



Louise Spengler are enthusiastic guides to the walks, wildlife and culture of the peninsula.

The hospitable Spenglers have invited Cass Abrahams, South Africa's leading authority on Cape Malay cuisine, to prepare and host dinner. "Cass teaches, writes and broadcasts," explains Chris. "We want her to teach our kitchen staff how to prepare dishes we can offer guests."

And so we sit down with Cass and her husband Jowa to a feast of pickled fish, chicken boryani and other Cape Malay delicacies, and as the conversation turns to their lives as academics under the apartheid regime, their international travels and the new South Africa it seems unimaginable that for most of their lives this thoughtful, sophisticated, mixed-race couple could not live in a "whites only" area, could not bathe on a "whites only" beach and could not vote.

We see more Cape Malay influences when we arrive at our final guest house, in the City Bowl suburb of Gardens. Almost at once I identify Welgelegen Guest House, a roomy Victorian mansion on the skirts of Table Mountain, as the place I want to stay on my next visit. It's only two minutes' walk from

lively Kloof Street (boutiques, restaurants and cafes) and a few minutes' drive from the city centre, and its elegance, character and welcoming staff redefine my expectations of guest house hospitality.

It's also within easy reach of some significant landmarks: the shamelessly pink Mount Nelson Hotel, Cape Town's grande dame; the 17th-century Company Gardens, the city's oldest cultivated plot of land, and the Cape Malay quarter of Bo-Kaap.

Once an exclusively Muslim network of brightly coloured 19th-century terraces and "picturesque" slums, Bo-Kaap is now yielding some of its identity to restoration and the property market. We do a lightning-fast tour of the new shopping development of Cape Quarter, which conserves the human scale of the district and showcases the eclectic creativity of South African design.

And now for Table Mountain. The summit is clear, we can see the cable car line from Kloof Street. But a robust version of the Cape Doctor, the south-east wind which soothes the fevered brow of the sizzling summer, has closed the stations for the day.

Next time.

The looming presence of Table Mountain makes Cape Town a natural wonder rather than a city

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALBERTO PEREZ

Quick getaway

MAINS OF TAYMOUTH, KENMORE



MAINS OF Taymouth is a collection of luxury holiday properties set in the middle of a 120-acre estate in Highland Perthshire. The heart of the development is a sympathetic conversion of 19th-century farmhouse buildings. The interior design is a mix of traditional and contemporary with flat-screen TVs in every bedroom, under-floor heating, crisp white bedding and glistening bathrooms with deep tubs and invigorating rain showers. The bonus is the outdoor hot tubs in some properties, while others have games rooms and a few also have saunas.

We were in Perthshire shooting fashion stories, and with a team of nine we really tested the Wester Bruidair property's ability to comfortably host a large house party. It passed with flying colours.

We didn't make use of the golf course but we were deeply struck by the beauty and picture-perfect setting of Kenmore.

The riding school is a stone's throw away just above the cottages. The Courtyard Restaurant, Brasserie and Bar has a laid-back air, and you can have anything from a bacon buttie to a full à la carte meal. The delicatessen also allows you to stock up on locally sourced goodies.

If you are looking for a special treat The Fortingall Yew Hotel, an arts and crafts beauty with a reputation for excellent dining, is worth seeking out. Just past nearby Aberfeldy the cafe at the Highland Safari does super scones and clotted cream with yet more beautiful views. Closer to the complex and worth a visit is the award-winning Craning Centre.

There are castles, folkies and historic sites at every turn, and the Tay Forest Park allows for every sort of adventurous activity, as well as the more gentle pursuit of ambling along its leafy paths.

Mains Of Taymouth has the facilities of a country-house hotel but affords guests an air of independence. It makes that family break or romantic retreat all it should be.

Mains Of Taymouth, Kenmore, Perthshire
01887 830226. Prices from £250 to £2,500 for a range of self-catering accommodation from two-bedroomed apartments to large cottages and houses. The Granary and Wester Bruidair houses sleep up to 10. Lets are from three to five days midweek or over weekends. Visit www.taymouth.co.uk

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