

Traveldiary Brigitte & Heinz

South-Africa (the west) and Namibia
discovered with a rental car



Chapter 14

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South-Africa (the west) and Namibia discovered with a rental car

South-Africa: a country changing, hopefully in the right direction

On the evening of July 20, 2006, we boarded a Malaysian airline plane that flew us from Singapore to Cape



Town. During the stop over in Kuala Lumpur, we were joined by several big groups of South African teenagers that returned after a choir-contest in China and others from a scholar exchange in Japan. On every occasion, one choir would start singing somewhere in the airport and everyone was impressed by their wonderful voices. All groups were of mixed races, which was a nice introduction to the new **South Africa** that had finally managed to get rid of the crazy apartheid system. Only 16 years ago, on Febr. 11, 1990 Nelson Mandela, the most famous political prisoner had been released after 27 years.

This week, he turned 88 and he is still the national hero loved by everyone; blacks, whites, Asians and coloureds. This term 'coloured', is how they call the people that don't fit into any racial category, as bright skinned blacks or descendants of mixed couples. The Boers used to call them "bastards". Even though the system of apartheid was officially in place "only ~ 43 years", it must have been a fact of life here for far more than a century. The history book tells how in 1893 Mahatma Gandhi, then a young solicitor, had been thrown out of a first-class train in South Africa, because of his race. This experience caused him to stay more than 20 years, fighting against racial discrimination in a non-violent way, even though he was put in jail several times, before he returned to India and later became a popular leader.

Whilst Portuguese were the first Europeans to see the southernmost tip of Africa in 1487, the first white settlers arrived near Cape Town around 1650, mainly from the Netherlands, but some also from Germany and France. At first, they were wandering farmers, called Boers. They believed they were god's chosen people, who had the duty to civilise their black "neighbors" and thereby ensuring their salvation, whilst preserving the purity of the white superior race in the promised land. The labour force working on the Boers' farms were mainly slaves imported from Indonesia and Madagascar.

On the beginning of the 18th century, more and more British settlers arrived and soon dominated politics, trade and finance, thus challenging the less educated Boers. Tensions grew even more after the British abolished slavery in 1833, a move that was generally regarded by Boers as against the 'god given' ordering of races. Consequently, many Boers headed inland in various directions, shooting their way free of locals, as they found green and fertile land. Several wars between British, Boers and Blacks emerged and only in 1902 a peace-treaty was signed, granting the British sovereignty. The indigenous people still didn't get any voting right and 1913 the natives' land act was enacted, setting aside 8% of South Africa's land of 1,22 mio. sq. kilometers for black occupancy, whereas the 20% whites took 90% of (the better)land for themselves.

Thousands of squatters were evicted from farms and forced into increasingly overcrowded and impoverished "homelands" (reserves) or into "township's" at the outskirts of cities and villages. In this time, the ANC, the African National Congress was founded to unite the rightless black people and now their opposition started coalescing.

In the run-up of the 1948 election, the National Party campaigned on its policy of 'apartheid' under the pretext to save the country from communism and atheism and was voted in. After having been in place for a long time, apartheid thereafter became institutionalised. Sex or marriages between different races were declared illegal - even existing ones, also between Asians and Coloured i.e. half-blooded people.

Separate, race segregated buses, hospitals, schools and even park benches were created. To secure superiority of the white, they had much better education than the coloureds and education for them was still superior to the one for blacks who barely learned how to read and write.

Protests turned increasingly violent and the so far peaceful ANC started with armed wings after some massacres by the police. As bloody riots continued, the international community started to put pressure on the South African government, which finally split away from the British Commonwealth and became the Republic of South Africa (RSA) 1961.

Nothing changed for the people and the ANC's vision of a non-racial democratic state remained just that: a vision! Worse even; in 1962 the ANC and any undesired unions were banned and later many leaders, including Nelson Mandela were sentenced to life imprisonment. In the sixties and seventies, apartheid was being enforced even stricter and the country was going into civil war.

We are glad we don't know about all the atrocities, but it must have been a very tough time for all and many whites realised that the civil war against the black majority could not be won. But they still seemed to prefer this to giving in, to political reforms. Many upper class and better educated whites left the country, to bring their families and money to safety.

In the RSA brutal military and police action intensified and at the same time the army also turned against Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Lesotho to fight against communism, atheism and black anarchy as they called it. International pressure increased, and the economic sanctions that had been imposed, began to show their effect which brought the currency (the Rand) to a collapse. In 1985 the South African government declared a state of emergency, which remained for 5 years. The media was censored and by 1988 there were at least 30'000 black people detained without trial, with thousands tortured and killed.



Finally 1990 a new president brought change; Frans De Klerk abolished discriminatory laws and legalised ANC and other parties again, freeing Nelson Mandela and many others. After months of negotiation, the white minority approved of the change and herewith to transfer power to the black majority. A new constitution was worked out between all races and after elections were called in 1994, the ANC cast 63% of the votes, whereby Nelson Mandela became the hero president. A nation of 45 Mio people admired how humbly and forgiving he led this nation together and convinced all South Africans to be forgiving and start a new life together. Some white people openly confessed to us that they were very afraid of the black people at the time. They feared they would take revenge and slaughter the whites by the thousands. The whites too, admire Mandela that he didn't have any hatred, after 27 years in prison.

Of course, the various races that have 11 different languages registered, didn't start loving each other from one day to the next. The gap between the poor, mainly black people and the rich, mainly whites, is still very big today. Also tensions often still arise between the different black tribes like Zulu and Xhosa. Therefore, crime is a major problem but we were told that the country is now much more relaxed and optimistic than a decade ago.

For us, however, the first impression of [Capet Town](#) was rather grim and cold, but not only because we had returned to winter. During the weekend we couldn't believe how empty and dead this town was. Everything had shut and nobody was strolling around the streets. Iron shutters, like in a prison, secured most shop windows. Only a few security guards and some dubious guys were standing around. What a contrast to the lively streets of Singapore!

Almost every building in Cape Town was decorated by a sign of a private security company that was guarding it and promised to those wishing to enter, that there would be an "armed response".



Many gardens and backyards or low roofs had barbed wire and electric fences. The most ironic, we felt, was the one in front of the building for crime prevention.

We stayed in a Backpacker's place at Longstreet in the centre, which had a prison-like security door with a code, plus a night guard. At least we were told that it was safe to walk along Longstreet's 800 m, thanks to the many security guards patrolling this touristy street with many restaurants, bars and accommodation. Each night, when we closed the door behind us and heard this metallic clink, we joked: "... back to security of our prison, where all inmates got a key..."

On Saturday afternoon, we walked down to the waterfront, which was a big enclosed area, with shopping centers, boulevards, restaurants and entertainment venues, both indoor and outdoor. It was located just next to the working harbour and the atmosphere was pleasantly lively, if touristy. The restaurants were packed with locals of whom about three quarters seemed to belong to the black and coloured middle class. Normally, people went out in groups and friends mostly belonged to the same race, even though mixed groups of friends could sometimes also be seen.

After dinner, we took a taxi back, as it is not considered safe to walk between the safe haven of the waterfront to the safe haven of Longstreet.



The weather was lousy, with fog covering nearby Table Mountain and it was drizzling and cold 14 °C. With all the shops and most restaurants closed on Sunday, we appreciated that the Backpacker's Hostel felt pity with their guests and invited everybody for a free dinner. This was also a good opportunity to get some first-hand information from travellers that already knew what it's like around here.

On Monday finally, everything opened again and life returned to the city. We don't remember what we've expected, but Cape Town is a city that looks entirely like a western city, only that the majority of people were black and coloured (in western dress). But we found no exotic, no local food or market, at best some African souvenirs. Here rushed the working people and some seemed quite well off. It was visible everywhere, that security is an issue, be it by the many security-guards, the secured shopwindows with metal lattice or locked iron-grid doors on many shops. To gain entry, you had to ring a bell and if the shopkeeper found your face trustworthy, he let you in. Most small shops were locked like this, even second-hand bookshops – bigger stores rather not. We bought some second-hand binoculars in a "cash converter" shop and here we saw that they did not only secure all shopwindows and doors at night with iron grids, they also emptied the shelves from most second-hand electronics to put them in a safe, as requested by their insurance company. After all this, we couldn't believe that Cape Town apparently got the reputation to be Africa's safest city. Though, everybody who had been to Johannesburg confirmed that it's much worse over there. The high crime rate is probably a consequence of the failures of the past. Huge slums flank the outskirts of every South African town. Here in Cape Town, 20% of the 2,5 Mio. people are still living in tiny shacks and until a few years ago, the 10 million of the poorest didn't even have electricity, tap water or dry-loos, as they have now.



We hired a car, a South African made VW Chico, which is an old model Golf. What it lacked in creature comfort, was made up in security equipment i.e. it came with a lockable gear stick. We were told we should always empty the glovebox overnight and leave it open. We were also recommended to lock doors whilst driving in the city and always to take out everything, as thieves would even steal dirty socks!

After six days in the city, we left Cape Town to explore the countryside. Along the peninsula with the Cape of Good Hope, there were many nice beaches and coastal

settlements. Further south, we passed above dramatic cliffs on "Chapman's peak drive" and later came to beautiful Boulders beach, where we could observe a colony of [African penguins](#). The conservation department had built boardwalks and charged an entrance fee but this way we could watch the prettily marked penguins with their almost grown up chicks from very close without disturbing them too much.



Now we drove along the sea and then inland through various small villages that looked much less fortified than the city. Suddenly, we saw some zebras on a meadow and so Heinz jumped on the brakes. As we got out of the car to picture them, some other animals appeared from the side: beautiful Oryx gazelles, that South Africans call Gemsbok (no resemblance to a Swiss Gemsbock whatsoever). They were very big and had long straight horns. There were also Gnus, called Blue Wildebeest here and the slender Springbock with its beautiful dark, brown and white markings plus an Ostrich couple having fun together. We were absolutely excited about this first glimpse of African wildlife, even though we realized that they were obviously kept on a farm. Otherwise, around us it didn't look and feel very much like we had imagined Africa to be - it rather resembled Australia.

In [Franschhoek](#) we later found a guesthouse where we stayed for 3 nights. This village had been founded by French Huguenots (Calvinists) who were fleeing religious prosecution ~ 1688. We are not sure if it's thanks to them, but eating out was the most positive surprise to us about South Africa. The quality of the food, the creativity and its presentation were always superb, the prices moderate (~150 Rand (16 Euro) for a 3 course meal) and the portions generous. It's the first English influenced country we've seen, where fast-food is not dominating. Even an ordinary sandwich regularly comes as a gourmet delight and it was often possible to choose between several types of crusty bread. Most snacks were served with a generous side salad, often with Feta or another cheese. As the sandwiches were so big, we started to share them, what often resulted in two full plates still. Once Heinz ordered "Egg Benedict" in a chain restaurant and you should have seen his face, when he was asked: "how do you like your egg, Sir? Liquid, medium or hard?"

Franschhoek was the declared gourmet capital of South Africa and famous for its fine food and wine. One hundred 'top chefs' spoiled their guests here and more than 40 gourmet temples lined this small village, where everything had French names but architecture was mostly of old 'Cape Dutch' style with thatched roofs. Properties were not fortified and the atmosphere was relaxed and pleasant. Mountains and grape yards surrounded it and all people: black, white or coloured seemed to know each other. No wonder that many wealthy people, South Africans and foreigners alike, had their holiday homes here and real estate agents quoted their prices in 5 currencies: Rand, GBP, Euro, USD + Swiss Franc.

From here, we continued up north, direction Namibia. The lush green landscapes with its big wheat fields, sheep- or dairy farms and the hills in the background, reminded us so much of New Zealand or Australia. We still couldn't believe we're actually in Africa. Every now and then, we came through a village and got a clue how they live in the countryside. Many people have small simple brick-houses but they are not that desolate as those in slums around the cities, even though they don't offer much privacy, as the houses often are very close to each other and often only have one "living room" for the entire family, where they cook and sleep. These small houses were normally built on the outskirts of every village. During apartheid, the 'townships' were built for the black and coloured part of the population by the white government. The middle and upper class usually live in a separate section of the village, where the shops and restaurants are, and those houses look pretty much as in Europe.

We later came into an area that mostly cultivated citrus orchards and in [Clanwilliam](#) we stayed in a luxurious 60 square meter guesthouse room that was four times bigger than many local's matchbox house. The accommodation was fortified as we have never seen on a private house, with doors and windows fitted with a massive iron curtain with locks and wooden shutters with padlocks outside. The entire property, which stood on an orchard, was protected with a three layer fence. The outer side was 2,5 meter high, army type with barbed wire on top, the middle part was a 2 meter electric fence and the inner part was a small chicken fence, probably put up to protect the big guard dog from touching the electric part. And this house was situated just outside a peaceful village that was neither fortified nor had any security guards patrolling. As everyone told us, it was perfectly safe here. The landlady told us that she had bought the place like this and didn't know why the previous owner had secured it like that.



Meanwhile, the landscape had changed from the green fertile pastures to barren dry rocky mountains with many shrubs growing on them. We were still within 100 km of the coastal belt that usually gets good winter rain. We were told that in summer, temperatures regularly reach about 45 °C. Now on the other hand, it was wet and cold. The nice thing that it brought with it, was that an immense variety of wildflowers sprung up. Their beauty has made the area so famous, that many tourists are drawn to the north west each spring and lucky us were here, when the flowers were already up, but the prices not yet, as it's common believe that the bloom suddenly appears on the 1st of August.

Our next stop was [Kamieskroon](#), a small and again peaceful village with unsealed roads, where we found a nice little B & B called Gousblom. The lady didn't even hand out keys to the rooms, only to the front door as we left at the same time as she did. She said; "up here it's not 100% safe, it's 110% safe!" As Kamieskroon only had a couple of coffee shops but no proper restaurant, the guesthouse cooked a delicious meal for its customers every night. All guests sat together and some wouldn't stop chatting until past their bed time.

The nights were very chilly but as South African nights only get cold as in a fridge and not as in a freezer, they all think there is no need for heaters. As in the last place, we waited for a day to let a rainy period pass but as soon as we crossed the border to Namibia, less than 200 km further north, we never saw a cloud again until we came back to this place!

Namibia: fascinating National parks, depressing crime & heavenly cakes

Due to its barren inhospitable coastline, [Namibia](#) was largely ignored by European maritime nations until relatively recently. Even though parts of the coast had been seen by Portuguese seafarers 1486, the first white settlers were - who wonders? Missionaries that arrived early 19th century. In 1867 the British claimed some islands and 1878 Walvis Bay that is today in the middle of the country's coast. Five years later Adolf Lüderitz, a German adventurer convinced his government to put the land he had acquired from a local chief, under their protection. Two years later, Lüderitz had bought almost all of today's coastal Namibia for 500 Pound and 60 rifles. Upon his urging, the German government also added this area, to which they incorporated later vast inland areas that were expropriated and became then part of German **South West Africa**, as the country was named.

After 1892, lots of German settlers arrived. A few years later, the Germans, British and Portuguese governments, who occupied already neighbouring territories, drew the boundaries to their present size of 824'269 sq.km. In 1904 the various native tribes that are traditional enemies, formed an alliance against the colonial power. However, the German "Schutztruppe" (protection troop) wiped out 75% of the **Herero** population and later also defeated the remaining guerrilla forces. After the First World War, Germany was required to renounce all its colonial claims and South Africa got the mandate to administer the country. This mandate was renewed after WW2. South Africa however, was more interested in annexing SWA as a full province in its union and decided to scrap the terms of the mandate and re-write the constitution and implement the apartheid system also there. The UN urged South Africa to withdraw for more than 40 years but only in 1990 full independence was finally granted with the change of name to Namibia.



After we had crossed the border into this country, we were very surprised how sudden the landscape changed: it was much drier! Some indigenous people were much darker, but others (Nama) were called the "yellow" people. Of the 1.8 mio. inhabitants, there are 5 major ethnic groups with subgroups plus about 100'000 white of German and Afrikaner descent.

For the first night, we stopped in the small village of **Grünau**. Even though there were only a few hundred people living there, each home was heavily fortified. The security guard let us drive into the courtyard that was

protected by a 3 m high electric fence, nicely decorated by barbed wire. Never the less, all the windows of the motel-rooms had iron bars.

The next day, we drove for most of the time on unsealed road, the first of many more to come. The landscape was of hills covered in loose red rocks and golden dry grass on the plains between them. Along the way, some locals worked on a railway line and everyone waved at us, even though they were usually covered in dust as we passed, depending on the direction of the wind.

The first natural attraction we came to see, was [Fish River Canyon](#), a deep gorge carved out of a flat area. The river bends endlessly and a little bit of water was flowing even now. Interestingly, there is a different climate here than a little further south. We heard that summers get sometimes more than 50 °C hot and there's a risk of flush flooding. Therefore, the 5 day hiking trail in the canyon is only permitted to walk between May 1 - Sept. 15 to groups of at least three and all must produce a health certificate of fitness. However, even from the rim of the canyon, it was a very impressive sight and we enjoyed it in pleasant 18°C degrees. Along the way in and out, we sighted our first wild Springboks, Zebras and Ostriches.



As there was no ATM that would dispense money to foreign card around this lonely area, we headed back to civilisation that night. The Namibian Dollar is linked to the South African Rand 1:1, which is legal tender in Namibia as well, but not vice versa.

[Keetmanshoop](#) was another place of many "fortresses", accommodating 15'000 people. Many of the outer village streets and pavements were actually not paved and once the wind ceased after sunset at 5:15 pm, the dust of the passing cars did not settle for a long time. We got a room in the "Schützenhaus", which belongs to the German club, that used it for its "Turnverein" (gym). Street names were often in German still, even though there was a trend everywhere to re-name them after African people, i.e. Sam Nujoma (the 1. African President) appeared in every village.

On our way north, we visited the **quivertree forest**. The up to 9 m high tree is actually an aloe plant with long succulent leaves that are situated at the tip of each branch in star form. They occur mainly in black rocks that absorb extreme heat. And rocks were laying around there everywhere. They were round or square, but the most bizarre was, how they were piled on each other. This area of several sq km was called "**Giants playground**" and in fact, we could imagine only Aliens having stacked them up.

Nearby was also a big enclosure, where we could observe two Cheetahs on a loop drive. We were lucky that they came to rest under a tree close to the track just as we got there too. We both were impressed how tall these predators are. Also other, smaller animals were around, as the Suricate that is sometimes called Meerkat and belongs to the Mongoose family and is famous because they like to stand up to look around on the hind legs, a bit like humans. Then there were hundreds of Rock Dassies (Hyrax) that looked like big fat Guinea pigs and a tame Eland antelope, one of the bigger species around here. In the trees we could see the enormous nests of the social weaver. Many birds breed in the same chunk of hey that's like a big apartment building for them.

Overnight we stayed in **Mariental**, where it wasn't easy to find accommodation. There were many guesthouses, but after this place, that apparently has got the reputation of being the driest in the country, has been flooded two months ago, many houses were still in a mess. We visited the Hardap Dam Nature Reserve, where we were almost a bit disappointed, as we "only" saw some more of the little Springbok, plus some Ostriches. Not much later though, on our way up north, we sighted a large group of rather big black monkeys along the roadside.

That evening we reached **Windhoek**, the capital and only real city. We stayed in "pension Alexander", about 1 km from the heart of the city. After seeing all these fortified small villages, it came as no surprise that also Windhoek has a security problem. At night and during the weekend, nobody walks in the streets, except some brave tourists. The town looked really deserted, although many restaurants were open and some were even full.

After dinner, we wanted to be cautious and take a taxi, as we were told that this is much safer than walking at night. However, as we stood at the side of the road, no taxi passed for quite a while. So we went back into the restaurant that had its iron bar door guarded by three security men. The manager just said "you're crazy to look for a taxi on the roadside. Only crooks pick people up after dark!". He ordered us to come back in, locked us immediately behind the iron bar and called his reliable taxi-man.



The next night, we thought we can go to the taxi stand, which we've noticed during the day. But after sunset, no taxi was there anymore. So we asked the waitress of the restaurant where we had some German type meal with Sauerkraut and Wurst, to call us a cab. Only then we realized that a (black) driver had been sitting in that restaurant all evening. On the way home he explained us, that he only serves customers of this restaurant and one hotel. He would never pick up somebody from the road at night, as only crooks take a taxi from the road and he would be too afraid to get robbed or car-jacked. We learned that in Windhoek, every restaurant and every hotel uses only some specific taxi drivers to serve only their own clients (considered honest). Oh dear, who can trust whom?

The city of Windhoek was pleasant, clean and looked pretty European during the business hours. There were shopping arcades, street café's and the pavements were bustling with people of all colours. At closer look, we recognized how much plain-cloth security personnel were mixing with the crowd. In contrary to the security guards in Cape Town, where they were fewer in numbers but always clearly identifiable by wearing bright yellow vests. In Windhoek, almost every business had a security door (iron bars) where the customers first had to ring the bell and pass the clerks trustworthiness-test, before being allowed in. On top of it, the most vulnerable businesses, like for instance the Tourist information office, hairdressers, internet-café's, but also banks and jewellers had their own security guard watching every move. We dared walking along some residential area of whites - the others' would have been too dangerous, we were told. Even in simple houses, every window had its iron bars. A handful only had low railings around their property, but most were lovingly decorated by two meter high fences which were more often than not, topped up with army type barbed wire and/or electric fences. They also all seemed to love dogs very much, particularly big nasty ones.



Now we suddenly understood what was meant, when they said in the LP travel guide, that Cape Town is probably the most "relaxed" city in Africa. You might understand that we didn't like to stay for long, although in the countryside, the security situation was not that much different. Everywhere it was fortified and guarded. Even during the coldest nights a security guard had to sit outside and watch houses and shops or that nobody steals the petrol pump on the closed petrol station. All private fridges we have seen had a lock and because water is so precious, taps in the garden could be secured with a padlock and sometimes also window shutters had padlocks against those that managed to get past the electric fence.

Now we headed north to **Outjo**. Along the roadside we had seen probably hundreds of Warthogs grazing. As we approached, they would always put their tail straight up and run away. As in many other villages in Namibia, the highlight for us was the visit to the German bakery that could be found quite commonly.

Etosha Nationalpark: guest for a week as s in the wild animals kingdom

Early the next morning we drove up to the gates of [Etosha National Park](#), which is 22'000 sq km; half the size of Switzerland. This was our ultimate destination and the reason for our trip to Africa, as Etosha is famous for its wildlife around a big salt pan. It was the 9th of August 2006 and we thought we can fit in without making



reservations for accommodation long ahead, because we squeezed in between the South African and Namibian school holidays - but we didn't expect that half of Italy and big parts of France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland preferred to see African wildlife instead of crowded European beaches.

With some Good Luck and a lot of patience with highly unmotivated government employees and some insisting, we managed to get bungalows for a total of 5 nights spread over all three restcamps and one night on a guestfarm 30 km out on the far end of the park. Despite all these hassles, we were very lucky, because August is considered being the best month for a visit. The climate was indeed perfect; the coolest and driest time of the year: ~25°C during the day and ~10°C at night with the sun shining daily, as throughout the country.

As it was in the middle of the dry season, the animals had to come to the few remaining waterholes; some of them had natural springs, others were fed by a solar powered pump. Of course in the interest of tourism, some manmade waterholes were placed just in front of the rest-camps, where the animals even tolerated floodlight all night long. We were surprised that on the waterholes in front of the camps, the "spectators" were only separated from the wild animals by a low wall. Much less fences than against burglars in the villages. Of course they had built a simple protection that hindered the animals from entering the rest-camps (wobbly wooden sticks on wire).

The pond in front of the **Okaukuejo** tourist village was very popular with animals. Sometimes big herds of Springbok, Zebras and Gnus arrived in succession for a drink. A cloud of dust indicated their coming over the hillside and after sipping from the water, they would disappear into the other direction half an hour later. Usually the different species drank very close to each other and didn't defend a territory. Only Giraffe and sometimes Elephants preferred to have a pond to their own.

On four occasions we've been lucky to observe the rare and endangered Rhinos. Once, there were two adults and a small one together and they always arrived just after sunset at the water.



It was already very exciting to watch all these animals around the rest-camp waterholes, but there was a road network of over 1'000 km along the parks southern part, that stretches for about 300 km as the crow flies.

Between sunrise and sunset, which meant now in winter from 6:30 am to 5:40 pm, tourists were allowed to drive out and watch animals in their habitat from the roadside and on 27 waterholes. There were two days, when we did "not see much" - which is still a lot in theory. But on the other 5 days, we've been so lucky; we've literally met dozens of species - hundreds of animals.



Most gathered around the waterholes but often entire herds were crossing the gravel-road. The funniest we felt, were the Zebras that often stood on or along the

road - maybe waiting for somebody to paint a zebra-crossing? They didn't even move when we slowly passed them and so we did not always need the 200 mm setting of our compact camera zoom lens. There were even occasions, where an animal suddenly appeared so close next to our car, that we were too nervous to drive the zoom back to the 28 mm wide angle setting to capture the entire lion or elephant.

Can you imagine how close they must have been? There is good reason that nobody is allowed to leave the car but you can wind your windows down.

On many occasions we could watch quite big herds of elephants playing around the water and when they got agitated, we didn't quite know how much is play and how much is fight. So we realized that for tourists, elephants are probably more of a danger than lions who were mainly laying around the shade during the day. At this time of the year diurnal animals are roaming around all day, whereas in summer, when it gets more than 40 °C hot, they can mainly be seen at dusk and dawn only.



The most common we've seen were certainly Springbok and Zebras, followed by different species of antelope like: Kudu with great spiralling horns on the male's head, Oryx with up to 1,2m long straight horns in both sexes and beautiful marks on its fur. Black faced Impala, a gracile brown antelope, of which the males only have horns in lyre shape and the bulky headed Blue Wildebeest or Gnu and Red Hartebeest.

We were quite surprised about the big numbers of Elephants, Giraffe and Lions we've seen. Next to them, there were also many smaller species around, like e.g. warthogs (that didn't run away), jackals, mongoose and ground squirrels. Also many birds could be seen, either small and colourful or big like eagles and ostriches that stand 1.80 m tall. It was absolutely amazing how tolerant all these animals in the park had gotten of cars and they really never run away.



It's just perfect how nature looks after herself here; we have not seen a carcass, but of all those that get eaten every day, nothing is wasted and all that remains are clean bones, which we have seen a few times but often even those get chewed away by animals that need calcium.

Predators are only preying on healthy animals during their own prime of life but they are often too lazy to make such an effort, as they are more likely to be successful when hunting a sick or injured animal. Thus, they help to prevent disease from spreading among the prey herds and often provide a mercifully quick death for old or injured animals, which would otherwise have to suffer the agonies of a lingering death, associated with starvation or disease. This is the case for many species, as they loose their teeth with age.

Almost daily, we've seen prides of lions dozing near a waterhole. Interestingly, their presence did not disrupt the peaceful life of the game in the area. They know that lions only eat every 3-4 days and as long as they are in sight, they are usually not dangerous. Probably for the prey herds it's just normal, that once a while one of them gets eaten.



Once, as we were parked on a waterhole, the driver of a safari-tour bus had just informed us, that one of our tyres was flat, when suddenly 9 lions got up from their place in the shade nearby and walked past our car to reach the water. Some of them came even that close that they touched our car. Brigitte nervously wound the window up a bit more. Had worse come to worse and the lions would have attacked us tourists, we would have needed to accept it, as we also ate meat of some animals that occurred in the park, served on the nightly buffets in the camps. However, we got away by driving very slowly back to camp 15km away, where we had our tyre fixed.



It was also very exciting to see large herds of elephants that often included some youngsters. On one occasion, three small herds of about 15 animals each, arrived on a pond from different directions. Just before reaching the water, they all started to run, creating a big cloud of dust, as there was no vegetation around. Mostly they would only drink, but on rare occasions they would also bathe and roll in the mud before throwing dust over their wet bodies, powdering themselves until they were beautiful enough for the evening. After about one hour, they all left swiftly in the same direction.

Giraffes were walking very elegantly and despite the fact that our animal-book said that they mostly live a solitary life, we had often seen up to 10 together. They were joyfully feeding on thorny shrubs and after that, they were thirsty. To see them drink was the most amazing picture! Giraffes were quite shy in approaching water, as they knew they would be most vulnerable when drinking because they need to stretch their long legs to the side. Because of their long neck and legs, it takes big efforts and they would fall easily if someone disturbed them. They frequently paused to look around and if they were in a group, one animal was always guarding nearby. Giraffes and elephants, as well as Jackals came to drink day or night, whereas zebras and antelopes only arrived during the daytime.

The 7 days in Etosha Park were certainly the highlight of our trip to southern Africa and we realized how much a zoo is a prison and as our friend Silke, we'll probably never visit a zoo again. We are glad that there are at least a few remaining national parks in Africa, where animals and plants still can live the way it's meant to be and serve each other in a harmonic circle. We learned that many animals and plants are much more than only "food" for each other. So many depend on each other for fertilizing, or harbour living quarters and may also help other species subconsciously to fetch their prey or to access plants they would like to eat.



Southwards through Namibia: fascinating national-parks and German culture



After one week in this animals' Garden of Eden, we plunged back into Namibian life. We often saw families on their way with donkey-driven carriages, friendly waving to us. In the central-northern half of the country, many people originate from [Herero tribes](#). In **Otjiwarongo**, we've recognized some women of them, as they wear huge long dresses and a pillow-like hat. The next day already, as we drove south to [Swakopmund](#) on the coast, we reached an area where the black population

mainly belonged to the dark [Damara](#) and "yellow" [Nama](#) ethnic groups. But more than them, we noticed the Germans here. Swakopmund is really quite pretty but fortified version of a modern German village. In most shops we were routinely greeted in German, after we gained access. In the white area, which means in the centre, German was by far the most common language. In various places, they still organize Bavarian-style carnivals that are said to be jam-packed with multicultural revellers. A famous German comedy theatre; Ohnsorg, was presently touring the area.

Here even more than in the rest of the country, food was still heavily influenced by its former colonialists. On the positive side, we have to mention that we really enjoyed nice bread and sausages. Cakes were made still the same way they had been done 100 years ago in Germany: with much less sugar and much more fruit! Even people that spoke Afrikaans or English used German names for these items.



Speaking of languages: it should be mentioned that Namibia chose English as its only official language at independence, despite the fact that only 2% of the population spoke it. This way, the government argued, everybody is put on an equal disadvantage - how logic is that? Even today, not very many people are fluent in English, but tourists can rely on it easily.

In Swakopmund we spent 6 days in an apartment, where we were able to receive German TV, as the owners had mounted a satellite dish. This made the world look much bigger suddenly.

Many German pensioners started buying retirement homes there, as the Costa del Sol (Natura) is long sold out... They like the unique opportunity to live like in Germany, but in a warm and dry summer climate to flee the cold winter at home. From a distance, Swakopmund looks like an oasis on the sea, surrounded by sand on three sides. The dunes really start at its doorstep and it almost never rains. The only moist comes in form of a dense fog that covers the first 50 km inland from the sea most mornings, dissolving by 10am or so.

\One day, we went sight-seeing 30 km south to Walfis Bay, where we could see some flamingos and pelicans. Also the golden dunes along the way were quite impressive. Soon we should see more dunes.

We continued along a good gravel road for 260 km down to **Solitaire**, where we stayed in a lodge, relatively close to Namibia's most famous dunes. As always, lodges are impersonal and big but offer less at a higher price (500 N\$ = 53 Euro) than a cosy B&B (~300 N\$ = 32 Euro).

From here it was still another 150 km on partly rattly - partly sealed road to Sesriem, where there was only camping. After paying the visitors fee for the [Sossusvlei National Park](#) (170 N\$ - 18 Euro) to a grumpy employee, we soon drove into a valley between red dunes. As they have had good rains three months ago, there was surprisingly green vegetation with flowers everywhere.



The most scenic area of the dunes was around some saltlakes and the biggest one still held water, a sight that sometimes cannot be seen for many years. Climbing up the hilltop of such a pile of red sand, we realized how much we were in the middle of a sea of dunes. As far as we could see, there was nothing else! Upon leaving, it was fascinating to observe how the light had changed with time and the appearing shades made the dunes look quite different now, especially those with these beautiful bended sloping crests. A 4x4 Safari-shuttle drove us back to the carpark from where we returned to Solitaire.

Next morning, we continued with our Golf along a

good gravel road further south. Although it was such an excellent road, there was almost no traffic, as most fellow-travellers most probably took the 300 km detour along the sealed road. Often they rented big expensive 4x4 with rooftop-tent that regularly could be seen driving in convoys, as recommended by intrusive travel agents.

For our rental car, we paid 150 Rand per day (16 Euro) and it did the job quite well on these roads. Insurance cover on them could at least be negotiated, whereas many of the big 4x4 vehicles were not even covered. None of the car-rental companies offered generous insurance protection anyway!

Although temperatures were above 20°C during days, at night they often got close to freezing. So for most people, it was too cold for camping. Many tourists only realized this upon arrival and therefore, budget accommodation was often booked out and all those big 4WD camping vehicles (Landcruisers) blocked the parking... Namibia is anyway too expensive for real backpackers and thus, the average tourist was rather wealthy.



Back to the 420 km of gravel road: at lunchtime we stopped at the small village of Maltahöhe, which was shockingly heavy fenced off around each building. Can't a few hundred people trust each other? With a full stomach, we headed on through a landscape of low ranges and arid valleys that were mainly covered in dry grass interspersed with countless loose rocks. Only about every 30 km we passed a small farm that had maybe some sheep or goats grazing and every now and then a few ostriches and springboks could be seen.

Overnight, we got a room in a house all to ourselves in a village called **Aus**. Nearby, we went to Hotel Bahnhof (station), where we got a delicious dinner. In Namibia, food was usually of good quality but not too refined. Here however, we got a gourmet-meal, as the chef was trained in South Africa.

From there we drove along a large forbidden area of ~100x200km, called "Sperrgebiet", because the area must be full of diamonds. There is a big company called CDM (South African owned by De Beer's Group), that has a monopoly on diamond mining and now accounts for no less than 90% of Namibia's tax revenue. Thanks to this, the government can afford to be the biggest employer. Every 5th job is a government job that consists mainly of non-white people. As in RSA, private businesses are still predominantly owned by white, but there is a law now, that requires every big company to employ a certain percentage of people of all colours, also in the management. This causes sometimes big head-aches we've heard, because there are not that many qualified black people yet and furthermore, even the coloured and black people seem to trust a white professional more, than one of their own. This is a consequence of apartheid, because during that time, whites got a much better education than coloureds and coloureds got a better education still than blacks.



It is still a fact that most well paid jobs are held by whites and most inferior jobs by others, for those in the middle, most whites tend to prefer to employ coloureds, rather than blacks, because of their education and as they tend to be more motivated than people from black ethnics. Because unskilled labour is so cheap, most white households and the few blacks that can afford it, employ a maid and gardener, which are easy to find in countries with such high unemployment; Namibia 30%, RSA 42% (2004).

The drift in wage between skilled and unskilled labour is still enormous. Whereas skilled labour is rewarded with western salaries, a helping hand often doesn't get much more than

100 Euro a month. This is barely enough to feed the entire family and there is no social benefit in either country. The problem only gets worse, as hundreds of people want to move from the countryside into the cities. According to local tradition, a family is obliged to look after everyone of its extended family that might join them in their already too small house, that often is only a government sponsored matchbox. This way, poverty grows and with it crime. Unfortunately, this also applies to South Africa. RSA has also problems with many refugees from neighbouring countries and their economy is better off than Namibia's that depends to 80% on imports from its southern neighbour.

In both countries, whites are quite well off and most of them own a car, whereas coloureds and blacks can always be seen walking and hitch-hiking along the streets, as they can neither afford public transport (if there was any) nor a bicycle or motorized transport. In both countries, a small but growing coloured- and black middle class developed. Cultural differences between the races are big and black people seem to be much less interested to start their own business than white and to a certain extent the coloureds do. Most blacks would probably still prefer to live on subsistence farming and be content with that. In today's society, of course there is no stepping back and so they are forced to find work and somehow fit into the present day western system. In Namibia, as well as in South Africa, tensions between different ethnic tribes still exist but they are by far not as bad as in the rest of Africa.

Our next destination was called [Lüderitz](#) after the German explorer and was an appealing coastal village that had grown thanks to the diamonds. It has an important harbour and as everywhere, the (formerly compulsory) town-ship at its outskirts. Moving dunes often cause problems in the area, as the wind blows sand onto the access road and railway, during frequent sandstorms that regularly last three days. We were glad we could experience calm and sunny weather and continued one day later on a gravel shortcut that was in the process of being sealed and so the biggest section was a brand-new perfect "highway", almost down to Rosh Pinah. After a quick lunch, we proceeded through several scenic mountain ranges, on a sometimes muddy gravel road along the Orange river, where the landscape quickly became much greener and flowery.

This river forms the border to South Africa, which we entered after one last night in a Namibian roadhouse in **Noordoewer**. We have really enjoyed Namibia's exciting sights, but somehow, we were also relieved to leave this problem loaded country.



South-Africa: after Namibia, many things got relative

Just for comparison, we drove into each of [South Africa's](#) northern villages, to get confirmation that the security prevention with big fences and guards was really much less than up in Namibia. Wherever we looked, there were only small railings around houses, no barbed wire and no security personnel. In contrary: shops had their doors wide open! Interestingly, government buildings, like schools and transformer-stations had barbed wire fences around, but probably that was because the government in Pretoria is not flexible enough to make a difference between countryside and cities. No wonder, as they are based in the same region as Johannesburg, where crime is at its worst. Here in the countryside, some locals even told us that they don't lock their cars and leave the key inside, when they go quickly into a shop. We have never changed our opinion about a country in such a short time like about South Africa. After Namibia, it had become so much more appealing to us - not only because they have better food and more efficient and friendlier service - we felt freer again here.



The first night we spent again in the nice guesthouse in [Kamieskroon](#). A letter we had posted from Windhoek more than three weeks ago, still hadn't made the 1'000 km journey yet. Also this time we got to talk to other guests, which were all South Africans and all confessed Christians. They gave us insight to a different attitude of the old way of thinking that must have prevailed here during apartheid. They were convinced that they had helped the black population by providing them work (slaves), homes (matchboxes without power+water), education (but not too much) and faith (what a gift). In contrary to most other white South Africans we had met, they wouldn't admit that some things had gone wrong in the past. Never the less, they only wanted the best and as any other people we've met, they were very friendly too.

The big area between the northern coast and the ranges a few hundred kilometers inland, were still covered in beautiful spring flowers among the arid bushes that covered these hills. Apparently it's been raining many times during the 4 weeks we've been up north and soon we saw big clouds again too. We headed inland to [Calvinia](#) that lay high up on a plateau. Around the village, the mountains were cooling the nights to freezing and as an exception, there was a heater provided in the house we rented. So it was at least comfortable as we waited for a day for better weather. The village was very charming and some guest houses and café's were decorated like one hundred years ago. Among a lot of old collectables, we saw fur of some animals, hunted long ago hanging on the wall, including one of a monkey. Ironically, from that day on, we've seen monkeys daily along the road. Baboons seem to cause problems as they sometimes enter homes if a door or window is open. If the wind closes it, the monkeys panic and damage everything they can get hold of.

Through the Karoo Ranges, we continued to the small but touristy village of [Prince Albert](#) on the foot of Swartberg mountain. On the next morning, we took the small gravel road through the very impressive red gorge to the equally impressive Swartberg pass that was on an altitude of 1'436 M above sea level. We were quite surprised to find some snow patches on the roadside and higher up the mountain. Now we knew, why it's been so cold!

On the southern side of this pass, the barren rocky landscape changed into green fertile pastures that were being farmed. Further south, most farmers were breeding [Ostriches](#) and the charming town of [Oudtshoorn](#) gained fame at the turn of the 20th century, when the so called "feather barons" made their fortunes thanks to a fashion-trend with coloured ostrich feathers. In gift-shops, we found some handy souvenirs, like stuffed lions or springbok furs coloured to green or orange. Ostrich eggs were worked into lamps or carved with various patterns of which



Brigitte would have liked to take a few along. We also found fresh eggs in the supermarket at 25 Rand and Brigitte couldn't resist to put one on the balance with the smiling "vegetable-weigher lady". That egg was 1.5 kg. Unfortunately, we couldn't get a room in the backpacker's hostel that promised an ostrich egg for breakfast...

There were many fine dining options in town and as typical for South Africa, they do not only serve gourmet meals for dinner, but also for lunch and breakfast. The experience during our breakfast we got at restaurant Romantica, was just as special as the one we had originally hoped for with the big egg of. Old grammo-discs served as placemats, on which they placed a healthy fruit- and müesli meal with muffin which was decorated like a poem. The black girl that served us wore an old fashioned white head dress and fringy apron, framing everything according to their romantic decoration.

Through green scenery that could just as well have been in Scotland or Switzerland, we drove to Berrydale, where we found a scenic place for lunch overlooking a small village and orchards in spring blossom. For two nights we stayed in [Montagu](#) near the mountains. On Friday afternoon and Saturday morning, the streets were very lively as long as the shops were open. Everybody came to fetch food for the weekend and it was

good to see that many coloured people also could afford to buy little luxuries like chips or ice-cream. In this area, every village had very many different churches and here we came across a church bazaar, where only white people browsed. On Sunday morning, the parking lots around the churches were packed with cars, many of them had stickers with religious phrases.

We could observe them through the open door of the restaurant where we had breakfast. Just as in Australia, South Africans liked to leave front- and back doors of shops and restaurants open, even on the coldest days. It's become so much of a habit that customers think the place is closed if doors are not wide open. The odd merchant, who decided to close the door, usually put a big sign on it, reading: "door closed on account of cold weather - please come in". Mostly, the personnel just wore thick jackets and kept the door open, sometimes they also had a fire burning in restaurants and doors open.

We went for a side trip to a small village called Mc Gregor and as common in the south west of the country, there were many beautiful old houses with thatched roofs that were built in the "Cape Dutch" style of the first settlers.

Just out of Montagu, is a beautiful narrow gorge where the road even passes through a short tunnel that was cut out from the rock. Lots of [baboons](#) live there and can easily be spotted from the roadside. To protect the monkeys on the windy road, the speed limit was set at 60 km/h, as they really often cross the street. Also we had to slow down and so it happened that a young speeding local bumped into our car's back. Luckily, there were only a few scratches on our golf, so we could drive on after fetching a police report for the car-rental company.

We reached the coast in [Hermanus](#) that is only 120 km east of Cape Town. With some Good Luck we could rent a wonderful two storey beach-front apartment for the same 300 Rand we had paid in the last seven places. From the window, we could see whales jumping in the bay. If we went out the back, we were in the midst of the pleasant restaurants and cheap tourist village with lots of internet access. We just loved it and decided our remaining time in of Franschhoek, where tomorrow.



was booked afterwards, original old fisherman's price. It was quite big Once upon a time it itself, but now it was resort's other buildings.

tourist village with lots of internet access. We just spontaneously to spend South Africa here instead we had planned on going

Our sea-front apartment but we still could get an cottage for the same and had thick walls. must have stood all by surrounded by the

We phoned the car-rental company and could arrange that they came to fetch the car right here. Before we returned it, we still went for a last drive along the fascinating coastal road to Gordon Bay and had the Golf Chico cleaned at the 'manual' car wash facility. For only 30 Rand, four employees cleaned it by hand for half an hour inside out.

The next day, we arranged to visit Eva and Jan whom we had met during our first visit to the Gousblom B&B in the north five weeks ago. They were among the very open minded people and they had left us their Hermanus address on the breakfast table, as they left early. This couple was very interesting to talk to and they seemed to always be busy visiting lectures on the University for the 3rd age, of which they were telling us very excitedly. As they also love to travel a lot, they sometimes get into a self-made conflict of interests as they have to miss some lectures. When we phoned them, we could arrange to meet them the next day. After bringing us to a nice restaurant for



lunch, they showed us their house which is superbly situated overlooking a rivermouth and the sea. Also their garden was wonderful and they had altered many things on the house to their liking, since they bought it four years ago.



We almost couldn't stop asking them questions about the past and present situation in South Africa and it was very interesting hearing their point of view. It was purely Good Luck that we could meet them again, as they left the next day for another holiday, this time to Addo Elephant Park and the kingdom of Lesotho.

This small country within South Africa is among those with the highest AIDS rate. More than 35% of its population of 1,8 million, got the HIV virus already, bringing the average life expectancy down to about 27 years. The fact that some witch-doctors advise infected men to cure AIDS by having sex with a very young virgin certainly creates more problems than it solves!

We didn't get much information about the AIDS problem in Southern Africa, but the infection rate must be somewhere between 10%-15%. Except a prevention campaign on TV and some straightforward explaining brochures, we didn't hear any talk about it. Apparently, many deaths would rather be declared as cause of Tuberculosis because the families are ashamed to admit the real cause.

In Hermanus, we just relaxed for 10 days, took time off travelling and soaked the good things up this country has to offer. Another pleasant thing was the Southern Right Whales that could be seen just in front of our doorstep and we loved to watch them every day for a while. At least one could be seen most of the time but there could be 10-20 showing up and waving their flukes or fin and sometimes even jumped out of the water.

We also enjoyed the culinary delights and not only those, but also all the good and bad things we've experienced here, needed to be digested. Also writing down this travel diary has certainly helped us to comprehend those controversial and contrast loaded countries Namibia and South Africa a bit better.

In the beginning, we were shocked about the high crime rate, but after a while, we got used to all those fortified towns and villages. In a country where almost 80% of the population lives on the rim of poverty, it is rather astonishing that the crime rate is not worse! At least in South Africa's countryside, it was quite safe. It's only in the towns, where they have problems. The people there leave their secured homes only to spend some leisure time in fortified entertainment- and shopping centers. To go outside for a walk after dark or on weekends, is not safe at all.



As a fact, in both countries the worst crime hit areas, are those with the most poverty. That means, in the slums outside the cities and in the former township areas, which are inhabited by the coloureds and black races. In the predominantly white areas and in popular tourist spots, guards ensured security (in exchange for money).

However, *all is relative*, also South Africa's problems! During our last week in Hermanus, we met an Englishman who lives in Brazil's metropolis Rio de Janeiro. What he told us about the crime rate there, was much more shocking! As the situation in South Africa seems "*so much better*", he decided to immigrate to Cape Town, as he feels ten times safer here...

The peoples of South Africa could serve the world as a good example that millions of people can unconditionally forgive those who murdered, tortured, suppressed and discriminated them for centuries.



Having good leaders as Nelson Mandela certainly helps, but all those peoples who want to change their world, can do it. They must stand together and change by themselves! That this worked out here, gives us some hope, that some other conflict-loaded areas, as the Balkan or Middle East, would finally use such tolerance and forgive each other to change their world to a peaceful one as well.

On the last weekend, Hermanus was amazingly lively, as many city folks flocked in for some leisure time and to watch the whales. Never before, we have enjoyed it so cognisably, to be amidst other people, than after having seen so many villages that became virtually "ghost towns" every evening and every weekend.

Now we are happy to be back in Singapore and find ourselves in the middle of joyful crowds any time day and night. That's why we were somehow also looking forward to flying back on September 15, 2006. Now we are again right in the middle of these millions of people of different races and it's all exotic and safe around us and we definitely feel where we are: in the heart of Asia!

Brigitte & Heinz



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