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Where wild fantasies come alive

• The Ultimate Playground offers visitors a chance to test themselves

Nick Wilson

t felt like we had been inserted into a scene from Francis Ford Coppola's Apocalypse Now as we heard the whirring rotor blades coming from a fair distance behind us. It wasn't long before we caught a glimpse of the helicopter and saw its gunners, who were baying for blood our blood.

I had always prided myself on being a rugged South African male full of derring-do. I grew up in Uitenhage, SA's Detroit, so surely was deserving of some sort of manliness medal. I had even visited Despatch a couple of times and been on the receiving end of a number of beatings.

Doesn't being a journalist automatically make you rugged? I have earned my stripes and have always secretly hoped for the grudging respect of my idol, legendary tough guy actor Steve McQueen, had he still been alive.

Surely, I would be prepared for anything out in the wild? But my skin was crawling and I had an anxious knot in the pit of my stomach. What in the world had I let myself in for?

It was only a paintball game being played by journalists and tour operators. How painful could it be? Quite. Especially when the paintballs are being fired at vou from a helicopter and you have to try to evade being shot while racing around on a quad bike.

My trepidation gave way to excitement as the game progressed and soon I was confidently speeding about on the quad bike yelping every now

and again as a paintball hit me. The biggest thrill was when we swapped roles and I was afforded the opportunity to become the hunter in the helicopter (minus its doors), aiming my paintball gun spitefully, while remembering some of the more painful hits I had received. Unfortunately, I am a terrible shot and only managed a couple of feeble hits

The luxury Leobo Private Reserve situated on an 8 000ha estate in the Waterberg area of Limpopo, is the only place in SA – and very likely the world – where Heli Paintballing can

be played. It is one of the extreme adventure activities offered



under the reserve's recently launched brand, Ultimate Playground. Other activities include skydiving from helicopters, 50calibre BMG target-shooting and was a member of the team that tactical military simulations with

quad bikes. Traditional game drives are also on offer to see hippo, giraffe, plains game, buffalo and leopard. There is also a lone crocodile called Stevie on the property.

THE PLAYGROUND IS AIMED AT **CORPORATES OFFERING STAFF INCENTIVES AND TEAM BUILDING**

For the less adventurous who prefer to lounge around, there are massages, heated swimming pools, a Jacuzzi and

The Ultimate Playground is aimed at corporates offering staff incentives and team building. Families and groups of friends who crave an adrenaline-fuelled getaway with a difference are also welcome.

Leobo Private Reserve is the brainchild of UK IT entrepreneur Rory Sweet, who initially chose the Leobo site as a

home for his family when they visited SA each year. Sweet, who is renowned for his devilmay-care adventurer's spirit, won the Scott Dunn Polar Challenge in 2005 – a 563km race Guests can go on safari on across the Arctic Circle to the magnetic North Pole

> Leobo has been commercially available since 2012. It consists of Leobo Lodge – which includes eight one-bedroom luxury chalets and a two-bedroom family chalet – and the Observatory, which serves as the Sweet family's private house when they are in the country and which accommodates six adults and three children.

What gives The Observatory its charm is the fact that Sweet's eccentricities can be seen everywhere. His love of astronomy is a main feature of the residence, with a beautiful dome that houses the astronomical observatory.

Guests can book a lecture with fascinating physicist and astronomer Dr Phil Calcot, who lives in the Waterberg, to describe the heavens above.

Underneath the dome is a double-storey library with an open fireplace. Designed by award-winning architects Silvio Rech and Lesley Carstens, the sumptuous Observatory property includes some unusual artifacts including an old disarmed

you enter Leobo. The entrance has a large sign hilariously warning of the terrible fates ecution afterwards.

schedule, choosing each day what they want to do. That could

vously waited my turn to shoot, listening intently to Leobo operational manager Tom Stewart explain the safety procedures.

of women and I watched as one after another they fired off fantastic shots, hitting key areas of When it was my turn, my mouth was dry and my knees felt a little weak. Other than firing a pellet gun at tin cans in my folks' back garden, I had never fired a real gun in my life.

Boom! The first shot rang out

AK-47 transformed into a piece Two speeds: of art, a wallet made of human skin and a real human skull. Sweet's humour and sense of fun is immediately apparent as

(including pictures) awaiting would-be trespassers. Not only will you face death from hippo, crocodile. snake, shooting, drowning and lethal injection, but you will be liable for pros-Guests at Leobo dictate the

mean lazing around the swimming pool, flinging themselves out of a chopper or honing their shooting skills at the gun range. I was found wanting with a 9mm pistol on the range. I ner-

Our group consisted mostly the human silhouette target.

loudly. Even with industrial

a special treat after the sun goes down at Leobo Private Reserve, top left, while during the shooting at

the gun range, above, or lazing by the pool, right. /Supplied



strength ear plugs, the sound of a gun is loud and unmistakable. Second shot. Then the third shot and fourth.

I walked over to survey the damage. I have 20-20 vision, so surely I must have got in some great shots, I thought as we pored over the target looking for my bullet holes. There didn't

seem to be any. Then Stewart pointed out one hole on the paper, way off from the silhouette. He was kind enough to suggest I may have been responsible for a shoulder glancing shot on the target. Truth be told, I had seen little plumes of dust kicking

up next to the target. When others in the group asked me how the shooting went, I vaguely implied that I had got in some good shots. But the next day, when we had the option of going to fire sniper rifles, I begged off, saying a 7am wake-up call was too early.

A massage helped me get over the stress of being such a poor shot. I sealed my fate to wander the earth as a Zeta male the lowest rung on the ladder of manliness. McQueen would have turned in his grave at the sight of me.

Wilson was a guest of Leobo Private Reserve.

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SMALL BUSINESS

Taste of Aussie microbreweries on tailored helicopter trips

Tiffany Leigh

he mission: Hit five country pubs in one day, scattered across the stunning Oueensland, Australia. The closest are 60km apart.

How to accomplish it? By helicopter, of course. This is the decadent reality conceived by Pterodactyl Helicopters, a company based in

Ipswich, whose aim is to pam-

per guests with an unforgettable sightseeing experience and drinking adventure all at once. It is the perfect time to go, because serious microbreweries are popping up all over

the region. And who wants to drive? A basic tour begins at about 9am when Captain Mike Jarvis,

a seasoned pilot with some 35 years' flying under his belt, picks parties of up to three people up at their hotel (or home, if the

His Robinson R44 will soar up to 5,000m and head towards

yard is big enough).

the Scenic Rim Region for the first of three pubs and two breweries that will be visited in

As Jarvis explains: "I've been doing this forever; I'm no spring chicken, but every time we lift off, it's a bloody awesome experience." Before putting on beer gog-

gles, pull out the binoculars: Jarvis will point out notable sights, including the mountains of the rim and the volcanic peak Tamborine Mountain. Visible on the flight are Lock-

yer Valley, an area rich in fertile farmland; and the oldest manmade overpass in Queensland: Dickabram Bridge, built in 1886 and located in the town of Miva. If Jarvis sweeps low, wallabies and kangaroos can be

spotted. Koalas are tough to see from the air "[Spottings of] koalas are rare

because they're typically private and quiet guys," Jarvis says. And if drinking is not the top priority, because, say, more than two-thirds of the region's famed



Great Barrier Reef has been bleached of its colour by rising sea temperatures, take a moment from supporting the local small-business economy to soar over the aquatic marvel and gain knowledge about the

changes first-hand. "We're all about customisation," says Jarvis. "So, if there is something of importance for you to experience and learn about, we'll make your priority

our priority The establishments that can be visited are scattered from the border of New South Wales, west to Selwyn Range, east to the glimmering Coral Sea and north to the towering Glass House Mountains. They are all included on the tour (or similar drinking outposts – the list rotates), as well as a lunch with locally sourced ingredients in

scenic Harrisville. "The list is always changing

Day-tripping: Guests are treated to a helicopter sightseeing experience and drinking adventure in one. /Supplied

because we want to showcase all the talented microbreweries that have popped up in the last couple of years. Mates here are taking their beer very seriously these days – from the traditional to the experimental [think carrot

beer]," Jarvis says. The Dugandan Hotel to which Jarvis flies tourists in the town of Boonah is considered one of the oldest in southeast Queensland. "The Dugie" has served up thirst-quenching suds to coal miners and railway workers, but nowadays it is contentedly offering tourists and locals a pint or three.

The Royal Hotel Harrisville is more than 150 years old. The allegedly haunted "house" is supposedly frequented by a shadowy female figure who roams the pub's kitchen at night. But worry not, heli-based visitors will be drinking in the reassuring comfort of daylight.

The Scenic Rim Brewery is a family-run brewery that prides itself on locally sourced ingredients. Its Fat Man Maroon Ale is a palate-pleasing brew with a slightly bitter finish.

The Bearded Dragon pub does not only offer accommodation. It is located on 44ha of farm and bushland and boasts skyline vistas of Tamborine Mountain. More importantly, its pub offers 15 beers on tap

While visiting this watering hole, try the Beard on Beard, its own in-house creation: as an Australian pale ale, it offers easy sipping with notes of grapefruit, passion fruit and a delicate hoppy finish.

Four Hearts Brewing Pumpvard Bar & Brewery, typically reserved as the finale of the tour, is a local microbrewery located in a 100-year-old technical college. It was also the original site for the supply of water to the City of Ipswich hence the name.

It has nine different beers, but since the rule with Pterodactvl Helicopters is one pint per location, opt for the Ipswich Challenger – a bronze medal winner in the 2016 Australian International Beer Awards. It is a light ale with a crisp vibrancy and notes of mandarin green tea and

warm spices. Those who are thirsty for more need only book about a month in advance with Captain Jarvis, who will craft a personalised itinerary. /Bloomberg