

Wildlife Conservation and Experiential Travel

LTG explores a new kind of
luxury safari with Elela Africa



www.elelaafrica.com

Imagine you are on safari and you are not just the observer. Somewhere which allows you to become a real explorer and gain a rare behind-the-scenes view into the important wildlife conservation efforts. Participate in people's real life. Truly engage in the local culture and deeply connect with nature. And imagine, just by enjoying these unique experiences, you make a real difference to this world.

Elela Africa is dedicated to providing meaningful safari experiences across southern Africa. In addition to gazing upon the continent's most spectacular wildlife in their natural habitat, Elela Africa explores the impact that living in unison with these magnificent animals has on the local communities, as well as introducing the fascinating individuals that play a key role in their preservation. "We are passionate about creating authentic and deep experiences to explore the wilderness and foreign cultures," said founder and owner Sandra Claassen.

The vision for Elela Africa was first devised by Sandra after arriving in South Africa in 2008 to work for a German travel magazine. "I met the locals and they let me take part in their lives," she explains. "I was allowed to look behind the scene of the glamorous safari lodges and polished travel products. I started to understand that all these products are part of a much greater vision and the people running them are unbelievably passionate about what they do."

Sandra was deeply touched by the great lengths in which people go to ensure the success of the conservation effort and wanted to share this unique experience with others too. "I wanted to create travel experiences which allow visitors to participate, to understand this beautiful mission, to feel what we can gain out of nature and to go on one's own journey."



Become a real life Ranger

In 2014, Sandra launched her very first conservation safari in partnership with the owner of a private game reserve in South Africa. The concept was created to allow guests to slip into the role of a ranger, giving them an inside look of the management of a big five wildlife reserve and letting them participate in important conservation projects.

Explorers learn how to track cheetahs via GPS. “The wild cats might have just been released and it is crucial to monitor them and check on their wellbeing,” explains Sandra. In addition, they will learn how to follow tracks, and search for lions, elephants and rhinos in order to collect data about their feeding and social habits. The eco guests also put camera traps out to catch the wildlife activities of nocturnal species during the night. While they will see plenty of animals on a game

drive, GPS and camera tracking enable the team to count and identify inhabitants, which provides important data for the reserve management.

During her time working with the German travel magazine, Sandra was mesmerised by the role of the ranger so it was a natural starting point for the business. “The daily life of a game ranger is very exciting and as you are dealing with nature and wild animals, it can be full of surprises.”

Five years later and Elela Africa’s Eco Ranger Safaris continue to be one of their most important and popular packages. Sandra adds: “Our Ranger Safaris let guests get a behind-the-scenes understanding of the conservation work that happens on a game reserve while still enjoying an enriching holiday in nature.”



Expanding the experiential travel offering

“When I got the first feedback from eco travellers on the ranger safaris, I knew I was on the right path,” explained Sandra. Before long the message started to spread and her clients started asking for similar experiences for their next trip.

Having built its reputation on offering quality responsible tourism without compromise, any new package that Elela Africa provided would need to be of an equally high standard. However, Sandra admits that it is quite challenging to find authentic and sustainable programmes which meet their strict criteria. She said: “For us, it is important that we know all our partners and that they are real conservation projects. We are against direct interaction with wild animals such as touching or bottle feeding. We support projects where animals roam free in their natural environment.”

Despite the difficulties, Sandra was able to establish new partnerships and build new opportunities for her clients. For instance, she found an exciting programme at a luxury lodge collection just north of Durban which combines a

unique eco safari with an authentic cultural experience. Here, explorers will meet Nunu the rhino whisperer who only walks barefoot to be able to feel the animals. Sandra tells us “he grew up in the area and used to be a poacher for meat. Now he takes safari guests on a spiritual walk in the big five Hluhluwe Imfolozi National Park. He wants his guests to feel the wilderness and get them to experience a very close encounter with the endangered rhinos.”

Next to the national park, guests can also undertake a homestay in the authentic Zulu village where Nunu lives. Here, you will experience the warm hospitality of the local South African people and learn about their distinct culture and traditions. As a family member for a couple of days you can cook traditional meals with the daughters, milk the cows with the father, learn how to weave traditional mats from the elders and enjoy interesting conversations about the Zulu culture around the open fire in the evening. Much like the individuals behind the conservation efforts, it is the personal stories of these local inhabitants that make this unique experience so special.



Making a difference

Gone are the days where conservation and eco-tourism means compromising on quality and comfort. With Elela Africa, safari guests make a responsible contribution, but without sacrificing their well-deserved holidays.

What makes Elela Africa different from many tour and holiday providers is that they deliver authentic travel experiences that can be tailored specifically to your needs. Sandra explains: "Our clients appreciate the fact that we respond very personally to their wishes. Some want a luxurious safari, others want to escape consumption and have a deep experience in the pristine wilderness. Some travel alone and others with the whole family. We advise our clients with an insider eye and a passion for creating a personal travel experience."

There is also the added benefit of knowing that by choosing Elela Africa, you are making a meaningful difference to the local community and the important conservation efforts.

Sandra adds: "Our aim is to leave the smallest footprint with our safaris, to act responsibly and to support wildlife conservation. Therefore we take care to work with partners with the same mind-set. Our Eco Camp, home of our ranger safaris, is solar-powered and makes a firm contribution to the conservation efforts of the reserve. The camps of the Mobile Safaris are temporary and leave nothing but footprints in the wilderness. And our partner for the rhino walks and homestay is a member of FairTrade and supports the community of the area. Last but not least, all of our clients support wildlife and community conservation by travelling with us."

A safari fulfils the longing for adventure whilst allowing you to connect deeply with nature and wildlife. However, what you will discover by travelling with Elela Africa is that seeing the magnificent creatures up close on a game drive and then playing a direct role in their preservation is as enriching as a travel experience can be.

A Journey into Namibia

Sandra spent her summer holidays as a child helping her veterinarian uncle tend to pigs, cattle and horses on the farms in Germany – often supporting him as he performed life-saving interventions and provided important vaccinations. When she discovered the opportunity to launch a new partnership in Namibia which allows safari explorers to accompany a wildlife vet for a couple of days, it was impossible to hide her excitement.

Telling us about the new Namibian safari adventure, Sandra explains: "Our partner, Nick, is an experienced wildlife vet based at a wildlife sanctuary close to Etosha National Park. Just like when I was that little child, guests can join him and his team when they get called out for an emergency and

experience working with a variety of wildlife species such as elephant, lion, hyena and leopard, as well as smaller animals such as pangolin, steenbok and honey badgers."

As well as spending time with the wildlife vets, guests can also join James, the anti-poaching team leader, and his dog Puma on patrol for a behind the scenes look at what they do each day and night to protect the local rhinos. Not only will travellers get to learn about the wildlife, but they will also discover the hidden role in which the vet plays in day-to-day conservation. What's more, adults and children alike will have fond memories and amazing stories to tell about how they saved animals in Africa just like Sandra did all those summers ago.



Eco Safari Tour Operator

Elela Africa

Western Cape, South Africa

www.elelaafrica.com



Elela Africa provides a rare behind-the-scenes view into the wildlife conservation efforts in southern Africa which the LTG judging panel described as a “truly eye-opening experience”. In addition to gazing upon Africa’s most spectacular wildlife in their natural habitat, Elela Africa explore the impact living in unison with these magnificent animals has on the local communities, as well as introducing the fascinating individuals that play a key role in their preservation such as Nunu the barefoot rhino whisperer. Guests even have the opportunity to play their own crucial role and make an important difference; slip into the role of a ranger in South Africa, learn bush skills in the Okavango Delta or even gain an adventurous insight into the life of a veterinarian in the wild in Namibia.

The LTG judging panel noted that Elela Africa is the ideal safari experience for those who enjoy luxury comforts but also want to give back and/or live an adventure. These immersive experiences add a raw, authenticity that has become one of the most sought after components of safari adventures in recent times. Furthermore, Elela Africa’s passion and unwavering dedication to supporting conservation efforts has enabled them to develop sustainable programmes whilst also offering bespoke safari experiences tailored to each guest’s individual needs.





Congratulations

Elela Africa

Winner of

**Eco Safari Tour Operator
of the Year**

Western Cape | South Africa

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'J. D. Dreyer'.

Editor in Chief

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