

Grootbos... getting away from it all



By [Brian Berkman](#): contributing editor, travel

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When assessing the value of something most of us look at what's there. What do we get for our money? At Grootbos, you must consider what's not there. There isn't pollution (unless you're allergic to fynbos pollens), there isn't noise (unless the sound of birds and the crashing sea is bothersome) there aren't crowds - even at full capacity the 1768ha reserve is vast so it is easy to feel oneself alone, in nature.



Forest Lodges are positioned to provide perfect privacy.

Grootbos is the sort of place to go to meet yourself. It is a retreat. There are things to do and part of check-in procedures will include reserving activities at Grootbos and at nearby Gansbaai, but the most relaxing experience will be soaking up the sun on your private deck and lazing your eyes on the mountains and vast sea below.

Have a whale of a time... or try something more active

If you want to be more active there are guided nature drives and walks, horseback riding (if you weigh less than 91kg) and walks to the beach and archeologically important caves. Shark-cage diving and boat-based whale watching are available but billed separately. During season, you have an eagle's view of the whales in the bay.

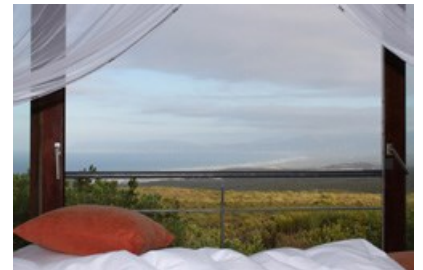
The luxury is of a European standard. Eschewing anything flashy and glitzy in preference for sophisticated quality, the focus here is on stylish but comfortable furniture.

Cuisine is a highlight and they do their best to meet the most demanding diets. We had dinner outside on the deck the first evening. It was a perfect, wind-free evening, balmy and fragrant. In my attempt to ride horses at my next visit, I am following a very restricted diet which I had some anxiety about managing while visiting Grootbos.

To their credit executive chef Duane Lewis and his team tried hard and in most cases did well.

Local is lekker... very lekker

Dinners are formal, five-course affairs with palate cleaners between courses while lunch is available from a generous buffet and a la carte. All the food, and breakfast is a case in point, is organic where possible with a strong emphasis on locally sourced ingredients. Service was charming, friendly, and efficient. The Tom Yum Soup, for example, was better than you'd expect at a Thai restaurant. Based on a scented consommé that had all the elegance you'd expect from a fine-dining establishment it was meaty with prawns. Other dinner items included a starter of roasted quail and duck liver on a brioche with an onion and chilli chutney or a creamy butternut risotto still with its "onde" or wave that the Italian's demand.



All fynbos and all sea from the privacy of your suite.



Nature guides deepen your experience.

The nature guides are clued in to the surrounding fynbos experience and succeed in decoding the sights, smells, and sounds to give one a deeper experience of the land. Did you know that old man's beard, (a type of lichen), is used to dress wounds or that the trees in the Afromontane Forest dry their top leaves at the first hint of fire to protect the forest from burning?

Born from fire

Fire devastated Forest Lodge about six years ago. And, just like the myriad plant species that require the searing heat of fire to seed and regrow, I doubt that Grootbos could have been what it has become without it.

When nature is uninterrupted, it quickly restores its own balance. Forest Lodge branches out from a dense milkwood forest. Looking around the mountainside there all you see is green - in more shades than I knew existed. A closer look reveals endemic species that are named after owner and GM Michael Lutzeyer's father, whose career was in publishing botanical books. There are more than 750 Cape Floral Kingdom species at Grootbos.



Newly rebuilt six years ago after a fire, the new lodge is architecturally interesting.

Book Forest Lodge unit 21 if you want to be nearer to main lodge. Unit 30 is farthest away. If it is cold out, light a roaring fire in your suite and watch DVD's from the comfort of your private sitting room. I found just staring out at Walker Bay below interrupted only by a long-tailed sugar bird gave me just what I needed - peace.

See www.grootbos.com or call +27 (0) 28 384 8000 for more information.

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