Weekend Post Saturday 6 January 2024

weekendlife



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

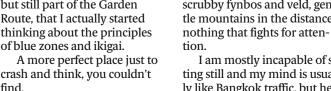
roo, just outside Oudtshoorn, but still part of the Garden Route, that I actually started thinking about the principles of blue zones and ikigai.

crash and think, you couldn't

First, we were lucky to have accommodation in one of the three stone self-catering cottages set above the guest lodge

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



of De Zeekoe which is as peaceful as only the Klein Karoo can



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

soothingly quiet comprising of scrubby fynbos and veld, gentle mountains in the distance,

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 everchanging 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 iki-

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 Manvel 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 Windpomp 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 thera-

pists 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 Windpomp Restaurant.

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

'There is no word like it anywhere in the world," Héctor Garcia, 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," Garcia said.

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

this word." For the purposes of this book, Garcia interviewed more than 100 elderly residents of Ogimi Village, Okinawa Prefecture, renowned for being a vil-

One thing that these healthy and active seniors have

lage of longevity.

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 ev-

ery day," Garcia 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

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

Garcia said. Garcia believes that these ties where people not only lived longer but also enjoyed a high quality of life in their old After analysing demographic data and interviewing numerous centenarians, they fig-

his team of scientists and de-

world in search of communi-

mographers travelled the

ured out the secret to their extraordinary longevity and vital-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

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

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 owneroperated 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 of-

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www.dezeekoe.co.za.

Ikaria, Greece; and Loma Linda California. With the support of National Geographic, Buettner, and

principles apply not only to se-

nior citizens, but to young peo-

If you haven't seen it yet,

then watch Secrets of the Blue

Zones series on Netflix which

should inspire all of us to find

tional Geographic fellow,

best-selling author.

Buettner is an explorer, Na-

award-winning journalist and

producer, and New York Times

He identified the five origi-

nal blue zones — the places in

the world with the healthiest,

longest-living populations, in-

cluding Okinawa, Japan; Sar-

dinia, Italy; Nicoya, Costa Rica;

ple as well.

our ikigai.