

Publication		
EXIT NEWSPAPER		
Page	Date	AVE (ZAR)
8	Mon 01 Apr 2019	15678.23



# EATING OUT

*& Sleeping Around!*

with Ian Vella

Ian Vella is a veteran of life on the waves, having put in service on cruise liners on the seven seas. Now he turns his jaundiced eye to destinations around South Africa. To invite Ian to take in your venue, please contact him c/o Exit at 011 776-9091 or [info@exit.co.za](mailto:info@exit.co.za)

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**WALKERSONS** ★★★★★



Well, it's been a little while since I have had the pressure, I mean pleasure, of entertaining you with Gavin and I sojourning in various eateries and establishments and then presenting you with our insight into whether you should be heading there or googling alternatives! We were invited to Walkersons Resort & Spa just 10km north of Dullstroom:

We arrived in Dillatroom early to have a delightful lunch with old friend Darryl who was dog-sitting two gorgeous Scottish Terriers for his sister at their lovely home. Darryl's creations were, as always, divine, with his salad caprese being especially scrumptious! We left Darryl's well sated for the short drive north to Walkersons arriving at the security gate around 3:30 and first impressions were most upbeat with a very scenic and winding drive from the main road down the valley to the lodge itself. We parked and in a flash Nico was out to welcome us and collect our bags. Staff at reception were charming and helpful and then Nico escorted us to our delightfully rustic but exceptionally comfortable rooms housed side by side in one unit with super views from the lovely verandas of the surrounding countryside and terraced trout lakes. We settled in and checked out the rooms which are very spacious, comfortably furnished with king beds, 2 inviting wing back chairs, an enormous poof (is that the right spelling??), lovely terrace with cushioned chairs, well stocked and reasonably priced mini-bar & tea & coffee station (real coffee too), safe, plenty of storage, lovely bathroom with double antique style vanity, separate shower, deep bath, (I couldn't help but luxuriating in there with bubbles up to my nose), and Charlotte Rhys amenities which I love as they are not scented: (much prefer me and my men to smell natural, or perhaps a little musky!). It was a pleasant surprise to have a good bouquet of DSTV channels including the sports channels which will surely get some sport fanatic husbands tempted to spend a few relaxing days at Walkersons. We then settled on Gavin's terrace with a splash of wine from the mini-bar before heading up to the charming lodge for dinner.

The lodge is rustically elegant with lots of rooms, nooks and crannies, very appealingly furnished with spacious couches, an eclectic selection of art and artefacts. There were various options of where to dine including two terraces, the main restaurant (also open to the public) and a children's dining room which helps keep the little monsters away from those who desire a peaceful meal. Don't get me wrong, I do like children, but perhaps in this enclave of such peace and tranquility some might find under 12 year olds a little intrusive. There were no kids there during our stay!

Now for the food which is much heralded in Walkersons' hype. Regrettably other than breakfast the dining experience was a little disappointing and while the quality of the food was good we found the selections to be rather mundane, uninspired and dated. Gavin had a salad Caprese and found that the one Darryl had prepared at lunch earlier was far superior. Walkersons version was just regular supermarket not quite ripe tomatoes, with regular mozzarella and what looked like store bought pesto sauce. This theme regrettably mostly continued throughout our two dinners and one lunch with the pea soup bland, duck with cherry sauce ordinary and not crisp, cheese balls for a starter, alas, and what seemed shop bought desserts, springbok carpaccio totally drowned in sauce, pork neck steak again bland, and lyonnaise potatoes without an onion in sight! Gavin enjoyed his prawn & chicken curry and the Sengalese sole with a polenta tower were acceptable as was an excellent mushroom soup on the second night. The food was quite well presented on good quality base plates, good flatware, lace damask table cloths (not quite my taste though) all in very pleasant surroundings including a lovely fireplace for those cold winter evenings. Lunch, from an extensive and varied menu, likewise was rather pedestrian: my pulled pork sandwich was soggy with just a smidgen of pork and Gavin's Waldorf salad while generous had little eye appeal unless one like what appeared to be a mountain of bacon left from breakfast. The breakfasts however were superb, interesting, tasty, perfectly cooked eggs, a platter of fresh fruit, delicious coffee and attentive service. The staff were unfailingly friendly and attentive but in need of a little training on the service side; a thumb print on every plate I was served! They carried in the soups for an adjacent table of 12 Italians stacked one on top of the other. (Gavin and I had a wonderful time speculating on what these Italians, apparently local and regulars, did!) The wine list was interesting and well selected as far as the higher priced wines were concerned but very ordinary for the lower priced wines which were all what we would find on the shelves of our local PnP. Perhaps Walkersons should think of doing a deal with a boutique winery that can supply them with something unique, maybe even their own label. We relaxed on the veranda and finished our wine before heading for a great night's sleep in very comfy beds with a huge assortment of pillows: I hope they are changing them annually: not too sure as one or two had a musty smell. A delicious turndown choccie by Darling Sweet Handmade was waiting patiently on the pillow to be devoured before snuggling up in their good quality bed linens.

After a delicious breakfast served by Eliad and Foily, we decided (after much debate

about the heat and energy required) to go for a walk down through the trout lakes to the river and water falls. Not enough superlatives to describe this gentle 2km trek with extraordinary scenery, beautiful gentle flowing river, magnificent waterfalls, everything green and lush: we spotted herons, hawks, ducks and geese. We certainly did not expect this to be so rewarding. The valley that contains Walkersons is a housing estate with some magnificent homes set in generous plots and also vacation bungalows for the well-heeled. There is also a helipad and airstrip. There is loads to keep you busy here, not only the walks and hikes, but bird watching, (a bird sighting list was in the compendiums), cycling, horse riding, a swim in a sparkling pool, a quick work out in the gym, or just relaxing on your verandah and enjoying the scenery. Then, of course there is fishing with permits provided at reception. For those less mobile or if you just want a bit of fun there are golf carts available for hire. If you can tear yourselves away from this little bit of paradise then Dullstroom is a fascinating little town with lots to do and some fine eateries. Don't miss the whisky tasting joint that also has an amazing selection of gins.

Maggie was the housekeeper making up our rooms and she was truly excellent, friendly and efficient: she noticed I enjoy my coffee and milk and made sure I was well stocked up: likewise the wine! Linens were not as white as they could be, surprising as the towels were as white as white can be, soft and fluffy. The turndown service was amazing; they even asked if we wanted our fires lit (despite the season) and the rooms were fresh and inviting as we returned

The spa is another fine feature of Walkersons and Gavin was comped a massage treatment. He was welcomed in a smart reception area and eventually decided on an anti-aging facial (he doesn't really need one!) and his therapist was a young local lady named Annah. She was very professional and we went for dinner with Gavin looking absolutely radiant. The spa offers a variety of treatments, all on the website, reasonably priced in lovely surroundings.

I had another great night's sleep awaking just before sunrise: the sunrise was absolutely glorious turning the low clouds and trout lake pink with a soft mist rising from the river valley. Well worth an early rise. Rebecca served us another delightful breakfast on the terrace: same table: such creatures of habit. Nancy also attended our table; also polite and charming. After breakfast we collected our bags and headed out, fondly farewelled, and once again so enjoying the scenery on the way to the security gate. We stopped off for a delicious coffee and chocolate cake in the company of Darryl and Tony at the zany Mad Hatter Cafe & restaurant before hitting the highway, our purchase of local pies, fish cakes and local cheeses safely stowed.

**What sizzled:**

Everything but the food! Especially enjoyed the walks, scenery, friendliness and comfort as well as the variety of activities.

Not a trace of security bars, security doors, electric fence or razor wire in sight and yet we felt totally safe.

The availability of room service in this sprawling resort is a big plus.

**What fizzled:**

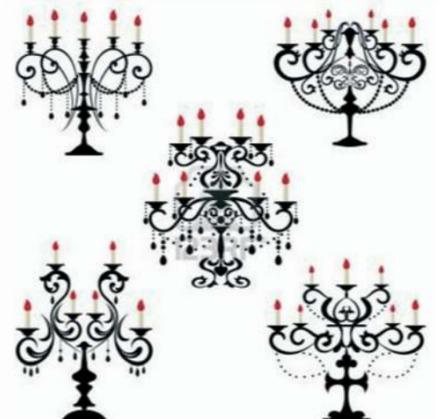
Would have liked ceiling fans in the rooms as well as some shade on the veranda.

Would have liked the wi-fi available all over the property and not just in the vicinity of the reception area.

It saddens me not to be able to rate the food higher: with a little effort, imagination and innovation it could be so much better.

**Rating:**

The place and experience: a resounding 5 candelabras.



The food: just 3 1/2.