

Diverse Karoo offers opportunities to investors

The sheer extent of the semi-arid Karoo as a region is like no other in South Africa. Covering almost 30% of South Africa and spanning four provinces, the Karoo is surrounded by the Kalahari in the north, Namaqualand and the West Coast to the west, the Boland and Overberg on the south-west, The Garden Route to the south, and the non-Karoo regions of the Eastern Cape and the Free State.

Furthermore, said Wayne Rubidge, Pam Golding Properties manager for the Karoo, the Karoo can be accessed within a two-hour drive from Cape Town, 45 minutes from George, one hour from Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown, less than two hours from Bloemfontein and three hours from East London. It can take six hours to drive from the east to the western ends of the Karoo and the same from north to south. Within this region there is a diversity yet to be discovered and a journey of discovery awaits the property investor.

"Each of the 52 Karoo towns with their historic buildings, unique architecture and broad range of affordable and unusual investment property choices, offers something very compelling and different from the next town, and all are located in contrasting settings.

For example there are high-altitude Northern Cape towns like Sutherland and Fraserburg, which offer some of the best views of the southern skies in the world and a very different lifestyle with more extreme temperatures providing a very different experience.

Carnarvon, located in the centre of the Northern Cape is also benefitting from its unique location at the centre of the Meerkat (SKA or Square Kilometre Array) radio astronomy project and from being a regional town with all its associated services.

"There are highly appealing Karoo villages such as Loxton (in the Northern Cape's Bo Karoo), which offers an enviable retreat from urban pressures with its simple and secure country lifestyle. Similarly, the picturesque villages of Nieu Bethesda and Murraysburg (in the Karoo Midlands) offer good value as a country investment and with an appealing lifestyle unknown to many from the larger centres.

Trendy and vibrant towns

"Then let's not forget the trendy and vibrant towns like Prince Albert in the Karoo, Western Cape. Increasingly in demand, the town is located at the foot of the Swartberg Mountains and in close proximity to the Cape and Garden Route. With its farm-type lifestyle, Prince Albert is renowned for its excellent Karoo produce, such as cheeses, olives, wines and fruit and is one of the most sought-after towns for premium property investors.

In the same property category, but with a very different offering, is Graaff-Reinet in the heart of the Great Karoo, also in the Eastern Cape. Surrounded by the Camdeboo National Park, this is rapidly becoming a prime game-farming area and safari destination, which alongside traditional sheep farming is the mainstay of the area."

Rubidge said that the Orange River towns of Gariep, Oviston, Vanderkloof, Hopetown and Prieska offer their own unique blend of Karoo and country living - much of it associated with the abundant water to which these areas have access. This region also has relevance as a "food basket" for many South Africans.

"In-between and among all these regions are many other unique Karoo towns, such as those in Northern Cape's Bushmanland Karoo, like Kenhardt and the Baviaanskloof Eastern Cape towns such as Willowmore and Steytlerville. Farming towns like Steynsburg and Middelburg in the Eastern Cape offer very good value for money and the latter is home to Grootfontein, one of South Africa's leading agricultural colleges.

Historic towns include Bethulie and Phillipolis in the Free State and Hanover (in the Northern Cape's Bo Karoo), which is midway between Joburg and Cape Town. Travelling down the N1 to Cape Town after Hanover and before Three Sisters is Richmond, which like Hanover is located in the Bo Karoo region, the official Booktown for the African continent, which is fast taking its place as a must-see literary destination with its beautiful Karoo architecture and excellent biltong."

Sound investments

Rubidge said that there are limited houses in all these idyllic country towns, many of which are of much historic value and have provided sound investments for many.

"All these and many other 'undiscovered' towns each have a wide variety of different property opportunities." He cited Phillipstown in the Northern Cape, with its great-value Karoo historic homes for between R250 000 and R450 000 and its large number of undeveloped agricultural erven varying in size from 2000-4000m² on the opposite side of the Hondeblaf Rivier. The Northern Eastern Cape towns like Rhodes and Lady Grey have their own very special appeal, which is transformed through the seasons, being surrounded by snowy mountains in the winter and with leisure activities that include adventure sports, fly fishing and the wonderful outdoor Karoo country lifestyle.

"Like the region itself, the Karoo is home to very special properties, some of which are available for purchase. These include an immaculately refurbished historic stone jail, which is now a residence offering exclusive guest accommodation. Located on five erven and built of stone, the Old Jail of Willowmore in the Karoo Midlands in the Eastern Cape has been meticulously restored and cleverly converted into four luxury en suite rooms plus a fifth en suite bedroom in the outside buildings. The property is currently run as a warm-and-welcoming four-star boutique guest establishment as well as an art gallery. Furnished with lavish antiques, the property, including its contents, is marketed for R12.8 million. Flanked by the spectacular Baviaanskloof and Swartberg mountain ranges this striking 1880's building is one of the finest examples of Victorian architecture in the area."

Artist's cottage

In the Karoo Western Cape in Prince Albert, with its enterprising residents and beautiful buildings is a property that provides an unusual mix of contemporary living and a historic, character cottage with a very appealing swimming pool courtyard. The artist's cottage is sold fully furnished with many original features, such as reed and beam ceilings. The main home, constructed about 12 years ago, is a modern interpretation of many of the traditional features of Karoo homes, including corbelled-style architecture. With double-volume open-plan living, sleek-and-functional dining and kitchen area, shaded patio and lap-style pool, plus a ramp to the second-floor studio/craft area and rooftop terrace with timber pergola, this unusual, attractive property is priced at R3.7 million.

Said Rubidge: "In Richmond, just off the N1, is the Old Bus Station with its sturdy buildings, offices, workshops and a huge yard located adjacent to the N1. Many of the Karoo towns had bus stations that serviced the communities, dropping off and collecting produce from various farm junctions. This service is, however, no longer available and now this unique expansive property offers considerable potential for any investor and is on the market, well priced, at R1.2 million."

In Graaff-Reinet Pam Golding Properties is marketing one of the town's original trading stores. This corner building has a commercial space at ground level and a top-floor residence with a beautiful wooden staircase, wooden floors and a large corner balcony. The property also includes a semi-detached, cottage-type building. Well positioned in the "horseshoe" close to schools and on the road leading to the Camdeboo National Park, this property has exceptional potential and multiple usage for a restaurant, an executive suite or similar and currently houses a café and rental rooms. The property is priced at R2.3 million.

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