the dirt track – bouncing along in exquisite exhilaration!



Image: Sourced

We're riding through 'the tunnel of naartjie love' – a road in the orchards so narrow you can pick the fruit while passing. Nookies and crannies your cart can reach on this Paarl wine estate are endless.

There's the cycad and healing herb gardens, hothouses and vineyards to explore. Or nose around some of the estate's numerous ventures: the essential oil distillery, the farm shop, bakery or juicery. Workshops (free to hotel guests) include learning about the honey-making bees, foraging for veld food and soap-making.

Our balsamic/olive oil tour included tasting 12-year-old 'black gold'. It was followed by an education on the cold-press process of the hand-harvested olives. Guests create their own keepsake from five estate oil varieties. I'm still savouring my peppery, piquant Coretina and rich, creamy Frantoio blend.



Image: Sourced

Staff at the much-vaunted Babel Restaurant – a converted cow shed combining Cape Dutch architecture and glass walls – were welcoming and warm.

Dishes were paired with estate wines and my 'yellow' beetroot starter came in a delectable roasted Macadamia nut sauce. It arrived with the delicious Candide white blend. Trev relished his lamb main and the accompanying estate red. His culinary creations are such that he's repeatedly urged to open a restaurant: "When you come here, you expect special and get special."



Image: Sourced

Like their current ['Pay for 1, Stay for 2' offer](#).

Our two-bedroomed Fynbos cottage had every comfort and a bathroom each. Luckily for Trev, my suite was far away enough from his to escape my snoring. With underfloor heating through, the Victorian-styled bath was in a bathroom big

enough to swing two kids in (I don't swing cats).

Wellness In The Wild/Lekkerwijn

I envisaged a rustic farm with trees and a characteristic gabled, old Cape Dutch homestead – precisely what you get at this three-star Franschhoek establishment.

Collectables such as oriental urns, family portraits and war memorabilia are everywhere. Including in suites. Though I didn't dare get too close to the antique porcelain infant bath displayed in my Camelia's bathroom due to clumsiness.



Image: Sourced

I was also visiting to sample the adjoining [Wellness In The Wild's special](#). My half-day package involved choosing four 30-minute treatments from a list. This included their back massage, manicure and the superb Sole survival foot wrap – their signature foot ritual using Kalahari Melon and a calabash.

I don't think I've ever had a foot wrap that softened my dry skin so well it lasted five days!

Additionally, therapist Caren gave me an attentive back massage with close to perfect pressure. A bit humorously, she also catered to my alternating hot flashes and chills, dancing between both heater and fan variously.



Image: Supplied

Long before I reached the Jacuzzi, a giggling young couple escaping a six-month-old baby in favour of romance had emptied bottles of something alcoholic.

The perfect start to my day after a delicious cooked breakfast the next morning was jumping on the outdoor trampoline, collapsing intermittently into giggles of my own.

Segway-ing

“I’m looking forward to seeing you ...falling about,” chuckled guide Maurice Olivier during our Segway training at Stellenbosch’s Spier Estate. This was a premonition.



Image: Supplied

Riding the machine is a ‘passive’ activity – but with enough adrenaline triggering to warm me from within. Push forwards to accelerate, backwards to slow down and the two-wheeler itself does the balancing! Extra appealing with their [current special of R250pp](#) (from R375).

In danger? Release the handlebar, jump off backwards and the Segway stops itself.

I eye the rocky roads, muddy ditches and wooden bridges with new appreciation.

Surrounded by the Simonsberg Mountains, our group learns about Spier's 'tree-preneur' community project and its biodynamic farming practices.

To prove it, we're assaulted by a mass pecking welcome from hundreds of Spier's happy free-range hens who produce thousands of eggs daily.

Cockily gliding along at full throttle in the vineyards, I suddenly hit something – I'm thrown off! Heading directly for my tangled mess of legs, the machine stops two centimetres from them. Apparently, falls happen routinely.



Image: Supplied

Far more suspenseful was Maurice's danger-defying act on our return. He's squatting on the moving machine, driving forward with one hand and looking backwards alternately – while videoing us behind him!

Tasting Spier's six wines now feel like a necessity rather than an option. Their signature Chenin Blanc – the world's best in 2016 – is my favourite. Their current special: buy one bottle, get one free.

Silver Forest

Steam rising off the hot water. Crisp air counters it perfectly. Contemplating life in a wood-fired hot tub under a canopy of stars is heavenly! In the distance is the howl of an unidentified animal and cackling guinea fowl.



Image: Sourced

Located under the Helderberg, my Forest Suite is a ‘special occasion’ spot. The boutique lodge’s tasteful décor is swathed in serene silvery grey tones with nature’s patterns proliferating. This extends to the soothing spa and its creative silver walls.

A potent fragrance permeates throughout. It’s knocking me out – pleurably. Or is it the Indian head massage I’m receiving? Apparently, owner Penny Rodenhurst created the pretty underlit ceiling art in my treatment room, should you struggle to relax.

But my eyes have long since closed, lost in the deep sensation of fingers working into flesh and bone – accompanied by the tinkling musical sounds of water.

My treatment was part of the [Wonderful Winter special](#). One of many current specials includes the Treat A Friend. Book any 60-minute treatment and get your bestie a free one!



Image: Sourced

Current specials at The Eatery include a three-course Saturday Date Night with a bottle of wine for R595 per couple. Or unlimited pizza for R200 on Wednesdays, including wine/beer.

Not the most discerning diner that day due to unintentionally starving myself, my unusual pasta rolls in the pizzaiola sauce had me almost licking the plate clean.

Undebatably, 10 other tables were filled. Quite a feat for mid-week.

Russian Tea Ceremony

I was all set to don my *ushanka* [traditional Russian hat with ear flaps] with only the slightest encouragement on my recent visit to Hazendal wine estate in Stellenbosch.



Image: Supplied

I'm sure Russian dentist-turned-estate owner Dr Mark Voloshin possesses at least one *ushanka* himself. But the day warmed up and it wasn't appropriate.

Buzzy Hazendal's tranquil centre is the elegant tea room where I'm to enjoy my Russian Tea Ceremony. [Teas are currently discounted by 15% during the week](#). Arriving to the sounds of the famous *Kalinka*, I couldn't successfully twist waiter Denis's arm to do an accompanying Russian jig for me.

Delivering a steaming, silver *samovar* [tea urn] to my lace-covered table, it was comforting to know that *varennya* [strawberry jam] is traditionally used to sweeten black tea – in the liquid or your mouth.

Under the grandeur of a massive crystal chandelier, I was surrounded by hand-painted murals. Behind glass in a corner stood a vodka-creating copper still.



Image: Supplied

Denis is giving me the lowdown of what's on my savoury and sweet vegetarian platter as I sip the smoky, black brew from a hand-painted cup.

My top favourites: the *Oladyi* (crumpet with mushroom ragout) and the dark chocolate tart – an exquisite mousse. There's also a gluten-free, vegan and kids' tea option.

If the *matryoshka* wooden dolls everywhere could talk, they may have smilingly waved me off saying: "From Mother Russia with love."

ABOUT SHELLEE-KIM GOLD

A long-time globetrotter, Shellee-Kim spent seven years travelling through 43 countries.

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