



# Helping Mother Nature help herself

by Iga Motylska

**Those who want to get their hands dirty or actively contribute to various conservation activities while they travel, can do just that thanks to the rise in popularity of ecotourism and voluntourism holidays.**

## What is ecotourism?

Ecotourism is a form of responsible and sustainable travel, including eco-friendly activities, that aims to conserve the environment, protect wildlife, and support local communities. It allows travellers to explore the world's natural wonders and immerse themselves in diverse ecosystems, while staying in low-impact accommodation. Ecotourism focuses on education and raising awareness about the importance of nature conservation and the preservation of cultural traditions and heritage, while creating meaningful travel experiences.

Ethical conservation activities, genuine animal sanctuaries, and rehabilitation centres do not include recreational interactions with captive-bred animals or wild animals that have been habituated, such as walking, petting, riding, feeding, or washing animals. Instead, they focus on hands-on activities that are often hard work and provide true conservation value, such as medical care in conjunction with a wildlife veterinary team, cleaning of enclosures, population counts and translocations, anti-poaching support, land rehabilitation, and any other on-the-ground help that might be needed.



### A five-night conservation journey at Samara Karoo Reserve

Conservation has always been part of Samara Karoo Reserve's DNA. When it was founded in 1997, its aim was to rewild 27 000 ha of fallow farmland to re-introduce wild cheetah, lion, and black rhinoceros into the region after they were wiped out over a century ago. Since the Karoo ecosystem has been rejuvenated, and continues to be rehabilitated, Samara has witnessed Cape vultures and leopards returning to their natural habitat. Vultures are the litmus test for a balanced ecosystem, while their scavenging prevents the spread of diseases. One of the mountains in the reserve is called Aasvoelberg – 'Vulture Mountain' in Afrikaans.

The Eastern Cape reserve, 53 km south-east of Graaff-Reinet, offers guests a five-night conservation journey to peek behind-the-scenes of this pioneering rewilding endeavour and get their hands dirty – quite literally. Guests stay in the authentically restored, rustic farmhouses and do an immersive sleep-out during a fly camping experience in the wild, beneath the Karoo stars. They have the chance to get involved in various conservation activities from land rehabilitation and spekboom planting to wildlife monitoring and anti-poaching activities, alongside reserve and fence maintenance and even wildlife translocations and research assistance. [www.samara.co.za](http://www.samara.co.za)



Iga Motylska is a senior journalist and conceptual copywriter who helps to tell first-person narratives and pens stories based on in-depth interviews and research. She's interviewed everyone from billionaires and start-up founders to environmental lawyers and leading conservationists, as well as neuroscientists and dietitians. Her byline has appeared in over 65 publications – such as *Business Day*, *The Star*, *Mail & Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, and BBC – on topics ranging from agribusiness and entrepreneurship to sustainability, travel, and exponential technologies. Iga's experience spans across numerous sectors and has seen her conduct independent research across the continent to write data-driven white papers and research reports. Contact her at [igamotylska@gmail.com](mailto:igamotylska@gmail.com) for any queries related to this article.





## The k9 anti-poaching unit at Lapalala Wilderness Reserve

The luxurious, off-the-grid Tintswalo Lapalala tented camp allows up to six guests at a time to gain personal insight into the daily routine of the reserve's anti-poaching unit. It monitors and patrols the 48 000 ha reserve 24/7 to protect the wildlife and vegetation in this part of the Waterberg – a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site known for its biodiversity of flora and fauna. The activity allows guests a once-in-a-lifetime experience to track rhinos on foot, log their sightings, and witness demonstrations by the unit's dog handlers – the hounds, pointers, and Malinois are the first line of defence. The cost (R5 000 for a group of six), over and above accommodation at the five-star, environmentally conscious camp, is re-invested into Lapalala Wilderness Reserve and the anti-poaching unit for its equipment requirements and training purposes to ensure the reserve remains a natural sanctuary.

Lapalala Wilderness Reserve was the first game reserve in South Africa to reintroduce black rhinoceros onto private land and today is home to both the endangered black and endangered white rhinoceros species, cheetah, African wild dog, and roan antelope. The reserve's proximity to several important Cape vulture breeding colonies, and its management practices that provide secure habitats for these scavengers, has also seen it declared a vulture safe zone.

[www.lapalala.com](http://www.lapalala.com) and [www.tintswalo.com](http://www.tintswalo.com)

## Tree planting initiative at Tau Game Lodge

Their innate passion for the environment led the game rangers at Tau Game Lodge in the malaria-free Madikwe Game Reserve to establish the Tau Tree Fund – a tree-planting initiative in partnership with the Department of Water and Sanitation and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment in 2008. It allows guests to plant indigenous trees in the reserve's concession area on the occasion of their visit, wedding, anniversary, the birth of their children, or to commemorate the memory of a loved one, in-between game drives and guided bush walks through the Big Five reserve.

Various tree species endemic to the region are bought from indigenous nurseries – wild olive, coral tree, cabbage tree, river bush willow, camel thorn, baobab, red ivory, black monkey thorn, buffalo thorn, tambotie, common wild pear, and marula. Today, the rare bushveld red balloon (*Erythrophysa traansvaalensis*) – less than 50 of which were known of in the greater Madikwe area before the initiative began – continues to provide an important seed bank for future and ongoing land regeneration and rehabilitation projects in the area. However, because wildlife took a particular liking to the young trees in the concession area, they are now being planted in and around the lodge grounds, as well as in surrounding communities and schools.

[www.taugamelodge.co.za](http://www.taugamelodge.co.za)







## Chimichurri pork meatballs

Meatballs, but not as you know them! These delicious Chimichurri Meatballs are made using lean pork mince and almond flour for a more nutritious alternative. An easy, high-protein midweek hit that will satisfy even the hungriest family members.

[www.sapork.co.za](http://www.sapork.co.za)



⌚ PREP TIME 20 MINUTES 🔥 COOKING TIME 15 MINUTES





## Beach clean-up at De Hoop Nature Reserve

With the Great Pacific Garbage Patch top of mind, recycling and minimising single-use plastics has become in vogue. As beach clean-ups are becoming ever-more popular, so coastal nature reserves and seaside private lodges are encouraging guests to get involved during their stay. De Hoop Nature Reserve – a three-hour drive from Cape Town, halfway between the Mother City and Knysna along the Garden Route – is hosting its fourth annual beach clean-up weekend on 12 and 13 May 2023 to commemorate World Environment Day, which falls on 5 June. Last

year, 45 participants collected 120 black bags full of garbage along the 11 km stretch from Koppie Alleen to Skipskop. Guests staying at the various accommodation offerings at De Hoop Collection, the private ocean-facing Morukuru Beach Lodge, and CapeNature, who will participate in the beach clean-up (on Friday from 16:00 and for a full day on Saturday) will be eligible for discounted rates. While here, summit the powdery white dunes that are covered in coastal fynbos, explore the creatures in the rock pools during a guided marine walk, or take an eco-boat cruise along the vlei. **[www.capenature.co.za/reserves/de-hoop-nature-reserve](http://www.capenature.co.za/reserves/de-hoop-nature-reserve)** and **[www.morukuru.com](http://www.morukuru.com)**



**Twitchers and hikers will love** the guided vulture experience and gourmet picnic – an hour-long walk along the Potberg trail to the Vulture Deck where they can admire the 200-odd Cape vultures that make up the last remaining vulture colony in the Western Cape (Potberg).



## Saving Africa's vultures with VulPro

The Magaliesberg is classified as an Important Bird Area (IBA) because of the 450-odd bird species that call the region home and a number of historical vulture breeding sites. A must-see for bird lovers is seeing vultures spiralling along thermals overhead and nesting in cliffside colonies. For a chance to see them up close, book an educational visit or volunteer at The Vulture Conservation Programme (VulPro). Several African vulture species are classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as Endangered or Critically Endangered. The award-winning non-profit rehabilitates and releases vultures that have been injured through electrocution or poisoning as a result of poaching, hunting, or the traditional medicine trade. It also cares for vultures that cannot be released due to their injuries and facilitates a captive breeding programme to bolster dwindling populations in the wild. In 2022, VulPro rescued 89 vultures and released 49, while producing 16 vulture chicks from the breeding programme to be released in the first quarter of 2023.

[www.vulpro.com](http://www.vulpro.com)

## Farmers: custodians of our land

You can watch vultures feed, just as they would in the wild, from VulPro's vulture restaurant, where around 300 wild and captive, non-releasable Cape vultures feed daily. Farmers who produce pork play a substantial role in supplementing VulPro's vulture restaurants with their mortalities. Not only can pork be a suitable, healthy, and safe food source, but it also helps farmers reduce their waste, while protecting several African vulture species. VulPro has also partnered with veterinarians and farmers who produce pork to establish vulture restaurants on private property around South Africa.

### Watch

Scan this QR code to watch SAPPO Selekt's short film documenting how South African farmers are saving critically endangered vulture populations across southern Africa.



**SAPPO Selekt**  
SATISFY YOUR CURIOSITY

### Enjoying pork saves vultures

Farmers are one of the first protectors of wildlife in South Africa. Watch our short film about how pork farmers are saving critically endangered vulture populations across southern Africa.

[www.vulpro.com](http://www.vulpro.com) | [www.sappo.org/veeet](http://www.sappo.org/veeet)

