

SOUL of our father



Paternoster, the oldest fishing village on the windswept West Coast, is an enigmatic place of both extreme beauty and harshness

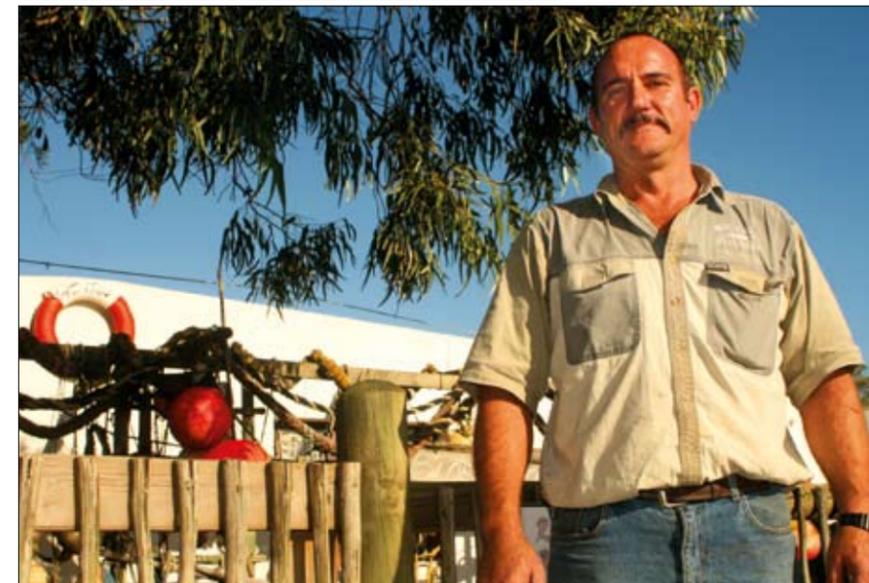
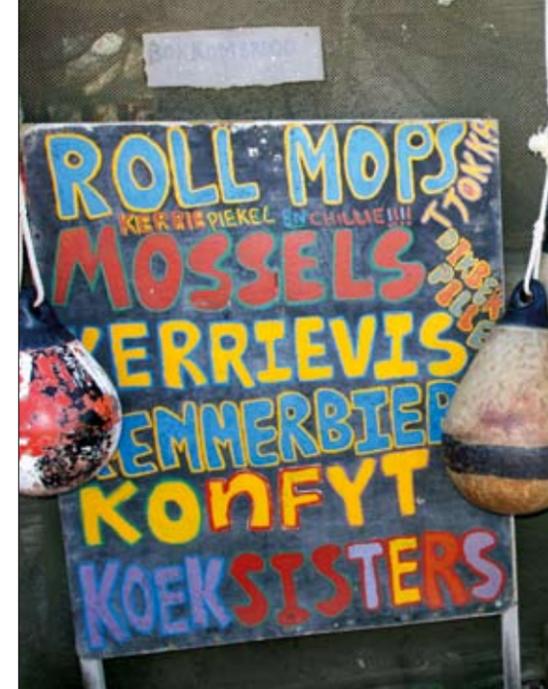
“MOST OF THE TIME THE WIND blows you off your feet, it's hot and dry and the sea is cold. Paternoster is harsh, like living in Patagonia,”

says renowned fisherman André Kleynhans. He's lived in Paternoster – which means 'Our Father' in Latin – for the past 20 years, and is now also a successful property developer. Actually, he's considered by locals to be the mayor of the village, everyone's guardian angel with a soldier's moustache.

“But I know for sure, Paternoster is definitely not for everyone,” says André. “People come here on holiday and think it's beautiful, then they move here. But when the south wind starts blowing, they head straight back to Joburg. Only the people who really belong here survive. You cannot choose Paternoster – it chooses you.

“That's what I mean when I say Paternoster has a special energy that only embraces certain people with kindred spirits. When it calls your name, it's like finding your soul mate – like dust sticking to wet paint. I believe those who belong here land up here eventually. Unfortunately there are lots of people in town who don't belong, but they don't know it yet.”

Driving from Vredenburg to Paternoster, as you crest the last hill down to the coast the whitewashed village fringes the ocean before you. It looks like a small piece of Greece – homes with blue window shutters and tall chimneys set in a flat, expansive landscape devoid of trees. That's a sure indicator of harsh weather and extreme wind. But in winter the rolling wheatfields around Paternoster swathe the village in waves of green, and in spring daisies >>



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WESTERN CAPE



Opposite:

□ Brightly painted fishing boats sprinkle the beach at Paternoster.

This page:

□ The iconic Paternoster Padstal sells local delicacies

□ André Kleynhans, considered by locals to be the mayor of the village.

□ Known to locals as Oep ve Koep, this shop is a treasure trove of unique Paternoster mementos.

>> in white and orange dance in the breeze all the way down to the beach. These are the beautiful seasons, with calm weather between cold front squalls. As summer approaches, the wind starts whistling, the earth parches, and swirling dust chases tumbleweeds across the landscape. Sand is everywhere. These are the moods of Paternoster.

- The village of Paternoster lies on a flat landscape and flanking a sheltered bay.
- Weather permitting, fishermen head out daily to catch line fish and crayfish in season.
- From his vantage point in the Cape Columbine reserve, lighthouse-keeper Japie Greeff can see up and down the entire coastline.

As you enter the village, the four-way stop street is the pivot. Everything radiates out from it – to the right is a quiet residential area, to the left another residential area but with more activity. There's the iconic Oep ve Koep shop selling bric-a-brac, rusks and jam, and further along is a rustic pottery studio and the fabulous Stone Fish art gallery, along with the Paternoster Hotel and its famous Panty Bar. Just across the road, under the rustling bluegum trees, is where crayfish is sold – pink gold for locals. Here the echo of 'kreef, kraakvars, spring lewendig' can be heard throughout the crayfish season. Paternoster Padstal nearby looks like a movie set. Draped in fishing nets and adorned with crayfish traps, this unique shop sells homemade ginger beer and crafts, and every kind of pickled seafood you can imagine.

Best of all, though, is the fresh fish directly off the boats, when they come into shore on the main beach. Colourfully painted, these traditional wooden rowing boats, or *skuitbakkies*, all have curious names

– like Visveld, Wikkel, Fat Boy and Troubles. When the sea is calm, they head out to catch snoek and *hottentotsvis*, and set netted traps for crayfish. Harders by the bakkie load are also caught by permitted beach seine-netting. First the community eats from the catch, free of charge, and what's left is turned into bokkoms, or fish biltong – an acquired taste for many, but much loved by the locals.

While change happens around them, the fishing community is the constant in Paternoster. Today there are about 200 fishermen launching from the beach and living in their tiny, character cottages overlooking the ocean. Fathers teach their sons the craft and hand down traditions, like repainting their boats in vibrant colours every new season. Leftover paint is used to refresh the inside of the fishermen's homes. So, while their tiny white houses are uniformly white on the outside, inside the walls are painted in rainbow colours – much like the local community.

Paternoster mostly escaped the injustices of apartheid, and the coloured and white communities have always lived integrated and peacefully, just as they still do. "It was only in 1986 that the government found out that white and coloured kids were going to school together in Paternoster," laughs André. "So they promptly changed that and the white kids had to go to school in Vredenburg,

15km away. But apartheid was very short-lived in Paternoster and didn't reach deep. So there's still huge mutual respect and tolerance between the people who live here."

Interestingly, the first people documented as living in Paternoster in the early 1800s were Europeans. They collected penguin eggs, caught crayfish and worked in the fish factory. In the late 1800s there were two crayfish canning factories in the village, fertilizer was made from crayfish shells and there was a fish liver oil factory. A boat-building factory also operated from the beachfront. Another first for Paternoster was the Redro fishpaste factory, and the Paternoster Hotel was the first hotel owned by Solomon Tollman in the 1930s. He went on to found the international Tollman Hotel Group. Today the only factory remaining is Paternoster Fisheries, which packs live crayfish for export.

Paternoster is mostly free of the biggest problems faced by the rest of the country – crime is minimal, petty and seldom against residents, and AIDS is not a big issue either. If there are problems, locals stand together and look out for each other, but one issue threatening harmony is beach property development, which will close the fishermen's access to the sea and their livelihood. "That is going to cause conflict in the community, which we have never experienced before," says André. "But I believe the sea and the fishermen will win in the end, because the first big storms will wash these houses into the sea."

Lighthouse-keeper at nearby Cape Columbine, Japie Greeff was born and bred on the West Coast and knows well the storms that lash this coastline. At least 17 ships lie beneath the waters in Paternoster Bay, many driven ashore in violent storms, others losing their bearings in heavy fog. "That's why the Columbine lighthouse was built, in 1936, after about eight ships ran aground along this stretch of coast," says Japie. "So far two ships named Columbine have sunk here." The last ship to go down off this coast was the Cheralin Dawn in 2004. The Columbine lighthouse is the most powerful on the South African coastline. It is visible for 32 nautical miles.

Japie says he definitely intends to stay at Cape Columbine until he retires, and André knows he will simply never leave Paternoster. It would be like leaving a life partner. "I can't tell you exactly what it is about Paternoster that keeps me here," he says nostalgically, "But I think it's something in the wind and the sea. You can never really know them, just like Paternoster." □

Map reference F1
see inside back cover



Footnotes



Paternoster Village Tourism 022 752 2323, info@paternoster.info, www.paternoster.info
Paternoster Hotel and Panty Bar 022 752 2703, www.paternosterhotel.co.za
Self-catering Accommodation Klein Paternoster 082 804 2500, www.kleinpaternoster.com
Rustic Accommodation The Beach Camp 082 926 2267
Voorstrand Restaurant 022 752 2038
Noisy Oyster Restaurant 022 752 2196
Stonefish Gallery and Kayak Paternoster 082 824 8917
Cape Columbine Lighthouse 022 752 2705

- Voorstrand Restaurant serves excellent seafood meals.
- Caught with a hand line from wooden boats, *hottentotsvis* is a favourite fish for the table.
- Locals love bokkoms and were raised on them, but they are definitely an acquired taste.