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Sandcastle Villa, East London

On a stretch of wild coastline, barely an hour's drive south of East London awaits a destination and villa so unreal it almost feels like you're stepping into a fairytale.

Sandcastle is the epitome of freedom, with two kilometres of unspoiled beach, 275 hectares of nature reserve and an exclusive villa of 1 600 square metres.

Arriving in the late evening, we didn't have time for the short walk down to the beach, but the sound of the waves endlessly kissing the shore reminded us it was near.

Expect African Adobe styling – a rather calming combination of both, including a curation of artwork from across the continent.

There are four en-suite bedrooms, two lounges, dining room, study and an open-plan kitchen.

The expansive sand-castle-inspired villa is set in a game reserve, in front of 2km of private and pristine coastline. Wewe is the resident game guide (and also an apiarist), always ready to introduce guests to the wildlife that he is so proudly a custodian of. The reserve is home to giraffes, sable, kudu, waterbuck, zebra, and with no predators you're free to roam at will.

Included in your stay is the staff setting up sundowners in either location for memorable bush and



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beach moments.

Opting for the latter on our last evening, from our boho-beach setting, we stared out at the calm surface of the ocean broken only in places by breaching whales, while closer to the shore a string of dolphins was slowly traversing across the horizon. In this setting, it's hard to not feel like you've found freedom. sandcastlesa.com

The Beach House, Jacob's Bay

Glancing at a picture of the Beach House you almost have to make a double take; yes you're seeing what you think you are – it's a beach house set in the dunes, directly overlooking the ocean.

In the picturesque and underrated little hamlet of Jacob's Bay, this four-bedroom West Coast 10-sleeper is a comfy and unpretentious beach house.

Jacob's Bay is one of the smallest West Coast towns, quietly hiding just behind Langebaan.

The Beach House is the last property set on a little peninsula, surrounded by kilometres of seemingly deserted beaches for exploring.

This magical setting provides some of the most memorable sunsets I've experienced.

The bottom storey serves as a separate cottage with its own kitchen and lounge. The middle storey has two bedrooms, the living spaces and then the famous living and dining room that open onto the dunes.

An upstairs en suite loft has two queen beds.

The nearby Weskusplek Restaurant offers a variety of meals – and with a dining room that spills out onto the beach you may just choose not to leave at all.

With plenty of space, it's a dream location for a friends or family gathering and is also child and pet friendly. thebeachhouse.co.za



Forest Whisper, Ballots Bay

Mention Ballots Bay, and many South Africans won't know where you're talking about – and isn't that the point of a hidden gem?

Ballot's Bay is essentially a private nature reserve 20 minutes outside George, where fynbos-covered hills become cliffs, which tumble dramatically into the ocean.

Forest Whisper is a new tree-house-styled home hidden in the verdant expanse of Garden Route greenery.

Ballot's Bay is accessed by a thrilling steep road in, which winds down to the secluded beach where several homes hug the valley, including Forest Whisper.

Owner Henry was the architect and mastermind and he and his wife Sally have lovingly created something remarkable.

The structure gently cascades down the steep hill, with three levels of living spaces – all glass-fronted to show off the views.

The first level is home to the open plan kitchen, dining and living space, and then two decks.

Each of the next two levels feature en-suite bedrooms with alternating forest and valley views.

Expect all the finer touches, including exclusive Joe Paine designs, Mungo towels, an Everdure braai and T-Shirt Company linen – and all this is available at a surprisingly affordable rate.

If you decide to leave the sanctuary of the home, Ballot's Bay beach is a minute's drive – or a short walk down the hill – where you'll find a braai spot and an enthralling cliff-top walk.

The estate is crisscrossed with paths to explore the landscape.

Book a few nights away for a magical experience tucked away in the forest; from the fragrant fynbos, passing whales and dolphins, alfresco dining, and majestic views. secretescapegardenroute.com