

weekend life



PERFECT PEACE: De Zeekoe, views from Porcupine Cottage, ever-changing clouds, Karoo vegetation at its best Photograph: MARK TAYLOR

Pondering my 'ikigai' at De Zeekoe

Relax in quiet surroundings while discovering your life purpose

The Japanese word *ikigai* literally means a life purpose or *raison d'être*.

It's the key to springing up in the morning with hope and reason and once you figure out what it means to you, your attitude to all the days of your life is guaranteed to change.

This word gained attention worldwide as it has entered the global lexicon and now enjoys widespread use.

Simply put, *ikigai* refers to things which bring value, meaning and joy to life; from people and family in our lives, to activities including work and hobbies, as well as embracing a healthy lifestyle with exercise and good nutrition.

Towards the end of last year, we started watching the Secrets of the Blue Zones on Netflix with author Dan Buettner as he discovers five unique communities where people live extraordinarily long and vibrant lives — and the reasons for this.

It was a seminal show that stuck in my mind, but it wasn't until I downed tools and went to De Zeekoe in the Klein Ka-



People & Places in the Garden Route

ELAINE KING

roo, just outside Oudtshoorn, but still part of the Garden Route, that I actually started thinking about the principles of blue zones and *ikigai*.

A more perfect place just to crash and think, you couldn't find.

First, we were lucky to have accommodation in one of the three stone self-catering cottages set above the guest lodge of De Zeekoe which is as peaceful as only the Klein Karoo can be.

Set 2km from the main lodge, staying in one of these luxury self-catering cottages is like dropping out of the world.

There are no sounds other than birds and even the vista is

soothingly quiet comprising of scrubby fynbos and veld, gentle mountains in the distance, nothing that fights for attention.

I am mostly incapable of sitting still and my mind is usually like Bangkok traffic, but here I found myself just parking off on our private terrace doing nothing.

We lay by the private pool and I found myself watching clouds and how they are ever-changing from wispy, scruffy to big, fat and fluffy.

The perfect setting in which to free the power of the subconscious mind — and to contemplate the philosophy of *ikigai*.

De Zeekoe also so happens to be home to people who have found their *ikigai*.

Take Poppie Ewerts, for example.

She was born on this farm and has spent her 70 years working and living here, has never been much further.

The Potgieter family, who own this property, even built a school for those who live on the farm.

Ewerts makes kombucha, grows sprouts for the restaurant, she bakes and mentors younger staff members.

Ewerts works doing things she loves, she belongs to a tight-knit community on the farm which gives her purpose, she keeps busy and eats simple healthy food — all the perfect ingredients of this phenomenon.

The same goes for Lucy Marvel because though she is not old, she espouses these principles.

She too was born and grew up on the De Zeekoe farm, started working as a cleaner and is now the head chef at De Zeekoe having learnt how to cook from mentors in this community.

Not only does she run a



WINDS OF CHANGE: The old windmill, the colours of the Klein Karoo and views from the Windpump Restaurant Photograph: MARK TAYLOR

restaurant that in busy times feeds 45 people, but she jumped at the training opportunity to become part of an excellent team of massage therapists here at De Zeekoe.

A visit here should include a massage delivered with passion and a Lucy-chef special of ostrich bobotie or gizzards at De Windpump Restaurant.

It becomes so evident how people here live for and care for their guests when you meet these folk.

"There is no world like it anywhere in the world," Héctor García, co-author of the book *Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life*, which helped push *ikigai* into the global spotlight.

Explaining that having an

ikigai is the key to leading a happy life with a healthy body and mind, this book — which has been translated into 63 languages — has sold more than three million copies since its release in 2016.

"When you feel down, just thinking about your *ikigai* will change something in you," García said.

"I receive comments even now from readers who say their lives were transformed by this word."

For the purposes of this book, García interviewed more than 100 elderly residents of Ogimi Village, Okinawa Prefecture, renowned for being a village of longevity.

One thing that these healthy and active seniors have

in common is that each has an *ikigai*, or something worth living for.

"When we asked what their *ikigai* was, they gave us explicit answers, such as their friends, gardening, and art.

"Everyone knows what the source of their zest for life is, and is busily engaged in it every day," García said.

Another distinguishing feature of this community is that the elders have strong social links with their peers and frequently get together to enjoy karaoke, birthday parties, and more.

"Avoiding social isolation is linked to the motivation and confidence to lead active lives," García said.

García believes that these

his team of scientists and demographers travelled the world in search of communities where people not only lived longer but also enjoyed a high quality of life in their old age.

After analysing demographic data and interviewing numerous centenarians, they figured out the secret to their extraordinary longevity and vitality.

Dan's adventures — and all that he learnt — is chronicled in his book, *The Blue Zones*, as well as subsequent books.

By all means visit De Zeekoe to do nothing, just be, but should you want to be busy there is lots to do in the area from visiting the Cango Caves, to Safari Ostrich Farm to see these crazy big birds, to the town and museum, feather palaces and other attractions of Oudtshoorn town only 7km away.

There are views of the Swartberg and Outeniqua mountains, there are more than 162 recorded bird species in the area.

The lodge offers all the creature comforts one could want from luxurious accommodation at the lodge and there are also self-catering chalets on the dam.

If you are lucky, you might see a porcupine or aardvark and De Zeekoe organises trips to see the meerkats.

Cape Country Routes (CCR) SA is a leading group of owner-operated and managed accommodation and activity establishments — more than 20 privately owned hotels, lodges and guest houses — located on the scenic and historic routes in the Western and Eastern Cape.

All carefully selected for their character, charm and romance, they offer the best accommodation and activity options to suit every taste and budget.

Newly launched is the CCR loyalty programme where for a small fee per year loyalty members get discounts and offers.

Book a stay at bookings@capecountryroutes.com and head to www.capecountryroutes.com for more information or book at info@dezeekoe.co.za or www.dezeekoe.co.za.



LIVING HER IKIGAI: Poppie Ewerts and her kombucha Photograph: MARK TAYLOR