

JN2 TRAVEL

LUXURY ON CAPE COOL

Sharon Feinstein is swayed by a taste of the high life in one of South Africa's most thrilling cities

When Michael Bublé follows you to your bedroom, you know you're staying in the right hotel. Admittedly it was all rather brief. We made a few clumsy stabs at jokes about my pyjamas and rumpled sheets and collected business cards. So we discovered this was his third stay – and mine – at the Belmond Mount Nelson, set in nine acres of English-style gardens themed in pink, white and grey to match the splendid building, against the backdrop of Cape Town's towering mountains.

It's been the hotel of choice for sophisticated travellers since Churchill, the Prince of Wales and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle sung its praises.

You arrive along an avenue of 100-year-old monumental palms and then the cool colonial elegance and charming staff simply envelop you in a state of permanent rapture.

Breakfast is a sumptuous affair on the warm terrace beside the main pool, where a pair of quirky Egyptian geese wade in with delighted bathers basking beneath the deep azure sky.

One of the world's great cities built on a bay, Cape Town is dramatically spectacular under Table Mountain and Lions Head, bounded by its two immense oceans. It seems to pulsate with a mood of excitement and celebration. There is music on the streets, people painting and making things out of anything that's washed up, and a sense of sunshine and hope in spite of the poverty and shanty towns out on the distant flats. The city has a raw energy and inventiveness that positively crackles, a world away from the permanently petulant irritations of England and its gloomy drizzle.

This is a walkable place – jazzy Long Street, stylish Bree for shopping, cobbled former slave market Greenmarket Square for its old Dutch buildings. A vibrant café society crammed with modish coffee shops, artisan bakeries and exceptional restaurants.

Two of the latter that are packed with locals, always a good sign are Il Leone and

Mano's, both a joy for their exuberant atmosphere, well sourced ingredients and home cooking. Il Leone's walls covered with colourful paintings and Mano's with faded black-and-white photographs of its history.

The Roundhouse, in the hills above Camps Bay, is an institution, with a great wine list, the best yellowtail dish I'd had and gracious waiters. Can I just say that my 80-something mother managed to rouse herself from the comfort of the Mount Nelson to eat here, which is quite a testimony. She also made it to Kloof Street House perched above the city streets, and instantly settled into the vibrant, bordello atmosphere and lavish food.

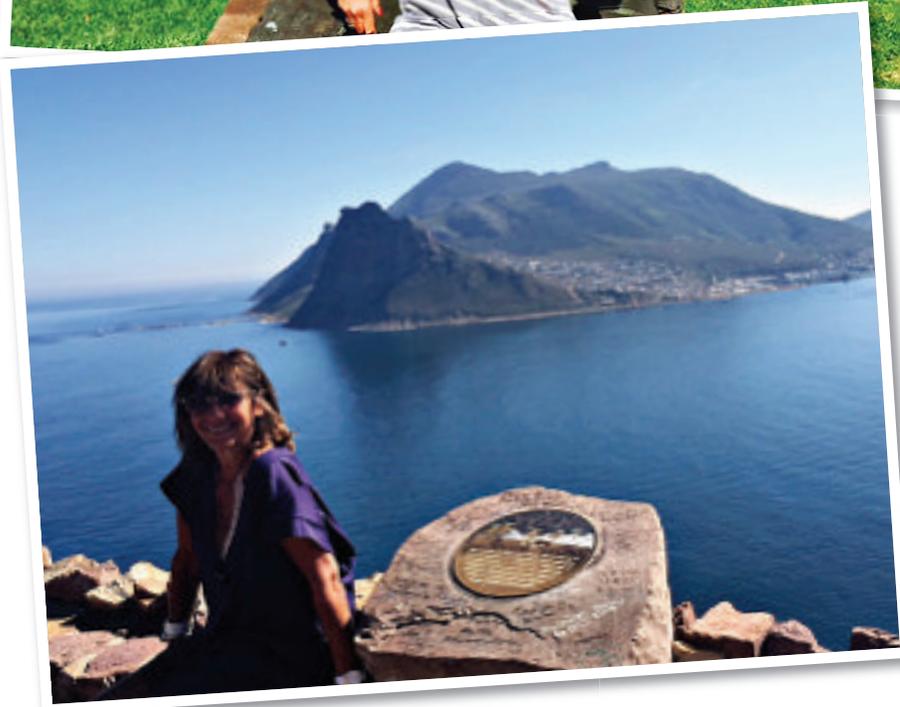
Facing Camps Bay, one of best beaches on the Atlantic side, is the Grande, with wonderfully fresh fish, an artistic, theatrical atmosphere and welcoming bonhomie. Kingklip is one of the greatest fish and it was prepared to perfection with crispy sweet vegetables.

I made the dramatic drive to Franschhoek, a picturesque farm town in lush wine country settled by French Huguenots fleeing religious persecution. La Petite Ferme, run by the Dendy Young family, is a haven of dreamy calm with comfortable, charming rooms, rolling views down the valley ever more entrancing as the sun sets, and food so succulent you can smell the sun ripened tomato and herbs coming out the kitchen. There are also wines from the family's own vineyard, especially the flagship sauvignon blanc.

The other stand-out among the plethora of renowned restaurants in this tiny town is Le Bon Vivant, set in the front garden of a quiet street, with imaginative dishes providing a memorable dinner for a warm night.

Highly knowledgeable Andries and Isaac of Walking Holidays took me through the fynbos on the slopes of Mont Rochelle Nature Reserve, which is chattering with bird song. The scent of erica, lavender, and jasmine is heavy in the air, and a group of baboons suddenly appeared to delight us. Andries led us through the wine farms, and we drank fragrant blends in the shadow of the vineyard's awning. A relaxing massage and facial at Le Franschhoek Hotel's spa was the perfect remaining ingredient to round off this cocktail of pleasure.

Back at the Mount Nelson cottage pool, basking in the stillness and heady smell of blossom, I realised that every year I didn't spend some



Sharon takes in the stunning scenery in and around Cape Town during her "pampered" stay



time in Cape Town at this legendary hotel would be a year incomplete. It's a gilded place which also has a rather jazzy Planet bar and romantic, fine-dining restaurant serving dinners under starry chandeliers.

Cape Town's first Jewish service, in 1841, was held here in the Helmsley Building, and the guest relations manager keeps five yarmulkes in his desk just in case they're needed for the sumptuous weddings in the gardens.

On my last sad morning, feeling utterly dismal at breakfast to be leaving, I suddenly noticed Harry Potter piling up his plate with sausage and eggs. With a burst of renewed energy I had a selfie with the now-bearded Daniel Radcliffe, there to shoot his new film.

After that, I watched that astonishingly beautiful landscape disappear for another year as I

headed for the airport and the smooth and pampering British Airways first-class cabin home – literally riding off into the sunset.

Sharon's contacts...

British Airways
<http://www.britishairways.com/en-gb/destinations/cape-town/flights-to-cape-town>

Belmond Mount Nelson
<http://www.belmond.com/mount-nelson-hotel-cape-town/>
<http://www.lapetiteferme.co.za/cape-town/>