

WESTERN CAPE: EATING OUT

Last supper in Sutherland

Recently back from the Explorer project, **Simnikiwe Xabanisa** recalls his best meal on the road

THERE'S nothing like the office canteen to elevate a decent meal you once had to Last Supper status.

As I write this, I'm wolfing down an oily curried mince and rice from the office cafeteria, because I can't leave my desk (the people who want this article are, to quote Rod Tidwell from *Jerry Maguire*, riding my ass like Zorro).

It's a state of affairs that highlights what I wouldn't do for another meal at the Cluster d'Hote restaurant in Sutherland. Having frequented a few too many Pub and Grills on our explorer journey from Joburg to Cape Town, we weren't expecting much on the eve of our last day of the trip.

But Jurg Wagener, the host at our guesthouse, insisted that Cluster d'Hote was the pride of Sutherland. Situated in an old Victorian doll's house on the main road in town, everything about the place is antique, despite the fact that the owners renovated as recently as 2007.



The signature dish is the lamb shank (or, as the owners call it, the "Roggeveld lamb"), which comes with samp, stewed Cape fruit, roast potatoes and grated sweet carrots.

The chef recommended that the lamb, which literally falls off the bone, be enjoyed with mint sauce. Coupled with the 2004 Groenland shiraz, all manner of senses were assaulted, bringing us to the conclusion that it was our best meal on the road.

The starter, tomato and red-bean soup, and the chocolate cake with ice cream for dessert pretty much sealed the deal.

What made the experience all the more rewarding was the cosy atmosphere and the owners' old-fashioned style of serving (no mohawked students with inexplicable attitudes to deal with).

If ever there was a reason to brave the bitter cold of Sutherland (other than the telescope, of course), the Cluster d'Hote is it.

FAST FACTS

CLUSTER D'HOTE
Piet Retief Street, Sutherland.
Phone 023 571 1436 or e-mail clusterdhoter@mweb.co.za.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: It's very easy to underestimate the place because it's so quiet once you're inside.

THE BILL: R760 for four, including two bottles of wine.

SERVICE CHARGE: Not included.

MENU PRICES: Starters in the R30 range; mains around R98. That sweet tooth will cost you about R38.

WINE LIST: I'd love to tell you how extensive it is, but all I know about wine is the kind of hangover one gets from it. But our Groenland shiraz (R115) went down so well we had to get a second bottle.

SERVICE: Owner Johann Marais is also the maître d' and head waiter, while his wife, Anelia, is the chef.

NOISE LEVEL: None, as there was only one other guest in that night. If anything, we might have disturbed the peace somewhat.

DÉCOR AND LIGHTING: The dim lighting gave the hotel an intimate feel; the décor philosophy is "antiques everything".

IS BOOKING NEEDED? Given how empty it was the night we visited, it's tempting to say no, but our host at the guesthouse still saw fit to call ahead on our behalf.

EASY PARKING? Ours was the only car outside.

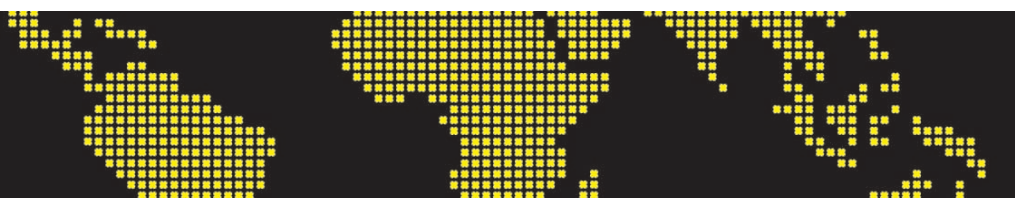
CHILD FRIENDLY? Yes.

DID YOU SEE MANAGER OR CHEF? Yes, and both were phenomenally welcoming.

OVERALL RATING OUT OF FIVE STARS: ★★★★★

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