

South Africa: A pure horse-riding adventure at the Triple B Ranch

Full of anticipation, I (Lara) am picked up from Johannesburg Airport by Steven, and three hours later I am warmly welcomed by Laura on the grounds of the Triple B Ranch. Unfortunately, it's already dark and I can't make out much of the lodge, but I'm all the more delighted by my cosy, African-style room. I get to know the other guests at the lodge over dinner, where we're treated to a fabulous homemade three-course meal. The atmosphere in the cosy dining room is very relaxed – almost like a family gathering – with everyone chatting away happily and seeming to be good friends. A few hours later, I realise why: the guests simply feel at home at the lodge and love the informal get-togethers. In fact, three of the five guests are spending their holidays at the lodge for the fifth or eighth time, and when the other two guests say their goodbyes the next day, they have tears in their eyes and are determined to return.

We enjoy a hearty breakfast on the terrace of the main house, with a magnificent view across the large pond covered in water lilies, which is also home to hippos. In front of the lake, a swimming pool and generous upholstered furniture on the lawn blend harmoniously into the overall picture. A round hut has been built on each side of the lake, promising undisturbed hours for couples or families. Once the horses have been fed and saddled, the guides and the lodge owners, Laura and Shane, join us for breakfast before all the guests swing into the saddle and the morning ride can begin. The ride takes us deep into the wilderness along sandy tracks through small wooded areas, across open plains and, last but not least, through the wildlife reserve situated on the grounds, where we promptly encounter a herd of zebras staring at us curiously from just a few metres away. We also come across kudus, which are grazing right under our noses. We make good progress, galloping through a stream and enjoying the lovely weather.



The riding group always consists of a guide and a back-up guide, who rides at the very back. We're very interested in everything the guides can tell us about the plants and animals. I have to get used to the Western riding style here, as I usually ride English-style. But even after the first ride, I'm thrilled by the riding style and even more so by my horse. Shane trains the horses himself, and you can watch him doing so after lunch – it's simply fascinating! This also explains why the horses are so fantastic to ride – it's a dream come true! Sometimes Shane also rides out with the guests and is happy to offer valuable tips and guidance. The horses are very soft-mouthed, and you can choose from the 60-strong herd between calm or more challenging four-legged friends – there's a suitable horse for everyone.

You can also choose between a comfortable McClellan, Western or stock saddle – all the saddles are very comfortable and well maintained. As well as lively trail rides, you can also experience cattle drives, Western games, cross-country riding and a two-day riding safari to another wildlife reserve. Riding lessons and private flatwork sessions are also available. Furthermore, a fantastic bush breakfast is often organised. As I was only at the lodge for a short time, I was unfortunately only able to try my hand at polo-crosse on horseback, but I was absolutely thrilled by it! It's a fast-paced game with rules that are easy to pick up, so you have loads of fun right from the very first time. During a break in the game (which my team happily wins), we enjoy a breathtaking sunset over a cool drink! The sunset the following day, which we marvel at from the lodge across the lake, also leaves us in awe – the sky is bathed in red, hence perhaps the term 'evening glow'... One morning, after a ride, we're allowed to unsaddle the horses, quickly get changed and go for a swim with them – an unforgettable experience! Here, you don't just ride; you have all sorts of adventures with your horse, which makes every day unique.

I was also fascinated by the fact that the horses live freely in the wilderness and come to the stables of their own accord at feeding times – a peaceful existence.



Horse riding in South Africa, always with a sundowner Horse riding in South Africa with giraffes at the Triple B Ranch Cattle driving in South Africa at the Triple B Ranch

If you'd like to take a half-day off from riding or do something else between rides, there's a wide range of activities to choose from: The lodge is happy to organise quad bike tours, guided bush walks, game drives, a tour of the vast Triple B Farm near the lodge, close-up encounters with rhinos, a visit to the village of Vaalwaters, a trip to a goat farm with tastings, some time out at the spa or even an elephant safari. On Sundays, you can also attend the local church service, explore traditional villages and visit a craft workshop with an on-site shop. After the morning ride, you can either go for a swim with your horse or relax by the pool. Weather permitting, a hearty lunch is served al fresco. Afterwards, you can watch Shane Dowinton, a well-known horseman, as he trains young horses in the round pen and outdoors, and you'll be amazed at just how incredibly well he handles the horses. You can also take part in a short activity before being treated to coffee and freshly baked cake later in the afternoon to fuel up for the afternoon's equestrian activity, which starts straight afterwards.



One reason why all the riding activities are so much fun for every guest must be that all the guides are always in high spirits, love the horses – and equally enjoy interacting with the guests. It's not uncommon to come across someone from the office or a guide having a lively chat with a few guests on the terrace. What's more, the range of riding activities on offer isn't just incredibly varied and

professional, but the riding times are also very flexible. One morning, we set off into the extensive grounds and, as we're enjoying ourselves so much, the guides suggest we could go for a longer ride than usual. However, a few of us want to return to the lodge at the usual time, so our group of six is split up without further ado and one guide heads back to the lodge. I join the group carrying on – we get back so late that we only have an hour between lunch and coffee and cake. But we'd had an unforgettable morning, roaming through so many different areas that we can hardly believe we've experienced such a variety of vegetation on a single estate. And after coffee, we decide to play a game of polocrosse, which leaves us exhausted – a long day in the saddle, but one that can only heighten our anticipation of riding the next morning. And the next morning, after a long ride, we try to track down the hippos in the lake in front of the lodge on horseback. This turns out to be a fun and lively adventure in the shallows of the lake – even though, sadly, we couldn't find the hippos that day.

After just under three days, it's time to say a heavy-hearted goodbye – it was definitely far too short! How I would have loved to have gone on more riding excursions, soaked up the lodge's unique atmosphere a little longer, and savoured the warmth of all the staff and guests! Although it may be hard to believe, I do shed a tear or two as I say goodbye after such a short time – the indescribable charm of the lodge didn't fail to captivate me either.

Lara von Breidenbach

Link to the programme: <http://www.reiterreisen.com/tbtsta.htm>