

Why Franschhoek?

Recently described by Travel & Leisure as "one of South Africa's most beautiful spots with a picture-postcard village, 45 minutes from Cape Town. If you are going to choose one place as your base, Franschhoek should be it."

Franschhoek has become known as the food and wine capital of the country. This is not surprising when eight of the top one hundred restaurants are located in the valley, including the Chef of the Year two years running. The talent in the valley continues to climb to new heights, with a number of past chefs being drawn back to the valley where they made their names to open up new temples of gastronomy.

Settled more than three hundred years ago by the French Huguenots, the Franschhoek Valley also produces some great wines. Franschhoek complements the artistry of its chefs and winemakers with the breathtaking beauty, it lies on the banks of the Berg River against a backdrop of the towering Franschhoek and Drakenstein Mountains - a dramatic setting indeed for the town and its attendant vineyards. You can taste and buy wine at most of the twenty-nine wine cellars, and there are some nineteen restaurants attached to wineries. For the adventurous you can explore the vineyards by mountain bike or you could even try some wine-tasting on horseback.

Franschhoek's charming main street is lined with shops and galleries providing a choice of antiques, art, crafts and bric-a-brac. Naturally, the gourmet is well-catered for, and here you will also find fromageries, a Chocolaterie and coffee shops serving delicious, freshly baked confections - a must when you're all shopped out and need to build up your strength. With your energy restored, venture into the mountains for a walk or go to the Forestry Station for hiking, cycling, horse riding or flyfishing (some of the wine farms also have trout streams - check with the tourism bureau).

Or, to understand why Franschhoek is rich in French heritage - and for a glimpse at how life was lived way back when¹ - visit the Huguenot Memorial Museum. And if you're in the area on the weekend closest to Bastille Day (14 July), join the locals for their annual gourmet fair and celebration of the town's French heritage.

Of course, with all these attractions and culinary temptations, you'll want to stay more than two or three nights. It is increasingly becoming, because of its central location, a base from which to explore the wonderful pleasures of the Western Cape ~ from the winelands to whale-watching to exploring the mother city.