



DOLPHIN DAYS

by Lara Potgieter

PHOTOGRAPHER:

Image © Dolphin Encountours Research Centre

"Advice from a dolphin:

Have a playful spirit.

Be curious.

Find someone you

really click with.

Sound out new ideas.

Glide through the

day with ease.

Find your life's porpoise.

Consider the flip side!"

- Ilan Shamir

Imagine waking to the sound of a Tibetan singing bowl, spending the morning swimming with wild dolphins, enjoying a quiet afternoon of reading, journaling and getting creative, and ending the day with a spot of yoga and a festive communal meal. Sound like your idea of a decent time out?

Energy healer and animal communicator Debbie Caknis of Zeropoint Healing has spent nine years perfecting the balance between rest and recreation, process and play on her five- and six-day Dolphin Retreats in Mozambique's Ponta Do Ouro. The experience includes swimming with dolphins combined with art therapy, kundalini yoga, reiki, crystal healing, kinesiology and more. Add sundowner expeditions to local beach bars and Pina Coladas at the pool - the perfect balance of deep healing and light-hearted fun.

The dolphin swims are led by the bubbly and passionate Angie Gullan of Dolphin Encountours Research Centre where conservation is the first consideration. Angie and team have a strict code of ethics around marine mammal encounters, and have been instrumental in the Ponta Do Ouro Partial Marine Reserve. The centre began with the intention of long-term monitoring of the local dolphins, and the swims finance Angie's DolphinCareAfrica NGO.

Since 1995, the Dolphin Encountours team has facilitated wild dolphin swims with tour groups, sharing the beauty and importance of the bottlenose, humpback, spinner and spotted dolphins of Ponta and surrounds. Angie identifies many of the dolphins by name, and seems to garner a deep trust from the local dolphin families. Bottlenose dolphins are a particular focus of the encounters, with the intelligent, curious and playful beings spending stretches of time interacting with snorkellers under Angie's direction. Simply finding the wild animals in the vast ocean seems like a miracle, but the crew are adept at anticipating their patterns. Out of respect they only let guests enter the water if the dolphins stay near the boat, indicating a wish to interact. Being able to spend time so close to them, observing and interacting on their terms, is an experience so transcendental Angie herself struggles to put it to words.

Ethical marine mammal tourism in Mozambique is important to Angie who encourages a few rules: only one boat to approach a pod at a time, no touching or feeding, and a thorough briefing beforehand. While she has first-hand experience of the healing power of dolphins, she opposes dolphin-assisted therapy or interaction that requires dolphins in captivity. She advocates keeping the dolphins' home plastic and pollution-free. The Dolphin Encountours team has been recording the humpback whale migration over the past ten years, and visitors between July and December often enjoy spectacular whale displays from the dolphin boat.

O Lar Do Ouro Guest Lodge is a festive and animal-friendly base during the retreat. A peaceful garden, well-stocked bar, communal dining and lounge/entertainment area, braai facilities and sparkling blue pool houses 26 people in double en-suite units. There is also a family room and self-catering flat. Breakfast is included and delicious Mozambican-style dinners available for retreat groups. In-room air-conditioning and poolside massages complete the relaxed offering. The lodge is a short walk from the Dolphin Encountours Centre and beach. Quad bikes and bicycles are part of future plans for guests to get to the village with ease.

Zeropoint Healing Dolphin Retreats start in Durban, with a bus transfer to Ponta Do Ouro through the Kosi Bay border or participants can self drive and leave cars at the border. 4x4 owners can meet directly in Ponta. The retreats are suitable for anyone 15 years and up, whether experienced or non-experienced swimmers.

The 2018 retreats take place in February, May, August and October. For more information visit www.zeropointhealing.co.za or contact Debbie at admin@zeropointhealing.co.za