

McGregor's festival magic

The region's robust wines and country cuisine take starring roles at the village's one-day celebration this month

MYRNA
ROBINS

tabletop



McGREGOR magic is assured. It takes many forms – tranquil gardens filled with bird-song, convivial pubs dispensing hospitality, delectable fare paired with robust wines. It includes sounds of the brass band drawing nearer, the distant braying of donkeys, the plaintive call of the fish eagle as it swoops over the dams high above the village.

There's a new buzz in this venerable settlement on the edge of the Little Karoo. Even as it preserves its reputation as a historic destination on the road to nowhere, residents are relishing the successful establishment of new restaurants and other enterprises. The village garagiste has vinous competition from boutique cellars in the surrounding hills and one of them is making eau de vies of rare quality.

The region's robust wines and country cuisine take the starring roles on August 28 when the annual one-day food and wine festival takes place in the NG church hall. While the winemakers set up stall to show off new vintages, bakers and caterers, restaurateurs and cheese-makers, farmers and talented cooks will fill the spaces between, presenting a colourful mix of fresh produce and dairy delights, preserves and pickles, country soups and an array of bite-sized snacks that range from sushi and smoked trout to heritage pancakes and vetkoek.

Cellars taking part include Lords and Wolfddoring, McGregor and Kingsriver, Tanagra and Kongingsrivier, Buitehof and Buffalo Creek, Wonderfontein and a couple of boutique wineries from down the valley. While ranges and styles vary, enthusiasts know they will find quality in labels such as



RURAL AMBIENCE: Make time to amble around the tranquil village over the festival weekend.

Rusty's Red and Lord's chardonnay, while the stylish grappas from Tanagra are attracting sophisticated fans. The diverse cellar products share just one attractive characteristic – affordability. Entrance to the festival costs R50, which includes a glass and all wine tastings. Some cellars will discount their wine prices for the day.

The village boasts a choice of restaurants disproportionate to its size: Frangipani, famous for its rustic brunches at throw-away prices, Tebaldi's for delicious meals by day and night, Lords Guest House for substantial dishes savoured alongside superb valley views. The quality contemporary fare presented by Andre and Kurt at Karoux is drawing diners from Robertson and beyond, while the Deli Girls promises the best coffee as well as daily specials. Green Gables serves well-cooked appealing meals at down-to-

earth prices, the Jack and Grape is renowned for steak, Jacobs Larder pleases organic fans. Oblivion and Kingsriver further increase the options for festival visitors making a weekend of it.

Visitors should arrive on Friday evening in time to take in the Noel Coward cabaret *Cocktails and Laughter*, performed by three talented locals (booking essential, phone 023 625 1773) and sporting types can start the festival day with an 8km or a 19km run along the Klipspringer trail in the Vrolijkheid nature reserve, 4km from the village (e-mail Angie at info@targetevents.co.za for details).

There will be big screens for rugby fans on Saturday and Sunday breakfast specials at several restaurants. For more information and accommodation, phone 023 625 1954 or e-mail John McGlashan at info@tourismmcgregor.co.za.



MATCHING FOOD AND WINE: Kurt Middleton and Anette Rosenbach pair Tanagra shiraz with Karoux's duck spring roll on Asian salad with sweet chilli sauce.