

Southern Africa



South-Africa, Swaziland, Zambia,
Botswana & Zimbabwe

Christmas & New Year
2013/14



...A two week Safari and
adventure trip with the family...

...Having as usual started the planning some six months prior to departure – it felt good to eventually be on our way to Southern Africa this Christmas Holiday. As we don't usually travel over this holiday it was with mixed feelings that we departed. However, and already at the check-in counter, we were positively surprised by being upgraded to business class with Emirates for the first leg to Dubai.

With a 6 hour stop-over in Dubai, an onward flight to Jo-burg for another 7 hours we were met with chauffeur who took us the last stretch to Hazyview by minibus for a final 5 hour drive. We were quite tired when we arrived after some 30 hours in total.

We checked in at Casa do Sol, a 4 star establishment, just outside the Kruger Park it self. This meant we had quick access to the Game Park in South Africa. The service and food was as good as can be expected. The usual problems with A/C's constantly breaking down along with failing electricity is something one has to accept. We spent Christmas Eve without electricity and had to eat/drink by candlelight. The staff was wearing red/white hats (tomte luvor) with blinking lights – an unusual Christmas setting in deed.





The Mother of all Game Parks - Kruger!

A week filled with Game drives in this great park....



...All in all we made 5 Game drives and bush-walks in the great Kruger National Park. It is not only easy work as you need to get up already at 03:45 AM to be ready to depart for the morning game drive which starts around 04:45. The early morning game drives together with evening drives are the best for viewing games.



The first two days were hectic and we were all in all quite successful in spotting game. I must say that it is also very much up to what ranger you get and how active he/she is during the game drive or walk. Out of the 5 rangers we had 4 were very good whereas the fifth was a disaster.. At Hazyview there are 3 main entrances into the Park. Phabeni Gate and Numbi Gate which we used. There is also the Paul Kruger Gate further northeast, however this is said to have more people coming in this way into the park





A visit to a genuine village was the highlight...

As the border to Swaziland is only 1 ½ hour away from Hazyview, we decided to take a trip down to this small kingdom with still quite old/traditional values. Having completed the border routines at Jeppe's reef we were on our way into this different country. The present King has only some 13 wives and an unknown number of children – to be compared to his father who had some 80+ wives and over 200 children. The country has some 1,3 million inhabitants of which many work in South Africa and commute back and forth.

The majority (85%) are Swazis' and some 10 % are Zulu's. The sad fact is that the average life expectancy had fallen from 61 to 32 years! In only 10 years time (from 2002 to 2012). This is largely due to Aids.

On our visit to the country we were fortunate to be visiting a very small and remote village (you had to walk to get there), which apparently did not get hoards of tourist every day. We were met by the son of the chief of this village who brought us proudly to his home village. All pictures below are from this village except for the one on the right of this text. On the way back we stopped at the Maguaga Dam project, quite spectacular, and went through areas of mountains and forests. Logging from Eucalyptus plantation together with mining is the main industry in this small kingdom today.





Drakensberg landscape....

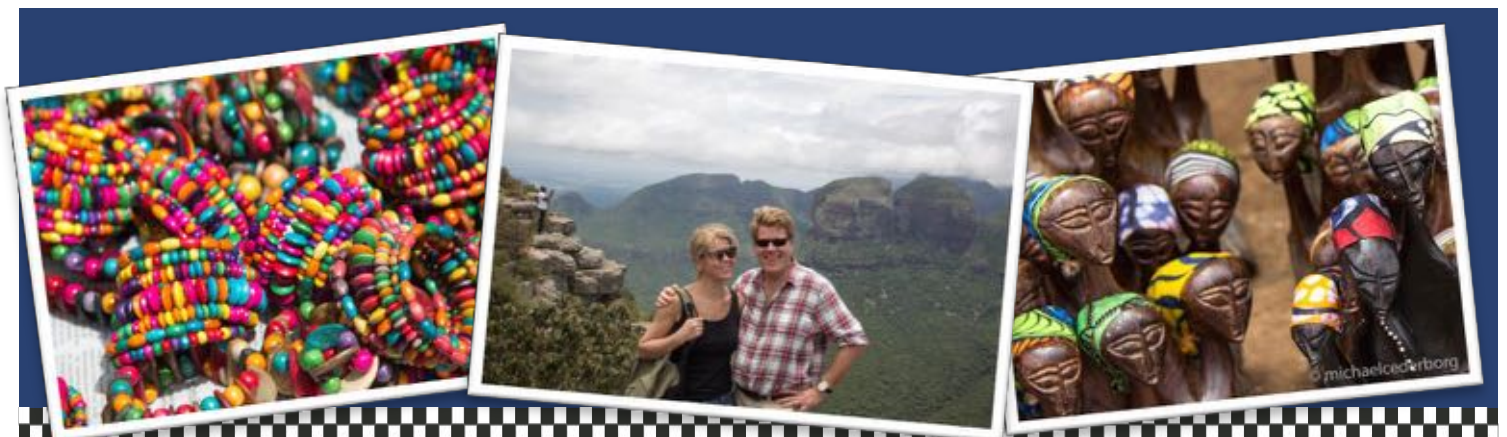
A panoramic visit to the mountains in the north...

The morning started with rain, and we were not too hopeful as to how much could be seen from the **panoramic views in the mountainous area of Drakensberg**. It cleared up however, and even if we did not get a full view overlooking the valley, we did have quite a good day even with some strikes of sunshine.

We drove from **Hazyview to Graskop**, which is the centre of this area. A nice little town, also known for its fantastic pancakes. We booked a table for all to have lunch at on our way back at **Harries Pancake house**. From Graskop we drove up to “Gods window” where we enjoyed a nice view overlooking the valley. The peak called “**Gods eye**” – you had to climb some 140 stairs..

We continued and stopped at one of many waterfalls – **the Berlin waterfall**. Quite a spectacular sight it was. Continuing north we thereafter headed up to the “old gold rush” mining area of **Bourke’s Luck Potholes**.

The trip is a whole day tour, and there are even more things to do and see in this region. The highlight of the day was probably the view from up at “Gods eye”. The kids though the highlight was stopping and eating at the pancake house in Graskop – which was great, I have to admit.





The Kruger National Game Park (RSA)

The park is the largest game park in the world covering some 2 million square hectares...

..We made four game drives and bush walks into the Kruger Game Park all in all. Here follows just a sample of pictures taken from these trips. We saw quite a variety of game, and the **most spectacular views were probably that of a pack of Wild African Dogs.** We found a group of 16 individuals. Taken into account that there are only some 130 in the whole game park, and that they are rare to see – this was the highlight in my view of our visit.





The Cheetah rehabilitation centre

Primarily for rare and endangered species such as Cheetahs...



The rehabilitation centre up in Hoedspruit (HESC) is today funded from donators all over the world, but was initially started up as a private initiative. Today they have over 20 cheetahs which are rehabilitated and then placed back out into the wild. One of the rarest animal and with only some 30 species worldwide in Africa is the “King Cheetah” – picture to the left. There are ostriches, wild African dogs, zebras, lions, rhinoceros but to mention a few.

It is well worth a visit as you also get a chance to get quite close to the animals, which is great for photography. It is also possible to participate in their student conservation programs.



Scenes from inside the rehabilitation centre at Hoedspruit...





Canopying in the tree tops at Hazyview...



This is the second time around we did a full Canopy trip. This time in South Africa – last time around in Costa Rica. It was a similar experience, but this time with all the boys old enough to participate. The “zip-lines” were 1.5 km in total length and it was ca: 15 lines in total. **This is the longest Aerial Cable Trail in the Mpumalanga region.** It is quite a thrill and you should not be afraid of heights. Try www.skywaytrails.sa for more details.





The amazing Victoria Falls... ..The eight' wonder of the World!

We flew up to Livingstone (Zambia) from Nelspruit (RSA) on New Years Eve. We then spent the second week of our vacation in and around Victoria Falls. We were however not so happy with the lodge/accommodation which we had been booked into. Although it was listed as a 4-star facility – The Zambezi Sun resort – we did not like this “Resort/family” type of stay at all.

Apart from this, I have to confess that the location, just a 5 minutes walk from the falls it self was a plus. We went to see the falls from both sides of the river I.e. from the Zambian side as well as the Zimbabwean side. In order to get across to the Zimbabwean side one has to take a taxi to the border and then walk across the bridge (built by the British back in the 1930ies). It is a bit of a hassle and it is not cheap.

For eating, try and get away from the restaurants provided at the Zambezi Sun resort. We had a very good experience from the Squires, walking distance from the hotel. They had an unusually good selection of T-bone steaks and other meat dishes.

The other place which is a must: is the Royal Livingstone, a sister hotel to the Zambezi Sun, but even more up-scale. The rooms here starts at around 600 usd/night c.w. ca: 3-400 for ours. The service and “colonial style” of The Royal Livingstone is really well worth a visit. The food is OK, but not top-top...

Last, but not least, the city of Livingstone is a dreadful place and should only be passed from/to the airport....





White Water Rafting...

...down the Zambezi river between Zambia and Zimbabwe...



Carl-Fredrik and I went **White Water Rafting down the Zambezi River** on a full day. I have now done river rafting on 4 different continents. The Zambezi River is graded as a scale 5 and at times the by-pass some of the most dangerous passes. We started at and went from pass 10 to 25 – and this was more than enough as an exhilarating experience...

In order to get to the river, we had to climb down sections of manmade ladders, climbing down the c: 270 meters. This was quite a dangerous exercise in it self. Our guide and captain on our raft said there was a casualty only a couple of months back on the river with a young boy from Australia who died.

This was a tough and great activity which I can highly recommend. I'm thinking to make a 1-week rafting journey all the way on the river ending up at the cost of Mozambique when time allows.



...rural villages on the way to the Zambezi River for rafting.

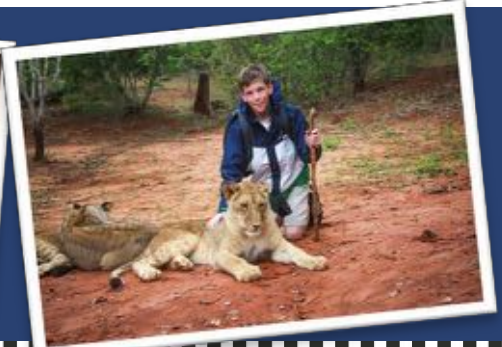




“Walking with Lions” at Victoria Falls

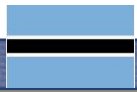


... While CF and I went rafting on the Zambezi river, then the rest of the family went **“walking with Lions”**. A rather expensive activity at the cost of 700 sek / hour and person – these Lions turned out to be quite lacy “kittens” who preferred to just lay down resting instead of walking around. But, the visitors seemed quite pleased judging from the photos taken...



The Chobe National Park – Botswana





Chobe National Park - Botswana...

...As famous as the Okavango Delta in Botswana...



..another days start out raining, and we are booked to go to **Botswana and the Chobe National Park** in the early morning. We set out from Victoria Falls via Livingstone and drive west towards the small border town of Kazangula. Zambia and Botswana share what is probably the worlds' shortest international boundary: 750 m across the Zambezi river by pontoon across takes some 10 minutes and the trucks wanting to cross can build up and having to wait for weeks at time.



We enter into the game park **at the Kasane Gate in the Northeast**. It is a very different landscape and park compared to others we've been to. We also travel near as well as on the Chobe River which serves as a boarder also between Botswana and Namibia. This river is infested with Hippos and Crocs – not a good idea to swim here. The area is also home to a large number of bird species which can be seen around the waterfront. This is a park I'd like to come back to and see more of....

....The Chobe River serves as border between Namibia and Botswana.

