

farmer's weekly

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**TRANSMISSION,
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TRAVEL

A CAPE TOWN HOTEL THAT
BLENDS HISTORIC CHARM
WITH MODERN FEATURES

MONTHLY TRACTOR
PRICES REPORT



With its great hospitality, you'll never feel blue at this seafront establishment

On a visit to The Blue Peter Hotel in Cape Town's Bloubergstrand, **Brian Berkman** was utterly charmed by its standout views and the upgrade it recently received.



The Blue Peter Hotel on Bloubergstrand beachfront, with Table Mountain in the background. PHOTOS: BRIAN BERKMAN

A wedge of African sacred ibis flies overhead from Robben Island to Bloubergstrand for daily refreshment and return to roost at the end of the day. For many people, the whitewashed Blue Peter Hotel and its famous outside tables and lawns has fulfilled the same role; it's a place to perch and be deliciously sustained. It is an institution.

The Rattray name has long been associated with South African history, hospitality and conservation at Fugitive's Drift in KwaZulu-Natal and MalaMala in the Sabi Sands Game Reserve in Mpumalanga. It may be less well known that The Blue Peter Hotel and restaurant, a sea-spray away from the rocks at Bloubergstrand, also has its roots in the Rattray family and today is run by Alison Morphet, previously of MalaMala.

A LONG HISTORY

Like Fugitive's Drift that was once a location for an important battle, the rocks

and beaches at Melkbosstrand, Big Bay and Bloubergstrand featured as sites for one of the Napoleonic wars fought in the Cape in 1806. The British forces, under Sir David Baird and Sir Home Riggs Popham, reached the Cape of Good Hope in late 1805 and attacked the Batavian Republic's defenders, led by Lieutenant-General Jan Willem Janssens, at the Battle of Blaauwberg on January 8 1806.

Although far from the front lines, a militia of farmers from Swellendam joined the Batavian forces to resist the British. Despite their efforts, Janssens ultimately capitulated, and the British gained control of the Cape Colony on January 18 1806.

Triumphant paintings of Baird and Popham are in The Blue Peter's foyer, and the nearby roads bare their names.

A NAUTICAL NAME

The hotel is today one of the oldest sites in Bloubergstrand, dating back to the late 19th century, when George

Henry Stevenson, a Cape Town harbour official, and his wife Fanali ran a small shop and later a tea room.

The Blue Peter was named after the figurehead on the *Galatea II*, a 19th-century ship, which now looks over the Duncan Dock in the V&A Waterfront.

The 'Blue Peter' is also a communications flag that is flown on ships, and you will see these framed flags on the walls of the hotel and flying from the mast outside its door. It is hoisted to signal last orders to seamen that the ship is about to leave port and set to sea. Interestingly, Popham is also credited with developing the telegraphic signal codes, which he published in 1799 and revised finally in 1816.

Today the building still has loads of historic charm courtesy of the original exposed ceiling beams, timber floors and in-room cubbies, now no longer used, where guests' shoes would once be left to be polished at night without their having to open the door.



ABOVE: Perennially popular, The Blue Peter Hotel always has a buzz, especially on weekends when the lawns are busy with visitors. **BELOW LEFT:** Original wooden floors and timber ceiling trusses in the foyer, along with portraits of British commanders of the Battle of Blaauwberg, echo the history of the property. **BELOW RIGHT:** The seaside sunsets are awe-inspiring.

Farmer's Weekly stayed in one of the recently refurbished rooms, number 28, a corner unit, which has two sets of windows, one for the most perfect Table Mountain outlook, and the front window and balcony overlooking the beach and Robben Island beyond.

EVEN THE NON-SEA-FACING ROOMS, THE MOST AFFORDABLE, HAVE VIEWS OF THE MOUNTAIN AND SEA

WELCOME UPDATES

The hotel's original bones are still strong but the update that included new flooring and the painting of the in-room timber headboards and desk consoles in lighter hues and shades of blue is very welcome. Soft furnishing like accent cushions and a nautically coloured fabric throw make all the difference. Linens are now crisply white and inviting.

For a beachfront hotel, The Blue Peter's rooms may be among the Cape's most affordable. For the view alone and direct access to the beach, this hotel cannot easily be topped.

There is a new focus on the restaurant and on corporate hospitality, with impressive food in generous portions being delivered.

Since October, the hotel has had an updated menu. Yes, prices reflect

the improvements in the menu and elsewhere in the hotel, but continue to represent good value for money. The Seafood Feast, which *Farmer's Weekly* enjoyed, delivered delicious calamari, mussels, hake, four prawns and fries with lemon butter sauce and fabulous home-made hot sauce for R295.

New menu items include Pasta di Mare (R250) with linguine, prawn tails, mussels, calamari, fish goujons, Napoletana sauce and garlic; and a carpaccio salad (R150) with beef, rocket, pecorino cheese, capers, and a balsamic reduction.

Two new pizzas (one to replace the four seasons) is the vegetarian verde for R155, with zucchini, spinach, capers, olives, artichokes, rocket, and oregano topped with mozzarella; and a prawn pizza at R225 with prawn tails, garlic, chilli, feta, rocket, Napoletana sauce, and mozzarella.

DINNER AND A 'SHOW'

During mid-September, while watching the approaching evening from the first-floor Lighthouse Restaurant, the sun appeared to dip directly into the sea for a twilight swim.





ABOVE: A newly refurbished Sea-Facing Beach room shows the nautical colours, new floors, and painted headboard. **BELOW:** Updated fabrics and cushions bring The Blue Peter into a contemporary, nautical style. **RIGHT:** The Seafood Feast served in the restaurant includes calamari, mussels, hake, four prawns, and fries, with lemon-butter sauce and home-made hot sauce. **BOTTOM:** The best tables in the house are at the window overlooking Bloubergstrand Beach and Table Mountain beyond.

The event of our dinner arriving only momentarily drew our attention away from the dwindling outside light show. The writer, and almost every other restaurant patron, was seen snapping photos of the burnished horizon as the sea appeared to take on a velvet texture.

Aside from the suite, which has a separate sitting room and a larger balcony, the Sea-Facing Beach rooms are the loveliest, located as they are in front of the lawns and directly at beach level.

These rooms also have front stoeps, each with a table and chairs. You could imagine dipping your fingers into the sea from the stoep.

Even the Non-Sea-Facing rooms, which are the most affordable, have lovely views of the mountain and sea.

The costliest room during peak season is marketed at R4 200 for two people, while you might nab a non-sea-facing room in low season for R1 700. Given that other – and (lesser) hotels, in this writer's opinion – charge considerably more, this might be the best view and the best value, too.

A current drawback is that the roadworks to rehabilitate the coastal road remain under way.

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visit bluepeter.co.za. **FW**

