



Tranquil Surval Boutique Olive Estate, near Oudtshoorn.



You can even play chess at Surval Boutique Olive Estate.

THERE'S something peaceful about a mountain range that's millions of years old. These thoughts accompanied me on the journey from Cape Town to Oudtshoorn, as did the pink and yellow flowers in the fields.

The drive was long but, lucky for us, ended at Surval Boutique Olive Estate. Situated at the foot of the Swartberg range (a Unesco World Heritage site), it was the perfect oasis in the Klein Karoo.

Seven venues

The team at Surval (which means "on the valley") welcomed us with refreshing glasses of sparkling wine. We also received maps of the property, which has seven venues to host weddings, functions, conferences (of up to 100 delegates) and more.

But all that mattered was the X to mark the spot to our individual rooms.

Surval Boutique Olive Estate offers a total of 23 rooms, including standard, luxury, family suites and a honeymoon suite, which comes with a Roman bath in front of the king-size bed. Each is individually styled – mine had an antique stove that I imagine would still work if I had some coal – and named after a different type of olive. Who knew there were so many kinds?

Centred around good food

A few hours after we checked in, it was time for dinner at Su Casa ("Your Home") restaurant, recent winner of top awards from Diners Club and American Express. It's a member of Confrérie de la Chaine des Rôtisseurs, an international gastronomic society founded in Paris in 1950 but tracing its origin back to 1248.

Francois Ferreira, creator of the culinary art and hospitality training academy that bears his name, has been bailli délégué (national president) for the last five years.

"I have worked in the food industry all my life and everything I do is centred around good food, good wine and good company," Ferreira said.

"I have a passionate love for all things South African: our olive oils, brandies, wines and all our amazing and unique ingredients that are

In the heart of SA's Klein Karoo, EUGENE YIGA discovers an oasis at Surval Boutique Olive Estate



Take home a few jars of locally preserved olives.

available in this country.

"We have a rich culinary tradition which I feel is not always appreciated."

Food and brandy pairing dinner

The menu takes inspiration from the Klein Karoo and, in honour of our visit, Ferreira created a once-off food and brandy pairing.

"I have a great fondness for South Africa brandies," he said at the beginning of our meal.

"But the brandies of the Klein Karoo have a special place in my heart. They've just got so much complexity, they're unpretentious and I find that

they're just perfect for food."

Dinner began with smoked salmon, micro leaves, sprouts, Parmesan crisp and Caesar dressing (paired with De Krans MCC sparkling wine and Grundheim Pear Schnapps).

It continued with roasted parsnip and apple soup served with home-made bread (paired with Grundheim potstill brandy).

This was followed by the Confit of Lamb Henry, served with potato croquettes and a duo of purées (paired with Boplaas 20-year-old potstill brandy).

"What we at the South African Brandy Foundation struggle with every day is changing perceptions,"

said general manager Danie Pretorius.

"But it's impossible to change perceptions if you don't put something into context. Only by enjoying brandy with fantastic food, such as we are eating tonight, can you appreciate the quality that's in the glass."

A hero must drink brandy

And so the meal continued with cheese and "boere dukkah" truffles – with poppy seeds, sunflower seeds, coriander, fennel and more – served with preserves and brandy caviar (paired with Ladismith 8-year-old Klein Karoo potstill brandy). It ended with vanilla pod panna cotta, lemon curd, pecan meringue and berry compote (paired with Muscat d'Alexandrie 2003 potstill brandy).

"Samuel Johnson said that claret is for boys, port for men, but he who strives to be a hero must drink brandy," Ferreira quoted. "By the end of tonight, you will be heroes."

Indeed, even after all there was to eat, we still enjoyed nightcaps in the cosy lounge before we made our way to bed.

Orchard tour with olive tasting

Surval Boutique Olive Estate is an ideal central point from which to explore the surrounding area.

In nearby Oudtshoorn, you can visit ostrich farms, a wildlife ranch, or the famous Cango Caves, which were discovered in 1780 but show evidence of people living there during the Middle and Later Stone Ages.

The estate can also arrange a guided Swartberg Mountain tour or, if you have the time, a five-hour "circle route" from Oudtshoorn, over the Swartberg Pass to Prince Albert, on to Meiringspoort, then De Rust and back to Oudtshoorn.

But if you don't feel like leaving the property, there's an orchard tour with olive tasting that gives an insight into the different cultivars it produces and lets you take a complimentary olive product home. And if you don't feel like more food, you can get active through many of the other options outside.

Pedal around the property

Inspired by the one person in our group who decided to try the parkrun route, the rest of us followed suit. That's how I found myself reliving my youth by riding a bicycle that doesn't stay in one place like the ones I'm used to at the gym.

It was an invigorating pedal around the property – with more time, I might have opted for a dip in the pool or sailed away in one of the boats on the Willow Dam. Perhaps I'll save that for the next visit. Like the mountains, Surval Boutique Olive Estate won't be going away any time soon.

● Eugene Yiga travelled as a media guest on a press trip hosted by the South African Brandy Foundation. The Surval Boutique Olive Estate is located on R328, Cango Caves Road, Oudtshoorn. Call +27 (0)87 350 1950, fax +27 (0)44 272 8599, email reservations@surval.co.za, or visit www.surval.co.za.



Cycling through Surval Boutique Olive Estate.



Sip a cocktail at the pool.

LOUDTSHOORN

The towns of Oudtshoorn and De Rust are in the Klein Karoo between the Swartberg and Outeniqua mountains. Oudtshoorn is the ostrich capital of the world. The world's biggest bird is just one of the many attractions in this area of exceptional contrasts and natural beauty. The region is home to

the spectacular Cango Caves, Africa's largest show cave system; an ecological hotspot where three distinct plant biomes (succulent karoo, Cape thicket and fynbos) converge; and the Swartberg mountain range, which is part of the Cape Floral World Heritage Site. For more info, see www.oudtshoorn.com.