

Have your year-end pick-me-up at Stonehill River Lodge

 By [Chelsey Hale](#)

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If you're the first one to put your hand up when it comes to needing a little extra self-love, you'll discover plenty of it during your stay at Stonehill River Lodge.

Settled along the Breede River, and surrounded by milkwood trees and giant aloes, this wellness wonderland has long-held its quiet corner of Swellendam.



And while we hate to let everyone in on its whereabouts, it's a local holiday secret almost too good not to share. This contemporary oasis ticks all the right boxes for a year-end pick-me-up with accommodation consisting of chic, modern villas showcasing the most pleasantly distracting mountain views

Inside, open-plan kitchens await, with inviting indoor fireplaces that create a cosy haven to practice some yoga, savour a glass of crisp Chenin and catch up on some reading.

Stepping up on the wellness factor

"In the last few years, a strong wellness movement has quickly swept across the world, and South Africa is certainly no exception," says Debora Nutter, Stonehill's general manager.

“Along with meditation, exercise and clean eating, there has been a strong focus on incorporating more travel into one’s lifestyle, and we’ve been contemplating how we, at Stonehill, can add value to wellness-focused South Africans seeking a new holiday destination.”

Run by mixed-use accommodation group, Dream Hotels & Resorts, management has been hard at work transforming Stonehill River Lodge into a tranquil oasis like no other.

With the addition of a seven-circle medieval labyrinth, they are also amidst plans to develop a dedicated retreat facility, consisting of natural tent-style accommodation, a yoga space and an EcoPool.



Nutter further reveals that the long-term goal for Stonehill is also to create two meditation areas that will incorporate a succulent-rich garden with indigenous trees – complete with secret wooden walkways leading to hidden hammocks and seating areas for the ultimate relaxation.

Walking the Stonehill Labyrinth

“Our Stonehill Labyrinth was purposefully built earlier this year by Terry De Vries, a local labyrinth guru who loves the outdoors, and who used the historic labyrinth located in the Chartres Cathedral in Notre Dame, as inspiration,” says Nutter.

If you’re wondering what exactly a labyrinth is, she advises not to think of it as a maze

“A labyrinth has only one path to the centre and back out, which is called unicursal (one line). It has no blind alleys or dead ends as mazes have. The path twists and turns back on itself many times before reaching the centre. Once at the centre, there is only one way back out.”



Labyrinth-walking is an ancient practice used by many different faiths for spiritual centring, contemplation and prayer. When entering the serpentine path of a labyrinth, one should walk slowly while quieting the mind, focusing on a spiritual question or prayer.

“Walking the Stonehill Labyrinth can be surprisingly calming and clarifying for your thoughts,” she adds. “Even if our guests don’t have a spiritual side, the slow, intentional walking in a quiet place on a set path allows for a level of focus that can be difficult to find in a busy life.”

Discover the soul of Swellendam

“Wellness travel extends beyond meditation and yoga retreats or the increased use of hotel gyms and spas,” explains Nutter.

“For some, these are ideal, but there’s a significant number of people seeking destinations and experiences where they can fully engage within their surroundings, connect with the people they encounter and build greater awareness within themselves.”



While in Swellendam, Stonehill guests can move with the pace of nature during a hike at Bontebok National Park or pound the pavements of this sleepy little town to admire some of it's handsome Cape Dutch architecture.

"Coffee-aficionados will love the collection of coffee shops, especially Tredici, where aside from a fresh cup of steaming Joe, their homemade bread and baked goods are the order of the day," she adds.

And even if you don't believe in fairies, a visit to the Sulina Faerie Sanctuary will quickly make you want to believe in them. A place like Swellendam is not without its quirks and this wonderful little locale confirms it.

"The fairy garden will quickly have you feeling like a little kid again. After all, there's nothing like spending time with a few gnomes, dwarves and dragons to lift one's spirits just before the buzz and bustle of the 2019 festive season hits," concludes Nutter.

ABOUT CHELSEY HALE

Having lived in Thailand, South Korea, and the U.K, Chelsey finally returned home to South Africa in 2016 where she now sails the adventurous tides of travel content writing. While she has a special focus on the travel industry, she also creates written content across multiple industries. She enjoys all things related to travel, spending much of her time looking for a great news hook and working alongside the team at Big Ambitions. Email: chelsey@chelseyhale.com

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