

WELKOM TO CAPE TOWN!

By Dr Martin Chio, Editorial Board Member

I was fortunate to be able to attend a conference in South Africa last year, and was very pleased that the scientific committee of the International Union's World Congress accepted my poster based on my Master's dissertation. There was great anticipation as this was my first trip to the African continent; there was previously an opportunity to visit Harare while I was in medical school but unfortunately there were some issues with a pharmacology exam that stood in the way.

The team arrived in Cape Town after a 13-hour red-eye flight on a cold and wet (yes, wet) Sunday morning, a day before the conference started. It did take some time for our rooms to be prepared so we leafed through brochures for day trips, which were limited by the inclement weather. We were assigned Gerald as our guide, an affable 70-plus-year-old Afrikaner, which proved to be serendipitous. He was knowledgeable and more



Table Mountain in the background.

importantly, entertaining, as he regaled us with anecdotes as we drove eastwards towards Franschhoek.

We popped into a few vineyards on the way to our intended destination: La Petite Ferme (www.lapetiteferme.co.za). This boutique winery has a panoramic view of Franschhoek Wine Valley from the dining area. It is well known for its country fare with a unique fusion quality. I was immensely satisfied with the tasty fishcakes for starters and generous portion of beef fillet for mains. P was so pleased and impressed that she bought a cookbook, *La Petite Ferme Rustic Contemporary Cuisine*, authored by the resident chef. I highly recommend this restaurant, which is very popular with both locals and tourists alike. We warmed ourselves around the fireplace before heading back out into the cold and wet, and

continued a car tour of Stellenbosch. We decided to have a simple dinner near the hotel in the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront and ended up in Quay Four Seafood Restaurant and Tavern, which was recommended by the guidebook. Unfortunately the Cape Malay curry did not live up to its appetising appearance and was a tad too salty. My fellow diners did not find their meal up to scratch either.

The rain did not let up on Monday but we were attending the conference so it didn't really matter. The sun finally emerged during lunch and we managed to pop into the Wharfside Grill Restaurant at Mariners Wharf for a fresh seafood platter. We were back in time for the afternoon session and thereafter the conference opened with tribal performances and dancing, and ended with a canon salute.



Martin with penguins @ Boulders Beach

The weather on Tuesday was equally wet and we were mainly confined indoors, but a lunchtime trip to the Cape Town Fish Market was able to satiate our cravings for grilled squid. With the continual wet weather, we were resigned to entertaining ourselves with food... not that I was complaining. We managed to get a last minute reservation at 95 Keerom (www.95keerom.com) and were joined by friends from Australia and the UK. The building was originally stables and slave quarters which had been restored. It has retained some of the original façade and the raw brickwork, offset with slate, glass and dark wood, created a very pleasant ambience for dining. The menu was explained to our table in an alcove by the resident Italian chef and our appetites were whet. The menu comprised Northern Italian dishes and as I was still quite full from lunch, I decided to have the sea bass and a simple nougat dessert.



Pineapple and marzipan beignet with whisky and raisin ice-cream quince beurre blanc@Aubergine



Beef fillet with cranberry brie on roasted pumpkin, sweet potato and rocket tartine in classic red wine jus@La Petite Ferme



Seafood platter@ Wharfside grill restaurant Mariner's Wharf



Fishcakes with spicy patata and fennel salad in red pepper and walnut coulis@La Petite Ferme



Wine bin@Grand Provence

On our fourth and final day in Cape Town, the weather was still dreary. We were told that it rains approximately four days a year and we were "lucky" to experience all those four days of rain during our stay. Therefore I was neither able to partake the views from the top of Table Mountain nor enjoy the flora of the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens. It would have been nice to dip one's toes into the sea at the Cape of Good Hope and feel both the Atlantic and Indian Oceans but oh well...

We decided to save what was apparently Cape Town's most highly rated restaurant for our last night and we were not disappointed. The Aubergine Restaurant (www.aubergine.co.za), helmed by chef Harold Bresselschmidt, is located in the former 19th century home of the first Chief Justice of the Cape, Sir John Wylde. It has a sophisticated and award-winning menu using creative modern touches

to enhance classical European dishes using local meats and produce. I usually like to sample the specials for the day and chose the asparagus wrapped in tuna sashimi. My main was a succulent marinated lamb with Kalahari truffle tortellini and I finished off with a unique dessert of pineapple and marzipan beignet with whisky and raisin ice-cream quince beurre blanc.

As a result of the weather, my experience of Cape Town was literally dampened but thankfully the food (and the conference content) was able to compensate. I will have to return soon, perhaps during the World Cup since we will not be able to watch the matches, even on cable TV.

Next travelogue: South Africa part II: The Safari. **SMA**

Martin finds food and travel photography a pleasurable distraction.