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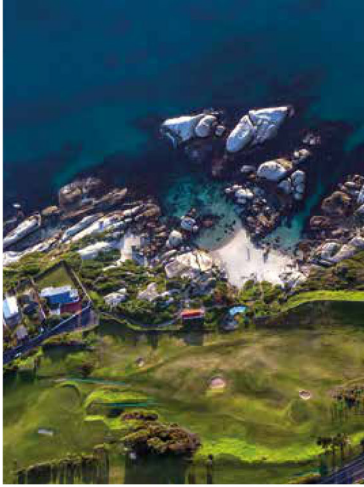
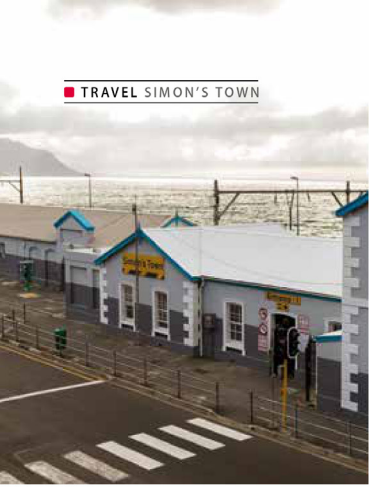
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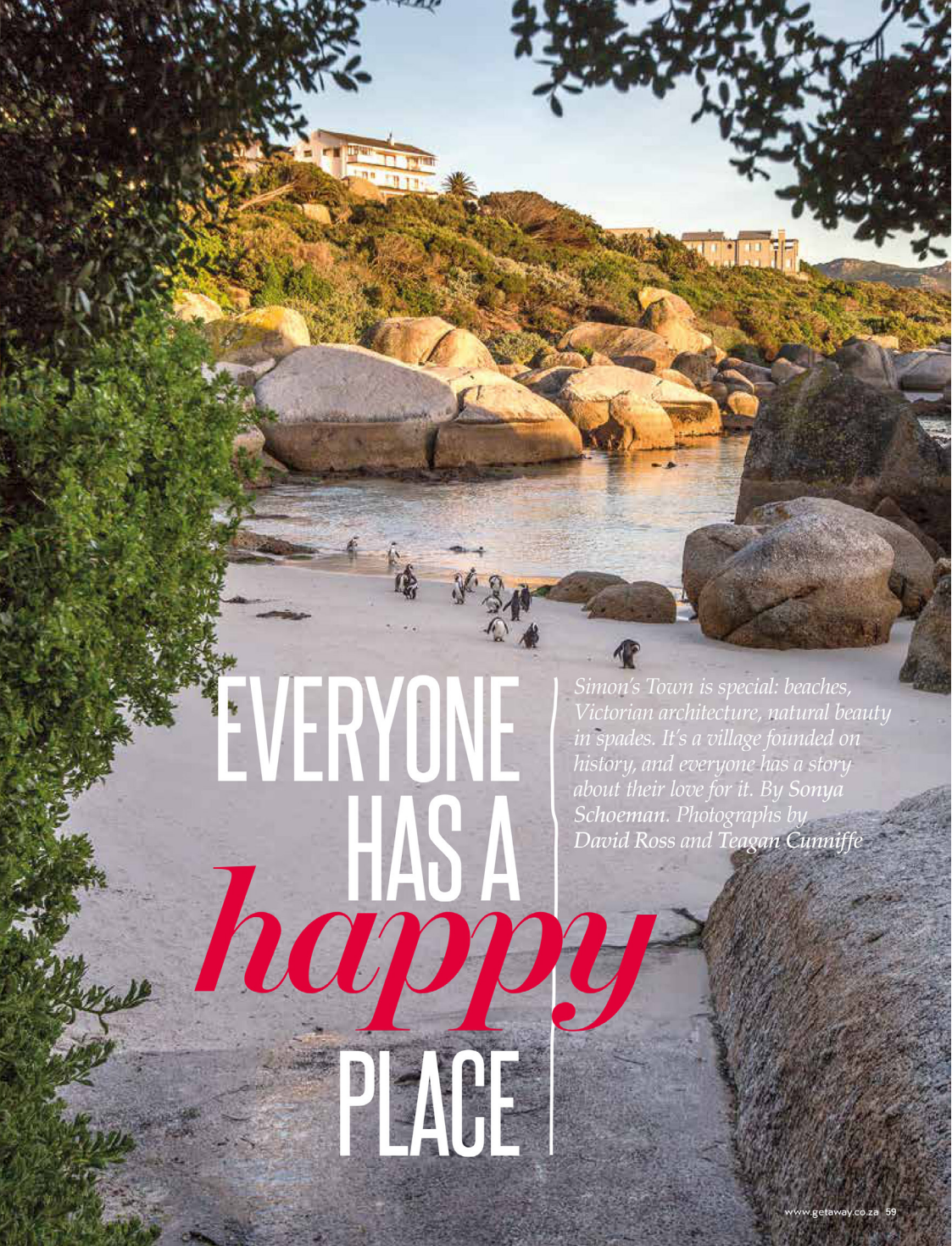
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INSIDE MONEY SAVER BOOK THE BEST ROOM FOR YOUR BUCK
VICTOR DLAMINI ON ENVIRONMENT VS DEVELOPMENT



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: The train station in Simon's Town lets people out onto Long Beach, a protected spot that's popular with families; Windmill Beach just off the golf course is protected from some of the wind – there are two small beaches so get there early; fish and chips from the very reasonable Neptune's Galley at False Bay yacht club, our good-find venue; ABC is a sexy, fun home to rent with a first storey pool and purple velvet couches set in the centre of the town; the main drag is not too crowded; Simon's Town is full of the ringing of church bells on Sundays – there is an active mosque too; the village is set on the hill, giving the mostly paved paths a beautiful sea view; Larjworks is in the main road and sells exquisitely handcrafted miniature boats. OPPOSITE: Boulders Beach is home to a colony of penguins and is a protected area. It costs R55 to enter.



EVERYONE HAS A happy PLACE

Simon's Town is special: beaches, Victorian architecture, natural beauty in spades. It's a village founded on history, and everyone has a story about their love for it. By Sonya Schoeman. Photographs by David Ross and Teagan Cumiffe

LAST SUMMER

a lot went wrong. Sometimes life's like that; bad things happen in batches. In my case, a job had gone over its deadline, the publisher refused to pay overtime, and my boyfriend fell into African poison ivy. Three weeks later he was still lying in bed with packs of ice and a gathering emotional storm as he was cheated of his summer, day by maddeningly itchy day.

The embarrassing part is: I felt great. I'm not heartless. I just couldn't help it. Every day the sun came up and spread its heat over the peninsula, the sky was cloudless, the fever trees outside my front door were as still as cats in the sun. I tried to cheer up the man I love but he felt affronted by my good health and begged me to leave him alone. There was just enough money for food and petrol. There were friends. There was the sea. So I filled the tank, packed the car and drove to Simon's Town.

Simon's Town is not a good place to be cash-strapped. The houses there cost millions; the municipal rates are high. There are no grocery shops and at the 7-Eleven a cucumber that usually costs R9 costs R19. Business rentals are exorbitant, I'm told. But if you turn your back on the houses, pack some food and have your own transport, it's a place full of pleasures. It has, without doubt, some of the most picturesque beaches in South Africa. And they are for everyone, and for free.

Main Road hugs the peninsula, wild dark-green and olive fynbos on one side, splashes of aquamarine coves on the other. My friends and I were hunting for the perfect swim. To find one takes time. The coves aren't easy to get to. The road hangs metres above them and access requires great care, agility and tenacity. A wrong foot can have you plunging to the rocks below. Seeking the good ones involves plenty of stopping and starting and discussion and careful consideration. A little pathway might well lead to a pretty, inviting beach, but then there's also the chest-wheezing haul back up. The equation must work: the trek up can be strict, but it shouldn't negate the cool and relaxing benefits of the swim you've had below.

A little beyond Rocklands Road we found one. It was rocky, but that one rock was big and round and flat. There was no soft spot to plug in an umbrella base, but it was warm and had plenty of space for towels. From the rock we dived into water the colour of jewels and didn't come close to the sandy bottom. It was deep enough for seals and fish and – a thrill to think – perhaps even a shark. Gulls paddled about. Oystercatchers called to each other. A seal breached beyond the seaweed and turned



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its belly up to the sun. The water lapped gently and light reflected off it in tiny flashes across the wide, deep bay in front of us. Salt sank into our skin. Everyone became still. Everything became still. Life was beautiful.

False Bay is fertile. This is one of the reasons Bruce Robertson, one of South Africa's top chefs, chose to semi-retire here. He is 45. He says 'retire', but really he spends his days foraging for food, which he cooks up for the mostly foreign diners who turn up at his chef's table at recently opened The Flagship. It's not cheap. But it is a delicious (mostly seafood) feast.

A locavore establishment is one that forages, grows or collects most of its ingredients within a certain radius of its



location. Bruce's radius is 12 to 16 kilometres, although he admits to a couple of transgressions, such as risotto rice. Foraging is not simply about walking down to the closest beach – in his case, one of the prettiest and most popular, past Boulders, just below Murdoch Valley. Everything from Muizenberg all the way around past Simon's Town to Cape Point and Scarborough is a nature reserve (part of Table Mountain National Park). No-one's allowed to pick anything from here, he says. From Kommetjie onwards it's possible to harvest, which is where he goes, 'but people need to know what they can eat and pick and must do so respectfully'. He's ardent about protecting the resources here. The bay is where our besieged sea life and fish stocks must replenish themselves. >

CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE: One great find was Neptune's Galley, the restaurant at False Bay Yacht Club, which is great for families as it has a lawn with some shade overlooking the picturesque harbour; the town is a treasure of second-hand antique shops; The Sweetest Thing is one of the best patisseries in the province; the town is full of picturesque little surprise views. OPPOSITE: Tourists flock to the town all year round, but particularly in summer.

He loves the area for other reasons too. 'Simon's Town is just an incredible place,' he says. 'There are so many secret beaches' – he refuses to divulge where, and I understand – 'so many beautiful rock pools.' The runs, the swims, the cycle routes, the natural promenade are special. He's a father of a six-year-old; there's a lot to do here for children too. He takes her fishing on the pier. Then there's the history, he adds, 'which is phenomenal. You know, I'm a navy guy myself and I have a real fondness for the community.'

Navy ports have a similar feel all across the world, says David Erickson, chairman of Simon's Town Historical Society. 'They're more laid-back,' he says. Partly this is because they hang on to buildings; the oldest navy building in Simon's Town was constructed in 1743. It's part of the naval dockyard. Had it been part of a commercial dockyard, it would have been pulled down long ago, he reckons.

The Historical Society was formed in 1960. It works to conserve the town's rich past. That it has a long history is well known, but what isn't as known is that Simon's Town fought hard against forced removals during apartheid. 'We tried to seek exemption. We had a very mixed community here. White, Muslim, black and coloured were living together, the beaches didn't have segregation and everything seemed to work fine,' he says. Now Simon's Town has become a place where the average age is of significance, says Erickson – it's almost a large retirement village.

Percy Kindo and his wife Mary were young people in Simon's Town in the late 1960s. Percy's great-grandfather bought a property in Cardiff Road, and that was where his grandfather, father and siblings were all born. They're a creative family – Percy is the brother of top choreographer Christopher Kindo and godson of the late artist Peter Clarke (who was born in Simon's Town). Percy himself is a stonemason and bricklayer.

He has pictures of his father's band, one of many in the town, and they used to play in the Alfred Hall, says Percy. Alfred Hall is still standing, but it's empty now. He shows me pictures of the harbour, where fishermen have brought in piles of tuna bigger than children. Everyone is grinning. Jubilee Square was full of young people and activity, says Mary. They all used to go and swim at the beach. There was a really vibrant church community and a wonderful feeling of life and activity in the town. Now it's quiet. For the most part, people stick to themselves.

Eight families got their land back, but only two – one being the Kindos – had the >

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: Bruce Robertson's five-course seafood lunch is innovative, and the ingredients are all harvested from within a 16-kilometre radius; you can stay at The Flagship, which also operates as a B&B; guests are usually seated in their own groups, but a couple may find themselves sharing the table with strangers too, which is half the fun. The Flagship can seat 14 in the dining room. OPPOSITE: Bruce with his boxer on the deck of The Flagship, which is set in Murdoch Valley and looks out over the expanse of the bay.

BRUCE ROBERTSON'S THE FLAGSHIP

It costs R720 a head for lunch here. For the avid foodie, it's absolutely worth it. Besides the view from the house being incredible, the fact that the food is foraged from the peninsula gives it a special touch – and it's delicious. There are five courses, and everything from the salt to the fish, snails and lobster comes from the sea. The wines are Backsberg, and each course comes with a glass of it (there's no miserly pouring, either). Bruce is larger than life, and very entertaining. He works barefoot, and he and his team prepare the dishes in front of their guests. chefbrucerobertson.com



ENVIRONMENTAL SNAPSHOT

Cape Point is in the transition zone between two biogeographic provinces – to the west, the cool temperate Namaqua province and to the east the warm temperate south coast province. Due to this and the high diversity of habitat in this Marine Protected Area, it's one of the most diverse (in terms of the numbers of species) stretches of coastline anywhere in the country. The Cape Peninsula is also rich in marine species endemic to southern Africa, some of which are even endemic to this change-over region. In 2004, the Table Mountain National Park Marine Protected Area was declared, encompassing everything between Mouille Point and Muizenberg. There are six 'no-take' zones (one with an exception – Hout Bay), which means exactly that: no fishing, no collecting of mussels or anything else. Simon's Town is one of these, and there are signs when you are entering and leaving a no-take zone. The Marine Team, based in Simon's Town, falls under the Department of Environmental Affairs, Oceans and Coasts, and is the custodian of these protected areas. Area manager (marine) Paul Siegen says they do their best to make a difference, but the public is not always aware of the damage being done to the ocean.

HOW TO HELP

- Witness poaching? Call Table Mountain National Park's anti-poaching unit. 021-786-5656
- Eat only sustainable fish – find out what they are on wwfsassi.co.za.
- Support the Save Our Seas Foundation's efforts. saveourseas.com
- Are you a diver? Share your info with the Southern Underwater Research Group on surg.co.za.

THE FUTURE

Being at the end of the train line, Simon's Town doesn't have a large catchment area in terms of incidental shoppers, which means it relies heavily on tourists and outsiders coming in. Its own community is small (around 7 000) and notoriously spending shy, and businesses have struggled to survive. However, Keith Alcock, chairman of the Simon's Town Business Association, says it is working hard at bringing people to the town, and the community is united in this. One success story is the Simon's Town Music Festival, which features classical and jazz. This September is its second year, and it will be held from the 19th to 21st. Another interesting development is an initiative being led by artist Jenny Cullinan to rehabilitate the Alfred Hall, a former Masonic Lodge, to create the Royal Alfred Academy of Art, an artist residency programme that will link in with the University of Exeter in the UK. The focus will be on the interconnection of art with environmental issues.



The water there is flat and clear, the bottom sandy, and just beyond the swimming line are yachts. Dolphins sometimes play there too

financial means to build a house. 'It will never be the same as it was; it hasn't got the same soul it had before. But we just knew we had to come back. We have many properties, but this was the only one I wanted to build on.'

From the broad balcony, I can see the exquisite expanse of bay and the roof of the train station, which lets commuters out onto Long Beach. The water there is flat and clear, the bottom sandy, and just beyond the swimming line are yachts. Dolphins sometimes play there too. Percy loves this beach best. He goes there early in summer, before the heat and hordes arrive. But when he's there, he says, he often sees families who used to live in Simon's Town. They still come all the way from Ocean View and other areas just to be at this place they love.

I'm at Elle and Sid Katzeff's Baxter House, at the edge of the golf course, a beautiful clapboard home. It overlooks Boulders Beach. From the wooden deck I watch crowds of tourists on the boardwalk gawking at the penguins walking up and down the sand, standing on the rocks, hiding behind them. This time it's a luxury visit. In the morning I drink strong coffee in the sun with my boyfriend – who, seven months later, has recovered from the poison ivy but still has the scars. Light streams into the upstairs bedroom and lounge, and the view puts us into a meditative state. It's because the bay spread out before us is constantly changing, with light, with shadows. Clouds gather on the opposite mountains, creating dramatic scenes. We grumble about the Katzeffs – we want what they've got. It's the most beautiful existence we can imagine. The shush of the sea filters through the house and we can hear penguin and seagull chatter, and the wind in the trees.

In the kitchen, Elle tells me about Jean Louw. Jean is in her 90s, and has a wooden hut on Boulders Beach. These are no longer allowed; hers is the last stand, and when she's gone it will be torn down. Every sunny day you can find her down there doing her crossword and looking out at the sea, Elle says. She never misses a day and she hardly ever gets sick. I imagine that's true. If you're happy, you're seldom sick. And that's the thing about Simon's Town. It's so many people's Happy Place. >

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: Just Sushi Bar and Restaurant comes highly recommended and is set over the harbour, so the views are very pretty indeed; Simon's Town's resident population is largely retirement age – clearly thanks to its very peaceful, old-world feel; besides being fresh and delicious, Just Sushi's sushi is beautifully presented – you can also have it with warm saki. **OPPOSITE, FROM TOP:** Baxter House is virtually on top of Boulder's Beach, and is a delightful home to rent with white floors and light, uplifting colours; Whale View Manor Boutique Hotel and Spa is set over Fisherman's Beach, so it's literally a case of eating a delicious breakfast (served in a dining room with panoramic views) and grabbing your towel to trip across Main Road and on down the steps to the sand; the harbour is a photographer's delight with an excess of seafaring paraphernalia and textures.



See more images of our flight over the Cape Peninsula on getaway.co.za

This bird-eye view image was taken in a flight over the peninsula with Cape Town Helicopters, which offer tours and adventures from the V&A Waterfront. For the details, go to helicopterscapetown.co.za.



PLAN YOUR TRIP

GETTING THERE

If you don't want to drive, simply hop on the Southern Suburbs train from Cape Town Station to the end of the line (R9.50). It's full of graffiti and not particularly clean, but it's how many South Africans travel. Download timetables at metrorail.co.za. There is an old steam train on Sundays (R250 for adults, R150 for kids under 12; atlanticrail.co.za). By car from Cape Town, take the M3 and drive south until the T-junction at Steenberg Road. Turn left to go through Muizenberg or over Boyes Drive; right to go over Ou Kaapse Weg (M64) pass via Fish Hoek. Or you can go the long route on the M65, past Kommetjie, Scarborough and Cape Point. It's a gorgeous road.

WHEN TO GO

It's pretty all year round. Summer, of course, is busy, prices are at their peak and traffic can drive you mad. If you're staying in the town, you'll be fine, especially in the mornings – people take time to get to the beaches. February to May is lovely, with fewer people and great weather. The wind can blow all year round, though, so be prepared for the southeaster; it gets strong. I love winter here. It gets stormy and the bay reflects the moody weather – beautiful. Prices are also good then.

DO THIS

If you love the outdoors, there's a lot to do on the peninsula. Main Road

(M4) is popular with cyclists, and it's a beautiful run too. In some places the verges are quite narrow, so be aware of that. There are numerous **hikes**; the easier ones are listed on the Simon's Town website. For a longer, more strenuous one, try the Swartkop to Smitswinkel route, which starts at the end of Jan Smuts Road and takes you close to Smitswinkel Bay, where you can walk down to one of the prettiest beaches in the area.

Cape Point, if you haven't been, is spectacular. There's a gorgeous swimming spot there called Buffels Bay; mind the baboons, though. Diaz Beach looks very inviting, but has dangerous currents.

There are five **museums** in the town: Simon's Town Museum (the broad spectrum, 021-786-3046), the Heritage Museum (Muslim history, 021-786-2302), the SA Naval Museum (021-787-4686), the Warrior Toy Museum (divine for collectors and kids, 021-786-1395), the Submarine Museum (in an old sub, 021-787-4686). There's also Simon's Town Historic Mile, which focuses on the town's old buildings.

BEACHES

The joy of this coast is that there are hidden treasures and beautiful rock pools, but these must be searched for and earned. There are many well-known beaches too, each good for certain purposes. **Long Beach** is right at the start of Simon's Town,

in the harbour and near the railway station. The water is gorgeous and flat and there's a view of the yachts. In hot weather it gets crowded. **Seaforth** is also quite protected. It's between the navy harbour wall and a restaurant, so it gets busy. But the carpark's right there, making for easy access. There's also tiny **Water's Edge** nearby. **Boulders Beach** is where you can swim with the penguins. Entry costs R55, but it's protected and magical to swim among the rocks – and the water is a lovely milky colour. **Windmill Beach** is off the golf course, and small, and to its left is another similarly charming beach. There are many nooks in this area, but get there early as people love them and they get full quickly. Beyond this area it gets quite rocky, but there are still charming places to discover if you're willing to explore. The next sandy beach is at **Miller's Point**; to its right is **Rumbly Bay**, with its rock pool. It also gets busy because it's so wonderful to swim here, but at certain times of the year – and during the week – it's empty. **Smitswinkel Bay**, for strong swimmers, will require a hike and you won't get a warm welcome from the locals. Just saying.

NEED TO KNOW
Simon's Town has very poor cellphone reception. For coastal exploring, pack a hat, sunblock (lots of it), towels, blankets, snacks, water and other drinks – there

aren't many options for shopping in Simon's Town, and what's there is very expensive. Best is to bring your own. **INSIDER'S TIP** Buy pies from The Sweetest Thing (82 St George's Street). Doreen Alcock bakes incredible beef, chicken and lamb ones full of good meat.

STAY HERE Budget

Hoerikwaggo Tented Camp at Smitswinkel is self-catering and basic, but very comfortable. Each tent has its own shower and bathroom, and the communal areas have a great feel. It looks onto the mountain. Because of the baboons it's surrounded by a fence, which isn't great but is a necessity. It's quite windy there, and the tents do flap; still, it's easy to sleep well. The biggest annoyance is management's policy of locking guests in and out. From R580 for a two-bed tent. sanparks.co.za
INSIDER'S TIP There are six tents. Try to book them as a group – it's best that way – and beat your friends to a tent further away from the communal area.

Reasonable

Whale View Manor Boutique Hotel has 10 rooms, six sea-facing, four mountain-facing. Each is decorated differently. They're not large but are very comfy. The sitting and dining rooms are on the lower floor

looking out onto the sea. The beach just below the hotel is one of the best on the coast. Being so close, you can stake your claim early. From R595 a person sharing, or R850 a single, including an excellent breakfast. whaleviewmanor.co.za
INSIDERS TIP Book room six; it feels slightly more spacious and luxurious.

Luxury

Baxter House is an exquisite clapboard house with white wooden floors and a light, happy feel. It overlooks Boulders Beach, so the views are incomparable, plus there are many coves to access from it. The house has numerous areas for communal lunches or drinks, and is just wonderful to live in – comfortable and not too precious. It's pricey; out of season from R5 000 a day. But there are five bedrooms (sleeps 12). ABC (see page 58) is a good luxe self-catering bet from R3 500 a night. perfecthideaways.co.za

EAT AND DRINK

I'd definitely go for Bruce's five-course seafood lunch at The Flagship (see page 62). There aren't many other very good options, but these are the ones I recommend.

The Lighthouse Café (021-786-9000) is probably the one to book for dinner as there's not much open at night. It has a decent menu with reasonable prices, and for this reason books up quickly. I had great fish and

chips here (R73), and my partner's steak was delicious too (R120), plus a mint and chevin salad (R70).

Just Sushi Bar & Restaurant (021-786-4340) offers dim sum and sushi, and is also very good. Pricey, though. Our dim sum (five pieces), soup and one platter cost R450.

The Sweetest Thing Patisserie (021-786-4200) offers excellent pies (from R24) and sweet things (from R15). It's open only during the day, but is great value and quality.

Neptune's Galley (021-786-4638), the Yacht Club's restaurant, is a really great-value find. It's right on the harbour and is an excellent place to take kids as there's space to play on the grass. A very decent fish and chips costs R55; non-wheat eaters have choices too.

The Meeting Place (021-786-5678) is a bit hit and miss, but on the whole good and in winter has a lovely fireplace. I liked its breakfast (scrambled eggs cost R40, so it's reasonable).

The Black Marlin (021-786-1621) is a tourist trap, but we've spent many a wonderful afternoon on the deck with a glass of wine in front of one of the most beautiful views in the world. If you must eat here, keep it simple – as in sandwiches.

CONTACT

Simon's Town Tourism Bureau
021-786-8440
simonstown.com
simonstown.org

