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# Postcard from...Lesotho

Afriski, one of two ski resorts sub-Saharan Africa, uses natural and artificial snow

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Francesca Lynagh AUGUST 25, 2017



It was when our waitress trudged up the stairs and arrived at our table out of breath and unable to recite the (very short) wine list, that I was most aware that I was sitting in Africa's highest restaurant. Not only does the Sky Restaurant sit at an altitude of 3,222 metres, it has a highly unusual outlook — over the slopes of Afriski, Lesotho's only ski resort, and one of only two in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa.

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We got our very first glimpse of it as we sped our Land Rover through the rugged Maluti Mountains. Having left Johannesburg early on a July morning, we had crossed the border at Caledonspoort to find winding roads alongside disconcerting vertical drops. Miles from anywhere, we spotted it — there, amid the barren mountains in the distance, was a tiny white strip. It was as if someone has spilled some Tipp-Ex on an oil painting of the surface of the Moon.

As we got closer, I registered that there was only one ski run and one main T-bar lift servicing it. "Resort" might be overstating it — apart from the restaurant at the bottom of the lonely slope, there was one shop, one après-ski bar and a car park. A few rental chalets dotted the surrounding hillside (carrying names such as St Moritz, Davos and Maribel [sic]). Afriski was established in 2002, not by a skier but by a South African hurdler, Wessel Bosman, who held the national record for the 110 metres for 16 years. The first time he set eyes on snow was in Nagano, Japan, when he went to the Winter Olympics and tentatively tried skiing. Noticing that a handful of South Africans had travelled all the way to Japan to ski, he sensed a business opportunity in the snow-capped mountains of Lesotho.

Since then, Afriski has grown to attract about 11,000 visitors a season, many of them South Africans learning to ski for the first time. Johannesburg-based snow-seekers can make it to Afriski in about five hours, roughly the same amount of time it takes to get to the Kruger National Park. The main T-bar services a 1,000-metre long run (although it is shortened if there's a lack of snow), and there are three smaller beginner lifts.

We parked and collected our rental equipment. The sun was shining and the bar sold hot chocolate with a shot of Amarula — a good start. The T-bar was painfully slow for anyone used to the facilities of the Alps, but the view from the top was thrillingly surreal: a dazzlingly bright white ski run lay before me,

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surrounded by a panorama of brown and grey mountains with only the barest dusting of snow.

Afriski uses a mix of natural and manufactured snow, its piste lined by artificial snow machines that draw water from a series of reservoirs. The hybrid snow felt surprisingly good — no early morning patches of sheet ice and not too much mid-afternoon slush. We lapped the lift eagerly, before the cold wind and sapping effects of the altitude forced us in for a break.

By early afternoon, the après-ski was in full swing, if anything replicating the Alps more closely than the skiing. Music blared and ski instructors wearing gorilla suits lured people to dance on outdoor tables in exchange for free shots.

The resort's management says the business is "reaching the point" where it would be feasible to add another slope and lift — though there are no physical signs of that quite yet. Meanwhile they are seeking investors to buy timeshare properties at the resort, and working to market it as a year-round destination. The ski season runs from the beginning of June to the end of August, but when the snow melts there is a network of scenic hiking and mountain biking trails.

I left in the morning, after a night in Whistler Camp, a prefabricated hut that was warm and comfortable, if lacking the glamour of its Canadian namesake (we were told to leave the shower dripping at night to prevent the pipes from freezing). Of course, Afriski is never going to rival Val d'Isère, but for an unusual weekend, or an anomalous diversion on an African holiday, it is hard to beat. Just remember that the nearest hospital is 140km away, in Bethlehem, South Africa, so perhaps save the front flips and board grabs for another time.

### Details

[Afriski](#) offers day lift passes from ZAR450 (£26) and chalet accommodation from about ZAR675 (£40) per person per night

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