

Enter the holiday paradise of Treedom Villas and Vardos

By  Evan-Lee Courie

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Fueled by her experience with people, travel and culture as a chef, African tour guide and VIP Events Director, Debbie Nortje, together with Marc Nortje, created Treedom Villas and Vardos, allowing it to blossom into the wonder it is today.

We chat to owner, founder and managing director, Debbie Nortje to find out about the holiday paradise that is Treedom Villas and Vardos...



Debbie Nortje, owner, founder and managing director of Treedom Villas and Vardos

❏ *Can you tell us a bit about Treedom Villas and Vardos?*

Treedom Villas and Vardos is a holiday paradise filled with gypsy magic and adventure.

Treehouse Villas is situated on the stunning coast of the Garden Route, South Africa, in the little town of Wilderness. The magic of Treedom is the overall feeling of happiness and relaxation found in a place still untouched by the stress of city life. It is the perfect blend of luxury and boho-chic living. It's a fantasy destination made real for families, honeymooners and friends looking for a slower more peaceful pace of life.

❏ *When, how and why did you get started?*

For 20 years, our family had a holiday home in Hermanus, and when it was sold, it left a gap in our holiday plans. We looked around for special places with character and charm and we stayed in some cabins and treehouses, but we felt the industry needed something new and totally unique to South Africa.

Like some entrepreneurs, we got help from family and luckily for us, we come from the events and film industry so lots of talented friends jumped in to help with our brand, décor and moral support.

We bought Treedom's 5-acre forest in April 2018 and started building in July 2018. The building was a huge feat as it's literally forest and thick bush. Pikes Construction made sure no vehicles were allowed to drive in the forest as we needed to preserve nature, only making small footpaths and keeping it as natural as possible.



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Phase 1 was completed in Aug 2019, which was the footpaths, water and electricity infrastructure, our home and the Treehouse Villa. The luxury Treehouse Villa is one of a kind - we are very proud to get the 'oohs and aahs' from guests on arrival.

Phase 2 consists of the 5 luxury Gypsy Vardos (wagons) and the pool and communal area. The Vardos will be the first of its kind in South Africa and we are so excited to start building in 2020.

Why Vardos, you might ask? We followed international building and holiday trends and saw that glamping and the tiny house movement growing at such a rate. We wanted to be ahead of the game and hit the market at the right time with something so quirky and magical that would appeal to many looking for a unique experience.

📌 **What is the core function of Treedom Villas and Vardos?**

Treedom is special and we offer a 'WOW' experience of relaxation and recreation. We want to assist guests with activities and share local secret spots and provide any help they need to make their holiday the best experience ever. We want to be the favourite destination and make new friends that keep coming back.



■ ***What are some of the obstacles you've had to overcome since starting out?***

Municipal approvals and lots of back and forth with no real support and proper advice for zoning and plans. We received some wrong advice, which caused us delays and unexpected costs and challenges which could have been avoided if authorities had engaged better.

My advice to anyone wanting to do a project like this is, you need to be resilient and resourceful and reach out to anyone you can to assist you. You also need to have a thick skin and do whatever it takes to get it done.

■ ***What advice would you give to other aspiring entrepreneurs?***

Never give up on your dreams - if it was easy, everyone would do it.

“ Our road has been a hard one but it has taught us many lessons. Be sure you get the right advice and remember it costs more than you think, build in a buffer in your business plan. ”

■ ***What has been your proudest achievement thus far?***

Every single guest that has come to Treedom has been asked to rate us on the various booking platforms. Each one of them has given us the highest ranking of “exceptional” every time with beautiful words to compliment us. Makes it all worth it.

Another huge achievement was/is building an eco-friendly site, chemical-free and self-sufficient, with our own water and striving to be off the grid and free from Eskom in the coming years.

■ ***What does the future of entrepreneurship look like to you?***

Phase 2 of our build is going to be very exciting with our Vardos. This time we have a lawyer and a much higher level architect to guide us and manage costs better. Thinking that we could manage all building costs ourselves was a mistake as things you never thought of pop up and cost money.



Get professional help, it may cost money but it will save you money in the long run. Not having the safety net of a salary makes you think of things very differently and you have to adjust your lifestyle to fit your new path, put everything you have back into your business to keep innovating and building on what you have.

■ ***What would you like to see changed in the South African startup landscape?***

We need greater support from both the community and the government and at the moment it seems very mysterious and how do we get that support and it's really tough to navigate from the peers and the government. It's not clear what can be supported. It needs to be introduced at school level. Kids don't know how to start a business, what it entails, and what does it mean.

■ ***What do you believe are the traits an entrepreneur needs in order to succeed?***

You must be passionate about what you are doing and believe in it wholeheartedly. It will be hard at times but you need to believe and have the drive to follow your dream to the end.

From our experience, your staff is your best asset and if they are happy they will help you build your dream. Include them and make them feel valued and they will give their all.

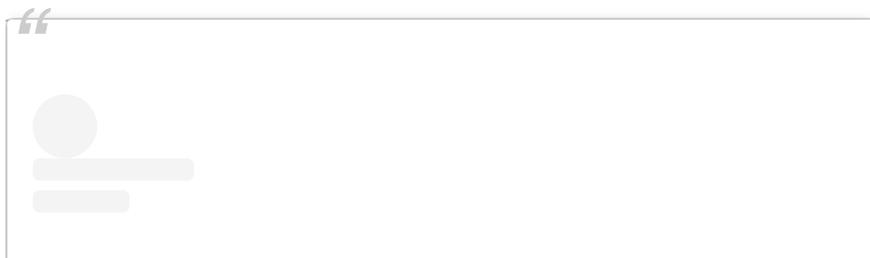
■ ***Tell us about your biggest struggles as an entrepreneur, as well as some major highlights.***

The feeling of loneliness is a big one, but being able to reach out to my sister, who is a very successful entrepreneur, was a blessing. Managing cash flow and managing the build remotely from CPT was a challenge as we had to finish our careers before moving to Treadom.

However, standing on the patio of the Treehouse Villa and looking over the forest, hugging my husband and saying, "we did it" was a very emotional moment. Being new entrepreneurs and building Treadom from scratch is the biggest highlight of our lives.

■ ***Why would you encourage someone to become an entrepreneur?***

For us, it was prior experience in the industry and our achievements along the way that fuelled this. We wanted freedom from the rat race and to control our finances. For me, my creativity was in full force and exploded whilst designing Treadom. Also the self-actualisation of this whole project.





[View this post on Instagram](#)



Read about the inspiration behind #Treedom, how it unfolded into a dream come true for Debs and Marc, and why you will fall in love with it too (Article link in bio). With even more magic coming in early 2020.

A post shared by Treedom Villas (@treedomvillas) on Nov 7, 2019 at 8:03pm PST



Where would you like to see Treedom Villas and Vardos in the next five years?

We would like to have achieved our goals of being the favourite fantasy holiday destination by upholding our core values of happiness, luxury and engaging experiences!

Also, to add in a borehole and hot tubs. We also want to be completely self-sustainable and give back to the community with free vegetables for those in need.

We would also like to provide jobs and training in self-sustainability for the underprivileged in the Langvele dunes and Wilderness community.

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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