



The small Free State town of Rosendal, situated in a valley surrounded by the Witteberge, epitomises laid-back rural charm

# ROSENDAL

Head off along the R70 and you'll find Rosendal wedged between Senekal and Ficksburg in the scenic Eastern Free State. The place doesn't have the same commercial vibe as Clarens, but lots of that same small-town artsy charm (and some part-time locals say it's a mini-Clarens in the making). The gorgeous scenery, unpretentious lifestyle and interesting neighbours has seen Sandtonistas (and some of Gauteng's finest creatives) buying up property in Rosendal – with some of them even taking up permanent residence. It was originally a farming town and, although agriculture still plays a role, weekend tourism (particularly from Gauteng) has picked up as an alternative source of income for the locals.

The place might be laid-back in a one-horse town sort of way – but has always been on the geographical radar. The San and Koi people first inhabited the Eastern Free State, living off the land and the abundant game in the region. Then great African chiefs such as Shaka, Dingaan and Mzilikazi laid claim to this part of the world – as did the Voortrekkers as they made their Great Trek towards the Transvaal. Many of them stayed, and by the 1830s the region was occupied by the Trekboers who were instrumental in the progress of this agricultural heartland. After the arrival of Piet Retief to the region (1837) a Boer Republic was established but in actual fact, Rosendal only became a bona fide municipality in 1914 when the widow of a certain Phillip Botha was given permission to name the town.

She, and her little son Hansie chose Rosendal, meaning 'rose valley' – for obvious reasons. In modern times, among those mesmerised by the beauty of this valley have been *7de Laan* actor Chris van Niekerk. He opened the Rosendal Teater almost five years ago and has attracted some of the country's top performers to the sleepy town. Names like Elize Cawood, Lizz Meiring and Elzabe Zietsman are regulars to the tiny dorp. Not letting any opportunities slip by, van Niekerk and his business partner Frik De Jager, also opened up Die Ou Handelshuis en Koffiestoep alongside the theatre, adding a new dimension to the entertainment offering in Rosendal. These days, Sandtonistas visit the town on a regular basis. It's the ideal haunt for city dwellers – it takes just three (sometimes four) hours to get there before being surrounded by good old country charm and home-grown Eastern Free State hospitality with a touch of the dramatic thrown in for good measure.

## Stay

The Rosendal Country Estate (aka 'The Rosendal') is a country retreat that offers 17 double luxury rooms and bathrooms en-suite. Ideal for romantic autumn evenings with fireplaces, underfloor heating and electric blankets. There are also family units available so you can bring the kids along too (it's also a renowned wedding venue). Another guest house worth considering is House Beautiful, a restored sandstone dwelling with six en-suite bedrooms boasting names such as Myrrh, Frankincense, Calamus and the like. There is also a 'sonstoep' called the Cinnamon Room where breakfast is held and you can enjoy lunches and dinners in the Aloe (dining) room. Three of the bedrooms are in the main house and the other three are situated in the annex. You can cook our own meals in the modern kitchen in the main house, but bed and breakfast are also offered – a bona fide farmhouse breakfast is always on the menu. If you're looking for a comfortable B&B that is well priced and homely, then Inglesby's B&B down Van der Merwe Street is a good bet. The B&B is located in an historical sandstone building that dates back to 1913. The building started out as a lawyer's office, then became the local bank and is now a sought-after home away from home. There are four modest en-suite bathrooms to choose from and home-cooked meals are available on request. Gaffie se Gastehuis is a three-bedroomed self-catering guest house close to the Rosendal Teater. This unassuming

spot also has a garden cottage consisting of two fully-equipped garden rooms – it's not quite the Ritz-Carlton, but it's comfortable enough for an inexpensive weekend away. There are also various options available where you can rent an entire house to yourself for the weekend and take along a bunch of friends for a good old-fashioned weekend opskop.

**Details:** *The Rosendal Country Estate*, from R550 per person per night incl. breakfast, tel (078) 801-9460, info@therosendal.co.za; *Inglesby's B&B*, from R225 per person excluding breakfast, tel (058) 211-0753, 083-759-6777; *House Beautiful*, from R350 per person per night and R275 per person sharing excluding breakfast, tel 083-632-2600; *Gaffie se Gastehuis*, from R190 per person per night, tel 082-805-8105, rosendal@gaffie.co.za

### Suzani gallery



## Eat & drink

Die Ou Handelshuis Koffiestoep is something of an institution in Rosendal. Open daily from 7am to 5pm and on Friday and Saturday evenings, it's the perfect spot for a good coffee with a few Vrystaat specialities. The Rosendal is also a popular place for dinners and lunches and dedicated chef Van Heerden Haasbroek prepares authentic boerekos with a twist (using the best of local produce from surrounding farms). For a home-cooked meal, Nelmarie Inglesby from Inglesby's B&B will also prepare a meal for out-of-town guests, but needs to have fair prior warning. She's known to be a dab hand in the kitchen and provides locally-inspired meals with flair. If you are planning on going the self-catering route, it's advised that you do a good shop beforehand as there is no local version of Woolworths just down the drag. There is a Spar in Ficksburg, but you're not always guaranteed of quality produce.

For drinks, the Terrace Bar at The Rosendal is a good bet, and while it's far from the vineyards of the Cape, some wonderful choices are available. One of the hidden secrets of the area is the Waya Waya Tavern in Mautse – the cheapest place in the Eastern Free State for beers with a good vibe to boot.

**Details:** *Die Ou Handelshuis Koffiestoep*, tel (058) 211-0902; *The Rosendal*, tel 078-801-9460, info@therosendal.co.za; *Inglesby's B&B*, tel (058) 211-0753. *If you're planning on going to Mautse just ask any of the locals and they'll tell you where Waya Waya is, or if you need to make contact beforehand, call Jacob, tel 083-585-8182*

Edited by Denise Slabbert



## Play

Rosendal is a great place to seek out little treasures you won't find anywhere else. A good place to start is the Meerkatkolonie Art Gallery that belongs to photographer Dahla Hulme (who creates functional décor pieces) and artist Michele Nigrini. There is also a fantastic gift shop situated alongside the gallery. Turksvy Trading is another noteworthy spot where you'll find a host of collectibles: anything and everything ranging from pinball machines to 'kitchenalia' including dinner sets, assorted tins, cookware and ornaments. Owner Sandra Lemmer also has Enamel (a shop that has a unique collection of new and antique enamel pots and pans in gorgeous pastel



Die Ou Handelshuis Koffiestoep

shades) and Suzani, one of the few places in the country that sells Suzani wall hangings and textiles crafted by women in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. You can also check out Black Anvil Messe and purchase Simon Streichner's homemade knives (by appointment only). It's worth visiting the Green Goose Organic Farm in Ficksburg for goose down duvets and pillows at ridiculously good prices. There are also numerous traditional antique shops in the offing in Rosendal. If you're self-catering for the weekend a great place to stock up is at the Melkstal, where you can buy creamy milk, old-fashioned farm butter, homemade cheeses as well as droewors and biltong. Note that it's worthwhile visiting the asparagus and cherry farms in nearby Ficksburg for your fill of the freshest asparagus and cherries.

When it comes to entertainment, make sure you visit the famous Rosendal Teater – it's a good idea to book early if somebody famous is in town. The theatre offers a dining and entertainment combined option, which is great for a big night out. If you love the great outdoors, then there are numerous walks and hiking trails on offer including the Mosamane hiking trail, which begins in the foothills of the Maluti mountains. The trail is located near the Lesotho border and is a great base for day trips to Katse Dam. There are also numerous San rock art sites in the area. There are mountain bike trails, and horse-riding and game drives are also options. There are also occasional festivals and special weekends to look out for, and next year Rosendal will be commemorating its centenary year with much joy and celebration.

**Details:** *Rosendal Teater*, tel (058) 211 0902; *Turksvy Trading*, Sandra Lemmer, tel 082-371-2137, (058) 211-0906; for information on Suzani, www.suzani.co.za; *Meerkatkolonie*, tel 082-458-0996, *Mosamane hiking trail*, tel Betsie 082-572-2042

## ROSENDAL INFO

For general information on Rosendal, visit:  
www.rosendalinfo.co.za