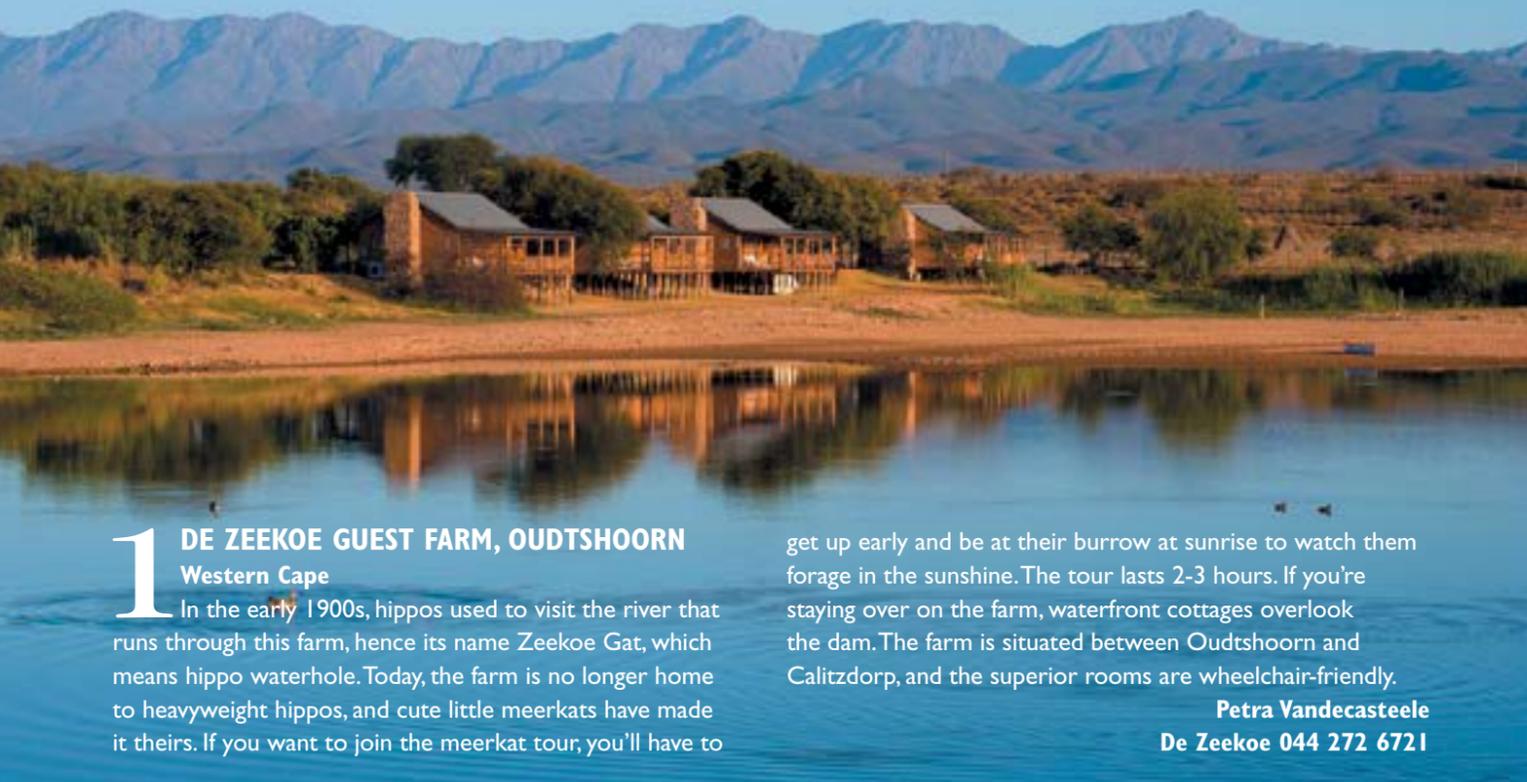


Recommendations from Country Life journalists of things to do and places to stay

Head out on the open road and soak up the hospitality that comes with staying on a farm. Stock up on fresh produce at the local farmers' market, enjoy wholesome boerekos and revel in the great outdoors



1 DE ZEEKOE GUEST FARM, OUDTSHOORN
Western Cape

In the early 1900s, hippos used to visit the river that runs through this farm, hence its name Zeekoe Gat, which means hippo waterhole. Today, the farm is no longer home to heavyweight hippos, and cute little meerkats have made it theirs. If you want to join the meerkat tour, you'll have to

get up early and be at their burrow at sunrise to watch them forage in the sunshine. The tour lasts 2-3 hours. If you're staying over on the farm, waterfront cottages overlook the dam. The farm is situated between Oudtshoorn and Calitzdorp, and the superior rooms are wheelchair-friendly.

Petra Vandecasteele
De Zeekoe 044 272 6721



2 ZWAKALA RIVER RETREAT AND MEDICINAL PLANTS FARM, MAGOEBASKLOOF
Limpopo

In the scenic countryside of Magoebaskloof, the Tooley's farm that runs down to the Broederstroom river is a place where horses, dogs, chickens and children are happily 'free range', and where visitors are quickly drawn into a slower pace of life. A craft workshop makes funky and functional décor products from invasive trees and it's great to get hands-on in the indigenous and medicinal plants nursery. Accommodation on this unique farm includes camping, a cosy cottage and a cabin all set on the banks of the Broederstroom. Perfect for trout fishing, tubing and swimming, the river is also renowned for its restorative qualities.

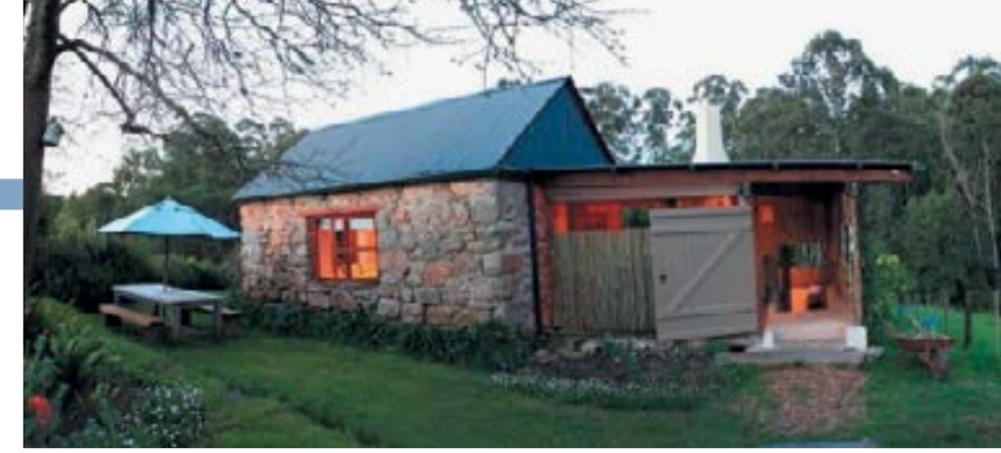
Lisa Martus
Zwakala River Retreat 015 276 4972



3 OEWERZICHT TENTED ACCOMMODATION, GREYTON
Western Cape

If you enjoy being close to nature, the tented camp on the banks of the river at Oewerzicht is a wonderful place to spend a weekend. It's only 10 minutes from the cosmopolitan village of Greyton, but far enough away to feel you're in the middle of nowhere. The only way to get to your tent – other than by boat or float – is the suspension bridge over the Riviersonderend. Each of the six luxury tents has a bar fridge, coffee-making facilities and heater/fan, and guests can make use of the fully equipped communal kitchen. There is a challenging 25km mountain bike trail, but once you've crossed the bridge, chances are you'll make yourself comfortable on your private veranda, and sit back and enjoy watching life go by near the river. And, if you're lucky, you'll see a flock of blue cranes landing in the fields.

Petra Vandecasteele
Oewerzicht 028 254 9831



4 THE FORGE AT OAKHURST FARM, HOEKWIL
Western Cape (Near Wilderness)

A little while ago I really needed a break, and staying at The Forge on Oakhurst Farm, an organic dairy farm, was just the answer. The 150-year-old stone cottage is designed in such way that it feels like an open bush camp. Its core is built of stone, but the fully equipped kitchen, lounge and dining area (with fireplace) are on a wooden deck, closed in by blinds. There's also an open shower overlooking the forest. By day the only sound is cows mooing. At night, the silence over the meadows is absolute. To top it all, owner Claire Crowther brought us fresh farm milk and eggs.

Petra Vandecasteele
The Forge 082 461 7669

5 ESELJACHT FARM, SUTHERLAND Northern Cape
Outdoor enthusiasts will enjoy a host of activities at Eseljacht, 21km north-east of Sutherland. Primarily known for its two-day Silhouette hiking trail (named after the beautiful silhouettes when the sun sets behind the dolerite koppies), Eseljacht has recently introduced a 20km 4x4 track and an exhilarating adventure motorbike trail of about 40km.

We sampled all the activities on offer and, while we only had time for the first day's section of the hiking trail, we thoroughly enjoyed the moderately challenging walk through wonderful varied scenery. We conquered the 4x4 track – there are only three pretty difficult sections – and I had the time of my life following the owner on a motorbike over some pretty rough terrain to the radar station above Sutherland. There are two very basic hikers' huts that sleep 10 people each.

Nick Yell
Eseljacht Farm 083 256 2688



6 HORIZON HORSEBACK, WATERBERG Limpopo

Laura and Shane Dowinton run a herd of more than 60 free-roaming horses on their game farm in the Waterberg. Novice and experienced riders can enjoy outrides, polocrosse and cattle mustering (great fun). You can also swim with your horse. During the 3-4 hour outrides, Shane took us to beautiful places on the farm where we enjoyed a good mix of walk, trot and canter and often got really close to the game. Few things beat the magic of joining a herd of zebra or giraffe as they canter across the plain. This, combined with superb accommodation and a sparkling pool, made it very hard for me to leave.

Petra Vandecasteele, Horizon Horseback 014 755 4003



7 BADDAFORD FARMSTALL, FORT BEAUFORT Eastern Cape

If you're travelling to the Amatolas, the Katberg or the Great Fish River Valley, resist the temptation to stop at one of the bigger centres. It's worth travelling the distance between Queenstown and Grahamstown before stopping for a travel rest at Baddaford Farmstall, just 7km shy of Fort Beaufort.

Restful shaded gardens, a nursery, a coffee shop with a menu of delicious home-baked teas and freshly prepared light lunches, a table groaning with just about everything that is locally grown, prepared, preserved and baked, from olives to sweet decadent morsels, will have your mouth watering. The Kat River Valley is also citrus territory and you are guaranteed one or other variety of naartjies, oranges, lemons or grapefruit year-round. From May to September you will also find avocados and pecans. It's a real oasis with padkos for the soul.

Kerry Peter, Baddaford Farmstall 046 645 1215



8 BATHURST FARMERS' MARKET, GRAHAMSTOWN Eastern Cape

Just 10km from Port Alfred on the R67 to Grahamstown, Bathurst Farmers' Market is a tried and tested staple on the local calendar each Sunday morning, and is renowned for its quality home-made goods, and the friendly faces, even when it rains. Many meet for a sociable breakfast with friends under the paperbark tree, after gathering their fresh produce for the week. For others it's a breakfast stop on the way to the beach. Be sure to pick up some of the locally produced pickles, relishes, jams and cheeses, too.

A veritable cultural melting pot, the market offers seasonal organic fruit and veg, speciality marmalades, fiery jam, peri-peri and chilli sauces, canned pineapple right from the prime pineapple area, crunchy pickled onions, smoked venison, goats milk cheese, shortbread just like the Scots settlers made it, egte Suid Afrikaanse melktert, Greek baklava, artisan sour dough bread and several local arts and crafts.

If you strike up a conversation you won't just go home with a bag of fresh veggies and several jars of locally made preserves... you'll have a story or two to tell about living in Bathurst.

Kerry Peter, Bathurst Farmers' Market 082 585 0774

9 NANAGA FARM STALL, N10 TO CRADOCK Eastern Cape

Locally famed for their homemade pies and mouth-watering variety of fillings, Nanaga has always been an irresistible padkos hangout for travellers in the know. Choose a stopover dinner if you're self-catering, or eat there and then. Their roosterkoek, jams, marmalades, relishes, chutneys and delectable baked goodies are worth taking home too. Once you've bust the hunger bug, you'll definitely want to linger a little longer to pick up some more padkos and a few travel mementoes from their array of edibles, gifts and collectables. Or, if you have little ones with cabin fever from the long road, you'll probably want to have a quiet meal at the restaurant while the children stretch their legs and burn off a bit of the road candy on the jungle gyms and tractors.

Just over half-way between Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth, exactly where the N10 to Cradock and the N2 intersect, Nanaga is an obligatory stop whether you're en route to the Sunshine Coast, the Garden Route or the Karoo Heartland.

Kerry Peter, Nanaga Farm Stall 041 468 0353



11 HILLSTON FARM, MIDDELBURG Eastern Cape

Delight waits at both sunset and sunrise on Hillston Farm, a welcoming family spread outside Middelburg in the Karoo Heartland. In the late afternoon, traipse up a hill and down a slope to view the iconic Teebus en Koffiebus (Tea Canister and Coffee Canister) koppies in the distance. The setting sun turns them gold and the vast plains below are populated by exactly one windmill and, with luck, a couple of dozen sheep.

In the pre-dawn, witness squadrons of blue cranes on the farm dam leave on their daily missions. Like most fighter pilots of old, they prefer flying at first light.

Stay in a comfortable six-sleeper stone cottage with all the amenities. And if you fancy a really historical braai setting, toast your lamb chops next door in an authentic old British blockhouse that goes back more than a century to the Anglo-Boer War. The bullet holes riddling the walls are testament to at least one break in the daily routine of the British soldiers guarding it.

Owners Jonathan and Riana Southey's daughter Adrienne is a fabulous chef who has done her time in the kitchens of the world and has returned to apply her skills in the Karoo. She'll feed you traditional fare made with love and skill.

Hillston Farm is a great stop-over on your trans-Karoo journey, and provides an excellent insight into life on a working farm in the Heartland.

Chris Marais, Hillston Farm 049 842 1627, 082 322 4403

10 ADAMSHURST INDIGENOUS NURSERY AND COUNTRY CAFÉ, HOWICK KwaZulu-Natal

Adamshurst Indigenous Nursery and Country Café is a charming destination on a 300 hectare farm run by a very creative family. The nursery stocks a wide range of plants, all propagated on the farm and bearing price tags to make you smile, and the café overlooking Midmar Dam is a little emporium of delights. A light menu offers many delectables, breakfast all day and the finest coffee. Pick up some legendary Adamshurst Horseradish grown and bottled on the farm, or chic bead necklaces handcrafted there by Patrick Sinclair. Adamshurst is also the home of Madhatters. Milliners Nicky Nielsen and Penny Mitchell create hats and fascinators, each unique and all so gorgeous you'll find it hard to choose from them.

Andrea Abbott:

Adamshurst 083 415 1806

Adamshurst is on the R617, 13km from Exit 99 on the N3

Open Wednesday to Sunday 09h00 to 16h00