St James... Charm, comfort... and even the weather report

By Brian Berkman: contributing editor, travel

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The St James on Venice is a 15-roomed hotel built into one of the many grand Morningside houses. The suburb has a leafy, old-moneyed feel about it and is also home to many embassies and The Kings House, the Presidential Residence.

Best part about Morningside for me is that Florida Road with its restaurants - many quirky, trendy and good plus other interesting shops - is in the vicinity, as well as the gorgeous Mitchell Park. Don't miss a visit to Ike's - the most fabulous second-hand and collectors bookshop I've visited.

The St James takes its name from the beautiful brick church directly across the way that has hosted The British Royal Family and many South African Presidents, and is as comfortable and welcoming a hotel as you will find. Nothing seemed like too much trouble for the staff and when they found out we didn't drink wine, we were offered soft drinks as a welcome gift in the room. This was followed by a very generous cheese platter which included home-made biscuits and preserves. A really great touch.

Setting it apart from its peers

It is these gestures that set this hotel apart from other luxury properties. I liked the personal touches like a note on our car in the morning saying that it had been washed and wishing us well on the "sunny day." I also liked the weather report, placed on the fireplace mantle in our room, which was hand-written along with a message and the chocolate truffles and chocolate-dipped strawberries at turndown. I thought these elements were part of their VIP treatment given in support of this review. But, on reading other visitor's comments on TripAdvisor, these ring true of every guest's experiences.

The original house was built in 1892 by Robert Storm who was the founder of Coronation Brick and Tile, which later became Corobrik. The hotel still has some of the original brickwork from this time.

The beds get an emphatic thumbs up - as do many other aspects of the St James.

Aah, the beds...

All bedrooms are individually decorated in a contemporary deluxe style with large graphic wallpaper motifs and feature deep padded headboards. Our room, number eight on the first floor, had the benefit of corner windows. The original stained-glass panes are still in place and it is wonderful to see the light streaming through them. Our bathroom would easily have accommodated a double bed. Luxury was in the marble tiles used throughout the bathroom and the quality finishes. Beds and linen also get a thumbs up.

Feeling peckish? Try afternoon tea - you'll go back for seconds.

There is also a vast lawn but I was disappointed that there wasn't a pool - there certainly is the space for it. Every time I visit balmy Durban I resolve to return as soon again as possible and having a pool would be an added attraction, especially when the rest of the country is cold and rainy.

An ideal book nook

The stylish restaurant seems to be a favourite among ladies that lunch but is closed for dinner on weekends. Our breakfast, included in the rate, was splendid and I

thought my poached eggs with smoked salmon a generous portion at a reasonable price. I also liked the private, first floor sitting room which has a fabulous collection of paintings and deep sofas. Light streams in from windows on two sides and it is the sort of room to curl up in with a book.

For more information on the hotel, please visit http://www.stjamesonvenice.co.za/.

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