

PROMOTION

# THEATRE ON WATER

*It's pure playful theatre against a splendid backdrop. Chic. Colourful. Filled with elements of surprise. The stage is an island surrounded by canals. Sound effects are provided by seagulls and lapping water. Elegant motorboats navigate slowly and theatrically by. The guests are relaxed extras.*

Gerard Scholtz





The Turbine Boutique Hotel & Spa on Thesen Island in Knysna transports you far away from a humdrum existence to become part of a production, a play, on water. The decor is a harbour, chimneys and cheerful little shops. And then there's the dramatic juxtaposition of a power station with its giant antique boilers, transformed, as though in a midnight fairytale, into a luxury hotel.

During my visit I couldn't escape these images. It really felt as though I had entered an elegant and colourful magical world on water, all the while being reminded of a rich industrial history that unfolds and surprises guests in all kinds of unexpected ways.

The Thesen family from Norway moved to an island in a lagoon near Knysna in 1870, where they erected a sawmill and power station that supplied towns as far away as Plettenberg Bay with electricity. The power station was fired with wood from the indigenous forests nearby. Around the 1980s there was great pressure by nature conservationists to stop the stripping of the forests. Developers took over Thesen Island and it was transformed from an industrial terrain to an iconic South African destination. The old power station with its huge boilers was converted into the luxury Turbine Boutique Hotel & Spa, an exceptional hotel with 24 suites.

**The old power station with its huge boilers was converted into the luxury Turbine Boutique Hotel & Spa, an exceptional hotel with 24 suites.**

It was only when I took a slow boat ride along the canals between the 19 little islands, all connected with bridges, that I grasped the extent of the entire development.

The original structure and materials were masterfully recycled by CMAI Architects. The heavy boilers, pipes, chimneys and other machinery



was used as a base, and the new eco-friendly hotel designed around it. Rainwater is collected here, hot water is the result of solar panels, taps are water saving and globes energy saving.

A symbiosis of warm pastel shades, hard industrial objects and fun furniture has been created, which is also soft on the eye. Visitors are welcomed in by these elements and they can spend hours hanging about in the reception rooms, the restaurant or gastro pub. The curious can explore the different levels and platforms between the boilers. Equipment, pipes and pressure gauges are incorporated in the passages to the suites, reminding you continuously of something extraordinary. But it's on entering your suite that your breath is taken away. Before you stretches a canvas of water, reflections, jetties and houses. I arrived early in the evening and I shall never forget that sight: mirror images of water and clouds in soft shades from grey to pale pink. I just had to rise early the next morning to watch the day break over the mountains and canals.

**It really felt as though I had entered an elegant and colourful magical world on water...**

At this time of the day, all is still, the light delicate and the water fragile.

The suites are spacious and luxurious. Each is individually decorated to reflect Knysna's rich history. My suite had gleaming wooden floors, framed photographs of the old sawmill and reproductions of ships, an old ship's chest and a mirror like a port window. From every corner of the room there are windows overlooking the canals, creating the effect of navigating on the water.

The hotel offers a range of activities and treats, including the renowned Amani African Spa. Boat and bicycle trips can be arranged, and there are many speciality shops for the shopping enthusiasts. I took a boat ride along the canals and finally to

The Heads and can recommend it highly.

When evening comes and the light acquires a pale pink glow and the reflection on the water has an added silver quality, then you know that the curtain will fall and rise again. Slowly and elegantly. And the enjoyment starts all over. [turbinehotel.co.za](http://turbinehotel.co.za)