

Biz.Travel Q&A with Roy Davies



By [Brian Berkman](#): contributing editor, travel

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Fresh from hosting England, Italy and Portugal World Cup teams, Roy Davies, general manager of Cape Town's Vineyard Hotel & Spa, answers our questions.



Roy Davies: "We believe that we should be a great four-star hotel, the five-star market is a bit crowded at present."

Biz.Travel: The Vineyard Hotel & Spa and sister properties the Townhouse Hotel & Conference Centre and the d'Ouwe Werf Hotel in Stellenbosch have appointed Southern Spoor and Lets Go There marketing companies to focus on marketing the properties to South Africans. By 2015 the Vineyard will be repositioned towards the luxury suites, junior suites, mountain facing, courtyard and villas providing 207 rooms. What can we expect will change?

R D: We will be working on improving our already great service, introducing a butler service at the villas, increasing the thread count in our suites and villas linen, while paying more attention to our guest amenities and public areas.

Biz.Travel: We loved our stay in the lavishly proportioned and contemporary Francois Suite, named after the patriarch of the owning Petousis family. Is the family involved in the day-to-day running of the hotel? Do you think that guests choose the Vineyard over a large corporate or company-owned hotel because of the family connection?

R D: The family are present on a day-to-day basis, the sons Lex and George in their executive roles while Kitty Petousis, the matriarch, still comes in every day, takes note of what is happening advises on the décor and then later heads to gym for her regular workout. The family ownership allows the hotel to operate on a more personal basis, recognising many of the return guests because of their association with the family.

Biz.Travel: Although you are graded four-star, we experienced many five-star details, do you believe that you attract more corporate business that avoids conspicuous consumption because of the four-star grading? With your 2015 focus, will you be re-grading the property?

R D: We believe that we should be a great four-star hotel, the five-star market is a bit crowded at present, and will remain as such for the near future. We do not plan at present to change our grading. We have great guests and would not like to have star grading as a booking barrier.

Biz.Travel: There have been some objections on the Trip Advisor website to the costs of your V&A Waterfront shuttle. Do you think them justified? There seems to be a split in opinion to billing a fully inclusive rate that lodges and some villas do, or itemising everything so that it appears cheaper at first glance but, in fact, isn't. What is always included in your rate?

R D: We have tried to reduce the transfer price by introducing a scheduled transfer at a more reasonable rate. When one takes into account the cost of staying at the Vineyard Hotel and Spa and what one gets, the grounds, the tranquillity and the great service and then compares that with the cost of Waterfront hotels, staying at the Vineyard Hotel & Spa is still more reasonable including transfers to the Waterfront when guests wish to go there. We include wireless internet in all room rates, use of our excellent gym, onsite parking and when specified, we also include breakfast.

Biz.Travel: We were very impressed with the food, especially the outstanding breakfast at The Square restaurant but you also have the famed Myoga on the premises. Can guests bill meals at Myoga to their room account or is it run as a separate entity? Guests can also eat in The Splash Café and in the Lounge Bar. How many meals will the average visitor have at the hotel?

R D: The Square does indeed provide a great breakfast, and in my biased opinion also the best value for money. The breakfast buffet in The Square can also be enjoyed from the patio, which is awesome in summer with the mountain as a backdrop. All our restaurants and bars including Myoga can be charged to the guest room account. Splash Café, the patio and Lounge Bar all have food service throughout the year, with Splash Café providing breakfast, lunch daily summer and a good South African braai twice a week in season. Guests frequenting our restaurants will vary, with some staying in and making use of all our venues, not forgetting room service as well.

Biz.Travel: What is the duration of the average guest stay at The Vineyard?

R D: In summer our average length of stay is about seven days while winter that shortens to two to three days. We have guests who escape the European winters spending up to six weeks with us over January, February and March each year.

Biz.Travel: Every guest to the Vineyard is taken by the beautiful gardens and Table Mountain views. Do you have staff gardeners or do you contract a gardening service.

R D: We have a team of ten who look after the gardens on a day-to-day basis, while making use of the services of Ann Sutton who has been involved with the layout and design of the gardens for years.

Biz.Travel: I was impressed by seeing a program on the hotel's community service on your information TV channel. Do you find that guests will choose to stay with you because you have upliftment programmes in place?

R D: We have seen that some individual guests stay with us because of our social responsibility activity, but we have also found international conference groups choosing us as the venue of choice because our conference centre is the first green conference centre in the country.

Biz.Travel: Is there something special we should know about?

R D: There is not a single something, but many something's. We have five tortoises, our 'Big Five', whom the kids love, we have a fantastic Thai spa specialising in low-tech high-touch treatments and great afternoon teas on the patio watching the

trees' shadows as they lengthen across the lawn.

One of our gem activities is our wine events through winter, each hosted by at least one special farm of the Cape wine lands book ended by our five wine partners, Klein Constantia, Meerlust, Simonsig, Warwick and Waterford, to start the season and the last event with eight vineyards from Constantia. This year we host thirteen of these events and may have a fourteenth.

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