

Between cows and cornfields in the Nissan Qashqai Midnight Edition



By Ilse van den Berg

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The Free State is a curious place: wonderfully welcoming with wide-open spaces, blue skies, and classic South African cuisine, but unfortunately not the number one reason foreigners visit South Africa. In fact, according to a 2020 article on [Business Insider](#), the Free State is South Africa's second least visited province, and its tourism authority says its brand is going nowhere.



To give some perspective, the Free State isn't some small little province we can just forget about. It's actually known as [South Africa's breadbasket](#). The province supplies significant proportions of South Africa's sorghum (53%), sunflowers (45%), potatoes (33%), groundnuts (32%), dry beans (26%), wool (24%) and almost all of its cherries (90%). It also produces about 100,000 tons of vegetables and 40,000 tons of fruit each year.

Though it's mainly about farming, if you appreciate history, breathing space, and delicious food, you'll probably have a good time in the Free State - as we did recently.

We hit the N1 from Johannesburg in the direction of Bloemfontein, on our way to Smithfield. It's about a five to six-hour drive and it was thus the perfect opportunity to test the ever-so-sleek Nissan Qashqai Midnight Edition. A friend recommended we don't stick exclusively to the N1 so as to avoid its monotony, so after we passed Kroonstad we opted for a back route via Welkom.

A safe, spacious and sophisticated family car

Sometimes the idea of a 'family car' makes the car sound a bit boring, at least in my mind. However, with glossy black roof rails and mirrors, a bold black V-Motion grille, darkened headlamp clusters and 19-inch black wind alloy wheels, this family car is ultra-sophisticated, yet a lot of fun.

Passing through Welkom, also known as Circle City, we had the spontaneous opportunity to experience the Qashqai's handling around more than one bend. You see, Welkom's traffic system is made up of roughly 30 traffic circles. The system was so well designed that there are still only a few traffic lights and stop streets in the city.

We glided past cows and cornfields, bakkies with sheep rails, and endless windpumps - totally stylish from the outside and spoiled with class-leading comfort and intelligent technology on the inside. With leather and suede-look combination seats, in the Qashqai, you can't help but feel smart - even if you aren't smart.



It is said that the Free State particularly wants to grow its domestic tourism arrivals. And to do so, it hopes to persuade avid travellers [through lucrative cost-saving packages or outstanding service excellence offerings that are found around the province](#). Supporting small towns are crucial and one can do so in multiple ways. We often decide to make our journeys a little longer to allow for time to stop at a padstal or local artisanal shops.

On this particular trip, we couldn't resist stopping in Reddersburg, purely out of intrigue. We popped in at the N1 padstal where apparently "their strength lies in their cakes, and tarts"; had a chat with a friendly local at Sarie Marais Hotel; and bought some biltong at Suid-deel Slaghuis which, as indicated on its signage lies "between the N1 padstal and the Sarie Marais Hotel"... a proper 10 to 20 metres, if you were somehow to get lost.





A question remained: would the shiny Qashqai be able to conquer gravel? Because you unfortunately can't pass through the Free State without a bit of gravel - even if it's just for a photo opportunity between the cornfields. The answer is yes. Though it's definitely more of a city sleeker, the fact that it's got a ground clearance of 182mm makes it a completely capable car if you find yourself in the countryside.



We made full use of the spacious interior. There seems to always be space for more - especially if you fold down a rear seat or make a fully flat floor for bulky gear - in our case tents and other camping gear.

The crossover has a smaller, responsive 1.2l turbo petrol engine and Nissan claims an average fuel consumption of 6.2 l/100km. In mixed conditions, we however experienced a higher consumption of roughly 7.2/100km.

Overall the Nissan Qashqai Midnight Edition, priced at R480,800, is surely the happiest in the city. However, for a long-haul drive like this, it is definitely comfortable and capable. We were thankful for such a smooth, luxurious drive with all the bells and whistles to make for a fun drive.

ABOUT ILSE VAN DEN BERG

Ilse is a freelance journalist and editor with a passion for people & their stories (check out Passing Stories). She is also the editor of Go & Travel, a platform connecting all the stakeholders in the travel & tourism industry. You can check out her work here and here. Contact Ilse through her website here.

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