

We didn't stop at any of the vineyards for tasting (many said "by appointment only") but on our second stop for sustenance, I had a glass of wine with my sandwich. It was a locally produced chenin blanc and cost about \$1.35 for a 250 ml glass. We also saw many bottles for sale at our first stop with prices ranging from about \$6 per bottle. It was tempting to stock up and have it shipped home; we felt sure the cost of shipping would not bring the price up to US levels. We didn't!

The whole day was taken at a very slow pace and the weather was gorgeous (90F at the hottest, by far as the hottest we have felt since Namibia) and the experience was one that we will long remember – and hopefully repeat.

We arrived back in Montagu just as the scheduled power outage began. We had been warned that it would last until 6:30 – and be "all clear" well before our evening meal. As last week, the power went out and came back on schedule so our dinner at the Four Oaks was secure – and, once again, very good. We met a couple who had dined with us at Serendipity in Palms (it turned out they were also staying at the same guest house as us) and we got chatting later with a young man in his twenties. He was of Zimbabwean parents, born in New Zealand and now pursuing a doctorate at the University of Michigan – in British Imperialism in the 1850s! Interesting, but I wonder what he'll do with it.

Sunday November 30

We had another good breakfast at the guest house and then checked out for our drive to Stellenbosch. It was warm again and headed for 90F under a clear blue sky. We drove west on Route 62 and then Route 60, once again through fruit farms and vineyards. We were still well and truly in the wine area and, even though we thought yesterday's drive was beautiful, the scenery today was even more stunning.



A little before the very trendy town of Franschhoek, we climbed the Franschhoek Pass and then had a fantastic view across the valley, the town and the surrounding vineyards.



Franschhoek

We stopped in town for a light lunch and walked around for about 30 minutes before the final 45 minute drive to our hotel in Stellenbosch. This was another in the Protea chain and our “room” was a two floor suite, much like the one we had in Mossel Bay.

We settled in before 3pm and spent some time looking at restaurants for our final two nights here. We booked a very exclusive one for Monday evening (full tonight) and this evening we ate at a local restaurant not far from the hotel. It was one we picked at random as we walked up the street but turned out to be a very good meal.

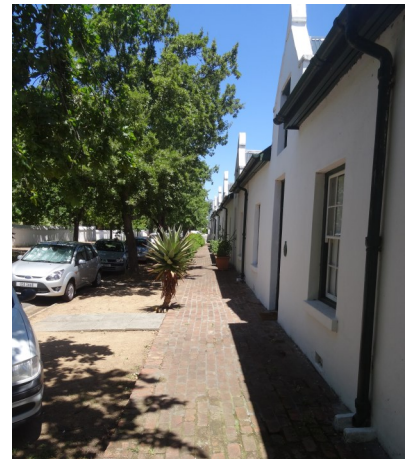
Monday December 1

It was a very pleasant morning as we left the hotel and walked a few blocks to a breakfast café where we had a full fried breakfast sitting outside, with temperatures in the high 60s and a nice cooling breeze.

Then we set out on a walking tour of Stellenbosch. We picked up a very useful brochure at the tourist information center and then slowly meandered around the historic buildings. Stellenbosch is the oldest inland city in South Africa and was initially founded by the Dutch East India Company as a farming community.



The Braak



Stellenbosch





Virtually all of the buildings are painted white, many have thatched roofs and a large number have gable endings typical of the Cape Dutch era of the late 17th century. Obviously not all of the buildings date from that period – many are mid 1800s and Victorian in style – and, since there have been a number of devastating fires, many buildings have been reconstructed. However, the flavor of the old community remains centered around a large green area (The Braak) and most of the streets are lined with trees. Many of these are oak trees for which the town is famous, so the whole effect is a painting of white buildings, large green trees, set against a backdrop of 2000 feet high mountains.

We spent about four hours on our tour (which seems to be about our limit these days for walking!) and then spent a very lazy afternoon at the hotel.

Tonight we had dinner at the Governor's Hall on the Lanzerac Wine Estate. This had been recommended by our host in Montagu and, based on our experiences at similar restaurants three weeks back, we were eager to try it again. We were not disappointed.

Tuesday December 2

This was our final day in South Africa (for this trip) but we still had a whole day before our midnight flight to Amsterdam.

We checked out of the hotel and drove to Franschhoek for a walk around that popular attraction, without the huge crowds of Sunday when we passed through last.



We walked along the main street and visited the Huguenot Monument, built in the 1940s to commemorate the arrival of 200, 000 Huguenots from France in the 17th century. They fled religious persecution and settled in the Western Cape area and are generally credited with establishing the French wine making methods as the major industry of the area.



Huguenot Monument

So, our three weeks were almost over. We drove back to Cape Town to return Mark's SUV, which had served us very well for the past twelve days, and had another great meal prepared by Danie. We had little excitement during our final hours in Cape Town when a wild fire broke out on the coastal side of Lion's head, only a few blocks up the hill from the house. Two helicopters took turns bringing water buckets from the ocean to the fire site and we certainly could smell and see a good deal of smoke and some ash actually fell on the patio. At times, ships in the bay, normally fully visible, disappeared into the smog but eventually the helicopters quit their job and, presumably, left the remaining smoldering to a ground crew. We did wonder if the house was in any danger and certainly considered moving inside for our meal, but in the end we stayed outside and enjoyed another wonderful meal.

At 9:30 Jerome arrived to take us to the airport so we said our farewells to the staff on hand and made the 40 minute drive. We checked in and were through Security and Passport Control quickly so we had time for a final stroll through the souvenir shops (no purchases) and a brief visit to the lounge.

Tuesday December 3

The flight from Cape Town left about 12:30am and we both were soon asleep and had a good seven hours before breakfast and the final hour to our change in Amsterdam. Here we had about two hours but by the time we had walked between gates and the lounge, we had time only for a quick cup of coffee before our onward flight to Detroit, which left at 1pm local time.

The flight from Cape Town to Amsterdam was the last for the captain after 28 years with KLM. To commemorate the occasion, he met passengers at the plane door in a uniform with EIGHT gold stripes around the sleeve cuff, gold shoes and a sash around his shoulders.

As we pulled away from the gate, an airport fire engine aimed a huge stream of water towards the plane as a sign of respect.

On touchdown in Amsterdam, the captain received loud applause from the passengers and the plane was escorted to the gate by at least eight airport vehicles with all lights flashing. A KLM employee was on the tarmac to capture the whole event on camera.

This flight arrived in Detroit on time and our layover was such that we had little time to linger before the final leg to Cincinnati, where we arrived around 6:30pm. We picked up the car at the Airport Marriott and drove home to Mason after a wonderful trip in which we saw so many different sights in a very leisurely and sophisticated manner. We are already thinking of a return to this beautiful country in 2015.

