

Southern Africa Trip – Day 1 – Wednesday March 19th

Today we start our three week trip to Southern Africa. Marcia and I (Jim) Elving will be traveling again with Marie and Kal Tinka. Marcia and Marie are sisters and the four of us really enjoy traveling together. This will be the 15th foreign trip we have taken together over the past 10 years. Also traveling with us on this trip will be Peggy and Dick Falkenstein. They are old acquaintances of ours from our days in Dayton, Ohio and are good friends of the Tinkas. In March of 2012 the six of us were all together on a great cruise through French Polynesia and the Cook Islands on the *Paul Gauguin*, a trip initiated by the Falkenstein's.

We all meet mid-afternoon at the Atlanta airport, the Tinkas flying in from Dayton Ohio, the Falkensteins from Wilmington, NC and the Elvings from Pittsburgh. At 6:30 PM our 16 hours direct flight from Atlanta to Johannesburg, South Africa departs. The sun rises earlier in Africa vs. the USA; they are six hours ahead of East Coast time. We should arrive in Johannesburg at about 4 PM tomorrow. We will be in the Southern Hemisphere so the seasons will be reversed from North America's. We will enjoy Southern Africa's early fall with daytime high temperatures in the 70s and 80s. We are on a 269 passenger Delta Airlines Boeing 777-200 jumbo jet (the same model as the missing Malaysia Air flight)! We have all paid a little extra for some additional leg room in the "Economy Comfort" section and we find the seats to be quite nice.



We will be on a guided tour in Southern Africa with the tour company *Odysseys Unlimited*. They are a company based in Boston that is known for very good quality trips, small group sizes of 18 to 24 folks, excellent itineraries, great Tour Directors and always very good accommodations. The Tinkas and Elvings have previously traveled on *Odysseys Unlimited* tours in Northern Italy, China, Croatia and Costa Rica and all were great. We have made our own flight arrangements and we decided to fly into South Africa one day before the start of the organized tour.

As shown on the map above we will be flying into Johannesburg, South Africa where we will spend three days. Then we will fly north to Victoria Falls where we will be spending four days in portions of Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana. Then we will fly to the country of Namibia where we will travel for five days. Next we will fly to Cape Town South Africa where we will spend four days. Lastly we will fly to Kruger National Park in northeast South Africa where we will stay for three days at a lodge and go on several "safari drives" to observe more African wildlife.

We are excited about this trip and the variety of countries, sights, and experiences we believe we will enjoy. Of the six of us I am the only one to have previously been in Southern Africa, having come to South Africa for

twelve days on business in 1985. Most of my time, then, was spent in the Johannesburg area where my company had manufacturing plants but I did enjoy a weekend trip to Kruger National Park. That was a very different time, during South Africa's *Apartheid* period where the races were strictly segregated and the United Nations embargo isolated South Africa from trade and relations with the international community.

Early into our flight we set our watches ahead six hours to South Africa time so it is now well past midnight.

 <h2 style="display: inline;">2014 Southern Africa Odyssey</h2>							
<p style="text-align: center;">Time is 6 hours ahead of USA Eastern Time Zone Average Hi Temp: 73 (66 Vic. Falls) Average Lo Temp: 55 (63 Vic. Falls) Sunrise: 6 to 7 AM Sunset: 6 to 7 PM</p>							
<p>Sun. 3/23 <u>Johannesburg to Victoria Falls</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -10:40AM flight to Zimbabwe -Tour of the Falls Meals: B & D Htl: Victoria Falls 		<p>Wed. 3/19 <u>Travel to Africa</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Depart Pitt. at 1 PM Delta 2272 -Depart Atlanta 6:13 PM on Delta 200 		<p>Thurs. 3/20 <u>Johannesburg</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Arrive Jo-burg at 3:55 PM -Travel to Hotel -Meals: None Htl: 34 on Bath 		<p>Fri. 3/21 <u>Johannesburg</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Free day in Johannesburg Meals: None Htl: 34 on Bath 	
<p>Mon. 3/24 <u>Victoria Falls</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -School Visit -Livingstone Talk -Dinner Cruise on the Zambezi River Meals: B & D Htl: Victoria Falls 		<p>Tues. 3/25 <u>Victoria Falls</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ride Elephants -Rhino Safari Meals: B & D Htl: Victoria Falls 		<p>Wed. 3/26 <u>Victoria Falls</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Chobe Nat. Park in Botswana -Game Drive -Game Cruise Meals: B, L & D Htl: Victoria Falls 		<p>Sat. 3/22 <u>Johannesburg</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Soweto, Mandela House & Museum -Pretoria Tour Meals: B & D Htl: 34 on Bath 	
<p>Sun. 3/30 <u>Sossusvlei to Swakopmund</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Namib Desert -Kueib Canyon -Swakopmund Meals: B, L & D Htl: Swakopmund 		<p>Mon. 3/31 <u>Swakopmund</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Skeleton Coast -Cape Fur Seal Reserve -Afternoon Free Meals: B, L & D Htl: Swakopmund 		<p>Thurs. 3/27 <u>Victoria Falls to Windhoek</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -1:05PM flight to Johannesburg -6:35PM to Windhoek Meals: B Htl: Hilton 		<p>Fri. 3/28 <u>Windhoek to Namib Desert</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Windhoek Tour -Namib-Naukluft National Park Meals: B, L & D Htl: Sossusvlei Ldg 	
<p>Tues. 4/1 <u>Swakopmund to Cape Town</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Flamingos -Whale Bay -2 PM to Cape Th Meals: B & D Htl: One & Only 		<p>Wed. 4/2 <u>Cape Town</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Cape Wine lands -Pearl Town -Franschhoek -Stellenbosch Meals: B & L Htl: One & Only 		<p>Thurs. 4/3 <u>Cape Town</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Cape Peninsula -Funicular -Penguin Colony -Botanical Garden Meals: B & L Htl: One & Only 		<p>Fri. 4/4 <u>Cape Town</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Robben Island -Boat Trip & Prison Tour -Table Mt. Cable Car Meals: B & D Htl: One & Only 	
<p>Sun. 4/6 <u>Kruger Nat. Park</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Morn. Game Dr. -Aft. Game Drive Meals: B, L & D Htl: Lukimbi Ldg 		<p>Mon. 4/7 <u>Kruger Nat. Park</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Morn. Game Dr. -Aft. Game Drive Meals: B, L & D Htl: Lukimbi Ldg 		<p>Tues. 4/8 <u>Depart for USA</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -1:35PM flight to Jo-burg -8 PM depart for USA #201 		<p>Wed. 4/9 <u>Arrive in USA</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -6:45 AM arrive in Atlanta -11 AM arrive in Pittsburgh 	

Southern Africa Trip – Day 2 – Thursday March 20th

Our second day starts with us in flight over the Atlantic Ocean on route to South Africa. While the service, food, and back-of-seat entertainment system on our Delta Boeing 777 are quite good, none of us are really able to get very comfortable in our economy plus seats on this 16 hour flight from Atlanta to Johannesburg. This is one long flight!

We are happy to finally see land below us after flying over the Atlantic Ocean and we are very happy when we touch down in Johannesburg, South Africa at 4 PM. Watching the cabin altitude reading we see that we are still at 5500 feet above sea level after landing and we are reminded that this whole northeast section of South Africa sits on a high plateau. This helps to moderate their weather. Johannesburg, a city of several million

people, is South Africa's largest city although not its capital. It is said to be their most racially mixed city and the commercial and industrial powerhouse of sub-Saharan Africa.

We have learned that since the end of *Apartheid* in 1994 (that was the term for separation of races and rule by whites) South Africa has been a constitutional democracy. Total population is 53 million. 80% are of the black race, 9% colored, 9% white and the balance Indian or Asian.

We quickly clear passport control, retrieve our checked luggage and clear customs. We had made prior arrangements with our hotel for transport and we easily find our driver. After a 45 minute drive thru chaotic rush hour traffic we arrive at our hotel, *54 on Bath*. It is said to be a 75 room "boutique" hotel in the trendy and upscale Johannesburg suburb of Rosebank. The weather is sunny with temperatures in the mid-70s.



As we arrive it seems like half the hotel staff comes outside to sincerely welcome us. We go inside and we sit down, are offered drinks and check in with additional friendly staff. We find our rooms to be luxurious and most comfortable. We all have nice views of the hotel lap pool, the patio outside the restaurant, and off to the horizon.



Somewhat exhausted from our travels, we meet at 7 PM for dinner in the hotel dining room. The food and attention from the restaurant staff is great. We have many laughs. Kal and Dick order tomato soup as an appetizer and are surprised when a waiter brings them each a large bowl with two small tomatoes, some

greens, and no liquid. When queried, the waiter deadpans “that’s how we serve it around here”. As they start poking at the greens, the waiter returns with a big smile on his face and a pitcher of hot tomato soup to pour into their bowls!



Southern Africa Trip – Day 3 – Friday March 21st

We have arrived in Johannesburg one day before the start of our organized tour and so today is our “free day” to rest up from the long trip and the time zone changes. We enjoy the included breakfast in the hotel dining room. The friendly hotel staff at the 54 on Bath continues to amaze us. The six of us meet at 10 AM to start our explorations. Most all report getting a good night’s sleep on our fine hotel beds.

Although there is an enclosed shopping mall connected to our hotel by a second story walkway, a member of the hotel staff offers to walk with us a short distance outside to show us an external mall entrance and to help us get our bearings. Shopping malls are very popular in South African cities. Unfortunately one of the main reasons is that shopping malls are safer for shoppers, shop workers and store owners versus stand-alone stores. South Africa has a high crime rate that has steadily increased over the past twenty years. Reasons include a declining economy, inflation, a high unemployment rate approaching 25% and the elimination of restrictions on where/when people can travel about. On the drive from the airport Marcia commented on how nice all the high walls looked that surrounded businesses, neighborhoods and houses looked until I pointed out that they are all topped by barbed wire, locked gates and frequently guards! It is said that “security guard” is one of the most popular and fastest growing job categories in South Africa. We have not felt uncomfortable at any time, however, as we are in a safe suburb and take all of the common sense precautions when we are outside of our hotel. All the folks that we see and interact with outside of the hotel seem happy and cordial. We have never felt at all threatened as we might in similar situations in a large USA city.



We enjoy walking around two malls, several shopping areas, and a craft/souvenir market. Weather today is great; low 70s and mostly clear. We have found that food and beverages in South Africa are about 50 – 70% of what we would pay in the USA and groceries and hard goods are also less expensive than what we are used to.

We walk back to our hotel and for the first time meet our *Odysseys Unlimited* Tour Director (for our tour that starts tomorrow) Tonia Devereux. Our first impressions are that she will be a great TD.



We next go back to a dining area where we saw several restaurants grouped around an open air mall. We scope out a good restaurant to reserve for dinner and then have very good lunches at an adjoining one. We walk back to our hotel, down a tree lined street, and are warmly greeted by the bell staff at the front door.



We relax for the rest of the afternoon and go out at 7 PM for an excellent dinner at a sea food restaurant. My entrée was about \$8 and Marcia's \$15.

Tomorrow we start our tour and this journal will get a lot more interesting as we visit historical sites, see amazing scenery and wildlife, and learn more about the people and countries of Southern Africa.

Southern Africa Trip – Day 4 – March 22nd

Today is the start of the organized portion of our tour. We meet our tour group for the first time at breakfast and we learn there will be a total of 24 folks on the tour, all from the USA, and all about our ages or maybe a little bit older. All seem to be really nice and we have good conversations over breakfast.

We depart at 8 AM in a motor coach for a tour of some key areas in the cities of Johannesburg and nearby Pretoria. Our tour director Tonia explains that these cities are situated on an arid 5500 foot high plateau not suitable for farming. When the first Europeans arrived here there were no trees growing. The reason that the two cities now anchor a region with a population of 10 million is due to the discovery of gold in the 1880s and the initial influx of gold miners followed by the area's growth as a mining and commercial center. South Africa has three Capitals; Pretoria is the Administrative Center, Cape Town the home of Parliament, and Bloemfontein the Judicial Center. Johannesburg is the acknowledged financial and commercial center of all of Southern Africa. We learn that South Africa has 11 official languages, English, Afrikaans (derived from the Dutch language and the main language today of descendants of the original Dutch settlers) and nine African tribal languages.

We are traveling north on a 45 minute drive from Johannesburg to Pretoria. We are on a modern freeway that sometimes grows to five lanes in each direction. The freeway is lined on both sides by modern office buildings, distribution centers, and manufacturing facilities...much like you would see in good parts of the USA.

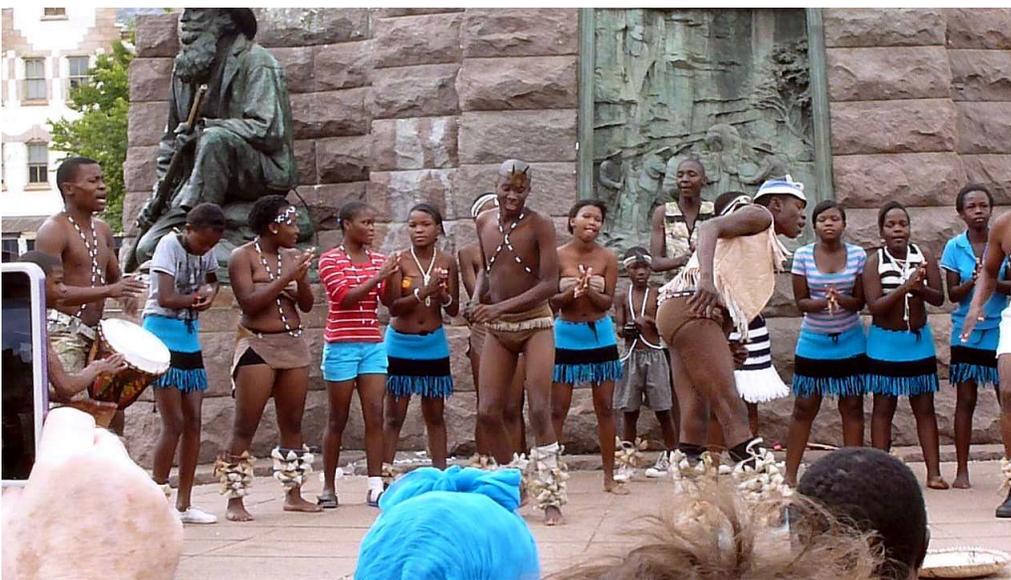
Tonia now gives us an excellent recap of the history of South Africa. Too much to repeat here but I will mention some highlights as they will help explain to you the significance of the sites we will visit today. The first Dutch arrived in 1652 to help service Dutch ships rounding the Cape on their way to Indonesia. The British took control in the early 1800s. Most of the European settlements at that time were in the Cape Town area. When Britain outlawed slavery in 1830 (and for a couple of other reasons) the descendants of the Dutch (called "Boers" for farmers) started their treks to the interior to settle what became the Orange Free State and The Transvaal. They took over land that had been used by the native population. The 1898 – 1902 Anglo-Boer War put the British in control of the entire region and the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910 as a British colony. In 1931 South Africa became an independent country. In the elections of 1948 (restricted to whites) the Boer Nationalist Party defeated the governing "British" oriented party and started implementing, for the first time, strict segregation in South Africa. Blacks were moved from the cities to "black townships" or "homelands". They were issued papers that they always had to carry that restricted them from leaving their home areas except to go to work. South Africa became a republic in 1961 when it left the British Commonwealth. Our Tour Director, Tonia, tells us that her parents immigrated to South Africa from England in 1960. She grew up in the 1970s and 80s and during that time (schooling, shopping, recreation) would rarely see a black person unless it was their housekeeper or gardener. The government censored the media so most whites never heard of any black unrest. In the late 1980s it became apparent to the Nationalist government that 10% of the people (the whites) could not continue to dominate and control the other 90%. In 1991 they released Nelson Mandela from prison and in the open elections of 1994 he was elected President and a new South Africa was established as a Parliamentary Democracy.



We now arrive at the massive *Voortreker Monument* built on a high hill outside Pretoria. It was completed in 1949 to memorialize the Boer's trek to the interior and their defeat of the Zulus. We spend the next couple of hours touring this "shrine to the Boers". We get nice views of downtown Pretoria from the monuments top.



We next drive through the city of Pretoria and view the many government buildings used by the current administration of President Jacob Zuma. We stop at a square in the center of the city and watch young children do native dances in front of the statue of Paul Kruger, President of the Transvaal Republic in the 1880s. Back on our motor coach we pass the building where the trial of "The Blade Runner" Oscar Pistorius is underway. Outside Pretoria we stop for an excellent lunch of *Bobotis* and then make a short stop at a government complex where a massive statue of Nelson Mandela has been erected.





We are now back on the freeway heading for the black township of Soweto, southwest of Johannesburg (in fact, Soweto means south-west-township). Tonia tells us that South Africa is now quite an expensive country to live in, The cheapest VW car costs 30K US\$ new, mid-range South African built BMWs \$70K, 13 gallons of gas \$70, elementary school \$3500 – 18,000 per year...unless you are poor and then the government pays, health care insurance is \$350 per month and required security for your house \$150 per month. There is a 14% VAT (Value Added Tax) on everything and income is taxed on a sliding scale from 25 to 40%. She tells us that many of the middle class are living beyond their means and are struggling to make ends meet. HIV/AIDS is a big problem. Land is being redistributed back to the black communities that used to live there (before the whites came in) which means many farms are being lost.

The goal is to not let this land go barren but for white farmers to lease that land back to and train black farmers to work the land in order to keep the agriculture industry strong. Affirmative Action continues to be a driver in South African employment. It is here to give disadvantaged people job opportunities that they have never had. South Africa is struggling to keep a good balance so that some previously advantaged groups don't feel shut out and feel the need to immigrate to another country. We all appreciate the candid and balanced description of life in today's South Africa that Tonia gives us. I hope that I have correctly stated them!

We arrive at Soweto. Today it is a city of 4 million. It was established in order to move blacks out of Johannesburg.

Our motor coach stops and we pick up our local guide Ngugu. He first takes us to a decommissioned coal burning power plant. The two cooling towers have been brightly painted and now serve as a platform for "bungee jumping". Then we drive to the house Bishop Desmond Tutu lives in when he is in the Johannesburg area (his main residence is in Cape Town). Next we walk to and then tour the house Nelson Mandela lived in before he was imprisoned and then again after he was released. It is a moving experience walking through the

simple three room house. The walls are now covered with citations from heads of states and universities celebrating his release from prison.



We next enter the *Hector Pieterse Museum*.....this proves to be another moving experience. Here's some background: In 1976 the Nationalist government determined that the blacks should be instructed in school in the Afrikaans language only, in all of their courses. Their rationale was that when the English speakers were in charge they maintained English as the instruction language, so let's change it to Afrikaans now that we are in charge. Also, the blacks only need to interact with us as their masters and bosses, so let's make them do it in our language. The students protested. Afrikaans is a hard language to learn, most of their teachers did not know it, and they wanted to stay with English which they felt offered better opportunities. The students went on "strike" and marched through Soweto in protest. A small group of police felt threatened and opened fire. Several children were killed including Hector Pieterse. A photo of his limp body being carried by a friend running to a clinic (with Hector's sister at his side) was flashed around the world. The incident enraged the world and led to the UN sanctions. The black protests continued over other issues of oppression leading to the Nationalist's realization in the late 80s that compromise and concession were required.



The weather today again is great. It was little cloudy in the morning and is now sunny. Temperatures are in the mid-70s. We return to our nice hotel. At 6 PM we all meet with our Tour Director. We each introduce ourselves to the other members of the group and try to give some interesting information about us. Tour

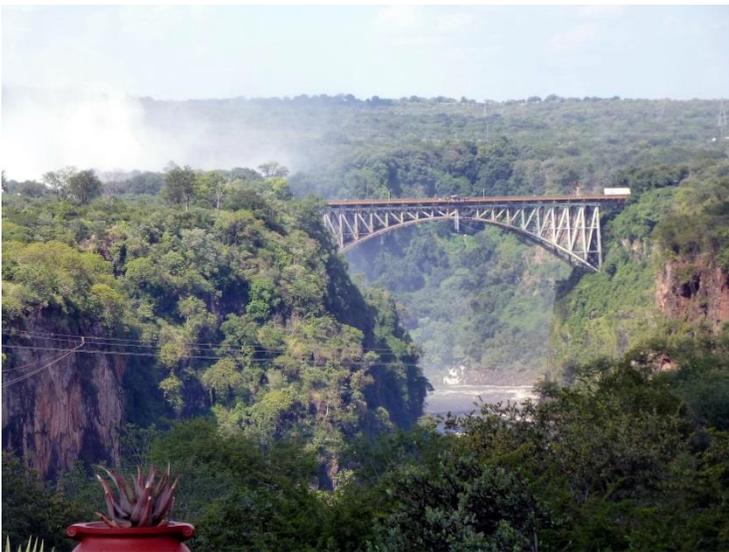
Director Tonia then details the program for the next week. At 7 PM we all enjoy a great included Welcome Dinner in the main restaurant. Several choices for entrees, appetizers, desert as well as wine.

Southern Africa Trip – Day 5 – Sunday March 23rd

Our wakeup call is at 6 AM, packed bags out by 7 AM, breakfast and then on to our motor coach. We really enjoyed our three night stay at the *54 On Bath* hotel in the Rosebank suburb of Johannesburg. Everything about it was great, especially the staff. Today we travel north to Victoria Falls in the nation of Zimbabwe.

We depart the modern Johannesburg airport on time and have a nice hour and forty five minute flight on a new South African Airlines A319, landing in Livingstone, Zambia at 12: 25 PM. Zambia is a landlocked country of 14 million people in south-central Africa. Victoria Falls defines part of its border with Zimbabwe. Zambia was once called Northern Rhodesia and was a British colony until 1964. Since that time it has moved in and out of one-party/socialist rule to multi-party democracy but the economy is in poor shape. Poverty is widespread and life expectancy is among the lowest in the world mostly due to widespread HIV/AIDS infection.

We are only in Zambia for a short time. At the border with Zimbabwe we clear Zambia border control fairly quickly and it takes a little longer getting into Zimbabwe. Our Tour Director Tonia appears to be an expert at this stuff. She takes all of our passports and \$45 US dollars each for a visa and turns them over to a colleague. He will stand in line, get all of our visas stamped in to our passports and return the passports to our hotel in Zimbabwe later today! We enjoy watching playful baboons as Tonia negotiates with the border officials.



We cross into Zimbabwe over the bridge spanning the Zambezi River and get a good glimpse of Victoria Falls as we cross. The bridge was built by Cecil Rhodes in 1904 as part of his dream of building a Cape Town to Cairo railroad. We have learned that Zimbabwe was the former British colony of Southern Rhodesia. Once called the “bread basket of Africa” it has been run since 1980 by the despotic dictator Robert Mugabe, now 90 years old. Zimbabwe is now one of the poorest countries in the world with an unemployment rate of 90%. A

few years ago their monetary inflation rate grew out of control. A 10 Billion “dollar” note then equaled 1 US\$. The only currency in use today in Zimbabwe is the US Dollar! Tonia tells us that the folks working in the Victoria Falls area appreciate their jobs so much that there is very little to no crime or theft for us to be worried about.

We check into our hotel for the next four nights. Construction on The Victoria Falls Hotel, said to be one of the grand hotels of the world, was started in 1904. Most of the current buildings were built in the following years.

The common areas are beautiful. The rooms are nice; quaint and maybe a little small but do appear to be comfortable. On the grounds of the hotel we see Wart Hogs and Baboons roaming.



At 4:30 PM we depart the hotel for a guided walk of the Victoria Falls. The first discovery of the falls by a European was by David Livingstone in 1855. While it is neither the highest nor the widest waterfall in the world, it is classified as the largest, based on its width of 5,604 feet and height of 354 feet, resulting in the

world's largest sheet of falling water. UNESCO has named Victoria Falls one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. We are here at the end of the rainy season so the falls are at "full blast".

We meet our local guide and for the next hour and a half have a great walk along a paved path on the river bank opposite the falls. There are many fine spots to stop and view the various cataracts. We see Vervet Monkeys and beautiful Trumpeter Bill birds. We are given waterproof ponchos to wear as in some places the spray/mist from the falls resembles a rainstorm. We all get soaked, but the weather is great; sunny skies and temperatures near 90 degrees. The falls are beautiful. These few pictures do not fully show their true beauty.



We meet at 7:15 PM and have a nice buffet dinner in the hotel's open air Jungle Junction Restaurant while enjoying the native dance show "African Spectacular".



Southern Africa Trip – Day 6 – Monday March 24th

We have a nice breakfast in the open air restaurant after our first night's stay at the Victoria Falls Hotel in Zimbabwe. At 9 AM we board a motor coach for a drive into to the town of Victoria Falls. This morning we are going to visit an elementary school and then do some shopping at a craft area.

Our Tour Director Tonia explains that there are 60,000 people living in the Victoria Falls area (although it appears rather sparsely populated to us). There are many elementary schools and high schools in the area. Children all walk to their school and wear school uniforms. There are two shifts, morning and afternoon. Students bring their lunch from home. School is mandatory through high school. The teachers have attended teachers college in the capital of Harare. Classes are taught in English. Odysseys Unlimited has adopted the school we are going to today. Other tour companies have adopted other schools. Odysseys Unlimited makes a yearly monetary donation; recent funds have gone towards stocking the library and earlier funds help develop playing and sports fields. Most of us have brought along school supplies to leave with the principal and we also contribute to a donation of money that Tonia will leave with them.

We spend the next hour and a half at the Chinotimba Primary School (Chinotimba is the native language word for the sound that the falls make). First, about a dozen boys and girls, dressed in native costumes, have a great time dancing for us; they really seem to enjoy it. Then, the vice Principal addresses us and reinforces all that Tonia has told us. We are then allowed to walk around the school grounds, poke our heads into classrooms and take pictures of the students.



I must say that I was surprised. I have considered Zimbabwe a totally “failed country”, but based on what I saw at this school they are doing a good job of educating their children. Tonia tells a few of us that she considers the Zimbabwe schools sometimes superior to her South African schools. The South African school system is struggling at the moment due to the Bantu education system implemented during the Apartheid regime and they have over the years had to adopt the system to try to get children from all backgrounds up to the same level. In attempting to do so the quality of the education may not be as high as it used to be.

Off to one side, Kal asks a teacher if HIV/AIDS is a problem. She says of their 450 students 76 have confirmed cases and probably more cases are unconfirmed.





We spend a little time at a craft fair in town (the vendors are not as bad as those in Egypt). Then back to the hotel and the six of us enjoy lunch on the Stanley Veranda, watching the mist from the falls.



At 3 PM the whole group attends a lecture by a local scholar. He covers the life of Scotsman Dr. David Livingstone who spent 27 years in Africa as an explorer (discovering Victoria Falls for the Europeans in 1855), a missionary, and an anti-slavery activist. I find his talk and presentation most interesting.



At 4:30 we drive to the Chobe River for a dinner boat ride. We have learned that at 2500 miles the Chobe is the fourth longest river in Africa (after the Nile, Congo and Niger). This is the end of the rainy season so the river is quite high. We board a large boat that holds 90 people on two decks for sightseeing and 50 people on one deck for a river cruise. Our small group of 24 folks has the entire boat to ourselves! What a great time we have on the river! Great sights and animals...Hippos, Nile Crocodiles, Termite Mounds ; open bar and a

great sit down dinner; sunset and then spotting the Southern Cross in the night sky.





Southern Africa Trip – Day 7 –Tuesday March 25th

We are all up early this morning as we are going on a game drive in a nature preserve that specializes in saving and breeding the rare Black Rhinoceros. We learn that the Black Rhino has almost been “poached” to extinction. They are being killed for their horns which are valued by Asians as an aphrodisiac and as medicine. The nature reserve is huge, about 20 square miles, but only contains seven Black Rhinos. The reserve is fenced and heavily patrolled to prevent poaching. Other parks have sent Rhinos they might have to this park to avoid attracting poachers to their properties.

Our group boards three open-air Toyota Land Cruisers and Land Rovers at 5:30 AM, while it is still dark, and drives about 10 minutes to the preserve to start a three hour drive on narrow dirt roads and paths through the preserve. The vehicles take different routes and the drivers keep in contact by radio and report sightings to each other. Our vehicle makes the first Black Rhino sighting, about 20 minutes into our trip, when we see two about 100 yards ahead of us on the trail in the mist. The Rhinos run into the woods and although we track them for the rest of the drive we never spot them again. Our folks in the other two vehicles are able to get close up views. We do spot many Impalas and Warthogs.



The nature preserve vehicles drop us off at the area where we will now take an Elephant Ride. What fun! Each couple boards an Elephant expertly controlled by a local handler. We travel around for about 15 minutes while getting interesting commentary from our handler. The elephants are about 40 years old and weigh around 6 tons. At the end of our ride we have time to feed "our" elephant. This is another great weather day; clear with temperatures in the high 80s.





Now our Tour Director, Tonia, feels badly that the six of us did not get a close view of a Black Rhino. This afternoon our whole group is scheduled to go on another nature drive through the Zimbabwe National Park. She offers to arrange for “the best guide” and to come back with us this afternoon to the Rhino Preserve (rather than the National Park). After some discussions we agree to come back mid-afternoon for another try at finding the Black Rhino. I had earlier asked Tonia about going on the “Lion Walk/Pet the Lions” adventure, which had been recommended to me. You get to walk with adult lions and pet the young ones. Tonia tells me that

Odysseys Unlimited had dropped this from their program. While the attraction had claimed to always release their adult lions to the wild, in fact they were selling them to wild game farms where hunters pay big bucks to shoot and kill captive wild animals (apparently, once a lion has been socialized around humans they can no longer really survive in the wild). Tonia offered to set it up the “Walk with the Lions” for me but I said no thanks!



We now go back to the Victoria Falls Hotel and have a late breakfast. Later we all relax by the hotel pool. The water is great.

Just after 3:30 PM the six of us and Tonia are picked up by the “best guide” from the Black Rhino Preserve, Milton, and we drive to the preserve in a comfortable Nissan game viewing vehicle. We drive into the preserve and see a Leopard Tortoise, Impalas, Warthogs, Water Bucks, and Kudus. After about an hour and a half Milton spots a Black Rhino and we get some good photos.

Now, Milton gets a radio call from another guide. A Black Rhino has been spotted sleeping beside a lake. The other guide arrives and directs us near the spot. He and Milton leave their vehicles and walk into the bush. A few minutes later they return. The other guide drives off. After checking with Tonia, Milton grabs his rifle and tells us to leave the vehicle and follow him into the bush. After a short walk we hear a noise and Milton orders us to stop. A Black Rhino is walking towards us through the bush! He is only yards away. Milton motions for us to walk slowly (and never run) back towards our vehicle. He sometimes tells us to stop and then he “talks” to the Rhino. After what seems like many minutes we make it back to our open air vehicle and we quickly jump in. The Rhino now stands glaring at the front of our vehicle, then turns around and “sprays” the area and ambles off. This has been an amazing experience. A great job by Milton. He tells me his rifle is a 458 and can stop an elephant with one shot (although I doubt he would have kept his job if he had had to shot one of the endangered Rhinos)!





Milton now drives us down to the edge of the lake where we watch the sunset while having refreshments (known as “sundowners” in Africa).



We drive back to our hotel and have a nice buffet dinner in the open air restaurant while we re-live our adventure of this afternoon. It was a memorable one!

Southern Africa Trip – Day 8 – Wednesday March 26th

We depart the Victoria Falls hotel at 7 AM for Chobe National Park for a full-day tour including a game drive, lunch and a boat cruise through the park on the Chobe River.



Chobe National Park is in the nearby country of Botswana. Tonia tells us that Botswana is a nation of 2 million people and 225,000 square miles and is one of the most stable and least corrupt countries in Southern Africa. Unfortunately 350,000 of its people are infected with HIV/AIDS. We clear Zimbabwe and then Botswana border control, walk over a piece of carpet saturated with disinfectant to control Hoof-and-Mouth disease, and after a comfortable hour-and-a-half ride we arrive at a resort hotel. We spot many unique birds and see a massive Barebare tree. The trunk is twenty

feet wide. Tonia says the tree is at least 1000 years old.

We depart the resort for a game drive that will last until 1 PM. The park is beautiful. We see many interesting butterflies and birds, including the African Fish Eagle, the National Bird of Botswana and Zimbabwe. We also see a Dung Beetle at work, Pukus, Impalas, Cape Buffalos, hundreds of elephants, Hippos, Baboons and Sable Antelopes. We drive along a tributary of the Chobe River and at times can see more than 50 elephants in a given area cavorting in and near the water. We have been told that Chobe National Park has 100,000 African Elephants. We are enjoying another perfect weather day with clear skies and temperatures rising through the 80s.





The terrain in Chobe, as in most of this region, is what is called the “Veldt Bush”. The ground is covered in grass, bushes and low trees. As rainy season is ending everything is green and overgrown. Near the end of our drive our guide spots a group of Zebras walking through the bush below us. We track them for several minutes and are rewarded when they come out of the bush and cross the road right in front of us.



We are driven back to the resort and we enjoy a good buffet lunch on the outdoor deck. Next we board a boat reserved for our group. We enjoy a two hour cruise on the Chobe River and see the animals from a different angle, including a dozen hippos in the water. Refreshments are available. We are hit by a rain squall, the first rain of our vacation. The skies soon clear.



We drive back to Victoria Falls. Our group meets at 7:30 PM and enjoys a gourmet dinner in our hotel's Livingstone Dining Room, rated by some travel publications as one of the 10 Best Hotel Restaurants in the world.

Southern Africa Trip – Day 9 – Thursday March 27th

Today will be mostly a travel day. There are no direct flights from the Victoria Falls area to Namibia. We will have to fly to Johannesburg and then on to Namibia. But first here are some of our general observations after a week in Southern Africa.



Disease: We all got our inoculations for Yellow Fever before leaving home. This is required by South Africa for anyone traveling into their country that has been in Zambia. We are all taking our Malaria pills (starting before the trip and to be taken four weeks after getting home). In addition our hotel in Victoria Falls had mosquito netting over our beds as will our camp in Kruger National Park.

Water and Food: We have been assured by all that the water from the taps in our hotels is fine to drink. There is always bottled water in our hotel rooms and plenty on the Odysseys Unlimited Motor Coaches. The food offerings have been excellent and not that much different than what we have at home (except the Zebra, Onyx and other game meat that is sometime available)!

Sports: No NCAA men's basketball on cable (Go Dayton Flyers!). Rugby, Cricket, Soccer and an occasional tennis or golf match blanket the four sports channels we typically get in our hotels.

Odysseys Unlimited: We expected great Tour Directors, Local Guides, Hotels and Meals from our tour company and have not been disappointed. Two other nice things with a maximum of 24 people on a tour vs. a typical 40+: A lot quicker getting on and off the motor coach (and more room when on) and toilet breaks end a lot faster. Also, OU covers tips for everyone except the Tour Director (at the end of the trip). It's not that we are cheap, but having small bills for bellmen, drivers, local tour guides, waiters on included meals, game drivers, etc. is a hassle especially with all the different currencies. All the folks serving us know that their tip will come from OU and not from us and they seem happy with that, as are we.

The British Effect: All six of the countries we are visiting were once British Colonies. As such, all have right-hand-drive vehicles traveling on the left hand side of the road. English is the official language in all of the countries we are visiting even though whites are a small minority in each. This is probably due to the fact that each countries Black population trace their origins back to several different tribes and languages. Typically each country has designated English as a primary language and then they have many secondary languages, as many as eleven Tribal languages and perhaps Afrikaans (derived from the original Dutch settlers) or even German in the case of Namibia. Schooling is in English so communicating with all is easily done by us. Signs are always in English and typically only in English.

Religion: Few claim "Tribal" as their religion. Those who do declare are almost all Christians (75% Protestant and 25% Catholic). This is the effect of the European missionaries.

Staff: The folks that we interact with at the hotels, restaurants, shops, airports, game drives and tours are almost exclusively Black citizens. Their friendliness and competence have been exceptional. Better than we have come to expect from service providers (of all colors) in the USA.



This morning we leave our hotel at 10 AM, having one last look at the mist from the falls, and travel to the Livingstone, Zambia airport, getting another stamp on the fancy “Zimbabwe” pages in our passports. We enjoyed our four night stay at the historic Victoria Falls Hotel. Marie remarks “wow, today we’ll be in four countries in one day”!

We depart at 1 PM for a two hour flight to Johannesburg on a nice South African Airways Airbus A319. Marcia, Kal and several others in our group are upgraded to First Class. Marcia switches seats with me. Kal gets an aerial photo of Victoria Falls from 8000 feet.



When I was here in 1985 the Johannesburg Airport was called the “Jan Smuts” airport after an old Afrikaner/Boer General. No more. It is now “OR Tambo”, named after a close confidant of Nelson Mandela.



After a 3-1/2 layover at the Johannesburg airport and time for some shopping we take off at 7 PM on a full SA 737-800. We land at Windhoek, the capital of Namibia, and are met by our local guide for the next few days, Freddie Vetter. We have an hour drive to our downtown hotel, the very modern Hilton.



Southern Africa Trip – Day 10 – Friday March 28th



We landed last night in Windhoek, the capital of Namibia. We have learned that Namibia is a sparsely populated country of 2.3 million people occupying an area about the size of Texas. The area was a colony of Germany, called German Southwest Africa, from 1886 until 1914. At that time Britain took control. Later, The Union of South Africa controlled the area until Namibia achieved independence in 1990. Namibia has a stable democratic government and the economy is driven by mining (diamonds, precious metals and uranium) and tourism.

We board our motor coach and depart at 8 AM. Our driver and “local” guide for the next five days is Freddie Vetter. He tells us he was born and raised in Namibia. His father was of German descent and his mother Afrikaner (Dutch). He takes us on a quick tour of this city of 400,000 people. It sits on a 5000 foot high plateau in the center of the country and has a

decided German influence. We see the Lutheran Church that was built in the early 1900s. With the exception of the exterior stone work, everything to construct and outfit the church was brought in from Germany. We see the Parliament Building and the new National Museum with a statue of the first democratically elected President.

Freddie tells us that the population is only 6.4% White and that relations between the races are very good. The eastern part of Namibia receives a moderate amount of rainfall but the amount of precipitation decreases as you go west towards the Atlantic. The western third of the country is desert. This is where we will be heading. We travel south on paved roads then turn west on dirt roads for the balance of today's drive. We cross the Naukluft Mountains and descend into the Namib Desert. Recent rain, heavier than usual, has turned the desert somewhat green. We stop and view a 500 foot high "Tufa Waterfall" formed by calcium deposits rising up from the rock during the rare times when water flows over the falls.



We stop at a desert lodge for a nice lunch and continue our travels over the rough, bumpy dirt roads. We see many Springbok and an Ostrich family.



At 3:30 PM we arrive at our desert lodge, our home for the next two nights, The Sossusvlei Lodge. Our rooms are comfortable. The roofs resemble canvas tents. The common areas at the lodge are very nice.



We have an excellent buffet dinner on their outside deck. A great salad bar, stir fry to order, and a special barbecue area when the cook game to order (Zebra, Onyx, etc.) as well as more conventional meats. The sun is now setting at 7 PM and rising at 7 AM. The night sky is amazing as we are in an isolated area with no “light pollution”. We quickly identify the Southern Cross and are amazed at how well we can see the Milky Way.

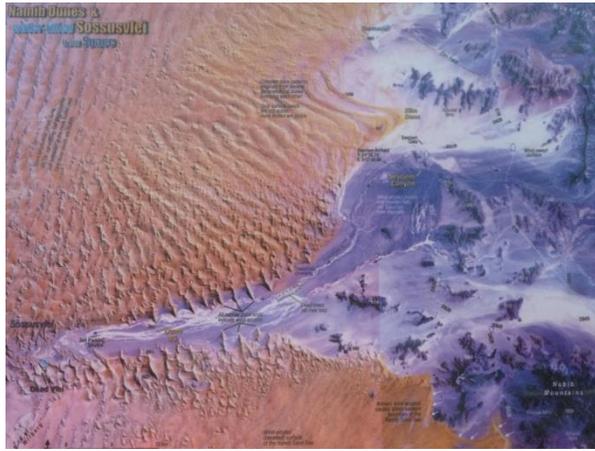


Southern Africa Trip – Day 11 – Saturday March 29th

We are up early after a good night’s sleep in our “tents” at the Sossusvlei Lodge in the Nabib Desert of western Namibia. We need to get an early start today as our main activity will be climbing up one of the famous red sand dunes at Sossusvlei. We have been told that the best technique is to climb barefoot but the climb must be completed before 11 AM when the sands will be too hot to walk on!

We depart in our motor coach at 6:40 AM for an hour drive to the dunes. On the ride we see more Onyx and Springbok grazing on the sparse elephant grass on the desert floor.

Our local guide Freddie explains that the entire coast of Namibia, 1000 miles long, is a protected area. We are in that area now and soon start to see the amazing reddish dunes. They are the highest in the world. Freddie shows us a satellite picture and we see that they cover many, many square miles.



We stop and view the Honeymoon Dune and the 45 mile Dune (and see people climbing up its spine).



We park our motor home and are greeted by a friendly Jackal that's hanging out in the parking lot. Freddie tells us that we are now about 40 miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean.

We next board all-terrain vehicles for a 4 mile ride over the sand to the dune we will climb. We view the dune known as

“Big Mama”. We will attempt to conquer the “knee” of Big Mama, climbing to a height of 410 feet.



Freddie and Tonia lead us to the base of the dune. We all take off our shoes or sandals and place them in our backpacks. Climbing single file we follow Freddie up the narrow “spine” of sand leading to the top. I am surprised how hard it is to climb in soft sand. Some of us sink in deeper than others! Keeping balance on the narrow spine is difficult, especially as the track steepens. After about an hour we reach the top, 410 feet higher than where we started. We sit down on top, look around at the great views, and rest up for the descent.





We have been dreading trying to descend on the spine of the dune fearing issues in trying to stay balanced. Suddenly Freddie announces that we must all now stand and join hands. We will be walking down the very steep face (45 degrees?) of the dune! We all join hands and slowly walk down the face of the dune. We sink into the sand almost up to our knees but it slows us so that we do not fall head-over-heel. It is a wonderful and enjoyable experience!



In the picture at the left you can see how high the dune is. Note the two people standing at the top. That's where we descended from. In fact, if you look closely at the face, you will see a band of lighter sand coming down the face. That's exactly where we held hands and "walked down" the face of the dune.

(You will note that our some time during our visit to the dune – our camera got sand inside the aperture and many of the following pictures have

"spots" in them. – Sorry.)



We are at the base at 11 AM and the temperature is 91 degrees. It is another clear, sunny day. We return to the Sossusvlei Lodge for a late lunch and we then all relax. I enjoy getting some sun on the back deck of our tent while I monitor the desert.

At 5:45 PM we all meet for a Nature Drive thru some of the many acres making up the lodge's property. We see interesting wildlife and paintings and primitive structures left by ancient inhabitants.



Near sunset we stop and our guides prepare an excellent “Sundowner”, snacks and drinks that we enjoy while we view the spectacular scenery and sunset.



Another great dinner at the lodge and off to get a good night's sleep in preparation for a long day on the road tomorrow.

Southern Africa Trip – Day 12 – Sunday March 30th

We are up early again this morning at 5 AM to get ready for what should be a “grueling” travel day. We will be on the road most of the day, on rough dirt roads, traveling from Sossusvlei to Swakopmund on the Atlantic coast of Namibia. We will be driving through interesting terrain of mostly desert and mountains.

We depart in our motor coach at 7 AM saying goodbye to the Sossusvlei Lodge where the staff, accommodations and food were great.

After a little over an hour we stop at the small and eccentric town of Solitaire.



An hour later, after spotting Zebras, we stop at the Tropic of Capricorn.



Our Tour guide Freddie describes how Namibia gets progressively more dry and desert-like as we proceed from East to West towards the Atlantic Ocean. The scenery is nice but we continue to drive on rough dirt road and experience a rather uncomfortable ride. Around noontime we enter the "Valley of 1000 Hills" in Nabib Naukluft National Park. We stop and climb up one of the hills and enjoy some nice views.



We view a couple of rare desert plants unique to the area. A Gordon's Hoodia Plant and a 450 year old Welwitschia.



Just little after 1 PM we stop at Groanikonte's Oasis...a real desert oasis...for a nice included German style lunch.

Right after lunch we drive through an area known as "The Valley of the Moon".



Back on the (rough!) road we continue our travels towards Freddie's home town of Swakopmund. He tells us that the area we are driving through contains eight uranium mines. We arrive in Swakopmund at 3:15 PM. He

has pointed out that a cold Antarctic sea current flows up the Atlantic coast south-to-north. When the cold water is hit by the warm desert air, clouds and fog form. They almost never see sunrises or sunsets in Swakopmund due to fog but the skies usually clear by mid-day. Today is a cloudy day on the Atlantic coast and the temperature is 30 degrees cooler than where we were fifteen minutes ago.

Freddie drives around the center of town pointing out the many German style buildings. This is the region that the first Germans settled in when the area became a German colony in 1885. Our hotel for the next two nights is one of those structures. It was built in the early 1900s as a train station and designed to replicate the old Hamburg Rail Station. It was renovated and opened in 1995 as the Swakopmund Hotel. The hotel common areas and our rooms are great.



We walk a few blocks to the beach and see that the posted water temperature is 58 degrees.



We enjoy a nice included buffet dinner in the hotel restaurant.

Southern Africa Trip – Day 13 – Monday March 31st

We all have a comfortable first night's sleep at the Swakopmund Hotel. We board our motor coach at 8 AM for a half hour drive south to Walvis Bay. We drive on a nice paved road with the ocean on our right and sand dunes on our left. The morning fog and clouds are with us.

Local Tour Guide Freddie points out the nice condos and houses on the beach side. He says that many Germans, Swiss and Austrians spend the European winter season here. There is no possibility of hurricanes so beach front property is safe. He points out the house that Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt frequently rent. They like it here; call it a "no paparazzi zone". Their first child was born at the nearby hospital.



We enter the town of Walvis Bay. The bay is Namibia's only deep water port and the only one for most of the Atlantic coast of the Southern African countries.

At 9 AM we board a catamaran that has been reserved for just our tour group for a 3-1/2 cruise on Walvis Bay and the surrounding ocean. We are told that the cold Bagola Current sweeps up the west coast of Namibia and cools the water but it is rich in nutrients for abundant sea life.





Shortly after we leave port a juvenile Cape Fur Seal jumps on to the front of the boat and greets us! We view the lighthouse and then see Atlantic Bottlenose Dolphins and later Bagola Dolphins which are unique to the area.



We cruise to the Fur Seal Colony estimated to number 27,000. There are 2.5 million seals in Namibia; more than the human population.





After a couple of hours all of us move to the rear of the catamaran where we are served a delicious lunch of two dozen types of sea food and finger food. We also enjoy drinks and desert. Richard tries his first raw oyster and says “if that’s all I had to eat I’d lose weight”.



An adult Cape Fur Seal tries to join us on the back deck.

Back on shore at 12:30 PM and we run into a friendly young Pelican. The fog has burned off.



Our afternoon is free, Later the group meets for a nice included dinner at the Tug Restaurant on the ocean.



Southern Africa Trip – Day 14 – Tuesday April 1st

Today we will leave Namibia and fly to Cape Town, South Africa. We have had a very comfortable stay at the Swakopmund Hotel. We leave the hotel at 9 AM and walk a few blocks to the Kristall Galerie which is a combination museum dedicated to crystals mined in Namibia and jewelry shop. After some time at the Galerie we walk to the Swakopmund Museum where we spend another interesting hour seeing objects and displays from the early period of German settlement.



At 11 AM we depart on our motor coach for the Walvis Bay airport. There has been little coastal fog or clouds this morning. It's sunny. We are again driving with the ocean on our right and sand dunes on our left. Freddie tells us that although Swakopmund sits on the salt water ocean and there is only desert for hundreds of miles inland there is never any water shortage. He describes how the rivers that start in the interior mountains flow underground to the sea. They are Swakopmund's plentiful water source. We stop and see some areas where the water has come to the surface, much to the delight of Flamingos.



We check in for our flight at the temporary Walvis Bay airport terminal. We discover we have mistakenly left some large containers of liquid in our carryon...sunscreen, aloe vera and insect repellent.....stuff we will need in Kruger Game Park! Marcia wants to throw it out but I put it in my carry on hoping to sneak it by security. The x-ray machine catches it. The "TSA" agent tells me to follow her with my incriminating liquids. I follow her outside to an adjoining building where she asks me to identify one of our suitcases. She then allows me to pack the liquids away in our checked bag!

We have a nice two hour flight on a regional jet to Cape Town. Great views of the desert, coast line, and then Cape Town on our approach.



We land at 4 PM and are met up by our new driver for the next four days. We will be in a full size motor coach so there will be plenty of room for the 24 of us. We start out on a 45 minute drive to downtown. As we do in all cities, we pass "shack cities" where the poor blacks live and then often nearby we see much better looking areas made up of "government housing". Tonia explains that once a citizen has been on the waiting list for 5

years they are given a fairly nice new “government house” (with subsidized utilities) so they can then move out of their “shack”.



The problem, she explains, is when they move out of their shack they call a friend in the countryside (or frequently in another country) and say “come to the city; you can live in my old shack”. So, the poor segment of the city population just keeps increasing. Folks from Zimbabwe, Botswana, Mozambique, and even as far away as the Congo flock to South Africa seeking a better life.

We arrive at our hotel for the next four nights. It’s the highly acclaimed “The One and Only”. We have read reviews of this hotel and have high expectations made even higher when Tonia mentions on the motor coach that we have all been upgraded to the “island units”. After a warm greeting by the hotel staff we are led to our rooms which are on an island surrounded by canals. We are really blown away by the room size and décor. The bedroom is about 30’ x 22’. The bath area is 15’ x 15’. The alcove connecting them is 15’ x 9’ and the outside patio is 10’ x 18’. Some of us have stayed in some pretty nice hotels. Never anything like this!





We enjoy a great view of Table Mountain from the hotel bar area. At 7 PM our group meets and walks to the waterfront for an included dinner at Karibu restaurant.

Southern Africa Trip – Day 15 – Thursday April 2nd

After a good night's sleep in our luxury rooms at Cape Town's One-and-Only Hotel we depart in our motor coach for Stellenbosch and Franschoek in South Africa's wine country. As forecasted, today is starting off very cloudy and showery. The weather outlook for the rest of our trip, however, is excellent.

After about an hour drive we reach the pretty town of Stellenbosch. We see Stellenbosch College which is said to produce 90% of South Africa's best Rugby players. We stop at an old general store, Oom Samie se Winkel, and view their eclectic mix of merchandise. We also see many examples of Cape Dutch architecture.



By now the rain has stopped and there are signs of clearing skies. The region we are driving through is like no other we have seen in Southern Africa. It is hilly with valleys and mountains and is very green with lots of tall trees. At times it reminds us of Hawaii and at times of Switzerland.



We stop at the Boschendal Winery, in operation since 1685. After a tour of their operations we sit down for a mid-morning wine tasting. We sampled a 2012 Chardonnay, a 2013 Blanc de Noir, a Le Bouquet, a 2012 Lanoy and their Shiraz.



Next we drive to the town of Franschoek and have about 45 minutes for some shopping in the many small stores on their main street. This town was founded by French Hugonauts (Protestants) in the 1700s. We have a unique lunch at the Allee Bleue Winery near Franschoek. Each couple is given a picnic basket packed with gourmet food which we eat while sampling five of their wines.

We drive back towards Cape Town and stop at the Kirstenbosch Gardens where we are taken on a long hilly hike and finally do find the gardens. It has started to rain again.



We arrive back at our hotel at 5:30 PM. The Peggy and Dick have a light dinner at the hotel restaurant while the other four of us go out and enjoy our first pizza of this trip!

Southern Africa Trip – Day 16 – Thursday April 3rd

We depart our great hotel at 8 AM for another full day of touring in the Cape Town region. We head down the Victoria Highway past the Atlantic beaches and stop in the Clinton neighborhood where we are told “nice” homes go for \$12 million. We next stop at Maiden’s Cove on Camp Bay where we view the mountain range known as “The 12 Apostles” and also watch an amazing rainbow hovering over the bay.



While we have always felt very safe on our travels in Southern Africa we note that even in these high-end neighborhoods there are nearby “shanty towns” built on public land. All of the nicer residences are enclosed by walls with barbwire or electrified fencing on top. Visible security guards are everywhere. The ADT signs have a phrase not used in the USA: “Armed Response”.

We are traveling down the Cape Horn peninsula to the farthest southwestern part of Africa. The scenery reminds us of the Italian Coast. At 10 AM we stop at “Boulders” to view the African Penguins. We learn that this species is only found in four colonies on the South African coast. They never migrate from their colonies, are flightless, and small being only about one foot high. They “bay” like donkeys, hence their former name of Jackass Penguins.



At 10:45 AM we continue down the peninsula spotting some Bontubucs antelope and then a family of baboons. We reach the Cape of Good Hope.





Next we take a funicular and then climb to a lighthouse that was in operation from 1860 until 1919. It was built so high in elevation that it was frequently shrouded in clouds and fog and not very effective. It was replaced by a lower standing lighthouse in 1919.

We enjoy another included gourmet lunch at the park restaurant near the lighthouse. We have a choice of a chicken entre or fish. Most of us have the fish which includes a large portion of Hake, Calamari most exquisite, and a Prawn. Desert is Cheese Cake.

Now we head back towards Cape Town bound for Table Mountain. We take the Gondola up to the top of this iconic mountain towering above Cape Town. We are at 3300 feet above sea level. The views are outstanding. Occasionally a cloud moves through us. It is WINDY.





We spot the resident Rock Hyrax rodents.

We take the gondola down and return to our hotel at 5:45 PM. Later the six of us go out and have a good steak dinner at a local restaurant.

Southern Africa Trip – Day 17 – Friday April 4th

We all meet in our hotel's lobby at 8:15 AM. This morning we will visit Robben Island where Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners were incarcerated during the Apartheid period.

Tonia leads us on a fifteen minute walk to the waterfront. The main ferry which can hold 300 people has broken down so they are using a collection of smaller ships today. We board a small but fast boat and cover the 10 miles to the island in about forty five minutes.



Tonia secures a motor coach just for our group and also finds the "best" guide for us. We drive through a gate still showing the original sign that greeted new prisoners. For the next forty minutes we are driven around the island, making frequent stops and receiving interesting information from our local guide. We learn that Robben Island was used as a Leper Colony until the 1930s. The prison was built between 1962 and 1965 primarily by prison laborers. We view the house where Robert

Sobukwe was imprisoned and learn that he was one of the founders of the ANC (African National Congress). He was jailed after the Sharpsville Riots in 1960 in which 70 black demonstrators were killed. We stop and view the Lime Quarry where Nelson Mandela and the other prisoners toiled mixing gravel and lime for paving the roads on the island.



We also stop and get photographs of the Cape Town skyline and the mountains towering behind the city.



He talks about how life was for blacks under Apartheid; forced to move from their homes to distant townships, the identity papers they needed to carry at all times and the six month prison sentences for being outside of permitted areas.

Our guide leaves us with the positive message that “Robben Island is a symbol of the triumph of Freedom and Human Dignity over Oppression, Humiliation and Small Minds”.

We now enter the prison area and meet our next guide. He was an actual political prisoner on Robben Island in the 1980s. He tells us that he joined the ANC after the Soweto riots in 1976 when more than 600 demonstrators were killed. He crossed from South Africa into Mozambique and was then taken to communist East Germany and The Soviet Union for training. He returned to Southern Africa and operated out of Swaziland conducting disruptive activities against the government in South Africa. He was captured and imprisoned in 1986. He was given a 17 year sentence but was freed with all of the other political prisoners in 1991.



He takes us to an interior room, a common area, where 70 prisoners would take their meals and use the toilets. He talks about the meager rations and how mixed races got more food than blacks. He tells us how the black leaders would arrange clandestine meetings to discuss issues and how they worked to improve their knowledge and later complete college courses when rules on possession of reading material were relaxed.

We now walk to the cell block and view Nelson Mandela's small cell. He was imprisoned on Robben Island from 1962 through 1982 and then transferred to a prison on the mainland. He was released in 1991. In the exterior shot his window is the fourth from the left.



Our tour ends at 11:30 AM and we board a large ship at 11:45 AM. This ship is slower than the one we came out on and we are going against the wind. It takes until 1 PM to dock at Cape Town. It is a windy ride. Marcia finds that her sun hat can be an effective shield from the wind. We see an occasional dolphin and then quite a



few fur seals chasing our ship.



We have the afternoon free. Peggy and Marcia do some shopping. Richard and I get in some quality time at the hotel pool. The water is great.



Marie and Kal have signed up for a “Township Tour” They have a great guide and are out from 2 PM until 5:15 PM. They watch singing children at the Community Center and are invited into a resident’s home. They report that the trip gave them a better insight into the living conditions and aspirations. The residents are looking for a better life, especially for their children. They are paying tuition to send their children to school in Cape Town. They are trying to start their own businesses like collecting and selling used automobile tires. Many successful people remain in this “shack” community to act as an inspiration to others.



At 7 PM we all gather for our “Farewell Dinner” in the main restaurant of the hotel. It is most excellent. Also most excellent have been our traveling companions. They have all been fun to travel with and all seemed to be experienced travelers. Seven couples will be flying home to the USA tomorrow while five couples, will be flying to Kruger National Park for three days of game drives and wildlife viewing in a wilderness “safari camp”.

Southern Africa Trip – Day 18 – Saturday April 5th

At 8:15 AM we three couples and two others, Evelyn and Joe and Jan and Art meet and depart this great hotel. The One-and-Only Hotel is certainly the finest any of us has ever stayed at. Both the common areas and our rooms were excellent. We really enjoyed our four night stay in Cape Town.



We head to the Cape Town Airport on a motor coach. Tonia is with us and guides us through the airport. We say goodbye to her at the security checkpoint. What a nice person and what a great Tour Director! We always have felt we had very good Tour Directors on our travels but she is at the top of the list.

We take off at 10 AM in a comfortable South African Airways AVRO RJ85 regional jet and land at the town of Nelspruit near the southern end of Kruger National Park at 12:30 PM. We have learned that Kruger Park is one of the largest game reserves in Africa. It covers an area of 7580 square miles and is located in the northeast corner of South Africa on the border with Mozambique. It is about the size of Israel. Areas of the park were first established in 1898 and it became South Africa’s first national park in 1926. The terrain of the section of the park we will be in is described as “Thorn Bush and Red Bush-Willow Veld”. We will see a lot of medium size

trees, grasses and bushes. We are here right after the rainy season so everything is green and overgrown. It is said to be easier to spot animals during the dry season.

At the airport we are met by two drivers and vans for our transfer to the Lukimbi Safari Lodge inside the park. The ride to the park is enjoyable. We drive through valleys surrounded by mountains. Nearer to the park we pass many fields where sugar cane is grown. At 2 PM our vehicles enter Kruger National Park. Almost immediately we see several Giraffes near the road and later several Elephants.



We arrive at the Lukimbi Lodge and are warmly greeted by the staff. We learn that this private lodge is 10 years old and has a lease on a “private concession” inside the park that is over 30,000 acres in size. Only vehicles from our lodge are allowed inside their concession (property) and they are allowed to take their 4-wheel drive vehicles off-road and on to trails, unlike what is allowed in other areas of the park. We check into our rooms and they look great. Each has a large bedroom, bathroom, sitting room and a private deck looking out over a stream. All under a vaulted thatched roof. The lodge has 18 units. Only 10 will be occupied tonight. I look out from our deck and immediately spot a large turtle on a rock in the stream and an Impala grazing on the other side of the creek. We will be staying here for the next three nights.



We meet at 4 PM for our first game drive. We meet our guide, Kim, and our tracker, Michael. The six of us are comfortably seated in a ten seat open air Land Rover. Our tracker sits exposed on a jump seat over the left front bumper.



We start off on a dirt road and soon Kim stops and asks us if we smelled anything. We all say we did not. She reverses our vehicle and says she smells a "kill". Sure enough a large Lion crosses the road right behind us and walks into the dense brush back to his kill. Michael walks into the bush and finds four lions feeding on the kill. We do not follow him! We see many Impalas and a Hippo and Zebra in the distance. Kim gets a radio call from another one of our lodge's vehicles. They have made a rare sighting! She won't tell us what it is but takes off at speed over the rough roads and paths. After twenty minutes we arrive at the sighting and find three

Cheetahs resting around a water hole. Kim tells us that there are only 120 Cheetahs in all of Kruger Park. At top speed they can run at up to 70 miles per hour. We watch them for about twenty minutes; fascinating!



Next we spot Elephants.





Next our tracker, Michael, spots five lions resting around a water hole. Kim notifies the other lodge vehicle so that they can join us. She tells us there are 1500 lions in the park and that they each will sleep about 18 hours a day.

We watch them until after sundown. Sunset and sunrise are both at 6 o'clock. Michael shines a spotlight on them to help us with our photographs.



Back on the road, Michael sits in his jump seat and shines a spotlight down the road to help Kim guide the Land Rover in the darkness. We stop when she spots a Chameleon. On the way back to our lodge we spot a

one-eyed male Lion sitting on the road with his mate lying behind him.

After a while we reverse course and arrive back at our lodge at 7:15 PM. A great three hour and fifteen minute initial game drive! We can't believe how much fun it was and how many animals we saw. We will start a game drive each morning right after sunrise and each afternoon two hours before sunset. Each will last over three hours. We will also have a



nature walk mid-day. We saw so much that we skipped our “sundowners” and we now enjoy them in the lodge’s nice bar area.

At 8 PM we move to an enclosed outdoor seating area where we have a gourmet meal by the fire pit. Specialties include Ostrich and Kudu meat and Venison sausage. We have a great Malva Pudding for desert.



Southern Africa Trip – Day 19 – Sunday April 6th



Today we will go on our first morning game drive. We are at the Lukimbi Lodge in the southern part of South Africa’s Kruger National Park. We receive our wake up calls at 5:30 AM. Coffee and snacks await us at the lodge. We depart in our Land Rovers at 6 AM. The sky is cloudless and temperatures are about 60 degrees. This is the start of fall in the Southern Hemisphere so it does get a little chilly in our open vehicles early in the morning and after sunset.

Our guide, Kim, first heads out towards the area where last night we saw the male Lion lying in the road with his mate.

We spot the two lions and they retreat a little bit into the dense bush. Then they start to mate and we hear some amazing roars and moans! She tells us that lions will mate about every 20 minutes! Next we spot a White Rhinoceros (the “white” name has nothing to do with its color) with a one year old baby. Red Billed Ox Picker birds are on their backs.



We drive over to the Crocodile River and spot Egyptian Geese and a Tawny Eagle.

We spot a Warthog on the road and then a baby Elephant with its mother crossing further down the road.





We see Giraffe and spot a Dwarf Mongoose. The Mongoose is only about 6 inches in length.

We stop for our morning snack break at a nice viewpoint.



Kim points out an Amarula Tree whose fruit is a key ingredient in the South African liquor Amarula. We see many Impala, like this male and his haram.

We are back at our lodge at 9:20 AM. Another great game drive on a perfect weather day.

After a nice breakfast we meet at 10:20 AM for our late morning walk. We first drive about 25 minutes to the Crocodile River. Kim loads her 458 rifle and waits for Steff to drop off the first group and join us with his rifle. They lead us single file down to the river where we view nine Hippopotamus including a baby and view two Crocodiles at a distance.



We return to the Lodge and Marcia and I relax by their pool until it's the 2 PM lunch time.



At 4 PM we meet for our afternoon game drive. Shortly after exiting the Lodge (and its electrified fence to keep the Elephants out) we spot a Lion resting by the road and then Rhinoceros.

We spot a Southern Yellow-Billed Hornbill.

Kim receives word via her radio that another vehicle has spotted the elusive Wild (Painted) Dogs and we take off to join the hunt. Unfortunately we do not spot the dogs. We stop for our "Sundowners".

We are back on a dirt road and it is now pitch dark. Ahead of us we spot a Leopard! Of the "Big Five" that folks hope to spot when they come to Southern Africa (the Water Buffalo, Elephant, Lion, Rhinoceros and Leopard) the Leopard is said to be the hardest to spot. We're told there are 1000 Leopards in the park but they mostly move at night and are well camouflaged. Our Leopard lies down in grass right by the side of the road and watches us!



We are back at our Lodge at 7:25 PM. We continue to be delighted with how much wildlife we are not only seeing but are able to watch move around and interact in their natural habitat. And also how much fun we are having bouncing around in the Land Rover on game drives.

Later we enjoy a sit down dinner. The highlight was the salmon entree.

Southern Africa Trip – Day 20 – Monday April 7th



Our morning game drive on the property of the Lukimbi Lodge in Kruger National Park starts shortly after sunrise at 6 AM. The skies are clear and yet another great weather day is predicted.

We are going to be driving over the dirt roads and trails in a different area today. Shortly after leaving the lodge we come across a mother Elephant and a young male.

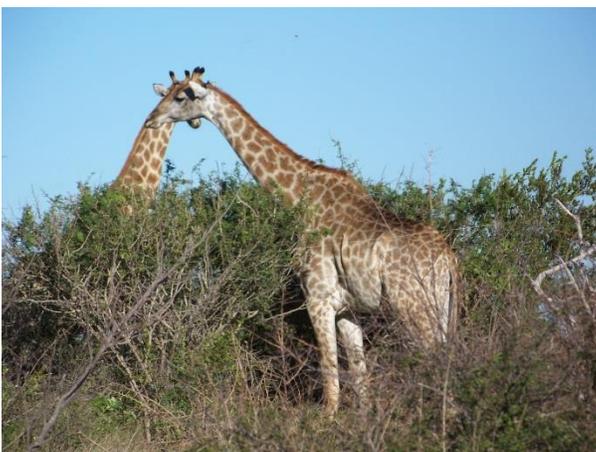
About fifteen minutes later we drive up to a large “breeding” herd of Water Buffalo. This is exciting for us as it means that we have now seen all of the “Big 5” our early game drives in Kruger. The Big 5 are the Elephant, Lion, Rhinoceros, Leopard, and Water Buffalo. Our guide, Kim, tells us that the “Great White Hunters” choose the term Big 5 in the late 1800s based on their feelings that these were the most dangerous Southern African animals to hunt with rifle on foot.



We see a Rhino at distance and two Giraffes up close. Later we stop and Michael and Kim prepare a morning snack and beverage for us.

Next we spot many Zebras, Impalas and a Hinged Tortoise.

The entrance road to our lodge is blocked by a big Bull Elephant. Guide Kim talks him back into the bush and we proceed.



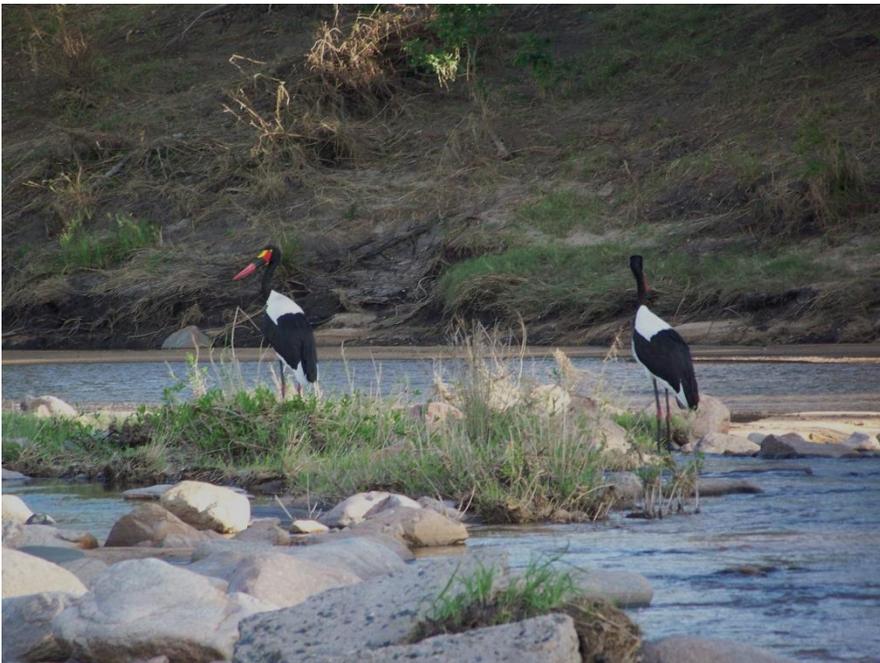


At 10 AM we meet for our morning nature walk. Guides Kim and Steff are armed with their 458 rifles and lead us on a walk along and across the creek behind our rooms. We see rutting Impalas, a Leopard Tortoise and learn more about the plants and trees of Kruger. Kim takes Marcia and my picture along with the other two couples with us from the Odysseys Unlimited earlier Southern Africa Tour, Evelyn and Joe and Jan and Art.



At lunch time we are chatting with Shawn, the Lodge Manager. Marie asks him if they have troublesome guests from time to time. He says not too often but they do have a sign hanging in the office that says *"All of our Guests Bring Us Joy. Most when they arrive, but some when they depart"*.

Our afternoon game drive starts at 4 PM. We are on the dirt road leading from our lodge for only a short time before seven Giraffes cross in front of us. Half a mile later an Elephant crosses the road. Then four Rhinoceros cross in front of us. Kim tells us that a majority of the animals in the park have become comfortable with vehicles, especially when they are correctly driven and handled.



We cross a stream and see a pair of rare Saddle-Billed Storks. They stand nearly three feet high. Kim says there are only 16 pairs in Kruger and only 60 pairs in all of South Africa.

The parade of interesting animals continues. We see a Rhinoceros with a 1 year old baby. Then a bird of prey, a Batalier. Next a Vervet Monkey at the top of a dead tree. Our first sighting of a Banded Mongoose. More Elephants and Rhinos. A Waterbuck. Numerous Impalas and an adult Giraffe with a young one.



We drive for miles on a crazy trail. It's the roughest one that we've been on. We finally stop for our Sundowners. We have noticed that when the guides radio each other to report any interesting animal sighting that they talk in code. Kim tells us that they use words from a Zulu dialect for the names of the animals. She tells us this is so that their customers/passengers won't know what animals may have been sighted by another guide. She says that some customers are so obsessed with seeing the "Big 5" that they would demand that she drive to a reported sighting even if she knows it is too far away to reach before the animals disappear from sight.



We are now back on our rough trail headed to the lodge. We spot a lion and again the big Bull Elephant blocking the road leading to the lodge. Kim talks him back into the bush which he does. We're "home" at 7:10 PM and now clean-up for another enjoyable dinner.

Southern Africa Trip – Day 21 – Tuesday April 8th

Today we will leave Southern Africa and start a two day journey to return to our homes in the USA. But first the Lukimbi Lodge has arranged one last morning game drive for us. This one will only be 2 hours long vs. the normal 3+ hours as we need to leave Kruger National Park and start our trip home at 9:30 this morning.

Just after sunrise at 6 AM we meet our Guide Kim and our Tracker Michael, board their open air Land Rover and start down the road leading from the lodge. It is another cool but clear start to an early fall day. A short distance from the lodge we spot a young 5 year old Elephant in the middle of our road. He quickly disappears into the dense brush and we slowly continue driving past the spot where he was standing. As we pass that spot suddenly the mother Elephant roars at us and briskly walks out of the bush on one side of the road, starting towards our slow moving vehicle. Then another adult Elephant does the same from the other side of the road. Kim lightly accelerates the Land Rover. We look back and now see the entire family of six Elephants staring at us and arrayed across the road. This sure gets our adrenalin going early this morning!



We leave the dirt road and travel on a remote path for about fifteen minutes without seeing anything of note. Suddenly Marcia exclaims "wait; there's something big in that tree far to the left". It looks like three lions to me but Kim and Michael instantly recognize three Cheetahs up in a dead tree about 150 yards to the center left of us. They maneuver off road and slowly proceed towards the dead tree, Michael, from his perch over the left front bumper, directs Kim around any wet areas so that we do not get stuck. Kim tells us that these are the same three Cheetahs, young brothers about 2-1/2 years old, that we saw the other night resting around a water hole with full stomachs. They are now standing on the tree looking for prey, most probably Impala. They now stare at us.



We slowly approach the tree while Kim radios to another of our lodge vehicles that is also now out tracking, and alerts them to our sighting. The Cheetahs slowly get down from their perch and start walking through the low bush. We try to follow them. Suddenly one makes a run at an Impala but is not successful. They continue on their slow prow, occasionally stopping and looking around, and then arrive at another dead tree lying on its side. They climb up on to this tree to get a better view of the terrain. Our vehicle approaches and we get great photographs. The other lodge Land Rover now joins us and our fellow guests now see the great views we have been enjoying.



We leave what maybe has been the highlight of all of our game drives and start back for the lodge. Kim tells us that our lodge is one of only two in the entire park that's allowed to go totally off road on their concession property; i.e., not staying on a road or on a rough trail. They are only allowed to do so for big cats, never for Rhino, Elephants or Giraffes. They must report today to a Park Ranger exactly when, where and for how long they were off road. A crew from our lodge will come out today and rake over any foliage bent by our vehicle's tires and repair any damage. The Park Ranger may come out to inspect their work.



We are back at our lodge at 8 AM. We shower, pack, have breakfast and depart the lodge at 9:30 AM, saying goodbyes and thanking the staff. We have enjoyed all 21 days of our Southern Africa vacation but we all agree that our three night stay at the Lukimbi Lodge has been the best part of the whole

trip. The setting in Kruger Park is ideal. Our rooms and the common areas of the lodge are first rate, the food at all the meals wonderful, the staff friendly and interesting and the game drives unique and most enjoyable. This has perhaps been “a once in a lifetime” experience for us.

Our transfer van delivers us to Nelspruit airport at 11 AM. Our flight departs Nelspruit at 1:30 PM and we arrive in Johannesburg just before 2:30 PM. We have plenty of time to kill at the nice Johannesburg airport before our full Delta Boeing 777-200 departs for the USA at 8 PM. We are on a 16 hour non-stop flight to Atlanta. All six of us have paid a little extra for “Economy Comfort” seats with some extra leg room. We set our watches back six hours to match East Coast time in the USA. So we are 10 hours into our trip, between the bulge of the African continent and Venezuela, 6 hours out from Atlanta when this day ends.

Southern Africa Trip – Day 22 – Wednesday April 9th

This is the last day of our trip. We are returning home. Today starts with us flying at 36,000 feet above the Atlantic Ocean six hours away from landing in Atlanta. We all agree that this has been a most enjoyable trip but we are looking forward to getting to our homes and enjoying the start of spring.

Our 16 hour flight from Johannesburg ends when we land in Atlanta, Georgia at 6 AM. Marie and Kal’s connecting flight to Dayton, Ohio leaves Atlanta at 9:10 AM as does Peggy and Richard’s to Wilmington, North Carolina. Marcia and my flight to Pittsburgh departs at 9:05 AM.

We liked just about everything on this trip. Highlights included:

- Tour Director Tonia Deveraux
- The Local Guides
- The Kruger National Park experience offered by Lukimbi Safari Lodge
- All the hotels but especially The One and Only, 54 on Bath and the Lukimbi Safari Lodge
- Climbing the sand dune at Sossusvlei
- Victoria Falls...they are amazing!
- The boat rides on the Zambezi and in the Atlantic off Walvis Bay
- The Penguin Colony
- Table Mountain

-Chobe Game drive

-Robben Island

-Learning more about the history and the developments in South Africa since the end of Apartheid

-The friendly people and the great hotel staffs

-The quantity and quality of the included meals

-Having Odysseys Unlimited cover all tipping

-The inexpensive wine and \$2 beer

Could use Improvement:

-Day 9 when we spent all day flying from Zambia to Namibia as we had to first fly to Johannesburg and then have a long layover.....this is most probably unavoidable

-The long drives over rough dirt roads in Namibia.....again probably unavoidable

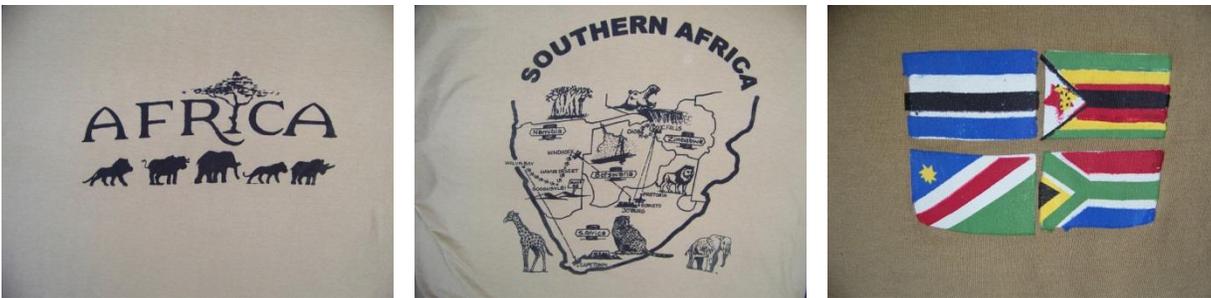
Here is a photo of some of the inexpensive but nice jewelry that Marcia bought for our daughter and herself:



Here's a photo of the other souvenirs we bought on the trip:



Tonia had a local Tee Shirt maker meet us early on the trip with product samples. Most of us bought one of these Tee Shirts which he quickly screened and delivered to our hotel. The front shows the "Big 5", the back shows our Tour Route and the right sleeve the flags of South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe.



Our next trip will be to Turkey in the fall.