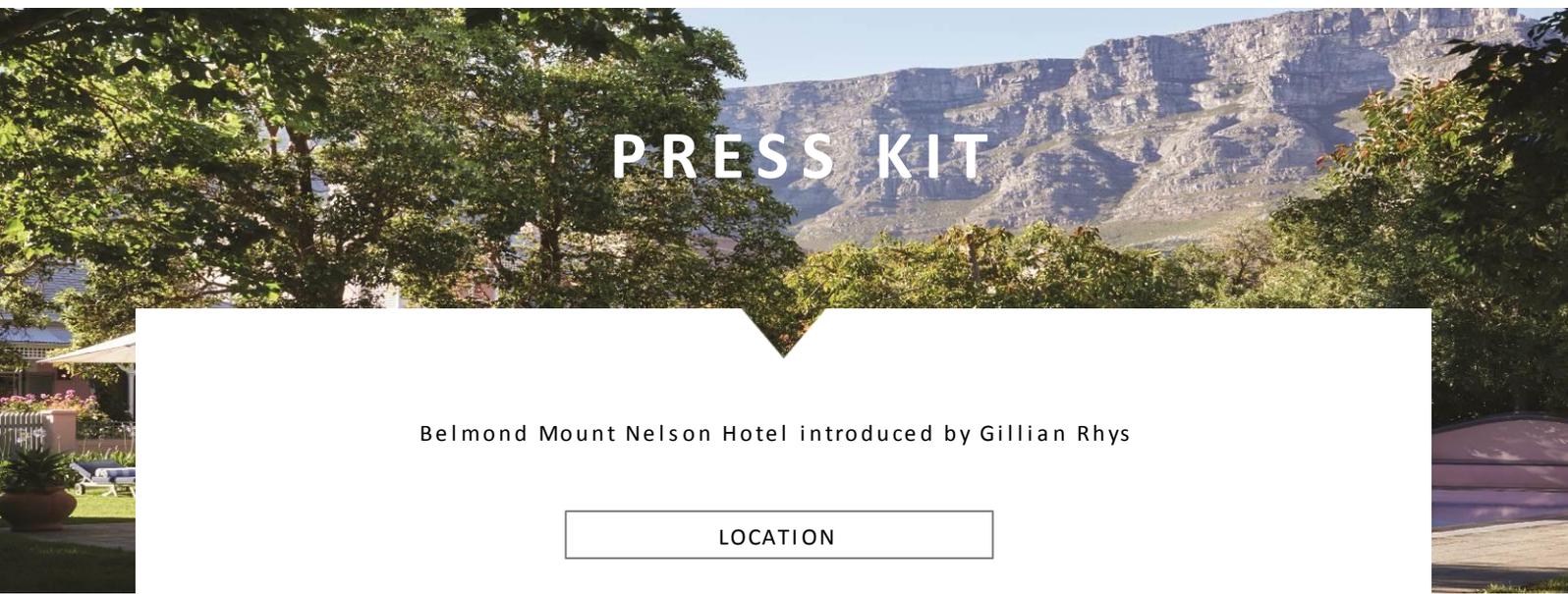




BELMOND  
MOUNT NELSON HOTEL  
CAPE TOWN



PRESS KIT

Belmond Mount Nelson Hotel introduced by Gillian Rhys

LOCATION

With its enviable position at the foot of iconic Table Mountain, Cape Town's most recognisable landmark, there's no mistaking where you are when you arrive at Belmond Mount Nelson Hotel.

Should guests wish to hike or take the cable car to the top of the famous flat-topped peak they couldn't be better placed. And they'll find buzzy Kloof Street right on their doorstep. Both the stunning beaches and wine regions of the Western Cape are an easy drive from the hotel.

The warm climate from November to May has long made this coastal South African city a magnet for discerning visitors escaping colder climates.

HISTORY

Belmond Mount Nelson Hotel stands on land that in the late 18th century supported a small farm owned by a Dutch aristocrat, Baron Pieter van Rheede van Oudtshoorn, who was appointed Cape Town governor but tragically died at sea before being able to take up his post (rather than being buried at sea, his body was famously preserved in brandy before being laid to rest in Cape Town). In 1806 the hotel's site was referred to in the local newspaper as "Mount Nelson", thought to be both a reference to Table Mountain and to Admiral Horatio Nelson who died the year before.

The hotel was opened in 1889 to provide a suitably first rate hospitality for first class passengers disembarking from the Union Castle luxury liners at Cape Town. There was nothing of its standard in the area at the time and it was the first hotel in Cape Town to offer hot and cold running water. The owner, Sir Donald Currie, also owned the Union Castle Shipping Line. The wooden chairs in the Sherwood Room and Lord Nelson Room today are the original deck chairs used on some of the Union Castle ships.

Among the guests in the hotel's first years were many British military officers involved in the Boer War – and a young war reporter named Winston Churchill who deemed it "a most excellent and well-appointed establishment which may be thoroughly appreciated after a sea voyage". Almost a century later, and a few months before his death, John Lennon checked in under the pseudonym Mr Greenwood. Staff remember him as exceptionally tidy and noted that he meditated in the gardens and on Table Mountain. During one such session a guest informed the general manager that there was a vagrant on the lawn whom he might wish to escort from the premises.

The hotel has seen some intriguing dramas over the years. The imposing grandfather clock that still stands in the lobby is said to have enraged one guest so much with its loud chimes at midnight that he hammered two six-inch nails into the hands. The clock remained silent for 20 years until another guest repaired it (these days, the chime is a lot quieter). Guests were also reputedly outraged by Sherlock Holmes author and keen spiritualist Sir Arthur Conan Doyle holding public séances in his room.

More recently, Nelson Mandela visited the hotel on several occasions to attend high level meetings and conferences. Margaret Roberts who has been a waitress at Belmond Mount Nelson for 31 years (her nickname is “ouma” which means grandmother in Afrikaans) remembers how he would always stop to chat to all the staff. She is one of many long-serving staff at a hotel where it is not uncommon to notch up 35 years of service.

## FEATURES

### The Property

Belmond Mount Nelson Hotel stands at the end of a grand avenue lined with palm trees, reached through a colonnaded entrance that was created ahead of the Prince of Wales’s visit in 1925. From the guard at the entrance to the top-hatted doorman at the front door, you know you’ve arrived somewhere special. A sugar-pink building with white gingerbread trim, the glorious shade dates from just after the First World War when the then general manager, Aldo Renato, decided to paint the hotel a cheerful hue in celebration.

Equally eye-catching are the gardens, filled with verdant trees and bright flowers. The beautiful grounds were first developed by Sir Hamilton Ross who owned Mount Nelson from 1843 for many years and was a keen gardener. Now they include two outdoor swimming pools – one family-orientated and the other for guests aged 16 upwards.

The hotel’s guest rooms are among Africa’s finest. Even the standard Deluxe rooms come with a sitting area and most have balconies. Suites range from Junior to Presidential, the latter featuring 1930s Baccarat crystal light fittings and a desk dating back to when the hotel opened in 1899. The spaciousness is evocative of the colonial era, when guests often stayed for months at a time – bringing their own bone china and fine crystal with them.

Offering the ultimate in luxurious seclusion, there are eight Garden Cottage suites housed in perfectly restored Victorian cottages. Each is set in its own rose garden with a white picket fence, with easy access to the swimming pool. Their sumptuous décor features toile wallpaper, Venetian mirrors, four poster beds and working fireplaces. Not surprisingly they are highly sought after by honeymooning couples and those seeking privacy.

### New room designs

Some 50 guest rooms and suites in the East Wing at Belmond Mount Nelson Hotel have recently been refurbished. Interior designers Hirsch Bedner Associates have taken inspiration from the wonderful gardens and the distinctive colour of the hotel for the new look.

As all the rooms vary in size and shape, and enjoy different views, no two are decorated in the same way. But all will offer a modern take on colonial times with oak floors, dark wood and leather furniture and antique-style mirrors. Rugs made by local carpet weavers and regional artworks will add a true South African feel. Beds positioned to face the windows will make the most of the exceptional views of Table Mountain and the gardens.

### Dining

Planet Restaurant opened in 2010 following the success of the glamorous Planet Bar which is popular with stylish locals. In keeping with its name, the dining room features shooting star chandeliers and a galactic-themed carpet.

The cuisine, overseen by head chef Chef Dion Vengatass and the hotel’s executive chef Rudi Liebenberg is “farm to fork”, led by seasonal, locally sourced produce. Organic and sustainable vegetables come from community farms in the townships under the banner of Abalimi Bezekhaya, as well as from farmer Eric Swarts in the nearby wine region of Stellenbosch, while eggs, beef and free range lamb is sourced from renowned local organic farmer Angus McIntosh. Cheeses served in Planet Restaurant are all South African. Breads and pastries are all baked in house while atjars, pickles, sauces and tapenades are all made on site.

## EXPERIENCES

An added attraction is the Chef's Table, tucked in a private alcove and with a bird's-eye view of the kitchen action. Having previously only been bookable by groups of eight to 10, from this year the experience is open to any number of diners from one to 12.

The five-course menu changes daily; it features only local produce that is sourced that day. Diners are asked if they have any dietary restrictions and apart from that the chefs allow their creativity free rein. The result is a unique lunch or dinner that's always respectful of the wonderful local ingredients.

### **Afternoon Tea**

Afternoon tea at Belmond Mount Nelson Hotel is a Cape Town institution. General Manager Xavier Lablaude has recently increased the number of sittings per day from one to four to allow more visitors to enjoy it in a relaxed atmosphere.

A morning tea and an evening tea have been added as well as a second afternoon sitting. The new evening tea features more cold cuts like smoked ham and biltong and a selection of cheeses.

### **Spa**

The award-winning Librisa Spa is housed in a restored heritage building. The changing room features a courtyard with a heated plunge pool and there's a conservatory to relax in before and after treatments. Two of the eight treatment rooms have balconies with views of Table Mountain.

The spa uses two South African brands, Africology and Kalahari, both of which are totally natural. Africology is based on essential oils and used for treatments including body wraps with Rooibos tea and lavender, and African coffee, mint and nutrient-rich potato.

Kalahari is plant extract-based with ingredients sourced from the desert. A signature treatment is Kalahari Rolling Sands which involves a massage executed with the forearms which feels like the rolling dunes in the desert, and another is Kgapa, a sound vibration therapy massage using a dried calabash which is intended to balance the mind, body and soul.

An added bonus for parents travelling as a family are the treatments for teenagers, which include a deep cleansing facial and manicures and pedicures. Complimentary child care is offered all day.

### **Families**

Belmond Mount Nelson Hotel attracts many families over the holidays and in particular during the festive period. The hotel is impressively geared towards young children and teenagers.

There's a constant programme of activities for children such as cricket matches, face painting and treasure hunts. There is also a family friendly restaurant with a children's menu at Oasis Bistro as well as an excellent babysitting service. Child size bathrobes and slippers are provided in the guest rooms along with children's toiletries, books, games, Xbox 360 and Playstation. Milk and cookies are served to children at bedtime.

The Nellie & Nelson Activity Centre caters for children aged three to 12 with educational games and toys, a blackboard wall and child friendly furniture, and organised activities such as storytelling and group games throughout the day. The Teens' Lounge, for 12 to 18 year olds, features contemporary furniture, Xbox 360, Nintendo W11, a computer and a big screen TV.

### **Historical Walking Tour**

A personal guide will accompany guests through Cape Town's historic streets giving an insight into the city's heritage. Landmarks include the historic Company's Gardens adjacent to the hotel, the Castle of Good Hope – the oldest building in South Africa, built by the Dutch East India Company – and Grand Parade. Also included is City Hall where Nelson Mandela addressed South Africans following his release from prison after 27 years and again following his election as president in 1994. There's also a visit to the unmissable District Six Museum with recreated interiors, photographs and personal stories about apartheid.

### **Township Tour**

Visiting one of Cape Town's townships, urban settlements which sprang up under apartheid, is an unforgettable experience. The tours are led by guides from the township communities themselves and provide an informed, ethical and unique trip. Guests are able to meet and talk with the township residents, and perhaps visit a traditional healer or enjoy a home cooked lunch.

Guests can also see the work of associations Belmond Mount Nelson Hotel has worked with to help the elderly and to educate young children, including the creation of vegetable gardens and a library.

### **Cape Winelands**

Within easy reach of Cape Town is the stunning Winelands region. Constantia, the oldest wine-growing region in the cape, is just 20 minutes away while the pretty towns of Stellenbosch, Franschoek and Paarl are around 40 minutes' drive. Belmond Mount Nelson Hotel wine tours are tailored specifically to guests' interests, whether they want to focus on red or white wines or are interested in combining sightseeing or another activity with wine tasting. One winery, for example, has a sculpture garden while another has a car museum. Many of the wine estates have fantastic restaurants and all are in beautiful settings.

## PEOPLE

### **Xavier Lablaude, General Manager**

French-born Xavier Lablaude has been General Manager of Belmond Mount Nelson Hotel since 2011. Before coming to Cape Town he worked at renowned hotels in Paris, Versailles, the Florida Keys and Carcassonne in southern France.

'This is a wonderful hotel, situated in spectacular gardens, and perfectly located in the heart of Cape Town,' says Xavier of his move to South Africa and Belmond Mount Nelson Hotel.

'I love the area around the hotel: Kloof Street, Bree Street and Long Street are full of locally owned shops, restaurants and art galleries and always a buzz with people and life. My wife and daughters have found some lovely, fun boutiques. We are across the road from the historic Company's Gardens and it is great to be next door to the Labia movie theatre which offers an excellent programme of independent films.'

True to his French roots Xavier adds: 'I love living in a wine region. After 10 years working close to the vineyards of Languedoc-Roussillon, it has been very exciting for me to discover the wines of South Africa. I left many wine-growing friends in France and I have made many new ones in this beautiful country. I have seen a lot of wine regions and the setting here is exceptional.'

### **Joey Michael, Guest Relations Manager**

Joey Michael joined Belmond Mount Nelson Hotel in 1989 and as Guest Relations Manager has the challenging and rewarding task of looking after the hotel guests, including VIPs.

Some guests stay for three months over the summer. Over the last 27 years Joey says he's welcomed several young people who have since grown up and returned with their children and even grandchildren.

'One of our longest-standing guests will be celebrating his 53rd year with us in January 2017. He comes to us every year for a month,' says Joey.

As so many regular visitors have asked him to keep items they may need during their stay Joey has set up a store room which is filled with guests' hair styling equipment, hats and more. He places the items in their rooms ready for their arrival.

Joey's tasks range from the mundane to the extraordinary. "I get many strange requests from guests or their assistants," he says. "I was once asked by a very famous WWF wrestler if could arrange a fight with a live python."

#### CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY & ENVIRONMENT

Many of the vegetables on the menu at Planet restaurant at Belmond Mount Nelson Hotel are sourced from Abalimi Bezekhaya, a community farming project in the townships of the Cape Flats. Previously neglected land has been cultivated and residents, particularly women, shown how to grow vegetables (the name Abalimi means "the planters" in Xhosa).

Ethical tours of the township vegetable projects can be arranged. There are plans to take guests on the twice-weekly pick-ups of vegetables that chefs back at the hotel will transform into delicious dishes.

Similarly, the hotel's executive head chef, Rudi Liebenberg, has started to source vegetables from Oranjezicht City Farm on the slopes of Table Mountain. This previously derelict space has been converted by former head of Cape Town Tourism, Sheryl Ozinsky, into a fruit and vegetable farm, cultivated by men and women who were previously homeless.

Chef Rudi has also forged a relationship with organic and sustainable vegetable grower, Eric Swarts, based in nearby Stellenbosch. All eggs, beef and free-range lamb are sourced from renowned local organic farmer Angus McIntosh. Rudi buys the line-caught and sustainable Green Dot Fish wherever possible and has recently been invited to join the Southern African Sustainable Seafood Initiative's Seafood Circle of chefs.

The chef also practices efficient disposal of food waste and packaging in the hotel's kitchens. As little as possible is thrown away, with leftovers used to feed the worms in the hotel's worm farm – which in turn turns food waste into organic fertilizer for the Belmond Mount Nelson Hotel gardens.