

AFRICAN ADVENTURE



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SOUTH AFRICA'S SAFARI AND CAPE TOWN

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One of the first things that comes to mind for most when Africa is mentioned would be its wildlife. Lions, elephants and rhinoceros are perhaps some of the most well-known animals. While zoos around the world do house some of these beautiful creatures, nothing can beat the experience of seeing them in their natural habitat.

Our trip to South Africa ignited due to the desire to partake in the once-in-a-lifetime experience of visiting an African Safari. We started our journey with a direct flight from Singapore to Johannesburg, followed by a connecting flight which took us to a tiny airport in Hoedspruit near the Greater Kruger area. We stayed in two different Safari lodges, Kambaku Lodge and Kapama Lodge, during our time there. These lodges are within private game reserves and each day consisted of two game drives, one in the morning before the break of dawn and the other in the evening. Between drives, we were pampered with delicious food, time for relaxation and perhaps most importantly, an open bar.

As July was winter time in the southern hemisphere, the lighter foliage made it easier to see the animals. The lower temperatures also meant that the animals were out in the open more. Like the

animals, we were also able to escape the scorching heat of the African sun, with temperatures ranging from about nine degrees Celsius in the mornings and nights to 24 degrees Celsius in the afternoons.

During the morning drives, we would get to see the animals as they wind down from their busy night of hunting and feeding. At the same time, we get to witness the beautiful African sunrise. An exciting aspect of the evening drives is that we travelled in almost complete darkness and saw the animals using a specialised torchlight.

Each game drive was an adventure unto itself – you never know what to expect; from watching a pride of lions feast on a wildebeest to doing a detour to avoid a rhinoceros sitting in the middle of the road. The thrill of being in an open-air vehicle and seeing wild animals up close in their natural environment evokes an indescribable exhilaration. And while we did get to see the big five (lions, leopards, buffalos, elephants and rhinoceros), the wildlife is just one part of a delicate ecosystem that contributes to the overall grandeur of this beautiful country. During our bush walks, we got to learn about the flora of the ecosystem and some basics in animal tracking. It is really amazing what one

can learn about an animal just by looking at their footprints and their droppings!

One of the highlights of the trip (other than seeing the animals) was interacting with our rangers and trackers. These experienced professionals have spent the better part of their working lives learning how to track animals and studying their behaviours. They had a wealth of knowledge and were happy to answer all of our questions. Their tracking skills were equally impressive and they were able to lead us to the animals simply by following the tracks found on the dirt road.

An important aspect of the trip was learning about conservation. It is alarming how much poaching has affected the animal population. An average of three rhinoceros are killed by poachers each day. We visited a conservation reserve during one of the afternoons and got to learn a great deal about how these game reserves contribute to the conservation of Africa's magnificent wildlife. Rehabilitating animals injured from poaching and eventually reintroducing them back into the wild is their top priority.

We had gone to the safari to see animals, but what we got in return was so much more!

Into the city

Our safari adventure came to a close, but we moved on to the next leg of our trip... Cape Town!

If ever there were a city that in one snapshot could encapsulate the beauty of the world while highlighting the problems that mankind faces, it would have to be Cape Town. This is a city where shanty-towns sit side by side with vineyards and lavish country estates, where one could be sampling wine and cheese in a beautiful 17th century Cape Dutch villa with alpacas grazing on nearby pastures, while the South African army conducts operations against violent gangs and drug syndicates just a few kilometres away in a ramshackle slum. The contrast is jarring and unnerving.

Cape Town is often described as a world unto itself. With its urban lattices interwoven into the undulating geography, constantly framed by Table

Mountain and the South Atlantic Ocean, it is home to unique cultures (eg, the Cape Malays and the Cape Dutch), unique flora and fauna (eg, the fynbos) and cuisines that are otherwise unheard of outside of the city. It is often also referred to as "Africa-lite", a place which is geographically within the Africa, but shields a traveller from the problems that unfortunately plague the continent.

Our five-day trip took us from the scenic Victoria & Alfred waterfront to the colourful houses of Bo-Kaap, the bastion of the Cape Malays, and many other evocative sights within the city. Further afield, we visited the wind-lashed Cape of Good Hope, the top of Table Mountain, which was mysteriously shrouded by clouds at the time of our visit, and the vineyards of Paarl as well as Stellenbosch, where world-class wines are produced in the shadows of majestic cliffs. At every turn, we found stunning sights, smiling faces and a smorgasbord of amazing food.

But a glance at the papers, or a peer into the distance from our car windows, often revealed an altogether differing, parallel reality. During our visit, we read in the papers of rampant gang violence in the Cape Flats, of a HIV epidemic and of rising violence against migrants from Zimbabwe and Nigeria. South Africa does a wonderful job of shielding its tourists from the chaos of its shanty-towns, but it does make one wonder if the separation of Apartheid has truly ended, or if it has merely moved from a distinction based on race, to a distinction based on socio-economic lines instead. ♦

Legend

1. Cape buffalo, rhinoceros and elephant
2. On top of Table Mountain looking down at Cape Town
3. Up close and personal with a family of lions enjoying their wildebeest breakfast
4. Cape of Good Hope

Dr Ganesh is a doctor at the Institute of Mental Health who is passionate about mental health and public policy. In his free time, he avidly follows his favourite team, Liverpool FC, and travels widely. Each country he visits makes him realise how alike we all are to each other and how much more united mankind should be.

Dr Lee is a psychiatry associate consultant who relishes his time hanging out with his fabulous friends, sipping cocktails, going for long never-ending jogs (while dragging some friends along), and doing (hopefully) constructive work. He fantasises about having a puppy, being able to do art as and when he pleases, and likes foxes, unicorns and similarly cute animals.



Dr Hong is a GP who is passionate about tennis, travel, film, television, music and musical theatre. When he is not indulging in any of these, he is either spending time with his friends and family or working to earn enough to indulge in his passions.

