



Jamie Oliver

How to make perfect pasta (like I do)

WEEKEND



Toyboy Nation

We only date younger men

MAGAZINE

Sunak will deny King his trip to Cop talks

Charles 'champing at bit' to be at conference

Valentine Low
Chris Smyth Whitehall Editor

Rishi Sunak is upholding Liz Truss's decision to stop the King attending the Cop 27 climate conference, even though he is "champing at the bit" to go.

The prime minister faces criticism over his own decision to skip the event and has been under pressure to allow the King to attend instead.

Charles is believed to be disappointed by the advice from No 10 that he should miss the event, which starts in Egypt next weekend, with allies suggesting that Sunak should let him go to prove Britain's environmental commitment. However, the King will not force the issue after Downing Street made clear yesterday that Sunak would not reopen any debate about it.

Thérèse Coffey, the environment secretary, said that it was up to Charles whether or not he attended the conference, raising hopes that Sunak might go back on the advice issued by Truss.

One person who knows the King well said he would be disappointed not to go. "He will be champing at the bit but knows it would need government blessing. The PM has reversed the fracking decision so this could be another smart environmentally focused move."

However, Palace sources denied that

the King was disappointed, and No 10 also insisted there was no row about the refusal to reopen the decision. Truss advised the King to stay away because she wanted to use his first foreign trip as monarch as a diplomatic tool, Canada being a possible destination.

But with President Biden and President Macron expected to attend, Sunak was accused of a "failure of leadership" for staying at home. The prime minister insisted yesterday that he was "personally committed" to tackling climate change, and allies suggested that he would have gone were it not for the looming fiscal statement next month.

Sunak will spend the weekend working on the statement. His allies said that making the "tough economic decisions to be taken ahead of the 17th" was his "No 1 priority".

He is also expected to make decisions on where else to focus his time, with the NHS, schools and crime said to be likely areas, but is holding off from detailed policy decisions until he has spoken to cabinet colleagues. Downing Street sources insisted that he did not have time to go to the climate conference, arguing that it was less important than last year's in Glasgow, where countries agreed commitments. "That was a big political Cop where targets are

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Bite back James Corden dismissed claims that he was rude in a New York restaurant, saying he had been protecting his wife. Page 11 & Caitlin Moran interview, Magazine

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Caitlin Moran
I don't feel safe outside on dark winter nights

WEEKEND



30 best UK mini-breaks for foodies

MAGAZINE

Maurice Saatchi
I talk to my dead wife every day



42 Travel

Revamped rooms, a new spa and, of course, great wine and food — **Susan d'Arcy** checks into Babylonstoren

The Newt in Somerset has been the UK's hottest holiday destination since it opened in 2019, thanks to an imaginative approach to hospitality centred around its extraordinary gardens and working farm. That's impressive, but not quite a match for its mothership, Babylonstoren in the Cape Winelands, which has been South Africa's number one hideaway for more than 12 years.

Babylonstoren has been on my wish list ever since I discovered it was the blueprint for the Newt's two hotels — the 17th-century manor house Hadsden, which was The Sunday Times' Newcomer of the Year in 2019, and the more contemporary Farmyard, which opened in 2021 and is another of my favourites. The news that the owners, the telecoms billionaire Koos Bekker and his wife, Karen Roos, a former editor of the South African imprint of Elle Decoration, have recently unveiled a raft of post-lockdown improvements provided yet more incentive to visit, especially combined with favourable exchange rates (the rand is one of the few currencies sterling is bossing right now) and some interesting intel gleaned from a former employee.

My source said he was constantly amazed while working at Babylonstoren that cost was never a consideration, because the South African couple's only concern was quality. That doesn't mean conspicuous consumption but stealth wealth, where it's the little things that really count. So, for example, at the Newt I'm almost ashamed to admit I found myself ridiculously excited by the bathroom taps, of all things. Don't judge me until you've wrapped your fingers around a fitting from Samuel Heath and appreciated how the ordinary can be elevated to the exceptional.

The duo's limitless funds and uncompromising attitude had already ensured the 500-acre Babylonstoren estate — the conversion of an 18th-century Cape Dutch farm ten minutes from Franschhoek — had an award-winning vineyard and farm supplying Babel, its equally garlanded restaurant. Plus bedrooms so stylish they are worthy of a centre spread in the design bible Roos used to edit.

For good measure, Babylonstoren is also home to the Versailles of vegetable gardens, even featuring an apple tree cultivated from the very one Isaac Newton was sitting under when he formulated his gravitational law. What could they have found to improve?

The answer is not the ironmongery. I can confirm Babylonstoren's taps were always as swooningly good as the Newt's. Instead, Roos and Bekker have introduced some heavy-duty "edutainment". The concept of merging education and entertainment has been flagged by pollsters as a huge trend for a growing cohort who seek something more meaningful than a suntan from their travels. That sounds horribly worthy, but fear not — in the hands of



Luxury South Africa

Cape Town's coolest vineyard hotel reimaged



these two, this is how university life would be if you turned up for your first day to find Margot Robbie and Idris Elba were your lecturers.

The showpiece of this sexy study time is the new Story of Wine museum. Its scale is mind-blowing. I imagine Tristram Hunt would give Jeremy Corbyn's eye teeth to have such investment at his disposal at the V&A. I enter through a striking sculpture-cum-passageway made from twisted vines. The idea is to make visitors "feel like one of the organisms within the soil, weaving its way through

the soil". I had come straight from tasting ten of Babylonstoren's wines, so I imagine I had the weaving bit down pat.

Displays are engrossing and surprisingly family-friendly. I watch children play with string curtains threaded with wine corks, and am reminded that size matters when peering into a cabinet of glasses from flutes to bowls where it's explained which best enhances the properties of particular wines.

I spot a dusty bottle of Klein Constantia dessert wine dating from 1821, the year of Napoleon Bonaparte's death. It was the general's preferred tippie during his exile on St Helena. He apparently knocked back

a bottle a day, the recent vintages of which cost about £70 today, if you're wondering what to get the enlightened despot in your family for Christmas. Another highlight is the "cinematic vat", a screening room that's like stepping into a wine barrel to listen to "wine-glass music". I say music; it's more sounds created by the resonance of water and glass.

By the magic of virtual reality, I whizz through the production process at the state-of-the-art winery, although it's nowhere near as memorable as the "real" tour of Babylonstoren's vineyard with the knowledgeable and super-cool Bronwin Zimba, whose family opened the country's first 100 per cent black-owned winery, Klein Goederust in Franschhoek, in 2019.

The 90-minute tour costs £16 for day visitors. Cape Town is a 45-minute drive and Babylonstoren's eight acres of gorgeous fruit and vegetable gardens are one of the city's most popular days out. However, the tour, like all activities, from botanical sketching workshops to bread-making sessions, is complimentary for hotel guests. I also have out-of-hours access to those magical gardens.

My tour concludes with a tasting that involves a generous slosh of the estate's ten wines, each paired with local food (often from the estate) including moreish cheeses to accompany the tangy mineral tones of its chardonnay, and chocolate truffles to help reveal the red-fruit flavours of the Nebukadnesar. I compare notes with fellow Brits, French and American honeymooners and a Swedish couple celebrating their silver wedding anniversary around a communal table.

I spot that UK visitors can buy cases and have them delivered to their home address free of charge from the Newt's warehouse. Full disclosure: at this point, I indulge in some KamiKwasi-style economics. I spot the quaffable chenin blanc is only £12.50 a

BABYLONSTOREN



A cottage bedroom



The Garden Spa



Fynbos Cottages

bottle. Without even a back-of-a-fag-packet calculation, I declare that with duties and so on it will be twice as much in the UK, and so I encourage my fellow Brits to stock up. I buy 18 bottles. Only later do I think to check the actual savings via the Newt's website. Two quid a bottle.

I'm on safer ground dining. At the Cellar Door café, even Liz Truss couldn't manage financial ruin. A bottle of the chenin blanc is £6.50, which feels like legalised theft and goes down all the easier for that, especially in tandem with a heavily loaded sharing platter of smoked salmon roulade, smoked snoek fish pâté, cheese truffles and avocado salad (£15 for two). The food at Babel, the flagship restaurant in the old cow shed, is another exchange-rate triumph. My chilled strawberry and pea soup (£5) and white fish with slow-roasted carrots and globe artichokes (£16) are packed with fresh flavours and again thrillingly good

value. Since lockdown, the Bakery has been transformed at night into a charming pizzeria for informal dinners of estate-produced antipasti, all-you-can-eat pizza served on wooden slabs and super-sweet puddings for £20pp.

It's bargain time at the spa too. I walk through a lush passageway of bamboo to a cutting-edge glass and wood complex where the lap pool has been more than doubled in length, so that it now swishes from indoors to outdoors and back inside. Here it is full-stopped by a new integral whirlpool, and thermal suite with steam, a salt-therapy chamber and sauna, all with stress-busting vine views. An excellent 60-minute therapeutic massage costs £60.

The couple have also increased the number of suites from 22 to 32. Their design reminds me of rooms at the Farmyard at the Newt: virginal white and minimalist, with spacious bedrooms and glamorous

tilled bathrooms. Here, they come with the added bonus of glass-box kitchens, generously stocked with estate goodies and glossy enough for Nigella's next cookery show. I can pick more produce from the gardens if I choose.

The original Garden Cottages are close to the public areas and I see two day visitors having a look through the window of one. Could be awkward, so I'm glad I am in the new Fynbos accommodation, which is a buggy ride through heavenly scented orange groves and well away from nosey strangers.

The Fynbos Cottages and the five-bedroom Fynbos Family House have terraces with Insta-exploding eyefuls of the vineyard, its lake and the snarly crags of Simonsberg and the Franschhoek mountains. They share a kidney-shaped pool and pool house and bar with complimentary estate wines and nibbles. These rooms are wrapped up in fragrant flower borders worthy of the Chelsea Flower Show and reinforce the couple's intention that guests become grounded in nature. I'd happily take root here.



The Pool Room

Need to know

Susan d'Arcy was a guest of Babylonstoren (babylonstoren.com) and Mavros Safaris, which has four nights' B&B at Babylonstoren from £3,224pp including flights from London, transfers and farm activities (mavrossafaris.com)

Three other new Cape winelands hotels

Seven Koppies Guesthouse, Franschhoek

James Jayasundera, the owner of one of the UK's most respected tour operators, Ampersand Travel, has furnished his five "farm-chic" rooms and one cottage with treasures and trinkets from his travels. They are fronted by an inviting 25m swimming pool with incredible sunset views over Simonsberg mountain. **Details** B&B doubles from £180 (7koppies.co.za)

Sterrekopje Farm, Franschhoek

Four-poster beds, hand-painted murals and vintage textiles — this 125-acre holistic retreat and regenerative farm has 11 maximalist and rustic suites. Complimentary activities include bread-baking, pottery-painting and biking up Sterrekopje mountain. There's a saltwater pool and a bath house for hammams and massages. **Details** All-inclusive doubles from £1,170, including one spa treatment per day; minimum stay three nights (sterrekopje.com)

Curiosity Green Point, Cape Town

This hotel-hostel modernist hybrid is close to Green Point Park Biodiversity Showcase Garden and within easy reach of the city's lively V&A Waterfront arts and entertainment options. Rooms are decorated with pieces by South African artists and artisans, with a café, a splash pool and working space with a casual neighbourhood feel. **Details** B&B doubles from £60 (curiosity.africa)



Seven Koppies



Sterrekopje Farm