

## Aquila Eco Lodges

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For proof that using environmentally-sustainable practices need not affect guest comfort, look no further than Aquila Eco Lodges in the Southern Grampians, six kilometres north of Dunkeld.

The complex of four, 4-star, self-contained lodges is enveloped by 100 acres of bushland bordering the National Park. The long-term integrity of the bushland has been secured through being covenanted with Trust for Nature. The Bjerking's have also been active in restoring the flora and fauna of Waterfall Creek on the property.

Aquila's combination of high quality accommodation, founded on a strong environmental ethic, has secured it three Victorian tourism awards in the eco-tourism category. In 2005 Aquila was added to the Victorian Tourism Hall of Fame in recognition of its consistent excellence. It was the crowning achievement in a string of business and environmental awards that the Bjerking's had won since opening in 2000.

The business not only manages to significantly reduce its environmental footprint, it is also an excellent showcase of sustainable living for the hundreds of guests it accommodates each year. Barb Bjerking is an accredited eco-guide and delights in not only taking people through the bushland, but also in demonstrating the 'green' practices of the business.



The green ethic has been embedded in the business from the ground-up, rather than being 'bolted-on' as an after-thought. Primarily, the architectural design and site placement of the lodges maximises winter sun and minimises summer heat.

As there is no networked energy supply to the property, Aquila derives all its electricity from a bank of solar panels, which are connected to 24 2 volt storage batteries and a computer operating system. This primary system is backed up by a diesel generator, which in part runs on bio-diesel fuel. The fuel is made locally from waste vegetable oil, collected from local restaurants and blended with methanol and caustic soda. Low wattage appliances and lighting is used throughout the complex to significantly reduce load on the supply.

Aquila collects its own rainwater from its building roofs. This is held in storage tanks totalling 300,000 litres, of which 40,000 litres is reserved for fire fighting.

The property manages most of its waste onsite, largely via a complete composting system for food waste and black/grey water. Worms are used to break down the waste products, and the Dunkeld recycling site accommodates additional waste. Each lodge features a flushing compost toilet system.

Not surprisingly, Aquila has long earned certification with Ecotourism Australia.

The ECO certification program assures guests that certified products are backed by a commitment to sustainable practices and provide high quality nature-based tourism experiences.

Barb Bjerking concedes that it is harder and more expensive being green, but that the reward is in the ability to educate many hundreds of people each year about the importance of sustainable practice.

“ Following your principles can prove to be expensive. When we established in 2000 much of the technology was not available or was much more expensive. Now it has come down in price a lot and there are government subsidies available.



“ What we do not compromise on is quality and the comfort of guests. Everything they have in their own homes is here at Aquila.

“ Yes, there are still probably some people who think we wander around in peasant skirts and beads and that they have to use a drop-toilet, but being green is no longer about compromise. If you go to the extreme you will just alienate people and lose business and your audience.

“Our approach has meant that we attract people from all walks of life, including many environmentally-aware customers and people with a social conscience: all our guests enjoy the comfort, relaxation and continual delights in this wonderful and amazing environment”.

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