

Berkman finds a Pearl

 By [Brian Berkman](#)

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I couldn't have been more wrong about Pearl Valley. I had dismissed an earlier invitation out of hand when I was still too fat and unfit to walk around a golf estate and the thought of visiting one held no appeal whatsoever.



How's this for restful?

Even if you are now, as fat and unfit as I was then, make a point of staying at Pearl Valley, on the outskirts of Franschhoek, as it provides everything the luxury-conscious traveller is after - exclusive location jammed with natural beauty and full of willing staff to assist. If you have any interest in getting physical, you, as I was, will be spoilt for choice.

As a golf estate designed by Jack Nicklaus, opened in 2003, Pearl Valley Golf Estates was named "best new golf course of the year" in 2005, 3rd best Golf Course in South Africa by Golf Digest in 2011, and a five star experience by Complete Golfer 2011 and Best Conditioned Golf Course in Western Cape by Golf Digest 2012.

An eye for the birds

The golf course has numerous water features and 12 lakes, which provides a haven for birds. I missed a number of tennis serves as I was looking at birds flying overhead, well that's my story, and I'm sticking to it.

There are a three accommodation options: First is to purchase a property and be among the select few who can live there. Around R5m gets you to the starting block. The villa we stayed in is available for R37,000 for a minimum two-week stay. If you're the sort that usually stays in a five-star property and travels with your family, this two-bedroomed house with two en-suite bathrooms upstairs, a guest loo downstairs as well as a sleeper couch downstairs works out to be excellent value.

If you're a foodie, the Miele kitchen is the stuff dreams are made of (two ovens, a gas hob with electric plates, two fridges as well as washing machine and dishwasher all in matching colours. First prize for me in the kitchen though was a Seaco Royal Coffee robot that grinds beans just before dispensing perfect beverages.

Mountain views

Our villa had a deck and pool overlooking the water all framed by spectacular mountains.



If you're there for a shorter stay, there are 31 self-catering lodges (three or four bedrooms, fully equipped kitchens, gas braais and balconies) with golf-course views.

The clubhouse is the hub of the estate and there is a restaurant and bar as well as a members-only restaurant. They're geared to offering conferencing and this is one location where I can see people rushing through presentations to get to enjoy the facilities.

There is a resort-style pool (think water slides, waterfalls and covered pool bar with seating in the pool, and there is a sauna in the change rooms. An impressive gym and spa is also in the main building.



Here's the man to turn you into a Big Easy clone... well, as much as possible, anyway.

If you find you simply have too many handicaps to play a decent round of golf, why not get into this racket?

Having a ball

What must have started as a gimmick to tailor something to the golfers works far better than the original hot-stone message upon which it is based. The Breathe Spa offers a hot golf-ball massage that uses 10 heated golf balls placed on various pressure points on the body, aiding muscle relaxation, releasing toxins, reducing stress and increasing circulation to ensure overall muscle and energy.

Spa manager, Lizelle du Toit explains that the idea was to incorporate the benefits of massage therapy with a golf lifestyle. The dimpled ball also provides mild exfoliation while the ball's spring adds a pressure dynamic that stones do not. We were in a couple's suite with its own shower for after-treatment wash-down. At R535 per person for an hour-long treatment it is competitively priced.



The start (or end) of another hard day on the course, or hiking, or biking, or riding.

Fancy a bike or a hike?



Fore!

Pearl Valley has its own Equestrian Centre offering rides into the vineyards and surrounding mountains and well as hiking and biking trails that leave from the banks of the Berg River, which is also where a large boma and braai facilities are.

"All of this, along with the superb service is what sets Pearl Valley Golf Estates apart as a destination of choice for golfers, leisure and conference groups in the most beautiful natural setting imaginable," says Pearl Valley Golf Estates General Manager Gawie Marx. "With 120 bird species identified on Pearl Valley alone, in golfing terms this may parlay into the ultimate birdy," he adds. "We are thrilled that design and

architectural excellence at Pearl Valley has been recognized for one of our residential homes, by Louis Phillip Architects", he says of a recent design award.

Even if you're a novice golfer, I suggest you book a lesson with the golf pro, WP. We spent much of the lesson (R380 per hour) working on the grip and getting into the swing of things. I really liked his detailed approach and felt that even though this was my first lesson that I was being taught by an expert who has the knowledge and was happy to share it.

See www.pearlvalley.co.za for more information.

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