

Book into a farm cottage for a getaway that brings you nearer to nature

 By [Brian Berkman](#)

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Agritourism or farm stays is a growing hospitality sector and the reasons why are clear: better bang for the buck and an opportunity to be nearer to nature. A stay on a working farm is also educational as guests see first-hand the elements that contribute to getting food on our tables.

The Ceres Valley, known as a fertile apple and pear growing region, has another attraction. There's a good chance of winter snow and a definite opportunity of experiencing a range of temperatures. Even in the heat of summer, early mornings and nights are cooler in Ceres than elsewhere.



At Ouplaas, a Tru-Cape apple and pear growing farm in the Witzenberg Valley of Ceres, they also raise horses, sheep, and some cattle. There too is the [Oubos Cottage](#), a comfortable and well equipped self-catering unit that sleeps four people in two bedrooms and more if the TV room/indoor braai area is utilised. Although surrounded by working buildings - the farm creche is next door and the fruit sheds are within reach, there is a real feeling of privacy and, especially when visiting on a weekend, soul-enriching quiet.



High glamour

Although a farm stay should be about 'getting back to basics', you might be surprised by the high glamour of the main bedroom at Oubos - complete with a silvery crystal chandelier and two bejewelled pendant lights on either side of the double bed. There's plenty cupboard space too; if you were planning on a longer stay. Although the second bedroom is larger, it doesn't have the stunning view over the horse paddocks to the mountain beyond. The second bedroom has two single beds. A taller person may find these a little short. There's one bathroom with a basin, toilet, and shower. Expect excellent water pressure as well as Charlotte Rhys bathroom amenities.



The kitchen is so well equipped there's even an apron and tins in which to bake bread. The kitchen area doubles as a dining area with a large table and six chairs. You could comfortably fit eight around this table and additional chairs are used as side tables in the spare room.

Down three stairs is the indoor braai area and TV room. Although there is no MTN mobile phone reception in the accommodation, the Wi-Fi is free and fast and there is a full bouquet of DSTV satellite programmes to watch. This room also has the benefit of two large windows and glass double doors that open up to the front terrace which has an inviting day bed and a very special attraction: a wood-fired hot tub in the garden.

Seeing the sights

As keen hikers, we ventured into the area of the farm which is a proclaimed nature reserve. Just getting to the reserve gate is a treat as you pass the main homestead and a tree surrounded dam.



We saw Grey Herons and a family of ducks on the first dam as we walked past. There is a forested area with moss-green grass and wonderfully gnarled trees that appear quite magical. On passing more paddocks and a riding ring for the horses, we lifted the gate to enter the reserve. As far as the eye can see are apple and pear trees, denuded of their leaves during the winter months.

As we climb along the jeep track to the first dam the fynbos looks pristine. Cape sugarbirds and sunbirds with their emerald heads dart and dive among the protea bushes and trees. We see the canoe at the dam which, in their welcome note, owners Calla and Orla du Toit say we are welcome to swim in and go for a paddle. We continue up - a steady incline but not too challenging. As we approach the top, we see a large cross we noticed illuminated the previous evening while stargazing. It was a little too soon to head back so we pressed on, past the cross, down the dale and climbed further. After about 5km, we stopped for our coffee break our legs dangling akimbo over the village of Tulbagh.



There are jars of home-baked rusks and biscuits in the cottage and a flask for just such an occasion. There too are elegant plastic wine glasses to take along to a picnic by the dam or to enjoy a bottle of wine in the hot tub. It felt as if we were on top of the world. We could see the snow-topped mountains and the beautiful valley beneath. In the far distance, a hint of Table Mountain which is, I'm told, visible, on a clearer day.

At the site of the cross, we decided to walk off-path to explore the very top of the peak for 360° views. And, on the way down, we explored a cave created by a rocky outcrop. Look out for the Protea Nana, elegantly described in Afrikaans as a Skaambloom, a shy blossom on account of its hanging head which hides its true beauty. I'd not seen this beauty before.

Cheeky Cherry

Back at the cottage, we build a roaring fire and cosy up for the cold night ahead. A story about Oubos is not complete without a word about a ginger cat with whom you might be sharing your digs. I am so severely allergic to cats I start to sneeze the moment they look at me. Not, however, in this case. I can't say if I've outgrown my allergy or if Cheeky Cherry is simply the non-allergic cat sort. She was in a ginger ball on the couch when we arrived. A tip of her tail unfurled when we approached but that was the extent of her engagement. Later she decided she wanted company and came to snuggle with us under the throws on the couch for this very purpose.

Do note that the nearest 'shopping' area is in Prince Alfred's Hamlet which is about 30 minutes away. The meat from Geldenhuys Butchery in the Hamlet is better than you might expect and worth a stop.

From R800 per night during a minimum two-night stay, this property represents excellent value for money.

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