

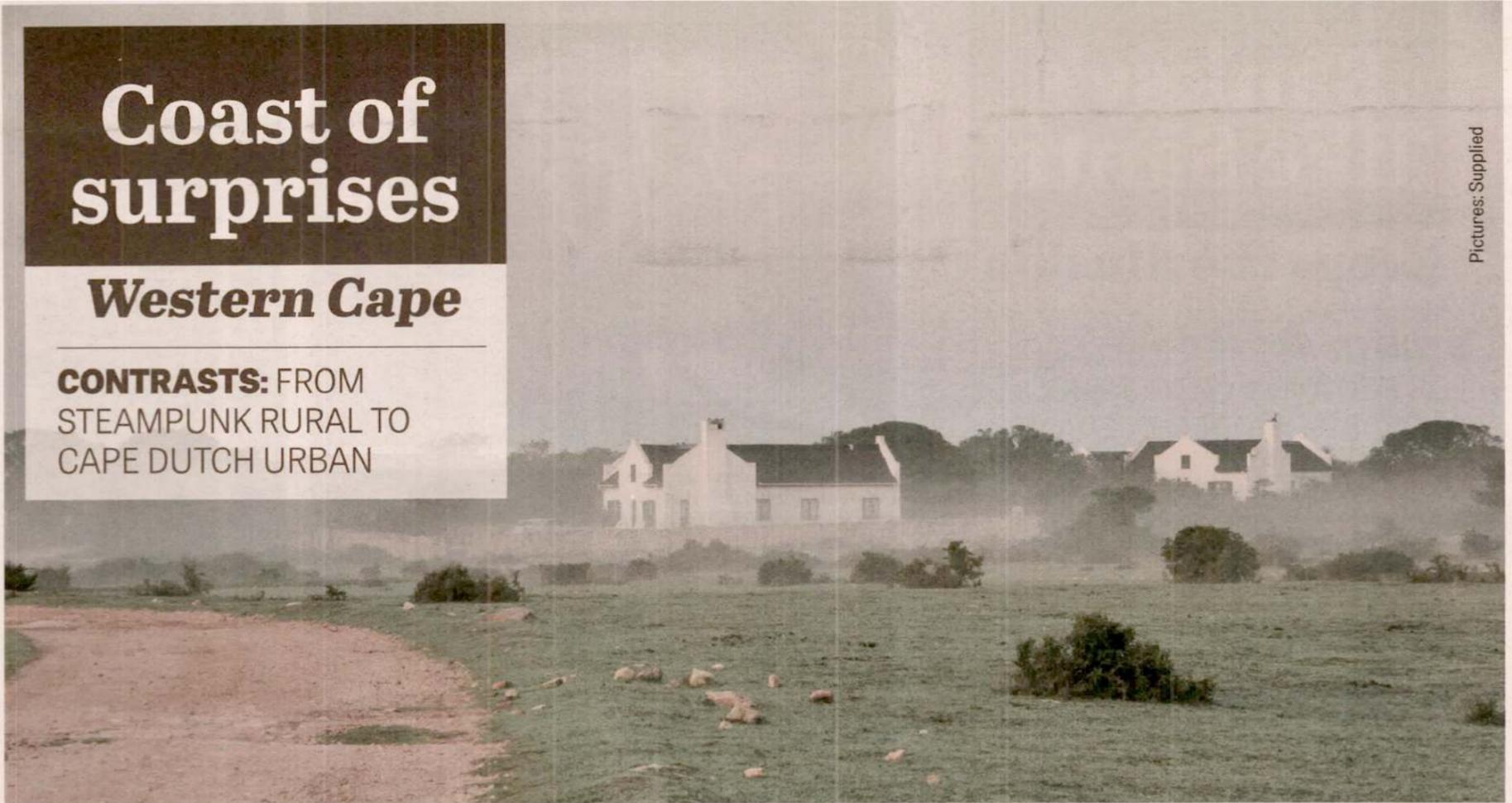
Publication		
SATURDAY CITIZEN - TRAVEL		
Page	Date	AVE (ZAR)
7	Sat 01 June 2019	23945



# Coast of surprises

## Western Cape

**CONTRASTS: FROM STEAMPUNK RURAL TO CAPE DUTCH URBAN**



Pictures: Supplied

**Helen Grange**

**B**oldly clinging to its heritage stretching back to 1800s colonial farmers, Knysna feels like a living museum, prettily perched above its picturesque harbour.

But I felt the harbour was marred by the Thesen Islands development, a Legoland of colonial maritime-style homes that seem to be at odds with Knysna as a whole. That being said, once you've crossed the arched causeway onto Thesen Islands, a laid-back holiday feeling instantly dispels the moaning Minnie in you as you wander around the eateries and swanky shops dotted around a gentle waterfront. And it's here you want to be if you're indeed on holiday.

In particular, you want to be at the Turbine Boutique Hotel and Spa, which must be one of the coolest hotel concepts I've come across in my extensive travels. This is because the Turbine used to be Knysna's main power station, so you're surrounded by massive turbines in the reception area, and on the ground and first floors – steel pipes and pillars, vividly painted in reds, blues, greens and oranges, that form the essence of Turbine's seriously steampunk appeal.

All sorts of unusual instruments and contraptions are dotted around the hotel and will keep engineers, scientists and curious visitors fascinated for hours. The rooms are also shaped around its industrial past, each with individualised décor, with the industrial backdrop of bare bricks and whitewashed walls softened by a playfulness in the décor.

And despite the constraints of working within a heritage building, all the rooms feel remarkably spacious and airy. Six of them have balconies with views

over Knysna Lagoon, and two have baths with a view over the island's canals. There's a honeymoon suite too, with a balcony overlooking the swimming pool.

For sit-down meals, the Island Café has a lovely terrace for *al fresco* dining and an airy interior where colourful chairs embrace impressive olde worlde machinery. The food here is good, so along with its Gastro Pub, the Turbine has built up a loyal local following which keeps it going through low seasons.

And as they say, if you want good value, follow the locals. Suffice to say, I just loved this art installation of a hotel.

On the way to Cape Town, in the Overberg region overlooking De Hoop vlei, is the well-known De Hoop Nature Reserve, a World Heritage Site and one of the Cape's last unspoiled gems near the southern-most tip of Africa, a 36 000 hectare tapestry of sea, sand dunes, vlei and fynbos. So if you're a Cape nature lover, you can't miss a stay here in the De Hoop Collection, a homestead of original farm buildings and lodgings that have been beautifully restored and decorated with Overberg farmhouse furniture.

De Hoop, a member of Cape Country Routes, offers world-class whale-watching and is paradise for bird enthusiasts with its more than 260 species of birds, including the endangered Cape vultures. Cape vultures are seen as a real asset in the Overberg area, and interestingly, they no longer scavenge on natural prey such as the eland and bontebok that occur in numbers throughout De Hoop Nature Reserve, instead feeding on livestock carcasses on the surrounding farms.

De Hoop's guides accompany groups to a well-appointed lookout point in the mountains, where you are close enough to see the Cape vultures – huge, impressive birds with a wingspan of about two and a half metres, as they cruise by,



### info

#### Specials

- ▶ Turbine Boutique Hotel and Spa is offering two specials valid until September 30 – less 50% for a two-night stay and less 55% for a three-night stay. Call 044-302-5746 or e-mail [reservations@turbinehotel.co.za](mailto:reservations@turbinehotel.co.za)
- ▶ De Hoop Collection is offering a 40% off special on a six-sleeper cottage (self catering), valid until July 31 for R1900 per night (usual price R3 171). Phone 021-422-4522 or e-mail [res@dehoopcollection.co.za](mailto:res@dehoopcollection.co.za)

sometimes so close you can hear the wind rushing under their wings. The utmost care has been taken that this vantage point is far enough removed so the nesting pairs are not disturbed.

The vulture excursion starts at 9am and includes an hour-long hike to get to the vulture deck, so



guests and day visitors who want to participate have to be at least 12 years old and reasonably fit.

Other activities include interpretive marine walks, hiking and mountain biking trails. De Hoop Vlei, with its bird, game, otter and even porcupine sightings, can be experienced on the daily eco cruise. For day trippers looking for lunch, the exciting news is that The Fig Tree restaurant, a staple of De Hoop's dining scene, has been transformed and re-invented,

and has moved a short distance away to a new venue, The Shed, a transformation of the old maintenance/sheep shearing shed built by the original farmer here in the 1800s.

The restaurant is open from 8am to 9pm, and on the menu is a variety of dishes using locally sourced produce, in keeping with a focus on living a healthy lifestyle. A three-course set menu at R325 per person is on offer until the end of September.