

FREEZING IN WAKKERSTROOM – JULY 2009

Crispy, white summer sheets are amazing – but not when the temperatures are below zero! The Wakkerstroom weekend was a last minute decision.....

When we booked our 17th wedding anniversary holiday, we decided it had to be 'right-on-the-beach' and preferably the milder Natal coast area. A lovely chalet was found in Saltrock, but only from Wednesday, 29th July.

Debating over squeezing in a 'low-budget-weekend-away' or an expensive dinner in Johannesburg, we decided to drive to Wakkerstroom on Friday, 24th July.

Leaving Randburg at 3.30pm was not such a good idea ... driving an unknown road instructed by our female GPS in the dark ... not such a good idea.

With numerous trucks on pothole roads, we met the owners, Hannes & Susanne van der Walt, of the Glass Art Studio Guesthouse in Bethal at 6pm. We still had 134 km to go and it was getting colder by the minute ...

At 8pm, we stopped in front of the Wakkerstroom Country Inn – it was already zero degrees!!! Hein dropped me off to order dinner (except for our coffee machine, we weren't geared for self-catering), while he fetched the keys.

With a fireplace and green tea to warm me, I checked the menu. Hein wanted something hearty. Steak and kidney pie caught my eye (*I'm a poet and I don't even know it – ha ha*). I dithered between a pasta dish and a fish/prawn curry. And made the wrong choice ...

Hein's dish was sublime! Hearty, robust and full of flavour. It came in a soup bowl topped with a small pastry lid. It looked like the pastry shrunk. My curry dish – for R80-something – had 4 prawns, 4 small pieces of 'monkfish' and a tiny saucer-full of curry sauce. With rice. Overpriced, under-delivered and under-fragranced.

We stopped at the guesthouse after 9pm, with the temperature below zero. No carport or garage, so poor ole Rissiepit (our 4x4) had to brave it outside. Hein immediately lit the inside braai cum fireplace with smoky results. While unpacking, I've switched on the wall heater in our bedroom and closed the door to keep some heat inside.



It's a 4-bedroomed house with 2 bathrooms, for R170/person/night. Susanne has the glass studio and several examples decorated the house. The lounge has 1 chair, a 2-seater couch and a 3-seater couch – each one of them lazy boys. (Or kick-out-chairs). We moved the 2-seater couch in front of the fireplace, kicked out the legs and watched the flames.

Noticing only 1 average thickness duvet on the bed, I searched and found only 1 big blanket and 1 small blanket. Imagine if there were 8 people in the house under those freezing conditions ...

And then having to climb into bed between freezing cold summer sheets. Do guesthouse owners not consider things like that?



At 7am we awoke on Saturday morning. I looked through the window and saw frost on the yellow grass. Pulled on a jersey and sheepskin slippers (sooo glad I packed those) and walked outside with the camera. My poor



baby car ... frost all over her! Hein pledged his love on her frosty window (pic right). Then we hurried inside, lit the smoky fireplace and had coffee and rusks.

Getting ready for brunch in town, I took a shower but warned Hein the spray wasn't very good. Enough of a handyman for a shower head, Hein unscrewed the head and with toothpicks cleaned the holes. He had a marvelous shower.



One of the owners breed with Arabic horses – we did see horses with fluffy coats. Were they Arabic? Don't know.

From the farm road, we saw the whole of Wakkerstroom. And then laughed when we saw the outside informal settlement – almost bigger than the whole town. With a beautiful purple house amidst all the other brown houses.

At the Farm Cheese Stall (a little house) we stopped to have a browse. Bought some wonderful dried wors (droëwors), saw more of Susanne's glass work, asked for a nice brunch spot and where the rugby would be shown. And that's where the small-town-cuteness wore off a bit ... because the locals are very vague in directing you. And you drive and drive through town, from the one end to the other, without finding the spot.



We decided on The Garret for brunch. A small coffee shop with high ceilings and scrumptiously good coffee. Hein had a beer and opted for the omelet. Probably made with only 1 egg, it was so small. He liked it though. Their breakfast menu is minute, so I had a choice between an omelet or 'bacon, cheese, egg & mustard scones' – and made another poor choice. The scones were nothing spectacular – if I didn't see the



bits of bacon, it would have been just an ordinary salty-ish scone. But the raspberry jam was divine!



We located the spot for rugby - 'De Oude Stasie' (Old Railway Station) outside town and went back to the house for a nap. After 2 hours we lit the fire again, read some and then I went to have a lovely shower. What a difference it was from my morning shower.

Arriving at 'De Oude Stasie', we saw this funny 'bicycle-tram' contraception (pic left). Good leg exercise. The big screen was waiting for the game, the beers were cold and cheap and I had a most comfy chair. I itched to read my book, but with that particular crowd and no lighting in the room, I thought it best to leave it in my handbag. And watched the game. But I firmly refused to dine there.

With the final whistle, we rushed to the car and I started to phone around for dinner. In Wakkerstroom's newsletter a few mentions were made of 'Xmas in July' at local restaurants. First I tried the Mucky Duck, but the owner closed the kitchen and was on her way home. Then I phoned the Country Inn, but they were fully booked. Realising we might have made a mistake in not booking dinner, and dreading having to celebrate our anniversary with crisps, chocolates & coffee, I was referred to The Bistro. They had a table for us.

Stopping outside The Bistro, I was first confused to step outside to read the sign - which said 'Metamorphosis Studio'. And then we entered the inner sanctum of gloriness!!

A lovely old house, doubling as art gallery and restaurant. We entered the room and were embraced in warmth, ambience and conversation. A skeleton dragon hangs from the ceiling, 4 small dining tables close to each other, a hearty fire, 2 lovely couples and Lizzie, the cook/owner, arty with long earrings in the one ear, studs in the other. Xmas decorations tucked around statues and big, fat red and green chillies on the tables. And the menu ...

For starters we had pickled herring with olives, baby tomatoes, Wasabi mayonnaise and greens. Light, subtly flavoured and tasty. Conversations were flowing to and fro, while my eyes flitted around the room to all the artwork. The whole atmosphere was too precious for my camera. You will have to experience it yourself.

Hein chose the fillet, flambéed with 3 different liqueurs and loved it! I had rabbit with chorizo sausage, beans and olives. Robustly flavoured, soft and juicy. Lizzy nearly had a fit when she took my plate - why didn't I finish my meal? Because I had to save some space for dessert ... she was happy.

The three dessert choices I can remember were: Christmas bombe (fruitcake with ice cream, I think). Nougat with rose-flavored-yoghurt. The lady having it was urging me to choose it. But from the start my eye was on the 3rd choice: hot chocolate pudding with berries. And for the 3rd time in one night, I made the right decision. Sublime!!!! Hein had a lovely bottle of red wine and we toasted everyone, talked, laughed and had a most memorable evening.

Until we slipped in-between those darn sheets again. Hein was soon fast asleep - I tossed and turned, cold as anything.

Waking on Sunday morning, I was so tired. Hein made coffee and then we packed. Looking forward to a nice breakfast, we thought we'll skip Wakkerstroom and head to Volksrust for a Wimpy.

Heading to town, I squinted when I saw something white and glistening next to the road. A water pipe had a hole in with a thin stream of water bursting into the air - and it formed icicles in the grass. Nature's own art gallery.



In Volksrust, about 30 km from Wakkerstroom, we refueled and saw this absolutely gorgeous explicitly explained notice:



The Wimpy was still closed, so we pushed on to Standerton, another 70 km. I decided on a cheese burger, no chips, milky coffee and Hein ordered the Dagwood. And for a few moments, I was totally blank when he ordered it – I could just not picture what a Dagwood looks like ...

When my burger arrived, I squirted mustard & tomato sauce on the inside, lifted it with both my hands and chomped. Absolutely divine!!!! Exactly what I wanted.

After breakfast we headed back home ... and to our cosy winter sheets.