

Rhinoceroses, giraffes & fine horses – Araber Lodge Namibia

Off to the next lodge! After my 6-day lodge holiday near Omaruru, I headed to the Araber Safari Lodge, 30 km north of Windhoek. The lodge is situated in a stunning location at the foot of mighty mountains reaching heights of up to 1,800 m.

Following the rain over the past few days, everything was glowing with fresh greenery, and even the rivier (as dry rivers are called in Namibia) was carrying water – a rare sight, as Sabine explained to me as we drove through the water at speed to avoid getting stuck. We reached the lodge on the other side without any trouble, and I was able to check in.

I was given one of the beautiful thatched-roof bungalows, of which there are seven. A bottle of fine wine awaited me as a welcome, and Ingeborg was already expecting me for lunch. I was invited to join her and her niece Sacha in their private home right next to the lodge. We sat comfortably on the terrace, with an idyllic view of the river, surrounded by curious cats and dogs.



After lunch, however, I wanted to see the horses, so we took a tour of the stables next door, home to numerous fine purebred Arabians, whose breeding and excellent training are Ingeborg's pride and joy. Only some of the horses were present at the time, as the rest of the herd was currently 'on holiday' – the horses regularly spend a few months in a huge fenced-off area within the game reserve, where they live completely 'wild' and enjoy their freedom. In this way, Ingeborg ensures that her horses retain their excellent temperament and their love of work in the long term. This work can be very demanding at times, as

many of the horses compete successfully in international endurance riding and cover distances of over 160 km a day! As a guest, you can also take part in a taster session in endurance riding or even join in real endurance rides.

Most guests, however, delight in the high quality of the horses on the safari rides on offer, and I too was soon to experience this for myself. So, off in my riding breeches and ready for the safari! I was given a lively chestnut horse and set off with Ingeborg on the Sundowner Tour (Ingeborg planned to meet us at a lovely spot along the way with the support vehicle and some cool drinks). Not far from the lodge, we passed a reservoir that's home to crocodiles, so we kept a respectful distance from the dense vegetation along the banks, which was also teeming with small, bright orange-shimmering birds. We then rode through open bushland and – at this time of year, lush and deep green – savannah landscape.

At every turn we encountered wildlife: to the left a herd of impalas, to the right a large herd of nimble zebras, ahead of us a group of white-tailed wildebeest galloped off, and behind us a few warthogs peered curiously out of the bush.

We also saw numerous elands – Africa's largest antelopes – as well as the prized sable antelopes (so-called because of their long, sabre-shaped horns), kudus, blue wildebeest, ostriches, springboks and waterbucks along the way – it was almost like being in a zoo, unbelievable!

The most beautiful encounter, however, was with a herd of over 20 giraffes, which we managed to get quite close to before they strode majestically away or galloped off as if in slow motion. It all seemed almost surreal in the golden evening light.



Very real, however, were the black clouds that were gathering behind us in the mountains and began to close in rapidly. We didn't want to be caught out by lightning and thunder on the plain, so we cancelled our sundowner and decided to head back instead – a decision that turned out to be the right one. Just as we arrived at the stables, it began to rain heavily, and afterwards a rainbow in the mountains enchanted the scenery. Once the horses had been looked after, I was looking forward to a hot shower.

Afterwards, we met at the lodge bar for a drink, followed by a delicious dinner. The next day, we set off on horseback once more on a game drive. Today I had a friendly gelding, a very experienced safari horse. With Sacha, we set off on the trail of the rhinos, which I was desperate to see. We found plenty of tracks, including fresh droppings, but these pachyderms have quite a large roaming range (on a few occasions they've even broken out of the reserve and had to be recaptured and brought back in a major operation). But the search didn't get boring for us, as we once again had plenty of opportunities to spot wildlife. For example, we got quite close to a herd of over 60 eland antelopes, including many young. As they retreated into the dense undergrowth, the ground vibrated beneath their hooves.

In the tall grass, just a few metres in front of us, a waterbuck suddenly leapt up; as we drew nearer, we spotted a newborn, still-wet calf on the ground, looking at us in surprise with its big, doe-like eyes – we immediately changed direction so as not to disturb the mother and her sweet little calf any further.

The sandy tracks also offered some lovely stretches for trotting and cantering, and so, after a couple of hours, we reached an idyllic spot where Ingeborg was already waiting for us in the middle of the bush with a stylishly laid table for a traditional bush breakfast! We refuelled with fresh salad, eggs, ham, olives, bread, fruit, cheese and a glass of white wine – marvellous!

On the way back, Sacha found a massive, well-preserved elk antler, which was, however, too large and bulky to take with her on horseback straight away. She planned to come back later by car to collect her 'trophy'. In the game reserve, the animals have few natural predators, as there are no lions, for example. A few leopards live in the mountains, and cheetahs are frequently spotted.

Cheetahs are not very popular with farmers in Namibia, as they kill large numbers of cattle, sheep or goats; this is because they only ever eat fresh meat, unlike leopards, for example, who can ration their prey over several days.

Just before reaching the lodge, we actually did spot the rhinos, hidden deep in the thorny thicket and, according to Sacha, unusually skittish that day – even 'in a bad mood'. We therefore kept a respectful distance, as we would have had little chance of getting away quickly in the thicket, whereas rhinos simply stride through the thorny undergrowth unhindered. Back at the stables, I was impressed by just how much I'd experienced and seen in such a short time! The next day, unfortunately, we had to set off early for the airport. Wisely, Ingeborg had parked her car on the other side of the river the evening before – it wouldn't have been possible to cross that day! Once in Windhoek, I caught a flight to my next destination, Cape Town in South Africa. – Julia Kretschmer -

For full details on the horse-riding safari, visit: <http://www.equitour.com/okasta.htm>