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Health News

Posted to the web on: 01 October 2008

Melting away stresses of the world

One way of boosting your immune system is to take regular breaks in places that disconnect you from the urban high-tech world, and reconnect you with nature, writes MARIKA SBOROS

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IT'S a dizzyingly fast-paced, digital world we live in. Add to that the information overload, and all the financial, economic, political and other stresses of modern 21st century working and living, and it's not surprising that blood pressure levels are soaring, along with rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cancers, worldwide.

One way of effectively shedding that stress and reducing your risk of serious illness is to join the global trend towards health tourism. It means actively seeking out and spending time regularly in places that disconnect you from work and reconnect you with nature.

Fortunately, with the rising costs of air travel these days, you don't have to travel far to find such places.

One is the five-star Summerfields Rose Retreat that nestles in the tranquil environs of a 100ha working rose farm in a secluded valley near Hazyview, Mpumalanga. It comes courtesy of the owners of Summerfields estate, André and Ilse van Heerden, who had a vision to create an environment where active farming and hospitality can happily co-exist.

There's an air strip nearby, and the estate is a mere 10km from the nearest Kruger National Park entrance gate.

The retreat is an instantly mood-enhancing, immune-boosting fusion of African soul and energy and the wisdom of the quintessentially English rose. It is the perfect place to cut off from all the sources of stress that make blood pressure climb into the stratosphere.

You won't be tempted to watch TV there, not the least because any one of the 12 elegant tented suites you may be staying in under the shade of Jackalberry and Tambotie trees, does not have TV. That's deliberate policy, says the retreat's lodge and spa manager Jaco Steyn. It's in keeping with the philosophy of creating an environment in which guests can truly "get away from it all".

The retreat is an environment that invites you instantly to switch off your cellphone, and not even think of logging onto your laptop.

You won't feel at all deprived, as the suites have all the luxuries any normal human being could possibly want. They are also positioned to ensure complete privacy with decked views over the Sabie River that runs to the Mozambique coastline.

Attention to detail is everywhere in the different rose-variety suites, with specially designed furniture and a special emphasis on natural materials, percale linen and the fragrance of freshly cut roses wafting over as you enter.

The suites have en-suite outdoor bathrooms that allow you to shower and bathe with the music of nature washing over your body — cascading river waters, a symphony of bird calls, the odd hippo snort.

The retreat's open-plan Rose Spa is also located close to the Sabie River. It allows you to indulge in treatment therapies in river-side pavilions overlooking the river bed where hippos bathe at dusk, and a crocodile named Steve (in memory of Australian wildlife expert Steve Irwin) sometimes drops by for a visit. (For that reason, a prominent sign warning guests not to swim in the river is meant to be taken very seriously).

It's the ideal place to give yourself over to the healing energies of wild, natural surroundings and the sweetness of breathing in clean air.

The spa offers a range of treatments based on the healing and sweet-smelling power of the rose, and thalassotherapy (sea water therapy) products from the French house of Thalgo. Therapies incorporate aromatherapy, reflexology, hand, foot and scalp massages, facial treatments and full body exfoliations and wraps.

The signature "touch of nature" treatment (my favourite) begins with a rose

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petal foot bath, macadamia nut exfoliation and a tender rose oil massage. For cooler, colder days, you can avail yourself of a "Desert Heat Body Cocoon", a rejuvenating body treatment in which you will be wrapped up in a bubbling mix of seaweed and mineralising golden mud from the Arizona Desert, enriched with copper, magnesium, and zinc.

Men are not excluded from the range of beauty treatments. There is an Ocean Men's Facial Treatment using products with algae and bamboo extracts to give an "anti-ageing, anti-fatigue and energising facial" specially for stressed male skins.

The retreat staff will also organise "health getaway packages" over five days. Packages include gentle detoxification programmes, daily walks, stretching exercises, and the usual massage and other spa treatments.

All guests have complimentary access to the rose quartz steam room, outdoor hydro bath and a "nature hydrotherapy meander" — different water temperatures, sprays and textures used in a form of hydro therapy to rejuvenate the senses.

Thereafter, the perfect way to wind down the day is with a "personalised bath": If you have trouble sleeping, or just want a little help to melt away the stresses of the outside world, butlers will prepare a Sleep Easy Bath Ritual for you. It's a candle-lit bath with a blend of essential oils in the water to calm the nervous system and relax body and mind, while you sip on a cup of Thalgo infusion herbal tea served with home baked, good mood cookies.

Or you can indulge in a "romantic bath ritual" — a rose milk bath for two served with champagne and Belgian chocolates.

Of course, attention to the needs of the stomach is not lost amidst all the external bodily pampering. Food is a gourmet dining experience set in "the valley" between Hazyview and Sabie on the Summerfields estate, with a varied menu prepared by chef Lienkie Erasmus.

Erasmus trained and qualified at the Spier estate in the Cape, and has worked extensively locally and abroad. She describes the cuisine she offers as "classical country, with a sprig of French flair" that takes inspiration from the natural surroundings.

When it comes to ingredients, "natural and local are always first prize," says Erasmus, "and the flavour combinations tend to follow". She uses fresh produce in season supplied by local farmers and from the restaurant's own garden. Everything from chutneys, mayonnaise and bread are homemade to complement the personal service.

- For more information, visit www.summerfields.co.za
- The writer was a guest of the Summerfields Rose Retreat

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