

# Steal away to Stanford

A glamping weekend at the Stanford Hills chapter of AfriCamps is, in one word, heavenly. Quiet, romantic, and with speech-robbing views, it really is the ultimate Overberg hideaway. Plus, here's so much to do!

WORDS **RICHARD BROWN**



## 'HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT BEACH WALKS?'

inquired pilot Dave. We were buzzing our way along the Klein River estuary towards the ocean in a small Cessna aeroplane, enjoying a bird's-eye view of the Stanford Valley.

'I can't say I have strong feelings about them one way or the other,' I replied, vaguely puzzled at the question.

'I like beach walks!' my partner's voice crackled excitedly through the intercom system from the backseat.

'Good!' said pilot Dave. 'Then you'll love this.' We'd finally reached the ocean, and Dave circled round over Walker Bay, then banked hard towards the long strip of beach in the direction of De Kelders. 'This is *my* kind of beach walk,' Dave grinned, pointing the Cessna's nose earthwards and plummeting towards the sand. He arrested the dive a few metres above the beach, and we hurtled along the shore at just over a tall man's height above the white sand and lapping waves. It was wholly unexpected, utterly exhilarating and moderately frightening. After several hundred metres, Dave pulled up sharply and the g-force felt as though we had left our stomachs behind – leading to involuntary shrieks and nervous giggles from the backseat. 'South Africa is one of few countries where a "beach

walk" is totally legal in an aircraft like this,' Dave informed us.

Extreme manoeuvres over, we did a couple of slow circles over Walker Bay, trying to spot marine life. 'There!' my partner pointed to a white speck off to the right. Dave banked towards it and circled the area until a massive Bryde's whale resurfaced in the same spot and released another spray of white from its blowhole. We circled it a few more times, before whizzing off towards Gansbaai, where we spotted a shark-cage boat, but no sharks. A little further off, Dyer Island was a spectacular sight from the air. Dave flew a tight arc around it giving us a magnificent view of the tiny island, every inch covered in seal-shaped blobs basking in the afternoon sun and the tuxedo'd figures of penguins.

AfriCamps, our home for the weekend, had organised the flight with African Wings, and what a treat it was – I can't recommend it highly enough. I am quite familiar with the Overberg, but an aerial perspective manages to shine new light on all you think you knew of the topography and geography of an area. Not to mention the sightings of marine life, the exhilarating aerobatics, and informative and entertaining chats with pilot Dave.

Once back on terra firma, we left the airstrip and drove the few hundred metres back to camp. I use the term

*Left to right: the tents look on to a pond, and the Klein River Mountain looms behind; the view from the Cessna flying over Walker Bay, with multiple whales frolicking close to shore*



'camp' rather loosely. AfriCamps have eight tented camps all over South Africa, but their offerings lean rather heavily towards the glamorous. In fact, I'd more readily compare it to a chalet than a tent. AfriCamps Stanford Hills follows exactly the same model as all other AfriCamps. It has a solid wooden structure that's covered in canvas, a wooden deck complete with a built-in braai and phenomenal views – in this case over a glassy pond, luxuriant fields, radiant vineyards and the Klein River mountain range towering behind – plus two bedrooms, a full bathroom with flush toilets and warm water, a well-stocked kitchenette with gas stove and fridge, and, wait for it, air-con and even a fireplace. It's not exactly roughing it.

Days here are spent at a slower pace, and we took to the quiet rhythms of farm life like proverbial ducks to water. The most strenuous activity we participated in was cantering around Stanford Hills on horseback. An hour's horse ride led us through dense forests of bluegums and port jacks, around vineyards and up the foothills of the Klein River mountains in a great loop, giving us a good look at the perfectly manicured and well-run estate that is Stanford Hills.

Hungry, we returned the horses to the stables, and settled down at the Tasting Room for a delectable plate of creamy seafood penne, paired perfectly with a bottle of Stanford Hills Sauvignon Blanc.

Later, we made our way a few kilometres down the main drag to Misty Mountains for a flavoursome gin tasting, which we proceeded to soak up with some cheese at the award-winning Klein River Cheese nearby – an absolute nirvana for cheese lovers.

### Take to the skies

Book a flight with African Wings, and let pilot Dave take you on a flying safari and give you a **birds-eye view of the Klein River Mountains**, the estuary, **Walker Bay** and **Dyer Island**. In season, whale sightings are virtually guaranteed, and keep an eye out for dolphins, orcas and white sharks too.  
[africanwings.co.za](http://africanwings.co.za)

Top to bottom: the AfriCamps tents all come with decks and comfortable wooden loungers from which to enjoy the view; nearby Birkenhead Brewery has a delicious selection of beers; the typical interior of an AfriCamps tent



### KNOW THIS

- **AfriCamps Stanford Hills** has five tents set at the foot of the **Klein River mountain** range on the Stanford Hills Estate, a boutique wine farm in Stanford.

- Tents sleep a **maximum of five**, come with a **fully equipped kitchenette, lounge, bathroom** and deck with **built-in braai**.

- The farm is a mere **15 minutes from Hermanus**, and an easy **two-hour drive from Cape Town**.

- It is the perfect base for foodies to explore this culinary district of the Overberg, and wine farms abound.

- Adventurous types have a variety of activities to choose from, including **hiking trails, mountain bike routes, horse riding**, and also nearby **boat cruises, shark cage diving** and **whale watching charters**, and even **flights with African Wings** from the private airstrip on the farm. AfriCamps will be able to advise on any and all activities.

- The Tasting Room is the restaurant on the premises, serving scrumptious food in a laid-back atmosphere with uninterrupted views of the Stanford Valley.

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Left to right: go for a row on the Klein River; the Tasting Room at Stanford Hills is surrounded by lush lawns and looks on to a small pond; go for a horse ride around the estate on a chilled walk or canter (depending on your riding level)

They take cheese making seriously at Klein River, and you can sample four styles and eleven types of cheese here, all of which manage to send you on a short journey to heaven and back with each bite.

We then rounded off the afternoon's indulgences with a delightful beer tasting at Birkenhead Brewery, sampling everything from a pilsner and Belgian pale ale, to a premium lager and even a sweet honey wheat ale.

Our evenings were spent braaiing (AfriCamps provide braai packs on request) and savouring the sublime vistas of the Stanford Valley from our verandah. The tents are well spaced and sufficiently secluded so that we didn't hear a peep from other guests, and felt like we were alone in the world for a while.

When the winter chill set in at night and the fog descended like a frosty blanket over Stanford, we moved inside and curled up by the fireplace with a glass of wine. It really is blissful here, and the AfriCamps concept suits this part of the world perfectly and makes the ideal base from which to explore Stanford's lovely surrounds. The best part of all? This particular slice of paradise is not even two hours' drive from Cape Town. ✈

