

Relax, rejuvenate, restore. That's the idea behind a soul weekend – and the area around the subtropical town of Tzaneen in Limpopo has long been known for its healing properties. We're talking gorgeous scenery, gentle rambles, fabulous food, soothing massages and amazing places to stay. Just what the Soul Doctor ordered.

Limpopo is one of South Africa's least-explored provinces, and its most African in essence. The province includes two-thirds of the Kruger National Park and wild tracts of beautiful bushveld that roll all the way to the borders of Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Limpopo offers incredible wildlife and bush experiences, a rich cultural tradition and lovely combinations of mountains and bush that will release your inner African princess, or prince.

North-east of the capital, Polokwane, the hamlet of Haenertsburg lies at the top of the Magoebaskloof Pass, a dramatic road that winds down the mountain to Tzaneen in a series of wild corkscrew bends and hairpin turns. With its head firmly in the mist, Haenertsburg has long attracted alternative thinkers, artists, craftspeople, healers and eccentrics.

Robin McIntosh is one of them. You must admit it takes a whole lot of vision to turn a massive concrete rabbit shed into a bold and sexy designer hotel. An architect with a bent for restoring old buildings, it took him almost a decade to create and move with his family to Bramasole (which means 'yearning for the sun' in Italian). Overlooking silver lakes and green hills, Bramasole offers stress-torn urbanites a luxurious escape with dramatic spaces, eclectic decor, and many a pampering opportunity. A recycled-glass staircase leads through the heart of Bramasole, and there are massive lounges with fireplaces, a library, and eight spacious suites with different themes, so, depending on what hits your soul spot, you can do sultry Moroccan, exotic Egyptian or ancient African. 'You can do as little or as much as you like,' says Robin. 'You can curl up by the fire with a good book or go for a massage. Or you can get out and go hiking, fishing or take a canopy tour in the forest.'

Nearby is the Growth Centre, which is run by Colleen Ballenden. Relax in the thatched meditation room, walk in the forests (where fairies surely live), and take time to let the sights and sounds sink in. A foot-therapy session is highly recommended – as is the three-hour massage by local healer Jane Moldenhauer. Her mountain massage room and chakra garden are an inspiration, and a massage here makes you feel like you've been on a two-week holiday.

Then head for the charming Wegraakbosch Organic Farm and Dairy for lunch and a glass of wine. Inspired by a dairy they visited on a trip to Switzerland, Wegraakbosch owners Nipper and Sylvia Thompson have created a Swiss-style property that's home to lots of happy cows, sheep, goats, pigs, chickens, ducks, birds and a resident dairy cat that really did get the cream.

'All our cheeses are handmade in the traditional Swiss way with live culture,' says Nipper. From cow to curd to cheese, no machines are involved at all.' Wegraakbosch is not only lovely, but 100 per cent organic, solar-powered, additive-free, ecofriendly and totally sustainable. >

THIS PAGE Kaross Café offers relaxed lunches in a stylish outdoor setting; OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: RIGHT A quiet spot at Tzaneen Country Lodge; 100 per cent organic cheeses from Wegraakbosch; delicious fare at Yum Yum; an embroidered Kaross cushion.

In the farmhouse the lights, fridges and freezers run off solar energy. And for over 20 years only compost and manure (no fertilisers or herbicides) have been used on the farm.

The Magoebaskloof Pass winds its precipitous way down the mountain towards Tzaneen, passing plantations, waterfalls, nurseries and roadside stalls selling mangoes, bananas and avocados, before dropping into the little town, surrounded on all sides by low, purple mountains. Hot, heady and subtropical, they call this part of the world the Slowveld, for reasons that soon become apparent.

The charming Tzaneen Country Lodge lies about 10 kilometres from town on the R71 to Phalaborwa, and, with its delicious Earth Spa, offers the aptly named De-Stress Weekend Getaway package to those in search of restoration. Set in pretty gardens and stretches of lazy bushveld, the lodge is tasteful and soulful. The owners also pride themselves on running a 'green' lodge, which means they're water-wise, ecofriendly and committed to sustainable practices. You can neutralise your carbon footprint and have a taste of bliss by way of a massage at the same time. It was Indira Gandhi who once wisely said that you cannot shake hands with a clenched fist. This Earth Spa is where you can unclench those fists, relax your shoulders and wiggle your toes. Go for a facial, pedicure or steamy sauna followed by an icy-cold shower.

The Tzaneen area is also home to a host of wonderful alternative therapists: try a private Inspirational Breath Workshop with Ashley Coetzee, who'll show you how to connect with your natural breathing pattern to get maximum physical and emotional benefits, not to mention expanded awareness. Maryke Boekee has been calming, soothing and rubbing people for a long, long time and you can take your pick from just about anything from Thai to Turkish, cranio-sacral to a good old-fashioned full-body massage. Another excellent healer is Linda Sahm, who does calming massage and de-stress treatments in a Zen-like garden studio.

A good spot for a bite is Kaross Café in the nearby Letsitele Valley, where you can also visit Kaross Embroideries, a rural women's project that produces colourful tableware and homeware inspired by Shangaan mythology. Kaross Café is a quiet and artistic bistro-style eatery set under two enormous essenhout trees, its decor making use of the work of local artists and craftspeople. There are giant wooden carvings and stylised benches by the late John Baloyi, and pots by legendary Venda sculptor Noria Mabasa.

Don't return home without a lunch or dinner at Yum Yum, which has brought delight to Tzaneen with its contemporary fusion menu and charming atmosphere, all chattering diners and trickling water features. This is soul food central, with head chef Jonathan Taylor serving up beautifully presented dishes made from fresh and organic produce, mostly from local farm Alon. For a heart-warming winter meal, try the dukkah-rubbed goat's cheese salad with roast beetroot; grilled Norwegian salmon with black-olive jus; and apple tarte tatin with vanilla-infused ginger gelato....

And so, with the body nourished and nurtured, the soul rests well. ☐

DIRECTORY

STAY

Tzaneen Country Lodge tznlodge.co.za;

Bramasole (Robin McIntosh), bramasole.co.za

EAT

Wegraakbosch Organic Farm and Dairy

(Nipper Thompson) 015-276-1811; **Kaross Café**

kaross.co.za; **Yum Yum** 015-307-3984

RELAX

The Growth Centre for reiki, reflexology, aura cleansing and meditation: Colleen Ballenden, 072-277-4809 or e-mail foottalk@telkomsa.net;

Inspirational Breath Workshops to learn how to breathe properly and connect with yourself: Ashley Coetzee, inspirationalbreathwork.co.za;

crystal readings and treatments: Jane Moldenhauer, 015-276-2730 or 082-858-1332;

full-body massage, Thai massage, reiki and cranio-sacral massage: Maryke Boekee, 083-305-5930; **de-stressing massage, cranio-sacral massage and other treatments:** Linda Sahm, 083-554-3706

DO

Make a point of visiting the **Kaross embroidery studio** (kaross.co.za), as well as the excellent game reserves in the area – Tzaneen is on the way to the **Kruger National Park** (sanparks.org/parks/kruger), which is a mere 100 kilometres away.

For more information on attractions in the area, visit golimpopo.com, magoebasklooftourism.co.za and tzaneeninfo.com



THIS PAGE Autumn hues in Magoebaskloof. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Ducks range freely at Wegraakbosch; fruits of the valley; a quiet space inside Bramasole; chef Jonathan Taylor of Yum Yum.