



Turbine



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Bungalow



# BEACH BREAK

Do December hols differently in Plett & Knysna

Words Carrie Hampton

The urge to travel south or east from Mpumalanga, Gauteng and Cape Town to the Garden Route coast in December can be likened to that of Tanzania's great wildebeest migration. In both cases, instinct kicks in, propelling each towards the bliss they seek.

I, too, have this impulse for the good life of sun, sea and sand, with Plettenberg Bay and Knysna my favourite des-res destinations. My friend Rosie always hires a villa but has taken to spending the last week of each holiday in a hotel. She claims her right to "down tools," absolving herself of planning, cooking and entertaining.

Two favourites hotels of the moment are The Bungalow Plett, part of the Raw Africa boutique collection, a literal stone's throw from Plettenberg Bay's main beach; and Knysna's Turbine Hotel and Spa on the water's edge of Thesen Island.

With curiosity peaked and knowing Rosie's high standards for pleasure and comfort, I went to see what appealed to her about these two very different hotels and what to do differently in their vicinity.

## **Plettenberg Bay**

Lit by neon and dressed in turquoise, The Bungalow boutique hotel embraces a laid-back beachy feel – how could it not – with Plett's powder white beach mere metres from the entrance. Choose a room at the front or a

family apartment right at the top, where sea-view terraces bring on the desired state of mind. The plunge pool may be disappointingly small, but the Indian Ocean right opposite is infinitely large. The hotel is at the other end of Central Beach to Beacon Isle – standing sentinel on a rock in the ocean – and where all the marine excursion booking offices are found.

I plucked up the courage to swim with seals with Offshore Adventures. Not so confident in deep water, my apprehension was palpable. Still, my fear dissipated the moment I plunged my masked and snorkelled head into the water and stared into big round eyes. The seals were checking me out and turning somersaults all around me. Half an hour of their playful frolicking left me childishly exhilarated, and the boat's high-speed beach landing increased the adrenaline. I was on a high all day.

Like seals, I prefer my fish raw, and the Bungalow's sushi quickly became my favourite go-to meal, accompanied by an icy lime Margherita. They suggested I drink my next cocktail at their big sister hotel Sky Villa, at the top of the hill behind Old Nick Shopping Village. Down-to-earth General Manager of Raw Africa hotel group Paul Duverge has ensured that the 5-star Sky Villa is accessible to locals, with an unpretentious, affordable menu, pensioner's specials and movie nights. And,

surprisingly, it's a rock concert venue too! Ard Matthews of Just Ginger fame walked by before playing his sunset gig that very night, as have other big names like Mathew Mole and Arno Carstens. Even without the entertainment, Sky Villa is entrancing for sea views stretching from Keurbooms river mouth all the way to the Robberg peninsula. When tired of looking at the vista, do a Rosie and sit by the vast blue pool with pink drink in hand.

I need a bit more activity, so I'd arranged to go on the Kalandar Kloof Fynbos walk in Nature's Valley, guided by a conservation scientist from the non-profit Nature's Valley Trust. It enlightens outdoor enthusiasts and school groups by explaining their cutting-edge conservation work and ecological research while wandering through protected areas full of indigenous species. The Knysna turaco suitably made several flashy appearances.

The most rewarding bird experience in Plett for families is Birds of Eden in The Crag. With a vision that only comes with a touch of madness, the owners of Monkeyland – the world's first free-roaming multi-species primate sanctuary – created another first with the largest free-flight aviary for rescued birds. These two special sanctuaries are next to each other, and nearby is Jukani Wildlife Sanctuary, giving forever homes to rescued big cats. Together they form SAASA – The South African Animal Sanctuary Alliance – whose high ethical principles raise them above less honourable outfits.

#### Knysna

Steam-punk décor doesn't come more genuine than The Turbine Hotel on Thesen Island in Knysna. Paying homage to its industrial roots as a power station, huge furnaces and brightly painted pipes determine the layout of rooms and provide some unusual eating spaces. The transformation from function to art inspires exhibitions of artworks for sale around the hotel, regularly refreshed by Knysna Fine Art Gallery and affording some great selfie moments.

I would have thought it was a bit too funky for Rosie until I saw my gorgeous room overlooking the water channels and exclusive water's edge homes of the ever-so-smart Thesen Island development. High heels impede walking the gangplank down to the Turbine's Water Club jetty to board a lagoon sunset cruise, so opt for flatties! Oysters and champagne for adults and crumbed and marinated platters for the family keep everyone happy.

Wanting to do the Circles in the Forest walk in the Goudveld section of Garden Route National Park, I packed walking shoes, but a pair of tekkies will suffice, and a Wild Card or small fee gives access. Sue Swain, the founder of BioWise, themes her guided walks here on



## out'n about

#### Plett

The Bungalow Plett and Sky Villa – [rawafricaboutiquecollection.co.za](http://rawafricaboutiquecollection.co.za)  
 Offshore Adventures – [offshore-adventures.co.za](http://offshore-adventures.co.za)  
 Nature's Valley Trust – [naturevalleytrust.co.za](http://naturevalleytrust.co.za)  
 SAASA: Birds of Eden, Monkeyland, Jukani Wildlife Sanctuary – [saasa.org.za](http://saasa.org.za)  
 Ocean safaris – [Plett-tourism.co.za/activity/ocean-safaris](http://Plett-tourism.co.za/activity/ocean-safaris)  
 Ocean Blue Adventures – [oceanadventures.co.za](http://oceanadventures.co.za)

#### Knysna

The Turbine Hotel – [turbinehotel.co.za](http://turbinehotel.co.za)  
 Knysna Fine Art Gallery – [fine-arts.co.za](http://fine-arts.co.za)  
 BioWise – [biowise.org.za](http://biowise.org.za)  
 East Head Café – [eastheadcafe.co.za](http://eastheadcafe.co.za)  
 Nutrilicious Kitchen – [nutriliciouskitchen.co.za](http://nutriliciouskitchen.co.za)  
 Garden Route National Park – [sanparks.org](http://sanparks.org)

biomimicry, commonly associated with copying shape, form or processes from nature for better design and technology; like how the Japanese bullet train replicated the shape of a kingfisher's beak to stop the sonic boom. But Sue's walks serve a greater purpose of reconnecting with, learning from, and emulating nature. So she offers two options; a walk focused on the magical hidden life of the forest and another more spiritual journey of sensory bathing, mindful breathing and re-discovering a sense of self.

In this newfound state of mindfulness, drive to the top of Knysna Heads to view the expansive views with a new sense of awe. Only daring or experienced yachtsmen brave the treacherous passage from the sea into Knysna lagoon through the narrow gap between steep-sided cliffs. Witness all the moods of this choppy strait in comfort from the popular East Head Café, whose tables perch on the rocky sea edge. Unfortunately, they don't take bookings, so take your chances, or go early or late.

You need to book ahead for a very different food experience that will make your whole family healthier and wiser. Dr Geraldine's interactive cooking workshops in various Knysna venues, or even your own kitchen, are based on her Nutrilicious way of eating a plant-based diet, free of refined foods. Integrating her background as an advanced nutrition mentor, doctor of homoeopathy and qualified chef, she creates dishes so delicious that you quickly become inspired to forge a new and healthier relationship with food.

Her book *Nutrilicious Kitchen – The Heart & Art of Nutrition* is sold out in hard copy but available in an online edition.

There's so much more to Plett and Knysna than is possible to explore in a short visit, but Rosie's indulgent philosophy of a hotel stay to polish off a Garden Route holiday migration has real merit. Add excursions in nature, a dash of adventure and some self-discovery into the mix, and it's my new ideal way to handle the school break in style.



