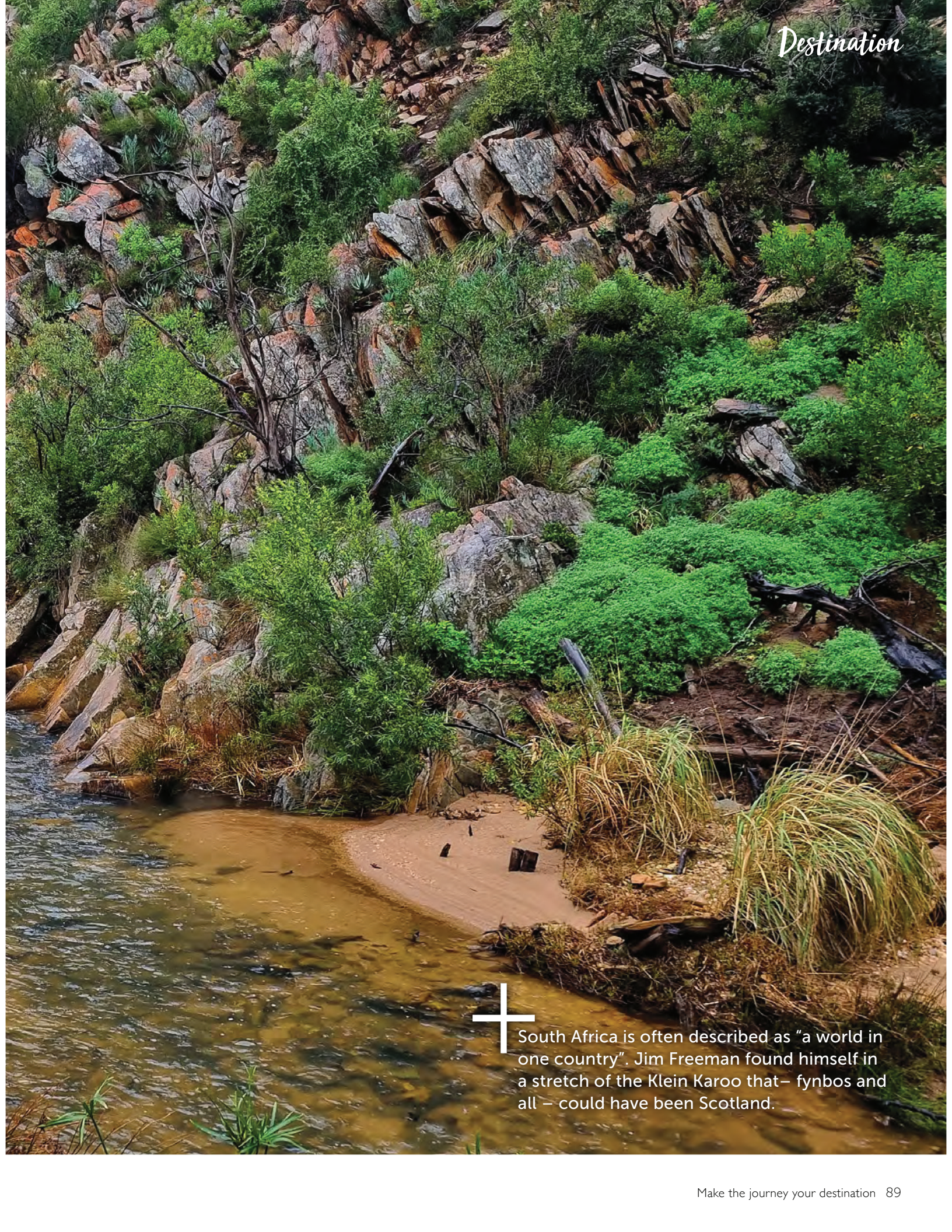




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Highland Sojourn

Wildevondkloof
Private Game Reserve



South Africa is often described as “a world in one country”. Jim Freeman found himself in a stretch of the Klein Karoo that – fynbos and all – could have been Scotland.



History tells us that there are close links between the Scottish and Afrikaner people, and that these are based primarily on a shared Calvinistic religion and a hatred for disrespect by the English. Nowhere in South Africa (with the possible exception of certain areas of KwaZulu-Natal) is this more apparent than the Eastern Cape and Karoo.

However, not only are there a host of place names that hark back to *The Auld Country* – think Aberdeen, Kirkwood, and Balfour – and families that bear Scottish surnames (Murray is the most obvious) that speak English only under duress but there are parts actually reminiscent of Scotland.

I was reminded of this when my girlfriend and I visited Wildehondekloof Private Game Reserve in the foothills of the Swartberg Mountains North of Oudtshoorn a couple of months ago.

Winter held the Klein Karoo in thrall: heavy flurries left the grim, grey peaks dusted with snow while weeks of good rains left the veld lush and green. Swap the fynbos for gorse and, in both fair weather and foul, you could easily be in the Scottish Highlands.

Overcast, the atmosphere is ominous but when the sun comes out, the scene is transformed. The snow sparkles ... an effect matched by countless tiny flowers that unfurl their petals and bask in unexpected warmth. Sunlight causes aloe blooms and

Nitida proteas to glow. This is a place of remarkable beauty.

Wildehondekloof Private Game Reserve (www.whkloof.co.za) is a recent addition to the Cape Country Routes collection of owner-operated and managed accommodation that incorporates more than 20 hotels, lodges, and guest houses located on scenic and historic routes in the Western and Eastern Cape. All are carefully selected for their character, charm, and romance.

The 4 000 ha property is more of a nature than game reserve. However, there are more than enough animals to keep guests enchanted, starting with a herd of nyala that graze on the lawns in front of the luxury nine-roomed lodge that includes a “presidential” suite.

There is also a self-catering family villa that can accommodate four adults and two children. All beds have electric blankets, and most rooms have fireplaces ... essential in





Winter. Furnishings and finishes are, as befits a four-star property, top quality. At this time of the year, one of the greatest attractions is two cavernous hearths in the lounge and dining hall that are fed almost constantly with black wattle logs.

The lodge has been designed so as to be cosy in Winter but cool in Summer. Oudtshoorn might be only 50 km away, but Wildehondekloof is consistently five to eight degrees cooler during the day. Nonetheless, the swimming pool provides welcome relief during the hottest part of the year.

“My husband and I bought the place in 2019,” says co-owner Paula Potgieter. “The first two years were spent uprooting invasive alien tree species that choked and poisoned the perennial streams that criss-cross the property.”

With water flowing clean and unhindered off the mountains, the Potgieters began restocking the reserve with herbivore species such as wildebeest, nyala, eland, kudu, oryx (gemsbok), red hartebeest, giraffe, and Cape

Mountain zebra. There is a diverse birdlife and other small animals abound.

Resident guide Quintin Lottering grew up in the area. He is not only knowledgeable but extremely engaging. He also got terribly wet during the first part of our early morning game drive: heavy rain squalls swept in from the North at regular intervals and, while Rose-marië and I were more than adequately sheltered on the back of the Land Cruiser, Quintin was completely exposed to the elements.

This, though, did nothing to dampen his enthusiasm and he had us entranced with his stories about the indigenous fauna and flora as well as local culture. Apart from the drives, activities include hiking and mountain biking.

Wildehondekloof is especially popular with South African travellers in Winter, particularly as a result of the outdoor activities as well as pricing offers. “It was locals that kept us going during Covid and we are not about to turn our backs on them now the pandemic is past,” says Mrs Potgieter.

