



IF YOU'RE WEARY OF THE CITY'S SQUEEZE AND BUSTLE, THERE'S NOTHING QUITE AS REJUVENATING AS LOADING THE CAR WITH MOUNTAINS OF FOOD, FIREWOOD, PUZZLES, OLD JACKETS AND BATTERED BOOTS, AND SETTING OFF FOR A WEEKEND ON THE FARM.

BY KYRA TARR

5 farm stays TO FILL YOUR CUP



This photo: The manor house on Vrisch Gewagt looks out over a beautiful olive grove.
Clockwise from above: Cabins on Oakhurst Farm; the veranda at The Knoll; signs point the way on Oakhurst Farm; The Cairn on Old Kilgobbin has a dining room large enough to host a small wedding.

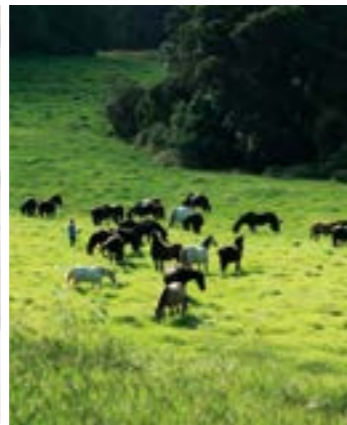


Ah, the farm. A place where clear horizons replace the washing line on your boundary fence, where daily duties give way to purple evenings and silent nights; and where all things rise with the dawn, ready to start again.

Staying over on a working farm reminds us that everything comes from somewhere; from juicy oranges or our favourite jersey to the oil we drizzle over our salad and the wine we splash into our glasses.

It would be impossible to compile an exhaustive list of all South Africa's fantastic farm stays, because they are many – and it's well worth scouring your area for one or two. But here are five gems to get you inspired: take shelter in a cosy Midlands cottage, breathe in the pure Karoo air, walk through a field of fragrant rosemary, and rediscover your true place in the balance of things...

KZN



OLD KILGOBBIN

The Dargle Valley in the KZN Midlands is named after a region in the Emerald Isle. Approaching Old Kilgobbin, you'll soon see why: impossibly green hills tumble into misty valleys, and indigenous forests coat the shady glades of this magical place.

The Bronner family have been calling this farm home since 1996. This is where respected horsewoman Carl Bronner breeds her black Dutch Friesians. Watching the herd play and graze is just one of the rare and beautiful sights you'll enjoy during your stay.

Carl and her husband, John, have fixed up three self-catering cottages. Gobbin's Cottage is a spacious three-bedroom house that sleeps eight, The Chicken Coop is a cosy hideaway for two, and The Cairn is a two-bedroom house with a dining room that doubles up as a small wedding



venue. The decor is country-chic with plenty of antiques, warm wood, patchwork quilts, earthy rugs and, most importantly, stands for coats, hats and wellies.

In summer, activities include hiking, biking and exploring the mist belt forest. In winter there could very well be snow, so pack thick socks and your favourite book. As evening draws near, take a walk through the farmlands, keeping an eye out for reedbeak, oribi and quizzly Shetland ponies.

What else? Book a session with Carl's Friesians at a clinic she calls HorsePlay to better learn to communicate and connect with these powerful creatures. Groups are limited to eight people; R500 per person. Visit horseplay.co.za for more.

WHERE? Farm 12 on the D17, Dargle Valley
RATES: Gobbin's Cottage – from R275 per person midweek out of season, from R350 per person in season and over weekends; The Chicken Coop – from R300 per person midweek out of season, from R400 per person in season and over weekends; The Cairn – from R275 per person midweek out of season, from R350 per person in season and over weekends.
CONTACT: oldkilgobbin.co.za; SMS 082 807 7772 (Carl Bronner)

THE KNOLL

Five kilometres from the charming village of Hilton you'll discover The Knoll, a historical guest farm owned by the Manley family.

On The Knoll itself you can enjoy the tranquillity of birdsong in the morning, gorgeous views of rolling green hills from the wraparound veranda, and paddocks filled with horses. A mere seven-minute drive away you'll find The Upper Millstone (36 Hilton Avenue), a quaint artisanal bakery and espresso bar that makes categorically perfect pastries.

There are nine accommodation options on the farm, ranging from lock-up-and-go rooms that sleep two to standalone cottages that sleep six. They are unified in their stylish decor and beautiful views that stretch all the way to the Drakensberg. A lovely touch are the cottages' names, like Creamery, Library, Forresters and Farriers, which hint at their prior functions.

Since its inception in the 1850s The Knoll has hosted transport riders, soldiers and even Jan Smuts. A section of the old hotel where travellers were served can still be seen on the property today, as can the original wagon tracks.

What else? Every second Wednesday night The Knoll hosts Music in the Hills, an open-mic evening, in the barn. This event is a favourite among locals and has hosted artists like Matthew Mole.

WHERE? 1 Knoll Drive, Hilton
RATES: Depending on the accommodation option, rates start from R400 per person per night up to R1 450 per night for an entire unit.
CONTACT: theknoll.co.za; 076 555 5408



WESTERN CAPE

VRISCH GEWAGT

The Great Karoo is a place you can lose your heart to. The vast sky over the arid landscape and the ancient contours of the mountains can revive even the weariest of souls. Nobody understands this better than the Cassola family, who own Vrisch Gewagt, a 1 600 ha farm that produces fine olive oil.

There are seven superb accommodation options. Units sleep two to eight people and each has its own quirky character. The Library Cottage, for instance, is stocked with

must-read books, and Hannes Cottage, named after a beloved former employee who was rather fond of liquor, is stocked with wine. Winning features on the farm include sweeps of pristine renosterveld, a dam with a deck, and an outdoor dining experience under the stars (book ahead).

The website lists the following activities: afternoon naps, doodling, floating in the pool, stargazing, hiking, sipping on fine wine, losing yourself in a long novel... The perfect itinerary or what?

WHERE? Vrisch Gewagt farm, R407, Prince Albert
RATES: Rates per night vary from R950 to R1 450 per person, depending on season and accommodation option.
CONTACT: vrischgewagt.co.za

ROSEMARY HILL

This organic rosemary farm on the eastern outskirts of Pretoria is a favourite among nature lovers living in the city.

Although Johannesburg is only an hour away, you'll wake to the intoxicating smell of rosemary plants, the laughter of playing children and the thrum of a farm's steady workday.

It would be impractical to list the spectacular accommodation options, but suffice to say there are pods, cabins, cottages, dorms, condos, studio apartments, lofts and, of course, a guest house.

Rosemary Hill is renowned for its mountain-biking trails, hikes, birding, Segway tours, Acrobranch facilities and picnics. Its scenery makes it a top wedding destination, and it boasts a celebrated restaurant and café with a garden-to-table approach.

The farm is also home to a Waldorf School and a variety of social responsibility programmes.

Whether it's for the weekend or simply for a day, Rosemary Hill is an 'oasis in the city' you'll return to over and over again.

PHOTOGRAPHS: SUPPLIED

OAKHURST FARM

Oakhurst's charms know no end – from fire pits and plunge pools to waterfall-bound hikes, fishing in the dam and cycling along extensive single-track trails, it's a place for all ages and tastes.

Situated on the Seven Passes Road between George and Knysna, Oakhurst has been owned by the Crowthers for the past six generations and is one of the last remaining large commercial farms on the Garden Route. Accommodation options include The Forge, a 150-year-old converted blacksmith's cottage that sleeps six, with its own private plunge pool, an outside shower and a deck with forest views. There are also five cottages that

sleep up to six people; The Schoolyard, which consists of three units each sleeping five; and eight Africamps tents, each sleeping five.

An impressive repertoire of attractions makes it the perfect combination of family fun and idyllic escape. Oakhurst goes the extra mile to be child-friendly: the kids can watch the cows go in for milking, scale the climbing wall, horse-ride and explore the forest while you watch from your deck.



WHERE? Hoekwil Road, Wilderness
RATES: The Forge – from R1 690 per night; farm cottages – from R1 750 per night; The Schoolyard – from R1 550 per night; Africamps – from R1 090 per night.
CONTACT: oakhurst.co.za; 064 384 1266

GAUTENG



WHERE? R964, Pretoria
RATES: Nightly rates start from R650 per person to R2 200 for an entire unit.
CONTACT: rosemaryhill.co.za; 012 802 0052 or 083 235 6857