

Wine on the River: A taste of the country lifestyle

By [Rachel Briant](#)

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Spring is in the air, and what better way to celebrate, than with a glass of fabulous local wine on the banks of the lazy Breede River? This is Robertson festival "Wine of the River" in a nutshell, which took place on the weekend of 20-22 October.

We were greeted by rows and rows of vineyards on the Goudmyn farm, before we were handed an empty glass at the entrance. Numerous stalls lined the grassy banks of the Breede River, with wine from almost thirty different wine farms in the area, many of them award-winning. Most of the wine stalls offered free tastings, with the option to buy a glass or bottle at a fraction of store prices. It was like a playground for adults.



It was a baking hot day in the Robertson Valley, a causal 30 degrees on the edge of the Klein Karoo, with plenty of poplar trees offering relieving shade. Every inch of the riverbank was decked out in picnic blankets, hessian coverings, wooden palate tables and tree stump chairs, already buzzing by late morning.

I saw women in sun hats and sun dresses, men in black and white stripes and children and pets joining in the fun. In my nostalgia I'm reminded of the Renoir's famous Impressionist painting "Luncheon of the Boating Party".



Image sourced from Google Images

A string of bands and live music added to the jovial atmosphere. Young men in black suits played music from a yellow wagon, speaking to the countryside culture. I'd recommend arriving early to get a good picnic spot, as this is definitely a popular destination for locals and city folk alike. Festival-goers had been queuing since 8am, even though Wine on the River only officially kicks off at 10am on the Saturday.



Whether you're a wine connoisseur or a curious beginner, Wine on the River is surely paradise for any wine lover.

A valley of winemakers and producers

The Robertson Wine Valley was officially founded in the mid-19th century, and is one of the most abundant wine areas in the country. Today, there are almost 50 million vines in the Robertson Valley Wine Route, which produce more than 200,000 tons of wine grapes every year. Wine on the River offers up the valley's most esteemed winemakers and producers from the towns of Ashton, Bonnievale, McGregor and Robertson, all available under one "roof" (of trees).

There are interactive tastings on offer too, for those interested to learn a little more from the best in the business and the "story behind the bottle", so to speak. I'm told that many of the local wine makers are fourth generation, with the farm and tradition of wine-making having been passed down in the family.

We stuck with white wine and MCC, to celebrate the hot pre-summer day. We were drawn to Springfield wine, our favourite wine from the area, taking a few welcoming sips of their Sauvignon Blanc – MCC was also on offer, and we enjoyed a little bubbly happiness from Paul René.



However, The Breede River was the real highlight of the show – it flowed sluggishly by, oblivious to its popularity. Boat cruises are offered during the festival, but they had already been sold out, so we opted to book a slot for Sunday.

Local producers, boat cruises and rubber ducks

The options for lunch included sushi, burgers, calamari, oysters and more - or you could snack on biltong and olives from

local producers. The afternoon came and went by, with festival attendees walking a little less straight, with sun hats appearing a little more crooked. We bowed out gracefully, retreating to our cottage in the nearby village of McGregor.



On day two, we returned for the boat cruise, and I enjoyed a Bon Courage Rose MCC for breakfast. Hmm. We also indulged in a little Ashton wine cooler (5% alcohol and surprisingly yum).

We caught the action of the “Duck Derby” – the proceeds of which go toward a trust fund for children from the Bonnie People project entering mainstream schools. This trust aims to assist children from the Boekenhoutskloof informal settlement to develop their skills and knowledge, and help them to be ready for the work environment. Tonnes of dark yellow rubber ducks bounced playfully on the water, while all eyes watched from the banks.



The boat cruise cannot come more recommended. The boat itself feels more like a barge, carrying about ten people at a time and is equipped with benches and shade. Plus you can take your wine on with you – big plus!

The Breede River is born in the Ceres mountains, and from here will go on to meet the Indian Ocean. It's calming and cool on the water, with small birds to keep you company. I was struck by how green everything looked, a soothing contrast to dry Cape Town.

As we left the Wine on the River festival, this much was clear - gone are the days when wine is considered an “exclusive” pastime. We got a taste of the lifestyle, and can’t wait to go back. #TastetheLifestyle



Five tips for Wine on the River:

1. Get there early to grab a great picnic spot
2. Don't like big crowds? Go on Sunday instead
3. Pack sunglasses and sun cream
4. Arrive with a curious palate and open mind
5. Definitely book a boat cruise

[Click through](#) to find out about next year's Wine on the River Festival!

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