

# SABI SABI

PRIVATE GAME RESERVE – SOUTH AFRICA  
ESTABLISHED 1979

## INTEGRATING ECO-TOURISM, CONSERVATION AND COMMUNITY

Sabi Sabi represents an excellent example of the link between tourism, conservation and community. Sustainable ecotourism supports conservation that in turn allows for community involvement. This is a fragile balance whereby all three of these components are integral to the successful running of the operation.

### TOURISM

Sabi Sabi strives to deliver exceptionally high standards and professional service. It is world renowned for its hospitality in the game lodge industry, offering an exciting safari destination, with a “luxury home in the bush” philosophy and the high luxury standards that are expected by the discerning tourist.

Sabi Sabi has been operating for over 4 decades. The result of this is that wildlife have been respected for generations and through this respect, do not associate our presence in vehicles on safari as any threat. This allows exceptionally close encounters to wildlife by guests in open safari vehicles. The combination of luxury accommodation, cuisine and personalised service, as well as excellent guides and Shangaan trackers, has allowed Sabi Sabi to maintain and increase its reputation as one of the best safari destinations in the world.

Sabi Sabi’s commitment to the highest international standards with regards to working conditions, employment principles, conservation and sustainability go back to its earliest days. As early as 1985, Sabi Sabi instituted employment practises that saw staff - drawn in mainly from local communities - rewarded and recognised for their efforts, and promoted to senior positions of responsibility. Sabi Sabi realised that laying the foundations of a sustainable business that embraced local communities was the only way the reserve would survive and flourish into the future.

Ecotourism can be seen as one of the major economic engines, which enables conservation to exist. At Sabi Sabi, (eco) tourism can certainly be viewed as the financial engine of the reserve. The revenue earned through tourism allows the other two arms of Sabi Sabi, conservation and development, to function. This idea that the company needs to justify itself economically in order to be sustainable and survive is one of the cornerstones of the company’s philosophy, and has allowed Sabi Sabi to manage the reserve effectively for the past four decades.

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### COMMUNITY

It is one of Sabi Sabi's core philosophies that in order for conservation to be successful in Africa, there needs to be an integral and participatory relationship between tourism operations and the neighbouring communities which border the reserve. Sabi Sabi has long recognised that its greatest asset is its staff, the majority of whom hail from local communities and many of whom have been part of the Sabi Sabi story since the very beginning. Today, there are second generation employees based across the four Sabi Sabi lodges, in the hospitality and safari sphere.

With this in mind, Sabi Sabi has always endeavoured to focus its community involvement on projects that benefit and involve staff, their families and respective communities. Our mission is to make a difference by fostering the success and upliftment of our neighbours in the communities bordering the Sabie Game Reserve. To the west Sabi Sabi borders the rural Shangaan villages of Huntington, Lillydale and Justicia in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, where many of Sabi Sabi's staff live.

With a high ratio of employed to dependents in these communities, employment represents tangible 'benefits beyond boundaries' to many people. It should be noted that the relationship is reciprocal; the employees themselves provide a loyal service to the company in all aspects of the operation from the workshop, Safari department, hospitality and marketing. The company in turn invests in human resources, recognises talent and believes in promoting its employees on merit and accomplishment. An ongoing internal training programme is in place that promotes and encourages skills development.

Financial benefits through employment are but one aspect of benefits. The focus of community projects is sustainability, ownership and accountability – in other words a partnership approach.

In conclusion, a balance that effectively integrates the cornerstone pillars of ecotourism, conservation and community is needed to ensure the effective management of this private game reserve in Africa. Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve represents four decades of defining and refining this model and has successfully managed to integrate these cornerstones and put them into practice. But the challenge is ongoing and the brand cannot afford to 'rest on its laurels'. Sabi Sabi strives to be able to contribute to solving these challenges and to be part of conservation of both community, culture and nature for all future generations.

## COMMUNITY PROJECTS

### Education

Education is the key to a brighter future, for which reason Sabi Sabi has committed so much of its outreach energy into this field with several ongoing school/training initiatives.

#### LDLC (Lillydale Digital Learning Centre)

Sabi Sabi, together with the GWF (Good Work Foundation), have partnered to provide a digital learning platform with the opening of the LDLC (Lillydale Digital Learning Centre). This programme was driven by the needs of the community and encourages community ownership. Located at Hlomani High School (Lillydale), this campus serves as a hub for all schools in the area where advanced technology is utilised to offer Grades 4 – 8 the opportunity of strengthening their ability to navigate the online world and all the benefits it has to offer in securing a successful future.

The two programmes available incorporate theoretical and practical components for the Open Learning Academy (OLA) for grades 4 – 8, and the Bridging Academy (BA) for all school leavers and second chance learners, who wish to improve their knowledge in this technological age.

#### Swa Vana Care Centre

This is a Sabi Sabi supported initiative running within the community. It comprises a care centre for HIV orphans and vulnerable youth, where day care facilities are available for children living with guardians. The centre offers meals, educational activities and a safe after-school environment for children. Sabi Sabi has incorporated Swa Vana into the community tour ensuring that they benefit financially through the proceeds from the tour.

#### Lillydale Education Centre

The centre serves as a multifunctional environmental education centre, promotes Shangaan knowledge and rural development tourism to the area and encourages local environmental conservation practices through training workshops. Today the centre employs six local teachers who are providing much needed adult literacy and numeracy education to the villagers.

#### Teach the Teachers

For many years Sabi Sabi has co-ordinated and run the conservation modules of the Teach the Teachers and Reach and Teach Education Programmes. To date the programme has trained over 120 teachers from neighbouring community schools.

#### Dreamfields

In conjunction with the Dreamfield's programme Sabi Sabi has launched a sports initiative by funding full sports kits for soccer and netball teams for more than a dozen schools in the local community. These kits include balls, boots and uniforms, items which are completely out of reach of the general village family. A great number of children will now have everything required to start up a league, inspire participation and foster joyful, healthy activity and team spirit.

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## COMMUNITY PROJECTS

### Sabi Sabi Chef Mentorship Programme

This is an internal training programme started by Executive Chef, Wilfred Mtshali. Chef Wilfred saw an opportunity in the local community to offer school leavers who showed an interest in the culinary arts the opportunity of joining the Sabi Sabi Chefs Mentorship Programme. Since 2015 many students have come through the programme, with an internal year-long training module at the four Sabi Sabi lodges, with the support of funds from Sabi Sabi. This initiative has had great success since its inception and has seen a number of graduates learning their way through the culinary world under the auspices of Wilfred Mtshali. Apart from the in-house experiential learnership programme they also attend training through the South African Chefs Association (SACA) where they are also registered members.

### Community Water Project

Sabi Sabi is excited to support a new water supply project in conjunction with InnovationAfrica South Africa NPC (iASA). It is apparent that the supply of potable water is an essential need in many of our neighbouring communities. Unfortunately, the supply of water is a major challenge given the historical deficiencies in architecture and developmental neglect within the community areas surrounding the reserve. Water supply remains a stark challenge and again is brought to light given the overriding importance of strict hand-washing and hygiene requirements in the current pandemic.

Fortunately, a solution to this quandary exists – and the innovative technology has been pioneered and tested by a remarkable not-for-profit company Innovation: Africa. The Sabi Sabi Foundation are delighted to announce that the construction of the first solar water tower has been completed. This will supply sustainable potable water to a sizeable part of the Huntington community, with approximately 10 taps throughout the village, providing over 50,000 litres of water daily. The completion of this first project has benefitted and alleviated pressure on many households, and additional projects are planned following the completion of the first construction.

The community further benefits from these projects with members of that community being employed per project, where they undergo training to participate in the construction process and further trained to oversee the maintenance of the project, with the ongoing support of iASA.

### Finance

Of course one of the very real problems facing the rural areas bordering the reserves is the very high rate of unemployment. With over 230 staff members, most of whom come from the surrounding communities, Sabi Sabi is a major contributor of employment in the area. To further stimulate local economics, projects have been designed with the aim of creating practical and dignified sources of income and opportunity for the villagers.

### Entrepreneurs and Outsourcing

Sabi Sabi resolved to support rural businesses by outsourcing to the local community wherever possible. Outsourced Lodge services such as gardening, thatching, washing and waste removal have helped many local entrepreneurs maintain viable businesses. Talented community choirs, marimba bands and traditional dance groups have been formed and are hired whenever entertainment is requested by lodge visitors.

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## CONSERVATION

The wilderness is vital to mankind: for in the wilderness we strengthen our bonds with the earth and find peace with ourselves. We believe it is our duty to protect the wilderness, to make it a sanctuary for flora & fauna, for future generations. By creating stable employment for our indigenous communities through eco-tourism and sharing our respect and love for the wilderness with our guests and staff.

Sabi Sabi's conservation philosophy is based on two principles:

The first is the need to conserve rapidly dwindling wilderness areas and to provide a sanctuary for fauna and flora as part of South Africa's heritage.

The second is the belief that the business must be a true example of eco-tourism effectively linking tourism with conservation and the community. Sabi Sabi's environmental management system is a holistic one, where the ecological needs are balanced with the needs of people and their communities, i.e. focusing on the interdependence of tourism, conservation and local communities.

Sabi Sabi is situated within a recognised hotspot of biodiversity in South Africa. The reserve supports a myriad of biodiverse species, both fauna and flora. One of the reasons for this diversity of wildlife is due to the many different habitat and microhabitat types that occur in the reserve. These include rolling hills, open savannah woodland, and denser bush along seep lines, rocky outcrops, as well as pans and riparian forest alongside the rivers.

An important aspect of conservation lies in the guide/ranger training. New rangers are selected after a structured training camp and are then included into our on site training relating to orientation and geography of the reserve, animal and plant identification, principles of ecology and guest etiquette. The training is intensive and of a very high standard. In effect rangers are environmental educators, the information and knowledge that they impart to guests may in a sense also represent a benefit that transcends site boundaries nationally and internationally. Similarly the trackers meet the highest standards in the field. Most of the trackers are local Shangaan people and possess an innate appreciation and deep knowledge of the bush. Besides being able to track the Big 5 on foot and interpret the diversity of animal tracks and signs like the back of their hand, they also have a wealth of knowledge on medicinal uses of the plants and trees as well as a depth of knowledge on almost all animals encountered.

Habitat management is a very important part of the operation: Sabi Sabi is actively involved in habitat management activities with a dedicated Habitat Management Team, which is operational all year. The development of a competent habitat management programme with input from qualified ecological consultants has allowed for informed decisions on the successful management of the reserve and to continually assess, review and revise this plan. Some of these habitat management tools include:

## CONSERVATION

- (i) **Controlled burning.** Various sections of the reserve are burnt on a four-year cycle. These controlled burns serve to clear encroached areas, to encourage the regrowth of fresh grass thereby attracting herbivores to these new open areas and to help to recycle nutrients. Hot burns serve to clear the bush of excessive moribund, collected grass, while cold burns race through an area rapidly without burning as intensely.
- (ii) **Waterhole rotation.** Another important aspect of habitat management involves rotating the available man-made water sources on the reserve. Most large herbivores need to drink daily and therefore concentrate around the pans and dams. Many of these animals' home ranges overlap around these waterholes, and therefore the vegetation in these areas is heavily impacted. Rotating water points reduces such grazing pressure and allows effected areas to regenerate.
- (iii) **Road maintenance** The road-network on the reserve is managed so as not to impact negatively on the environment. This entails constructing and placing the roads in such a way that minimises water run-off that causes erosion. For example mito-drains are systematically placed on the sand roads allowing water to drain into the surrounding bush. Also roads are carefully sited to follow the con tours of the crests of drainage lines as far as possible. The roads are constructed so as not to cut through sensitive soils such as sodic patches or seep lines.
- (iv) **Erosion control.** The careful placement of roads, as described above, is one example of erosion control. Where there may be additional risks of 'gully erosion' by water run-off, such as on roads which do go through drainage lines, gabions are constructed which serve to protect the banks and walls from collapsing. Another example of erosion control is where areas that have been grazed heavily by herbivores are 'brush packed'. This entails placing acacias or other suitable shrubs on an effected area thereby allowing it time to recover and hence prevent 'sheet' erosion.
- (v) **Alien plant control.** Aliens are plants from other continents that have taken hold bypropagating prolifically and threatening to squeeze out indigenous species. Examples of alien plants include the Lantana and Prickly-pear cactus. These are removed and this is one function of the habitat management team.

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- (vi) **Waste Management:** Every day we make choices that impact other species, our climate and ultimately our environment. Sustainable tourism and conservation mean that this impact is sensitively managed and kept to a minimum, underpinned by a commitment to preserve the bushveld that surrounds us and in doing so ensure that this experience is here for generations still to come.
- **Waste Water** Specially constructed wetland systems at all four lodges allows for the recycling of waste water via a series of interconnected dams. All waste water is pumped into a series of gravitational dams and a natural filtration process takes place ensuring a pure water deposit back into the underground river systems. A greywater system at Bush Lodge that recycles water from baths, basins and showers is used to irrigate the lodges, saving on precious underground resources.
  - **Plastic Bottled Water Waste Management** Bottled water is provided to our guests in all suites, on game drives and on request while dining or lounging in the communal areas at the lodges. Unfinished water bottles are taken to a central point where the remaining content is used for laundry and watering plants, ensuring that not one drop goes to waste. Turning single-use plastics into recyclable units are not evident only in our amenities but also our bottled water that is provided to our guests. We are committed to the conservation of our environment in support of the “Planet or Plastic” campaign and remain true to sustainable practice utilising resources available to us in this remote area. These bottles are made from PET - globally recognised as a safe and 100% recyclable material. Our aim is to be mindful of the use of plastic and the harm it can do to the planet if not discarded responsibly and hence, we have partnered with a local beverage supplier who similarly has sustainable views toward the use of bottled water. All used water bottles are collected and donated to a local empowerment group of 5 ladies who then process the bottles and lids – this not only provides much needed employment but also serves as an educational role against littering. We are committed to supporting local business where possible and all our water bottles are supplied locally - packaged in corrugated cardboard (which is made from the recycled bottle caps) and are specifically provided with no stick-on labels so that the bottles can be fully recycled.
  - **Suite Amenities** Sabi Sabi proudly partner with Charlotte Rhys on offering their exclusive range to our guests at all our lodges in our luxury suites. Committed to recycling, Charlotte Rhys has streamlined their own recycling efforts within the PET (polyethylene terephthalate) recycling chain. Used products and empty containers are collected from our four five-star lodges and sorted according to product and container type. A recycling partner picks up the items that have been categorised and drops these off at the converter manufacturer, after which they will be returned to the Charlotte Rhys factory to be repurposed as new products and returned to our lodges.



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- **Food waste** From a kitchen management perspective, food waste is kept at a minimum. However, as it goes within any kitchen, commercial or private there will always be a certain amount of food waste. Management plans are in place to use as much as possible of all fresh produce within the kitchen. Certain food items are repurposed within the kitchens and are served as staff meals. The repurposing of such items are done within the margins of strict health and hygiene protocols. All other food waste unfit for repurposing are donated to the local farming community. Such food wastes are collected twice a week from the lodges by local farmers such as Mr. Johnson Sibuyi. Mr Sibuyi is a local pig and fresh produce farmer within the local community. Collected food waste is used as pig food and compost on his farm. This allows Mr Sibuyi to save on certain operating costs in providing not only the local community but the lodges as well with meat and local produce from his farm. Sabi Sabi has always been and always will be a supporter all local enterprises within our area. The policy of “Keeping it local” assists not only in the upliftment of the local community through job creation but also aids in the growth and development of small business enterprises.
- (vii) **Anti-Poaching Unit.** Sabi Sabi has a dedicated APU (anti-poaching unit) that is responsible for the safe keepikng of all wildlife species. This is over and above the Sabi Sand Wildtuin conservation units that further enhance this programme.

The corporate sector speaks of asset management in the form of investments of substantial monetary value. For South Africa, its rich biodiversity and wildlife are themselves extremely valuable assets that need very careful management. People need to use these wisely and invest in them so that future generations can share the privilege of enjoying them as we do today. Sabi Sabi strives to act as a leader in wildlife management, through biodiversity conservation and the active interpretation of these actions to guests and to the public at large.

Sabi Sabi is part of the Sabie Game Reserve (SGR) and in conjunction with the SGR, Sabi Sabi introduced a Guest Conservation Levy. These levies are collected by Sabi Sabi and paid to the SGR, who utilise the funds toward very successful anti-poaching initiatives as well as overall conservation efforts.

Since many conservation issues don't recognise borders, Sabi Sabi also strives to link with many local and international conservation organisations. These include World Wide Fund for Nature, the Peace Parks Foundation, the Endangered Wildlife Trust, the Southern African Wildlife College and the South African National Parks Board.