

SIX WEEKS after devastating fires destroyed large tracts of indigenous forest, 1 059 homes and claimed the lives of eight people, I was invited to spend a few days in Knysna.

As a tourist I was not sure what to expect – we had watched in horror as the TV reports showed forest being consumed by flames and the agony of those who had lost everything.

From Buffalo Bay onwards, what was previously green hills of forest on either side of the N2 were charred remains of trees and blackened soil.

On entering the bridge that crosses the Knysna lagoon, I slowed to take in the damage caused by the fires. Twenty-five tourist establishments were destroyed and many of the houses immediately to the right of the bridge – going towards Brenton-on-Sea were destroyed, as were those on the left side towards Phantom Acres.

Miraculously, the town remained undamaged by the fires.

During the five days I visited Knysna, I realised none of the usual tourist attractions were affected by the disaster and I could enjoy good food and wine, relaxing, hiking, sunset cruising on the lagoon and shopping at the Waterfront.

On my first day I spent a few hours browsing the Waterfront and, as it was out of season, there weren't many tourists and most of the exclusive boutiques had half-price sales, making shopping affordable.

That afternoon I drove to see Noetzie Castles and managed to sneak into one as they are being renovated. Though left derelict for a few years, the views over the beach and lagoon are breathtaking.

I dined at a few restaurants and two that stood out were Freshline Fisheries in a semi-industrial area in the Railway Siding Dockyard and Totties Farm Kitchen on the Rhenendal road.

I was invited to stay at two hotels: The Moorings Premier Hotel at Knysna Heads and The Turbine on Thesen Island.

I must admit that driving into the hotel's grounds, my first impression was that it was an overnight stop for tourists to their final destination and not a destination on its own. My first impression turned out to be incorrect.

The Moorings is 3km from the centre of town, located on the banks of the Knysna Lagoon towards the Knysna Heads. The property is set on 4½ha of land, with one of those being lagoon, managed by SANParks. The park-like grounds have pine trees providing a fairy-tale like setting for the children's play area with tables and benches where families can enjoy a picnic under trees.



The famous Knysna Lagoon Cruise.

Knysna's disaster fails to dampen its spirit

Garden Route town's hotels roll out the welcome mat, writes **Sarene Kloren**

The extra-large large swimming pool has plenty of loungers and there is enough space for everyone to enjoy themselves.

The accommodation includes one- and two-bedroom suites and 14 large two-bedroomed luxury lagoon front villas which are fully equipped and perfect for a family holiday.

The strict security at the entrance ensures children can move around the large resort freely without parents being concerned about their whereabouts. The villas offer a self-catering option or guests can dine in a relaxed atmosphere at the resort's Salmon Restaurant, which offers breakfast, lunch and dinner.

The relaxed bar area offers a selection of beers, spirits, wines and speciality coffees and is the perfect spot to relax in front of the fireplace while reading a book.

My second stop was The Turbine Boutique Hotel and Spa on Thesen Island. This heritage



The Turbine Hotel Island Café.

building used to be a power station and the turbines were left to form part of the hotel's décor. The building was erected in 1939 and produced enough power for Eskom to supply Knysna and Plettenberg Bay before it was closed in 2001.

Unusual industrial instruments and contraptions from the old

power station are incorporated throughout the building – making for brilliant artistic photography.

There is an impressive display from the Knysna Fine Art Gallery on display throughout the corridors and communal areas, which are for sale.

The Turbine Water Club have partnered with various Knysna

adventure companies to offer activities including guided walks through the forest, cycle tours, kayaking around the lagoon and paragliding.

The hotel has two motorised pontoon barges seating up to 10 people and I enjoyed a scenic champagne and canapé sunset cruise from Thesen Island to the Knysna Heads.

Dining at the hotel's restaurant – The Island Café – is popular among guests and locals. The food is excellent, with meals served all day. The dinner menu changes often and has something for everyone.

While you are in Knysna, don't miss a visit to the SANParks regional office on Thesen Island where visitors can see the endangered Knysna sea horses being bred in captivity.

My road trip was made possible by MLS Car Hire. Founded in 2002, the company is actively managed and owned by its founder, Janet Pillai.



MLS Car Hire provided the wheels for the trip.

WIN WIN WIN WIN WIN WIN

WIN!! To win a two-night car hire experience valued at R1 000, email your details to competitions@hippocommunications.com.

To win this competition, a valid driving licence must be provided. Times and dates for the vehicle use will be discussed with the winner.

ARTSCAPE THEATRE CENTRE OM/02/10718835
Dial-A-Seat 421 7695
Box Office 421 7839 Book at **Computicket**
www.artscape.co.za

The Delphic Council of South Africa presents **OPERA HOUSE**
25 August 2017 @19:30

THE 2017 NATIONAL DELPHIC COMEDY CHAMPIONSHIPS

"The World needs comedy more than ever. Come see a comedian from each province of South Africa contend for gold, silver and bronze and a chance to compete at the International Delphic Comedy Championships"