



5 things to do in and around De Rust

Words Sarietha Engelbrecht

1 Look for a mermaid

Meiringspoort, the legendary passage through a dramatic cleft in the Swartberg, starts about 2 km from De Rust. The road through the poort is 21 km long and crosses the Groot River 25 times. The causeways have interesting names such as Skelmdrif, Perskeboomdrif, Ontploffingsdrif and Laastedrif. (Get a brochure at the tourism bureau in town for the stories behind the names.)

There are quite a few wonderful picnic spots in the poort, but it's mandatory to stop at the waterfall, about 11 km from De Rust. Only five minutes' walk from the parking area, water tumbles 60 m into a deep, dark pool where, according to local legend, a mermaid lives.

There is a story that during the floods of 1996, the mermaid was washed out to sea. A local radio station reported that she was captured and put in a tank at the CP Nel museum in Oudtshoorn, causing a bit of a stir. But the elusive mermaid remains at large. One of the reasons the mermaid legend is kept alive in this area is because local rock art features creatures with fish tails. A seer claims to have made contact with the mermaid, and found out that her name is Eporia...

2 Liquorice allsorts

Dysseldorp lies 13,5 km from De Rust on the road towards Oudtshoorn. You can't help

noticing "Die Kruisberg". At the top of the hill is a white church, reached via a twisting footpath known as the Via Dolorosa.

This little Catholic church was built in 1978 by the priest, Father Rankel, and parishioners. On Good Friday every year, people from all over the country gather here for an Easter pilgrimage.

There's a lovely view of the village and surrounds from the top of the hill. Dysveldorp's liquorice factory, which is open to visitors, is the only one of its kind in South Africa. The liquorice plant (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) flourishes on the banks of the Olifants River outside Dysveldorp.

You can also pop in at the dried fruit factory while you're in the area.

Contact: Book in advance to visit the liquorice factory. Call ☎ 083 922 2474

3 Beautiful redheads...

The best place to see De Rust's famous Red Hills (Mons Ruber) is on the farm Rietvallei, about 6 km outside De Rust. The red hollowed cliffs are one of the few instances where Enon conglomerate, a reddish, muddy type of rock, is visible above ground.

In 1925 the Prince of Wales visited and was apparently so impressed that he insisted the rest of the royal family also come and see the beautiful landforms.

Princess Elizabeth (the future queen) and her parents returned in 1947. The Queen Mother was performing a ceremonial ostrich-feather cutting in the area when an inquisitive ostrich stole the limelight by pecking at a diamond earring worn by one of the ladies-in-waiting. Fortunately the earring landed on the ground, and was retrieved before the ostrich could swallow it. Photographs of the visit can be seen at the small museum section in the farm's wine-tasting room.

Contact: ☎ 044 251 6550

4 Grand old things

Drop in at Schoeman's Gallery in Robertson House to see Tom Schoeman's collection of antiques. An architect named WB Robertson designed the house in 1903 for the pretty young bride of a Mr du Plessis.

"That was during the time when ostrich feathers were still expensive, but then the bottom fell right out of the market and everybody went bankrupt," Tom explains. "They thought ostrich feather would always be in vogue. When I bought the place, it was falling apart."

Tom has been running the gallery for the past 16 years. During this time he has amassed an impressive collection of antique porcelain, Oriental carpets, books, records and sheet music.

Look closely at the portraits on the wall to see if you can spot the picture of Tom at age 21.

Contact: ☎ 044 241 2185

5 Take a ride in a donkey-drawn taxi

Have you ever taken a ride on a donkey cart? The people of De Rust are very proud of their donkeys. In 2004 they founded the De Rust Donkey Awareness Project as well as a club for donkey owners.

The donkeys in the project are all still working animals. They pull carts that carry people, wood and all sorts of other goods around the village.

Thanks to a few sponsors, the project has been able to buy materials for leather harnesses for the new carts, and the old carts have been rebuilt and repainted.

The donkey carts are also used for parties and weddings. Find them behind the tourism bureau.

Contact: ☎ 044 241 2231 (Hillary and Carl); ☎ 044 241 2258 (Gert)