Go to The Orient (in South Africa) and be amazed...

Travel - Feb 1, 2019 -

I honestly have battled with finding quite the right words to describe my stay over and dinner with award-winning Chef Chantel Dartnall at The Orient in Elandsfontein. Epic, awesome, incredible, stunning and all the other words that I often get accused of overusing just don't even start to do justice to this beautiful oasis in the midst of nature in The Francolin Conservancy. Breathtaking may just be it... I'll see.

This is a destination boutique hotel and restaurant that everyone knows about, or at least has heard about, and that is no surprise, Chantel has received numerous awards and accolades for her nature-inspired menus and her passion for her craft.

A mere 45-minute drive from both Joburg and Pretoria (and yes I timed it to make sure they were right), The Orient is hidden in the Crocodile River Valley, and upon arriving at the gates of the property you may start thinking that perhaps you had accidentally arrived at a Moorish palace.

This assumption could be partly correct, although Chantel is not Moorish, her 'palace' is certainly one of the most exquisite hotels I have ever visited. From arrival to departure no attention to detail is spared – and you are treated like the queen (or king) you truly are – even the room turn down is special, with a cute little teddy bear who arrives on your bed while you are at dinner, complete with a poetry book, fresh lavender sprig and choccies to munch on.

I gave my name at the main gate and within a short 4-minute drive to the actual hotel, they had radioed ahead and a team where on stand by to show me where to park, take my luggage and welcome me with a refreshing drink after the drive.

I was whisked up to my Royal Suite 'Udaipur' – the others boast a variety of cool names such as Marrakech, Samarkand, Constantinople and are decorated with artefacts gleaned from Chantel and her families worldwide travels. Each of the 10 suites is individually and uniquely decorated – no cookie cutter designs and decor here.

From the flowing curtains surrounding the bed to the plush lounge furniture, not to mention the incredible bathroom that found me gasping upon entering it this suite was designed for maximum relaxation and pure opulence.

Let me just bang on about the bathroom a smidge more – as this was certainly one of the highlights of my stay. A separate loo (always a plus if you are part of a couple) a corner bath big enough for two and a shower with a see-through window and a balcony overlooking the beautiful nature reserve. That bath – wow!

Dinner starts at 19h00 with a welcome cocktail or glass of bubbles and canapes in the foyer, before you are escorted through to the restaurant. The entire restaurant is decorated in Chantel's favourite style – Belle Epoque – so expect big thick curtains and carpets, golden decor, polished wood tables and crisp white linen, and big framed artworks. There are so many 'things' on the go – yet somehow everything works perfectly together.

The wine cellar at Mosaic is to be seen to be believed – ask them for a tour when you are there. Dug under the property – the rambling rooms run in to each other (one even has a huge rock rising out of the floor)

Head sommelier, Moses Magwaza, who has a friendly smile and expert knowledge on the entire cellar contents, expertly matches wines along with Chantel to complement every single dish on the menu and is happy to make recommendations on what to order with your meal if you are not doing the pairing menu. You can also book a wine before you arrive, for a super special occasion, which I thought was a lovely touch.

I was treated to The 'Grande Degustation' menu of the current season 'Natura Naturans'. Chantel's fame comes from expertly combining her classical French culinary training with her love of nature, and every single dish is literally the art of nature on a plate – all ingredients are fresh, and organic, and are sourced from local suppliers.

Chantel believes in also using seasonal produce, which is why her menus change twice a year, adapting to bring in warmer winter foods and by that token summer flavours.

Menu's run from the equinoxes and once a year the restaurant closes for one month in June/July as the family travel overseas to not only source more incredible wine and decor but also for Chantel to gain inspiration from nature for her next masterpiece. She told me that on occasion just finding a beautiful plate will be the start of an incredible journey – and the dish builds itself to match the plate. Oh, to be so creative!

Other dining options include The Market Degustation – which is a slightly condensed version of the Grande Degustation menu and vegans etc are well catered for. Wine pairing with dinner is optional, although I highly recommend it – and wines vary from countries such as France, Spain, Portugal and of course South Africa.

Chantel explains: "As a chef, it is important for me to know what is happening in my industry across the globe and I enjoy meeting with other chefs, sometimes working with them, and experiencing their creativity. It inspires me to work harder at what I do to ensure that our quality at Mosaic is parallel to what you would encounter in the best restaurants around the world."

And that she certainly does – this is an experience second to none, and one that I would highly recommend. Although not a cheap experience, certainly something special to celebrate an anniversary or a special birthday.

Rooms range from R 3000 – R 4500 per night with brekkie and dinner on it's own can range from R 850 per person up to around R 2000 with the wine pairing included (and it is a lot of wine, may I add).

Closed: Monday and Tuesday
Lunch: Wednesday to Sunday
Dinner: Wednesday, Friday and Saturday

A: Francolin Conservation Area, Crocodile River Valley, Elandsfontein, Pretoria

T: 012 371 2902

Find out more about The Orient right here...

Some images supplied and others taken by myself on my Samsung S9.

Tags: **2019**, **award winning**, **blogger**, **chantel dartnall**, **chef**, **dining out**, **eating out**, **elandsfontein**, **entertainment**, **fun**, **heather hook**, **joburg**, **johannesburg**, **latest**, **live**, **local**, **media personality**, **mosaic**, **new**, **news**, **online**, **radio presenter**, **restaurant**, **show**, **shows**, **south africa**, **south african**, **the orient**, **things to do**

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