

A LITTLE PIECE OF HEAVEN

By Nadine Schmat

Located on the banks of the Crocodile River, in the Muldersdrift Conservation Area, the spa was a short 40-minute drive from Joburg. Just 40 minutes to a whole new world. We were greeted by Elmari on arrival, who showed us through to the dining area, a quaint, country-style room with tables situated around the fireplace, with a view over the river and Zwartkop Mountains.

Tea, coffee, hot chocolate and sherry were offered as we filled in client forms, which I was glad to see asked the preferred intensity for our massages. I have often referred friends to salons, and when I expect them to thank me for the wonderful reference, they merely shrug and say: "It was okay. A little too soft, though." So this was a good start.

After receiving our itinerary for the next day-and-a half, we were led to our room. En route, though, I red-facedly asked if there was a little shop nearby where I could buy a toothbrush. This is not the first time I have left my toothbrush behind, so I was feeling a little spare. Elmari just giggled: "No problem. It happens all the time." And off she went to fetch me one, joking that she hoped I would like the colour.

She led us through the gardens to our room, which was actually a cottage. As we walked in, we were immediately taken in by its warmth in its design and also due to the fact that the two heaters in the lounge and bedroom had so kindly already been switched on. Seeing as though we had booked in on the Romantic Overnight Ritual package, the mood was set by the rose petals at the doorstep, candles throughout and the vase of roses on the table, under which sat a box of yummy chocolates.

A fridge stocked with any drink we might want over the next few days included in the price, by the way a microwave and tea station made sure we were able to make ourselves at home. No detail was overlooked. All the home comforts were accounted for, from tissues on the nightstand, to extra blankets on the bed and the cottage's own DSTv decoder.

We unwound with a walk down to the riverfront, where we could have sat on a number of benches placed strategically in quiet spots throughout the bush, but chose to head towards the hammock and swing, which were sheltered by a massive tree. If the sun wasn't setting, I could have sat there for hours reading a book, or dozing off.

For dinner we were given two options: we could either have chosen to stay in with a picnic basket or travel to the 5-star Kloofzicht Lodge down the road. We opted for the latter, which was well worth making the trip down and up the 2km dirt road again. We had only been there for half a day and already I felt like we had been away for a week.

The next morning, in our gowns and slippers, it was off to the dining room for breakfast before starting our treatment session. Our day started with a foot cleanse and Indian scalp massage in the gardens overlooking the pool area and the river a little further on. This was a nice touch as I had seen many garden-facing treatment rooms and was quite excited to have the treatment in the garden itself, with the sun shining on my face.

In between all the treatments we were offered refreshments, which we could take in the dining room, the lounge area or out in the garden. Next it was off for our facials, which catered to our specific wants and needs. Riverview Spa is a small operation. There are only two cottages, so only two couples can stay at a time, and they take a certain number of groups per day. So there was no waiting for appointments, and while we crossed paths with other clients, we never clashed.

We had just the right amount of personal attention. Our hostess seemed to appear at just the right moment to offer us drinks, but we never felt like our space was being invaded. And no matter where we decided to hang out in between treatments, a therapist would come and find us to lead us onto the next item on our itinerary. After the facials, we had some "us" time when the sauna/jacuzzi/warm pool area was booked out for just the two of us, for 45 minutes. Again, everything we needed was prepared in advance, complete with water bottles to take to the sauna.

Afterwards lunch was served on the patio, giving us time to relax before our massage lesson. This I was not expecting and was a little nervous, but once again, our therapist made sure that this, too, was a most enjoyable experience. We took turns in learning how to destress our partner's back, neck and shoulders and were given a bottle of massage oil at the end so that we could practice our new skills at home.

Straight from there, we moved on to our final treatment for the day - full-body aromatherapy massages. And all I have to say on that topic is ... heavenly. What really impressed us on our weekend spent at Riverview was the incredible attention to detail.

I have already mentioned the cottage, but then every place setting at every meal had rose petals, or some kind of leaf, placed at the seat to make it a little prettier; when having our body massages, instead of having to stare at a boring brown carpet through the bed hole, a little bowl of floating rose petals was placed underneath the table; water was automatically brought down to the sauna/jacuzzi session; not once did we see a paper on the floor or a messy treatment room. And things were explained to us before we even got the chance to ask any questions.

I thought of writing a letter to the owner praising Elmari for her efficiency until I found out that Elmari is the owner. She gets involved in every aspect of her business, from carrying luggage from the car, to clearing used towels after a treatment.

The spa has many treatments and packages on offer. You can drive in for the day for a special pamper party, treat a mom to be or just take a break with friends. There are also seasonal specials to look out for. I have only one complaint about the weekend ... that it ended.

For more information and a price list, visit www.riverviewspa.co.za, e-mail info@riverviewspa.co.za or call 083-419-6807.

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