

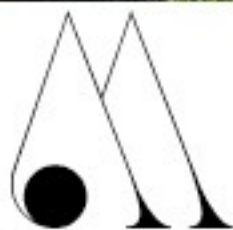
SLEEPS

1-6

LUCKY CRANE VILLAS, MCGREGOR, WESTERN CAPE

RATE: FROM R1 150 PER PERSON PER NIGHT

BY SUZY BROKENSHA



McGregor is a tiny cluster of white-washed houses at the foot of the Rivieronsderend Mountains, a 2-hour drive from Cape Town along the scenic Route 62. A favourite with artists, this easy-going village also became a hub for intellectuals and creatives fleeing the constraints of city life during the hard lockdown.

'I'm Italian by birth and South African by choice,' says Lucky Crane Villas owner and creator Monika Schmalzl, who fell in love with Africa on a visit to Kenya when she finished high school. 'I lost my heart to this continent. I've lived in Germany, Austria, China and the



Netherlands, but I always knew I wanted to come back.'

Monika eventually moved to South Africa in 2011, and four years ago she worked with architect Frederik Labuschagne to build five modern, stylish and thoughtfully designed villas on a private piece of land bordering the Krans Nature Reserve. Kitted out with high-end



kitchen gadgets and punctuated with original artworks, they are oases of calm – the perfect place for me to relax after a stressful deadline.

The first thing I did was sink into a lovely scented bath with the doors open to the private courtyard filled with Karoo succulents. It was bliss. Later, we ate at The Fat Lady's Arms, an excellent and well-priced gastropub, before falling into a dreamy four-poster bed. We woke to the sound of birds flitting around the huge indigenous garden and olive orchard, specifically landscaped by Monika to attract birds (250-plus species occur in the area). We watched them for a while – bright flashes of red and green – before taking a gentle stroll with friends to 51, a restaurant famed for its delicious breakfasts.

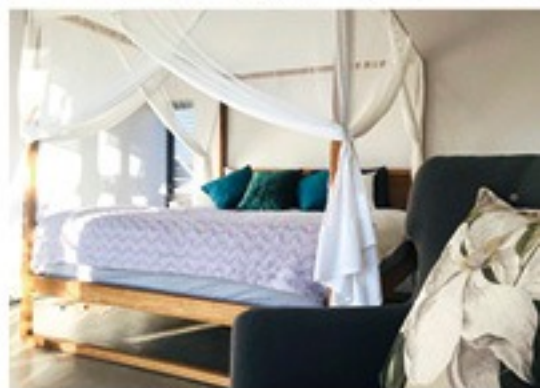
Recognising that the entire world is feeling a bit frazzled at this stage, Monika was inspired to curate local experiences for her guests. They are loosely themed around Ground, Create and Feast: you can choose one-on-one in-villa massage or healing therapies, a variety of group pottery classes with talented Alila Hofmeyr at

the wood-fired Mill Stone Pottery, learn to bake sourdough bread, taste award-winning bubbly and more.

'It's about unwinding, relaxing and experiencing the space,' she says. Coming from a small village in Italy, Monika understands how space expands the soul. 'It's a luxury you can't measure with money.' Lucky Crane Villas embody that philosophy. We chose the bubbly-tasting experience and spent a delicious afternoon at Lord's and Silverthorn wine farms.

It was a fabulous weekend from start to finish: lovely places to explore, and a serene, airy haven of a home to return to in between. Soul expanded. I felt absolutely restored and can't wait to go back.

There are five Lucky Crane Villas, each catering for different needs and numbers. We stayed in The Winged Kite.



5 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

- 1 Chelsea Flower Show Gold Medal-winning garden designer Leon Kluge, who exhibits all over the world, has created Windblown, a beautiful public garden in the church grounds.
- 2 McGregor offers easy access to fabulous mountain biking and hiking routes, as well as excellent wine and olive oil farms.
- 3 Temenos is a private retreat in a gorgeous garden in McGregor – a truly special place to explore mindfulness and contemplation. Also on the premises is Tebaldi's, another good restaurant.
- 4 There's a local craft and produce market at 9am on Saturdays opposite the church.
- 5 If you're a fan of donkeys (and who isn't?), turn left at the sign saying 'Eat, Bray, Love' for Eseltjesrus Donkey Sanctuary.

luckycranevillas.co.za
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