

Post



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The joys of air travel - August 8, 2025

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SUMMARY

Great morning game drive including a long time watching a pride (more like puddle) of lions from about 12 feet away. They had obviously eaten recently and were sleeping in a big pile with the younger ones occasionally playing with each other or a stick. Said a very sad goodbye to Tricia and Don at the airstrip and took another small plane to Maun for our connection to Cape Town. Unfortunately the plane for that flight had mechanical issues and they had to fly parts in from Johannesburg to fix it. So, we had a very long layover in Maun and arrived in Cape Town five hours late. Arrived at our B-and-B at 11:30pm. Ugh! - Karen

DETAIL

Today's our last day at this camp and doing safaris at all. Yesterday at breakfast Tricia and Don gushed about how nice it was to finally have a heater in their cabin, er, tent. "What??", we thought. We'd left our HVAC system in "cool" mode overnight and it was quite chilly in the morning. Once bitten, and all that. Today we switch our system to heat mode and are able to get it a little warmer for our showers and packing.

At breakfast it is really cold. We are quite bundled but still, with the breeze we are freezing. We'd slept in and were hoping that, being a bit later in the day (7 am versus 6 am) we'd get some warmer air, but no luck. Our servers are commenting on how unusually cold it is. Not the sendoff we were hoping for. Because we're at a different time than the normal "everyone's eating at once" breakfast it takes quite a while.

From the printed menu, Tricia is wishing to have a particular granola/fruit/yogurt thing. It's not available, but they have other things which, combined, would be the same thing. Our waiter goes back and forth to the kitchen a few times to try to figure out why it's not available and what can be done about it. The language difference and accent makes things harder. In the end she gets something close. Our food takes forever, not our usual experience. The whole time we're freezing in the cold temperature and cooling breeze. Sigh.

In the drive vehicle we're warmer. It's later in the day by now and we have our extra blankets and especially our hot (bush baby) water bottles. It's a tad more cramped for the four of us (plus Obie) in the drive vehicle since all our luggage and carry on are with us. On the "road" Obie quickly finds a big pride of lions. They apparently enjoyed a big meal recently (wildebeest with a broken leg, perhaps?) and are sleeping it off as they digest. The kids (pretty darn big ones) are resting, too, but they're kids so they want to play.

We're one of two vehicles there and at one point a lady in another vehicle drops her scarf out of the vehicle onto the ground. Whoops! Now the fun begins, perhaps. In the end it's not all that dramatic as the driver simply maneuvers the vehicle a bit and then opens the door slightly and reaches a long way down to the ground. The first rule of safaris is don't drop anything out of the vehicle (or stand up or, or, or).

At one point one of the larger, older female lions gets up and walks around, including walking around our vehicle. We're cautiously looking down to see where she is, inches from us. As she walks in front of our vehicle (motor off) we lose sight of her. Where'd she go? I eventually lean out for a look and can see that she's flopped over to sleep some more, directly in front of our vehicle, almost touching the front tires. I guess we're backing up to get out of here.

In all, we're there watching the lions playing and sleeping for forty minutes and I take 107 pictures. Yikes. Next up is a group of three warthogs followed by maybe eight giraffes. They always keep a keen eye on us whenever we're close by, and it's no different now, but they're also intent on all feeding from the same large tree/bush. We're told it's a shepherd tree and that everyone (including humans) like the fruit. We're told we can find ground coffee flavored with shepherd tree fruit if we're interested. Not so much.

We stop to 'pick some flowers' and have our mid-morning coffee. In doing so we flush out a big group of the overly dramatic and gangly guinea fowl. One leaves behind a feather which is quite intricate and detailed. Well done! Obie's radio crackles and he gets word from the camp. Another vehicle is disabled and three of the guests are stranded there. Do we mind having them join us? Obie tries to not put that on us, but we don't mind and head back to camp to pick them up.

At the "airport" we say our good byes (to Obie but also to Tricia and Don). I take pictures of the funny signs there, which suggest the open flat runway is a big more grandiose than it actually is, with a terminal number and gate number. On our flight back to Maun we stop at the Khwai Private Reserve and drop of a half dozen guests, excited about just starting their safari experience. I see a herd of elephants from the air and finally we're back in Maun. Now we just have to wait for our flight to Cape Town.

Bags checked and through security we're met by Mike and Lisa, from our first camp, and news that our flight has been delayed. Groan. Little by little the flight is delayed more and more. We're allowed to go back into the main part of the airport, or even outside the airport, as we wait.

We end up in a lounge (US\$24 each, well spent). Mike and Lisa start out across the street from the airport at a hole-in-the-wall restaurant for lunch, and later in the same lounge with us. Word is our plane has a problem and they're flying a plane in from Johannesburg.

At lunch Mike talks to the pilot and flight crew (also eating but not drinking) and asks about the issue. "There's a problem with the plane" he's told. Yes but what kind of a problem? "With the hydraulics system". Hm, those allow for adjustment of the flight surfaces and brakes, so yes, we don't wish to fly with those compromised.

The plane from Jo'burg finally arrives at which point we learn that it is not a replacement plane for us to fly to Cape Town, rather it is carrying the parts needed to fix our plane (hopefully). It'll just been an hour (or maybe more). We're told that if they can't fix our original plane we'll just take this newly arrived one.

At this news some of the other passengers (of whom there are many) go ballistic. If we have a perfectly good plane here (that just flew in from Jo'burg and thus has proven its air worthiness), why can't we just fly that to Cape Town? How will we know that the plane is really fixed (other than flying with us onboard)? It's not pretty and we're glad we're not the ones making the scene. The poor desk clerk who has to relay these messages tries to diffuse the situation. Finally everyone calms down.

Six hours after our original departure time we're finally crossing the tarmac to our (hopefully) properly repaired plane. We've already communicated with the people picking us up about our new arrival time. We've also cancelled our dinner reservation.

At 10:30 pm we arrive in Cape Town and get through immigration (after a while). We get our luggage (yay) and meet our driver, Chris. We do get into our hotel and room by 11:30 and boy are we ready for bed. Not the day we'd signed up for.

Photos



When we wake it's cold out. Colder than it's been. Brrrr. In our rooms the heater helps warm it up a big, but at breakfast it's just cold. And the breeze doesn't help.



Finally done with breakfast and out on our morning safari ride Obie quickly finds a big pride of lions. Most want to sleep but one is wide awake and wants to play with siblings, parents, whomever.



The younger lions just can't help looking cute and cuddly. We know better.



Who doesn't look cute and cuddly?
Warthogs. Their long hair is kind of
amazing. Where do they get their hair
coiffed?



A big 'tower' of giraffes enjoying the
Shepherd Fruit Tree. Supposedly
everyone (humans, too) like the fruit.



Time to leave camp and fly down to Cape Town (first stop: Maun). At the airport there is a departures and an arrivals area. Essentially just platforms (maybe in case there's standing water on the ground). Luggage for the leaving passengers on one, and that of arriving visitors arriving on the other.



The facility is mostly just the long, flat, open runway (air strip) but funny locals try to make it seem a bit more grandiose.



FARNSNIENTE

On the flight to Maun (rhymes with noun) I spot some elephants around an unappetizing watering hole.



In Maun, at our gate to fly to Cape Town are Mike and Lisa. They're going to Cape Town, too, on our flight. They were the fifth and sixth person in our safari vehicle at our first camp.





With the flight delayed the airline said we could leave the gate area and go 'across the way' to where there's a restaurant. I thought they meant "in" the airport. Nope. You leave the airport and walk across the (mostly empty) main street and there's a restaurant. We didn't. Mike and Lisa did and said the food wasn't half bad.



Six and a half hours after our scheduled departure we head to our repaired plane. We're all thinking "finally" and "geez, I hope they did the repair correctly!"
Onward to Cape Town.

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