

Trip Report – South Africa 2014

By T.C. Melody Bohlmann

“The trip of a lifetime!” echoed with emphatic enthusiasm. That pretty much describes the South Africa Expedition. The source of enthusiasm were the animals, the people, the beautiful and geographically diverse countryside, the food, the culture...and for some, the low cost and quality of wonderful handmade locally made crafts.

I will describe some of my favorite moments. The most memorable was seeing the faces of the participants who had just returned from their first game drive. Even the most stoic of faces lit up brighter than the Uptown Park area the evening after Thanksgiving! Listening to “I had no idea we would be so close to the animals and that we would see so many different animals just being out one time,” or watching Dave Stotz describe his literal eye-to-eye encounter with an elephant.

The excitement when the whales were spotted off the Cape Peninsula and everyone piled off the bus trying to get those elusive photos. Hearing the voices of the cooks and wait staff sing native songs and playing musical instruments with such enthusiasm that it moved us as well as entertained us. It was a surprise that South African cuisine was so good, plentiful and dirt cheap. Seeing Roger Holzman after he completed the strenuous *Featherbed* nature walk. He reminds me of Thomas, the engine that could. Watching Marsh Lutz, Joan Waddill, Ann Rogers, Lynda Meyers, and others hug or get petted by an ostrich at the Oudtshoorn Ostrich Show Farm.. Seeing Juile Davis-Raley sit on the rocky Cliffside of the Cape of Good Hope, serenely appreciating the Ceylon blue ocean view while Ross Baker, Jay Leggett, and a whole contingent of participants, climbed the cliff at the Cape of Good Hope to see the lighthouse and for a better view of the Cape.

But, let me outline our journey from the beginning. Over half of the participants elected to begin our journey with the pre-trip to Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. We flew into Johannesburg, S. Africa and spent the night at the Protea hotel. This was a modern hotel close to the airport to allow us to get horizontal and reset our body clocks as S. Africa was seven hours ahead. The next morning, we flew to Kasane, Botswana and traveled by vans to Zimbabwe. At the border, we encountered our first wild life – herds of warthogs and some elephants. We stopped on the way to our hotel for a sundowner cruise on the Zambezi River enjoying cocktails, local snacks, and

A rare sight indeed!



hippo and elephant sightings. We continued by bus to the majestic Kingdom Hotel, aptly named. We toured Victoria Falls, considered the largest curtain of water in the world, beginning in the Rain Forest, seeing Livingstone Statue, the Chain Walk, some cataracts, and then toured the Falls Bridge. This is where we appreciated Tom Hogle, the diligent "watch guard," of our stuff. We had a Boma dinner and experienced some traditional BBQ and entertainment at the Victoria Falls Safari Lodge. We experienced our first game drive of the Expedition at the Nakavango Estates which was a great introduction to some of the antelope varieties and to rhino's and giraffe. While in Victoria Falls, some did elephant safaris meaning that they literally rode on the backs of the elephant. For those of us that passed on the elephants and could get past sharing our weight with the local crew, we rode a helicopter. I enjoyed riding shotgun with the

pilot and sharing the panoramic view of the falls and the gorge on a helicopter tour with Ron and Roberta Rambin, Tom Hogle, and Patti Richards.

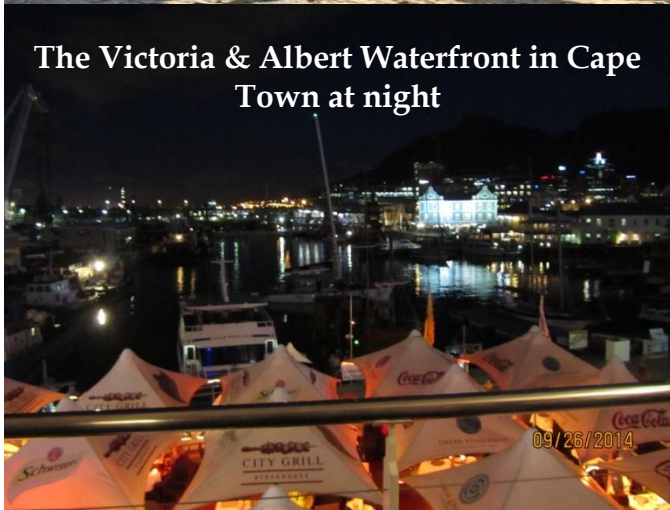
We spent our final night in Victoria Falls having an elegant and fabulous dinner in the Livingstone Room at the historic Victoria Falls Inn. We flew back to Johannesburg, S. Africa where we met up with our Main trippers at the Protea Hotel. The next morning we made our way to Port Elizabeth on the eastern coast of the country. We traveled to Kariega, a family owned private game reserve that has rich biodiversity and lush landscapes. We stayed in well-appointed chalets that had great views and were remote enough to enjoy the landscape - we were in the bush. The rangers would pick us up from our chalets to go on our safaris and take us to the main lodge for meals. We experienced sunsets and sunrises, a

George, David, Roger, Jay, Diane, Beth, Christina, Sandy & Joann on a game drive





Amy Collwell taking a wild ride on the ostrich. Go Amy Go!



The Victoria & Albert Waterfront in Cape Town at night



Diane & David Stotz enjoying the sundown river cruise on the Zambezi River with Joan Waddill in the background

traditional barbeque Boma dinner and were entertained by the Boma Singers. These were our cooks and wait staff playing the drums and other instruments and singing traditional local songs to us. Amy Colwell, was the first up to clap and try the local dances. I believe most of us saw the "big 5" - lions, elephants,

rhino's, buffalo, and the cape leopard. We also saw the rare white rhino with tusks. Truly amazing. Larry Robinson and James Schneider had great luck fishing in the river at Kariega ... and they were really that plentiful and big!



Joann DeBlasis, Jill Nanney, Marsha Lutz, Christina Anderson & Pat Musemeche



Marilyn Swanson and Larry Robinson with Melinda and Dennis Hughes in the background at Marilyn's



Jay Leggett at the Cape of Good Hope Most Southwestern Point of the African Continent

We then journeyed along the famous Garden Route with its great beaches along a narrow strip of fertile land that is nestled between

majestic mountains and the Indian Ocean. Our first overnight on this journey was at the Tsitsikamma Inn in the Village of Storms River. Some enjoyed the Woodcutters tour, Segway riding, or bicycling in the Tsitsikamma Forest, and many enjoyed ziplining along the canopy. Some toured the bridge. Marilyn Swanson, Larry Robinson, and many of us danced away at Marilyn's 60's Diner named after Marilyn Monroe. We saw some vintage motorcycles, cars, and Elvis memorabilia. Yes, we were still in S. Africa. Just goes to show you how much influence Hollywood and the US have on other countries.

We traveled Route 62 which is considered the longest wine route. All along the route, there were fabulous views of greenery, fertile valleys against a semi-desert of the Klein Karoo and towering Swartberg mountains, rivers, and streams. We arrived at the Knysna Lagoon and the Featherbed Nature Reserve. Most took a tram ride to the top to hike through the reserve. Our next stop was the ostrich farm in Oudtshoorn. This is where some experienced the ostrich petting. Amy Colwell was the first person to volunteer to take a wild ride on the back of an ostrich. She inspired Diane Morrow, Carol Johnson, Diane Stotz, and others to take a ride on the wild side. Most of our pictures are blurs as they move very quickly but Brian Baxendale captured the great one we have in the article! We stayed overnight at the Berluda Farmhouse and cottages. The owners served us a wonderful dinner that was overseen by the matriarch of the family. One of our guides, Frank, sang the S. African national

anthem for us. The group then went on to the Cango Caves which were very interesting and beautiful and Frank serenaded them again with the great acoustics. In Cape Town, one of the world's most beautiful cities, we stayed at the Winchester Mansions on the Atlantic seafront close to the Victoria & Albert Waterfront. The group experienced Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens, the Cape Point, Simons Town, got up close and personal with African penguins on Boulders Beach, went on cable cars to the top of Table Mountain which is a national park, and toured Robben Island seeing the lime quarry where Nelson Mandela and his fellow prisoners did hard labor and his prison cell. The group also enjoyed visiting the Blaauklippen and other wine estates where they give tours and tastings.

A few of our folks went on to Krueger where they reported additional fantastic experiences. It was a long journey but everyone will tell you this journey was well worth it. Pictures, especially my pictures, just don't do S Africa justice; you just have to experience it!

