

WEEKEND HOTSPOT

MOST South Africans know that Cape Town in holiday season, and sometimes in-between, is a nightmare.

It's one of those unfortunate irritations that comes with housing one of the most beautiful cities in the world — people flock to it when the weather's good and when it's not. This leaves little "quiet" time for the country's own citizens to enjoy a tourist-free holiday in the city.

Luckily, the hamlet of Franschhoek is an escape where even Capetonians can dodge the crowds.

If you can splurge a little, a stay-over on a wine estate break is a must. Val d'Or was our destination of choice, 5km from Franschhoek central.

The estate offers accommodation for upmarket romantic breaks as well as family chalets, without hous-



IDYLLIC:
The
gorgeous
Val d'Or

ing so many guests that the breakfast room is crowded.

Set on 35 hectares of wine farm, Val d'Or is the epitome

of country chic.

Think checkered tablecloths in the breakfast area, but Moët in the larder, high-

backed chairs for privacy with views of the Franschhoek mountains and lavender fields.

Host Suzette and one of the establishment's friendly cooks, Florida, both move inconspicuously, catering to guests' whims — even if it is takeaway breakfasts after the 10.30 cut-off.

The rooms are cosy and comfortable, offering state-of-the-art electronics and fluffy gowns, down duvets and king-size beds. Carefully selected plush rugs, chenille throws, antique movie posters and elegant ceramics perfect the decor.

Some chalets have quaint outdoor dining areas. And its out-of-the-way play areas make it child-friendly.

Most enticing is the pool area. The deck chairs create a visual illusion overlooking a sparkling pool, seemingly melding into the estate's lake with mountains beyond.

Grumbling tummies woke us from mirages of retire-

ment, as the venue does not usually cater for lunch and dinner, which gives you a reason to leave the estate.

With the pick of South African fine dining a five minute drive away, it would be unforgivable to stay in for dinner anyway.

There is lots to do, too:

● La Fromagerie at La Grange: try the lunch on the verandah of the converted 200-year-old barn.

● Huguenot Fine Chocolates: chocolate-making lessons

● The Flying Company does helicopter trips offering magnificent views of the area.

● Franschhoek Hiking Trails through the mountains and atop the pass.

● Wine tasting and horseback riding are available on some estates. — *Shanthini Naidoo*