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TGIFOOD

MARKET REPORT

Meat you under the stars for skaapstertjies and stoep sitting

The art of stoep sitting is a respected practice in the Karoo. It almost always involves a glass of some hot or cold – depending on the time of day – and can feature a large company or sole sitter. It's not always conversation-driven but has been known to evolve into a full-blown “kuier” once Stoep Sitters start leaning over to adjacent stoeps to share stories and meals and, naturally, wine.



The market at Laerskool Volksskool Graaff Reinet, advertising their iconic skaapstertjies. (Photos: Supplied) Skaapstertjies on the braai. (Photo: Deidre Cloete)

According to Karoo Wine Club founder and professional Graaff-Reinet stoep sitter Rose Wright, stoep sitting is the epitome of Karoo living. She founded Graaff-Reinet's now-famous Stoep Tasting wine festival in 2014 and the event has since grown to become Graaff-Reinet's biggest annual business-boosting event.

Apparently, South Africans are natural stoep sitters and love to celebrate the sport at this fiesta in the heart of the Karoo.

"Our kids think we're raging alcoholics," Rose says. "But stoep sitting is what we do and city folk love to join us."

The weekend now sees more than 70 hand-picked wine producers, each occupying a stoep of one of the town's old "Dorpuisies", offering wine tastings to visitors. In 2021, the neighbouring town of Nieu-Bethesda became an official partner of the Stoep Tasting weekend, offering visitors a two-town wine weekend special.

Fine Karoo fare



Karoo tapas from Hello You eatery in Somerset Street, Graaff-Reinet. (Photo: Louzel Lombard Steyn) Stoep Tasting street by night. (Photo: Prinsloo Photography)

In the Karoo, good wine is always accompanied by the best food and there's no shortage of this at the Stoep Tasting weekend. Graaff-Reinet's biggest food market hub over the weekend is hosted by Laer Volksskool Graaff-Reinet and features some famous Karoo morsels. Skaapstertjies, skilpadjies, roosterkoek and sosaties come standard, says Danelle Botes, who is in charge of organising the food stalls at the

school market. The stalls are set up in front of the Huis Eybers hostel, which doubles as accommodation for guests over the weekend.

“People come for the skaapstertjies,” Danelle says, confidently. “They’ve become a market favourite and we continue to run out every year – even though we double or triple our orders from the years before. People love them because it’s something you can’t get anywhere else, and it’s so true to the Karoo.”

The skilpadjies – spiced lamb liver wrapped in caul fat and braaied over the coals – are a firm favourite too. These easy-to-eat morsels are braaied by Johan Niewoud, the koshuisvader (resident head) of Huis Eybers. It’s no small feat, as hungry market goers often buy three or four at a time and devour them on the spot. The small snack-sized portions are easy to eat with one hand, while the other is otherwise engaged with a wine glass.



Foodie pals Mitchell Knott-Craig (left) and Kye Cilliers at the Stoep Tasting. (Photo: Supplied) The Prego Pals’ famous prego roll menu. (Photo: Jeani Meyer)

Elsewhere, in Graaff-Reinet’s vibey Somerset Street, two young locals have gained fame for their scrumptious Prego rolls sold from a literal garage in front of Lot 44. Childhood pals Kye Cilliers and Mitchell Knott-Craig may look a little rough around the edges, but these dudes know their way around a flat-top grill. Kye is a senior chef de partie at the famous La Colombe Restaurant in Cape Town while Mitchell is qualified in marketing.

Armed with a spatula and litres of “that good sauce”, they migrate back to Graaff-Reinet every year to spoil Stoep Tasters with their moreish Prego rolls.

“People want to eat meat, and we have the perfect platform to showcase Karoo meat during Stoep Tasting,” Danelle says. “Our small town is home to many meat-producing farmers and the market pays homage to our region and community.”



Another sip, please! Kaapzicht Wines on the stoep of Die Waenhuis in Nieu-Bethesda. (Photo: Nieu -Bethesda Tourism) A platter with freshly baked plaasbrood and local cheeses from The Brewery and Two Goats Deli in Nieu-Bethesda. (Photo: Nieu-Bethesda Tourism)

Next door, in Nieu-Bethesda, the entire dirt road that crawls through town transforms into a market hub of Karoo favourites during Stoep Tasting weekend. Here, the Karoo fare continues both in the streets, on the stoeps and in the many high-quality restaurants of this quaint Karoo village.

“This year, local chef Chris Lloyd’s trademark burgers and flavoursome filled vetkoek will be available on Die Waenhuis restaurant stoep alongside Kaapzicht wines,” says organiser Carla Smit.

Other highlights include traditional curry mince jaffles and milk tart at The Village Inn stoep and the “Frans-Karoo” Montpellier MCC pairing on The Bethesda Guesthouse’s stoep, where whole lamb will also be on the menu for the duration of the weekend, paired with French baguettes and olives.



The beloved stoep of The Bethesda Guesthouse, which is partnering with Montpellier again in 2022 to host their exquisite MCC masterclasses and pairings. (Photo: Nieu-Bethesda Tourism)

Then, there's the case of André BOK (goat), André BID (pray) and André BAK (bake), Carla explains. "There are three prominent Nieu-Bethesdians with the name André, so we distinguish them by their trade. BAK or bake for André du Toit from Manna, BOK for André Cilliers of The Brewery and Two Goats Deli and BID for religious devotee André Kriel of the Italian eatery Nieu Karoo Country Restaurant.

Regardless of which André you end up at, all promise an offering of delicious food during the festival. This year, André BAK of Manna Better Bake & Coffee will be hosting a chocolate and aged red wine pairing with his home-baked delights, including Basque burnt cheesecake, chocolate almond torte and chocolate fondant.

In the heart of winter in dreamy Nieu-Bethesda, this experience is guaranteed to be one for the books. The entire Stoep Tasting is, for that matter. This weekend is a coming together of two of South Africa's most renowned gastronomical regions – the Winelands and the Karoo – to celebrate the best of both under the open Karoo sky. The experience is a sensory delight to inspire, nourish and refresh.

Quick info



The broad stoep of Reinet House Museum in Graaff-Reinet during the annual Stoep Tasting. (Photo: Jeani Meyer) Roosterkoek on the coals. (Photo: Deidre Cloete)

The Stoep Tasting festival takes place annually during the last weekend of May. In 2022, it's happening from Thursday, 26 May to Sunday, 29 May. More than 70 wine estates and producers have been selected to present their finest wines all across town.

For food, the markets will be open throughout the weekend and restaurants according to individual trading hours. Many restaurants have market-style menus during the weekend, or sell grub vendor-style from their stoeps.



Forget Uber... Catch a ride with the Karoo-Ba taxi at the Stoep Tasting. (Photo: Karoo Wine Club)

Only local businesses and individuals are granted permission to trade food, make music or offer any services during the festival – no outside food trucks or vendors are allowed. The idea is for it to support local businesses and entrepreneurs.

It's best to book accommodation in advance as space in the towns is limited. Local taxis will be operating between Graaff-Reinet and Nieu Bethesda every few hours. Drinking and driving will not be tolerated under any circumstances.