

The West Coast is a wondrous place for a wine-tasting

 By [Ilse van den Berg](#)

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Five hours on the N7 in a van is unnerving even to the most easy-going traveller. Even so, the scenery is pleasant on the eyes and good for the heart. Philadelphia, Malmesbury, Morreesburg, Piketberg for a quick pitstop to stretch legs, and off we were again. Citrusdal, Clanwilliam, and then just before Klawer, we decided the sun was setting too fast, so we took a gravel shortcut and arrived at Doringbaai at a magical hour.

The sun was kissing the horizon goodnight and the Atlantic Ocean welcomed us to the wild West Coast with a fresh, winter breeze. There were barely any people in sight and we quickly learned how chilled this seaside village really is.



Doringbaai is home to a small but hardy fishing community and boasts a small shop, bottle store, restaurant, a petrol pump, church, library, primary school, an abalone farming project, and Fryer's Cove Winery.





Note the (one and only) petrol pump...

Back to the beginning

The story of Doringbaai dates back to 1925 when the North Bay Canning Company instructed a Dutchman named Koos Bleeker, to establish a crayfish packing factory in the West Coast area. When Bleeker arrived in Doringbaai he found nothing more than an abandoned wooden shack, but there was no shortage of crayfish.

He then went on a mission to find locals who'd be willing to help with the construction of the factory - the first willing man being Jan Laubscher from the Sandveld. In the 2000s, the original Laubscher brothers were still farming the area and it was on a part of their farm that the Fryer's Cove vineyards, named after the first commercial farmer in the area, British settler Richard Fryer who entrenched a tradition of community investment in the area, were founded.



We dropped our bags at Thornbay Accommodation, our whimsical sea-view shelter for the night, and took a walk down to the winery in the dark - all we knew was that we're supposed to follow the lighthouse's bright light, spinning ever so rhythmically.

Arriving at the old crayfish factory - quite literally *on* the water - our passionate host and the marketing manager of Fryer's Cove, Francois, awaited us with much-appreciated wine, a scrumptious seafood *potjie*, and a crackling fire.



Now, you might be shocked or perhaps intrigued to find out that there is a winery in this area, as was I. In this district, nature is unrelenting. It rains an average of only 50mm per year and the Southwesterly wind constantly buffets the coastline, but even so, the region is apparently ideal for winemaking. Who would have thought?

Fryer's Cove is probably the most unconventional winery I've ever visited. In fact, it's arguably the world's only vineyard this close to the Atlantic Ocean.

The vines of Fryer's Cove dot the hillside 820 meters from where the cold ocean throws its breakers against a rocky shore - in between the towns of Doringbaai and Strandfontein.

'Forged of the earth, tempered by the sea'



The wines have a distinctly oceanic flavour, hence the slogan 'forged of the earth, tempered by the sea'. According to winemaker Derick Koegelenberg, due to the vineyard's close proximity to the ocean, tiny salt flakes actually end up on the skin of the grapes and this is what causes this slight salty flavour.

As a predominant red-wine drinker, I was swept off my feet (not literally, guys... I have self-control) by the fresh and fruity Sauvignon Blanc and may have even arrived in Cape Town with a box of it.. It is marvellous and quite unlike any other wine I've tasted.



There are also a couple of other things to do in the area:

Mix with the locals

A Weskus person is a *lekker* person. I don't think many would disagree when I say that. Nothing is quite as entertaining and good for the soul as a good conversation with a Weskus local. They are full of stories, colloquialisms, and basically make you feel like you just drove straight into a big bear hug. They will do every and anything to make you feel welcome - without any pretentious poshness. The locals of Doringbaai are as robust and unfettered as the landscape and it is this terroir that imbues every bottle of Fryer's Cove wine.

Drive to Strandfontein



Strandfontein is a quick drive from Doringbaai and is a livelier town with plenty of holiday homes, great beaches, camping and caravan spots, a restaurant and a *kafee*.

Explore Papendorp



As you drive into Papendorp, you feel as though you're on a movie set. And if it's not one, it will probably be in future. Either for some Afrikaans drama, or a freaky horror movie. Its wide expanses and dramatic quietness can almost make it difficult to breathe - if you're not used to so much space and silence.

It is also where the Olifant's River meets the ocean and has an incredible view over the wetlands and river with a massive variety of bird species - apparently 183 species.

The locals of Papendorp make a living by fishing in the estuary and by gathering salt at the nearby salt pans.



What a privilege to live in a country with so many hidden gems! I urge you to prioritise visiting and supporting our smaller towns in South Africa.

Those at Fryer's Cove say it beautifully:

“ *“Only through tourism and alternative commercial ventures do these authentic West Coast fishing villages survive. It's one of the last outposts where hospitality, fresh crayfish and excellent wines come with the territory. To us, it's a tradition worth saving.”* ”

Trading hours: Monday - Saturday. Fryer's Cove Cellar: 09:00 – 17:00. Jetty Restaurant: 10:00 – 16:00. (Breakfast is served till 11:00 on weekdays only). www.fryerscove.co.za | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Thornbay Accommodation](#).

ABOUT ILSE VAN DEN BERG

Ilse is a freelance journalist and editor with a passion for people & their stories (check out Passing Stories). She is also the editor of Go & Travel, a platform connecting all the stakeholders in the travel & tourism industry. You can check out her work [here](#) and [here](#). Contact Ilse through her website [here](#).

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