

# SIGNATURE

The Diners Club International Magazine

## TURKEY'S ANCIENT PLAYGROUND *Cappadocia*

140 Years of Leadership  
in Mercedes-Benz Design  
Conquering Kilimanjaro  
& The Climb for Conservation  
Framing Fashion: When the  
Image Becomes the Story

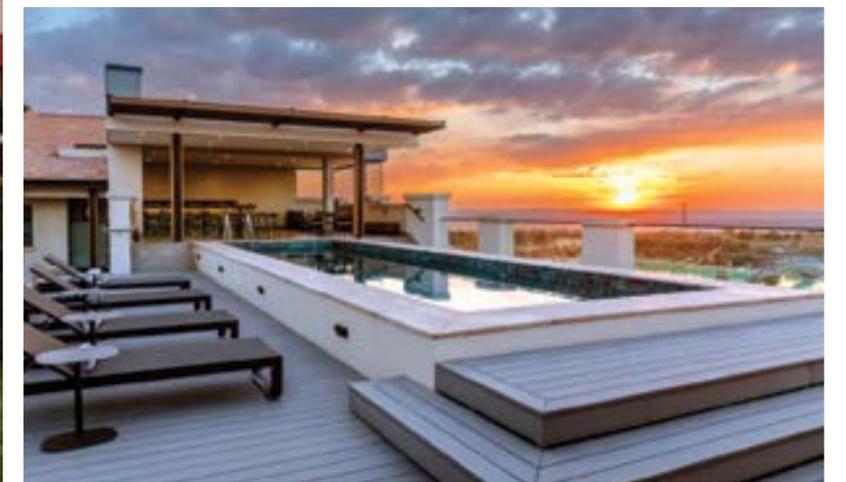


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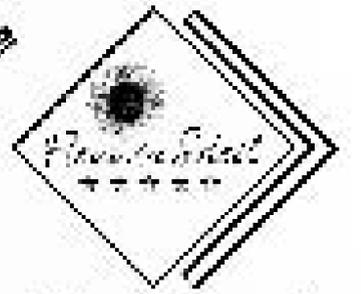
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*from the* MD



## Welcome

Esh Naidoo  
Managing Director

There is a quiet satisfaction in belonging. Not defined purely by exclusivity, but by a shared appreciation for discovery, craft and experiences that leave a lasting impression.

That spirit has long been central to Diners Club. Our cardholders form a community of travellers, diners, and enthusiasts who understand that the value of a journey often lies in the memories it creates and the stories it inspires. The pages of *Signature* reflect that same outlook.

This edition takes readers to remarkable corners of the world. In Cappadocia, Turkey's dramatic landscape becomes even more captivating at sunrise as dozens of hot air balloons drift above valleys shaped over centuries. Closer to home, a balloon safari over the Serengeti offers a different perspective on the African wilderness, revealing its scale and beauty in the soft light of early morning.

Exploration also extends beyond geography. We reflect on more than 140 years of design leadership from Mercedes-Benz, a legacy that demonstrates how vision and craftsmanship can shape an entire industry. Elsewhere in this issue, fashion photography captures creativity in motion, while features on entertainment and wellness highlight the growing importance of balance in modern life.

What connects these stories is a shared sense of curiosity. Diners Club has always been about more than facilitating transactions. It is about enabling experiences and bringing together people who value travel, culture and the pleasure of good company.

Wherever your own travels lead in the months ahead, we hope the stories in this issue inspire you to explore a little further and savour the journey along the way.

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# roberto cavalli

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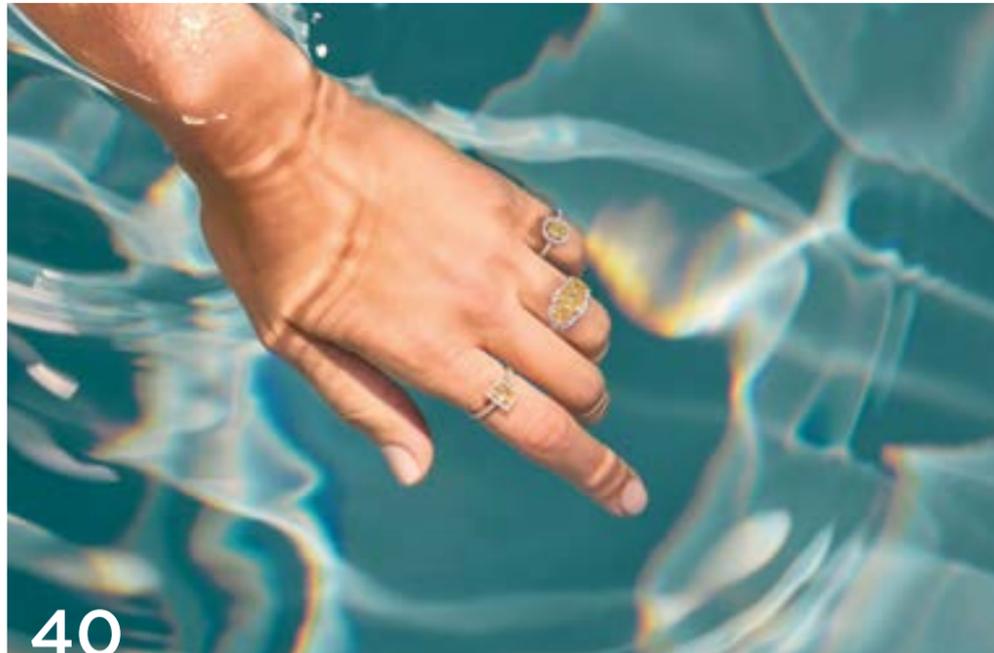
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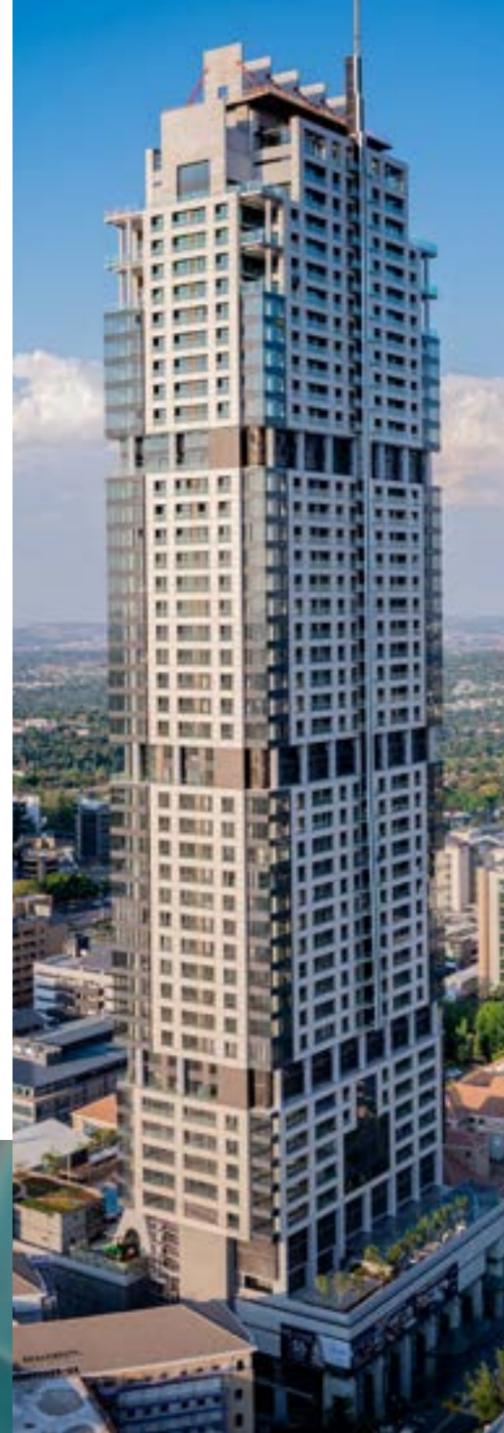
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Beyond its shores, an untouched marine world unfolds. Vibrant reefs, historic wrecks and calm, clear waters invite quiet exploration beneath the ocean's surface. History too is etched into the island's contours. Georgian architecture, coastal batteries and storied sites whisper of global explorers, naturalists, and leaders in exile.

The island invites you to make your journey meaningful. Plant an endemic tree to aid in the revival of an ancient forest or volunteer your time to monitor the delicate population of the island's sole remaining endemic land bird – the wirebird.

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biohacking, cellular regeneration and precision aesthetic treatments, each guided by measurable outcomes rather than fleeting trends. The focus is longevity and genuine optimisation, not surface-level indulgence. A stay here restores, certainly, yet it also recalibrates. Guests leave clearer in mind, lighter in body and grounded in a balance that lingers long after the valley slips from view. [www.terrepaisiblemedicalsapa.com](http://www.terrepaisiblemedicalsapa.com)



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### ULTRA SOUND

Since its inception in 2014, Ultra South Africa has grown into a cornerstone of the local music calendar, drawing tens of thousands of fans each year. The 2026 edition will transform Johannesburg's Expo Centre at Nasrec (25 April) and Cape Town's The Ostrich (26 April) into world-class festival destinations. With cutting-edge production and top-tier sound, Ultra South Africa promises an unmatched celebration of electronic music culture. This year's events will feature Main Stage headliners including tech-house sensation John Summit, French hitmaker DJ Snake, progressive house icon Axwell, and a special back-to-back set from Afrojack and R3hab, and more.

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# TRAVEL WITH PURPOSE

## 2026 Belongs to Hobby-led Holidays and Passion-first Planning

In 2026, travellers are no longer choosing destinations purely for postcard value. Instead, they are asking a more revealing question: what do I love doing – and where in the world can I do it better?

Whether your passion means chasing tulip season in the Netherlands or perfecting *pâte à choux* in Paris, hobby-led holidays are reshaping travel into something more personal. Less about ticking off landmarks. More about leaning into lifestyle.

Marriott Bonvoy calls these trips “passion pursuits”, and the data support the shift. 72% of global travellers have already taken a trip centred on a personal hobby. Among Gen Z, that figure rises to 84%. Closer to home, Flight Centre’s latest Global PR Survey shows that 83% of South Africans cite food and gastronomy as a primary driver of their travel choices.

### PURPOSE IS THE NEW PASSPORT STAMP.

According to Zay Ferguson-Nair, Flight Centre South Africa’s Customer Experience Leader:

“Travel will remain deeply personal in 2026. People want journeys that mirror what lights them up, whether that’s yoga, photography, gardening, or baking the

perfect croissant. Travel is no longer only about where you’re going, but why you’re going there.”

It is a subtle shift, yet a meaningful one. The destination is no longer the headline. The passion is.

### SIX WAYS TO LET YOUR PASSION PICK THE PLACE

#### 1. For the Gardeners and Flower Fanatics

From March to May 2026, Keukenhof Gardens in the Netherlands becomes a living spectrum of colour. More than seven million bulbs transform the landscape, and cycling paths cut through fields of tulips in full bloom. Timing here is everything, and when you arrive at peak season, the reward is unmistakable.

Closer to home, Namaqualand in the Northern Cape delivers its own annual spectacle between August and September. For most of the year, the terrain appears stark and subdued. Then spring arrives, and the desert floor bursts into carpets of wildflowers. It is a reminder that nature’s most dramatic performances are often fleeting.



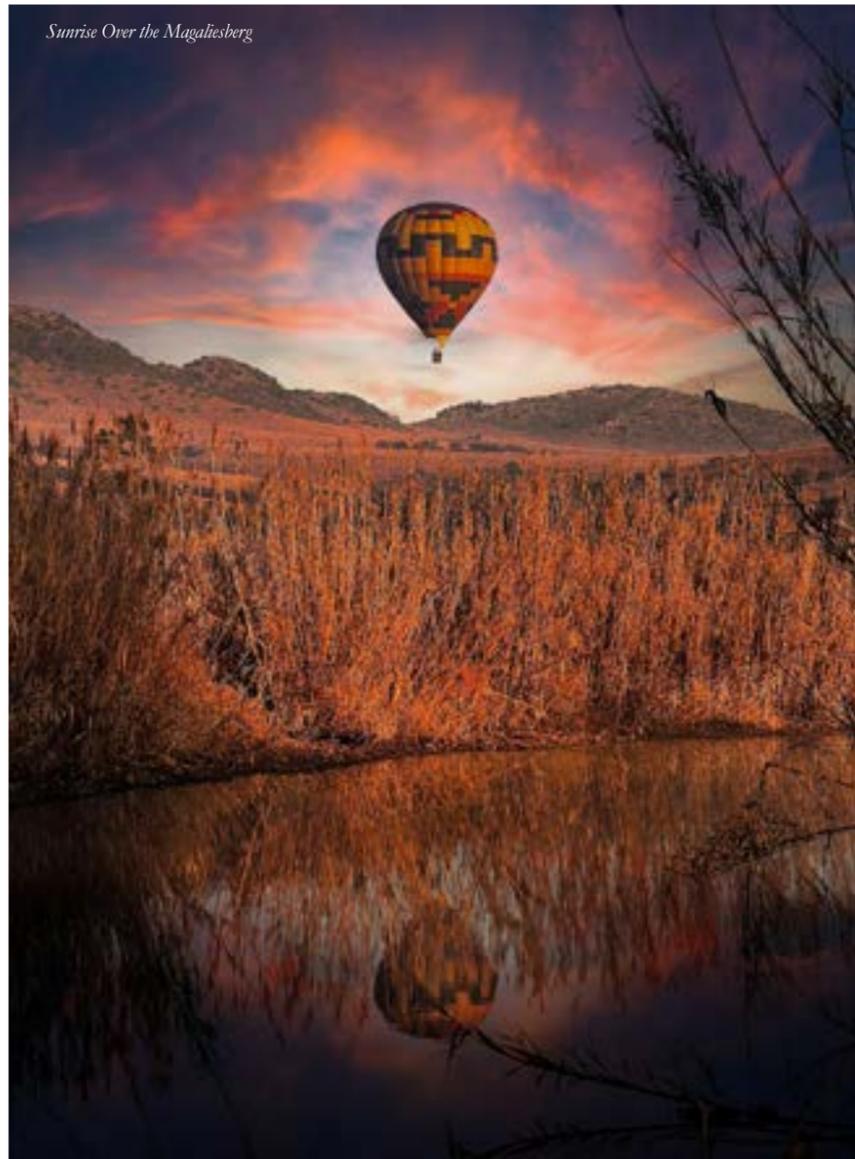
Keukenhof Gardens

#### 2. For the Yogis and Wellness Seekers

When pace becomes pressure, distance can restore perspective.

From March to June, Ubud in Bali offers sunrise yoga overlooking rice terraces and plant-based cuisine rooted in local produce. The setting does much of the work. The rest is breath and intention.

In Gauteng, the Magaliesberg offers a more accessible reset in April, May, or again in September. Eco-lodges and forest retreats host digital detox weekends, aerial yoga sessions and guided hikes that feel far removed from city routine. The change of scenery may be subtle, but the shift in mindset is tangible.



Sunrise Over the Magaliesberg

### 3. For the Photography Obsessives

Some landscapes demand to be captured properly.

Iceland's South Coast, best visited between late February and April, delivers blue-hour light across glaciers and black-sand beaches. Long exposures reveal skies that shimmer and shift in ways no filter can replicate. Conditions can be unpredictable, yet that unpredictability is part of the appeal.

Between June and August, the Drakensberg Mountains in KwaZulu-Natal offer crisp winter air and sharply defined ridgelines. Golden light sweeps

across the peaks in the late afternoon, turning an already dramatic landscape into one of the southern hemisphere's most rewarding natural studios.

### 4. For the Readers and Dreamers

Literary travel is less about sightseeing and more about stepping into a narrative.

In March 2026, Bath in England hosts the Jane Austen Festival, transforming the city into a Regency-inspired stage set. Bonnets, ballroom dancing and live readings add theatrical texture to streets already steeped in Georgian architecture.

Back home, the Franschoek Literary

Festival each May brings leading South African authors together in a setting framed by vineyards. Panels unfold beside fireplaces, discussions stretch into the evening, and the atmosphere encourages reflection as much as debate.

### 5. For the Bakers and Foodies

For those who plan their days around flavour, travel becomes an edible itinerary.

June in Paris offers Champagne picnics, time-honoured pâtisseries and baking workshops led by award-winning chefs. It is indulgent, certainly, but also immersive.

From March to May, harvest season in Cape Town and Stellenbosch delivers its own culinary rhythm. Artisanal bakeries, chocolate ateliers and relaxed picnics sit alongside seasonal food festivals that celebrate local craftsmanship. Here, the experience is rooted in both flavour and provenance.



Franschoek, Western Cape



## EXPERT TIPS FOR PLANNING A HOBBY-LED HOLIDAY

- **Track Global Calendars Before Flight Prices.**

Before you shortlist destinations, establish when your passion peaks. Cherry blossom season, truffle harvest, a major e-sports championship, or a chefs' congress all operate on tight timelines. Competitive fares are irrelevant if you arrive after the moment has passed.

- **Book the Experience First, the Flight Second**

For hobby-led holidays, the event defines the journey. Ferguson-Nair advises securing limited-access tickets, such as festivals and masterclasses, before confirming accommodation through your Flight Centre Travel Expert.

- **Pack with Purpose**

Prioritise equipment over outfits. Photographers should check voltage compatibility for chargers. Yogis may prefer to travel with their own eco-mat or strap rather than rely on studio gear.

- **Leave a Day for "Creative Drift"**

Hobby-led travellers often overschedule. Building in one open day allows space for unexpected discoveries, which frequently become the highlight.

- **Match Local Expertise to Your Niche.**

Work with your Travel Expert to connect with local guides who share your interests. Shared enthusiasm can turn a structured itinerary into genuine exchange.

As Ferguson-Nair concludes: "The map expands in unexpected directions when you follow what makes you feel most alive. Passion becomes both the journey and the destination. And that's a trend worth packing for."

In 2026, travel is not about collecting places. It is about refining identity. The suitcase still closes the same way. What changes is the reason you packed it. 🎒

by **flight centre**  
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# TURKEY'S OTHERWORLDLY PLAYGROUND

*Chasing Sunrises in Cappadocia*

Cappadocia feels less like a destination and more like a dream sequence. Situated in central Turkey, this remarkable region is defined by towering rock formations, ancient cave dwellings, and skies filled with hot air balloons at sunrise. For South African travellers looking beyond traditional European itineraries, Cappadocia offers exceptional value, rich history, and genuinely unique experiences. It is a place where you can sleep in a cave hotel carved into volcanic rock, explore underground cities built thousands of years ago, and watch the sun rise over one of the most surreal landscapes on the planet.

There are places you visit, and then there are destinations that stay with you long after you've returned home. Cappadocia firmly belongs in the latter category.

Located in central Turkey, roughly an hour's flight from Istanbul, Cappadocia presents a landscape so unusual that it feels almost extraterrestrial. Towering rock pillars known as "fairy chimneys" rise from the earth like nature's own sculpture garden. Entire towns have been carved into the rock itself, while beneath the surface lie vast underground cities that once sheltered thousands of people.





For South African travellers seeking something genuinely different in 2026, Cappadocia offers a compelling blend of adventure, culture, and affordability. It delivers bucket-list experiences without the prohibitive price tag often associated with Western Europe.

#### **SUNRISE BALLOON EXPERIENCE**

If there is one image that defines Cappadocia, it is the sight of dozens of hot air balloons floating silently across the dawn sky.

You'll need to wake early. Very early. Balloon operators typically collect passengers from their hotels around 4:30 am, but the effort is richly rewarded. As the first light of day touches the rocky terrain, the balloons begin their ascent, rising slowly above valleys, vineyards, and ancient cave dwellings.

From the air, Cappadocia reveals its true scale. The landscape stretches endlessly, carved by millions of years of volcanic activity and erosion. The silence is striking. Apart from the occasional roar of the balloon's burner, there is nothing but stillness.

For many travellers, this becomes the defining moment of their entire Turkish journey.

Balloon flights typically cost

between R3,000 and R5,000 per person, depending on the season and operator. It is not inexpensive, but it is unquestionably worthwhile.

#### **GÖREME: THE HEART OF CAPPADOCIA**

Most visitors base themselves in the town of Göreme, and for good reason. It offers easy access to Cappadocia's major attractions, along with a wide range of

accommodation options, restaurants, and tour operators.

Göreme itself feels like a place frozen in time. Cave houses line narrow streets, while restaurants serve traditional Turkish dishes such as lamb stew, fresh bread, and locally produced wines.

The Göreme Open-Air Museum is one of the region's most important historical sites. This UNESCO World Heritage Site contains rock-cut churches dating back to the 10th century, many of which still feature remarkably preserved frescoes. Walking through these ancient spaces offers a powerful reminder of Cappadocia's deep historical roots.

#### **STAYING IN A CAVE HOTEL**

Accommodation is one of Cappadocia's most distinctive highlights.

Many hotels are built directly into the rock formations, offering guests the opportunity to sleep inside rooms carved into volcanic stone. Despite their ancient origins, these cave hotels are anything but primitive. Most feature modern comforts such as underfloor heating, luxurious bathrooms, and private terraces overlooking the valleys.

Waking up in a cave hotel as dozens of balloons drift overhead is an experience that feels uniquely Cappadocian.

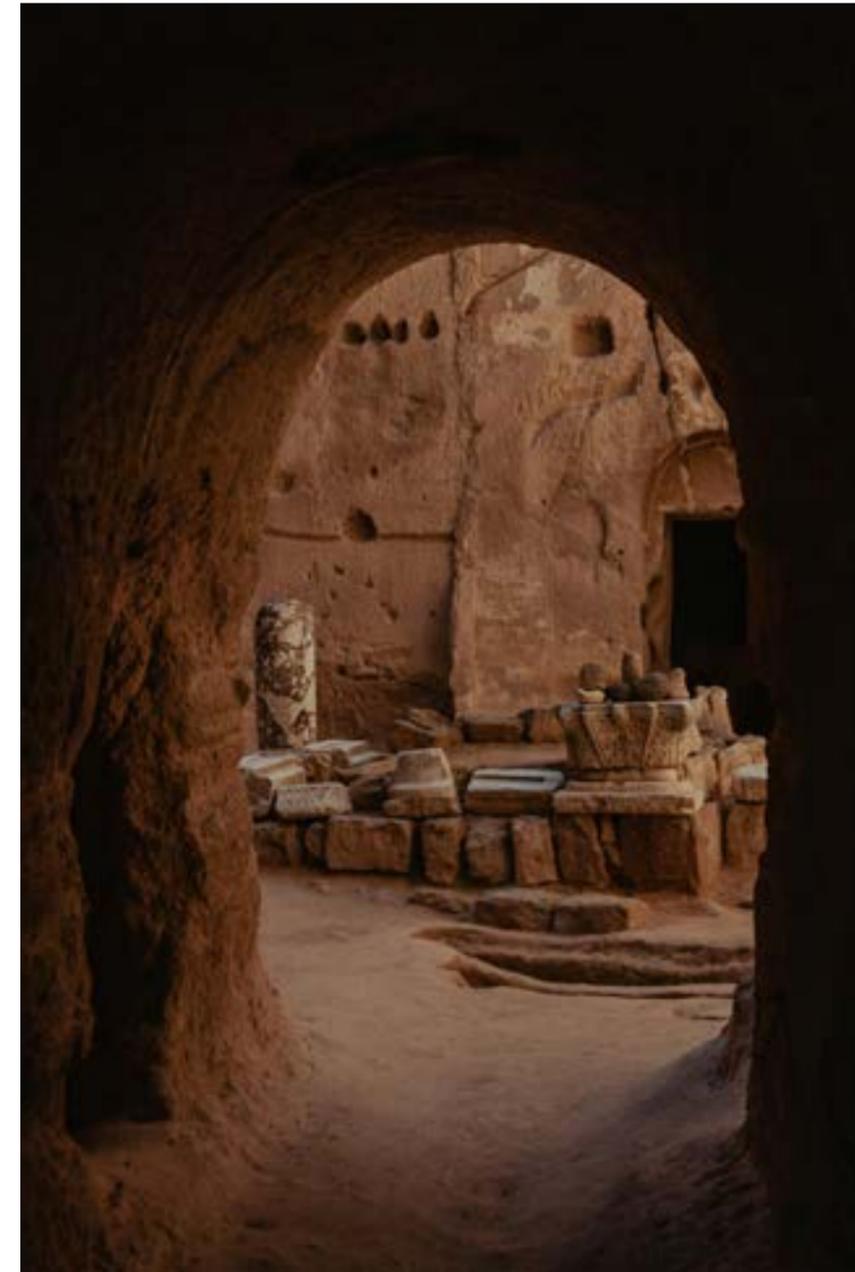
Prices are surprisingly reasonable. Excellent cave hotel rooms can be found from around R1,500 per night, making them accessible to South African travellers accustomed to international pricing.

#### **EXPLORING THE UNDERGROUND CITIES**

Underground cities such as Derinkuyu and Kaymakli were constructed thousands of years ago to protect their inhabitants from invasion. These subterranean complexes extend up to eight levels underground and include living quarters, kitchens, storage areas, and ventilation systems.

Walking through these narrow tunnels requires a degree of agility, but the experience offers an extraordinary glimpse into human ingenuity and survival.

It is estimated that Derinkuyu alone could shelter up to 20,000 people.



## THE VALLEYS OF CAPPADOCIA

Cappadocia is best explored on foot.

Several valleys offer hiking routes that range from gentle walks to more demanding trails. Among the most popular are Love Valley, Rose Valley, and Pigeon Valley.

Each offers its own unique character. Love Valley is known for its towering rock formations, while Rose Valley earns its name from the pink hues that emerge at sunset. Pigeon Valley reflects the region's long tradition of pigeon keeping, which played an important role in agriculture.

The terrain is accessible to most travellers, and guided tours are widely available.

## HOSPITALITY AND CUISINE

Turkey's hospitality is one of its greatest strengths, and Cappadocia is no exception.

Local restaurants offer a wide range of traditional dishes, often prepared using recipes passed down through generations. One regional speciality is

Testi Kebab, a slow-cooked meat and vegetable stew prepared inside a sealed clay pot, which is dramatically cracked open at the table.

Turkish tea and coffee are served everywhere, and meals are typically unhurried affairs.

For South African travellers accustomed to vibrant food cultures, Turkey feels both familiar and refreshingly different.

## ACCESSIBILITY FOR SOUTH AFRICAN TRAVELLERS

Reaching Cappadocia is relatively straightforward. There are no direct flights from South Africa to Cappadocia, but Turkish Airlines operates regular flights from Johannesburg and Cape Town to Istanbul. From there, a short domestic flight to either Kayseri or Nevşehir brings you within easy reach of the region.

The Turkish lira's favourable exchange rate makes Cappadocia particularly attractive from a value perspective. Accommodation, meals, and activities

are generally more affordable than comparable European destinations.

South African passport holders can obtain an e-visa online, simplifying the entry process.

Cappadocia is a year-round destination, but the best months to visit are between April and June, and September and October.

These periods offer mild temperatures, clear skies, and ideal conditions for balloon flights and hiking.

Summer can be hot, while winter brings snow that transforms the landscape into something entirely different. Snow-covered fairy chimneys create a striking contrast, and winter visits offer fewer crowds.

## PRACTICAL TRAVEL TIPS

Planning ahead significantly enhances the Cappadocia experience.

Book balloon flights well in advance, particularly during peak seasons. Popular operators often sell out days ahead.

Stay at least three nights. Cappadocia rewards slow exploration, and rushing



through the region diminishes its impact.

Wear comfortable shoes. Much of Cappadocia's charm lies in its valleys and uneven terrain.

Consider renting a car or joining guided tours. Distances between attractions are manageable, but organised transport simplifies logistics.

## WHY CAPPADOCIA MATTERS

South African travellers have traditionally favoured Europe's major capitals, but destinations like Cappadocia offer something more distinctive.

It combines natural beauty, deep history, and memorable experiences in a way that few places can match.

In an era where travellers increasingly seek authenticity and meaningful experiences, Cappadocia stands apart.

It is not simply a place you visit. It is a place you remember.

And as the sun rises over its ancient landscape, with balloons drifting silently across the sky, it becomes clear why Cappadocia continues to capture the imagination of travellers from around the world. 

by *bernie hellberg jr*  
/photography by *unsplash.com*

# AIMING HIGH FOR A PURPOSE

## *Conquering Kili & the Climb for Conservation*

Some climbs start with a map and a dream. Ours started with a purpose. What began as months of checklists, training hikes, and late-night Googling slowly sharpened into something bigger than a personal challenge. Kilimanjaro wasn't just a mountain to conquer. It was a way to give back, to raise funds for conservation, and to prove that a small team with the right reason can go further than they ever imagined.

Months of checking lists, gear laid out neatly on the bed, and late-night rabbit holes of “what to expect on the mountain.” Between work, life, and trying to squeeze in training hikes at sea level (Cape Town isn't exactly known for its altitude), preparation felt relentless and exhilarating. Every detail mattered: the right socks, the right layers, the right mindset.

But what truly powered us was the why. Climb for Conservation wasn't just an adventure – it was a mission. Sarah, my colleague at Ker & Downey@ Africa, and I have always cared deeply about protecting Africa's wild spaces. So when the opportunity came to climb for a cause – raising funds through the OKOA Fund and African Bush Camps Foundation to help protect lions,

wildlife, and communities – we didn't hesitate. This wasn't just a bucket list. It was a purpose.

### SIX PEOPLE, ONE MOUNTAIN

Soon, our team of six was locked in: Sarah and I, Simone and Shannon (two Cape Town friends-of-friends who quickly became family), Charles (our Arusha colleague), and Iggy (a local filmmaker with an eye for grit and grace). What started as a half-joking “we should climb Kilimanjaro one day” turned into training hikes, WhatsApp groups, and booked flights. Then we were there, and suddenly it became real.

The night before the climb, we met our guides, Paulo and Barrack – calm, confident, mountain-strong. Paulo was preparing for his 297<sup>th</sup> summit. We repacked, weighed, fine-tuned, and tried to sleep through the nerves.



### INTO THE GREEN

We chose the Machame Route because it's tough and beautifully varied (rainforest to moorland to alpine desert), and it felt right for a climb rooted in impact. Day one began in mist and green: moss-draped trees, ferns, wild blooms, laughter. By Machame Camp, the air had sharpened, and we felt like a team.

It's impossible to tell a Kilimanjaro story without honouring the people who make it possible: the porters, guides, and crew. While we walked with daypacks, they carried everything that built our world up there – tents, food, cooking gear, bags – arriving ahead of us with songs and smiles that softened the hardest days. “Pole pole” (slowly) became both instruction and philosophy.

### HIGHER, THINNER, HARDER

As we climbed higher, the mountain kept changing. The rainforest fell away, replaced by moorland and thin air. At Shira Camp, we stood above the clouds, watching the horizon turn gold and purple. At Lava Tower (4,600 meters), everything turned stark and volcanic – step, breathe, repeat. Descending into Barranco, life returned in surreal shapes and textures. It was like walking through another world.

Altitude hit two teammates hard one afternoon. We rallied with water, medication, encouragement, and time. It wasn't dramatic, but it was defining. Leave no man behind. That night, the summit appeared in full view: snow-capped and magnificent.

### SUMMIT NIGHT

Base camp at Barafu was high, exposed, and silent. The kind of place that makes you speak softly. At 11 p.m., we started the summit push. Seven

hours in the dark. -14°C. A small circle of light in front of each step. The guides sang low and steady to keep us moving.

At one point, I looked up and thought the stars were strange. Perfectly spaced and moving slowly in unison. It was then that I realised they were head torches. That's how far we still had to go. I didn't look up again.

Stella Point arrived with the first streaks of dawn. From there, the Arctic Zone: scree, ice, and air so thin it barely felt real. Then Uhuru Peak. 5,895 meters. The Roof of Africa. Hugs, photos, disbelief – and a quick descent before altitude could catch us.

Hours later, we stumbled into Mweka Camp filthy, wrecked, and quietly proud. The next morning, we walked out to birdsong and green air, lungs finally full again. At the gate, cold Kilimanjaro beers tasted like triumph. We sang one last time with our crew – slower, heavier, full of gratitude.

Sunset Over Basecamp



Baranco Valley



### WHAT THE MOUNTAIN GAVE BACK

Kilimanjaro strips everything back to breath, humility, and “pole pole.” We came to Climb for Conservation to raise funds and awareness, but left with something else too: perspective, gratitude, and proof that with purpose (and people who have your back), you can go further than you ever thought possible.

The campaign was a success. Together with the OKOA Fund and the African Bush Camps Foundation, we raised \$7,000 to build seven lion bomas in Zimbabwe, helping protect livestock, keep lions safe, and support coexistence between people and wildlife.

A small victory on the mountain – and an even bigger one for conservation. 🌱

*Ker & Downey Africa is a leading luxury travel company specialising in expertly curated journeys across Africa. With deep on-the-ground knowledge and a commitment to meaningful, responsible travel, the team designs immersive experiences that connect travellers to the continent's landscapes, wildlife, and cultures – with purpose at their core. [www.ker-downeyafrica.com](http://www.ker-downeyafrica.com)*



# FLOATING ABOVE THE SERENGETI

*A Sunrise Balloon Adventure*

From the window of a safari vehicle, the Serengeti is breathtaking, yet it remains a view from the outside looking in. Only when you rise silently above the plains in a hot-air balloon does the landscape reveal its whole, living soul. Serengeti Balloon Safaris has been granting that privilege for more than three decades, turning a simple dawn flight into one of Africa's most unforgettable wildlife experiences.

The day began in the velvet dark of pre-dawn. Land Cruisers weave between lodges and tented camps, headlights cutting through cool air scented with wild sage and distant woodsmoke. On an open plain, the launch site glows orange long before the balloons themselves appear. Enormous envelopes lie collapsed on the grass like sleeping giants. Guests are invited to lie on their sides – an oddly exhilarating position – watching flames roar into the nylon until the fabric billows and the balloon stands upright against a sky still bright with stars.

With a final gentle shove from the ground crew, the ropes are released. There is no lurch, no engine noise, only the softest lift as the basket leaves the earth. Almost instantly, the world falls silent except for the occasional whisper of the burner overhead.

Then comes the moment everyone waits for. A thin line of rose-gold appears on the horizon, thickens, flares, and suddenly the sun clears the distant hills. The plains ignite. Shadows of scattered clouds drift like slow islands across waves of golden grass; flat-topped acacias stand in perfect silhouette; a meandering river flashes silver one moment, molten gold the next. From a thousand feet, the Great Migration resolves into countless individual wildebeest moving in ancient, purposeful rivers. Elephants look like grey boulders until one flaps an ear and the whole herd shifts. Giraffes drift between thorn trees like long-necked ghosts.

## AT THE HELM

The pilots are extraordinary: calm, weather-beaten men and women who have flown these skies for thousands of hours. They steer not with rudders but with



altitude, rising or descending into invisible currents, skimming low enough for the basket's shadow to race across the backs of zebra, then climbing until the horizon curves and the vastness of the ecosystem becomes almost dizzying. All the while, they narrate quietly: the name of a distant rocky kopje, the reason those vultures are circling, the faint trail beneath that marks a migration route used for millennia.

Because the balloon travels with the wind rather than against it, the animals rarely bolt. A lioness leading her cubs across an open plain glances upward once and continues walking. A tower of giraffes stares eye-to-eye as you drift past at treetop height. Elephants rumble so close you can see dust on their eyelashes and hear the low thunder of their stomachs. At times, the basket hovers motionless while ostriches sprint below in perfect, comical formation. The silence allows every natural sound to reach you – the tear of grass, the bark of a zebra, the soft click of a giraffe's knees folding to drink.



Sharing the basket with strangers adds its own gentle magic. A retired couple from Scotland, a family from Tokyo, a photographer from Cape Town – within

minutes, backgrounds dissolve. Cameras click, but more often people simply stand in wordless wonder, occasionally turning to one another with the same delighted, disbelieving smile.

After roughly an hour, the pilot begins scanning for a landing site. The descent is as graceful as the ascent. The basket kisses the grass, sometimes with a short, exhilarating drag before settling. The instant the basket is steady, the crew materialise with folding tables, white linen, and chilled champagne. The pilot raises a glass, recites the traditional Balloonist's Prayer with varying degrees of theatrical flair, and the plains echo with laughter and applause.

#### A FITTING ENDING

Breakfast is served in the open or beneath a spreading acacia: tropical fruit, warm croissants still fragrant from the oven, eggs cooked to order, crisp bacon, and endless tea or coffee. Impala graze nearby; a curious giraffe peers over the



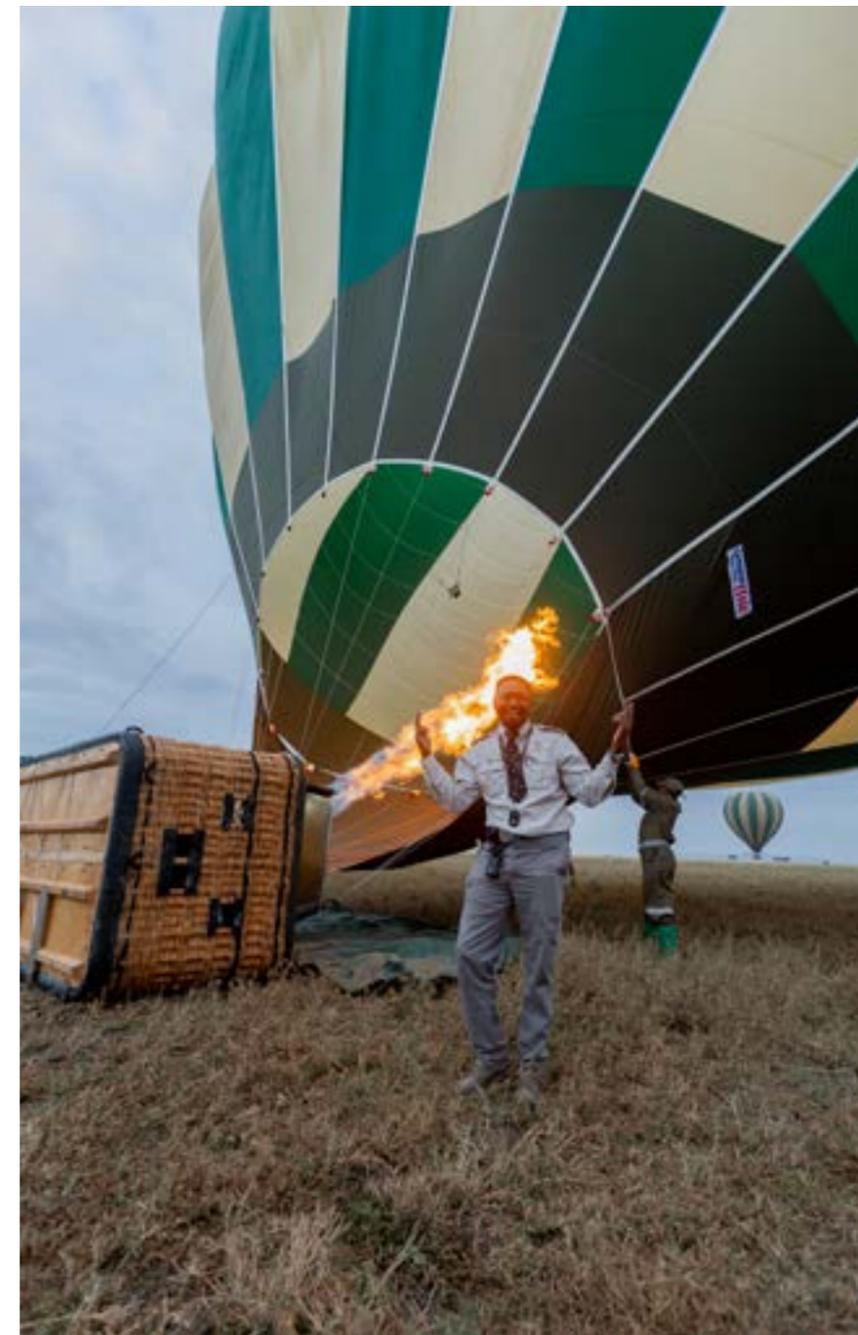
bushes; overhead, the deflated balloon lies like a bright fallen rainbow. Conversation flows easily – replaying favourite moments, swapping stories, promising to stay in touch.

Safety is meticulous, pilots are among the most experienced in Africa, and a portion of every fare supports anti-poaching patrols and local schools. Launch sites are rotated to protect the fragile grassland. When the tables are finally packed away, and guests climb back into the vehicles, the Serengeti looks different – familiar now, intimate, no longer just scenery but a place briefly and beautifully known from the sky.

That rare perspective, earned in the hush of dawn with champagne in hand and the sun rising in a blaze of gold, remains vivid long after you have returned to earth.

For more information and bookings, visit [www.balloonsafaris.com](http://www.balloonsafaris.com). 

by *Ivor Jenkins*



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**LIFESTYLE**

**EMERALD INSTINCT**

Roberto Cavalli deepens its Signature collection with Verde Assoluto Eau de Parfum and Uomo Verde Assoluto, two fragrances that channel an opulent, jungle-inspired mood. Verde Assoluto for her blends bright mandarin with creamy gardenia, before easing into a warm base of amber woods and vanilla. The result is sensual yet composed, polished

without losing its edge. Uomo Verde Assoluto builds on the original Uomo with a richer, spicier profile. A layered spice accord meets earthy patchouli and vibrant amber, creating a confident woody scent with real presence. Uomo Verde Assoluto is available in 100ml and Signature Verde Assoluto in both 30ml and 75ml bottles at select retailers.

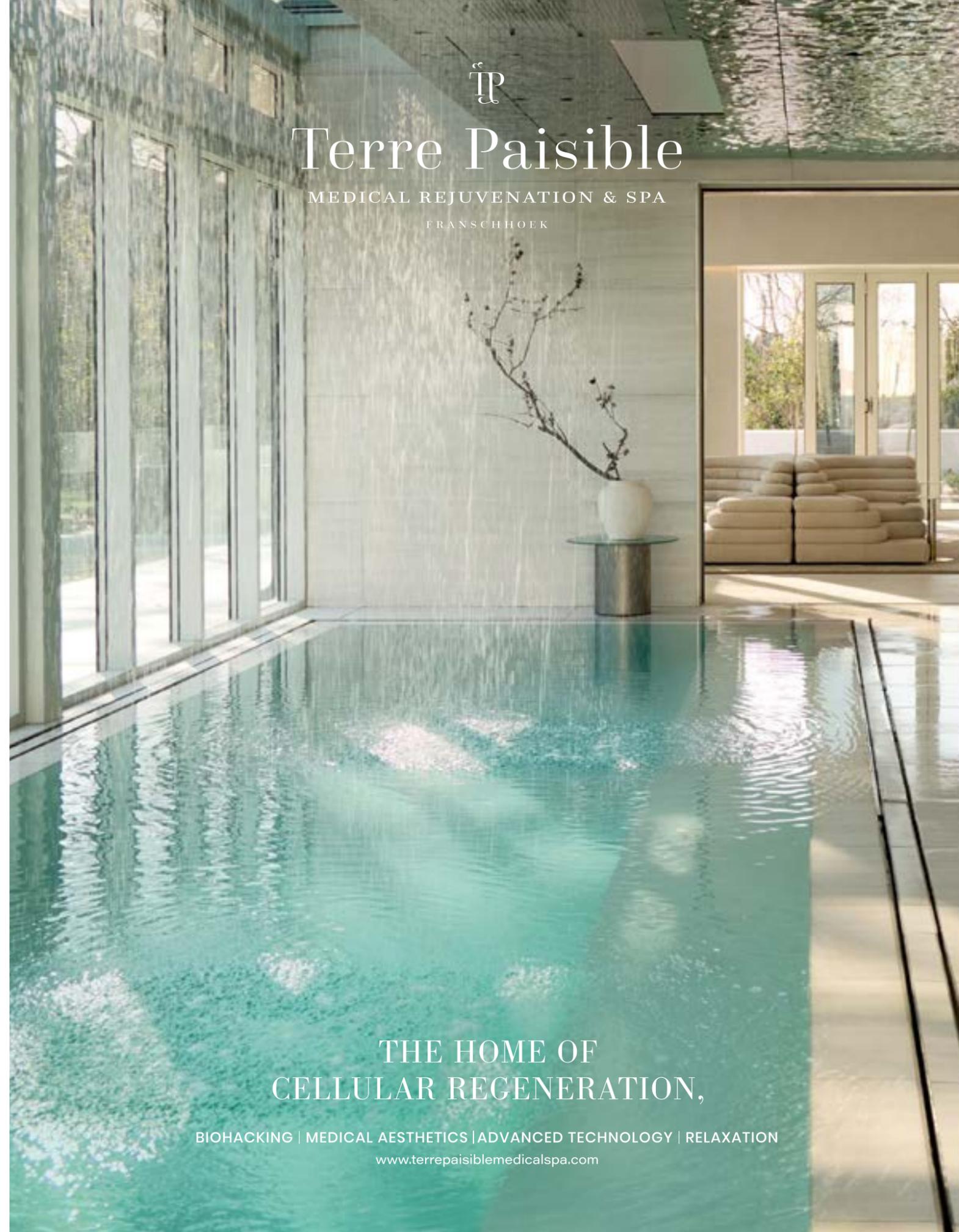


**VOLPES EVERYDAY LUXURY**

There's something undeniably inviting about a boutique hotel bedroom: crisp white sheets, layered textures, and a sense of calm that instantly slows the pace. With Volpes, The Home of Linen, recreating that everyday luxury at home is simple. Start with quality cotton bedlinen in fresh whites or soft neutrals, paired with supportive pillows and a plush duvet inner for that perfectly made-bed feel. Layer in a textured throw or quilt for depth, and complete the experience with indulgent towel sets and subtly scented fragrances. Minimalistic styling keeps the space serene, allowing comfort and quality to take centre stage. Thoughtfully chosen essentials can transform an ordinary bedroom into a restful retreat – proof that luxury doesn't have to be reserved for weekends away. Start shopping Volpes today at [bash.com/Volpes](http://bash.com/Volpes).

**PERFECTION IN A BOTTLE**

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# EMBRACING COZYMAXXING

*Why South African Homes Are Choosing Warm Design This Winter*

As temperatures drop and daylight fades sooner, interiors are evolving into layered sanctuaries built around comfort, texture, and emotional warmth.

There is a particular stillness to a South African winter morning. The Highveld air carries a dry sharpness, coastal homes feel the creeping damp of Atlantic fronts, and tile floors offer little sympathy to bare feet. Winter shifts behaviour. We wake slower, settle indoors earlier, and instinctively gravitate toward warmth. Increasingly, our homes are responding in kind. A global design movement known as cozymaxxing is reshaping interiors, not through extravagance, but through intentional comfort.

Despite its contemporary name, cozymaxxing reflects something deeply familiar. It is not about filling spaces

indiscriminately, but about refining them to nurture the people who live in them. South African homes, long shaped by an architectural relationship with the outdoors, are now placing greater emphasis on interior warmth during colder months. The result is spaces that feel less like showpieces and more like sanctuaries.

## THE POWER OF TEXTURE

Texture has emerged as the foundation of this shift. Hard, visually cool surfaces such as polished concrete, porcelain tile, and exposed stone remain architecturally relevant, but they are increasingly being balanced with softer elements. Wool throws draped across sofas, boucle armchairs positioned near

windows, and thick woven rugs underfoot introduce both physical and visual warmth.

These additions do more than insulate against the cold. They soften the acoustics of a space, absorb sound, and create an atmosphere that feels calmer and more intimate. A living room anchored by a substantial rug immediately feels more defined and grounded. The room becomes less transitional and more purposeful, encouraging occupants to linger rather than pass through.



Furniture is evolving alongside this material shift. The crisp, minimalist silhouettes that defined interiors over the past decade are gradually giving way to fuller, more accommodating forms. Sofas are deeper, cushions are more generous, and seating prioritises comfort over visual austerity. This reflects a broader reassessment of what the home represents. It is no longer simply a place of efficiency, but one of restoration.

Bedrooms, perhaps more than any other space, demonstrate the value of

texture. Layered bedding, upholstered headboards, and heavier fabrics create environments that feel insulated from the cold beyond the walls. The bed becomes not just functional, but protective. It becomes a refuge.

## LIGHTING THAT CREATES ATMOSPHERE

Lighting plays a transformative role in shaping winter interiors. Many homes rely heavily on overhead illumination, which, while practical, can feel clinical

and unforgiving. Cozymaxxing instead favours layered lighting that creates depth and warmth.

Floor lamps positioned beside seating areas, table lamps placed on sideboards, and warm-toned globes produce softer, more controlled illumination. This approach reduces harsh contrasts and introduces subtle shadows, making spaces feel more relaxed. It mirrors the natural qualities of firelight, which humans have instinctively gathered around for warmth and comfort for generations.

This is particularly relevant in South African homes, where fireplaces often serve as seasonal focal points. Yet even in their absence, carefully considered lighting can replicate the same sense of calm. Pools of warm light create smaller zones within larger rooms, allowing interiors to feel more intimate without altering their architectural footprint.

Natural light, too, is used more deliberately. During winter, sunlight carries both warmth and emotional value. Seating arrangements that capture afternoon light, or reading corners positioned near windows, transform ordinary spaces into restorative retreats.

#### COLOUR AND EMOTIONAL WARMTH

Colour has quietly undergone its own evolution. Cooler whites and stark greys, once synonymous with modernity, are increasingly being replaced by warmer, earth-inspired tones. Shades of taupe, caramel, olive, and muted terracotta echo the winter landscape, drawing inspiration from dry grasslands, exposed soil, and timber.



These colours absorb light rather than reflect it, creating interiors that feel grounded and calm. Walls no longer recede into the background. They contribute to the emotional tone of the space. Even small interventions, such as introducing warmer cushions or replacing cooler textiles, can dramatically shift the atmosphere.

This palette aligns naturally with South African architectural traditions, which have long embraced natural materials and organic finishes. Timber furniture, handmade ceramics, and woven textiles reinforce a sense of authenticity. Cozymaxxing does not replace these elements. It amplifies them.

#### A RETURN TO THE PURPOSE OF HOME

Perhaps the most significant aspect of cozymaxxing is what it represents beyond aesthetics. Modern life is defined by speed, connectivity, and constant external stimulation. The home has become one of the few environments capable of providing genuine psychological relief.

Cozymaxxing acknowledges that design is not purely visual. It is sensory. The softness of a chair, the warmth of a light source, and the quiet insulation of layered materials all contribute to a deeper sense of well-being. These details shape how a space is experienced, not just how it is seen.

Importantly, this shift does not demand extensive renovation or significant expense. It is achieved through thoughtful layering and refinement. A heavier throw, a warmer globe, or a carefully placed rug can entirely redefine a room.

As winter settles across South Africa, homes are adapting in subtle but meaningful ways. Interiors that once prioritised visual restraint are becoming softer, warmer, and more human. Cozymaxxing reminds us of something architecture has always understood. The true success of a home is not measured by how it looks on arrival, but by how it makes you feel when you stay. 10

# THE RIGHT TO REST, RESTORE, RENEW

*The Brahma Kumaris*

In today's fast-paced world, the right to rest, restore, and renew is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Our lives are driven by deadlines and targets, often resulting in compromising our health and wellbeing - both physically and mentally. On a physical level, we are more aware of ways to restore and renew. But we often overlook the ways we need to restore and renew ourselves mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

Just as the body cannot function without sleep, the inner being cannot thrive without moments of stillness and renewal. When we take time to consciously breathe and slow our minds by choosing positive, calming thoughts, we experience mental ease that extends into the body. Sometimes this relief is immediate, while at other times it appears gradually, improving our overall health. The connection between body and mind is profound. Decades of research have shown that many illnesses are psychosomatic, and so nurturing the mind directly improves physical well-being.

If we observe our thoughts, we notice how easily the world floods into our minds, creating stress. External events are only triggers; it is our mental response that produces worry, anxiety and fear. While it may seem that we have no control over these reactions, consistent practice of taking time out- especially at the start of the day- helps us realign our thoughts with gratitude and compassion. This shift changes how we feel and how we engage with others.



Such thoughts are not only positive but powerful. They enable us to choose our responses rather than reacting impulsively to circumstances. Instead of being drained by emotions, we cultivate resilience and calm. Renewal does not require waiting for a holiday. Small daily steps - moments of reflection on peace, gratitude or compassion can restore balance and bring us to inner calm.

**RELAX INTO A BETTER LIFE**

When we feel relaxed, restored, and renewed, the benefits ripple outward. Families, friends, colleagues, and communities all experience the harmony we carry within. Ultimately, caring for the soul alongside the body brings joy, strengthens health, and contributes to peace in the wider world.

Drawing on the wisdom of Dadi Janki, "There are many external crises. It is not always possible to do something about that. But the crises you create in your own mind - at least put a stop to that, and claim back your peace.", gives us the

encouragement that we do not have to be at the mercy of the world around us. Through small regular practices of positive thoughts, breathing and reflection, we can maintain a spirit of calm and feel refreshed. 🙏

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# THE KING OF CLASS

*Mercedes-Benz's Most Ambitious S-Class Refresh Yet*

**When Mercedes-Benz pulled the wraps off the refreshed S-Class on 29 January 2026 at the Mercedes-Benz Museum in Stuttgart, the timing was no coincidence. It was the brand's 140<sup>th</sup> birthday, and the company used the moment to remind the world why the S-Class has been the undisputed flagship of automotive luxury for more than half a century.**

The stalwart saloon from Mercedes-Benz, the inimitable S-Class, has received the most extensive mid-cycle update in the model's history, with over 2,700 parts (roughly 50% of the car) either newly developed or heavily revised. Production begins later this year at Factory 56 in Sindelfingen, although local customers will have to wait until 2027 for deliveries, despite the anticipation that already seems electric.

The S-Class story in South Africa is one of quiet dominance. While German rivals have come and gone, the S-Class has remained the default choice for captains of industry, government principals and anyone who understands that true luxury is measured in effortless kilometres rather than decibels. That reputation was forged long before the first official "S-Klasse" badge appeared.

The lineage begins in 1972 with the W116 – the car that formally introduced the Sonderklasse (Special Class) name. It brought the world the first anti-lock brakes on a production car and set the template for safety as a luxury feature. The W126, introduced in 1979, was a masterpiece of aerodynamics and

restraint, and it introduced the airbag to the masses and became the best-selling S-Class of all time. The W140 of the early 1990s was almost comically over-engineered – double-glazed windows, soft-close doors, a whisper-quiet cabin – and earned the nickname "the vault" for good reason. The W220 brought aluminium construction and Airmatic air suspension; the W221 added night vision and the first radar-based safety systems, the W222 introduced full-LED lighting and the revolutionary Magic Body Control; and the current W223, launched in 2020, rewrote the rulebook with its digital cockpit and Level 3-ready autonomy.

Each generation has added layers of technology while preserving the core promise: serenity at any speed, on any surface. The 2026 refresh honours that heritage while bringing the S-Class firmly into the second half of the decade.

## SUBTLE POWER MOVES

Visually, the changes are evolutionary but confident. The grille is now larger (up around 20%) and, for the first time on a standard S-Class sedan, can be illuminated with a constellation of three-dimensional chrome stars. This feature will turn heads at night, though European regulations may delay its arrival in some markets. The new Digital



Light headlamps feature a twin-star motif that projects subtle three-pointed-star patterns onto the road ahead, while the taillights echo the theme with star-shaped light modules. New wheel designs up to 20-inch, and an expanded Manufaktur palette (40 fresh exterior colours, 25 new Nappa leather interiors) give configurators fresh life. The overall stance is slightly bolder, yet still recognisably S-Class.

#### TECHNOLOGY MEETS TRANQUILLITY

If previous S-Class iterations are anything to go by, the updated cabin will feel more like a private jet lounge than ever. At the heart of the transformation is the new Mercedes-Benz Operating System (MB.OS), a purpose-built supercomputer that powers the entire

infotainment and vehicle architecture. The MBUX Superscreen is now standard, with improved ergonomics: the driver display sits more upright, the central screen is pushed slightly rearward for better reach, and the passenger screen remains. In the rear, two 13.1-inch detachable tablets run native apps, turning the back seat into a genuine mobile office. Four-seat configurations with a fixed rear console are far more widely available, and every seat can now be fitted with heated seatbelts – a frivolous addition for some, but a brilliant touch for others.

Augmented-reality head-up display, Digital Vent Control that automatically adjusts air vents to your preferences, expanded ambient lighting themes and a “welcome home” animation that greets you with soft lighting and a gentle seat massage

all reinforce the S-Class’s role as a sanctuary on wheels. For South African executives who spend hours in the car between Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, these details matter.

#### POWERTRAINS TAILORED FOR A NEW GENERATION

Under the bonnet, the powertrain menu has been comprehensively refreshed to meet stricter Euro 7 emissions standards while delivering more refinement and, in many cases, more performance. All variants now run 4Matic all-wheel drive as standard on the diesel models – welcome news for Gauteng’s summer thunderstorms and the occasional gravel shortcut.

Diesel remains the smart choice for many South African buyers, and the updated straight-six OM 656 family



continues. The S 350 d 4Matic produces 230 kW and 650 Nm (plus a 17 kW/205 Nm mild-hybrid boost), while the S 450 d 4Matic ups the ante to 270 kW and 750 Nm. Both promise sub-6.5 l/100 km combined and effortless highway cruising – exactly what is required when the next fuel stop is 400 km away.

Although the S 450 and S 500 are likely not destined for South Africa, other markets will get an updated M 256 Evo inline-six in the S 450 4Matic (around 280 kW, up to 600 Nm) and S 500 4Matic (around 330 kW, 600 Nm with brief overboost). But the star of the show for performance-minded owners (and a model likely to be sold here) is the new M 177 Evo 4.0-litre V8 in the S 580 4Matic. Now fitted with a flat-plane crank, revised intake and exhaust, and higher-flow turbos, it delivers around 395 kW and 750 Nm – enough for a claimed sub-4.5-second zero to 100 km/h sprint – while the 48-volt mild-hybrid system smooths out every transition. Fuel consumption is listed at around 10.5 l/100 km, which is respectable for the performance on offer.

Plug-in hybrids will be particularly interesting in South Africa. The S 580 e 4Matic combines the updated six-cylinder

with a more powerful electric motor for a combined system output of around 480 kW (some sources cite higher) and an electric-only range of over 100 km – enough for most daily commutes in the major metros while still offering effortless long-range capability when the battery is depleted. Mercedes has also confirmed that the V12-powered S 680 (450 kW) and the armoured Guard variants continue, as does the range-topping AMG S 63 E Performance for those who want extreme power and drama.

Chassis upgrades are equally significant. Rear-axle steering is now standard at 4.5 degrees (optional 10 degrees on long-wheelbase models), Airmatic air suspension is standard across the range, and the optional e-Active Body Control can use cloud-based road data to pre-emptively adjust damping – a system that should shine on our variable road surfaces. Safety remains class-leading, with expanded sensor arrays, more airbags (up to 15) and the latest iteration of the Drive Pilot Level 3 system.

Pricing and exact model allocation for South Africa will only be confirmed closer to the 2027 launch, but expect the range to mirror the current line-up’s logic: the S 350 d as the volume seller, the S

580 e for those chasing lower company-car tax and urban zero-emission running, the S 580 V8 for the passionate few, and Maybach and AMG variants at the top. Current S-Class pricing starts at around R2.58 million for the S 350 d L, so the refreshed car will likely start at over R2.7 million once specifications and import duties are taken into account.

For South African buyers, the appeal remains unchanged: the S-Class is the car that makes every drive a masterclass. Whether you’re logging 50,000 km a year between meetings, or a collector who simply wants the best-engineered luxury sedan money can buy, this refresh delivers more of what has always made the S-Class special – plus the technology and efficiency demanded by the most discerning buyers.

Mercedes-Benz has never rested on the S-Class’s laurels, and this most ambitious update proves the point. The king has not only retained its crown – it has polished it, added a few more jewels, and reminded everyone why it has worn it for 54 years. In South Africa, where distance is part of the national character and status is measured in quiet confidence rather than noise, the refreshed S-Class will feel right at home. 11

# BUILDING LOYALTY FROM THE GROUND UP

*Ford Rethinks It's Dealership Experience*

**Signature sat down for an exclusive interview with Elena Ford, the Chief Dealer Engagement Officer for the Blue Oval, and great great granddaughter of Ford Motor Company founder, Henry Ford, to understand how the brand is redefining the dealership's role through its ambitious Signature 2.0 programme, a global initiative designed to transform dealerships into welcoming, hospitality-led spaces that strengthen trust, deepen loyalty, and reinforce Ford's long-term commitment to customers.**



Exclusivity in the motor industry rarely arrives with fanfare. More often, it presents itself in fleeting windows between tightly scheduled engagements, where the real conversations happen away from the spotlight. Our meeting with Elena Ford, Chief Dealer Engagement Officer for Ford Motor Company, was one such moment. Granted exclusively to *Signature* during her recent visit to South Africa, our discussion took place shortly after Ford South Africa's annual dealer conference at the Sandton Convention Centre. Joining her was Neale Hill, President and CEO of Ford South Africa, whose leadership has helped position the local operation as one of Ford's most strategically important global markets.

The purpose of Elena's visit was not merely ceremonial. Ford is in the midst of reimagining one of the most fundamental elements of its business - the dealership itself. Known as Signature 2.0, the programme represents a comprehensive rethink of how customers interact with Ford at the most critical point of contact. It is a recognition that while vehicles may evolve through electrification and connectivity, the human experience surrounding ownership remains just as important.

And perhaps nowhere is that more relevant than here.

#### GLOBAL STRATEGY ON A SOUTH AFRICAN STAGE

South Africa occupies a unique position within Ford's global footprint. The Silverton Manufacturing Plant

in Pretoria produces up to 200,000 Rangers annually, supplying customers across multiple continents while simultaneously serving local demand. The Ranger is a global pillar for Ford, making South Africa far more than a regional outpost. It is a cornerstone of Ford's manufacturing and customer ecosystem.

Signature 2.0 arrives at a time when customer expectations are evolving rapidly. It represents the most significant update to Ford's retail experience since the Trustmark programme was introduced more than two decades ago, reflecting the brand's response to new competitors, changing customer behaviour, and the growing importance of seamless physical and digital interaction.



Elena was quick to contextualise the scale of change.

“We redesigned facilities about 20 years ago,” she explained. “At that point, there really wasn’t even an iPhone.”

That simple observation underscores just how dramatically the retail landscape has shifted. Today’s customers arrive at dealerships armed with research, comparisons, and expectations shaped by experiences far beyond the automotive sector.

“We know that people do about 40 to 50% of their research online,” Elena told me. “But they still want to come into the store. They want to take the vehicle for a test drive. They want to talk to someone. It’s really about deepening that relationship.”

That relationship is central to Ford’s strategy, and Signature 2.0 is designed to

facilitate vehicle purchases and foster lasting loyalty throughout the ownership journey.

#### HOSPITALITY FIRST

The philosophy behind Signature 2.0 becomes immediately apparent when stepping into one of the new-generation dealerships. I experienced this firsthand during my visit to Ford Roodepoort, one of the first facilities locally to adopt the concept.

The traditional dealership environment, often defined by desks, partitions, and a clear separation between customer and salesperson, has been replaced by something more open and intuitive. A central hospitality hub welcomes customers as they enter, encouraging exploration rather than directing movement.

“The idea is when you walk into the store, it’s more of a hospitality

experience,” Elena explained. “Like you’re walking into someone’s home. We want to make it warm and inviting.”

This hospitality-led approach forms the foundation of Signature 2.0, alongside three additional core principles – “Sales and Service Anywhere”, “Discover Ford”, and “Operations Excellence”. Together, they create an environment that strengthens emotional engagement and supports meaningful interactions between customers and dealership staff.

One of the most significant operational changes lies in breaking down the traditional barriers between sales and service.

“We call it sales and service anywhere,” Elena said. “We want customers to feel like they can come in, sit down, have a conversation, and build a relationship. Because once they buy the vehicle, we want

them to come back and service it as well.”

This continuity reinforces trust and strengthens long-term retention. The dealership becomes not just a point of sale, but a hub for ongoing engagement.

Equally important is the shift in how customers discover the brand.

“In the past, it was very transactional,” Elena reflected. “You come in, you buy the car, and you leave. Now, we want customers to discover Ford. We want them to understand our history, our future, and what the brand represents.”

This includes curated displays of accessories, merchandise, and brand storytelling elements that transform the dealership into a space where customers can

engage with Ford beyond the vehicle itself.

Neale Hill emphasised why this transformation is particularly relevant in the South African context.

“There’s been a dramatic change in the competitive environment,” he told me. “We have to offer a distinctive customer experience that differentiates the Ford brand. It starts with that welcoming when customers walk into the dealership. They shouldn’t feel intimidated. It should be hospitality first.”

His point speaks to a broader industry reality. As new competitors enter the market and customer choice expands, experience becomes a defining differentiator.

Signature 2.0 is Ford’s response to that challenge.

The rollout itself is deliberately measured. Already, six dealerships have made the transition, with another five currently in the process of aligning with the Signature 2.0 standard by the end of 2026, with broader adoption continuing beyond that timeframe.

“The investment we’re seeing from our dealer partners is a strong endorsement of the Ford brand,” Neale explained. “These are long-term commitments made by independent business owners who believe in Ford and have confidence in the strength and future of our products.”

That confidence is already translating into tangible results globally, with early adopters reporting increased customer engagement and positive feedback.

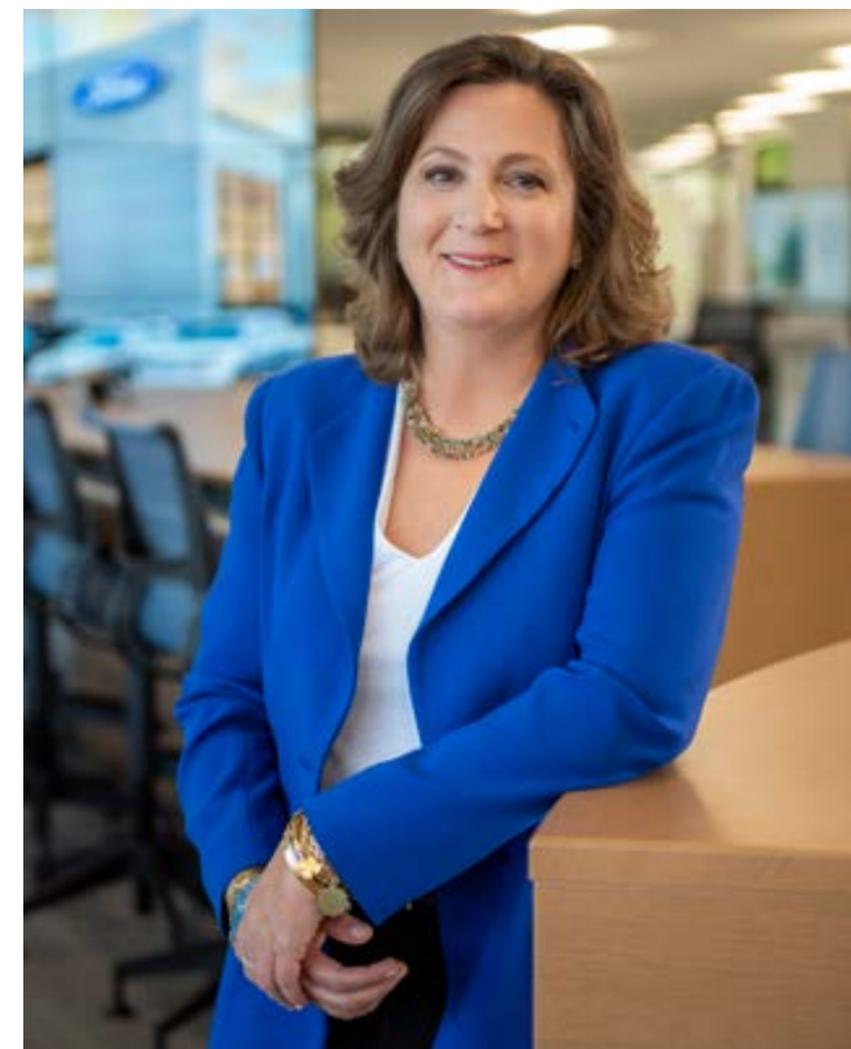
But what struck me most during my visit to Ford Roodepoort was something less measurable. It was the atmosphere. Customers moved freely through the space, interacting naturally with staff. There was no pressure, just engagement.

In an era defined by rapid technological advancement, it would be easy to assume that the future of automotive retail exists entirely online. Yet Signature 2.0 acknowledges a deeper truth. The dealership remains one of the most powerful touchpoints in shaping customer perception.

Ford’s decision to invest in transforming that experience speaks volumes about its long-term vision, not only globally but here in South Africa. With the Ranger continuing to roll off the Silverton production line in volumes that serve markets worldwide, South Africa’s importance within Ford’s ecosystem remains undeniable.

Signature 2.0 reinforces that commitment. It goes beyond a new dealership design to reflect a shift in mindset, placing customer experience at the centre of Ford’s retail strategy.

If my conversation with Elena and Neale concluded, it became abundantly clear that Ford is not simply modernising its dealerships, it is rebuilding the foundation of customer loyalty – from the ground up. 19



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**TO ENTERTAIN**

**KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN**

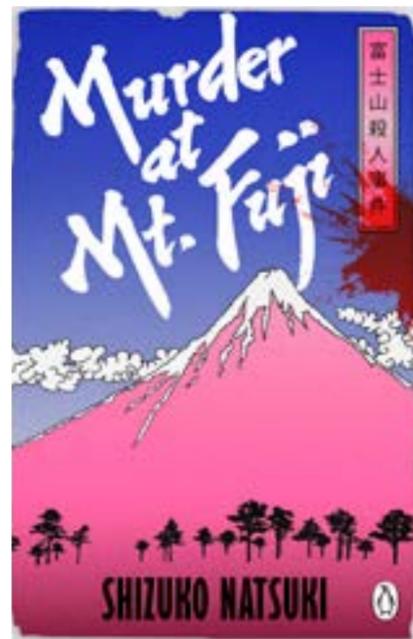
Cast: Diego Luna, Tonatiuh & Jennifer Lopez,  
Director: Bill Condon

Valentín (Luna), a political prisoner, shares a cell with Molina (Tonatiuh), a window dresser convicted of public indecency. The two form an unlikely bond as Molina recounts the plot of a Hollywood musical starring his favourite silver screen diva, Ingrid Luna (Lopez). The movie is based on the Tony Award-winning Broadway musical hit of the same name.



**MURDER AT MOUNT FUJI**

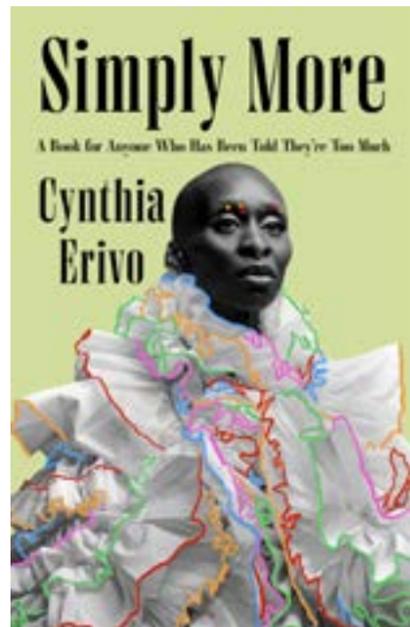
When American student Jane Prescott is invited to spend the holidays with her classmate Chiyo, she jumps at the chance to see in the new year at a luxurious mansion at the foot of Mount Fuji. Chiyo belongs to one of Japan's wealthiest families, the heiress to a pharmaceutical empire headed up by



Yohei "Grandpa" Wada. With the whole Wada family gathered and snow falling outside, the festivities are in full swing. That is, until Chiyo bursts into the room - covered in blood, holding a knife, and screaming that she has stabbed her grandfather to death. Stunned, the family closes ranks to protect one of its own, but Jane alone has more questions than answers. Did any other member of the Wada clan stand to gain everything with the patriarch's death? And if so, could the real murderer still be in their midst?

**SIMPLY MORE**

Part-memoir, part-inspirational manual for better living, *Simply More* is for anyone seeking greater harmony and fulfilment in their lives. Cynthia Erivo learned the music to *Wicked* a decade before she needed it, not knowing that those same lyrics would change her life. Ten years later, she performed those songs on a world stage, showing us that there is always time to keep discovering ourselves and that the journey of becoming is not finite. Through a series of personal vignettes, Cynthia reflects on how she has grown as an actor and as a person, shares the lessons she's learned over years



of performing, and reminds us of how capable we are of so much more than we think. She urges readers to lean into the wisdom of their bodies and to understand and strive for a physical and mental balance. Because when we chase our deepest desires, each small step leads us closer to where we want to go.



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# DESIGNED TO LEAD

*How Mercedes-Benz Defined Automotive Form for 140 Years*

**From the Patent Motorwagen to the electric era, Mercedes-Benz has used design not simply as styling, but as a tool to shape perception, technology, and the very idea of mobility.**

In 1886, when Karl Benz unveiled the Patent Motorwagen, he did more than invent the motor car – he established the foundation for automotive design itself. The three-wheeled machine was rudimentary by modern standards, yet its proportions, exposed mechanical honesty, and purposeful structure created a template that designers continue to follow. Over the next 140 years, Mercedes-Benz would evolve from engineering curiosity to global design authority, producing vehicles that defined their era.

One of the enduring principles of Mercedes-Benz design is clarity of purpose. From the earliest days, the brand understood that good design begins with engineering logic. The 1936 540 K, for example, combined flowing wings with a long bonnet that visually communicated the presence of its powerful straight-eight engine. The proportions were not arbitrary. They told a story of performance before the engine even started.

This philosophy matured further in the post-war period. The 1954 300

SL Gullwing remains one of the most recognisable cars ever created, not simply because of its dramatic doors, but because those doors were a direct result of necessity. Its tubular spaceframe chassis demanded high sills, and the upward-opening doors became both a technical solution and an iconic design signature. It was engineering constraint transformed into aesthetic triumph.

In modern Mercedes-Benz models, this principle continues under the banner of Sensual Purity. Surfaces are clean, lines are reduced, and proportions are carefully balanced. The current S-Class, for instance, does not rely on excessive ornamentation. Its design communicates confidence through restraint, using light, reflection, and proportion to convey luxury.

## DESIGN AS A SYMBOL OF PROGRESS

Mercedes-Benz has consistently used design to signal technological advancement. In the 1960s, the W111 “Fintail” models introduced subtle tail fins that were not merely stylistic flourishes, but visual cues aligned with contemporary architectural and industrial trends. They represented optimism and forward thinking in a rapidly modernising world.

By the 1970s, the W116 S-Class demonstrated a different approach. Its clean, horizontal lines and disciplined geometry reflected a growing emphasis on safety, stability, and authority. It was less flamboyant, yet more deliberate.

Fast forward to the present, and the EQ electric range represents another shift. Models like the EQS embrace aerodynamic efficiency as a visual identity. The cab-forward silhouette,

BELOW: 1992 Mercedes-Benz 300 SL





seamless surfacing, and uninterrupted light signatures are not only visually distinctive, but also serve measurable functional purposes. With a drag coefficient as low as 0.20, the EQS proves that design remains inseparable from engineering performance.

**INTERIORS THAT REDEFINE MODERN LUXURY**

While exterior design often captures immediate attention, Mercedes-Benz has been equally influential in shaping interior environments. The brand recognised early on that luxury is experienced, not simply observed.

The introduction of wood trim, ergonomic seating, and clear

instrumentation in mid-century models established benchmarks that competitors would spend decades trying to match. Yet the transformation in recent years has been even more profound.

The MBUX Hyperscreen, spanning the width of the dashboard in models like the EQS, represents a new interpretation of automotive space. It blends architecture, digital interface, and craftsmanship into a single cohesive form. Ambient lighting, carefully selected materials, and layered surfaces create an environment that feels both technologically advanced and emotionally engaging.

Importantly, these interiors never lose sight of usability. Controls remain intuitive, and the layout prioritises clarity.



TOP: 2026 Mercedes-Benz CLA Interior  
RIGHT: Mercedes-Benz 220 SE Heckflosse-Limousine

BELOW: Mercedes-Benz 300 SL Gullwing



It is a design that serves both the driver and the passenger in equal measure.

**A LEGACY STILL IN MOTION**

What distinguishes Mercedes-Benz is not simply its longevity, but its consistency of vision. Across 140 years, the brand has demonstrated an ability to evolve without losing its identity. Each era introduced new materials, technologies, and aesthetic directions, yet the underlying principles remained intact - clarity, proportion, and purpose.

From the exposed mechanics of the Patent Motorwagen to the seamless digital integration of modern electric vehicles, Mercedes-Benz design tells a continuous story of progress. It reflects changing tastes and technological possibilities, yet always maintains a sense of confidence and authority.

In many ways, Mercedes-Benz did not just invent the motor car. It defined how the motor car should look, feel, and interact with the world. And as the automotive landscape shifts toward electrification and digitalisation, design will continue to play a central role. 11

# FRAMING FASHION

*When the Image Becomes the Story*

Fashion lives in motion, on runways and in ateliers, yet its lasting impact is often sealed in a single frame. A photograph has the rare ability to freeze style in time while revealing the ideas, identities and collaborations that shape it.

The photographic exhibition *Fashion\_ The Image*, turned its attention to the photograph as the quiet architect behind fashion's public face. Presented across the Roger Ballen Centre for Photography and the Inside Out Centre for the Arts in Forest Town, Johannesburg, the exhibition traces how fashion imagery has shaped visual culture across South Africa and the African continent over the past five decades.

For most of us, fashion enters our lives through images. Editorial spreads, campaign photography and fashion films travel far beyond the runway, carrying ideas about identity, aspiration and creativity with them. In this way, the camera becomes both witness and storyteller. It documents the garments, yet also records the mood of an era and the cultural shifts taking place around it.

Curated by Sharon Armstrong in collaboration with Aspasia Karras and the African Fashion Research Institute, the exhibition brings together archival work, new commissions and rarely seen images that chart the evolution of fashion photography on the continent.

Photographers such as Pieter Hugo, Kristin-Lee Moolman and Nadine Ijewere appear alongside designers including Thebe Magugu, Rich Mnisi and David Tlale, highlighting the collaborations that give these images their depth and energy.

The result is a compelling reminder that fashion photography is not simply a glossy by-product of the industry. It is a powerful visual language that shapes how a place, a generation and a creative community choose to present themselves to the world. **10**

by roger ballen centre for photography

*Black Coffee (by Kevin Mackintosh 2020)*





*Garin Rajah (by Michael Oliver Love)*

*NaoSerati (by Tiaenda)*





*Chulaap (by Kevin Mackintosh)*



*Thebe Magugu (by Kristin Lee Moolman)*

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