

## Hello Darling! The flower of the West Coast...

Written by {ga=micheller}

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The charming little village of Darling has a big reputation for spectacular wildflowers, and it's for this reason that it's known as **The Flower of the West Coast**. In fact, the wealth of flora and natural flowers is undeniably its biggest asset. Summertime sees the town nestled between golden fields of wheat and perspiring vineyards, and winter's rolling green pastoral hills are dotted with arum lilies and grazing cows. It's spring time though, that sees Darling blossom into fiery, flowering brilliance and bloom into a must-see stopover along the West Coast Road.

Darling lies in the region formerly known as De Groene Kloof (the Green Valley). Founded in 1853, it was named after Sir Charles Henry Darling who came to the Cape as Lieutenant Governor. The town gained municipal status in 1955 and since then has made a concerted effort to market its tourism attractions. Over time it has gained a reputation as a botanical centre, thanks to its profusion and variety of wild flowers. Come September, more than 1000 species of flowering plants emerge. This astonishing variety makes the region unique.

In 1917 Mrs. Suzanne Malan of Die Pastorie and Mr Frederick Duckitt of Waylands founded the annual **Darling Wildflower Show**. They wanted to display Darling's floral wealth for the world to see. At the same time they promoted the conservation of flowers amongst the farmers of the district, who have since maintained the botanical diversity of the region over several generations.

Since then this show, which runs an orchid show at the same time, takes place during the third weekend in September and has become an annual event drawing large numbers of tourists. Since its inception, the wildflower show has grown from a few floral arrangements in a hall, to the spectacular exhibitions today which include natural displays reflecting the geographical diversity of Darling's surrounds.

All flowers and plants on show grow wild in the Darling district and are picked under the strict supervision of the Darling Wildflower Society.

Darling's annual **Voorkamerfest** is widely considered one of the most unique arts festivals in

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the world. It's a theatrical adventure taking you into the sitting rooms of local village residents, to be entertained by famous South African and foreign performers. Held annually in the first week of September, the Voorkamerfest takes place in 21 homes, ranging from township shacks to grand Cape Dutch homesteads.

One ticket buys you five shows on a route across town. There are various routes, with five shows allocated for each. You won't know which route you're on – that's part of the quirky surprise. Local taxis will transport you around the village on your route. Sit back and enjoy the ride. The Voorkamerfest is a mixed bag of theatrical genres offering an exciting South African cultural experience.

Darling has become the home of well-known South African comedian Pieter-Dirk Uys's theatre and restaurant, **Evita se Perron**, named after his alter-ego, Evita Bezuidenhout. This enjoyable venue hosts the Voorkamerfest in September each year as well as the regular Darling Talent Shows. Enjoy the eccentric ambience of this cultural gem with restaurant, bar, cabaret and Tannie Evita's arts and crafts market.

Highly acclaimed satirist Pieter-Dirk Uys will astound you with his brilliant up to the minute wit on current South African politics.

- Shows are subject to change, please call 022 492 2831, for the latest show times.

Just 75km from Cape Town, Darling is the perfect weekend getaway destination.