

A GRAND ESCAPE

For most, the idea of a luxury weekend in the Winelands conjures up images of Franschhoek, Stellenbosch or Paarl, yet the often-overlooked town of Wellington is beginning to make its mark as a tourist destination. *Compleat Golfer's* **Brendan Barratt** checked out its credentials.

I'll be the first to admit that my expectations of Wellington weren't particularly high to begin with. My two lasting (or perhaps only) memories of the place included a trip to the Boland Rugby Stadium to watch the Sharks throw 50-plus points at their hapless hosts and a wine-tasting trip that ended there after we took a wrong turn while trying to locate Paarl.

The town that I hastily attempted to escape in those days didn't appear to be doing much to attract visitors, but as my host at the ultra-luxurious Grand Dédale guest house informed me, this was no longer the case. And after enjoying the pleasant drive

through to the Doolhof Wine Estate, on the outskirts of Wellington, I'd have to agree that this is an area that really shouldn't stay off the tourist map.

The approach to Grand Dédale serves as a pretty good introduction to the Wellington area, with a small, dense forest and an avenue of trees giving way to some spectacular views of the vineyards, fynbos, Kromme River and the nearby mountains.

The old Doolhof Manor House has recently been spruced up into a five-star country house that is both elegant and sophisticated and is an ideal spot from which to explore the Cape – in particular the Winelands.



Some things to see and do in the Wellington area:

BAINSKLOOF PASS

In the late 1840s, Andrew Geddes Bain began planning a route through the Wellington Mountains, but it was only in 1853, thanks to the hard graft of over 1 000 convicts, that the pass was finally opened. Declared a national monument in 1980, the pass offers breathtaking views over Wellington and is well worth a day-trip drive. Just be careful, it can get rather hairy at times!

BONTEBOK RIDGE RESERVE

Two-hour game drives through

Bontebok Ridge Reserve allow visitors to get up close with bontebok, found exclusively in the Cape, eland, wildebeest, red hartebeest, springbok, duiker, grysbok and grey rhebok, as well as zebra, which are part of a revolutionary attempt to rebreed the extinct quagga.

Contact Tom Turner on 082 576 9657.

BUFFALO RIDGE

Only a handful of farmers in the southern hemisphere are currently producing buffalo mozzarella and the only one in South Africa can be found just outside Wellington. Wayne Rademeyer set up shop

on an old wine farm with 24 water buffalo, imported from Australia, and uses age-old Italian techniques to create the delicious mozzarella cheese.

The farm is not open to the public, but tours can be arranged.

DOOLHOF WINE ESTATE

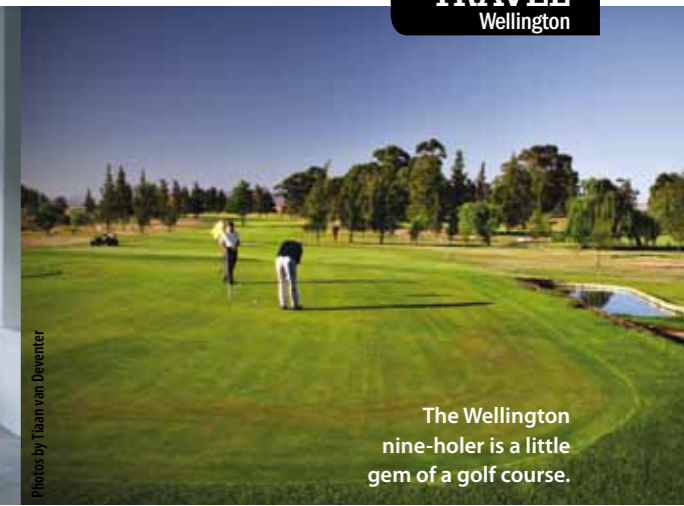
Only 40ha of Doolhof are currently under vine, yet in recent years the wine estate has produced a number of award-winning wines, including the Legends of the Labyrinth range of reds. The intimate tasting room is open to the public. Call 021 873 6911 to book your table.

WINE FARMS

There are numerous wine farms worthy of a visit in the Wellington area with the arguably most well known being Diemersfontein – home of the chocolate Pinotage – and Bowlei. Other wineries such as Dunstone, Nabygelegen and Welvanpas are located nearby. Foxenburg Estate, producer of fine organic foods such as goat's milk cheese, oyster mushrooms and olive oil, is not too far away.

GRAND DÉDALE

www.granddedale.com
Contact Angelo or Tina: 021 873 4089 or info@granddedale.com.



The Wellington nine-holer is a little gem of a golf course.

Photos by Taan van Deventer

Our host for the evening, Italian-born Angelo Casu, is passionate about Wellington's potential to develop into a tourist destination to rival the likes of Franschhoek and Paarl – and according to him, it's well on its way. Over another superb meal – using only locally sourced ingredients – and a bottle of Doolhof's finest, I found it impossible to disagree.

Indeed the wines of Doolhof are arguably worthy of a day-trip out here on their own. But don't take my word for it – those with far more knowledge than I have adorned their wines with little gold badges and the Malbec 2007 sports a Decanter gold medal to go with its Double Gold from the Michelangelo awards last year.

Grand Dédale's facilities comprise a swimming pool, spa room, hiking, horse riding, mountain biking, a river walk and a vineyard

walk on the estate, but if it's golf you're into then you will be facing some interesting choices during your time here. The local Wellington course (above right) is a nine-holer that plays a little tougher than it looks. It's not a place you would want to be caught at during the heat of the summer's day, so opt for an early tee time or prepare for some serious heat. As with many country courses, the grounds staff do an amazing job of keeping the course in good condition despite the proverbial shoestring budget, but the real attraction of a club like Wellington comes from its large member base of friendly, farmer-type golfers who are proud as punch of their links. And when the sun goes down here, the 19th transforms into a lively, festive watering hole.

A little further down the road, in the direction Paarl, are the two fine

estate courses of Paarl and Pearl Valley. The latter, designed by Jack Nicklaus, may set you back an arm and a leg, but many will attest that it is well worth shelling out the cash for the experience of playing one of the country's top layouts.

One could argue that Paarl Golf Club – or Boschenmeer as the estate is known – sits rather comfortably between the other two courses in terms of facilities and atmosphere. The course is a true test and it is hard to remember a time when it has not been in good condition. It is a 27-hole facility, but you would ideally hope to play the original 18-hole course that was designed by Ken Elkin and touched up by none other than local legend David Frost with Danie Obermeyer. The course runs along the Breede River and the views of Paarl Rock and the Taal Monument are pretty special. **CG**