

Grootbos... In for The Long Run



By [Brian Berkman](#)

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Jochen Zeitz knows something about running. He was at the helm of Puma for 20 years and now focuses his energy on the Zeitz Foundation and its The Long Run programme that accredits worthy tourism establishments that add to the 4 Cs: Conservation; Community; Culture; Commerce. For Grootbos Nature Reserve owner and Managing Director Michael Lutzeyer, being included in The Long Run is big news.



Back to nature - at Grootbos.

During our walkabout, Michael happily shows me behind the scenes - something that rarely happens on media trips - and I can hear the excitement in his voice when he talks about this latest accolade. Grootbos has received and will continue to receive the most important tourism awards because not only does it tick all the environmental, luxury, fine-dining boxes but also it is also magnificently situated.

"Surely a reason we travel is to meet other people and expose ourselves to different food and cultural experiences," Michael ponders, "and where else other than in the travel industry can you meet people of influence without first having to go through their secretaries and marketing directors?"

The lodge in the garden

Michael's passion is not, you might think, the superlative cuisine and wine cellar that Grootbos offers nor is it the unfussy, luxurious guest cottages but rather the not-for-profit Grootbos Foundation and its projects.

Although we've stayed at Grootbos Nature Reserve's Forest Lodge before, we are billeted at the more family-focussed Garden Lodge, considered so as most of the cottages are two-bedroomed, two bathroomed with a central sitting room configurations.

Michael's parents left Germany soon after the war and Michael was born in Cape Town and went to Cape Town High School. I mention this because his accent might mean one thinks of him as a foreigner. This would be wrong as he has all the sensibility and sensitivity of a local who not only understands our land's challenges but also wants to contribute to mending them.

Understandably, it is the go-to place for people who want to be in pristine fynbos. Grootbos is high enough to take in

sweeping views of Walker Bay and surrounding mountains but near enough to De Kelders to reach the astonishing caves and beach below that forms part of a Cape Nature Reserve. Whale watching from here, I'm told, is even better than Hermanus and there is a cliff-path that sweeps down to the sea to give a spume-spraying view of the leviathans.

On a previous visit, I saw the Green Futures project that produces organic food for use in the hotel. It is hard to imagine a mustard leaf with more bite, rocket with more pepperiness or spinach more tender and delicious. This is, of course, just one of the reasons that the cuisine at Grootbos is nothing short of exceptional.



Growing the Future.

Growing the Future

A new Grootbos Foundation project, linked to Growing the Future, is currently being piloted with the hope of a rollout in the community if successful. Michael is planting vegetable crops, spinach and rocket initially, into custom-fit old apple crates. Not only does this system lift the soil off the ground to make tending easier and stay out of reach from snails but also keeps nutrients contained and moisture trapped so less water is required.

The foundation also has a strong adult education and sports training focus and many of the staff and nature guides, including Bongani our fabulous fynbos-walk guide, are foundation alumni.



A pond for all seasons.

I can't think of a single luxury-experience seeker who will not also love Grootbos. For adrenaline junkies there is advanced horse riding, hiking and shark-cage diving, for the more sedate there are novice horse-back excursions through the fynbos, beach walks, guided cave explorations and 4X4 trips while those who simply want to chill can feast like kings and have spa treatments from German-trained medi-spa specialists.

As a smart, upscale tourism operation, Grootbos caters for the five-star market. It has a six-roomed villa with an enviable collection of South African art and space to entertain 50 people with a view that is hard to beat but comes at a price affordable for

group or corporate event.

Awards

Yet, because Michael is not out of touch with the real world, or the fiscal constraints of many South Africans, he offers a very reduced local rate on a Thursday - and when you consider that cuisine and activities are included in the rate, it is affordable.

At Indaba last month, they won Best Community Safari Property in South Africa and runner up in Africa. This was from the Good Safari Guide. More importantly from his perspective, at We Are Africa, Grootbos was voted by tourism buyers for the Best Community Engagement Innovation Award 2014.

Last year the foundation's Gansbaai Breaking Barriers programme was shortlisted for the 2013 Virgin Active Sports Awards: Best Community Programme.

While walking through the milkwoods, some gnarled while others are sprouting new branches like a tangled Jungle Jim, with the roar of the sea in my ears and snail-shells under foot I thought about the other Cs so famous in the hospitality industry - Relais & Chateaux's Charm, Courtesy, Character, Cuisine and Calm. From my vantage point, they also all apply to Grootbos. I wonder when they will be approaching Grootbos for membership.



Alive with flavour.

For more information go to www.Grootbos.com.

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