



THE CULINARY CAPE FLATS

The trendy city centre streets are not Cape Town's only epicurean hot spots ... there's also a burgeoning foodie culture in the city's townships

WORDS *Lucy Corne*

FOR ALL CAPE TOWN'S CELEBRITY chef-run restaurants and hip cafés serving bone broths, poke bowls or gluten-free, plant-based unicorn cronuts, it is a homely African restaurant in the suburb of Langa that is rated as Cape Town's top eatery by about 1 300 TripAdvisor users. The Cape Flats is not often thought of as a culinary destination. Tourism to the area tends to focus on apartheid-era history, with visits to social upliftment projects usually included in organised half-day tours. But visitors are becoming increasingly uncomfortable with peering at other people's lives from afar. Food and drink bring people together – so what better way to get a feel for the sprawling area that is home to the majority of Cape Town's residents than over lunch or a freshly brewed cup of coffee?

Culinary culture is on the up in the Cape Flats, with a small but extremely passionate network of entrepreneurs proving there are plenty of tasty reasons to leave the city limits in search of refreshment.



• • MZANSI



• • KAFFA HOIST

Just a few hundred metres from Mzansi, Zimbabwean-born Chris Bangira runs Kaffa Hoist, Langa's first coffee shop. Based in the courtyard of the Guga S'thebe Arts & Culture Centre, the open-air café sees a clientele comprising mostly overseas tourists who nip into the centre to shop for crafts as part of a guided tour of the area. Those who venture out to the café tend to keep the rest of their tour group waiting. It's a peaceful place to sit and sip, marrying rustic art – think driftwood tables and upcycled palates – with a splash of nature in the form of scattered pot plants and a distant view of Table Mountain. Travellers make up the bulk of Chris's customers, but he also has local fans who come not only for the flat whites but also for the pancakes and sandwiches – and the legendary ginger beer that's usually sold out by lunchtime.

Guga S'thebe Arts & Culture Centre | Washington Street, Langa | 071 120 6345

"I didn't think TripAdvisor would work for a restaurant in the dusty township of Langa," says Nomonde Siyaka, owner of Mzansi. But for the past three years, the restaurant has reigned supreme over a list of more than 1 200 Cape Town eateries on the travel review site. "To be honest, this is a home, not a restaurant," says Nomonde.

"The food is not cooked by a chef but by a mama, with a mama's love."

Mzansi's food is all cooked with heart and seasoned to perfection, as evidenced by the speed at which diners clean their plates and stand up for seconds. "There are no waiters at home, so you must serve yourself," says Nomonde, referring to Mzansi's buffet-style dining. I can't resist a second helping of the tender beef stew, another dollop of creamed spinach and a top up of samp – the best I've ever tasted.

The food is only half of the story here, though – it's the combination of honest African eats, warm hospitality, live marimba music and a few personal tales from Nomonde's past that keeps the customers reaching for their smartphones to add yet another five-star review.

45 Harlem Avenue, Langa | 021 694 1656 | mzansi45.co.za



• • 4ROOMED EKASI CULTURE

Abigail Mbalo-Mokoena found fame when she participated in *MasterChef South Africa* in 2014. A food truck followed, and later, a light-filled restaurant based in a converted four-room home in Khayelitsha. Book ahead for the family-style feast, served for lunch and dinner on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Abigail's menu takes traditional dishes and gives them a *MasterChef* twist, resulting in a unique banquet of African-fusion fine dining. The samp comes cooked in coconut milk, the slow-cooked "runaway" chicken turns a tough bird into a tender bite and let's just say you've never tasted pap quite like this. For quick eats, there is also a *padkos* menu featuring similarly elevated local dishes designed to be eaten on the run.

A 605 Makabeni Road, Khayelitsha | 076 157 3177 | 4roomedekasiculture.com

• • SIKI'S KOFFEE KAFE

By night, the space adjoining Sikelela Dibela's family home is a garage – but by day it is the Cape Flats' hottest new café. Siki, as he is known, earned his stripes at *Vida e Caffè*, first as a dishwasher and later as a barista, manager and trainer. In 2016, after seven years in the coffee industry, he converted the family garage into a coffee shop and neighbourhood meeting point.

"In Khayelitsha, getting people to come to a coffee shop and pay for coffee was a challenge," says the affable Siki – but he worked out a way to get locals to support the venture along with visitors, adding a book swap, internet café and occasional events such as poetry nights. The coffee – Siki's own blend – has also been created with his neighbours in mind. "I designed the blend, which uses beans from Burundi, Kenya and Ethiopia, to appeal to those who usually drink coffee with sugar. So the bitterness level is low," he explains.

7 Ntaba Street, Khayelitsha | 082 369 8229 |

facebook.com/sikiskoffeekafe



• • SPINACH KING

You've never heard anyone wax quite as lyrical about spinach as Lufefe Nomjana. His story is an inspiring tale of entrepreneurship and hustle. Founded with "R40, a neighbour's oven and four bunches of spinach", the business has bloomed, with Lufefe's gluten-free spinach bread now available in a range of Cape Town coffee shops, supermarkets and health stores. But the best place to taste it is straight from the oven at his flagship café, based in a bright green shipping container next to the Khayelitsha Mall. Here you can also sample a range of other spinach-filled goodies, including muffins, smoothies and freshly squeezed juices.

He buys spinach and herbs from 20 community gardens around Khayelitsha and Philippi – a number that may well increase once Spinach King's second café opens at the busy Mutual Park business complex just outside Cape Town later this year.

40 Khwezi Crescent, Khayelitsha | 073 892 5907 | spinachking.co.za