

YOUR WEEKEND

Garden Route hidden gem 'a very perfect place'

Majestic and historical Portland Manor offers farm getaway par excellence



HOMELY ELEGANCE: Step away in time, amid beautiful scenery, to Portland Manor Country Hotel

Image: SUPPLIED

It is possible to find the perfect farm getaway without having to drive for hours on a dirt road to get there.

It's far away enough from the town of Knysna but also close enough to enjoy some of the activities that earned the town the title of "Best Dorpie" in the 2022 Kfm Best of Cape Awards.

Situated in Rheenendal, Portland Manor Country Hotel is truly the perfect farm getaway.

The majestic historical country estate and hotel are situated in the foothills of the Outeniqua Mountain.

When we arrived, we were met by the estate's scenic and peaceful surroundings and also immediately fell in love with beautiful Portland Manor.

With an easy check-in system and efficient and friendly hosts, it all took less than five minutes.

When we stepped into our room it felt like we were on the set of a movie with its beautiful antique furnishings, but with added modern comforts.

Thereafter, we were able to explore 212 hectares of pure undisturbed wilderness with ease and as nature lovers, we got to enjoy the mix of ancient trees and the rich birdlife that the region is known for.

Portland Manor PR and marketing manager Jeannine Orzechowski said the history of the manor dated back to 1819 when George Rex bought a portion of Leeuwenbosch farm (De Poort) from Salomon Terblanche and renamed it Portland.

“After George Rex's death in 1839, his properties were put up for sale under the terms of his will and Portland was bought by Thomas Henry Duthie.

“In 1842, Henry Barrington, 12th son of the 5th Viscount Barrington, arrived in the Cape and journeyed to Knysna.

“He brought with him lavish household items from England, which included a grand piano and a chandelier, and was on the lookout for the perfect home in which to place them.

“He purchased the Portland farm from Duthie and set out to transform the estate into a ‘very perfect place’.

“In 1863, Henry Barrington built the farm’s first house, styled after the manor houses of England, with a traditional cow byre.

“Unfortunately, both were badly damaged in the Great Fire of 1869, but repairs began immediately, and the cowshed was completed in 1874 with an iron roof replacing the original thatch.”



POSTCARD PERFECT: Portland Manor Country Hotel's magnificent gardens surrounded by nature at its best

Image: SUPPLIED

Orzechowski said in later years, Bunny Newdigate’s Jersey cows were milked there but it was upgraded by her grandnephew and previous owner into a restaurant named The Pack House.

“Taking it back to its heritage, the present owners of Portland named their new eatery The Cowshed.”

Though we visited the establishment on one of the coldest weekends of 2022, we got to escape the bustle of city life and unwind with long chat’s next to the fireplace at the unpretentious The Cowshed restaurant, which is perched above

the manicured lawns of the estate adjacent to the hotel, looking across the Lawnwood Dam.

It's a rustic building with exposed trusses in the double volume interior and quarry tiles on the floor.

The doors open wide onto a sunny terrace anchored on each end by two wood-burning ovens which take centre stage in the preparation and delivery of Chef Desmond Morgan's menus.

Dining at The Cowshed was an experience with the chefs cooking right in front of you.

We got to enjoy an evening of excellent food and the vibe felt so warm and homely, with the chef checking up on us and the staff at the restaurant making sure all our needs were catered for.



FIRESIDE MENU: The Cowshed's chef, Desmond Morgan

Image: SUPPLIED

The menu itself is small and seasonal, but Morgan has made an effort to meet local produce suppliers and believes it's important to support them.

“We’re in this together. The journey of discovery of local farmers and suppliers gets me excited.

“All around us are fruit and nut orchards, dairies, and artisans.

“My wooden items were all made by a local craftsman.

“All our produce comes from local fruit and veggie shops and from our own garden, local butcheries, and dry store companies,” Morgan said.

The new owner, Russell du Preez, wants to use Portland Manor to promote local tourism that is economically sustainable, environmentally conscious, and allows for job creation in the immediate area.

“It’s an opportunity to offer a whole new experience to vacation goers,” he said.

If relaxation is what you need, Portland Manor is your next getaway spot.

Situated close to nature reserves, parks, local markets and beaches, the area offers plenty of fun activities, like the Knysna Elephant Park that you can enjoy alone or with a group of friends and family.

There are also unique restaurants in town, one of them at The Turbine Hotel, which was incredible to experience – it was like having dinner at an old power station that had been transformed into a five-star establishment.

Portland Manor is a real Garden Route hidden gem.

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