

TRAVEL / RESORTS

One of South Africa's Historic Presidential Retreats Has Become a Luxury Resort

Lekkerwater is as remote and royal as you'd expect.

BY SARAH KHAN ON JUNE 13, 2019



The Afrikaans word *bosberaad* translates to “meeting in the bush,” a summit held in a secluded location to discuss critical matters. It’s easy to see why former South African president F.W. de Klerk might have selected [Lekkerwater](#), in [South Africa](#)’s remote De Hoop Nature Reserve, as the setting for his own *bosberaads* in the 1990s to plan out the delicate details of the nation’s transition from apartheid to democracy.

A four-hour drive from [Cape Town](#) deposits you at this cliffside retreat clinging to the edge of the world, where wide beaches are unmarred by footprints, hills are overgrown with fragrant fynbos plants, and shimmering rock pools are teeming with octopus, abalone and whelks. It doesn’t get more isolated than this—even if your own preoccupations are decidedly less zeitgeist-altering than de Klerk’s.

The original Lekkerwater burned down in 2015, but as of April, it has been reborn as a chic new beach lodge from Natural Selection ([a relative newcomer to the safari-outfitter circuit](#)). The seven rooms are simple but comfortable, and expansive windows are the focal point—anyway, with ocean views like this, who needs art? (Though there is art, too—colorful paintings of proteas and whales by [Cape Town](#)-based Jemima Sargent.)





Lekkerwater Beach Lodge

Photo: Courtesy of Natural Selection

The simplicity continues in the main lodge, from the natural materials (woven bamboo chandeliers; a massive dining table hewn from a slab of oak) to the home-style meals shared around the communal table with fellow guests—*braaied* lamb chops and *boerewors* sausages one night, perhaps, or a harvest table of salads, steaks and cheeses for lunch.

De Hoop's designation as a Marine Protected Area, with 43 miles of pristine coastline, means there's an abundance of marine life—and an absence of human life. You're far more likely to see dolphins splashing around close to the beach than people plodding along its sandy shores. And from June through November, you'll want to keep your curtains flung wide open at all times: De Hoop is the best perch from which to see whales in Africa, and in season, massive groups of southern right whales converge by the lodge for your own private *bosberaad*.



Lekkerwater

Photo: Courtesy of Natural Selection



Lekkerwater Lodge in South Africa sits only a few hundred feet from the Indian Ocean.

all the porcelain for a certain very famous French luxury-goods company. Afterward I stopped for a lunch of white asparagus and spelt risotto at the exquisite restaurant La Cuisine du Cloître before heading back to the hotel.

A visit to this part of France wouldn't be complete without sampling some Cognac. So the following morning, I drove to the Bourgoin *maison* in nearby St.-Saturnin, where I met Frédéric Bourgoin, the dashing fourth-generation Cognac maker now heading up the business. The young Bourgoin gave me a tour of the estate in what used to be his grandfather's 1960s Peugeot D4B, tearing around the vineyards at breakneck speed. Bourgoin is part of a new wave of Cognac producers bringing a *soigné* effortlessness to the region's heritage brands. Larger houses, such as Rémy Martin and Château de Cognac, are also within striking distance.

On my last morning I sat outside on the lawn and recorded the avian symphony that had come to define my stay at the Domaine. The greatest testament to the hotel? I've listened to that soundtrack every day since I got home. *Rooms from \$391; domainedesetangs.com.*

—Jemima Sissons

Lekkerwater Beach Lodge

South Africa

Lekkerwater is Afrikaans for “nice water,” not something typically associated with the southernmost tip of Africa, an area known for treacherous seas and roiling currents. The name was inherited by Lekkerwater Beach Lodge, an unusual new property on an isolated stretch of coastline east of Cape Town. Formerly a local farmer's rustic beach house, Lekkerwater was constructed in 1939 about 350 feet from the crashing waves of the Indian Ocean, closer to the water than any building would be allowed today. In the 1980s the South African military expropriated the cottage, along with 37 miles of adjacent coast, to create a missile-testing range. Later it would become the weekend home of F. W. de Klerk, when he was South Africa's president, and a portion of the missile range was eventually turned into De Hoop Nature Reserve.

De Hoop covers about the same area as New York City, but it holds more plant species than the United Kingdom.

Considered the jewel of the Cape Floral Region, a UNESCO World Heritage site extending along the South African coastal escarpment, it shelters twice as many plant species per square mile as the Amazon, plus zebra herds, baboon colonies, and the occasional leopard. Environmental regulations prevent almost any new construction in the area, so Natural Selection, a leading South African safari operator, jumped at the chance when the former presidential home went on the market. Those regulations also prevented it from building anything larger than the cottage's footprint even after a wildfire tore through the area just weeks after the sale closed in 2015.

Rebuild it they did, though, and the result is a sleek, modern lodge with room for only 14 guests at a time, divided among seven detached cabins. Those cabins are stylish but simple, with wood-burning stoves and ocean views that offer the chance to wake up, look past your feet, and see what most people will come to see: whales.

Between June and October, De Hoop offers the best land-based whale-watching in Africa, if not the world, with thousands of southern right whales migrating here to calve in what is essentially an aquatic game reserve. Humpback and Bryde's whales visit as well, in addition to dolphins and seals. The cabins offer verandas for endless hours of observation where it is unlikely you will ever hear other guests, thanks to the surf.

Lekkerwater's staff-to-guest ratio is small (out of necessity because of the lodge's size) but attentive. Its restaurant features an excellent hyper-local menu. Guest stays are limited to two days, which makes a visit to Lekkerwater the perfect complement to staying at one of Natural Selection's safari camps in Botswana or Namibia, with a helicopter transfer that the operator can arrange. **Rooms from \$268 per person, all-inclusive; naturalselection.travel.**

—Jane Broughton