TOUR CODE

ZA1

ADVENTURESABROAD

SOUTH AFRICA, SWAZILAND & LESOTHO

An Overland Exploration

17 days

Updated 14/06/2013

Day 1 *Arrival in Johannesburg*

Arrive in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Johannesburg is South Africa's financial centre and largest city. This "Place of Gold", as the Sotho word for Gauteng Province suggests, harbours the gold fields of South Africa. No one could have imagined the repercussions when an unemployed miner found a stone bearing traces of gold in 1886. This seemingly insignificant event led to the discovery of the world's richest natural treasure trove. People flocked to the area from all ends of the earth and the open pastoral landscape changed almost overnight. Today in the "New South Africa," Johannesburg continues as the country's -- indeed the entire region's -- economic powerhouse and is evolving into a very vibrant cultural melting pot.

Overnight in Johannesburg (Sandton). Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Johannesburg: Soweto, the Apartheid Museum & Pretoria*

This morning we have a guided 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 (recently renamed Tshwane*) 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, 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.

Day 3 *Johannesburg - the 'Panoramic Route' - Hazyview*

From Jo'burg we head off through the vast wilderness of Mpumalanga (formerly the Eastern Transvaal), the "Land of the Rising Mist". Along the way we travel from the vast grasslands of the High Veld, with its huge farms and ranches, down to the drier Low Veld region characterized by rocky hills and acacia scrub forest. This is an expansive landscape of mountains, valleys, rivers, waterfalls, primal forests, and colourful flora. Steeped in a history of pioneers and fortune-seekers, we will pass many Gold Rush towns and farming communities en route. Lydenburg ("town of suffering") established by Voortrekkers in 1849 lies at the bottom of Long Tom pass. This pass, named after the big gun used by the Afrikaners during the Anglo Boer War, is one of the most scenically dramatic in the country. It links Sabie on the escarpment with Lydenburg on the Drakensberg plateau.

A highlight of our sightseeing today is the spectacular Blyde River Canyon. This great escarpment is the kind of place where brochures and guide books run out of original adjectives to describe the fresh mountain scenery and magnificent panoramic views. The Blyde River Canyon is one of the most spectacular in Africa and its cliffs rise between 600-800 m (2,000-2,640 feet) from the river bed. At the "Three Rondavels viewpoint" is an unforgettable view of three huge rock spirals rising out of the far wall of the canyon. Their tops appear to have a hut-like rounded roof.

Following the road and the Treur River south, there are further viewpoints; Wonder View, God's Window and the Pinnacle. Their names help to conjure up the indescribable vastness of the scenery. From here we continue to Hazyview near Kruger National Park.

Overnight in Hazyview. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Kruger National Park*

Early this morning we enter South Africa's largest game reserve, Kruger National Park, named after Paul Kruger, the first to initiate the setting aside of this area as a reserve in the 1890s. Here we transfer to open safari vehicles and make a full-day excursion through the southern sector of this fascinating and beautiful park.

The Kruger Park is an enormous area of flat veld, broken by rivers and comprised of mixed vegetation and terrain. The park, officially founded in 1926, supports more species of wildlife than any other African reserve -- over 137 mammal species, 49 fish species, 112 reptile species, and nearly 500 bird species! With some luck we may see and photograph lion, leopard, cheetah, elephant, zebra and many other wonderful African animals.

We return to Hazyview in the late afternoon.

Overnight in Hazyview. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Hazyview, South Africa - Swaziland*

We travel south today and enter the Kingdom of Swaziland, an independent country completely landlocked by South Africa and Mozambique, and smaller than Kruger Park! Naturally fortified by beautiful mountains, Swaziland remains one of the last kingdoms in Africa, a continent once dominated by colonialism. The pace of life here is relaxed and the

lifestyle traditional; we will see rural people working their farms and tending their herds as we make our way to our hotel, nicely-placed in a scenic spot near Mbanane, the capital. You will have time this afternoon to relax and enjoy the grounds of the hotel and the adjacent parklands.

Overnight in Swaziland. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Swaziland - St Lucia Wetlands, South Africa*

This morning we depart our hotel and travel south, through Swaziland's diminutive capital, Mbabane, descending onto the Swazi Lowveld (lowlands), similar in climate and vegetation of the lowveld region we experienced in South Africa and Kruger Park in previous days. We'll travel through sugar cane plantations and the bustling commercial centre of Manzini, before crossing the border back into South Africa and the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Our destination today is the St Lucia Wetlands. Lake St Lucia and the Eastern Shores together comprise the largest estuarine system on the African continent. Lake St Lucia was declared a Natural World Heritage Site by UNESCO -- South Africa's first -- on December 1, 1999. The park features a variety of landforms including coral reefs, long sandy beaches, coastal dunes, lake systems, swamps, and extensive reed and papyrus wetlands.

This afternoon we enjoy a boat safari on Lake St Lucia, with excellent opportunities to view hippos, crocodiles, and myriad bird species for which the park is famous.

Overnight at St Lucia. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *St Lucia - Durban*

This morning we travel by road to the seaside city of Durban. On arrival, we'll enjoy a panoramic tour of the city, including a stop at its excellent botanical garden.

This area was opened up to white settlement by the Voortrekkers in the early 19th century, though the Portuguese were navigating the coast here as early as the late 15th century. Vasco da Gama was the first European to sail along this coast, giving it the name Natal to commemorate his Christmas Day arrival. In 1899 the British and the Boers went to war, but under reconciliation in 1910 formed the Union of South Africa with an agreement signed in what is now Durban's modern-day Main Post Office.

Overnight in Durban. Meal plan: Breakfast.

Day 8 *Durban - Drakensberg Mountains*

Today we travel by road inland into the Drakensberg Mountains.

The uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park (formerly the Royal Natal National Park) covers some 8000 hectares of this area, including some impressively high and jagged peaks. The Drakensberg belong to the mountain range of the Great Escarpment, and the park, proclaimed a protected area in 1916, encapsulates the beauty of this rugged alpine mountain world. Vertical rock walls, grass-covered mountain slopes, roaring torrents and thundering waterfalls present a unique natural landscape.

Short walks or a horse ride through mountain terrain are options for the afternoon.

Overnight in the Drakensberg. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *The Drakensberg: The Sani Pass to Lesotho*

This morning we include a 4x4 excursion up / down the Sani Pass. Once, the Sani Pass was a rough mule trail descending the Eastern Highlands of old Basutoland into Natal. Tough drovers brought wool and mohair down the Pass on donkeys and mules to be exchanged for blankets, clothing and maize meal, the essentials for life in a remote, impoverished country. The pass, famous for its spectacular scenery, takes you to the top of the Drakensberg and into the independent country of Lesotho. We can have a drink at the 'Highest Pub in Africa,' at 2837metres (9,300 ft) above sea level.

Your afternoon is free for optional activities.

Overnight in the Drackensberg. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Drakensberg - Umtata - East London*

Today we travel by road to East London via Umtata (Mthatha).

En route we visit the Nelson Mandela Museum, which offers visitors an inspiring journey through the life of Nelson Mandela. Known affectionately as 'Madiba', Nelson Mandela is loved and respected world-wide for his tireless energy to bring about a better life for all. Mandela has insisted that the museum should not be a tribute dedicated to him, but should rather serve as a catalyst and springboard for the upliftment and development of the local community.

Continue to East London, affectionately known as 'Buffalo City,' situated 1000 kilometres from Cape Town on the South East Coast. Lying in between the Nahoon River in the north and the Buffalo River to the south it is the only river port in South Africa.

Overnight in East London. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *East London - Grahamstown - Port Elizabeth*

Today we travel by road to Port Elizabeth via Grahamstown.

A hauntingly beautiful region -- arguably the crucible of South African history -- "Frontier Country" is a vibrant mix of all the best that Africa has to offer. One of the premier tourist routes in the Eastern Cape, it has a turbulent past, with more forts than the rest of the country combined.

Now no longer the scene of conflict and strife, it is about people breaking through frontiers. This is the historic heartland of the Eastern Cape and embodies the spirit of the many and varied cultures who met here and made their mark -- Khoi, Xhosa, Boer and British.

Near Grahamstown we stop at the 1820 Settlers National Monument, built to commemorate the contributions made by English-speaking settlers to South Africa. Not just a stodgey statue without function, this is a "living monument," whose building provides facilities for use by all South Africans, in particular activities which encourage the ideals of freedom of speech, social interaction and the use of English as a contact language. This concept has led to the establishment of highly successful educational and cultural projects.

Continue to Port Elizabeth, the start of the famous "Garden Route."

Overnight in Port Elizabeth. Meal plan: Breakfast.

Day 12 *Port Elizabeth - 'The Garden Route' - Knysna*

Port Elizabeth is South Africa's fifth largest city and the third largest port. This morning we will have a brief panoramic tour of this city seeing the Market Square and the beaches of Algoa Bay.

From Port Elizabeth we travel along the world-famous 'Garden Route' toward Knysna. This route is parallel to the ocean and features lakes, mountains, beaches, and steep cliffs. This part of the garden route reminds one of the Oregon Coast (USA) with its sand dunes and great surf beaches. We'll make a lunch stop at Storm's River Mouth in the Tsitsikamma National Park, located on the shores of the Indian Ocean. You will have time to walk a short section of the famed Otter Trail, widely regarded as one of the finest in the world, stretching 41 km (25 mi - 5 days) from Storms River Mouth to Nature's Valley.

We continue to Knysna, a charming coastal town with tremendous water and mountain views and a laid-back lifestyle. The town was founded in 1817 by George Rex, reputed to be an illegitimate son of King George III. Known for its picturesque lagoon, the town was first established as a timber port. Today, Knysna is proud of its riviera atmosphere with many sidewalk cafes and shops.

Overnight in Knysna. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Knysna: At Leisure*

Today we enjoy a well-deserved day-at-leisure. Many travellers choose to enjoy an unstructured day of wandering the town's pleasant streets, shopping, or enjoying a seafood lunch al fresco. Alternatively, you can fill all or part of your day with optional activities, such as boats trips on the Knysna Lagoon, excursions to the Featherbed Conservation Area, horseback riding, shark cage-diving, etc. Your guide can help you plan your day.

Overnight in Knysna. Meal plan: Breakfast.

Day 14 *Knysna - Mossel Bay - Swellendam - Cape Town*

This morning we continue our tour along the Garden Route to Mossel Bay. Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias arrived here on February 3, 1488, thus proving to his sponsors that Africa had a southern tip; making it theoretically possible to sail from Europe to India. Our destionation is the Dias Museum Complex, which marks the spot of the historical landing of Bartolomeu Dias. The 500 year old Post Office Tree, a national monument, can still be seen at the site, now harbouring a post box shaped as a shoe.

Our next stop is the town of Swellendam, the third oldest colonial town in South Africa, established in 1745. Here you will have time to have lunch and visit several historic buildings built in the charming Cape Dutch style with characteristic whitewashed walls and black, thatched roofs.

We then pass through a vast wheat growing and sheep farming area on our way to Cape Town. In the late afternoon we cross the Hottentot's Holland Mountains, the centre of South Africa's apple growing region, to arrive in Cape Town, one of the world's most isolated and beautiful cities.

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

Day 15 *Cape Town: Table Mountain & Stellenbosch*

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, Maclears 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!

We then 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.

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

Day 16 *Cape Town: the Cape Peninsula*

Today we have the quintessential full-day tour of the Cape Town area: The Cape Peninsula.

Our tour takes us south along the Atlantic Seaboard where we have spectacular views of some of Cape Town's most affluent neighbourhoods and spectacular mountain and coastal scenery. We have a brief photo stop just before Camp's Bay, a pretty surfside suburban community featuring the classic view of the town with the 'Twelve Apostles' peaks as a backdrop.

We continue south along a seaside-hugging route, through the town of Hout Bay and the famous Chapman's Peak Drive, one of the most spectacular marine drives anywhere in the world. The 9km route, with its 114 curves, skirts the rocky coastline of Chapman's Peak, the 593m high southerly extension of Constantia Berg.

Our next stop is the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve and Cape Point. The reserve is a wildflower, bird, and animal paradise on 77 sq km (30 sq miles) of the Cape Peninsula. The reserve is also home to eland, springbok, bontebok, baboon, and zebra. Within the reserve are Cape Point and the Cape of Good Hope, the most southwesterly point on the African continent.

After a break for lunch and free time at Cape Point, we head north again, stopping briefly at the Cape of Good Hope, before continuing back up the Indian Ocean side of the peninsula, passing through Simonstown, founded by the Dutch in 1741 as a naval depot and named for Simon van der Stel, governor of Cape Colony from 1679 to 1697. Today Simonstown is famous for its distinctly English architecture and atmosphere, and the southernmost train station on the continent.

We complete our loop around the peninsula, past the well-watered eastern slopes of Table Mountain, Constantia, Bishops Court and the campuses of the University of Cape Town.

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

Day 17 *Departure*

Departure from Cape Town.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.