

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.