

Experiencing the wild with Aquila Safaris

 By [Robin Fredericks](#)

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Aquila Safaris in association with World Travel Market Africa recently invited us to get a taste of its own brand of wild during an overnight stay. Just two hours' drive from Cape Town, this gem of natural beauty welcomed us to its vibrant and breathtaking surrounds which could easily leave anyone in awe.



Welcomed with drinks, we could already feel the bushveld ambience with staff dressed in neutral colours such as olive greens, browns, and khaki and the sound of safari buses rewinding themselves up for their journeys.

Ours pulled up and ushered us to Aquila's Animal Rescue Centre (ARC), just a stone's throw away, which comprises an eco-synergy system and diversity garden. Eco-synergy ambassador, Riaan Louw took us through the recycling and various waste management initiatives, including vermiculture and aquaponics. "We wanted our waste to work for us instead of costing us money – so we came up with aquaponic farming in a self-sustaining way."





Selfsustainability initiatives, ecological systems

The eco-synergy system collects the vegetables left over from the reserve and then members chop them up and feed them to the worms. The worms then process the excess waste into compost and by doing so, they produce natural liquids – an organic fertiliser used for whatever they plant.

ARC's eco-synergy ambassador, Donovan Vorster then welcomed us to the diversity garden which is an ecological system comprising high growing shrubs, trees and fynbos. Bird lovers can explore the garden and can get a sneak peak of the birds, which also includes the Cape Sugar Bird. Plants such as Lavender and Buchu produced in the garden are also used in the spa. The diversity garden was created as a means to assist bird species under stress due to low flowering conditions, with an outcome to produce relief for them by bringing in nectar.





As it's also a rehabilitation centre, we were introduced to two lions that had previously been exposed to canned hunting practices and the lion trade. At Aquila's ARC, these lions are provided with a safe space to rehabilitate and be reintroduced into the wild.

Sunset Safari party

After visiting the ARC, we sat down to a delicious buffet lunch, after which we could check into our rooms and freshen up. The rooms overlooked the stunning highlands and slopes of mountain terrain. Quite breathtaking – I could have stayed there forever...



Once we were all freshened up, geared and ready to go (wearing our complimentary Safari hats - thanks Aquila!), we huddled together and climbed on board our safari bus for our sunset safari adventure.

Our first stop brought us to Osita and Jumbo – orphaned rhinos on the reserve. Here, Divan Grobler, head conservationist shared more on Aquila's non-profit, conservation and anti-poaching project, [Saving Private Rhino](#), which offers free anti-poaching training to game rangers working on African private game reserves. With a **24-hour rapid rhino response team**, Aquila Safaris aims to rehabilitate these rhinos and prepare them for heading into the wild.



These majestic beauties might look all thick-skinned, but they require so much love and attention. Grobler shared with us how sensitive to sunlight, and how susceptible to germs and illness they are, adding that they possess awesome personalities and are pretty smart.

After we waved Osita and Jumbo goodbye, we headed on our safari excursion with Memory Khumalo, head ranger at Aquila. Memory's knowledge astounded me (and his sense of humour was on another level). There were things I learned about the Big Five that I had never known before – it was extremely informative and I would suggest the sunset safari for anyone visiting the reserve. From wildebeest to springbok, zebra, lion to ostrich (and not forgetting the rhino), the safari immersed us in all that Aquila has to offer.

What I loved about Louw, Voster, Grobler and Khumalo was their passion for the work they do – every bit of knowledge that they shared with us was done with such zeal.





When our safari travel came to a halt, we were welcomed by African dancers at Aquila's Stone Cottage and a braai to boot. We marvelled at the sunset, enjoying a barrel full of laughs around a beautifully decorated table. Although the evening was

predominately cold, we had fires blazing and good conversation all around.

There was but one incy-wincy thing that irked me on our return, and that was the larger than life Piet the Spider (I named him after Pieter who came to my rescue).

Packed and ready to head out, we first took part in Aquila's daily activities on offer. We had the option of choosing from either a spa treatment, a horseback or quadbike riding.



I opted to do quadbike riding and it was amazing! If you're a thrill junky (or even if you're not), I would highly recommend that you put the pedal to the metal and explore the Aquila terrain with this guided drive. It was loads of fun, and now I officially know how to ride a quad bike on my very own.

Should you ever find yourself exploring the Western Cape, be sure to explore the wild with Aquila Safaris.

Thank you, Aquila, for an awesome time – for the warm welcome and great hospitality!

ABOUT ROBIN FREDERICKS

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