

I'm at the till, paying for a small ceramic when I spot the sign behind the cashier: "No photography." I flush and glance at the offending object in my hand: my phone, on which sit probably 30 pictures I've just snapped as I wandered the Art Shed, a huge warehouse-style gallery and a shop, with ceramics, jewellery, textiles and paintings by local Paternoster artists.

It's a chilly June day and with no other visitors in the half hour I've been there, she's definitely clocked me. Loath to seem like *that* tourist, I confess, apologise and explain that I'm here for a story. She is gracious. "No probleeeem," she sings. "Are you staying at the Abalone?" In this town teeming with B&Bs and guest houses, she got it in one. "How did you know?" I marvel.

"Influencers love the Abalone," she says.

I laugh and wince at the same time, then flee into the pretty streets. Influencers, I ponder, must love all of Paternoster, a place at once wildly photogenic and weirdly schizophrenic since it's part working fishing village, part bougie coastal escape.

Here, fishermen head out daily in colourful wooden boats to harvest snoek, hake and West Coast rock lobster (*kreef*), while not far away, chefs pipe seaweed foam over angelfish ceviche for the night's tasting menu. Local kids on go-karts dodge stray dogs down narrow lanes while on the beach, girls in full makeup and flowing white dresses stage barefoot photoshoots. The dresses are white, naturally, because in Paternoster, often dubbed "South Africa's little Greece", it's practically the law.

At least it is when it comes to architecture. All 2.5km² of it is a jumble of whitewashed buildings. In one of the



natural hues. Suites are serene and spacious while the public spaces invite lingering over organic ceramics and artworks that reference both marine life and Khoi iconography.

SUITE DREAMS

Its latest addition lies just across the road – the Oyster Villa Seaview Suites. A short staircase leads down to five double en-suite rooms, each with sliding glass doors that open onto private patios. These patios line one long, shared lap pool, bordered by a low stone wall on the other side. Just a wildflower field beyond that is the sea. And while the wall means you'll need to stand up from that comfy sunbed to catch the vaunted view, the real visual drama awaits upstairs.

The Oyster Lounge, a chilled restaurant and bar, has the elevation for the views – whether you're inside by the cosy, contemporary fireplace or out on the wide sundeck.

It's no surprise that the lounge lives up to its name with dressed-to-impress oysters and a bubbly selection to match, but the Nikkei-style sushi was a first for me – a fusion of Japanese and Peruvian flavours, where sushi as you know it gets a twist with things like smoked chipotle dressing and pickled jalapeño. It's unexpected, flavour-packed and ready for its close-up.

RHAPSODY IN BLUES

South American influences also surface on the menu at Blues, the in-house restaurant at the main hotel, where global flavours are layered into local seafood. Starters like Patagonian calamari, Korean chilli chicken and bitterballen nod to the kitchen's pan-continental leanings.

The mains take a similar world tour – from green Thai seafood curry and teriyaki pork belly to local heroes like line fish and, for full-throttle indulgence, the Paternoster Crayfish Thermidor. Breakfast, included for hotel guests and chosen from a set menu, is also served here.

BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE

All guests have access to the main hotel's jacuzzi, sauna, two heated swimming pools and spa. Villa guests also have exclusive access to a wellness area, with a sauna and cold bath.

OUT AND ABOUT

Compact Paternoster is eminently walkable, with a path from the villas leading straight to its 6km-long beach. Beyond the Art Shed, shops and galleries offer ceramics, curios and more. Nature lovers can kayak, horse ride or visit the Cape Columbine Nature Reserve, home to the country's last manually operated lighthouse.

LIGHTS OUT

Back in my Oyster Suite at bedtime, the blue-lit, heated pool invites a dip even on a windy night, followed by a full-blast rainshower and a bout of Netflix on the smart TV. Propped up in the giant bed, I scroll through my camera roll: an indecent number of naughty ceramics, sushi close-ups and silver-grey skies. I may not be an influencer but Paternoster, it turns out, is hard not to post.

Sleith was a guest of the Abalone Hotel & Villas.

INFO

RATES: The Oyster Villa Suites are from R4,751.10 per couple per night, including breakfast.

SPECIAL: Until August 31, get two nights in all room types (except classic); daily breakfast; 60-minute massage with a glass of bubbly; and a Sushi or Oyster Tasting Experience from R4,850 per couple.

MORE INFO: See abalonehotel.co.za

POSING IN PATERNOSTER

The new Oyster Villa Seaview Suites at the Abalone Hotel prove the perfect base for salty strolls, sushi close-ups and more than a few Instagram posts, writes **Elizabeth Sleith**



Abalone Hotel & Villas stays true to the 'woke up in Greece' aesthetic, above, and right, a decadent oyster adventure at the Oyster Lounge.

Pictures: SUPPLIED



Clean lines and layered neutrals create a serene, beachy retreat.

country's oldest fishing villages, this tradition has practical roots. White reflects the harsh sun, and the limewash used as paint long ago was cheap, cooling and weather resistant. Today, bylaws ensure that newcomers building holiday bolt-holes don't break the spell with any pink palaces or tacky Tuscan nonsense. Now simple cottages – low-slung, capped with thatched or tin roofs – sit alongside designer beach houses, galleries and gift shops, every one a vision in white.

BLENDING IN, STANDING OUT

The Abalone Hotel & Villas is one of only three hotels here. When it opened in the mid-2000s, it was a pioneer, helping reframe Paternoster as a destination for luxury and design-conscious travellers. After various ownership shifts, it now balances heritage with reinvention and a contemporary polish. The main hotel is a labyrinth of upstairs-downstairs rooms – some with sea views and private balconies – clustered around courtyards. It's all so true to the "woke up in Greece" aesthetic that I half expect Meryl Streep to appear on a landing, singing an ABBA song into a mop.

Inside, it blends modern coastal minimalism with earthy, textured elements. Think stone, wood and woven details softened by pale linens, warm lighting and