

KASHUKA

One of my favorite middle-eastern dishes is Shakshuka. It's basically a tomato-base of stewed vegetables with the eggs cooked right in the sauce. I absolutely adore it but it wreaks havoc on my digestive system due to the acidity in the tomatoes. So, never one to give up anything I love, I came up with this non-tomato concoction and changed the name to make it my own. It's not quite as stewy as traditional Shakshuka—it's a bit firmer—but it's equally delicious.

KASHUKA (serves one)

INGREDIENTS

1 Idaho potato, rinsed, peeled and grated (large grate)

1 vadalia onion, peeled and grated (large grate)

2 cloves minced garlic

1 cup fresh spinach, washed

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup parmesan cheese grated, (fine grate)

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon paprika

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cumin

Salt & pepper to taste

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon red pepper flakes

6 tablespoons canola oil

1 egg

1 sliced avocado

PREPARATION

In a large bowl, combine the grated potato and onion. Using a cheesecloth or clean linen dishcloth, squeeze as much of the liquid out as you can and discard. Add the garlic, spinach, parmesan, paprika, cumin, salt, pepper, and red pepper flakes to the potato/onion mixture.

Heat a large non-stick skillet over medium heat and add 4 tablespoons of oil making sure to coat the entire pan. Just as the oil begins to smoke, add the potato mixture to the pan and flatten it so that the entire bottom of pan is covered. Cook untouched for about four to five minutes until the bottom begins to brown. Shake the pan to loosen the potato cake. If it is sticking, gently use a spatula to loosen it from pan.

Using a plate that can cover the skillet, flip the potato cake onto the plate. Add two more tablespoons of oil into the skillet allowing it to come up to temperature. Slide the cake back in the skillet with the uncooked side down. Don't forget to use potholders. If it has come apart a bit, just use the spatula to try to bring it back together. *(If you can flip an omelet over like a pro, then you should be able to flip the potato cake too. But be careful. You don't want half your dinner on the floor.)*

Using a soup ladle, make a dent in the center of the potato cake. Crack open an egg and gently place the raw egg in the dent. Cook for four to five more minutes until the egg is cooked to your liking.

To serve, carefully use a spatula to loosen the potato cake. Slide it onto a plate trying not to break the egg. Place the sliced avocado around the cake.

DON'T FEED THE BABOONS

You can't go all the way to Cape Town without heading south to the Cape of Good Hope, the most southwestern point of the African continent, at least according to the sign. There are lots of signs as you make your way there, but most of them are about NOT feeding the baboons:

DO NOT FEED THE BABOONS!

BABOONS ARE DANGEROUS AND ATTRACTED BY FOOD!

DO NOT OPEN FOOD NEAR BABOONS!

DID YOU READ THE SIGNS? DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT FEEDING THE BABOONS, YOU IDIOT!

Clearly baboons have caused some problems. I did some digging and some unfortunate tourists have had their arms nearly bitten off not to mention other extremities, just trying to share their snacks. One brazen baboon actually jumped into the passenger seat of a car and stole a woman's purse complete with her passport and wallet. Maybe she had an open KitKat bar that lured him.

As we got closer and closer to our destination, we did see quite a few baboons just hanging out next to the road. Three of them were perched up on a rock looking fairly harmless to me. Nevertheless, we closed our windows, sealed up our potato chip bag and tried not to make eye contact. After all, with potato chips, we all know you can't eat just one. I have a feeling the baboons know that too.

CLEAN OUT THE FRIDGE CASSEROLE

I hate wasting food, but eating the same thing a few nights in a row can get boring. If I make a roast chicken, I'm always looking for different ways in which to use the leftovers. And if I've got some veggies in the fridge that are a tad past their prime, but not quite ready for the compost bin, then there's a meal to be made. Feel free to sub-out chicken for leftover turkey, pork, burgers or any meat you have, and use whatever vegetables that still have some life in them. Enjoy!

INGREDIENTS (serves 4)

Olive oil

10 small potatoes, cut in half, skins on

10 brussels sprouts, cut in half

$\frac{1}{2}$ head of cauliflower, stems cut and florets separated

2 leeks, white parts only, thinly sliced

10 cremini mushrooms, sliced

3 cloves garlic, minced

1 pound cooked chicken cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ " cubes

1 can Campbell's Chunky Creamy Chicken & Dumplings soup

1 cup gruyere cheese, grated (large grate)

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup panko

salt and pepper

1 scallion, thinly sliced for garnish

PREPARATION

Pre-heat oven to 375 degrees.

Place cut potatoes, brussels sprouts and cauliflower in a large bowl. Season with salt and pepper. Pour 2 tablespoons of olive oil onto the vegetables and mix with a large spoon. Pour vegetables out into a large roasting pan or onto a large baking sheet, separating the vegetables into one layer. Place in oven for 20 minutes.

Remove from oven, turn the vegetables over and roast for another 20 minutes or until the vegetables start to brown.

While those vegetables are roasting, heat a medium-sized skillet with 2 tablespoons of olive oil on medium heat. Add leeks and sauté for about 7 minutes until they begin to brown. Set aside. Add 2 more tablespoons of olive oil into the pan and add mushrooms. Sauté for 4 minutes until softened. Add the garlic and sauté for one more minute. Set aside.

When the roasted vegetables are ready, place them in a large bowl along with the leeks and mushroom mixture. Add the chicken cubes and canned soup. Mix until combined. Re-season to taste with salt and pepper, then mix.

Grease a medium-sized casserole dish with one tablespoon olive oil. Pour the entire vegetable/chicken mixture into the casserole dish, smoothing it down into an even layer. Sprinkle the gruyere on top, then the panko.

Bake for 25 minutes or until the cheese has melted and the panko begins to brown.

Remove from oven. Garnish with chopped scallions.

EAT, PRAY, LOVE

I love movies with exotic locations. *Eat, Pray, Love* made Bali look so beautiful, romantic, and otherworldly that given the chance to go, I couldn't pass it up. Who wouldn't want to live in a glamorous hut shackled up next to Javier Bardem and never worry about locking the door?

When I arrived in Ubud, the spiritual center of Bali, I half expected to see Julia Roberts at a café drinking *Kopi Luwak*, otherwise known as civet coffee—you know the coffee beans digested by civet cats and then pooped out and hopefully well cleaned.



But alas, no Julia was in sight. However, that doesn't mean her presence wasn't felt. My friends and I hired a tour guide who showed us around pointing out every spot Julia graced. And there were many.



By far, my favorite was a scene just downstream from a waterfall—a young couple stealing a kiss. Of course if I had widened out the shot, you would have seen their wedding photographer and entourage too, but why spoil the moment?

Away from the main drag, it doesn't take long to get out into the fields where nature is balanced and everything seems in order, just like these ducks.



Ironically, I did have my Julia moment after all. No, it wasn't in Bali. It wasn't in some exotic location. It was actually halfway down my block in Brooklyn. She was filming a movie and her trailer was parked on our street. Trying to be nonchalant, my neighbor and I took turns walking by, putting out our garbage bins and then putting them back. And then there was a sighting. An assistant opened the door of the trailer and there she was, luminescent even if only lit by a table lamp. She was simply knitting to pass the time.

Which just goes to show you, sometimes fantasies can come true even in your own backyard.

BEET SALAD WITH GOAT CHEESE DRESSING

I've never been a huge fan of beets, but I seem to be able to tolerate them if they are dressed up with a bunch of other tasty ingredients. I do like the color they add to a dish and from a nutritional standpoint, they are a very respectable vegetable. Paired with goat cheese, beets can be down right delicious—even for non-aficionados.

DRESSING INGREDIENTS

1/3 cup crumbled goat cheese (feta is a good substitute)

2 tbsp red wine vinegar (balsamic glaze is a good substitute)

3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

1/2 tbsp Dijon mustard

1 clove garlic, grated or minced

1 tbsp fresh dill, finely chopped

1 tbsp fresh chives, finely chopped

1/2 tsp Kosher salt

Pinch of fresh ground pepper

1/4 cup cold water

SALAD INGREDIENTS

2 beets (cooked, and sliced $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick)*

Salad greens

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup crumbled goat cheese

1 dozen cherry tomatoes, sliced in half lengthwise

salt and pepper

PREPARATION

Cut off ends and stems of beets. Rinse to clean off any dirt. Place beets in medium size pot and cover with cold water. Bring to a boil, then turn down heat to simmer and cover for 45 to 60 minutes until fork tender. Drain out water and let cool for twenty minutes. (*NOTE: You might want to use disposable gloves for this next step so that the dye from the beet doesn't stain your hands.)

Once cooled, the skins should easily peel off in your hands. Slice beets into rings and set aside.

In a medium size bowl, whisk $\frac{1}{3}$ cup crumbled goat cheese, balsamic glaze, olive oil, mustard, garlic, dill, chives, salt, and pepper together until creamy.

Slowly pour in the water and continue to whisk until it is the consistency of a creamy salad dressing. You may need more or less of the $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of water to get to a consistency you like. (Note: Dressing will only keep for a few days in the refrigerator because it has no preservatives.)

In a large salad bowl, lay out salad greens and lightly season with salt and pepper. Lay sliced beets and cherry tomatoes on top of greens. Sprinkle the remainder of the goat cheese on top. Pour dressing over salad and serve.

LIONS AND RHINOS AND SCARES, OH MY!

I've never been much of an animal lover. I was chased by a Great Dane as a kid and he almost bit me as my bell bottoms flapped in the wind, nearly getting caught in the spokes of my bike as I lifted my feet from its hungry mouth. I still have a fear of dogs to this day. Anytime I'm near a cat, my gums numb and my hands swell from an intense allergy. I tried having tropical fish for a while until my brother scooped my favorite one out of the tank just to watch it flop around on the floor. So, it was surprising to many that one of my bucket list travel experiences was to go on safari.

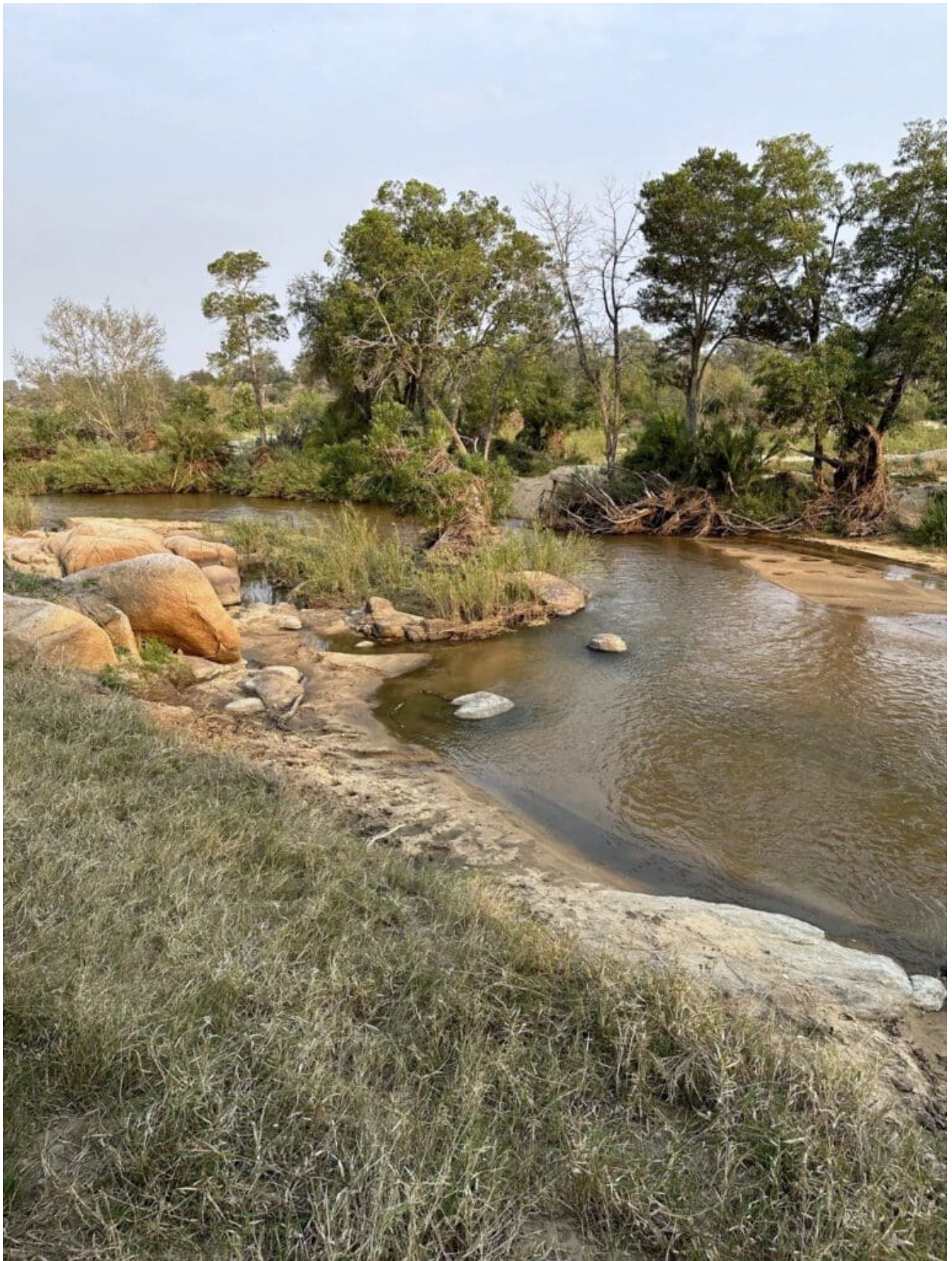
Fortunately my husband was game to see some game, so we chose South Africa as our destination, not knowing much about the nuances and differences in safari experiences. As it turns out, South Africa is home to the big five— lion, elephant, leopard, buffalo and rhino. But if you want to see gorillas, you have to go to Uganda or Rwanda or Congo. Like life, you just can't have everything in one place at one time.



Arriving in a tiny airport near Kruger National Park, we made the two hour trip to our campsite, surprised to find elephants within meters of the road. We didn't expect to see them so soon, but this is their territory and who am I to tell them where and where not to roam?



The Mala-Mala Camp sits just outside the border of Kruger with its own land to explore. I really shouldn't call it a campsite—it's a total "glampsite." Huge round huts made of clay and straw encase an unexpected interior of luxury with well-appointed furniture, art, and floor to ceiling windows. It's completely incongruous with the surroundings, but what can I say? You can't take the city out of the girl. I knew if I was going into the bush, I didn't want to have to "go in the bush," if you know what I mean. No sleeping out in Boy Scout tents just waiting for a monkey to come steal my cosmetics case for this girl. I'm not opposed to roughing it, but given the option, I'll go for comfort. I don't need bragging rights about how I slept on a hard dirt floor just to be one with nature. I'm okay with just being nature adjacent.



We were instructed to rise and be ready each morning by 6:00 for our morning excursion. Fortunately the FOMO was greater than our desire to sleep, so we grumbled our way into the open air Land Rover. It's winter here and the land is dry and

brittle, stretching out into one big brown vista. We're told it's a better time of year to see the animals. Come summer and the rainy season, the grass is so high, it's hard to spot them. But the Jewish mother in me wonders how the animals can feed themselves with so little greenery and the rivers almost dry? I'm assured there's still enough for them to feed themselves, so I try not to worry, but you can imagine how that goes.



Over the next few days, we come upon herds of elephants, some with newborns in tow. One little guy is so brand new his ears are still matted to his head, only fanning out occasionally when he walks. He stumbles around, not knowing quite what to do with his trunk and we all let out a collective “awwww’” at his antics. It's like watching a Disney movie of a baby elephant who accidentally drinks too much hooch.



A few moments later, down a hill that opens into a huge field, we encounter a herd of at least 100 Cape buffaloes. They all stare at us as if we're playing a game of chicken. And then they surround us. This is starting to get a bit too close for comfort. Our driver then turns the engine off and the buffaloes lose interest and walk right past us.



Right around sunset, a male lion meanders down the road in front of us and plops himself down for a rest. He barely acknowledges our presence. With his big mane surrounding his face, he looks just like the MGM lion. Although as far as I'm

concerned, there's no need for him to start roaring. Watching him yawn is much more reassuring.



We follow a leopard as she walks over to a stream to quench her thirst and then rests up on a hill. What a gorgeous creature with its regal brown and black spots.



Lounging in a field, we spy some adorable lion cubs snuggling up to their mom, annoying her as they nurse. It seems that we could easily just get out of the Rover and pet them, but our guide tells us we'd only get to do that once before being mauled to death. Noted.



Unbothered by our arrival, some rhinos cause us to pause as they walk in front of our vehicle making it clear they'll take their time. All of them are tuskless to prevent poaching. The conservationists remove their tusks for their own protection. Imagine what that job must be like.



There are so many impala walking around that it doesn't take long before we simply pass them all by having exhausted ourselves shooting their pictures. What's so astonishing is how close we are to all of them, often within meters. They are so used to these huge non-threatening vehicles that they seem to say, "Ok lady, shoot your damn picture and just move on. Can't you see I'm trying to get some sleep here?"



It takes a day or so before we see our first giraffe. Their heads towering above the trees, they become fairly easy to spot after a while. Some are huge – almost 20 feet tall, maybe more. As they nosh on the leaves of their favorite trees, they

take a beat to look me straight in the eye as if to say, “You want some of this? You’ll have to climb up here to get it.”



But as the days pass, I start losing hope of seeing some zebras. I mention it to our guide Bens—short for Benson—who tells me they can be a bit shy when they see the 9-seaters around. But within an hour of talking about it, there they are in all their splendor—three beautiful zebras out in an open field. They are so beautiful with their black and white stripes and multi-colored manes getting blown out by the air as if they were sitting in a high-fashion salon. I don’t know why I have such a fascination with them, but watching them prance around I’m almost hypnotized as their stripes practically animate.



By the end of the week we did indeed see all of the Big Five and then some. Even on our last day, we waited patiently for a hippo to surface from the water just in time for me to snap a shot of him yawning. It was very kind of him to hold the pose for me.

It's ironic how I am terrified by the bark of a neurotic domesticated dog, but I feel totally safe watching a lion and his brother devour the carcass of a dead baby hippo. Maybe I just need to get out in the wild more often. It's so much more civilized there.

THE BEST LAID PLANS

Now that I'm getting to a certain age, I've started a bucket list of all the places I'd like to explore and visit while

I've still got the energy and adventurous spirit to enjoy them. The idea is to do the hard trips first because you never know what type of monkey wrench life can throw. First up—safari. I've planned a trip for my hubby, Dan, and me to South Africa, and we'll ease into it with a food and wine crawl from Cape Town to Franschhoek in the heart of wine country before heading deep into the bush in search of the big five.

Cape Town is a city known for its innovative food. I spent weeks researching all the hot new spots and managed to eke out a few hard-to-get reservations. One restaurant, FYN—voted one of the top 50 restaurants in the world in 2022—has an eight-course tasting menu where every course looks like a piece of art and I'm hoping tastes equally exquisite. It's a fusion of Japanese and African cuisines, so I'm sure there will be some incredibly inventive dishes. After a few days of sampling what Cape Town has to offer, we'll head up to wine country, where it's going to be hard to go wrong as we sip and nosh our way through the region.

On our first full day in Cape Town, we discover an upscale Indian restaurant in a trendy neighborhood off Kloof Street, called Thali. It's a cozy spot with a welcoming open kitchen. Aromatic spices like cumin and cardamom permeate the room. Course after course, it is hands down one of the best Indian meals I've ever had. Actually, no need to qualify that; it's one of THE best meals I've ever eaten. Masala Duck Tacos and Lamb Galouti Kebabs served with naan fresh from the oven are just a few of the many delectable dishes placed in front of us. Each is balanced perfectly—no one spice overwhelming another. We can't stop eating even though there is enough to feed twice as many people.



And then later that night, the glutton gods paid a visit and forced me to pay for my sins with a vengeance. Not to be too graphic, but everything that went in, decided to come out—from both ends. I'm fairly certain it was not food poisoning. I think I caught a bug from that pill of a woman sitting next to me on the eleven-hour flight over. She looked like I feel now.

I can't sleep the entire night and the thought of ever eating again is nauseating. The only thing I can keep down over the next 24 hours is a half piece of toast with apricot jam. I

force myself to rally and stick to our plans. My cousin Grayson is working and living in Cape Town and he's going to be our personal tour guide. I warn him that wherever we go, we need to be within a three-mile radius of a bathroom.



Although delicate, I am able to walk down to see a colony of penguins hanging out on the beach. I've always loved penguins and it's hard to believe that they live within thirty minutes of a major city. And they don't disappoint as they waddle

about chit chatting with each other.



We head over to “Fish on the Rocks,” THE place for fish and chips—at least according to Phil Rosenthal. The smell of fried food is so overwhelming, I force Grayson and Dan to sit at a separate table, preferably downwind from me. I place my head down on the table and wait as they munch on some fried calamari. I start to believe I will never have an interest in food again.

That night, I reluctantly cancel our dinner reservation at Fyn in favor of another piece of toast with a Pepto Bismol chaser. I’m starting to feel a bit better. At least I can extend the bathroom radius to ten miles now. In wine country, I spend the next few days tasting and then spitting, not being able to swallow anything for fear of a relapse.



Our next stop is a working farm with a serious commitment to sustainability, Babylonstoren. When we arrive there, the receptionist takes one look at me—my complexion still a light tinge of green—and conjures up a cure made of medicinal herbs from their garden. He makes me a brew of marigold leaves, rosemary and mint. The first few sips make me wonder if this is going to have the opposite effect and make me feel worse, but after about thirty minutes, I feel surprisingly better. I think he may have cured me.



I'm hopeful I can start to enjoy myself a bit more. It would be a shame to have to hold back because they use everything they grow on the farm for their restaurant, giving the term farm-to-table a literal emphasis. Just walking about the

grounds there are beautifully maintained orchards and vineyards and gardens that go on for acres to explore. You can learn to bake bread here or have a private wine tasting or see how they process their olives into oil. They've refurbished a few of the workers rooms into lovely suites for guests and there's a spa to help ease the tensions of your stressful life. They take pride in everything from the fresh pressed juices on the breakfast buffet to the Mary Poppins-esque fruit lady who stops by your table with a full basket of citrus to offer up an evening cleanse of tangerine or kumquat.

I'm finally able to start eating whole food again, but not with my usual gusto. In the end, it takes over ten days to feel "normal," and by then we are wandering among the beasts in the bush. After coming up close and personal with so many exquisite animals, it makes me start thinking I should become a vegetarian. After all, vegetables are so much easier to digest.