TOUR CODE

QVJ

ADVENTURESABROAD

SOUTHERN AFRICA

with Jonathan Hodgson

20 days

Updated 22/11/2013

Day 1 *Arrive in Cape Town*

Today we arrive in Cape Town, one of the world's most spectacularly located cities.

Overnight in Cape Town. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Cape Town: Table Mountain & City Tour*

We will start our day with a gondola trip to the top of Table Mountain,* a sandstone plateau rising up above the city. The top is approximately 3km wide and at its highest point, Maclear's Beacon, rises to 1085m / 3,580 ft. Over the centuries it has become one of South Africa's most famous landmarks. The steep cliffs and rocky outcrops of the mountain play home to a number of animals and approximately 1,470 species of plants -- more than the entire British Isles!

After descending the mountain we tour Cape Town, the seat of the Parliament, which holds a six-month session here each year. We will see the Houses of Parliament, the Malay Quarter with its narrow streets and minarets; the Castle of Good Hope, South Africa's oldest building; and visit the South African Museum.

We also visit the National Botanical Gardens of Kirstenbosch, with over 4,000 species of indigenous plants (2,600 are endemic to the Cape Peninsula). The garden's history dates back to the 1660s, when the first Dutch settlers arrived in the Cape. Governor Jan van Riebeeck planted a barrier of Wild Almonds to protect settlers' cattle from the original inhabitants of the area -- and part of this hedge is still in the garden!

* NOTE: The order of our Cape Town sightseeing may vary depending on weather. Table Mountain is particularly susceptible to cloud and mist and may be accomplished elsewhere in our program at the discretion of your Tour Leader.

Overnight in Cape Town. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *The Cape Winelands*

This morning we travel the short distance to Stellenbosch, South Africa's second oldest colonial settlement. After a little spin around the town, we'll park in the centre of town and allow some time for some independent, on-foot exploration. You will notice some of the finest examples of traditional Cape Dutch architecture along the town's famous oak-lined streets.

We continue to one of the area's many wineries for a cellar tour and tasting. The Cape vineyards were originated at Constantia by Jan van Riebeeck in 1685 and were advanced in 1688 by Hugenot refugees who brought their vine seedlings and skills with them from France. The Cape's different soils and climatic variations allow a wide variety of wines to be pressed. Along our route today we will see several wine estates with their delightful Cape Dutch houses, thatched roofs and decorative gables.

Today we include lunch at one of the area's wine estates. After lunch we'll continue our scenic drive through the area before heading back to Cape Town for dinner on your own.

Overnight in Cape Town. Meal plan: Breakfast and lunch.

Day 4 *Cape Town & the Cape Peninsula*

This morning we drive south of the Mother City to Cape Point and the Good Hope Nature Reserve, enjoying the coastal scenery along the way. The Cape of Good Hope -- the most southwesterly point on the African continent -- was earlier known as the Cape of Storms by the Portuguese. The name was later changed by the Portuguese king as not to discourage future nautical expeditions on their way around Southern Africa in search of the eastern route to the source of pepper and other valuable spices. The reserve is home to eland, springbok, bontebok, baboons, and zebras.

We thgen turn north again and make our way back up the peninsula on the Indian Ocean side, with False Bay on our right-hand side. The name "False Bay" was applied early on (at least three hundred years ago) by sailors who confused the bay with Table Bay to the north. The confusion arose because sailors returning from the east (The Dutch East Indies) initially confused Cape Point and Cape Hangklip, which are somewhat similar in form.

Our journey takes us through Simon's Town, originally named Simon's Vlek after Simon van der Stel, the Dutch governor of the Cape Colony between 1677 and 1699. The town grew rapidly when it became a Royal Naval Base and the home of the South Atlantic Squadron under the second British occupation of the Cape in 1806. Simon’s Town remains an important naval base to this day, and the town which rises steeply above the harbour up the mountainsides is rich in both architectural and natural beauty, as well as Cape history and strange legends and tales.

Time permitting, we may stop in Simon's Town for some tea and a wander before completing our circle route back to Cape Town.

Overnight in Cape Town. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Cape Town, South Africa - Windhoek, Namibia*

Today we fly from Cape Town to Windhoek, the capital of Namibia. Depending on the flight schedule, we hope to have a tour of Windhoek upon arrival.

The capital is located in Namibia s central highlands, at an altitude of over 1600 metres. The city's name translates as "Windy Corner." This is a small, rather elegant city with a distinctly European feel to it. The city is full of trees and gardens and some splendid buildings dating from the turn of the 19th century. The multicultural nature of Namibia is most evident on the streets where you can see influences of the Wambo, Herero and Damara people, among others.

Overnight in Windhoek. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Windhoek - Swakopmund*

Today we travel west by road to the German colonial resort town of Swakopmund. This is Namibia's second biggest town and traditional "summer capital", and one of the most surreal places in this surreal country. We approach the town through the endless expanses of the desert, one of the world's largest wilderness areas. Then, through the mists (it is almost always misty in the morning and late afternoon) Bavarian spires and elaborate Germanic architecture rise

through the fog banks. The boom of the surf on the notorious Skeleton Coast is an ever-present reminder of the icy Atlantic Ocean beyond.

Overnight in Swakopmund. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Swakopmund: Optional Activites*

Today is free in Swakopmund.

We recommend a flying excursion (weather permitting), up the northern coast of Namibia. Our choice is the "Ovahimba Day Trip," on which you witness the rugged beauty of the Skeleton Coast and meet the proud, nomadic tribe of the Ovahimba. We overfly a number of shipwrecks as we head for the town of Opuwo in Kaokoland. Here you board 4WD vehicles to travel into the bush to visit the Himba people, a semi-nomadic and, until fairly recently, isolated people. The Namibia section of your post-booking information will provide a price range and further instructions re this option.

There are also other land-based options to visit the coast and the Cape Cross Seal Colony overland on tours of varying durations. Your Tour Leader can assist in making these arrangements.

Overnight in Swakopmond. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Swakopmund - Namib-Naukluft National Park*

We continue our journey to the Namib-Naukluft National Park via the spectacular rocky Kuiseb Canyon -- with possible sightings of baboon, rock hyrax, or, if lucky, leopard. We continue south to Solitaire. As the name suggests, this is a lonely place in the middle of absolutely nowhere. The only reason it exists at all is to service visitors to the park. It used to have one solitary tree, one petrol pump, and a take away kiosk. But big things have been happening here and there are now two or three petrol pumps, a fully blown cafeteria and small shop.

The Namib Desert is a place of magnificent colours, pastel-basted rock formations, and waves of taupe-coloured grasses. Even the clouds are tinged orange-pink as distant dunes reflect their colour skywards. In the Nama language, Namib means vast, and this is an understatement. This park is the largest conservation area in Namibia and one of the largest in the world, at almost 50000 sq km (31,000 sq miles). It encompasses several very different landscapes the wettest of which is the estuarine lagoon at Sandwich Harbour. At the opposite end of the moisture scale is the parched Namib desert with endless orange dunes blown into razor sharp ridges by the sand-shifting wind. The famous Sossusvlei sand dunes at 300 m (1,000 ft), are the highest in the world, towering over their nearest rivals in Arabia, and just begging to be climbed barefoot. The northern part of the park has stony plains leading to lunar landscapes, and the Naukluft Mountain massif has monumental purple-hued mountains, rock pools and wildlife.

Animals, insects, and plants have adapted to live in this generally inhospitable region and apart from infrequent rains, rely on the sea mist that rolls far inland. En route we have the chance to see kudus, springboks, gemsboks and black eagles set against some of the most expansive and dramatically rugged scenery in the world.

Overnight in the vicinity of the Namib-Naukluft National Park. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Namib-Naukluft National Park*

Very early this morning we drive into the park to a place called Sossusvlei, a huge dried up pan (vlei) which sporadically holds water, at the base of some of the most spectacular dunes in the Namib. We watch the morning sun

light up the apricot coloured sands, the long shadows accentuating the graceful, almost feminine curves of the dune crests. These immense rich ochre sand dunes are one of the most wondrous sights in the world and just beg to be climbed barefoot.

Geologists say that this supreme desert covering most of the Namib-Naukluft Park could be the oldest in the world. The older the dune, the brighter the colour from slow iron oxidisation and minute fragments of garnets. Dwarfed by the sheer size of the dunes, your footprints look like insect trails and each step forward forms a mini sand-slide. The solitude is immeasurable and your place in the great scheme of life, takes on a curious insignificance. Visually powerful and deafeningly silent, this unforgettable experience is a high point of our visit to the Namib. Possible game sightings include oryx antelope, springbok, or ostrich.

On our way back to our accommodation we will make a stop at Sesriem Canyon located near the entry gate to Sossussvlei. It was an important source of water for early inhabitants and even during dry times there is water in the upper reaches, where deep clefts in the rock reduce evaporation. Explorers, transport riders and early travellers used to lower a bucket down to collect the water and it normally took 6 lengths of thong tied together, hence the Afrikaans name Ses meaning six, and Riem meaning thong. The canyon was formed by the Tsauchab River rising in the Naukluft and Zaris Mountains to the east, and flowing through to Sossusvlei. Walking through the canyon takes you on a journey back 10-20 million years ago when sedimentary layers of gravel and sand were deposited and cemented together by lime. The ledges are now inhabited by pigeons, raucous pied crows and chattering starlings.

Overnight in the vicinity of Namib-Naukluft National Park. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 10 *Namib-Naukluft - Windhoek*

Today we leave the Namib region and head northeast through the Gamsberg Pass to Windhoek.

The Windhoek area is at a refreshing altitude amongst rolling bush-dotted hills and is well watered by rain. It does, however, get so hot that the rain evaporates soon after each dramatic downpour. Winters are bright but very chilly at night and summers wonderfully hot. As capital cities go, Windhoek is very relaxed with a whole mixture of Namibia's tribes strolling the streets. The city is full of trees and gardens, plus some splendid buildings dating from the turn of the century, all jumbled up with post-modernist office blocks in a swirl of ethnic mix.

Overnight in Windhoek. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Windhoek, Namibia - Maun, Botswana - Okavango Delta*

Today we fly to Maun where we connects with our flight into the Okavango Delta.

Kanana Camp (Setswana for 'paradise,') is centrally situated in the Okavango Delta, deep amongst grass covered islands, encompassing a necklace of islands on the Xudum River. The camp comprises eight large twin-bedded safari style tents with teak decking and private en suite bathroom, built on plinths, overlooking the Delta. The common facilities of the camps are also built up on stilts overlooking these floodplains. The area is an excellent walking and mokoro area.

By game viewing on foot and by mokoro, you do not have the noise of the vehicle and therefore will experience the bush in its true form. You will be at one with nature without the intrusion of man. There will be just the sounds of the bush and your footfalls on the earth. The silence will help your ears to pick-up the previously unheard sounds of the bush usually hidden by the mechanical hum of the car. You are on their ground on their terms! Motorboat excursions to the Xo Lagoon is offered when the lagoon is in flood, and game viewing in 4 x 4 vehicles is also available.

Overnight in the Okavango. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 12 *Okavango Delta*

We have a full day exploring the waterways of the Okavango Delta. Depending on water levels, we may do our sightseeing either by mokoro canoes or by 4WD vehicles, or a little of both.

The Okavango Delta is unique. It is the largest inland delta in the world; instead of flowing into the sea, the annual flood of fresh water flows inland, spreading over 15 000 sq km of the Kalahari sand in a maze of lagoons and channels. The Okavango Delta is a lush wonderland surrounded by the arid Kalahari Desert and home to many species of antelope, such as Lechwe and Tsessebe. Herds of buffalo, zebra and elephant that number in their thousands pass through annually on their migration routes.

Overnight in the Okavango. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 13 *Okavango Delta*

We have another full day exploration of the wonders of the delta.

In the lush indigenous forests of the delta and its islands, and along the floodplains spawned by this great marriage of water and sand, more than 400 species of birds flourish. On the mainland and among the islands in the delta, lion, elephant, hyena, wild dog, buffalo, hippo and crocodile congregate with a teeming variety of antelope and other smaller animals -- warthog, mongoose, spotted genets, monkeys, bush babies and tree squirrels.

Fishing, bird watching, game viewing, photography or simple relaxation; indulging in any of these in the Okavango are experiences without parallel.

Overnight fly-in lodge. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 14 *Okavango Delta - Chobe National Park*

This morning we fly to Kasane. On arrival we continue by road the short distance to Chobe National Park.

The original inhabitants of what is now the park were the San people. They were hunter-gatherers who lived by moving from one area to another in search of water, wild fruits and wild animals. In 1967, the area was declared a national park, the first in Botswana.A major feature of Chobe National Park is its elephant population, which is probably the largest in the world. This
population covers most of northern Botswana plus north-western Zimbabwe and is currently estimated at around 100,000 individuals. This elephant population has been built up steadily from a few thousand since the early 1900s, having escaped the massive poaching that decimated other populations elsewhere on the continent during the 1970s and 1980s.

The Chobe elephants are migratory, making seasonal movements of up to 200 kilometres from the Chobe and Linyanti rivers where they concentrate in the dry season, to the pans in the south-east of the park, to which they disperse in the rains.

Overnight at a lodge in the vicinity of Chobe National Park (Kasane). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Chobe National Park*

The Chobe National Park covers 10,566 sq km and has one of the greatest concentrations of game found on the African continent. This park has an amazing variety of habitats, ranging from floodplains, baobab, and mopane trees and acacia woodlands, to verdant flood grasslands and thickets bordering the Chobe River.

Our safari starts with a cruise on the Chobe River (shade and refreshments available), which takes us close to the waterfowl and wildlife on the river. Large flocks of birds, big pods of hippo and very large crocodiles can be viewed from the safety of your boat.

After lunch we board open (covered) safari vehicles and head off into the park to view some of the elephants, buffalo herds, sable, wildebeest, giraffe, and with luck, some resident lion and hyena.

Overnight in Chobe National Park. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 16 *Kasane, Botswana - Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe*

Today we travel to Victoria Falls from Kasane, at the confluence of the Chobe and Zambezi Rivers and roughly the place where the countries of Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, and Namibia meet. We make our way to the town of Victoria Falls, an area has been inhabited for hundreds of thousands of years, though the current European names did not come into being until the Scottish missionary David Livingstone was brought to the falls in 1855 and named them after Queen Victoria.

NOTE: We don't include dinner tonight as there are a number of choices in the area and past passengers have indicated a preference for some independence in the evening meal plan at Vic Falls.

Overnight in Victoria Falls. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Victoria Falls Area*

Today we have a guided walking tour of Victoria Falls and adjacent national park.

Mosi-oa-Tunya ("The Smoke That Thunders") is one of the most amazing sights in the world: twice as high as Niagara Falls and several times longer. It took thousands of years of erosion for Victoria Falls to appear as and where it does now. During the Jurassic Period (150-200 million years ago), volcanic activity resulted in thick basalt deposits covering large parts of Southern Africa. As the lava cooled and solidified, cracks appeared in the hard basalt crust, which were filled with clay and lime. Erosion and the course of the mighty Zambezi River cut through these softer materials, forming the first of a series of waterfalls.

Our tour is conducted on level paved paths, much of which is shaded by the dense rainforest that exists due to spray from the falls. To walk to the farthest extent, with viewpoints along the way, is about one kilometre, the last part of which is without shade. We encourage you to go right to the dn, as the views are fantastic, including the best look at the famous Victoria Falls Bridge, the brainchild of Cecil Rhodes, part of his grand and unfulfilled Cape to Cairo railway scheme, even though he never visited the falls and died before construction of the bridge began.

The afternoon is yours to enjoy optional activities. You may relax by the pool, do some shopping in the village famous for local artisan crafts, travel to the Zambian side of the falls, or even go elephant back riding or sightseeing by micro-

light aircraft or helicopter. Your Tour Leader can help plan your afternoon.

Overnight in Victoria Falls. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe - Johannesburg, South Africa*

Today we fly from Victoria Falls to Johannesburg (flight times are variable).

Overnight in Johannesburg (Sandton). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 19 *Johannesburg - Soweto - Tshwane (Pretoria) - Johannesburg*

This morning we have a tour of the city of Soweto.

Soweto unto itself is actually one of the largest cities in Africa with an estimated population of 2 million. It also has one of the most dubious histories of any city in Africa, as it was the site of some of the more infamous events during the struggle against apartheid. The name "Soweto" simply stands for South Western Township, due to its location outside Johannesburg. It was here that thousands of black workers were forced to live in order to provide labour for the gold mines.

We will see the good, the bad, and the ugly of Soweto -- from affluent neighbourhoods to shanty towns; the world's largest hospital, Baragwanath; and the former homes of Soweto's Nobel Laureates, Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela. We also visit the excellent new museum dedicated to the victims of the 1976 Soweto Uprising.

En route to Pretoria we will visit the extraordinarily powerful Apartheid Museum, an obligatory stop for visitors and residents alike. The large blown-up photographs, metal cages and numerous monitors with continuous replays of apartheid scenes will make you feel that you were in the townships in the 70s and 80s, dodging police bullets or teargas canisters, or marching with thousands of school children. One can easily spend the better part of a day in this museum; however, for the sake of timing on a busy day, we will be taking in the highlights only.

We continue to Pretoria (recently renamed Tshwane*), the administrative capital of the Republic of South Africa. Surrounded by hilly countryside, this relaxed capital is known for its colourful gardens and lush green parks. We will see Church Square, dominated by its statue of the Boer Republic's first President, Paul Kruger, and lined with buildings of architectural and historical interest. From here we will proceed to a panoramic view of the city at the Union Buildings, the administrative headquarters of the Government of South Africa and scene of Nelson Mandela's inauguration as the New South Africa's first democratically elected State President in 1994.

* Tshwane is the name of a pre-colonial local chief and means "We Are the Same". In 2005 the city council approved the switch from Pretoria to Tshwane as part of an effort to make place names more African.

Overnight in Johannesburg (Sandton). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 20 *Departure*

Departure from Johannesburg.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.