



Horsepower

Discover an adventure out of the ordinary

"There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man."

By Charley Larcombe

Sitting by the warmth of the camp fire, the flames stealing across their threshold just as an after dinner brandy also steals through my body and the warm ache from a few hours spent in the saddle, this saying seems particularly true. How fitting, Mr Churchill. The last aromas from a sumptuous supper, a slight smokiness from the fire pit and the earthy perfume of Africa all play on the nose, as we catch the last of the light and the disappearing view of the mountains from our platform at the Hyena Bar. The darkness and surrounding bushland are enveloping us and soon we'll retire to our beds with only the vast night sky of stars to guide us.



We're in Namibia with BMW to try out their combination of horsepower and pony-power in quite possibly one of the most diverse and exciting safaris you could wish for. The BMW Driving Experience takes place over nine days and promises non-stop adventure, showcasing the aptitude and comfort of the BMW X5 Tour, as well as views of the bushveld in all its glory from between the ears of pure-bred Arabian horses. There's the promise of pitting our driving skills against our riding ones, of spotting white rhinos and giraffes, galloping alongside antelope and traversing valley-deep gorges in our 4x4s. We're looking at a relentless and exhilarating experience in the country of never-ending colour; a land right out of the pages of Genesis.

Our adventure starts as we touch down at Windhoek's International Airport and mime our way through immigration before being met by the BMW team, all easy smiles but also knowing eyes. They understand what they have in store for us. Our merry band of adventurers has deliberately been kept small – BMW offer a max of a dozen per trip – so it's already as if we're travelling with friends and family. There's nothing like a local airline with your knees hitched up to your ears for lack of leg room to unite a group of travellers.

We're then spirited away to the Okapuka Lodge, the base of Ingeborg Hernes, a former Resource Manager from The Netherlands who came to Africa for a 10-day vacation... but never really left. It is her horses that will be our trusty steeds for our adventures ahead on the 10,000 hectare, malaria-free game farm – and we meet them sooner than expected. No sooner have we stepped onto the stoop of the lodge and we're off stepping up into the stirrups and swinging into the saddle for a sun-downer ride. The cramped muscles from the flight and the sluggish jet lag lifts free as we canter out, led from the front by Hernes. She and her ponies take us down tracks and along riverbeds and it is as though a childhood friend is showing you their secret den where they keep their treasures hidden from the world's eyes. It's such a unique experience to be shown a wild scene by someone who knows it like their backyard; riding beautiful horses in a beautiful setting. So immersed in the landscape, we easily spot the famous Namibian wildlife and it looks like our prayers to the safari gods will be kind to us this week.

Early to bed, and early to rise, we're off to explore more of the ranch on day two. It's safe to say that this trek is for the experienced rider, not only in terms of fitness – you spend on average four hours a-stride so, like pre-skiing, make sure you've done your squats to get bum-fit! – but also the terrain you're covering. On this morning we ride past a herd of wildebeest, idly moving as one and near enough that we feel as if we're gauchos rounding the cattle in off the veld. They're quiet enough as we watch from the side-lines, but you get the feeling that one startle would quickly ripple through the herd and they'd mow down whatever – or whoever – was in their way. Our horses are sure-footed and old hands to navigating the bush, but you definitely need to be aware of your surroundings – which only adds to the heightened feeling of this once-in-a-lifetime experience. You're never a tourist in Africa, you're a visitor who gets to soak up all the sights and sounds and stories. And this trip is certainly a story.

A quick lunch and gallons of water to quench the thirst from a dusty morning and it's into the BMW X5 for an off-road tour snaking up into the Otjihavera mountains. We're treated to views upon views, and alternate between trying our hand at driving and stopping to train the camera lens on soaring eagles and peering into ravines and gorges. It seems at odds to be in this convoy of luxury cars whilst kicking up the dust on the savannah. The glossy black paintwork soon becomes covered in a thick coating of red dust which bakes in the day's heat, but inside we have the air-con on and are revelling in the exec-style plushness of the interior.

The next day it's on to pastures new and all about the horsepower – which after two long rides gives us an opportunity to attend to any saddle sores. (Note to self, bring comfortable underwear). We leave the Lodge and head towards Okahandja, cutting through the countryside before arriving at Namibia's most famous wood carving market. Some offerings are more artistically carved than others but it is a pleasure to see the carpenters at work and we enjoy the bustle of the market. Having picked up a few souvenirs, it's a further drive onto the exclusive Erindi Private Game Reserve for the night.



Here offers some exceptional sights from a pack of African Wild Dog puppies playing in the golden grass, to Black Kites overhead caught on the breezes coming off the mountains. Erindi means place of water, so the surrounding waterholes and thick, verdant grasslands encourage a plethora of animals to hover close to camp. Keep your eyes peeled and your camera turned on whilst having dinner on the terrace of the luxurious Old Trader's Lodge. It is an unforgettable vista.

Day four and we give up roads for riverbeds with the BMW X5 eating up the miles to the Erongo Mountains. Here the landscape looks as though from another planet, and when we're shown the crude cave paintings adorning the walls, it's as if we're being shown a language from another time. We stop and admire the murals and fascinating rock formations that make up this extraordinary backdrop. It's the perfect stage for a traditional braai under the stars, where delicious food is accompanied by lots of chatter and the sound of nature all around us. Even the earth beneath our feet seems to quiver – perhaps with the sounds of

history – and as we swap stories from our "where are you from; what do you do?" repertoire, you can almost feel the ground absorbing every word into its library of sounds. We bed down at Ai-Aiba, the Rock Painting Lodge, amidst the towering granite boulders and you can't help but feel your insignificance in a place that looks like time forgot.

We spend the next morning and afternoon on an immersive history lesson with the hood of the BMW X5 cresting and dipping down the banks of the *Khan* and *Swakop* riverbeds. We're told of the different tribes that call this part of Namibia home; of the *San* Bushmen and the *Damara*, the *Herero* and the *Wambo* who make up half of the country's population. We visit a 'living museum' that has actually been authentically recreated giving us an insight into how some of these indigenous people lived and carved their existence out of these sometimes harsh surroundings.

Day six is a day of contrasts – and begins with a different form of transportation, on a boat skimming the waves of the Atlantic. Seals, pelicans and flamingos are pointed out to us and we think, although we're not certain, we saw the crest of a whale on the horizon. Or perhaps our sun-strained eyes were playing tricks on us. Lunch is served on a beach with our toes wriggled into the sand – a welcome respite from the well-loved but beaten hiking boots that have barely left our feet for the entire trip. This is followed by a drive towards Sandwich Harbour, a lagoon, salt pan and bird sanctuary, which forms part of the Walvis Bay Wetlands. The return journey is not for the faint-hearted as you move through the dry Kuiseb River and up over monstrous sand dunes that climb far up into the clear blue sky before descending into the ocean. This ancient desert boasts the tallest dunes in the world and I'm thankful for my day's dune driving in the deserts of Dubai, in being able to navigate through this part of our safari.

From the coast, it's a return drive to Okapuka where we're restless to be reunited with our equine friends on another sundown safari – not that we haven't fallen in love with our BMW X5, whose plush leather seats are far more comfortable than our stock saddle ones. We take it easy though on this ride, keeping close to the ranch in preparation for a huge trek the next morning. At dinner, we're told cheetahs have been spotted near the lodge and we keep our fingers crossed that we get to see these Usain Bolts of the veld tomorrow.



We've been here just over a week and it seems the BMW team have been saving the best 'til last. We mount up early in the morning and head deep into the Otjivavena range, picking up speed along the arid riverbeds before slowing down and picking our way along the ridges. We spot eagles with wingspans that seem to blot out the sun, and mountain zebra that flutter their long eyelashes flirtatiously at us from under the shade of acacia trees. We encounter magnificent kudus, watching us majestically from their viewpoint with their crown of cork-screwing horns spiralling above their heads.

Our last night is spent swapping stories, trying to retain every feeling, every sound of what has become our home this past week. We share photos and videos; some taken with shaky hands and sound-tracked with a couple of squeals as we've driven down cliff-face like dunes. Others poignant, like of a caught sunset of colours streaked across the sky, a perfect end to a day. And now also, our trip.

Fortunately there is time on our last morning for one more ride. One last canter through the golden grasses with the sun on our face; one last joyful gallop with our friends towards the horizon, looking like the closing credits of some 1950s Western.

Totsiens Namibia, you and your horses have been good to my body and my soul.



Location	Namibia, Africa
Participants	Max. 12 participants / 2 participants per vehicle
Dates	3 to 11 October 2017 (9D + 8N)
Vehicle	BMW X5
Requirements	Participants must be over the age of 18 and have a valid driving license or international driving permit. If the license is not in English, an English translation must be ready at all times. Participants need to be skilled equestrians to participate in this horse riding experience. There is a maximum weight limit of 85 kg.
Route	Approx. 1,300 km
Price	€ 5,390*

*Single room, without flight, travel cancellation, health insurance and visa

Reserve your slot today at drivingexperience@bmw.de or call +49(0)89 1250 16 444

