



A Luxurious Escape

Unwinding at the Olive Woodpecker Villa

Nestled in the heart of McGregor, amidst serene landscapes and a vibrant community, the Lucky Crane Villas promises an escape like no other. The Lucky Crane Villas offer 6 villas in total with different sizes and we stayed in the 3-bedroom villa – the Olive Woodpecker. Reflecting on my recent getaway with my family, I find myself immersed in memories of a truly unforgettable experience.

Guided by our noble steed, the Bentley Flying Spur, we embarked on a retreat promising tranquillity and luxury. Driving through the quiet streets of McGregor to the very outskirts of the small town, the sight of our spacious villa set against the backdrop of the Krans Nature Reserve and the Langeberg mountains in the distance was nothing short of breathtaking.

An aura of modern elegance greeted us upon stepping into the villa. The interior

boasts a perfect fusion of sophistication and comfort, with less-is-more finishes that exude a sense of calm, extending an invitation to unwind and embrace the serenity of the environment.

One of the highlights of our stay was undoubtedly the time we spent around the swimming pool, which beckoned us to indulge in moments of relaxation under the warm sun. Whether dipping into the cool water or simply lounging by the poolside with a refreshing drink in hand, each moment

spent here was a testament to the epitome of luxury living, where space and privacy defines the experience.

In the evenings, the lovely veranda with its inviting braai area became the heart of our family gatherings. We were drawn to this charming space every night, relishing the joy of sizzling delicacies and laughter-filled conversations under the starlit sky. It was here that bonds were strengthened, and memories were etched into the fabric of our retreat.



Exploring the surrounding area added another layer of richness to our experience. Our journey led us through picturesque landscapes dotted with numerous wineries, quaint eateries, and farm stalls offering an array of local delights. We couldn't resist the allure of boutique wines from Bemind Wines, a boutique garagiste wine cellar in McGregor, with winemaker Ilse Schutte creating a range of wines that tell a story of craftsmanship and passion. Lunch at the nearby Van Loveren Family Vineyards was a culinary delight, with each dish complemented by the finest wines the region has to offer.

Yet, amidst these adventures, the unwavering hospitality of the Olive Woodpecker Villa truly stole our hearts. From the warm welcome upon our arrival to the attentive care exhibited by the staff throughout our stay, every moment was infused with genuine warmth and sincerity. This attention to detail transformed our retreat into an unforgettable journey, leaving us yearning for more even as we reluctantly bid farewell.

As we departed from the Olive Woodpecker Villa, our hearts were filled with gratitude for the memories created and the moments shared. It was more than just a getaway – it was a sanctuary where time stood still, allowing us to reconnect with ourselves and each other amidst the embrace of luxury and serenity. Indeed, it was an experience that will linger in our hearts long after the echoes of our laughter have faded into the horizon.

To book your stay, visit www.luckycranevillas.co.za.



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**Q&A WITH MONIKA SCHMALZL, OWNER
OF THE LUCKY CRANE VILLAS**

1. Please share the story of how your journey led you from Italy to eventually settling in South Africa and establishing Lucky Crane Villas in McGregor?

I have always had a passion for the African continent, especially after a trip with my parents to Kenya, which was a gift for my enrollment. I could have moved to Kenya right then and there if it weren't for my parents' wise decision to convince me to return to Italy to finish my tertiary studies (International Business and Economics at the University of Innsbruck in Austria).

It so happened to be a love story, many moons later, that brought me down to South Africa in my late thirties, and so we began the first project right outside of Robertson in the Western Cape, Mo & Rose, which still operates today. After a few years at Mo & Rose, we decided that we each needed to go our separate ways and thus decided to sell the business. At this point, I found a beautiful piece of land in McGregor, right on the edge of a nature reserve, that I knew was the perfect location to start anew. People who have bought property in McGregor usually did so because they genuinely fell in love at first sight.

2. What inspired you to choose McGregor as the location for your business, and how has the local community influenced your experience?

Firstly, I always believed that the broader Langeberg area had the potential to grow and develop through tourism and essentially become the "underdog" of the Western Cape. As time goes on, this area has more and more to offer. Secondly, I had to choose a location that authentically resonated with me; selling something you genuinely love is much easier. McGregor has always been the most appealing village in the Langeberg to me. Firstly, for its architectural aesthetics and true village character that is unrivalled, and second and even more importantly, because of its community.

McGregor's community makes this little village stand out, more so than its expansive views and natural landscapes. It is incredible how such diverse individuals with vastly differing life experiences can come together to create this colourful, caring, open and exciting atmosphere that becomes the very essence of McGregor. Most guests who visit McGregor will say that it is the community itself that left the most significant impression. When I found this stretch of land at the edge of this magic village bordering the Krans Nature Reserve, I knew it was it! That is precisely what I was looking for – the feeling of being surrounded by nature with uninterrupted views that allow you to breathe deeply and restore alongside the feeling of being surrounded by a colourful village within walking distance of



restaurants and coffee shops. I could immediately feel the tranquil yet lively energy of the space. And it was a piece of land that had been waiting, as it didn't even have zoning when I bought it. I applied for zoning and subdivision, and while waiting for the red tape to roll out, I developed the vision of Lucky Crane Villas.

3. How did your previous experiences and travels around the world shape your vision for Lucky Crane Villas?

Most guests who check into Lucky Crane Villas often to escape the hustle and rush of their daily lives. Here, they can finish that book they've been meaning to read for months or finally have enough time to do all the things they've pushed to the backseat. Here, they can focus on themselves and not "the world".

With this in mind, I put a lot of thought and care into the design and positioning of the Villas so that each Villa has this sense of being almost alone in the middle of nowhere with nothing but the great expanse of the bushveld.

I also aimed to capture the essence of McGregor's old-style country houses while meeting contemporary living needs. I wanted Lucky Crane to focus on the Villas and enhance the natural space around them. Therefore, I kept the decor light, airy, and minimalistic, with African-inspired details and textures. This approach ensures guests can immerse themselves in the serene outdoor views without distractions.

4. Could you highlight some unique aspects of the villas and the experiences you offer to guests that set Lucky Crane Villas apart from other accommodations?

As aforementioned, much thought and care went into the positioning and design of the Villas; the ultimate goal was to bring a sense of the outside in, and the inside out. For example, each Villa has an "inside amenity" outdoors, such as outdoor showers, baths, saunas and hot tubs as well as the interior design is

minimal to bring attention and focus to the uninterrupted views sweeping in through large glass sliding doors and windows.

The benefit of having a business in a small town is that it becomes easy to personalise each guest's experience by connecting with different companies. For example, we can organise in-villa treatments, massages, and catering through other companies and arrange day trips touring the wine valley to indulge in wine tastings, delicious lunches, and picnics. We also have options for those keen to explore their creative side.

5. How do you incorporate sustainability and community engagement into the operations of Lucky Crane Villas?

Sustainability is our core focus, driven by my deep connection with nature. Each Villa has solar panels that cover 60-70% of daily energy consumption. We use water-wise indigenous plants in our gardens and rely solely on our borehole for watering. Our toiletries are sourced from local artisans who are committed to sustainability. Additionally, we provide recycling facilities for guests.

Regarding community engagement, we support The HipHipHooray Circus Project, which nurtures local children and teenagers. We also harvest olives from our orchards and sell them locally to fund the project. Lucky Crane Villas also donates a portion of profits monthly to support this initiative.

This wonderful, fun and nurturing social circus project works with children and teenagers to develop concentration, coordination, confidence and trust. Through play they not only acquire new skills but also expand their learning horizon as they achieve what seemed impossible at the start.

If I wouldn't have believed in myself and in my strength to realise my visions, Lucky Crane Villas would not be standing here today.

Text by Deidre Loots
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