

## LIFESTYLE

WORDS: RIEKIE HUMAN :: PHOTOS: CHRIS MEINTJES, SUPPLIED

# The name of the rose



It's not for nothing that the privileged travellers who've ventured into the small town of Rosendal in the Eastern Free State want to keep it to themselves



Much of Rosendal's charm stems from its being virtually undiscovered by the tourism industry. We're talking picture-perfect *stofstraatjies*, one restaurant (its breakfasts and lunches are legendary, but it's only open on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights), breathtaking scenery and a rustic way of life that seems almost too good to be true.

But it is, and many of the town's inhabitants once wound down this road on holiday, only to vow never to leave it again. First-timers quickly adjust their internal clocks to that of Rosendal's — which is pretty slow. Sure, the potent coffee served by the inimitable Lientjie Janse van Rensburg — a self-confessed, card-carrying coffee addict who drinks 13 to 14 cups a day — at Rosa Restaurant is sufficient to speed up your heart rate enough to sprint up and down the dusty streets on a mountain bike, but apart from that your days will probably be spent in respectful quietude, reading on Rosa's stoep, with one eye on the comings and goings of the handful of locals and their motley crew of dogs.

This is all part of the town's appeal, and the reason for city folk's flocking to it. "It's so peaceful; unlike Clarens, which feels like a second Johannesburg these days,"



says Lientjie, who was born and bred in Rosendal and has no intention of ever leaving.

"While it's mostly quiet around here, long weekends are something to behold," says Hanli Deysel, or "Jurgie", as she's known among the locals, "and come New Year's Eve it's not uncommon for tents to be erected to accommodate all the extra visitors."

With many good and modestly priced self-catering establishments to choose from, such as the sandstone haven of House Beautiful, and the fact that it's close enough to towns such as Senekal and Ficksburg to stock up on supplies, Rosendal is the ideal home from home getaway. And for those with a travel bee in their bonnet, Golden Gate Highlands National Park is less than a two-hour drive away.

Staying put is perfectly understandable too, but then swing past Studio Ben, where Henk and André Loots rent out mountain bikes.

Be sure also to check out her kelims and weave-work, buy some of her home-made soap and admire what is arguably the most beautiful garden in town.

Then there's the weekly highlight of pizza night — every Thursday at Rosa Restaurant. It gives any authentic city pizzeria a run for its money, and there's a

## DIARY

**Love Rosendal Festival:** held in February every year, this festival is brimful of good food, creative energy, entertainment and, of course, a nod in Cupid's direction. [rosendalinfo.co.za/love-rosendal-festival](http://rosendalinfo.co.za/love-rosendal-festival)

**Hot Stuff Winter Festival:** this year's installment of this winter warmer of a gathering is scheduled for the weekend of 7-9 August. "We're going to yarn-bomb the town. The plan is to knit loads of squares and make blankets for those in need. And that's just the start of it all," says Sam Yeowart, known as Rosendal's "hoofmeisie", thanks to her involvement in just about every happening there.

Like the Rosendal Facebook page for Hot Stuff updates: [facebook.com/RosendalTheatre](https://facebook.com/RosendalTheatre).

collection of hard tack that would do both the Scots and the Irish proud: Lagavulin, 18-year-old Talisker and Tullamore Dew. Add the roaring fire, fairy lights hanging whimsically over Rosa's wire sign and the merry band of locals and tourists and you're in for a treat.

For the culturally minded, the sprinkling of local art studios is a must, including Willem Pretorius's Skoppelmaai Studio and Michèle Nigrini's Meerkatkolonie. Every six weeks there's a drama or musical to be watched at the quirky theatre right next to Rosa's.

The more actively inclined are well catered for too. The Mosamane route just beyond Rosendal passes through 7.5km of picturesque scenery — complete with caves — and is well worth the effort.

Whether you make it a pit stop en route to the Drakensberg, a weekend getaway or an extended stay away from the city, Rosendal is the kind of town where your creative juices can't help but flow.

Says Hanli: "On the one hand, there's the beautiful silence that allows you to concentrate intensely; and on the other hand, we really know how to throw a good party."

**“We could be like any other small town, but we’re not. We have extraordinary people who do extraordinary things in our extraordinary little town”**

*Sam Yeowart*

#### NEED TO KNOW

##### Tourist info:

rosendalinfo.co.za

##### Rosa Restaurant:

058 211 0902

##### House Beautiful:

083 632 2600

housebeautiful.co.za

##### Bike hire:

058 211 0629

henkloots@lantic.net

##### Mosamane hiking route:

082 389 2254

mosamane@absamail.co.za

## TRAVEL

# In with the new — as well as the old

With its eclectic mix of age-old sandstone buildings and smattering of modern-day design sensibility, the tiny town of Rosendal boasts plenty of architectural eye candy

WORDS: RIEKIE HUMAN :: PHOTOS: SUPPLIED



#### THE INSIDE SCOOP

We asked local estate agent Zaria de Villiers from Zaria de Villiers Properties why holiday-home buyers should consider Rosendal.



#### What does Rosendal offer property buyers from Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal?

The town's tranquillity is its main drawcard. Children play in the street while their parents go for long walks or simply put up their feet and relax. House prices remain low if you consider how much space you get for your money. You can easily buy a large family home for less than R1m. Proximity is another boon — Johannesburg is about three hours' drive away and Bethlehem is less than an hour away by car.

#### Has there been a rise in interest in property in the town?

We have definitely received more enquiries, but the market is still fairly slow.

#### How does Rosendal retain its desirable small-town character?

We seem to attract like-minded, creative people. You either “get” Rosendal or you don't. There aren't any property developments on the horizon, nor are there shopping malls or townhouse estates, which helps the town preserve its rural identity. But we welcome new residents in a supportive, close community. [rosendal-properties.co.za](http://rosendal-properties.co.za)



Douglas Mason, a Canadian freelance journalist, predominantly works in other African countries but has based himself in Rosendal. “An unusual choice, I suppose,” says Mason, “but when I stumbled on it by accident, it spoke to me right away.” So, he bought the building that used to house the town's bank and transformed it into the kind of home that would tempt even the hardest city slickers to decamp to the *platteland*.

Douglas says the bones of this 112-year-old building were more than good enough and that it is a good example of the sandstone buildings so typical of the Free State.

“There were many original features that hadn't been lost over the years to poor design or makeover decisions, so it was a real gift to find it as is and to be able to bring it back to life,” he says.

Highlights include the original sandstone colonnade, full-length windows, high (3.9m) pressed-tin ceilings, original window and door casings and antique

hardware. And what's more, the walk-in safe with steel door and metre-thick concrete walls is still intact.

Staying true to the original features, he restored as much as possible, and where fittings needed to be replaced, he sourced them from architectural salvage depots around the country.

On the other end of the spectrum, modern abodes such as those designed by architect Daniel van der Merwe have the look and feel of a farmhouse but make use of materials such as lightweight steel frames and Vermont planking (cellulose mixed with cement).

And then there's Hanli Deysel's home. She needed a cost-effective solution for withstanding the freezing Free State winter, and so she teamed up with Philip Nel, an engineer from Bloemfontein whose forte is modular housing systems.

It works like this: it is custom designed to the owner's preferences but makes use of discrete segments reminiscent of container homes. Raised

slightly off the ground, Hanli's house has wooden floors — “I went plain and simple, with scaffolding planks” — and a fabulous northern facade made entirely of glass.

Thanks to overhanging roof segments, she gets warming sunlight in winter and no direct sunlight in the scorching summer months.

Other impressive components include a solar-panel geyser, the option to add another storey in future, as well as the delightful fact that many of the fitted features were scavenged for reuse, such as the enamel bath that hails from a scrapyards in Bloemfontein and the sliding doors of the northern facade that used to be a shopfitting at Truworths.

It is hardly surprising that Hanli says she couldn't be happier here: “When I've been away for a few days and come home, my face pretty much turns red and flushed with excitement as I drive down my street.”

For more on Philip Nel's modular homes, visit [inizio.co.za](http://inizio.co.za).

**“There's definitely a sense of soul and a sense of place in Rosendal. It's an oddly cosmopolitan town but is also very close to the reality of the country. I love Johannesburg and Cape Town, but I don't want to avoid South Africa's hard edges; I want to know them”**

*Douglas Mason, freelance journalist*

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